

Seeking Out My Brothers and Sisters



I had an amazing meeting the other day with some 15 Orthodox Israeli leaders.

This past year, our Jewish Federation invested in a leadership program in the religious-Zionist Orthodox community in Israel. It was one of our flagship Global Connections Kedma programs, to promote shared society and religious diversity. This cohort has included the national Chair of

the Bnei Akiva youth movement, the CEO of the primary community newspaper, the Settler Council spokesperson, educators, community rabbis, journalists, and more.

We've invested heavily in this program, helping to guide them on a journey through the different communities of Israeli society, from Reform to Conservative, Druze and Muslim and Christian, Left-Wing to Right. And in partnership with our sister federation in New York, we brought the group to the United States to see American Jewish life: how we pray, how we talk with one another, how we gather as a community, and much more.

I often speak with Israeli delegations who come to visit us. Consistently, I find that many Israelis are surprised by the level of respectful dialogue and civic discourse that we have here. They see how our Jewish Federation works hard to regularly convene diverse groups of rabbis, professionals, and volunteers to work together, to learn together, and to help guide the community.

Loving Israel and loving the Jewish People is a two-way street. Yes, we send missions, and peoplehood programs, and partnerships to Israel, to learn more about and deepen our connections to the Jewish State. And yes, we bring a large cohort of Israeli emissaries – *Shlichim* (post-army) and *Rishonim* (pre-army) – to our synagogues and JCCs and community. But no less impactful is the statement we make when those emissaries return to Israel, taking with them the ideas and enthusiasm for programs that reflect our principles of shared society and respectful discourse. Sitting with the wonderful group of Orthodox Israelis, I said this:

I am not Orthodox.

My halachic orientation is different. But I love the Jewish People and I believe we all need to sit together.

Respect me. Because I respect you.

Don't just talk to me here in the United States. Talk to my friends back home in Israel.

Sit with people like me in Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv, and the Negev.

People who aren't necessarily Orthodox but love Israel, serve in the Army, believe in the Jewish People but daven (pray) differently.

You and they don't have to agree, but you have to be respectful, and kind, and tolerant. They have to understand your sensitivities and red lines. But you have to understand theirs, too, especially those that see political power and religious perspectives overlapping.

Even in a Jewish State, the overlap of power and faith can lead to coercion, hatred, and misery. It's on you, as the current and future leadership of Israel, to prevent that, to guide, to inspire, and to love.

Greater MetroWest will be proud of you, and proud to stand with you, as you work to figure it out.

Because it won't be easy.