

Week 2 Report

At the end of our last report, we were just about to go into Atlit Detention Center, the prison where the British cruelly housed Jews who illegally immigrated into Israel. Our visit there left the kids thinking about the role of Jews as the masters of their own destiny. Next we visited a Druze village, followed by a talk and amazing dinner at a Druze home. The kids asked great questions, including whether the Druze sanctified same-gender marriage (no, but the man was incredibly forthright about the fact that all peoples and all societies include homosexuals), then belly-danced the night away.

Wednesday we headed toward the mystical hills of Safed, where we visited the Caro Synagogue and learned how the Kabbalists were deeply spiritual and rational at the same time. Our afternoon was spent lazing at Blue Beach on the Kineret (Sea of Galilee). We ended the afternoon with a meditative service led by four Rashi kids and then a lovely ride back into Haifa.

Thursday we went up to the Golan Heights to learn about Israel's more modern wars, specifically 1967 and Yom Kippur. Thursday night, the kids gathered for a party at the home of one Haifa student, and they are already planning to see each other at least a hundred times before the Israelis arrive in Boston in just a few short weeks. The staff and I agree that some of the relationships built in this week will likely last a lifetime. It's quite extraordinary and makes us all very proud.

Friday began in Haifa with a heartfelt and tearful goodbye to our Israeli hosts. We then went on a gorgeous and somewhat strenuous hike, before heading to Jerusalem.

Shabbat in Jerusalem was profound in many ways. We brought in Shabbat with a *Kabbalat Shabbat* service on a balcony overlooking the *Kotel*, and the prayers that rose up from our group were extraordinary. We actually had people from outside of our group asking for prayer sheets and joining in with us. It brought tears to my eyes. We then spent a brisk (meaning COLD) half hour experiencing the incredible energy of Shabbat down at the wall. Wow!

Shabbat morning had us divided among the Reform shul *Kol Haneshamah*, the Conservative Center, and a small and lively Orthodox *shteibel* (small synagogue). All of the kids and staff enjoyed their different experiences, as well as the afternoon spent "chillaxing." After a *Havdallah* ceremony that rivaled *Kabbalat Shabbat* in energy and beauty, we shopped 'til we dropped on Ben Yehudah St.

Sunday began with a tour of *Yad Lekashish*, an organization that trains and employs senior citizens in various artisanal trades, then sells their work to fund further training. It was inspiring and mind-expanding. We met with a Torah scribe who managed to be both wildly esoteric and deeply practical at once. In the afternoon, we packed groceries for needy families, and then completed our shopping. The kids chose to buy a mezuzah as a gift for the school and they made a spectacular choice. They can't wait to show it off.

Today we said goodbye to Jerusalem and made our way to Tel Aviv via a JNF forest where we each planted a tree; the Israeli tank museum in Latrun; the Weizman Science Center, and a big field of potatoes in need of harvesting. We actually harvested 1500 kilos of potatoes in 20 minutes! Every potato will go to a hungry Israeli before Pesah

Now we're in Tel Aviv, having some fun and games. Tomorrow we explore the birth of Israel at Independence Hall, visit an outdoor artists market and then go to a kibbutz that housed a secret bullet factory. Wednesday, we return to Jerusalem for Yad Vashem and Mt. Herzl and then it's Shalom Israel.

It's almost time to say goodbye to this incredible, action packed and transformative trip. It has been unbelievably wonderful, and the overwhelming vibe among the group has been one of happiness and excitement.

Shalom,

Sharon, Matt, Carolyn, Dave, Josh and Erica