

DAY 7

The theme of the day is Clashing Answers to the Four Questions. We set off for the West Bank/Judea and Samaria.

The basis of understanding for the day was that a student needs to own the four questions in order to engage with the military occupation. We have a base line of the things we can argue about. Hebron was actually divided into two. 1997 agreement. 80% of geography under Palestinian authority (H1), 30,000 Palestinians. 20% geography under Israeli authority (H2) 500-800 Jewish Israelis. Tension, stray dogs. Experienced more violence than anywhere in Palestine. Many people who have done the terrorists attacks in Israel have come from Hebron and the area of Hebron. Green license plates Palestinians. Yellow license plates Israeli. Flat roofs Palestinian, because as generations continue, they build the houses up. Red sloped roofs Israeli. Black hot water heaters on the roofs of Palestinian dwelling spaces.

What was most interesting about the day was the amount of extra people who were with us for the day. We had a specific guide for the day who organized the experiences in the West Bank, Alex Stein. We had a guard, a 21-year-old right out of the IDF (he was not thrilled with where we were going). We had someone who was there to observe where we went (I didn't understand his purpose). And then specific guards or speakers at each stop plus our logistics coordinator, and the three educators. We had a different bus and bus driver for the day. I think it was an enforced bus and the driver who was able to drive into those areas.

We met Hamed a man who lives in Hebron and we walked up and down Shehade Street in Hebron with him. It was a ghost town. Truly no one was around. There were one or two other buses and very few Palestinians were around. We saw how this area was completely enclosed and closed off. There were closures everywhere and it appeared arbitrary where and why they were constructed. Hamed was articulate and had a sense of despair. He feels that the Israeli government is trying to make it so unbearable to live there that people will on their own will leave. The schools are challenging to get to, almost impossible. The fear of moving around is palpable. Hamed's Narrative was important. I kept on wanting to ask why he wanted to talk with us. He was in an Israeli section of the Hebron for the first time in 10 years. What I took away from Hamed was a feeling of survival and humiliation.

We visited the Cave of Machpelah. The burial place of Abraham & Sarah, Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob & Leah. It seemed to be a very holy place for many of the people there. We learned that Jews have access to 19% of the Cave and Muslims have 81% access. 10 days during the year Jews have access to the whole space and 10 days Muslims have access to the whole space.

So, we don't actually get to go into caves! Jews and Muslims share this space and there is the creation of a memorial structure above the cave. They are more like crypts of some sort with lots of adornment. Lots of intense prayer and notes where the graves are marked for being beneath. You could see through to the Muslim side, through a bullet proof shield. On this cold and dreary day, in this ghost town full of separation I felt a sense of despair as well. I had a terrible feeling of how will things ever change.

We went to a Jewish section of Hebron to meet with Mrs. Sarah Nahshon. She felt God gave us this land. There are places that Jews are not able to go in the land now. Her feeling and life work is we don't fight we won't have access to Cave of Machpelah.

After the Six Day war she wanted to live in the Old City. Husband wanted to live in Hebron. She said it is neck of the Israeli government. 7 families stay in the empty police station in Hebron. Settlers of Hebron. First Brit in Hebron in 40 years, her son. Can't bring wine in the cave of machpelah. She had a Brit in the police station. Next child she has she does the Brit in the cave of machpelah. It was secretive and without permission. Moved from old police station to live in this new Community. Next child does the Brit in the cave of machpelah. They arrested her husband. And within the day he was released. She had a feeling of longing and entitlement.

We asked why is it so important to have Hebron built. To be in Hebron is to be near our forefathers and foremothers. She feels the connection to the Jewish people in this area. She tells a story of taking 8 women who had not been able to have children to the cave of machpelah and pray for 40 days. All 8 women have kids today!

She has 11 Children

100 grandchildren. One of her daughters has 17 children

30 great grandchildren

Gives her life purpose. Zionist meets the political. Spiritual zeal. Religious spiritualism. Messianic, religious zeal. How representative is Sarah for people who live in the West Bank. Vast majority live there because it is cheaper and a better quality of life. The government was giving a good incentive. Although the enterprise wouldn't have been possible without the messianic people. Each place has its own story.

The difference between the Palestinian speaker in the rain, walking through the gates and dilapidated housing. And then the Jewish Settler in her home, that was warm and with vibrant art made an impact as well.

If we are meeting with these speakers they are already in a space to have a conversation. We now met with two different sets of partners that do collaborative work.

The organization Roots-is in Judea, Gush Etzion.

A local project. It is all about identities.

Jewish presenter. Immigrated to USA at 2 years. Always connected to Israel. Came first time in 1995 after Rabin assassination. Came to an agricultural religious kibbutz. Arrived summer of 2000. Beginning of Shemita year. They were dealing with issues beyond Shabbat, kashrut...and were now asking the questions of how to deal with a Jewish economy. Palestinian presenter.

Very young. 26 years old. He lives in Bethlehem and spoke about the feeling of living a childhood without knowledge of the conflict until the 2nd Intifada. Then he needed to make a choice to be in conversation or not. He made the choice to be in. It is not without challenge because conflict does not take place between Israeli, Palestinian...It takes place between "us and them."

We explored the idea as a group is this a peace process or existential process. Brings up anger, fear, mistrust. Sense of despair. Anger + fear = hate

Majority still support 2 state solution but that is the same number that does not believe that in their lifetime they will never see it.

Big questions for many...Who was here first? Once we answer that it defines who is illegitimate. Can it ever be that this is a sacred land for both communities. Have the acknowledgment that there are three religions belong to this land.

We went to a town in Hibbeh Zachariah. We met with the Muhtar and Myron Joshua. Both live in Gush Etzion. Their lives are intertwined. The Muhtars Community often times works within the Jewish Community. He spoke Hebrew, but was not allowed to incorporate Hebrew into the curriculum for the schools in his community. By reaching Hebrew it would be considered that there is an acknowledgement that there is a Jewish State and they are in power. However the Muhter sees the need in commerce to have the language. It is as if the Muhter is fighting for his people against both sides. He is not allowed to build onto any building. So if a person grows up and marries, they cannot build in the village, they have to move out. Can't add rooms to the school. The Muhter says that he wants to do things legally and he is always worried about the Israeli government coming in and destroying what they built on one hand and on the other hand trying to give his Community the best they can have.

We returned back to Tel Aviv. I walked (ran) to my favorite pizza place (Roman style) and a yogurt place that Peter and the kids went to on our last trip. It was a great place that you can add all the toppings you want!

We debriefed about each narrative. The role of narratives in teaching context. We concluded the long day with Talmud study.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin 55a

And that if a brick wrongfully appropriated has been built into a palace. The Rabbis taught: If a man wrongfully takes a brick and builds it into a palace, Beit Shammai say that he must demolish the whole palace and restore the brick to its owner. Beit Hillel, however, say that the latter can claim only the money value of the brick, so as not to place obstacles in the way of penitents.

1. Acknowledge what you did (stole the brick)
2. Bring the brick back
3. Do Tshuvah

Palestinian's might say, I don't want the money, I want the actual brick or justice. The challenge is that war changes the rules.

We live in a world of truth (values) and peace (humanity). Practical language means you need to compromise on the truth and sometimes some groups have to compromise more than others.

How do we find a just and Jewish Solution??