

## SUMMARY OF AFSI CHIZUK MISSION TO ISRAEL MAY 20-28, 2025



This AFSI Chizuk Mission was the second since the October 7 attack on Israel and the outbreak of Operation Swords of Iron. Due to safety concerns, we are thankful to those who made it and we were ready to get going on what was a wonderful and meaningful experience. Here are brief highlights along with photos from our trip.



### DAY 1

News of the murder of Tzella Gez had shaken all of Israel. A woman on the way to give birth to her 4th son, gunned down by a terrorist on her way from Bruchin to the hospital. We quickly made our way to the tent that Yossi Dagan, Shomron Regional Council head, had set up to house his office and the young people praying for her wounded infant (the infant succumbed to his wounds a week later). We spoke with Yossi about the need for additional security and in particular the need for Sovereignty.



A road to the tent had been cleared and construction vehicles were busy starting to build - the Jewish response to terror.

Our group of 23, 12 from Texas - Texans for a Safe Israel, 4 from New York, 1 from California, 1 from Chicago, 1 from Western Canada and 3 from Florida immediately came together with one heart. A love for Israel; the land, the people and the book.

We left with heavy hearts after agreeing to keep in touch and build bridges to the U.S.



Then on to the Shomron Security Center, the heart of the overall security Center in the region. No pictures allowed but we observed the high-tech capabilities - cameras, drones, etc. that are needed to monitor and prevent terror. One very surprising statistic we learned here is that there are on average 6 rock-throwing attacks each day in the region.

Next, we headed to Har Bracha and the Hayovel Headquarters. Josh Waller, one of the #Israel Guys, greeted us and gave us an overview of their

program - bringing Christians from many nations to help with planting and harvesting. We marveled at one of the fields of grapes their volunteers harvest to help Israeli vintners.

Our final stop of this first day was Chavat Gilad. Our old friend, Ilana Shimon greeted us for a walking tour of this growing, off the grid, community. We have been visiting here for years, and the growth is astonishing. Even more amazing is the community spirit that is evident everywhere!



Then to the Art House for a mini conference. Speakers included Natalie Sopinsky on behalf of Hatzalah Yosh, Yael Shevach who lost her husband to a terror attack at the entrance to the Yishuv and Elad Ziv who came from Amichai.

Elad gave us an update on the progress of this community that was constructed in 2018 to house the violently expelled residents of Amona. It seems like things are going well and the community has approvals for massive expansion. These brave people deserve the best.



Natalie and one of the medics she brought with her gave us these alarming statistics: In 2024, Palestinian terrorists committed at least 6,343 attacks against Israeli Jews in Judea and Samaria, resulting in 27 deaths and over 300 injuries.

After a beautiful bountiful and scrumptious welcome dinner at what is probably the only beer garden in the Shomron, we watched the sunset on an amazing first day.



## DAY 2

Our first visit on this crystal-clear day was to Bnei David - the first Mechina in Israel- in Eli. After High School many Israeli boys come to prepare for the next phase of life in a Mechina. This particular Mechina turns out many outstanding officers in the IDF. Sadly, they have lost more graduates since October 7 than in all the 30 years they are in operation. We met with the CEO Lior Shtul who gave us great insight into the workings of this great institution.





We then went on to meet with one of Mechina's star graduates, Gilad Ach, founder of 3 NGOs. #GreenIsraelForum, #AdKan, #ReservistsGenerationofVictory.

Most recent undertaking: The Israeli Reservists – Generation of Victory. “With the understanding that we were going into a long war with an unclear path to a decisive victory, while we and our friends were losing jobs, our families at home, and our friends were being killed and injured. Our statement at the beginning of the war, that seizure of territory in Gaza is victory, reached every media channel, and even the Knesset and the U.S. Congress. Many public initiatives on the subject began to arise, and this became a central issue in the public discourse. Only taking territory from Hamas will lead to a change the day after the war.”



They have undertaken this mission to try to ensure that their sons will not have to fight the same battles in the places they have fought too many times. Kol Hakavod!

From Eli we headed to Shiloh where we toured Ancient Shiloh with Moriah Rapaport. To this day they are discovering evidence of Jewish civilization during the Davidic dynasty.

Moriah's parents were one of the first families to arrive here with a dream of finding the first capital city of Israel, the City of The Mishkan.



At dinnertime, we volunteered to BBQ for soldiers at Beit El IDF base. We're still not sure who enjoyed this more - our group of volunteers or the soldiers we fed!





