

A Blog by Lee Lasher

Jewish Federation Past President

Reflections from his experience on an exclusive mission he attended with Jason Shames, Federation CEO. The mission was for Jewish leaders and sponsored by Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and the Council of Presidents (COP).

Blog #5

I had the privilege to spend today doing *Chesed* and *Chizuk* with Rav Yosef Rimon and some other wonderful Jews including a family from Great Neck and group of Syrian Jews from Brooklyn (including one person I knew many years ago and a cousin of Saul Levy who used to live in Englewood and made *aliyah*). Many of you know Rav Rimon who is a man of incredible warmth, kindness, intellect, energy and holiness. We started the day at a school in Jerusalem that is hosting children displaced from the South. Rav Rimon, me and the others taught them, spoke to them and danced with them. We tried to encourage them during difficult times. We emphasized the eternal nature of the Jewish People and the current *achdut* of Am Yisrael.

After this we went to the hotel at moshav Ma'aleh Hamisha which is housing families from the south (mostly from Netiv Ha'asarah) . The entire hotel is now a home for many families and so many are trying to help them. The hotel has a room which is a free store (see pic) that has all sorts of clothing and other supplies that people and companies supply and the families take as needed. We heard from survivors from Netiv Ha'asarah who told stories how they survived (some hiding for 24 hours or more) and about their friends who were murdered (see pic of the 20 people murdered from Netiv Ha'asarah including a few couples). It is very difficult for me to say this but I truly felt like I was hearing Holocaust survivor stories but this was 2023 and in Israel. I can't get my head around this. Need I say more....

From here we went to Beit Meir, a small picturesque community in the hills outside Jerusalem which families from Sderot are now living. We sat with them and again Rav Rimon spoke to them taught them and we spoke as well. We sang songs including "Od Avenu Chai". I told the children of Sderot that I have been to Sderot many times. It is a beautiful city and when they return (not if but when) it will be even more beautiful and I will be happy to visit them.

After this we visited an IDF base outside Beitar Ilit. This based houses Kfir brigade reservist soldiers who are protecting the towns in Yehudah and Shomron while the active army is down south and north. This visit was emotional and so meaningful. Rav Rimon spoke to them, encouraged the, spoke about the challenges we face and the fight of good vs. evil and emphasized the eternity of the Jewish People (see pic). At this location (and all the prior ones) he gave brachot to each person there. I had a very emotional moment when he spoke to the IDF soldiers and said he would say the misaberach for IDF to them. I have heard that prayer probably thousands of times but this was the first time when I heard someone say it and say "*Misabarech Aventeynu Avraham Yitzchak V'Yaacov who yivarech autchem* (all of you)" and not "*Chalayeri Tzva Haganah*". He was literally blessing each of these soldiers and each of them was in harms way defending Am Yisrael. I gave some of the letters that the children of Englewood

prepared for Chayalim (see pic of me and IDF soldier Cohen from Chicago). The Brooklyn guys did the same. I spoke and told them I have a bag of letters from the children of Englewood but in the bag was not just letters but an overflowing amount of love and support for each of them. We know they fighting for the State of Israel and each of every one of us. And that good will prevail over evil. One of the soldiers spoke and said they have received food (too much), clothing and letters. They throw out much of the food, they can only wear so many pairs of socks and underwear but it is the letters that motivates them and encourages them. To the children of Englewood – well done!

Here is a must watch video that someone sent me. It is difficult to watch but critical to do so. We need to scream to the world what has happened and to allow Israel to defeat our enemy which is an enemy to the free world and civilization. When you hear talk about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza remind those people that this is actually a crisis of humanity.

<https://vimeo.com/876498483>

Best Regard,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LL' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Lee Lasher

Jewish Federation Past President