

**From: Lilach Bluevise, Golda Och Academy (formerly known as SSDSEU)**  
**Project: Living Bridge - Teachers' mission to Israel - assessment report**  
**Date: February break 2011**

Background:

While we continue to develop the living bridge between our school and the partnership community in Merchavim Israel with our students and their parents, we are cognizant of the fact that students grow up and graduate; the influence of and value of the connections to a large extent exist outside of the current life of the school. Therefore, the next step for us was a living bridge connection between the more permanent members of the communities – the teachers and the lay leadership.

A delegation from Merchavim visited the school on December 2009 and we, thanks to the help of project InCite, local federation and partnership and other sponsors were able to follow up with a “mission” to Israel.

Our delegation is composed of GOA teachers and administrators. Faculty representation includes lower and upper school teachers, general studies and Judaic studies teachers to ensure that this culture of peoplehood connection will be accepted and internalized at all levels. We believe that only in this way can our vision be realized by a broader segment of the GOA population and therefore be even more effective. Our plan included participation of board members, to ensure understanding and support for the totality of the Israel education at GOA.

By providing our faculty and board members an authentic and rich Israel experience enriched by Mifgash with our partners in Israel they will become stronger supporters of our Israel programs, mainly the Israel experiences during high school. This will help them experience first hand the impact of these programs on our students and their families, so they will support it and advocate for it in their constituencies. Our teachers will be able to share the sentiments and excitement that our students feel about Israel and their Israeli peers.

This group of teachers is to become role models in supporting Israel programs by participating in the various programs we have in school as well as by chaperoning our Israel trips.

Assessment:

14 faculty and administrators were registered for our mission and have gone through the months of preparations and meetings pre trip. Unfortunately 2 of them could not join us last minute due to emergency health issues. We truly missed them but we keep them engaged with activities after the trip. (I even attached the Dvar Torah that Gloria Kron prepared before the trip that was read on her behalf in Israel).

We did not anticipate this, but it was very hard to get board members to join us on a school break, since their children are home or vacationing with them. At one point the president of the board as well as another lay leader were supposed to join us for parts of the program in Israel, but this did not materialize since the president cancelled his visit to Israel due to personal reasons.

I was anxious to see how the group will bond. After all we come from 2 different campuses, a few different departments, different observance levels, teachers and administrators. I was pleasantly surprised to see the group bonding throughout the preparations prior to the trip, when the delegation members took upon themselves different responsibilities for the trip (such as

organizing the spiritual parts, buying gifts to hosts, writing Divrei Torah, bringing food to our meetings etc) and enjoyed each other's company.

I was also pleased to see the new friendship created between the members of the delegation, especially between the lower school and upper school teachers.

Our group bonded wonderfully with our scholar in residence, Elan Ezrachi, and embraced him as a part of the group. They also appreciated the company and leadership of our director of Israel programs (who resides and work in Israel), Alona Nir.

The group loved meeting the special guests and speakers. They felt honored to meet distinguished Israeli leaders and professionals such as Judge Dorner, Roth Calderone, Leah Rosenberg, as well as Jewish leaders such as Ranni Yeger, Rabbi Chayah Baker, Rabbi Andi Ezra, Rabbi Ian Pe'er and Rabbi Tamar Kolberg who shared from their endeavors to enrich Jewish life and Jewish pluralism in Israel. The group was surprised to discover how much progress there is in Jewish pluralism, since the last time they have visited Israel (or heard about Israel). We still had the challenge of our kippah wearing women who faced questions and looks almost everywhere they went, but it also served as a great trigger for discussions and learning on both sides.

I did not expect our faculty to appreciate so much the educational visits to the partnership schools: MetroWest high school, Tal'i and Meitar in Ra'anana and Merchavim high school and Aleh Negev institute in Merchavim. It was challenging to include touristic attractions as well as so many learning opportunities in such a short time, and I was afraid that participants will be disappointed there are no more trips, sightseeing (or shopping) included in the itinerary. To my great excitement the group was eager to spend more time at the schools and really appreciated meeting all the people they have met. It had a great impact on them, both professionally and spiritually.

I even remember 2 participants coming to me after they were very moved by a poem Elan read to them when we visited Yemin Moshe and Mishkenot Sha'ananim – they really appreciated the learning and development aspects of the program.

