

Thursday, January 18, 2024

Ani V'Ata

What is the purpose of Diaspora Jews visiting Israel? What is the purpose of bringing Israelis to our communities, camps and colleges? The most common response, I think, is "education." This is wrong.

I left our group on our final day today to instead spend time in our partner community, the Yoav region. One purpose of my visit was to ensure that our friends in Israel - the actual and the proverbial - knew how much we cared about them, how much we support them, and how, in our own way, we are fighting for them. And time and time again, the resounding response has been how greatly this show of support is appreciated and strengthening.

The Lehigh Valley has had a partnership with Yoav for 20 years. In that time, we've developed institutional relationships, but also personal relationships. And building personal relationships are the very essence of what a JCC does. Being able to reach out to someone in a time of need, and having others to lean on, is made possible by the relationships we have built.

And this is the reason that we work so hard to bring Diaspora Jews to Israel and vice versa. You can't understand Israel without understanding Israelis. You can't love Israel without loving Israelis.

Arik Einstein sang one of Israel's most famous lyrics: *Ani v'ata n'shaneh et ha'olam*. You and I will change the world. Perhaps no sentiment better summarizes the Zionist spirit. The message is as simple as it is powerful, and conjures memories of Theodor Herzl's message when he founded the modern Zionist movement: *Im tirtzu, ain zo agadah*. If you will it, it is not a dream.

I leave Israel in a few minutes perhaps with more questions than answers. With tremendous sadness and also great inspiration. With new relationships, and rekindled old ones. I do not know what it will take to bring peace, to heal the wounded, or to rebuild what has been lost. But I know it is possible, and I know that we will do it together.

Thank you for your interest in reading these daily updates. I hope that they have been informative, thought-provoking, and/or interesting. I look forward to sharing more details about my trip next week, so please stay tuned.