

Israel Discourse Advisory Committee

Report to Board of Trustees

February 19, 2019

The Israel Discourse Advisory Committee (IDAC) held its first meeting of the year on January 17. Rabbi Franken gave a brief report on his recent trip to Israel, stressing unreported positive developments there; facts one sees on the ground that may differ from official government positions; a nuanced political situation that is not captured by black-and-white characterizations; insights into Israel-Diaspora relations; enormous growth in construction and infrastructure; and a fascinating visit to Robinson's Arch at the Western Wall. He also distributed copies of a significant article in Forward by Peter Beinart, entitled "Young Anti-Zionists: Be Uncomfortable, Like I Am With My Zionism," <https://forward.com/opinion/416306/young-anti-zionists-be-uncomfortable-like-i-am-with-my-zionism/>, which parallels the rabbi's Yom Kippur message that Israel, though imperfect, nevertheless warrants our engagement.

The committee reflected on the recent decision of the Durham Human Relations Council on the Durham police training matter not to accept in full the draft report of its subcommittee and the message to the Jewish community about that decision by Jill Madsen, Executive Director of Federation. Although it was noted that there are still some pending legal challenges, it appeared that these developments had largely brought this matter to a close. No further action or expression by the JRC Board was anticipated. Nevertheless, the committee felt it useful to re-iterate that IDAC's interest has been not on the adoption of a particular position but on efforts to assure that all points of view are respectfully expressed and that the diversity of perspectives on this issue is reflected in communications by the Board, considerations which were included in the summary of the previous IDAC meeting. Significantly, that summary addressed the responsibility of the congregation as a whole to honor the diversity of views of its membership and the responsibility of individuals who identify themselves as JRC members in public settings or writings to be clear that they do not represent the congregation as a whole (this would appear to be especially important when the congregation or Board has specifically adopted a contrary view).

Within this framework, committee chair Norm Loewenthal felt it appropriate to relate how the congregation, during his presidency in 2007, had developed a process (still in effect) through which the congregation could adopt official positions on political matters. He shared that he is much more aware now than he was then of the need to respect and reflect diversity of views when this process is used.

Norm Loewenthal reported to IDAC that he had convened a meeting with Bruce Jentleson and Alex Peroff, head of Next Dor, JRC's 20's and 30's group, to plan an occasion at which Bruce could speak to the group (and other young people in the area with whom Next Dor is in contact) on Bruce's experiences and insights in the challenging efforts to bring about peace in Israel-Palestine. The meeting was quite productive, useful information was shared during and after the meeting, and plans by Bruce and Alex appeared to be well under way to arrange such an event, thereby addressing the concern that Bruce's earlier presentation did not reach a young demographic. The Next Dor gathering at which Bruce would speak is envisioned as informal and not requiring the assistance of a facilitator. It would

be intended only for a youthful clientele and would not involve publicity other than Next Dor's communications with its own membership and related groups in the Triangle. IDAC members indicated their continued approval for this sort of follow-up to Bruce's earlier presentation.

With respect to matters related to the Adult Education Committee, Norm Loewenthal indicated that the appointment of Chip Carnathan as AEC co-chair with responsibility for Israel-related programming has been a positive development. The rabbi and Norm have been in contact with Chip about the rabbi's request for \$500 from the AEC's budget for a stipend for Father Josh Thomas of Kids4Peace to visit the congregation, an invitation IDAC approved at its last meeting. Chip was encouraging about that request but not necessarily about additional funding for Fr. Thomas' travel expenses, which could total a further \$500. The rabbi will explore possibilities for Fr. Thomas to schedule his visit with us at the same time as other travel to the area and to economize in other ways. It is hoped that his visit would occur around the latter part of March.

IDAC discussed other ideas for Israel-related programming that might be undertaken by the Adult Education Committee. These included the theme of a New York Times article suggested to Chip the previous day, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/16/opinion/israeli-palestinian-conflict-matti-friedman.html> (arguing that the conflict needs to be understood in a much broader context than Israel-Palestine alone); a program on Israel's achievements in the technical and medical fields (already suggested to Chip by a congregant); Israeli film; and Israel and LGBTQ issues. Norm indicated that he would convey all of these ideas to Chip, and, with regard to the New York Times article, would mention ideas for a possible presenter that were discussed at the meeting. In all cases Norm indicated that finding an appropriate speaker to lead a session is a key consideration in educational programming and, in addition, that it is highly desirable for the topic and leader to provide a context within which constructive dialogue on significant issues can take place.

In this part of the discussion Norm felt that it was important to reiterate that while IDAC may play a useful role in suggesting programming ideas it is not itself a programming entity and that it has other important functions, as enumerated in its charge. (This point also relates to the item below on IDAC's continuing role).

The committee briefly discussed plans for the visit of Israeli scholar Rachel Korazim in May as JRC's scholar in residence and Norm encouraged IDAC members to share any ideas they may have for topics for Dr. Korazim's lectures during her visit based on the information that had been provided about her for the committee's last meeting.

Norm also provided an update on the Federation course on Jewish Values and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, underscoring what a valuable opportunity for dialogue this has been for members of the Jewish community, including JRC members (at least 10 of whom were in attendance for the previous week's session on "Jewish Narratives of Peace"). The course's Biblical, Talmudic and contemporary readings, in combination with thoughtful video lectures and interviews, Rabbi Daniel Greyber's energetic leadership, and stimulating periods of interaction among participants, have made for a rich experience in Israel-related discourse, and a reason to be pleased about Judea's co-sponsorship of this course.

Finally, the committee briefly returned to the topic of the status and role of IDAC following the initial 18-month period of its existence in March. Ziva Raney indicated that she had received useful information from the discussion at the previous IDAC meeting at which members made favorable assessments and that she is in conversation with the Board about this. While continuing to feel

positively, members expressed that the committee has more work to do in translating its own model of civil discourse to the congregation as a whole and that IDAC's existence (and the charge and policy on which it is based) are still not well enough known to the congregation. The thought was expressed that the committee's extension for a further 18 months, as envisioned in its charge, might be viewed as a kind of a default option, and that such an extension might be made in a way that would reaffirm IDAC's purposes and direct attention to the underlying policy that led to the committee's creation. The committee agreed to continue this discussion at its next meeting on February 14.

Submitted by Norm Loewenthal, Committee Chair