

The echoes of song and cheer continue in my head.

Yesterday, we welcomed the Israeli Tzofim/Scouts “Friendship Caravan” to the JCCH. This troupe of teenage performers - touring North America this entire summer - is an energetic and inspirational example of the best that Israel has to offer. They met our nursery school students, performed in concert on my front lawn, joined one hundred of us for a great BBQ dinner and were then hosted by six JCCH families who reported to me this morning on how much they enjoyed their young Israeli guests. About the performance - they brought us a full day of great music and dancing, of course. But, more than that, they helped us renew and further strengthen our ties to the State of Israel. While the Tzofim Friendship Caravan has been coming to the United States for over forty years, it had been quite a long time since we welcomed them to the JCCH. It was so good to have them back here, even if for only a day. Many people helped make this happen and particular thanks go to the Rozov family.

This visit by the Tzofim caps a year that was chock-full of visitors from Israel, representing many facets of the rich and complex nature of Israeli society. Allow me to review our visitors from the State of Israel just this year: We welcomed the **Friends of the IDF and Lt. Amir Madeson** for a “kickoff” Shabbat dinner in September. Our visitor reported on his unit’s heroic efforts during the Summer 2014 war in Gaza. We look forward to the Friends of IDF bringing a full complement of soldiers to the JCCH for a full-weekend visit this December; let me know if you’d like to help plan their visit or host a soldier.

Our **Israeli High Holiday Choir** added beauty and meaning to our Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur services; we look forward to their return this coming year. A few days later, hi-tech entrepreneur and **Knesset Member Erel Margalit** joined us to share his views on Israel’s successes and challenges in an engaging presentation in partnership with the AJC. December saw a Scholar-in-Residence weekend visit from **Conservative/Masorti Rabbi Andy Sacks of Jerusalem**. Andy enthralled us with his reports on such issues as women's equality in Israel, full Egalitarian access to the Kotel (Western Wall) and ensuring that conversion and other lifecycle events within the State of Israel represent the best of Jewish values.

In February, we welcomed the Israeli educators **Sveta and Ye’ela, representing the Ein Yael Living Museum** for a Shabbat with the congregation which was followed by a wildly-successful “vacation camp” with 50+ of our children and teenagers. Members of our congregation attended the important **AIPAC** and **J Street** conferences in Washington DC in March and were exposed to a variety of perspectives on Israel’s geopolitical challenges. **Rabbi Chaya Baker**, the only full-time female Masorti Rabbi met with several members of the congregation in April, including our adult bat mitzvah class. Individuals within the synagogue also **visited Israel** in great numbers this year - for personal, Birthright, business and tzedaka-related reasons. I commend all who visit Israel at every opportunity – just as I take those opportunities myself. A special **nesiyah tova** – wishes for good travels - to the **Wohl Family** as they leave this summer for a year-long sabbatical in Ranana where Miles, Aidan and Russel will enroll in the Israeli public schools.

Looking ahead, the JCCH will join the inaugural cohort of **Rav Siach**, a program to strengthen and deepen the relationship between Conservative communities in the Diaspora, Masorti communities in Israel and the State of Israel by: creating a conversation on the key issues confronting Israeli society and

Diaspora communities; building relationships between Israeli and Diaspora rabbis and their respective communities and providing support and guidance and promoting the use of educational and conceptual tools to achieve these goals. More information to follow on this exciting opportunity for us.

Finally, I am very eager to **travel to Israel** with as many of you as possible in the coming months and years. While bringing visitors from Israel is wonderful, there is no substitute for visiting the Jewish State – as a first-timer or a veteran. I hope to build up to one trip each year from our congregation – this is a long-term goal. My quandary, to be honest, is figuring out with you when the time might be right for a trip or trips. One idea under consideration is for an older-adult trip this coming Fall and a Younger Families trip next summer (June or August). I need your feedback – please let me know what might work for you.

Wishing you a wonderful summer.

Rabbi Eytan Hammerman