

# Weekly Teaching

March 9, 2018



*Visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulcher during our Interfaith Israel trip.*



*Our Israel group at the top of Masada.*

It has been a non-stop whirlwind since I arrived back home from our Shalom Center's Interfaith trip to Israel.

It took more than a week for me to feel fully present in our Eastern Time Zone, and for my regular sleep patterns to return.

But, the physical time adjustment was much faster than the mental and emotional processing of our amazing trip.

Processing poignant events usually come more slowly; often in bits and pieces.

I find Interfaith trips to Israel always more intense because amidst the overriding camaraderie within the group, we experience different viewpoints and different spiritual traditions in a land always contested between different peoples, and passionate historic ethnicities.

One example that keeps emerging for me was our group visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which marks the place of the Crucifixion of Jesus, and the Burial Cave.

I had been there before on other trips, and like many sacred sites, it is very crowded.

Our group was fortunate to visit when we did because soon thereafter, for the very first time, it was closed for a couple of days as a protest against taxes being lodged against the Church.

The tax protest closed the sacred site.

I found the encroachment of the new and current; such as taxes and protest; as connected to such an ancient and sacred place to be just one more of the amazing aspects of the modern State of Israel.

Seeing the clashing amidst modern society and governance, and respectful preservation of antiquity, always brings a sense of marvel.

Another example of modern meeting ancient happened when we visited Masada, which on my previous dozen trips there has always been hot, exhausting and crowded.

This time Masada was practically empty because one of the main roads to the mountain fortress was washed out by heavy brief rain showers and most buses were prohibited from going.

However, we found a different route, and I visited the site with new eyes.

As I have previously written, our group also met with an English Muslim woman living in a Arab village within Israel, and she shared her stories with delicious tea and biscuits amongst her farm animals in her backyard.

We also met with soldiers at an army base, those who cover the checkpoints and borders, and try to keep the safety and peace afloat in this Holy Land.

Many different viewpoints and sharing took place between our fellow travelers, and echoes of these conversations remain in my mind.

Roseanne and I bookended our trip to Israel by first stopping in Copenhagen, Denmark, a country that saved its Jewish citizens during the Holocaust years by sending them away briefly on boats and bringing them back after the War.

We ended our trip with visiting Petra, in Jordan.

Petra is a city carved in rock, in canyons.

There exists in Petra intricate carvings of buildings by a people and civilization that we know little of and can only make inferences about, based on their rock creations, though they are slowly eroding, but still exist up through our time.

In Petra, there are carvings of the people's pagan gods.

The carvings of gods, unlike some of the dwellings, appear simple, such as a small rectangular column located at what were homes or meeting places.

One of their gods that greeted us passersby was such a rectangle with merely a pair of eyes widened, that interrupts the smooth stone.

This god, with its open eyes, was the god who noticed all the sins of the people, so they prayed for forgiveness; they acknowledged their sins before the open eyes.

Sins of people, sins repeated, century after century, of people separating, oppressing, stealing from, murdering each other, fearing each other; we still engage in these sins with thrown rocks, guns, words, weapons.

Finally, this time, my visit in Israel gave me an experience of walking along a beachside pier of shops and breezes and starlight with my wife and son, and being suddenly verbally accosted and abused by an Israeli—don't know what ethnicity, Arab, European—he cursed at us in English because he hates Americans.

He wanted to fight; he invaded our space.

He came around in front of us as we continued walking past his vulgar tirade and he invited a fight with his fists up at my son's face.

He was drunk or high.

It could have happened in New York or anywhere.

We walked into a store and he went away.

He didn't want Americans in the land.

We also saw camaraderie, cooperation, respect and empathy among people at the same time as all the divisiveness; like pieces in a child's kaleidoscope that unite and spin apart forming endless patterns.

There was an episode of the TV show Parenthood that comes to my mind, where the patriarch and matriarch are seeing a marriage counselor, after so many years of marriage.

The husband is working to improve his relationship and he starts a habit that includes a mantra; before he responds to his wife's voice, he starts with the sentence "I hear you and I see you."

We just visited a land with a divided population, a land of contrasts among its peoples, its times and its spirit.

Israel is a land of passions and protests and persuasions.

I also returned to a land of all those things in the United States of America.

Here too we explore being protective and open, balancing rights of freedom, education, immigration and preservation.

From Copenhagen to Capernaum, or Jerusalem to Petra, people need to connect, to know their passage here has meaning.

Just as the eyes of those pagan gods carved in rock depict wide open, "I hear you and I see you," when we look and listen to each other, we will know a neighbor and feel peace and empathy in our corner of the world.

Shabbat Shalom,

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