### DAY 3

We began our Thursday visit to Gaza Envelope at Sderot where we experienced a beautiful motion picture and touching memorial that they have built at the site of the old police station. This is the site of a brutal battle on Oct. 7, 2023, that resulted in 20 officers' deaths. We learned about the resilience of the people of Sderot (72 lost in total that day) and moves that are being made to make life there better than ever.



Next stop in the Gaza Envelope - Kibbutz Nahal Oz, probably the closest of any community to the Gaza border and where some 75 Israelis were murdered and 15 were kidnapped. Included in these numbers are the 60 or so IDF surveillance personnel stationed at the base adjacent to the Kibbutz. We met with friends, toured the property and heard their stories of loss, survival, community strength and plans for return. We had great views into Gaza and visited a beautiful new memorial to the murdered IDF troops.



We then visited the heart wrenching Nova Festival site. A Torah scribe onsite and soldiers present to visit family, and friends were uplifted to know that Americans had traveled to pay respects there.

While at the army base, we visited just a few kilometers from the Nova site we saw how the information gathering drones are operated. The base is adjacent to Kibbutz Kissufim where 4 kibbutz security team members, 4 other residents, 6 Thai laborers and 8 Israeli soldiers were killed.







Then on to the #ShuvaAchim junction. A place of respite for the soldiers serving in the Gaza envelope. Home cooking, some supplies and wonderful camaraderie.

Dinner that night in Ashkelon at a Shipudei place with Dror Vanunu, our long-time friend and former spokesman for the Jewish Gush Katif communities in Gaza. May we meet with him again in a Jewish Gaza in days to come.



#### DAY 4

Naomi Kahn, Director of the International Division of Regavim, led an informative early morning tour of the Ancient Susya synagogue. The visit included a detailed discussion on Regavim's work to safeguard state lands and prevent land



loss. On this day we specifically focused on Masafer Yatta, the region south of Hebron. This area, featured in the film "No Other Land," the film that should never have received acclaim but won an Academy Award, is central to the narrative of "settler violence" and is currently experiencing illegal annexation of Area C by the Palestinian Authority. We also got an enlightening and disturbing overview of all of Judea and Samaria's illegal land takeovers!

Then on to Jacob's Cattle Farm in the Southern Hebron Hills, which exemplified AFSI's support for developing communities. Our bus couldn't navigate the challenging road, but our hosts Israel and



Morea Kaplan and their family greeted us and brought farm burgers. This young community of two families, about 15 people on a thousand acres, led by Israel (on IDF reserve break) and Morea (a nurse), represents classic

AFSI support. We anticipate their growth in this rugged, beautiful area. We also hope to continue our visits to and support for them as they grow and flourish!



We joined together for Shabbat dinner at our Dead Sea hotel. Here we rested, relaxed and recharged.

## DAY 5 - SHABBAT

Day of rest at the Dead Sea.

## DAY 6

Our first stop of the new week was to Hebron where we were met by Yishai Fleisher, the International Spokesperson for the Jewish Community of Hebron, and we started our wonderful visit at the recently beautified Tomb of Yishai and Ruth, visited some of the surrounding grounds of great archeological significance and then had a wonderful visit to the Cave of Machpela, purchased by Abraham 3,800 years ago and the resting place of the Jewish Mamas & the Papas. Along the way we had some great geopolitical discussions and learned about the current situation in Hebron where Jews make up less than 5% of the population.







For our next stop AFSI visited our great friends Ari Abramowitz and Jeremy Gimpel at the truly remarkable Arugot Farms on the mountain tops of the Judean frontier, where they both defend and beautify the land!



Then, on this busy Sunday, AFSI met with some of our favorite friends, Nadia and Yehudit at Oz v'Gaon in Gush Etzion. As time was short, the focus was primarily on discussing the current environment and the urgency of advocating for Sovereignty Now. These



influential women, leaders in the Sovereignty movement, are vital to strengthening Israel. While a full tour was not possible due to time constraints, the meeting prepared AFSI for Knesset visits and MK meetings the next day.



## DAY 7 – YOM YERUSHALAYIM

On this day, our group toured Mount Herzl, Israel's national cemetery, led by David Ha'Ivri. We heard stories of fallen soldiers from Israel's founding to recent losses after October 7, 2023. Witnessing mourners and a

funeral, it was a somber yet meaningful visit.



