

What has changed and what has stayed the same?

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Sitting in my home in North America watching the horrific events of October 7 unfold was heartbreaking. Being so far physically removed from Israel was isolating and left me feeling helpless. My only sources of comfort in the days and weeks immediately following the massacre were the strength of the relationships I have formed with Israelis over the years. Instantaneously my gratitude for WhatsApp increased as this enabled me to connect with, and offer support to, my family, friends, and colleagues. Still, I longed to be there on the ground to be with my people in their – our – time of greatest need.

So, I was grateful that, in the days immediately preceding Thanksgiving, I was given the opportunity to travel to Israel with a group of like-minded educators. The visit enabled me to be with my – our – community both to support them and to provide me with the comfort of being amongst those I love.

As both an Israel educator and as a human being who has a deep and meaningful relationship with the land and people of Israel, it was at times nearly impossible to differentiate which hat I was wearing. We met with colleagues, communities that had been completely displaced, families of hostages, and heroes who saved



lives. While people thanked us for coming and told us how important our visit was, I was the one who felt indebted to those I met with for welcoming me and making me feel that my presence mattered to them. We mourned together, we cried together, and yes, we even laughed together in the face of a very long and difficult healing process that we will embark upon together. The human side of our experience was profoundly touching and gave new meaning to the word “meaningful.”

As Israel educators, we had the opportunity to sit and think with our community, both Israelis and North Americans, about what this means regarding the important work that lies ahead. We soon realized that creating a space where we can process these tragic events together needs to be our utmost priority.

Toward the end of our time together, we were asked to think about and respond to this prompt: “What has changed and what has stayed the same?” My immediate response was “everything and nothing.” After further thought I came to the realization that while the trajectory for a better tomorrow has *changed*, the necessity for a better tomorrow has remained *the same* and is more important now than ever. Through all of this we cannot turn away from the challenge of moving toward a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict; however, the events of October 7 have forced us to look at new and different ways of forging a path to peace.

As a community of educators, we need to double down on building relationships between North

Americans and Israelis, and committing to immersing Israel educators in the new reality of Israel and Israel education. Both as human beings and as educators it is crucial that now, more than ever before, our connections, our community, and our capacity to have hope remain at the forefront of what we do. We closed by singing *Hatikvah* together in the middle of a day that was both powerful and slightly awkward, but so full of meaning and our desire to not lose hope.