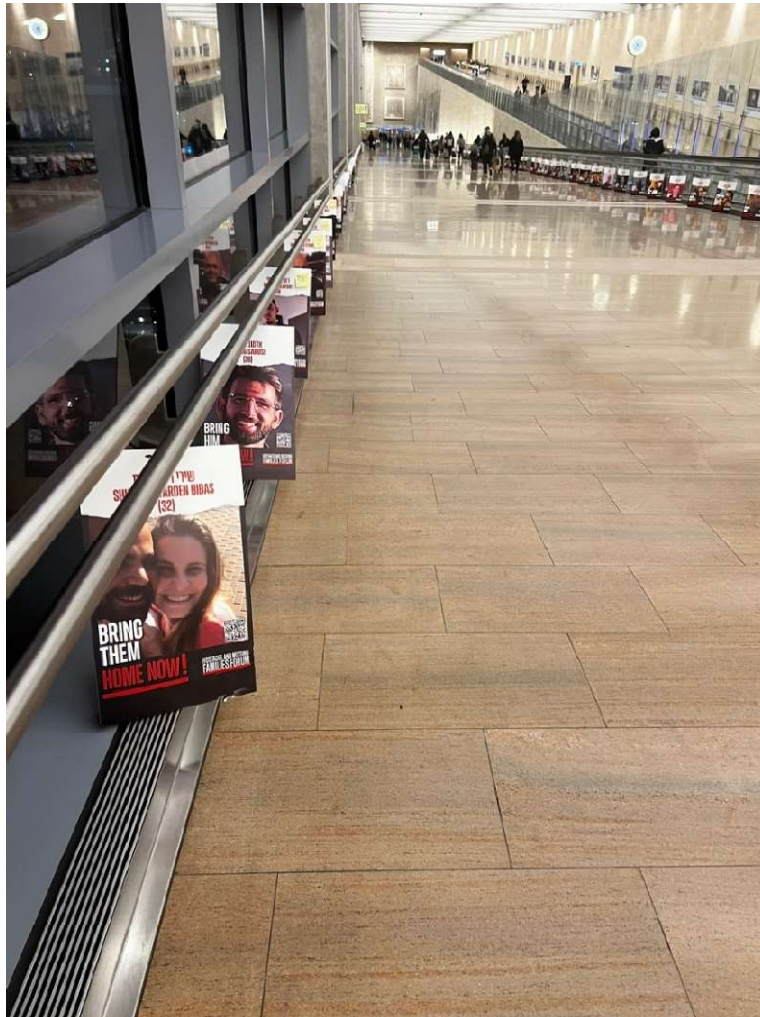


Reflections and thoughts on Israel post 10/7 and the future of Jewish education going forward.

Trip dates: 1/21 – 1/28 2024. Rabbi Moshe L. Gray



We are about to land and fear of what I am about to experience is starting to manifest in my stomach.

We are landing at night in Tel Aviv, and I won't see much today but just landing in Israel knowing that the war, 136 hostages will be front and center in a way it hasn't been in Hanover.

On campus it is us, the students and small Jewish community that fights for Israel and the Jewish people, here it is the entire country, it's in the air we breathe and the language we speak.

I hope to get a good night sleep because tomorrow is going to be heavy, very very heavy.



Refugee in his own home: This was the title of this post before I learned that Israelis entirely reject that title. He is a guest in Kibbutz Tzuba until it is safe for him to go home. This is a heart-breaking story and one of resilience.



This is Adir,
The values that guided this civilian response to 10/7 is honor and respect for every Person.
They coordinated everything from mental health needs to hot meals with proper kashrut. Created a fortune 500 level supply chain for every evacuee/resident of Jerusalem. Every person in need received a card saying 'you are our guest of honor' and it gave them discounts across the board, food, museums and on and on, in order to make them feel at home.
Duffel bags from USA with his name arrived at the airport, people sent from the USA hoping it would just get to the Chamal, he got a call saying his bags are on baggage carousel #8.
This response from abroad and feeling of support from overseas every duffel bag was and is a virtual hug.