The professional development with Guzu from SIT was also received by the group very nicely. They appreciated the examples from the world outside school and easily applied it to their lives and professional work. I plan another final session with the group for the end of this school year in which I will do a follow up work on their projects and goals, as I was guided by Guzu.

It was a real treat for me to work with Guzu. While the group enjoyed one session with him, I enjoyed an ongoing professional development as to how to support my teachers, how to help them maximize their work and how to use models developed by SIT for that. It is a pleasure working with Guzu (and visiting their cool office in Israel), which I did in my trip on March. Another benefit I experienced through the preparations and through out the mission was to get the teachers closer to the federation and partnership leadership: the group worked with lay people from our partnership both in NJ and in Israel. We had workshops and meetings with the shlichim, lay leaders and key professionals on both ends (and we even got to meet the new Rishonim (Shnat Sherut) who will serve in our school next year).

I was hesitant to let the partner school plan the 2 nights, 3 days of Mifgash but with a lot of preparations and back and forth we created a nice program together which included tour of the region, including Sderot and Aleh Negev, site seeing like the Bedouin museum followed by a meeting with an inspiring Bedouin leader- a woman who works tirelessly to empower woman in Lakya, her village, to be more independent and educated; the Cooking Women from Ofakim etc. I was surprised to see all participants loved the home hospitality component (I was worried that it may not be a good fit to all people, but it was great). I had hard time getting people on the bus in the morning after the mifgash ended because there were long good-byes. I enjoy hearing all the

drishot shalom and little stories still shared by participants about “their” family in Merchavim. As a community, we got so worried when the school in Merchavim got a direct hit (no one hurt, thank G-D) on one Shabbat a few weeks ago. Then all the stories we heard (and saw) from our friend Karin, who lives in Sderot with her family, and Dalia, the lay leader who spoke to us about MERKAZ OTZMA – where they help treating the anxiety of the people in the area were very vivid and personal for us.

With these real personal connections a wide range of professional connections isn't opened to both schools. We are now working on formalizing it into specific programs.

It was a real treat to have dinner at one of the moshavim of Merchavim region and enjoy the food of the cooking women from Ofakim. This is a group supported by our community, and the women whom we met were in our school 2 years ago and cooked with our kids in Hebrew. A son of one of them was on a mission to our school last year. It was so nice to see all these circles of Mifgash in so many levels.

I do see a challenge in this coming year, since the principal of Merchavim high school is leaving to be a head of school in Mexico for a few years. However, with the help of the lay leadership and professionals in MetroWest Israel, as well as the enthusiastic and committed teachers who took part in the mifgash, I believe we can overcome this change in leadership in Merchavim school.

The reunion of our former students and graduates living in Israel was a program that I added to the trip pretty late but was worth all the hard work. We were able to gather 24 of them for dinner and a nice program. It was very rewarding for our faculty to hear how the education in our school impacted our former students' choices in life, and it was nice to see how well the former students responded to what we have shared with them about the developments in our school.

We have formed an Israeli chapter of our alumni society as a result of this mifgash. We have approached some of them to serve as speakers on our Israel programs and they are excited to do so.

I am very pleased to see the immediate effect our mission and project had on the participants in their lives in our school as well. For example, the representatives from the lower school worked with me on revamping Yom Ha'azmaut program. They were inspired by our visit to Israel Museum and wanted Yom Ha'azmaut stations to reflect exhibitions they saw in the museum. We have worked to make these stations meaningful, educational and experiential. Some examples are: learning about the artist Hanoah Fiben and creating portraits following his technique; digging in the sand for Israeli coins, tracing them and then learning about the symbols and how they are the same as appeared on old coins; crawling under tables “in caves” to retrieve the Megilot, putting the puzzle together and decoding what is on them, as well as learning about the dead sea scrolls, how they were found and what we learned from them; mosaic activities with Israeli symbols after learning about mosaic art and specific floors in Israel etc. I was thrilled to work with this group from our time at the museum through all the planning process (choosing ideas, writing mini lesson plans, finding other teachers to work the stations, changing the structure of the day, budgeting and presenting to the principal). It really empowered them to continue with other projects in the future.

Another example is how much Israel was infused in the news paper of the lower school, whose advisor was part of our mission as well.

