

The Road on Which We Are Walking

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“My peace is tied by a thread to yours.”
(Zelda)

We arrived at Ben Gurion Airport and were immersed on all sides with individual images of Israeli hostages held in Gaza. Each of the people we encountered in Israel, whether in person, in a photograph, or video, told us their name and their story. We gathered them one by one, as their stories became part of our own post-October 7 narratives.

I recently visited Israel with a group of educational leaders. Through conversations with survivors of the massacre, hostage families, October 7 heroes, grassroots organizers, fellow educators, soldiers, and others, we were privy to both heartbreaking and inspiring stories and realities.

During a period of unimaginable trauma, Israelis, (and Jews from around the world) stand together to support one another in the most remarkable ways. Throughout Israel, within a day of October 7, evacuees were relocated to hotels, villages, and apartments. Many arrived with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Massive donations of everything imaginable arrived from local citizens, from communities and individuals across the country, and from around the world – from food and



clothing, to toys, books, toothbrushes, and much more. Within a few days, makeshift schools, childcare facilities, laundry services, youth activities, and, of course, emotional support services, were all up and running, thanks to grassroot organizations and efforts.

Still now, months later, nearly every Israeli continues to volunteer to support these efforts and others in addition to the hundreds of thousands of Israelis currently in the IDF. In virtually every Israeli home, there is a parent, child, sibling, and/or spouse serving far from home in the IDF.

The families and friends of hostages who every minute are living a nightmare, have organized to support and advocate in every way possible for the immediate return of their loved ones. The “Bring Them Home Now” *diskiyot* (dog tag necklaces) are worn by thousands of Israelis, representing a shared sentiment that all the hostages are our family, and we collectively wait for their return. Every Israeli knows a hostage, or someone who knows a hostage, or someone who knows someone who knows a hostage. Israelis are writing individual names of hostages on the backs of their *diskiyot* both as a symbol of shared responsibility for the hostages’ return as well as in honor of every individual’s name and story.

I was listening to Shai Tsabari’s song, “כוכבים בשמים” “Stars in the Sky.” The metaphor of the stars and road on which we’re walking offers glimmers of hope and humanity – in the way everyday people have acted bravely and Israeli civil society has come

together to support everyone. And there is also a feeling of despair as we recognize the vastness of the stars and all that is unknown, such as where the road leads.

While our reality and hearts are broken, our prayers and actions light up the road ahead of us, and together we will eventually begin to heal and rebuild. It is important for North American and Israeli educators to come together – in Israel – to strengthen, inspire, and support one another, while creating meaningful and rich educational strategies to best serve our students and communities now and moving forward.

We are committed to ensuring that Israelis today become part of our story, and we hope our being in Israel together with Israelis becomes part of theirs. Israel education needs both parts of the story.

When we come together to support and rebuild, we ourselves become the stars that light up the darkness.