His request, we should never return to Oct 6 with its divisions, we have unity and together we can do amazing things.

10/7 and its aftermath is a page in history.

The First paragraph we had nothing to do with its writing

The Second paragraph is being written by the IDF.

3rd is being written by the Israelis.

The 4th is for all of us to write!

THE JERUSALEM CIVILIAN COMMAND CENTER

Exploring the chaos and the energy of the Jerusalem "Chamal"

One of the most-used words of this challenging period of time in Israel is the word "chamal" (חמ"ל in Hebrew). "Chamal" is an acronym for "cheder milchamah" or "war room". It refers to a command center, or "situation room" in which people are mobilized for the war effort. Apart from the military command centers that are operating around the clock, there is also an incredible proliferation of civilian command centers, staffed entirely by volunteers to meet the needs of the Home Front. The "chamal" in Jerusalem is one of these. It was opened just a few hours after the attack began on October 7th, and has taken on a critical and central role in providing for the ongoing and evolving needs of civilians and soldiers alike. Now, a few weeks later, the "chamal" is operating around the clock, run by hundreds of volunteers every day.




Source: <https://channel31.co.il/substack.com/the-jerusalem-civilian-command-center>

THE JERUSALEM CIVILIAN "CHAMAL"

Check out some information about the Jerusalem "Chamal" here: 

- ✦ At the top of the page is an interview with one of the volunteers. Before listening to it, scroll down the page, and watch the short introductory video about the 'chamal'.
- ✦ After watching the video:
 - ✦ Briefly describe what you are seeing.
 - ✦ List all the questions that you have: big and small, logistical and conceptual.



THE JEWISH MUSEUM OF EDUCATION





Walking in the streets of Jerusalem I met Shimon. "Go back to where you came from Jew" where does Shimon go back to?!?
Sorry he doesn't fit your narrative!



Why am I here?

The people I told I was coming here had generally two reactions. #1 stay safe and I hope it's a good trip #2 why? There's a war going on wait.

I'm here because I have felt the pull to be here ever since 10/7 (I always feel it but even more so) I couldn't come during term and over December family kept me.

Then a very important opportunity was offered to me to join a Birthright educators trip to help envision and think tank post 10/7 education on future trips.

Both in reaction to 10/7 but also in a proactive way (more on this later)

Birthright has been a life changing gift for the Jewish people and specifically for the Jewish community at Dartmouth.

I've had the honor of leading 17 Dartmouth birthright trips to Israel with over 300 participants since 2005. To be asked to help shape the future of education for these trips is an honor I couldn't say no to.



The site of the Nova music festival. Aside from soldiers there aren't many visitors, because for Israel this is ongoing, time has stopped in parts. In the meantime pop up memorials have formed of those murdered.



Friends, families and loved ones do what they can to add beauty in the footsteps of the Devil.



Red poppies grow, its as if the ground itself is bleeding. We will never forget HYD.



This is Lior from Kibbutz Beerli we meet him on the side of the road near an Bacardi field.

He's a personal trainer- but now an avocado farmer.

On Oct 7 he and his wife hid in their safe room remember these rooms are for protection of rockets coming from Gaza not terrorists with Ak 47s, RPGs and 50 cal machine guns mounted on pickup trucks. And so, they don't have locks on the doors. He instinctively held the handle and survived in his room for 16 hours until the army came and rescued him.

