

DAY 1

The program I am part of is called Qushiyot. It is jointly run by the Jewish Education Project and Makom. It is a year-long program in which we learn about how to approach Israel Education or any challenging topic through the lens of the four Hatikvah Questions. Lihiyot (to be), Am (peoplehood), Hofshi (freedom), Beartzanu (in the land). Every lesson or piece of curriculum should fit into one of the four quadrants. After this eight-day long study mission, I will have seminars and a coach to help RSNS look at how to implement this philosophy into our educational system.

The group is all Jewish Professionals. There are 15 of us, a logistics coordinator, a leader from JEP, Makom and an Israeli educator. The Israeli educator is the head of Aaron's program at Hartman, Chaya Gilboa. It is just a coincidence. What a pleasure it has been getting to know her.

Traveling down south to Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh where we had lunch, dinner and sleeping for the night. We began with introductions and expectations. We were asked to state our expectations of self, group and leader. I hope that this experience helps me to chart new and different opportunities for RSNS for future Israel experiences as a congregation. I will be exploring how to have Israel engagement through different grade levels and how to use these models to prepare our youth to explore open and challenging conversations. Their premise is Americans like to have a consensus when there is a disagreement and Israelis can sit with the disagreement and find closure. I don't know if I completely agree, but it is an interesting concept.

We studied a text from Baba Mitziah, 84a. This is the largest order of the Talmud because it focuses on the interactions between human beings. As Chaya said, we are here to discuss the words, but the spaces in between. The text was about the benefit of having a Hevruta that is different from you, different in life experiences and different theology. That in the differences and the challenge comes the greatest growth. Most important the text warns by the tale that is told, not to let your ego get in the way of learning from that person.

We arrived at Ben Gurion's grave and overlooked the Negev in all its peace and silence. We sat with the silence. The graves are raised with Jerusalem stone. They are simple with Ben Gurion and his wife buried side by side. With their names, birth and death and date of Aliyah. A field trip to the place where Zionism began. We studied a piece by Ben Gurion, To the Negev. Did his vision of a flourishing Negev become a reality. The truth is that what he was able to achieve in his lifetime is how the Negev remains. It has not been populated in the prophetic vision that Ben-Gurion hoped. 80% of Israelis live centrally in and between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. 10% up North and 10% down South. He was so dedicated to the development of the South that he took a leave of office from the Knesset to work the land on a Kibbutz with young idealists. "They told me they were fighting for Israel's independence by taming the wilderness."

Ben-Gurion has the philosophy of the community being more essential than the individual. He wrote, "Such a move won't be easy." But by creating communities in the South Israel can attain defensive depth and cultivate the land. His philosophy is both visionary and prophetic and a leadership model that is not in fashion anymore. How do we look at Ben-Gurion and his actions and writings as a whole and withhold judgement of him as a person and try to understand the ideas.

Everyone told Israel stories tonight and Chaya (who grew up Haredi) told one about protesting with Peace Now, that her sisters settlement get removed. She retold when her three brothers and sister were on one side fighting against the army removing them from the settlement and Chaya was on the other side protesting that they should have to be removed. That Shabbat her father called all of them and said I am telling you that you all need to come for Shabbat dinner. He made them all come and said no matter ideology, Family comes together. There were many more stories told. Many of the participants have a long history with Israel. Made Aliyah and returned to America and some have only been here a few times. The connections whether deep or surface have intense feelings behind them.