

## Israel Centre ManCom Report

### July 2014

#### P2G Cape Argus Cycle Tour Delegation - March 2014

In March 2014 the Israel Centre and Partnership2Gether hosted three Israelis from the Beit Shemesh-Mateh Yehuda region, for them to participate in the Cape Argus Cycle Tour. Not only did they cycle the challenging race, they also had an opportunity to experience Cape Town and Johannesburg and the Jewish Communities there.

The three cyclists were chosen not only for their cycling abilities but as representatives of the multi-faceted cultural and religious landscape of the Beit Shemesh-Mateh Yehuda region.

Moshe Lichtenstein is Ultra-Orthodox and in his 50s, married with eight children, he made Aliyah from the United States. Shlomit Simantov is a physiotherapist living on Moshav Aviezer and is National Religious, she is in her 30s, married with three children and competes in triathlons. She is pregnant with her fourth child. Amir Alfie is secular, in his mid-twenties, studying industrial design and works as a personal trainer.

They could not be more diverse but their shared love of cycling and the region in which they live in Israel create massive commonalities for these Israelis. They were excited to share their life experience of the Beit Shemesh-Mateh Yehuda region with the Cape Town and Johannesburg Jewish Communities, showing the rich existence in the region and the everyday co-existence of varied groups. Their mutual love of Israel, their fellow Jews and newfound passion for South Africa more than bridged any superficial differences they may have.

While in Cape Town the delegation not only participated in the Cycle Tour but enjoyed kind Cape Town hospitality and appreciated the numerous and varied warm Shabbat experiences available in the city. They also were able to get a better sense of the city, its beauty and attractions before even mounting their bicycles for the race.

The delegates visited various schools. This included holding activities in Herzlia Weizmann and Herzlia Constantia. They addressed pupils at Herzlia Middle School and Cape Town Torah High. They also visited the University of Cape Town and engaged with students at the Abrahamic Tent during Israel Apartheid Week.

While in Johannesburg the trio visited King David Linksfield Senior Primary, King David Sandton and King David Linksfield High School, where they spoke to learners about their love of cycling and the

region they live in. They met with one of the twinning classes and cycled with a group of high school students and their School Headmaster, on a muddy and wet mountain bike course.

A highlight of their Johannesburg experience was a visit to the Lion Park where they were able to play with lion cubs and feed a giraffe from their hands. They also visited Soweto and were thrilled with the many different and delicious kosher restaurants Johannesburg has on offer.

The insight into the experience of Zionists in the diaspora and specifically Cape Town and Johannesburg was eye-opening to the delegation and gave them a much more comprehensive grasp of the situation here and the perception of Israel.

The Cape Argus Cycle Tour 2014 delegation was an exemplary illustration of the person-to-person relationship building and facilitation of deeper and personal Israel-Diaspora understanding, the very underpinning of Partnership2Gether.

### **Higher Education Expo - May 2014**

During May 2014 the Israel Centre hosted representatives from Hebrew U, Aardvark, Technion – Israel (Engineering Institution) and Betar Wingate Program, for the annual Higher Education and MASA Expo. The expo is held every year for Grade 11 and 12 learners, who are exposed to the different studying, volunteering and internship options available to them in Israel, once they have finished school.

This year's expo, held in Johannesburg, started with a Chai FM radio interview. Benji Shulman interviewed the representatives on their lives in Israel and the programs they represent. This generated much interest in the community and was a great start to a successful expo.

Delegates visited King David Victory Park and King David Linksfield High Schools over two mornings, followed by one on one interviews at Beyachad for interested participants and their families. These proved to be extremely effective as they provided an opportunity for these participants to gain detailed information about specific programs.

The highlight of the expo was The Tertiary Education evening hosted by King David Schools at Sandton Shul Hall. Here Grade 11 and 12 learners and their parents had the opportunity to visit various higher education institutions, both local and Israeli. Enormous interest was shown in the programs offered by the Israeli institutions and the Israeli table was busier than any other by far.

Encouraging young South African Jews to spend significant time in Israel is one of the priorities of the Israel Centre. The Higher Education Expo affords the Israel Centre and the visiting institutions the opportunity to present the various options available to these young people, to ensure that their Israel experience is worthwhile and constructive.

