

Shalom Temple Sinai Community,

Our second week on the Biluim Israel program has been packed full of new experiences, good food, and lots of traveling! This week our focus was understanding the many unique peoples that make up Israel's complex culture and society.

We started our week up North visiting Kibbutz Hanaton, where learned about pluralism and its role in Israel. At the Kibbutz, Israelis with all different religious identities live together peacefully. For lunch we stopped at a Druze restaurant, where we learned about the Druze religion and its history, while eating unbelievably delicious food. We then travelled to Haifa, where we visited the beautiful Ba'hai gardens and learned about the Ba'hai faith.

On Monday we started South toward Jerusalem. On our way we stopped at Givat Haviva, an Israeli-Arab village and peace organization. We talked about the history of the formation of Israel, and how in the process tough decisions were made in Arab families about whether to remain in Israel. We also learned about the creation of Areas A,B, and C that divide the West Bank into zones. We then visited the village of Barta'a, in which half of the village is in Israel, and the other half is in the West Bank. Next we met with three Israeli- Arab teenagers living in Givat Haviva, who talked with us about the difficulties of living in the Jewish State. We were able to understand their perspective when hearing about dealing with stereotypes, whether in airport security, or in the university admissions process.

Finally we reached Jerusalem. We started out by touring the old city, visiting the Western Wall, and exploring the tunnels underneath it. We learned a lot about the history of Jerusalem, Mount Moriah, and the Temple Mount. Later that day we met with an organization called Women of the Wall. Their purpose is to legally gain the rights for women to pray freely at the Wall, with a Torah scroll, Tefillin, and a prayer shawl. We also learned further about inequalities between men and women in everyday Israeli life. We were shocked by hearing some of the reactions to the Women of the Wall when they challenged such inequalities, whether at the Wall or elsewhere.

The next day we visited the National Cemetery Har Herzl, and discussed the importance of the leaders of Zionism and the Israel when the country was first founded. We also talked about the Army as a large part of Israeli life, and how soldiers who died defending Israel are honored. We then spent some time in the Mahane Yehuda market, and later Ben Yehuda street finding excellent food and great shopping.

We ended our week by visiting an organization called Brothers for Life. The organization is made up of soldiers that were injured physically or mentally in combat. We learned about the power of being able to talk about their experiences with one another, without judgement, knowing that they will be understood. We were moved by two men who spoke of their personal stories of being injured in combat, and the massive effect it had on the rest of their lives.

This week I have learned and experienced so much, and am extremely grateful to be here in Israel.

L'Shalom,

Naomi