

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 9/7/18

### ***Ki Tavo 2018***

Our Torah portion this week begins with a declaration to be made by those who enter the Land of Israel. They are to say with great pride and happiness before Gd, "Behold, I have entered the Land that Gd swore to our ancestors." Well, today I make the same declaration with pride and great joy, "We entered the Land of Israel, travelled for a week and a half and had the time of our lives in the Land that Gd Promised to our Ancestors." So let me tell you a little about the adventure Helene and I just got back from with the members of our congregation.



I want to share three prayer experiences with you, but first let me say what a joy it was to be with this group. Such wonderful people who went not really knowing one another and came back with a whole new group of good friends! Nearly 25 years ago, when the Confirmation Israel Trip was born, I took Mel and Joyce Ruthen's daughter, Stacy, to Israel as a 10th grader. Well, Stacy is now married and a mother, and I finally got the chance to take her parents to Israel. Mel had not been for 50 years, and Joyce not at all. Wow! And to top it off, the head of the program I worked with 25 years ago, Joe Freedman, was OUR tour guide for this trip! We are both 25 years older, but being together was like we never parted. It was like the closing of a circle started a quarter of a century ago.

The first experience I'd like to share was on the day we arrived. We came in on Friday morning, and by Friday night we were standing at the Kotel, the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Helene took the women up to the Wall for their service, and I led the men in mine. We carved out our own little spot in the crowd, and with singing going on all around us, we prayed together as a group. On the women's side, Helene's group was surrounded by women singing and dancing. Everyone was deeply moved. Afterwards, when we talked as a group about our experience, many people commented on how warm the Wall itself felt - which makes sense since it had been a hot summer day; but, the warmth of the Wall made us feel warm inside. It was like the touch sent a wave of spiritual energy straight to our hearts.

The next time we davened as a group in Jerusalem was Monday morning at the section known as Ezrat Yisrael, which is a separate section along the Western Wall where men and women, boys and girls can pray as one. There were several other groups there with us, but fortunately we all were wearing earphones that carried my voice when I led the service as well as when Helene, Joe and I read the Torah. We divided into three groups and each group had an Aliyah at the Wall in Jerusalem. For many it was the highlight of the trip. To be called up to the Holy Torah, and to recite blessings of it with in feet of the Holy Temple mount was a very powerful spiritual moment, and I could see it and feel it in our group. As a shul we brought what we have here to Jerusalem in a way our ancestors could only dream of...That moment, early in the trip, not only made us feel closer to Gd and to Israel, it made us feel much closer to one another. And just two or three days ago came the good news that the Israel's government is indeed going to make that section more open and accessible to all. Yay!



These first are prayer experiences I'd had before, but the third was a first! Our first Shabbat was in Jerusalem and our second was in Tel Aviv, and as you may know, those two cities are worlds apart. And I was nervous about being able to feel that same sense of spiritual connection in cosmopolitan Tel Aviv that we felt in sacred Jerusalem. We went as a group to Beth -T'filla Yisraeli, which simply means "The Israeli House of Prayer." But it's not truly a house, per se, because the service is done outdoors. It's at the newly renovated Port of Tel Aviv and is held as the sun is setting. It's visually stunning and spiritually uplifting. First it's the music. They use musical instruments to accompany the Friday night services, Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma'ariv. They also mix in Hebrew songs. It was so beautiful it is making me re-think the use of musical instruments for OUR Friday night services since our group enjoyed it so much. There is not a "synagogue" in the traditional sense of the word. No one pays financial dues, and no one

technically belongs. And, yet, it was obvious from looking at the crowd that everyone belonged. They were mostly what would be called "secular" Jews. Who knew if they'd be at a Friday night service if it was in a building? But it's not as if these Jews did not paid dues. They served in the Israeli Army and paid their dues. They live in the Jewish State, with all its complexity, and help to make it thrive. They look out for one another and strengthen the Jewish State. They have indeed paid their dues, and to see this diverse crowd celebrate Shabbat together in front of a glorious sunset in Tel Aviv was a deeply, deeply spiritual experience for all of us. What we all learned is that Israel is the Kotel on Shabbat, AND Israel is the Port of Tel Aviv on Shabbat, too. And there is a spiritual energy in each. A rich and diverse Jewish State, the true ingathering of our Exiles.

On the last day of our trip, just hours before we headed for the airport, we all sat together around a table and talked about our experience. Joe's wife, Sue, spoke about how good it felt to be with our group. She told us that after 30-plus years there, life in Israel is still difficult and trying. She told us about the anxiety she has each day knowing that her grandchildren are, or soon will be in the Army. And on behalf of our whole group I said to her, "We promise to do all we can in America to protect your grandchildren here in Israel." Indeed, with the joy of our visit also comes responsibility; the responsibility to do all we can for the Jewish State, through advocacy, through tzedakah, through encouraging others to visit, and through sharing with as many people as we can what makes the one and only Jewish state so very special and unique.