The learning specialist who was on the mission (whom Debbie met when she visited) volunteered to run Israel Day Parade in NYC and work with me in the upper school on Yom Ha'azmaut programs. The media specialist will work with me and our marketing and technology departments on creating a new Israel section on our web site. One of the participants, who eventually were not able to join due to health reasons, will be working with our young Shin

shinim next year in Israel discussion alternative minyan as well as supervise them when I will be on a maternity leave.

It is clear that this is a beginning of a big change in our school and it is supported by our administration and board. I will be able to devote more time to Israel education in the coming school year, as the board approved adding to my position. Our hope is that this change will continue to trickle down and reach all faculty members, even those who don't always share our experiential education and Israel programs.

Even though it is clear that participation involved a lot of work and commitment, there are many faculty members who have already asked to join the next mission to Israel. It is rewarding to see this as they acknowledge the contribution of a program like this to their professional and personal development.

### **What would I do differently next time?**

While we are sure this is the path we need to continue and expose as many of our faculty and leadership to our wonderful Israel programs and connections with our partners in Israel, here are some issues I think we should look at for next time:

1. Timing of delegation: a school break is much easier when you take teachers away from their classes; however, it is a challenging time for board members to be away during a break. Maybe it will be easier to have a separate mission for board members during the school year, or over summer, when their kids are in camp.
2. We did not have experience with mixing board members and faculty, but I am sure it is a challenge that we would have faced had we had board members joining us.
3. More time in the schools in Israel (longer days to allow more exposure to the professional work of individuals there).
4. It was a challenge to have Merchavim teachers join us for Shabbat. We are a conservative school and need to observe Shabbat accordingly, which was a challenge for our friends. The egalitarian tfillot were not good for them as well. There needs to be more thinking about the Shabbat together with GOA and Merchavim.
5. I would try to incorporate more time for Tikun Olam projects together with our Israeli partners.
6. Depending on the number of participants- if we have enough to divide the group into first timers and veterans for some of the site seeing.
7. When doing text study or chavrutah learning to give more tools to participants, since not all are skilled in that. This will be a part of the professional development as well.
8. I would love to start the mifgash with ODT activity to bond the participants. We did our own activities due to budget reasons, but ODT is the best way to get to know each other, rely on each other and practice communication.
9. Adding a program by Ulpan Or (Jerusalem): touring Jerusalem in Hebrew (possible only if group is divided according to Hebrew levels).
10. Due to budget constraints we did not go to watch a concert or a show together, and I think it could have added a lot. My hope is to add the Kobi Oz concert which ties nicely to our themes and partnership area.

### **How could the idea be adapted or used by others in the field of Israel Education**

As a school we have realized the importance of Israel experiences and Mifgashim not only to our students but to our faculty and leadership as well. If we want to implement our vision and mission statement and create life long connections with Israel and Israelis for our students, we must have our faculty and leadership experience it first hand. Once our first group was in Israel, touring, site seeing, studying, being hosted by Israelis they became more committed to Israel education and to this major part of our school's mission. As you can read from their excerpts- it was a meaningful program for them that will continue to affect their work for a long time. We now share the same language of Israel engagement and it translates into their work in the different department. A lot of work is still needed in guiding them and creating a cohesive program, but I am very excited to continue this in my work with them.

Our goal, as stated, is to find funding to send all our faculty members and staff to Israel to really change the culture of the school to reflect the values we have stated in our mission statement and the strategic plan.

This is true to any institution that sends students, campers, congregants to Israel - their programs, mission and values related to Israel will be better transmitted to the participants if the staff experience it in Israel.

Our model of preparation, trip and post activities can be easily duplicated as well as some of the educational themes and the thinking about the appropriate programs.

#### **Pictures can be found at:**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/goldaoacademy/sets/72157626070606757/>

And:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/goldaoacademy/sets/72157626334454058/>

#### **Here are some quotes from participants:**

Michelle Resnick: "...It wasn't your typical trip...Instead; we spent our time learning about what day-to-day life is like across various settings in the modern state. We discussed the contemporary social issues confronting the society and met many wonderful people who are trying to manage those issues...."

