

Shalom Temple Sinai Community,

Sadly this is my final letter from Israel and I return to Vermont this week. I am so thankful for these past few weeks in Israel full of amazing experiences.

Our final week was everything we could have asked for. On Sunday we drove to Be'er Sheva, and learned a lot about the history and importance of the Negev. From there we drove to the Bedouin tents! We heard from a community member about the Bedouin people and culture, and their history in Israel. Next we went on a short camel trek to see the sunset over the mountains. After some incredibly delicious food we participated in a drum circle, and finished off the night with some stargazing.

The next morning we awoke at 4am to hike Masada. It was one of my favorite moments on the trip, and the view from the top was incredible. We spent some time walking around the fortress and learning about the Roman culture and influence. Later in the day we went for a swim in the Dead Sea! We finished off a long day in Mizpe Ramon, tired but happy.

Tuesday and Wednesday were two great days of hiking and exploring in the Negev. We first hiked in Ein Ovdat National Park, and saw lots of beautiful mountains and wildlife. Next we visited Ben Gurion's grave, which had a stunning view over the desert. We discussed what characteristics make up a good leader and how Ben Gurion embodied those qualities, both the positive and the negative.

The next morning we drove into the enormous Ramon Crater to hike a trail called Red Canyon. We were surrounded by beautiful mountains and canyons in all shades of red and orange. Then we started our long drive down to Eilat.

Once in Eilat we spent a morning volunteering with kids from refugee or asylum seeking families. We discussed what it means to be a refugee or asylum seeker in Israel, and how it impacts the lives of the children we met. The families were mostly from Sudan or Eritrea. In the afternoon we went snorkeling in the Red Sea! We saw many different kinds of fish and corals and had so much fun.

For our last hike of the summer we woke up at 3am to climb Mt. Tzfachot. We watched the sunrise over Eilat, looking across the sea in to Jordan. In the other direction we could see into Egypt. It was by far my favorite hike of the summer.

We wrapped up our trip in Jerusalem, first visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum. We spent hours learning and taking part in meaningful discussions. The next day we visited an outstanding organization called Shalva. The organization provides therapy, childcare, and resources to families with children who have special needs. Touring the facilities we were blown away. The most amazing part was that every single thing about it is absolutely free to the families. We were able to spend some time playing with some of the children in the childcare, and really understood what it means for them to have such a special place.

This trip to Israel has been absolutely incredible and I am excited to return in the future.

L'Shalom!

Naomi