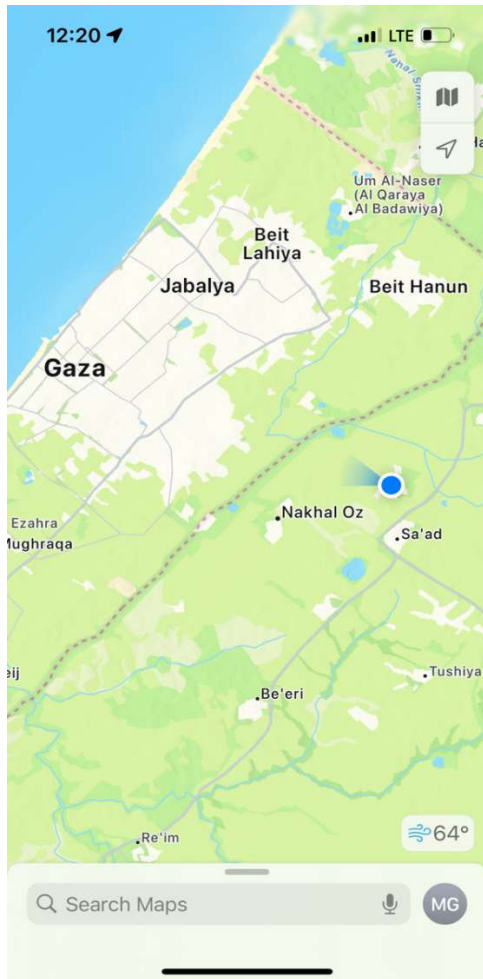
Since the Hamas terrorists couldn't get in, they tried to burn and smoke him out, but he was one of the lucky ones and the smoke and fire didn't get bad enough. Many weren't as fortunate. He was very angry and although he admits he is in the small minority, he now wants the war to end, although he doesn't know who Israel can make peace with.



I am inhabiting a strange space. To know a thing and even know it well and then to see the thing firsthand is a different matter entirely. The sheer magnitude of the destruction takes your breath away.

I just witnessed with my own eyes part of a single day Holocaust of the Jewish people. For a Jew to be able to witness the aftermath of such acts so soon after is rarely afforded to Jews throughout history.

Many of us have visited sites long after the events that took place there, the monuments and memories that are there to commemorate are well thought out and often look very professional. Here in Israel, they are makeshift, raw and spontaneous. Israeli society in many ways time has stood still. It's not memory it's the now.



I'm grateful at the end of it all that I was given the chance to visit and bear some semblance of witness to what happened on October 7. On the one hand, it simplifies matters for me. It emphasizes a moral clarity that I knew all along that we are in a struggle between good and abject pure evil, we don't try to understand evil or contextualize it, but push it away with both hands and with force. This clarity can, and is obscured by social media, on campus where there are allegiances to free speech (sometimes) and where the exchange of ideas seem to be all powerful.

On the other hand, I thought to myself before this trip that I'd be pained and sad to see the horrors, but what I wasn't prepared for was the shock and rising anger I felt. Not so much against Hamas, because is it worth being angry at the devil? But anger at the world, the moral equivocators, the self loathing, who seem to equate everything when convenient. I'm not sure how all this will manifest for me and the people that I strive to educate, but I will just need to lean into patience into the everlasting truths of the Torah, the Jewish people, people of Goodwill and the witness will bear positive fruit in the long run.





After the extremely heavy and challenging day of visiting, what's called the Gaza envelope, it was decided to tackle a much lighter subject, the Israeli Palestinian conflict and the challenges that American college students face in discussing and dialoguing around this topic. The conversation amongst the 25 educators on this trip on many of the ideas and thoughts are ones that I have been having for a long time before October 7. I see one of the greatest challenges on college campuses is finding the good faith partners that we need in order to have these dialogues. There has been a shattering of trust and I just don't think Jewish students or at least many Jewish students can be that vulnerable right now. On the one side, we're seeing lots of simplistic catchphrases, slogans that are catchy said with a beating drum and fit on a one-page Instagram photo. But Jews have always been about debate, nuance, complexity, and it's hard to be all of those things when the other side slings catchy phrases like white settler colonialist apartheid. How do I have vision in approaching this and balance it with the need for justice but mercy, balancing security but hope? I'm thinking about the need for exercises that build trust, especially amongst such a polarized student body, these will be very difficult and challenging thoughts for a long time to come. But I have to believe, and I know that our students are up for it. One highlight of today was seeing an alum and dear friend of ours Menucha Saitowitz '10. She lives in Beersheva, and I was able to see her today. Catch up a little bit hear her personal stories over the last 3 1/2 months challenges she and her family face, challenges, her children face. It was uplifting for my soul to be together with her for a short time.



