

June 2015

June in Jerusalem

This is a beautiful time to visit Israel. During this season, one can expect high temperatures in the low 80s and lows in the high 50s. I know this because of the weather app on my iPhone. I have this ritual: every morning, after I've checked the weather in Irvine (where I live) and in Tacoma (where my daughter Rebekah goes to school), I check the weather in Jerusalem. Sometimes I check again before I go to sleep, since nighttime for us is a new day in Israel. Somehow this silly ritual makes me feel connected to the place I long to visit, the place where I left part of my heart and a piece of my soul almost exactly ten years ago. From June of 2004 until June of 2005, Israel was home for me and my family. And for the last ten years, I could only imagine the warm winds that blow in the fall, the cold rains that pour in the winter, tulips that blossom in the spring, and the hot sun that beats down in the summer. The weather app brings me closer to Israel and its seasons; but very soon, I'll be able to find out the weather simply by stepping outside my hotel.

Next week, we will make Temple Etz Rimmon history with the first-ever congregational Israel trip. I will be joined by Harvey, my mom (Judy Devor), Lizz and Lew Goldman, Lainy and Larry Vinikow, Dorie Goldman and Ron Pearlstein, Marilyn Gordon, and Sandy Brown. After about a year and a half of planning, we are packed and ready to go (well, not quite packed but definitely ready to go)!

I would like to share our plans with you, hoping to you can "virtually" join us on the trip.

Travel day—Our plane will land in Tel Aviv, and we will begin with the short trip into Jerusalem. The first sight of Jerusalem is breathtaking, and a Shehecheyanu blessing is always in order! We will have dinner together at one of our favorite restaurants in Jerusalem (you can Google "Olive and Fish Jerusalem") and then get some much-needed sleep at the hotel.

After a good night's sleep at the Prima Royale, a 4-star hotel in Jerusalem, we will have a conversation with Anat Hoffman, Executive Director of the Israel Religious Action Center (known also for her work with Women of the Wall). She will help us understand the social and political complexities of the country. Then we will explore the excavations at the City of David, wade through the 2,700-year-old water tunnel of King Hezekiah, walk through the tunnels under the Old City, visit the Christian Quarter of the Old City, and place our prayers in the cracks of the Kotel (the Western Wall). We'll end the day with a Night Spectacular show at the Tower of David Museum (check it out on

YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9wjdTTrYqw>). And this is just Day One!!

The next day, we'll visit Yad Vashem (Israel's Holocaust Museum), Machane Yehuda (also known as the shuk or outdoor market), and then return to the hotel to prepare for Shabbat. We will be welcomed as guests of Kol Hanesama, Jerusalem's Reform congregation, where we will light candles and speak with congregational representatives about their history and the place of the Reform/Progressive movement in Israeli society. After services, we'll return to the hotel for dinner and a conversation with Professor Paul Liptz. Paul is originally from South Africa and is now a professor at Tel Aviv University. He was also a teacher of mine at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem. To meet with Paul is a unique opportunity; he is a brilliant historian and gifted teacher who understands the complexities and challenges of a diverse culture. He will speak more with us about Israeli society and will answer all our questions.

We are blessed to be able to spend Shabbat on our own in Jerusalem. This is an opportunity like no other. I can hardly wait for my honey challah and plum cake, and to just sit in a café and enjoy some "te im na'a-na" (tea with fresh mint). Some of us plan to spend a couple hours at the Jerusalem Zoo and some may head back to the Old City, while others may need some extra rest time at the hotel. Shabbat is the time for rejuvenation, and we'll be ready for it!

On Sunday, we'll head south to ascend Masada, the desert fortress that has stood for more than 2,000 years and represents our freedom and determination (learn more about Masada at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.com). Then we'll descend to the Dead Sea, the lowest elevation on land. After a float and maybe a mud bath, we'll view the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Then we'll return to Jerusalem and enjoy Ben Yehuda Street, Jerusalem's outdoor shopping mall and a very popular place on a Saturday night.

The next morning, we'll head north to Kibbutz Gesher on the Jordanian border. There we'll visit the Kinneret Cemetery, drive through Tiberias on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and explore Tsfat, the center of Jewish art and mysticism. We won't miss the old synagogue in Tsfat, a beautifully maintained Sephardic synagogue and probably the oldest synagogue in Israel.

The next day, we'll explore the Tel Dan Nature Reserve, where we'll meet with kibbutz members to learn more about the ideology of the kibbutz movement and the impact the kibbutzim have on modern Israeli society. We'll also visit Caesarea where we'll see the Herodian theatre and the new excavations along the Mediterranean shore. Then we'll head south to Tel Aviv to visit Independence Hall where David Ben-Gurion proclaimed Israel a state in 1948.

Our group trip will end in Tel Aviv. Some are going home from there. Some are staying in Tel Aviv, and some are continuing on to Eilat and then to an extended trip to Petra, Jordan.

I am exhausted just thinking about it, but also excited beyond belief! I wish I could take all of you with us! For some in our group, this will be a first visit to Israel. For others, a second, third, or fourth trip. But for all of us, this will be a spiritual pilgrimage and a return to our homeland. Because traveling to Israel is always about going home again.

We've just celebrated Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day) on May 17. This day was established to commemorate the anniversary of the day that Israel forces captured the Old City of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War, which resulted in the reunification of Jerusalem as part of Israel. It is a time for parades, parties, special meals, dancing and singing. It's also a time when we reflect on the importance and centrality of ancient Jerusalem in our modern day.

On Yom Yerushalayim, it is customary to recite words of Psalm 122: "Our feet stood in your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem built up, a city knit together. Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem: may those who love you be at peace. May there be well-being within your ramparts, peace in your citadels." As we prepare for our pilgrimage, we too pray for peace for Jerusalem and for all the people of Israel.

The weather in Israel is usually perfect this time of year, but the truth is that it doesn't really matter to me. Rain or shine, I will be going home. I will once again be immersed in our Jewish homeland, sharing moments with friends from temple, learning, exploring, celebrating, and making lasting memories.

Our congregational trip to Israel begins May 26.
Watch your emails for updates and pictures from Israel!