Then on Jerusalem Day we were honored to attend a memorial service with 3,000 attendees on Mount Herzl cemetery honoring the thousands of Ethiopian Jews who died in the desert to escape Ethiopia and march towards Israel. In 1984, Israel rescued 8,000 through Operation Moses and in 1991, Israel rescued 14,000 through Operation Solomon. Today 175,000 free Ethiopians live in Israel!! At the ceremony, PM Netanyahu came to speak, and we were blessed to hear the powerful singing of IDF Chief Cantor Shai Abramson.



For just the pick-me-up we needed, we met with Avi Abelow at his Jerusalem studio. Avi gave his unique and “politically incorrect” view of the happenings in Israel and the world today. Many disturbing developments but also many to inspire hope and progress. Avi’s “Pulse of Israel” is recommended viewing for all.





Later, the group was at the Knesset with MK Ohad Tal and MK Amit Halevi giving our support and encouragement for the application of sovereignty in Judea & Samaria.



Yom Yerushalayim is a very spirited day in Israel, celebrating the reunification of the Holy City in 1967. Many youth, families, and AFSI Chizuk participants march in the Flag parade which culminates at the Kotel for hours of joyous celebration.



## DAY 8

Bright and early, the entire group ascended to Har Habayit with Rabbi Yehuda Glick in the early morning. Then, we met at the Jaffa Gate for a spectacular Old City tour seeing the amazing acquisitions engineered by Ateret Cohanim. The indefatigable Daniel Luria never fails to educate and inspire! We can just imagine the entire Old City turning blue and white due to their work. Many exciting developments are on the horizon.



Then to Atarot Airport in Northern Jerusalem and adjacent to the illegal Arab city of Kfar Akab. In the late 1990's residents of the small Arab village were shooting at the airplanes as they were taking off from the predominantly domestic airport, enough so that in 2000 the airport had to shut down operations. (One has to wonder why the Arab village was not removed preemptively.) Meanwhile the town continued to grow so much that what was 5,000 people in 05' has grown to a reported 80,000 today. These illegal buildings are so close to the former #2 airport in Israel that its reopening is impossible due to aviation standards. The good news is that longtime AFSI friend Chaim Silberstein, who led us this afternoon, and his

Jerusalem Center for Applied Policy organization has just the day before received approvals to move ahead with a refurbishment plan to turn the abandoned and ransacked airport into a visitor center and aviation museum, with future hopes for more Jerusalem housing development and prevention of further Arab occupation.

Dinner was shared with Arie King, the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, and his parents. Notably, King's parents survived the events of October 7 in their home located in Kibbutz Alumim.





## DAY 9

The final day of our AFSI Spring '25 Chizuk Mission started with a visit to the headquarters of United Hatzalah in Jerusalem. Here, we learned so much from our extraordinary host and field volunteer



responder Rachel, about the history, operations, culture and the heroic volunteers that make up their forces and have saved so many thousands of lives throughout all of Israel. As first



responders that are dedicated to their goal of 90 second response time, their strategies and methods are both admirable and mind blowing. Of course, we also learned about their call to action on 10/7 and all of the remarkably courageous and selfless good they were able to do during those devastating days.



The afternoon brought us to Tel Aviv and the Ma'aleh Eliyahu Yeshiva. Here we were greeted warmly by CEO Yair Ganz and his father Rav Chaim Ganz. Thirty years ago, Rav



Ganz left his home in Kiryat Arba along with his Yeshiva in Hebron to move to Tel Aviv with his wife, 9 children and 25 students, to found the yeshiva. With this move he hoped to create an atmosphere of growth, harmony and mutual respect among the various groups in the city. Today, his vision is becoming a reality as the Yeshiva and its students are an integral part of the community with initiatives such as preparing non-religious boys for their Bar Mitzvahs, serving as learning companions with senior citizens, assisting families sitting Shiva, visiting and arranging Kiddush for sick people in nearby hospitals and supporting schools and synagogues in vicinity by joining them in prayer. There are also more recently launched and growing projects including Torah and Emunah (faith) programs for women aged 18-26 in national service or studying at university and a Wounded Warrior Recovery Program empowering them through Torah, community and resilience-building wisdom. Here we enjoyed a delicious lunch cooked in their kitchen led by one very special chef that feeds so many.



Finally, after we walked along the Tayelet on Tel Aviv's beautiful beaches we arrived at Regine restaurant for our farewell dinner. There we were met by Adv. Yifa Segal whose long resume includes being the Chief of Staff for Gilad Erdan during his ambassadorship in Washington DC. She currently works with the Hetz organization and with Habithonistim, founded by General Amir Avivi to promote true security in Israel. Yifa gave us a very candid view of the current situation in Israel, answering all questions posed to her and even many that were not asked.