What is the story we want to tell? Visiting the Anu (meaning US) museum in Tel Aviv this morning I was struck by something Zohar Raviv shared with us our second night in Israel. He said the catastrophes that happen to the Jewish people aren't Jewish events, they are events that happen to us, they are interruptions in our story. Our story is what happens before and after in response to these interruptions.

This museum is our story, from the start until today focused not on the interruptions but the institutions that have kept us for the millennia.

One of those is the synagogue, and all of the magnificent models that carried over from the old museum. The Synagogue, the place of meeting established as a life boat for the Jews of the new exile after first temple destruction and it has kept us until today.

This particular model is a wooden shul, wasn't allowed by the government to be built with any nails! For if expelled since we always were temporary in exile, one match and there isn't even a remnant of a Jew left, not even a nail. "Go back to where you came from Jew"

(Notice Tongue and groove building method)



So, what is our story? This image is books of our tradition, generations and generations of Rabbis, scholars and innovators have been added to the incredible library of the Jewish people and it is what has kept us for thousands and thousands of years it is before the interruptions it is a middle of our interruptions and it keeps us going after our interruptions. It is the details of our lives. It is the consistency and the muscle memory that we as Jews have developed for the millennia. And this piece of art struck me because interposed to all the books is music in this idea that we as Jews, stay grounded and tethered to our Torah to our scholarship, to each person's inheritance that they can add to this wisdom, and over time, we use new developments new technologies new methods to further propagate God's wisdom so here you have musicians singing, Rabbi Yehuda Halevi and others. My own Rebbe would use satellites and technology to further promote and spread Judaism, Chabad and now others use all forms of social media and new technologies to promote Israel, Judaism and its values.

