

## Finding Inspiration Amidst Adversity

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Undoubtedly, these weeks following the horrific tragedy of October 7 have been filled with darkness for Jews around the world. During our recent two-day solidarity mission to Israel, *Mishlachat Areyvut* (delegation of mutual responsibility), we were all personally and deeply impacted by the collective trauma, adversity, and emotional roller-coaster being experienced by the Israeli populace.

Yet, we also witnessed firsthand sources of light and inspiration—the resilience, creativity, and collective strength of the Israeli spirit—that give us hope as we move forward.

So, what comes next in terms of Israel education? What am I bringing back to the field of Jewish camp from this experience?

I carry with me a heartfelt charge we received during the mission from distinguished Brandeis Professor Emeritus Ilan Troen, who suffered the tragic loss of his daughter and son-in-law in the horrific attacks on October 7. He challenged us to view this as a pivotal moment of transformation; Israel is not the same as it was, and we must quickly reimagine our approaches both for both educators and learners.



Israel plays an essential role in the Jewish camp program each summer, as I can attest from my personal camp experiences (many moons ago), where my own relationship with Israel developed and grew. The presence and engagement of Israeli *shlichim*, the intentional incorporation of Israel programming and education, and the active inclusion of Hebrew, all combine as intrinsic elements of the camper and counselor experience.

Especially as we prepare for this coming summer, I see three pressing areas of opportunity:

1. Witnessing the situation firsthand and engaging with Israelis *in Israel* allows for a deeper understanding and a more personal connection to the unfolding narrative. They need our awareness, insights, and solidarity. I urge Jewish camp directors and educators to take advantage of opportunities to visit Israel before the 2024 camp season so that they can bear witness, convey solidarity, and experience their own learning, processing, and growth.

2. October 7 represents an inflection point requiring new content, strategies, and methodologies for connecting with today's new realities. My colleagues on the mission have already been exploring new ways to "meet the moment," especially with a more nuanced understanding and sensitivity to diverse perspectives many college-age students have experienced on their campuses.

3. We must continue our efforts to deepen the connection between Israel and communities in the diaspora. We are one global Jewish community—*Am Echad im Lev Echad*—one people with one heart. Jewish camps accomplish this each summer and we will help ensure they host even more Israeli *chanichim* (campers) and *madrichim* (counselors) for summer 2024. In particular, we know the camp setting can transmit Hebrew in a joyfully Jewish way and recent research shows that Hebrew immersion builds a stronger connection to Israel and Jewish peoplehood. (Promising new evidence: Becoming connected to Israel through Hebrew).

My participation in *Mishlachat Arevut* has left an indelible mark. From witnessing the immediate impact of October 7 on the entire population, to experiencing the resilience and creativity of the Israeli spirit, I feel the imperative for unity, courageous leadership, and transformative education. We must adapt, collaborate, and remain deeply connected to the evolving narrative of Israel during these difficult days.