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Our Many Homes
Temple Beth El
Parsashat Pekudei 5771

As you can hear from my tired voice and see from my weary face, I am jetlagged. It is 4 am in Israel and I am struggling to make the transition to a new time zone and place.

I was blessed this past week to be in our Holy Land. During my weeklong tour with SPICE I was asked several times, "How many times have you been to Israel?"

It's kind of like asking, "How many time have you been home?" For Israel is my home, my family, my past, my future. For the past thirty years, Israel has been a part of the fabric of my life.

As Jews, we are blessed to have at least three homes... we have our personal homes, we have the homes of our sanctuaries, we have our homeland of Israel.

In our Torah this week, as we just heard, we complete our book of Exodus and we complete the building the sacred home of our sanctuary. We began the book of Exodus in slavery feeling God's absence. Today, at the close of the book of Exodus, after completing the building of our sanctuary, God's presence fills our Tabernacle. Our first portable Temple in the desert is all that we want it to be – a place where we dwell and a place where God dwells.

Rabbi Daniel Gordis in his book [Saving Israel: How the Jewish People Can Win a War that May Never End](#) writes about the concept of having a home: "Home is where we go to be ourselves. Home is where we go in order to heal, to recover... For all of us, homes are not simply a refuge, but an opportunity to create a world with ourselves at the center. It is in the privacy and comfort of our homes that we dress how we like to and talk as we wish. We are surrounded by the art and the books [and the music] that speak to us; we set up the space in a way that works for us, that enables us to relax, to be ourselves. Our home is the place we can be our authentic selves."

Israel is our National Home where as Jews we can be our authentic selves – celebrating Shabbat as we choose, celebrating our holidays as we choose, and living our lives as we choose.

I once heard the story of an older couple who got married. The man had spent much of his life in Israel. He yearned to bring his new wife there. Together they planned a trip and when they arrived they sat on Har Hatzofim, overlooking the holy city of Jerusalem. Together they viewed the walls of our ancient city reflecting the magnificence of the setting sun and reflecting the gold on the Dome of the Rock shimmering in the sunset.

The man began to weep, tears streaming down his face.

"Why are you crying?" the wife asked. "You've seen this site a thousand times."

"Yes," said the husband, "But this is the first time I am seeing my holy land and holy city through your eyes."

This past week, I was blessed to see our homeland of Israel through the eyes of our SPICE members, our active seniors some who had lived in Israel before, some who had visited there decades ago, some of whom had dreamt a lifetime of going and had their visions fulfilled.

I saw the heights of the fortress of Masada as we rode up on the cable car and walked down the ancient Roman ramp. I saw the salt lined crystal bottom of the Dead Sea. I witnessed the beauty of Israel's

vineyards, I appreciated the blossoming flowers of the spring and with the group, I enjoyed the hospitality of Bedouins who fed us in their tent and led us on their camels.

With our seniors, I drank the wines of Israel. I experienced a Shabbat in a Shomer Shabbat hotel, a Sabbath Observant hotel which required that we shut off laptops in the lobby, that we only open Kosher wine, and the housekeepers even left in our rooms special Shabbat toilet paper so we could keep the Shabbat commandment of not tearing on Shabbat.

We told jokes and we laughed. I learned through our seniors' eyes about aging. With canes, the stone roads and uneven path of archeological landscapes looked different.

I learned about their fears around the loss of memory as they told a long litany of jokes on aging that they called, "I hope this never happens to us."

Here's just one of them. "A senior citizen was driving down the freeway, his car phone rang. Answering, he heard his wife's voice urgently warning him, "Herman, I just heard on the news that there's a car going the wrong way on Interstate 77. Please be careful."

"Heck," said, Herman, "It's not just one car. It's hundreds of them."

I learned through our seniors eyes about this land.

"What did you see?" I asked them...

"I saw the importance of the land and its location in forming Israel's history," they told me.

"I saw that size doesn't matter when there is total commitment of a people to a common vision," they shared.

"Israel has shown me and the world that service to others for the greater good (such as military service) is not only an obligation but a source of pride."

"I saw graves of heroes and warriors. I felt the tears of the past and hopes of the future. I heard the words of Torah come alive." They said.

"I learned that acts of sacrifice have evolved and matured over Israel's history from the sacrifice of animals in ancient times to the sacrifices of the young and passionate pioneering settlers who built up Palestine over 100 years ago to the sacrifices today of soldiers."

On this SPICE trip I saw and experienced many things for the first time, as well. This was the first time I visited Yad Sarah -- a facility that gives free medical equipment to anyone who needs it. I went to check on a sleep apnea machine and picked up a wheelchair just in case we had fall. I was awed by the vision and philanthropy that created this institution that I, as a foreigner from across the sea, could just walk into and get what we needed.

This was the first time I went to an emergency medical clinic and got outstanding care, lab work and tests that brought peace of mind and success to our trip.

This was the first time where many of the places we went were reported on the Jerusalem Post. The day we went to the wall. The Chilean miners went to the wall.

The day we went to the Dead Sea. The Chilean miners went to the Dead Sea.

The day we went to Masada. The Chilean miners went to Masada.

This was the first time I soaked in the hot springs beneath the Golan Heights or visited an army preparatory program for Ethiopian immigrants.

No matter how many times you go to Israel. No matter for what purpose you go. There are always new sights to see, new sounds to hear, and most of all, new lessons to learn.

This week I not only saw the world through the eyes of our SPICE members but I saw the world the Israeli glasses -- lenses through which I see more clearly when I am there. When in our Holy Land, suddenly the uprising of Egypt or of Libya or of other Middle Eastern States is much more fearful. The resolution of each Arab nation's uprising and call for self-determination has a more direct impact on our homeland which is so fearfully close.

Traveling to Israel as a senior in your 70s or 80s or even 90s could be scary. Your bodies get a tired. Being in a foreign place can be overwhelming. I learned through their eyes that sacred and safe space is not about being in your own personal home, in the country in which you dwell. You can find the sacred space in our homeland of Israel surrounded by Hebrew writing on billboards and on candy bar wrappers. You can find sacred space in being surrounded by Hebrew words and song and by being embraced by the circle of your extended Israeli family.

And you can find sacred space in your community. Our younger SPICE members which were the majority helped our older SPICE members find their feet after floating in the Dead Sea or find their luggage at Ben Gurion or find their footing on the ancient stone or the Old City or archeological sites.

Fears are calmed. Joys are lifted. Dreams are fulfilled. Not alone, but with others.

Holiness is found not just in our home here, but in our home of Israel 6,000 miles away.

In the final words of the book of Exodus, we build a sanctuary and God dwells among us. With our Israel trip, we built it and God came. We planned a senior trip for more than a year and a half and God dwelt with us as we learned and celebrated, as we connected to our past, our present, to one another and to our home in the Holy Land.

On this final Shabbat of the book of Exodus we pray that God will continue always to dwell in the homes of our sanctuaries, in the homes of our families, in the homes of our sacred land of Israel.