Gena Rosenberg: "...Being in Israel and doing the team building activities has allowed the lower school team to have the vision to update and revamp a whole school program (Yom Ha'azmaut), find added ways to bring Israel into the school (sharing daily news with kids in Israel, which Paula will work on), and hopefully, if we get the funding for the busses, next year, have a whole lower school Tikkun Olam Day. We developed this idea after meeting with the Hannah Schwartz at the Tal'i school...The trip was inspiring. I want to help make our school more connected to Israel and more spiritual about Israel in a real and meaningful way for our children to understand at all levels. "

Nancy Leaderman: (upper school principal in an email to parents of our school:

"As I wrote to you a few weeks ago, I was extraordinarily privileged to have the opportunity to travel with a delegation of our teachers to Israel over February break. The trip, generously

funded by foundations and our own Federation, enabled a group of us to meet and collaborate with our sister school in Merchavim, learn about education and other current issues in Israeli society, and experience some of what our students explore on their Na'ale and Neshama programs.

We were impressed by so many things--the stirrings of religious pluralism in Israeli society, the young but sophisticated legal history of the State, the work of a wide range of educators to transform what and how students learn, the plight of refugees and minorities as they struggle to find a place in society, the beauty of Shabbat in Jerusalem, and the warmth of our Israeli hosts. All of us who participated look forward to sharing these and many other highlights with our students and colleagues in the weeks and months to come."

Additionally, I was incredibly moved by the various educational initiatives we saw—the amazing work going on at the school in Merchavim, at Metrowest High School, and at the other schools we visited in Ra'anana. I was intrigued to learn more about pluralism in Israel, both from the schools we visited and from the beit midrash experiences at Alma and Pardes. Our interactions with Bedouin and with African refugees also put a human face on some of the complicated issues Israel faces. In terms of connections, I was happy to deepen relationships with the principal and teachers of our sister school in Merchavim, and I know we will continue to build connections with them that will impact our and their students. "



Our teachers with our Merchavim colleagues.

Michael Monson: ..."Nothing could have been more heart warming or emotionally touching than the greeting I received when Eli Peretz boarded the bus in Sderot. He is the head of school at Merchavim. We hugged each other in a reunion of two people who have forged a friendship. He had stayed with us during the Israelis' visit to West Orange and we have been in touch ever since. Thanks to Golda Och Academy I have a friend. Eli in many ways is a soul mate. In two different languages, Eli and I speak the same language. When Eli was here, we spent hours and hours into the middle of the night talking about education, about Judaism, about everything. I am pleased to say that I was able to replicate that experience at his home during this visit. Most important, I had an opportunity to see the Merchavim teachers firsthand and to see the ambience and spirit of his school. I also, I am proud to say, had an opportunity to speak in one of the classes that I visited, and to engage in a dialogue with the students...The trip continues because I am in constant touch with Eli. I am very excited about this curriculum sharing that we are launching. I really hope that it is a successful venture. I look forward to many new and exciting educational and personal experiences with my new colleagues and friends."

## GOA Teachers' mission February 2011 Itinerary

*subject to changes*

### Wednesday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Depart from Newark 1:15pm (LY 28; terminal B, Newark); duration: 10:25 hours.

### Thursday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011

6:40am arrive at Ben Gurion airport

10:00-3:00 **"Jerusalem: Between pilgrimage to a holy city and the reality of Yerushalayim Shel Mata: a challenge for Jewish educators"**, with Dr. Elan Ezrachi

"Shehecheyanu" Ceremony at Mt. Scopus and Dvar torah of Gloria kron, Lower School principal.; Tfillah

Lunch - Pizur in the Jewish Quarter

Tour of the Jewish Quarter ; Robinson Arch - Mincha at the Masorti Kotel , Western Wall, The Generation Center

5:30pm check-in

6:00-7:00 opening and orientation to the program

7:00 Dinner at Fuchsberg center for Conservative Judaism

8:00 Jewish Pluralism in Israel- panel discussion with local rabbis

Rabbi Ian Pe'er – Orthodox, Shir Hadash, Jerusalem  
Rabbi Chaya Becker, Conservative, Ramot Zion, Jerusalem  
Rabbi Andi Ezra, Reform, Kol Haneshama  
Rani Yeger, Beit Tefilah Israeli