After a delicious dinner where we shared our impressions of the experience of the last 9 days. Then we were off to the airport for our flights to many different North American destinations. Never do we say goodbye - only L'Hitraot - see you again soon!

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### ***What people are saying about the AFSI Chizuk Mission to Israel...***

#### **Avi Abelow**

One of the best organizations motivating and activating people to stand up strongly, proudly and unapologetically for the truth about Israel, and this organization has been doing it for years. So amazing to see Judy Freedman Kadish and Ken Freedman continuing on the holy work that their mother started!

#### **David and Brenda Goldfarb**

Judy, I finished my time with Associates for Biblical Research and Brenda, and I are spending a quiet weekend in Jerusalem before flying out on Tuesday. At breakfast this morning we were reminiscing about what a great visit we had in Israel and at the top of the list was the eight days we spent with AFSI. It was the most amazing experience/tour we have ever done. We loved the people we were with and the itinerary you and Ken made up. For us, you truly captured magic in a bottle that week. My experience at Shiloh and the dig was wonderful. I feel very connected to Shiloh on a spiritual level and felt sad as we were getting ready to depart yesterday afternoon. I hope next year you can get Dr. Scott Stripling to speak to your group. He is an amazing individual and committed to his profession of archaeology. Thank you and Ken and your blessed mother for a wonderful experience. ~~David and Brenda

#### **Patrick Assad**

Having a couple weeks to review many thoughts I need to share some key factors of having this annual trip. Judy and Ken and others I'm sure, organized a difficult task with merely a disruption. Like Ami said as he attempted to engage the hair pin turns at the "ranch," life gives you lemons you make lemonade. Thank you Ami our amazing talented drive. Each site was a bit different than the next; mini surprises, some hands on, some just listening others were great dinners and lively night-time regardless of venue. Listening to "Bibi" speak in person. Many friends and family enquired about the trip: #1 How was the food? Never disappointed was I, not once. #2 Were you scared at any point? Never. (Ami at the hairpin maybe a little). I felt safer in Judea/Samaria and all communities than being in Boston after 2am. #3 Flight...Save your points and combine them (I can show you that) get a biz class round trip for same



price as coach. #4 How were the locals? Super kind, friendly and hospitable and grateful and ALWAYS SMILING. I noticed that a lot on this second time around. The sad part was I was only there for 11 days, that's the only negative. I've had multiple people wanting to visit the Holy Land. I have engaged with many and hope to have 4-6 people joining on the next one. As I may have stated to some on the trip, I personally have visited 24 countries, some a few times, but ISRAEL by far is in the top 3. There is only one #1 and the best and that's GOD!!! So got all others with a desire to experience an off the grid trip that fascinated you daily join us. Judy, Ken and all others involved thank you again for making this trip seamless!!! Love you all, P Assad.

**Yehudit Katsover and Nadia Matar**

Where else can you find a group like our dear friends from AFSI?

Dear AFSI friends, Judy, Ken, Leon, and all,

You had barely stepped off the bus at Oz v'Gaon when we felt it — the electricity in the air, your incredible energy, optimism, and joy. You didn't come as mere visitors; you came as full partners, as dedicated soldiers for the Land of Israel and for the application of sovereignty. Within moments — even before the hugs ended — your message was clear: “Okay, what can we do? How can we help? We're here!”

We have walked this path together for many years — back in the 1990s we stood side by side protesting the Oslo Accords, later you joined us in the struggle to save the hilltops from hostile Arab takeover, and then in 2011, when we raised the banner of Israeli sovereignty, the late and beloved Helen Freedman, founder and longtime director of AFSI, immediately embraced the idea with full enthusiasm and commitment.

Today, you continue Helen's powerful legacy, and it is heartwarming and inspiring to see the spirit of AFSI growing and evolving — especially with the new branch, Texans for a Safe Israel. Kol Hakavod!

During this week's visit with you, we focused on the urgent need to promote sovereignty over the Land of Israel — and once again, you rose to the challenge without hesitation.

Thank you for your unwavering friendship, partnership, and support throughout the years. With God's help, we will continue forward — together we will act, and together we will succeed.

And let us add:

AFSI doesn't just stand for Americans for a Safe Israel — it also stands for Amazing, Fantastic, Strong, and Impactful!

With love and deep appreciation,  
*Yehudit Katsover and Nadia Matar*  
The Sovereignty Movement