### **Zionist Caravan East - May 2014**

In an effort to reach Jewish Communities who do not live within the mainstream hub of Johannesburg and Cape Town, Shlichim and representatives of the Israel Centre took to the road to

visit South African Jews from far and wide in the Annual Zionist caravan event, with the aim of reconnecting these people to Israel.

This year, in an effort to enhance the connection and provide further evidence that the land of Israel is ours, the Zionist Caravan included Israeli archaeologists Dr Jon Seligman and Naveh Yogev.

The Johannesburg contingent started their informal education in Maputo, Mozambique. Aliyah and Betar Shaliach Ori Leizer, WZO and Habonim Shaliach Yaron Shiponi and Dr Jon Seligman met the small Jewish community in the newly renovated Shul in Maputo. Talking to a crowd of Jews and Christian supporters, Dr Seligman gave a fascinating talk about Archaeology and the Jews: Sources and Finds. During the presentation, he showed a few archaeological sites in the P2G region of Beit Shemesh and Mateh Yehuda, and the artefacts that were discovered in each.

Moving on to the vibrant Jewish community in Durban, the Shlichim Zionist Caravan held an evening event at the Jewish Club. Dr Seligman gave an interesting talk on Archaeology in Jerusalem, presenting artefacts found in the City of David, the first Temple and the Old City, proving the connection of the Jews to Jerusalem and the Land of Israel. He also spoke about a new excavation he will be working on - at the great Shul in Vilna, Lithuania.

The next destination took the caravan to the small but warm and welcoming Jewish Community of Klerksdorp. Hosted by the Shul, Dr Seligman again presented the connection of the Jews to the land and the city of Jerusalem.

The objective of the caravan is to bring a taste of Israel to these smaller communities. Through Israeli food, video presentations of Israel's tourist sites and discussion on Israeli current affairs, the Shlichim endeavour to connect these communities with the realities of Israel, and offer them ways to experience Israeli life as a tourist or potential Oleh. With this objective in mind, the caravan also visited Jewish schools in Durban and Johannesburg to educate and instil a love of Israel among the learners.

The Zionist Caravan concluded in Johannesburg with a talk by Dr Seligman given at Beyachad.

In total, they met with 200 people and made an enormous impact on the people living in these outlying communities.

#### **Zionist Caravan West - May 2014**

5 Shlichim, 1 archeologist, 4 small Jewish communities, 5 meetings, 2 148 KM, 6 days, over 260 participants.

Every year the Zionist Caravan leaves Cape Town, in order to run informative, enjoyable evenings about Israel and to reconnect with the smaller Jewish communities along the Garden Route as well as to strengthen the support of Zionist Christian Communities there.

This year, in a joint effort with our partnership region in Israel (Partnership2Gether): Beit Shemesh Mateh Yehuda, we managed to bring Naveh Yogev, an employee at P2G, who is also an Archeologist.

After having a well-attended opening event in Cape Town on Sunday 8th of June, The Israeli Mishlachat left Cape Town for approximately a week

The Mishlachat represent the various faces of Israel - which includes members from all of the youth movements as well as from the Yeshiva of Cape Town. The Mishlachat come from different places in Israel (from Dimona in the south, through Jerusalem and its surrounds to the center of Israel) and come from a wide range of religious practice.

The Mishlachat held meetings with the communities in Oudtshoorn, Plettenberg Bay, Port Elizabeth and East London, attendance in all of these cities and towns far exceeded expectations. All of the audience participants enjoyed a fascinating presentation by Archeologist Naveh Yogev, telling them a little bit about the historical connection between Israelis and the land of Israel by using archeological artifacts.

Thanks to the generosity of Bridges For Peace in Cape Town, we were also able to give away copies of their December magazine which had an article about the hidden treasure on the Temple Mount.

The Zionist Caravan was used as a platform not only for formal engagement, but also for informal engagement through conversations with people regarding Israel and Aliyah. During the Caravan a meeting was held with a potential Olah from Port Elizabeth as well as a meeting with a Matric student from Plettenberg Bay, going on a Kibbutz-Ulpan programme next year.