**Overnight: Dan Boutique Jerusalem**

### Friday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011

07:00 Breakfast served from 7:00 to 8:30

8:30 leave for Yad Vashem

11:30 leave for Har Hertzal

1:15 tour Machane Yehuda and lunch one your own

3:00 Prepare for Shabbat

4:00 Merchavim teachers join for Shabbat

- 4:20 leave to Kotel
- 4:52 candle lighting  
Kabbalat Shabbat at the Kotel or shul (weather permitting)
- 7:00 dinner + Dvar Torah nancy Leaderman, upper school principal
- 9:00 Oneg Shabbat
- Overnight: Dan Boutique Jerusalem**

**Shabbat, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

- 8:00 Breakfast  
Shabbat Services at different synagogues
- 12:00 Shabbat activities (prepared by participants)
- 1:30 lunch
- 4:00- 7:00 a short tour at Yemin Moshe  
Seuda shlishit  
Havdallah
- 7:30 Reunion and light Dinner with Schechter Alumni at Fuchsberg center
- 9:30 Optional time: Ben Yehudah st. or meeting relatives / friends

**Overnight: Dan Boutique Jerusalem**

**Sunday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

- 07:00 Breakfast served from 7:00 to 8:30
- 8:00 leave for Ra'anana; on the bus - **Introduction to the Israeli Educational system and its Jewishness**
- 9:30-1:00 **Religious pluralism in the Israeli education system**  
tours and panel in Ra'anana: MetroWest high school, Tal"i, Meitarim, Kehilat Ra'anan - Ra'anana.
- 1:00 lunch in Kehilat Ra'anan
- 2:30 Mrs. Leah Rosenberg, Ministry Of Education
- 4:00 Introduction tour to Tel Aviv - finish with Arvit (at the Tayelet?)
- 6:00 check-in  
Free evening, dinner on your own / relatives visit

**Overnight: Grand Beach Hotel, Tel Aviv**

**Monday, February 21<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

07:00 Breakfast served from 7:00 to 8:30  
 08:30 Shacharit  
 check-out

9:30 study in Alma College - Israeli society as reflected in Tel Aviv life:  
 Jewish Pluralism in Tel Aviv - with Dr.Ruth Kalderon  
 11:30 Site visit foreign workers living in Tel Aviv  
 12:30 lunch in Rishon Le Zion/ Yavne rest area

1:00pm Drive to Merchavim  
 3:00 visit Merchavim high school / tour the region

6:30 Dinner at homes of Merchavim teachers

**Overnight: Home Hospitality**

**Tuesday, February 22<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

8:15 joining classes at MHS  
 10:00 Tour of Merchavim - Merchavim campus, "Alle Negev", Moshav Ranen  
 and the Karaite synagogue  
 1pm Bedouin in the Negev with Merchavim teachers  
 Bedouin lunch, visit "Desert embroidery" women factory  
<http://www.desert-embroidery.org/>  
 And the elementary school of Tarabin village  
 6pm tourism initiatives in the Merchavim region -  
 dinner with Ofakim Cooking women at the "Dutch Farm"  
<http://www.dutchfarm.co.il/index1.php>  
 Arvit at the Dutch farm  
 8:30 return to Host families

**Overnight: Home Hospitality**

**Wednesday, February 23<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

8:30-2:00pm Touring the south: Masada,  
 Ein Gedi and Dead Sea. (weather permitting)  
 tfillah  
 Drive back to Jerusalem

5:00 Check in free time and dinner on your own

8:00 "My Role in Israel Education" with Guzo Shalev, SIT expert

**Overnight: Dan Boutique Jerusalem**

**Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

6:30 Shacharit  
07:00 Breakfast served from 7:00 to 8:00  
8:00 **Political and legal aspects of relations between State and religion in Israel – with Elan**  
8:30 Israeli Pluralism and the law of the state - visiting the Supreme Court and meeting Judge Dorner  
  
11:00 Israel Museum - Israeli society - past, present and future including Lunch  
  
2:30pm Israeli society as reflected in Modern Jerusalem- study in Pardes  
  
4:00 Syum activity with Elan  
  
6:30 Festive dinner and end of program - Beit Ana Ticho  
7:30 Depart to the airport

El Al flight 12:30am (LY 27; leaving on 02/25/2011 at 12:30am from Terminal 3 in Ben Gurion airport). (check in 9:00pm on 02/24 Thursday) Duration: 12:30 hours.  
Estimated arrival time at Newark, terminal B : 6:00am