



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

KALSMAN INSTITUTE
on Judaism & Health

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Dear Friends,

Too much time has passed since my May-June trip to Israel, but I thought a few reactions might be of interest. My particular kind of wit is challenged by brevity, so I apologize if this is more business – like than usual. Let my poor memory serve to shorten this “report”.

Overwhelmed again by the spirit of people who struggle for some of the basic things we take for granted, I had a marvelous experience with people involved in healing work, and with the learning that is accompanying that work. Ruchama Weiss has developed a further step beyond Mezorim, which will be called “Sugiyot Hayim” (chapters of life,) in which she will explore healing through texts. She is still one of Israel’s amazing new teachers, and she has written a chapter to be included in our next book (Jewish Lights Publishing Co.) [Healing and the Jewish Imagination II](#), which we plan to publish in the coming year. Rachel Ettun was in the States for much of the time I was in Jerusalem, but we did see each other at the amazing HUC Shavuot Tkkun, and I saw the effects of her leadership everywhere I went.

I continue to be bothered by the contrast between the burgeoning economy—especially in hi-tech and pharmaceuticals—and an increasing poverty; and by the fact that the wealth in Israel has not yet found its way to the Reform movement. Our students and graduates who work in congregations must spend an inordinate amount of time keeping their institutions afloat, even though evidence of the need continues to grow. Our movement is strong, on the one hand, and struggling on the other. I assume similar things can be said of the Conservative Movement—whose seminary I visited a number of times. These are really brave industrious folks.

And then I see the human rights struggle that must continue. I come to my consciousness from a “progressive” bias, which some would call “left-ish”; but the truth is that my interest lies in trying to see things from different perspectives, rather than having a political position. While I stay mostly at HUC’s campus, I spent six full days living in East Jerusalem amidst UN workers, shopkeepers and Tony Blair’s staff. I wandered the streets of East Jerusalem, which too many Jews never see. I’m not pretending to be

adventurous or brave, just describing what happens when you listen to other voices. And there are forces within Jewish life in West Jerusalem that are trying to bring Palestinians (especially from Jerusalem) into more intimate contact with the West (a double meaning here.) It is surely a complicated world. At President Ellenson's apartment I lived for a week with Reuven Friestone, HUC's Islam expert, and he often read the Arabic Press to me. I have the sense (not shared by a lot of people) that had Olmert not gotten taken up with the problems he is having in the extra-political sphere, he would have made from some to much progress in communication with Abbas.

I was scheduled to work a day in Sderot, but our representative there became ill, so that was cancelled. But I substituted that day with a day at the Knesset, as a special guest of Michael Melchior's committee on education. What a thrill to be sitting in on a meeting where Haredi leadership was trying to assure their allocation while resisting some of the national curriculum standards. Our IRAC representative (one word for this in Hebrew is "lobbyist") represents liberal Judaism intelligently and vigorously. I cannot say enough good about Anat Hoffman and her IRAC staff.

I also spent a day with Arik Ascherman in Silwan, seeing some of the problems there. There is a controversial situation there, having to do with the imperialistic potential of archeology, and some questions of legitimacy. I don't know enough to say much; but this much I will say: Israel has to spend more resources making life viable for young Palestinian Jerusalemites. Otherwise we will have hundreds and thousands of disaffected youngsters on our hands.

A lovely luncheon with Alef Bet Yehoshua, an old friend from our younger days, was delightful; but, most important, it seems to me that he is modifying his words that attack living in "hutz la-aretz". If one reads his new collection of essays—some old, some more recent, one gets a much more balanced feeling that one would assume from his American Jewish Committee speech of two years ago. I am seeking his permission to translate one of his unpublished short stories.

The gateway to Jerusalem is glamorous and impressive—a soaring mesh—sword or bow-like, while on the ground the streets are still too narrow and even dirty. Where will the perfect balance ever be achieved? Old pioneers lament the loss of Histadrut values, even as they enjoy the new and pricey restaurants on Emek Refaim. There is a massive effort to make Jerusalem more compatible with contemporary sensibilities, and I

hope that everyone will support that effort. Our friend, Elan Ezrachi (Naami Kelman's husband) is deeply involved in projects to keep Jerusalem at the center of modern Jewish attention, while at the same time making it home to so many different peoples.

It's still the most interesting place I've lived in, and it still makes my heart beat faster. My hope for it is reflected in our plan to have Simkha Weintraub and Stuart Schofman engage in a dialogue about the place of Jerusalem within a broader healing sensibility. Can Israel become the center for a kind of health Kom-miyut!! And I continue to marvel that a tiny trip to Israel by Susie Kessler, Simkha, Nancy Wiener and me four years ago has resulted in so much health and healing activity. Little acorns are still effective in this work.

Michele Prince carries me daily into my vigorous but liberated retirement. But I'm still involved in many of our projects, and I love seeing the Kalsman Institute grow.

My very best.

Bill