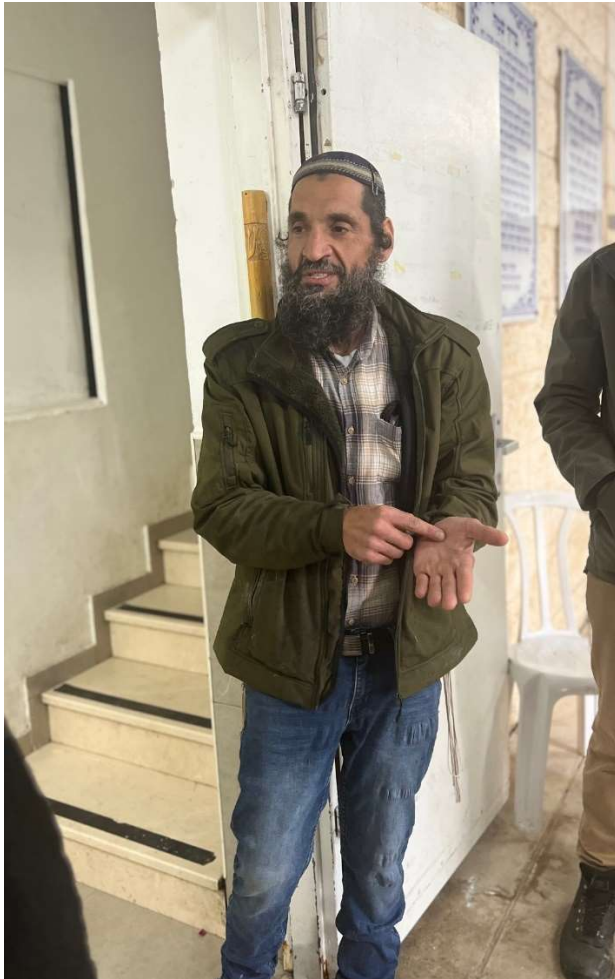


Going into Shabbat after the week I just experienced with major polarities, I began to think of what message what idea what ethic did I want to bring back from this trip to the Jewish people in Hanover, New Hampshire, and beyond. Our group convened to do a pre-Shabbat experience, which was very meaningful, and then with the remaining time before dinner, some of us chose to go and pray at the hotel Minyan. Just a word about these particular prayer services. In the hotels in Israel tend to draw a very eclectic crowd, because many Israelis vacation within Israel. Remember they cannot drive three hours north if you live in the north because that puts you in the middle of Lebanon and in Hezbolah land. If you live in Jerusalem, you cannot really drive east two or three or four hours because that puts you in the middle of Amman. If you live in the south you can't drive west, that put you in the middle of Gaza so Israelies tend to do a lot of vacationing within their own land, and they know their land well, they know it every inch of it. Jews, who live up north will vacation and take a weekend and come down to Jerusalem and stay in a hotel so I'm used to eclectic groups at these Shabbat services. Walking into that room, at first glance did not look, particularly unique, and I sat down in the back of the room and began to pray. then something extremely unique began to transpire the man leading the service a British Hasidic man paused a very familiar Ashkenaz Kabbalah Shabbat, and says "we have brothers and sisters, honored guests, who have been displaced from their homes from both the north and the south of Israel and we are welcome them into our service not just to be a part of it but to actually lead part of it, to bring their own unique customs and styles, and so we are going to shift gears now and sing a specific Sfardi song by Yemenite Jews. This is a song that I am

entirely unfamiliar with and an elderly gentleman who has been displaced by the war in Gaza, begins to sing in a beautiful melodic voice, after a few stanzas of the song he stops and then from around the corner I hear a young boy take over and this is where I begin to get blown away I get up go around the corner in the synagogue to see this young Yemenite boy maybe eight or nine years old with a big knitted kipa and long curly payiot, and he begins to sing with his father beaming next to him. They also displaced living in this hotel for the last three and a half months due to the war in Gaza. And now I start to look around this room and I see a black hat next to them, an Ethiopian Jew, and a Moroccan Jew, and a Yemenite Jew, and a Lithuanian Jew, and an American Jew, wearing different style kippot, different style hats, all sitting next to each other, praying as one being in community as one, and then I see the women's section, women with their hair, uncovered, covered with a traditional wig. Women with beautiful colored head scarfs, and I realize that this room represents all of Israel, all different types of observances, all making space for each other, welcoming in each and every one of them because we are one family and this my friends is the absolute highlight of this trip. This room was empowering. This room is the message to the world that the Jewish people are indeed one.