### **Israel Quiz Round One – May 2014**

The first round of the Israel Quiz took place on 19 May 2014. Nine schools participated from Johannesburg and Cape Town and there were 95 entries in total

Of the learners who participated, fifteen percent achieved 90% or higher, eighteen percent achieved 80-89% and ten percent achieved 70-79%

Round 2 will be taking place on 11 August and the FINALS on 14<sup>th</sup> September.

The top 15 contestants from round one and two combined (weighted equally) will be selected for the FINALS.

### **Shimon Farewell – June 2014**

After 4½ years of Shlichut in South Africa, we bid farewell to Shimon Shamila and his family who are returning to Israel in July, at a farewell party at Beyachad on 26 June 2014.

Saying farewell to Shimon was a bittersweet event, attended by the people he engaged with during his time in South Africa. All the major Jewish organisations, many Christian Zionist organisations and the staff of Beyachad were present.

Both Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein and Avrom Krengel (Chairman of the South Africa Zionist Federation) spoke about the good work Shimon did in the community during his Shlichut. They expressed gratitude for his contribution, always carried out with passion and enthusiasm, and his commitment to “Zionising” the South Africa Jewish Community.

Isla Feldman (National Executive Director of SAZF) spoke about how much she enjoyed working with Shimon and Ori Leizer (Betar and Aliyah Shaliach) thanked Shimon for his leadership, on behalf of the staff of the Israel Centre

In a heart-warming thank you, Shimon said that “serving at the Israel Centre was so much more than a job, it was an experience he will cherish for the rest of his life”. He thanked the community for its hospitality and described how much they loved living in the heart of Glenhazel, sending their kids to Yeshiva College and shopping at all the kosher shops in and around “the shettel”

We wish Shimon and his family Behatzlachah and hope to see them soon in Israel.

Shimon will be replaced Aviad Selah, an analyst who spent 30 years in the army.

Aviad will be arriving in August 2014

Upcoming Projects:

### **Cycalve – August 2014 (P2G)**

CycAlive will be taking place from 17<sup>th</sup>- 24<sup>th</sup> August. Boys from Torah Academy, 2 schools on Soweto and the Beit Shemesh region will again be riding the 700km from Johannesburg to Durban in an effort to build bridges between the young men from such diverse backgrounds, to inspire ubuntu - optimism and commitment for the common good of a positive future in South Africa, raise funds for educational projects and to highlight the importance of road safety and the ARRIVE ALIVE campaign particularly relating to cyclists.

### **Aliyah Together – August 2014 (P2G)**

Aliyah together is scheduled to take place from 28<sup>th</sup> August – 3<sup>rd</sup> September. Telfed have advertised for 2 Olim living in the Beit Shemesh region to visit South Africa, to speak to the Jewish Community and potential Olim about their Aliyah experiences.

### **Israel Encounter – Dec /Jan 2015**

Will be taking place in for 10 days over the end of December and beginning of January 2015. There will be approximately 150 students nationally (Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban). Itinerary is currently being finalised and the tour coordinator from Israel will be coming to SA later in the year to discuss the program with parents of children going on Encounter.

### **Aliyah Expo – March 2015**

The annual Aliyah Expo that is hosted by the Israel Centre has been postponed until March 2015 and will be incorporated into an Israel Expo in Sandton, Johannesburg as part of the SAZF Zionist Conference

### **Windows 2015 – March/April 2015 (P2G)**

The Windows 2015 competition will include Beit Shemesh-Mateh Yehuda, South Africa and Washington DC., with participants in grades 4-7, in Jewish Day Schools in South Africa and the regions. The objective of the competition is to encourage children in the partnership regions to learn

more about each other's day to day existence, in the places they live, play and visit, through photographs.

Participants must upload a photo that reflects their daily lives and the city in which they live, to a specially designed competition website. The photo must be taken through a window and include the window frame. Once it has been uploaded, students need to write a 40-50 word description explaining how this reflects where they live.

Voting will take place on the website and 10 winners will be selected based on the top votes and a panel of judges.