

# *a Message* **FROM ISRAEL**



**J FROM THE DESK OF  
TODD ROCKOFF | PRESIDENT + CEO**

Boker Tov from Tel Aviv

Today begins the third day of the JCC Association Leadership Solidarity Mission to Israel. This has been a remarkable program and once again I share what an honor it is to represent the Tucson J on this important mission.

We began our mission with a briefing from Col. (retired) Miri Eisen who helped to frame for us where we are and how we got here. On Monday we spent a remarkable day meeting with former Israeli Prime Minister Neftali Bennet, who was in conversation with Polly Bronstein, Executive Director of [The One Hundred Project](#). This was followed by an emotional visit to the Bring Them Home Now Headquarters, whereby chance we were joined by the Father of [Omri Miran](#), who was kidnapped on October 7. I am inspired by the strength of this man and the incredible work of the [Forum](#), open this link and look at the clock and read the names and their stories, a theme of this experience is that this is about the names and not just the numbers. Monday also included a visit to the Residence of the President of Israel and a meeting with President Isaac Herzog. President Herzog thanked us for being here in Israel and emphasized the importance of telling our story when we return home, I committed that this is exactly what I will do, we are fortunate to have the [Weintraub Israel Center](#), a partnership between the Tucson J and Jewish Philanthropies of Southern Arizona to help lead this work in our community!

Yesterday was a day I will never forget; our mission took us south to see first hand the devastation that took place. We began in Sderot where a mother shared with this moving [Video](#) and then told us her story and shared her fear of coming back home and not feeling safe in her own home and not sure when coming back home will be a reality for her. We were reminded of the work of [ZAKA](#), who are a group of volunteers who collect all the bodies and remains to ensure that they are buried properly according to Jewish Tradition.

We visited the Eshkol Regional Council, which is the area of the Gaza Envelope that shares the longest border with the Gaza Strip and met the most remarkable group of professionals, who shared that members of the Kibbutzim and Moshavim are now dispersed across areas of the Dead Sea down towards Eilat. The team that is charged with building community quickly realized that a “Community Center is not just a place, it is a connection between people” and they are in touch with all members of the community wherever they may be connecting those who are now displaced from their homes and in a greater sense from each other. The person who works with people with disabilities drives to each area and meets with each family demonstrating the power of community.

Visiting the site of the Nova Music Festival, a festival dedicated to love that turned into a pogrom was emotionally devastating. Young people who gathered to celebrate love, peace and have a party were murdered. A memorial was established naming each person who was murdered and naming each person who has been taken hostage.

We then went to Kibbutz Nir Oz and stood one mile from the border with the Gaza Strip Ron, a member of the Kibbutz took us house to house telling us the story and names of each family, who was taken, who was murdered and who survived. This is about the names not the numbers. Avraham Infeld teaches that telling our stories helps to turn history into memory. History belongs to someone else, memory belongs to us. The story of what happened on October 7 and continues today is our story, and it needs to be told. I thought I understood what I meant by bearing witness and seeing and being seen. I really did not have a full understanding of that until I stood on the ground and talked to the people. In Sderot, Ofakim and Nir Oz everyone said that living along the Gaza Envelope was 99% heaven and 1% something else and on that one day that all changed. This was a beautiful area, and I could see what was the 99% and why it is so important to ensure that this area is safe and rebuilt.

When I arrive back in Tucson, I will be sharing pictures and other reflections on this experience. Right now, I feel as if I am being fed, I will need to chew and then truly digest this experience.

I was reminded yesterday as we looked at all the names and heard all of the stories, that we just started reading the book of Shemot (Names) and how appropriate it is that we are here bearing witness and remembering the names. May the memory of all those who we lost be for a blessing and may we see the safe return of every hostage to their homes and to their families.

Am Yisrael Chai  
Todd Rockoff  
President + CEO, Tucson J



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