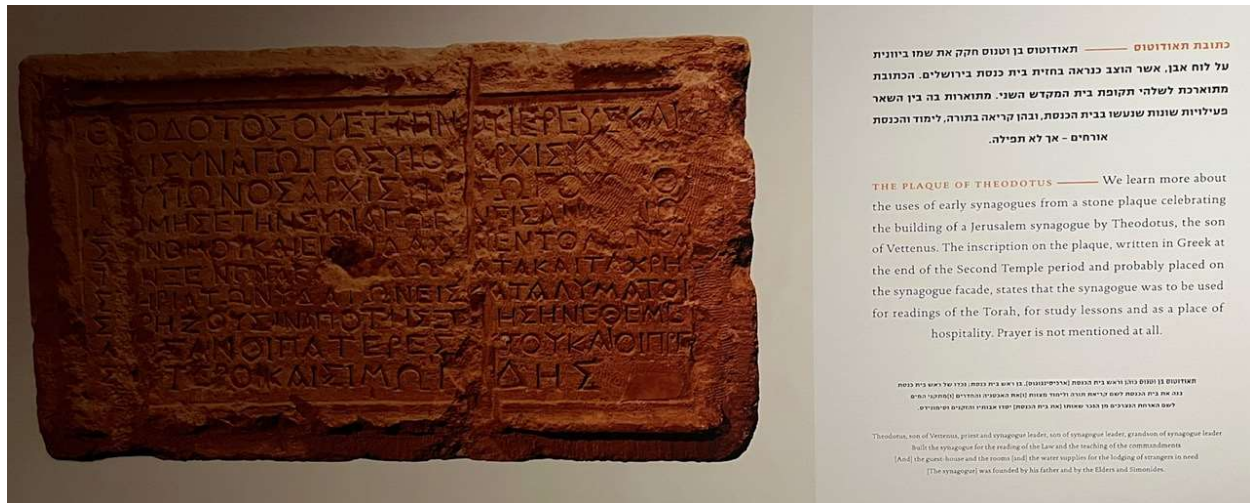


Thursday, I had the very good fortune to spend time and have dinner with two heroes of the Jewish people. Jordan Kastrinsky 16 and Jacob Cutler 18, both of whom graduated Dartmouth, made Alyiah, have both served in the IDF and are back serving in this war. They both were in good spirits and just happy to be together. I asked them both if there is any part of them that regrets their decision? I had walked over to the restaurant from hostage square, where in Tel Aviv the families of the hostages have set up camp to bring attention to their friends and family who are being held in inhuman conditions as hostages of Hamas for 114 days now, demanding the release of them all. Of course, they don't regret their decision, they are proud to defend and protect the Jewish people and the Jewish state, I am proud of them, where they came from and what they are doing!



Pain, fear, optimism, and resilience, these are very real and on display in Israel right now and will be there for a long time. War In Gaza, sons and daughter, sisters and brothers in serious harm's way. A looming war with Hezbollah in the north, 200,000 displaced Israelis, families of 5 living in a single hotel room for months on end. Divorce rates rising, substance abuse among teens, PTSD, children regressing, 1000s of severely injured all things that that we haven't even begin to talk about due to the ongoing war, daily soldiers deaths and the ongoing hostage crisis. But in the midst of all of this, there are stories of heroism, overcoming and radical doing for the other. This is Shlomie, he lives in Sderot a large town near northern Gaza. He has always given back but when the war came to his doorstep and its aftermath he realized the only way he would survive this was to do like he's never done before. He now serves 10,000 meals a week to civilians in Sderot who have been decimated by the war and its impact on the economy and daily life. Driving through the town we didn't see any open stores or eateries. And another 6000 meals to soldiers on a weekly basis. He doesn't know what comes next and has a very hard time talking about it (he had to leave us mid-sentence due to overwhelming emotion) but for now he is giving all his heart to those who need it.

Hero!



The story of the Jewish people needs to be told to the world and to ourselves. What story are we telling our children? Is it a story that invokes pride in our history and values? Or is it one that is flimsy and doesn't stand up to the prevailing in vogue flavor or the month movement?

The idea that we have to intentionally teach our children that we come from this land after we have yearned, studied, prayed and hoped for our return for 2000 years is a new concept, it was known and understood for the millennia that Israel was our biblical homeland given to us by the Almighty, as told in the Torah, the 5 Books of Moses. We the Jewish people have lived on that land ever since Joshua brought the people in with very few interruptions. And yet there is a lack of real knowledge of being there by many and proof is necessary. Thankfully there is an abundance of archeological proof, written proof and testimonial.

I encourage whomever reads this to spend time on this site and others learning and understand our connection to this land, because to let the lie perpetuate and continue that we first showed up to Israel in 1880 might be the boldest lie ever told.



This trip ultimately was all about education, which is the ethic and value that is kept the Jewish people from our very beginning. The holiday of Pesach, which commemorates our freedom and birth as a nation, is based on, “and your children will ask you on that day and you shall instruct them”.

Education, and the route of education in the current climate is as the Reba in Tanya writes, the long short route. Education is about truth, language, honesty, difficult conversations, and nuance. But it also has to be balanced with moral clarity, it is truly shocking how so many “educated” people are morally bankrupt, or throw out critical thinking when it challenges their identity or their pet cause of that particular hour. But we as Jews must stay on course and educate, it’s a long road, and in the end we will prevail for as the Torah says “for it is your life and the length of your days. Stooping to tactics that only serve in the moment but in the long run just create a deeper victimhood mentality should be rejected outright.

This group came together to learn from one another, challenge ourselves and deepen our knowledge to educate the current and future leaders of the Jewish people. It was an honor and pleasure to be selected and to be part of this esteemed cadre. Thank you to @birthrightisrael for making this happen and may we all go from strength to strength.