

Israel Discourse Advisory Committee

Report to Board of Trustees

April 16, 2019

The Israel Discourse Advisory Committee (IDAC) met on April 11. Rabbi Franken opened the meeting by sharing thoughts about the “sacred but difficult Zionist project,” for which the apparent crash landing of the ambitious Bereishit moon rocket earlier in the day may be a kind of metaphor, as well as an event that shared the headlines of a challenging week with the Israeli elections. He reiterated his message about the importance of remaining engaged with Israel and not losing heart.

The rabbi reviewed plans for the upcoming visit, on May 10-11, of Israeli scholar and writer Rachel Korazim, for an unusually full and robust weekend of events within the rubric of the Levin-Moscovitz Lecture Series. There will be no fewer than five events that are open to the congregation, another tailored for Jewish professionals, and a concluding program on the evening of Saturday, May 11, entitled “Women's Voices (but not only for Women),” at the home of Larry Marks and Caryn Hertz, to which IDAC members and their guests will be invited, along with members and significant others from the Board of Trustees, the Adult Education Committee, and the Torah study group. Dr. Korazim's visit promises to be a rich opportunity for learning and discourse about Israel.

The rabbi indicated that he had not been able to arrange the hoped-for visit of Rabbi Laurie Phillips, Chaplain of Kids4Peace, but expressed the hope that the congregation would schedule a visit in the future either of Rabbi Phillips or the director of the organization, Father Josh Thomas.

Norm Loewenthal reported that congregant Bruce Jentleson had followed up his November presentation to the congregation with an informal get-together on March 3 with a small gathering of members of Next Dor, JRC's 20's-30's group, at which he shared his expertise on Middle East policy and his experiences in peace efforts in the region. Both he and Alex Peroff, the 20's-30's leader, had indicated that there was good discussion (despite noisy conditions at a local restaurant). It is hoped that Bruce will reach out to other demographic groups in the congregation in the future.

Turning to co-sponsorships, the committee enthusiastically endorsed the request that the congregation co-sponsor next year's Federation offering of the Shalom Hartman Institute course “Engaging Israel: Foundations for a New Relationship.” The course will be a sequel to this year's highly regarded Shalom Hartman course, “Jewish Values and the

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” also co-sponsored by JRC. Next year's course, like the current offering, will be taught by Beth El Rabbi Daniel Greyber. It was noted that the Shalom Hartman courses, in addition to the excellence of the instruction and materials, offer outstanding opportunities for thoughtful discussion about difficult issues.

[Subsequent to the meeting Norm Loewenthal notified Federation Executive Director Jill Madsen of the committee's decision to co-sponsor].

The committee reviewed its recent online discussion about the request to co-sponsor the upcoming talk by Jerusalem Post writer Gil Hoffman about the Israeli elections, an event to be offered by Voice4Israel, and the fact that a consensus to do so was not reached (though the event is being publicized, without endorsement, through JRC's e-notices) That outcome had to do largely with the view of a significant part of the committee that V4I has adopted an excessively combative tone characterized by ad hominem attacks and that, accordingly, it would not be appropriate for JRC to associate itself with the group through this co-sponsorship.

That view was re-iterated by some during the committee's discussion, a central point being that V4I's manner of expression is not in keeping with IDAC's guiding document, the Israel Discourse Policy, and that withholding co-sponsorship is a way of upholding the principles in that document. However, others on the committee feel strongly that IDAC members need not agree fully with a sponsoring organization in order to lend the congregation's name to a worthwhile program and that by excluding itself from co-sponsorships IDAC runs the risk of failing to engage the community in important learning opportunities.

While this matter was not resolved, a possible approach for future consideration would be to suggest to Federation that it, rather than other groups, serve as the offering entity for programs like the Gil Hoffman talk. There was general agreement among members of the committee that with such an approach they would be comfortable approving co-sponsorships of programs like this. Norm Loewenthal indicated that he would broach this idea with Federation leadership. (A potential potential further obstacle was noted in the form of other potential co-sponsors with which committee members might not wish the congregation to be associated, and that issue remains unresolved.) In any event, it was suggested that IDAC would do well to make the Israel Discourse Policy better known within the wider Jewish community.

Also in the vein of co-sponsorships, Norm Loewenthal reported that the congregation had been given an opportunity to co-sponsor a Federation event to be offered this coming November, entitled “Thou Shall Innovate” (or “We Shalt Innovate”) and featuring the entrepreneur Avi Jorisch. Because co-sponsorship in that instance required a financial commitment of \$250 and because the Adult Education Committee, unlike IDAC, has access to congregational funds, the request was directed to that committee.

The leadership of the Adult Education Committee, without providing the proposal to the full committee, rejected the idea of co-sponsorship, apparently because the presentation was viewed as one-sided and not sufficiently attentive to issues other than technology. That being the case (and bearing in mind that IDAC lacks a budget) the matter did not come before IDAC. The Federation was then notified, prior to its March 1 deadline, that Judea would not be a co-sponsor of the event.

The committee expressed concern about this sequence of events and the process it reflected. It was suggested that this might be a matter for review by the Board of Trustees. Norm Loewenthal was asked to provide information about the Jorisch program to the committee. [Subsequent to the meeting, Norm obtained that information from Jill Madsen and provided it to the committee. Jill indicated that there is still an opportunity to co-sponsor the event should JRC wish to do so].

Regarding technology, it was reported that according to Chip Carnathan, the Adult Education Committee co-chair with responsibility for Isreal-related programming, there has been no progress since IDAC's last meeting on a Technion-related program, or any other programming related to Israel.

The committee took note of the fact that, functioning via email in the interim since its last meeting, IDAC had approved a request by the 4th grade of the Religious School to make a tzedakah gift to the Jewish National Fund. This request had come to the committee for consideration because of IDAC's broad mandate on matters related to Israel, particularly in light of the fact that there are various perspectives about the JNF. Mention of this topic led Ziva Raney to indicate that the strategic plan calls for an assessment of the Religious School curriculum, to gain a deeper understanding of it. The Board plans to look at this in the coming fiscal year. Ziva indicated that the results of this assessment would likely address IDAC's questions regarding instruction related to Israel and Palestine.

Ziva conveyed to the committee that the Board of Trustees had extended the life of IDAC as an ad hoc committee by a further 18 months, a fact that she will include on our webpage (and perhaps through other communications to the congregation). She also indicated that during this period the Board, with important input from Rabbi Soffer, will want to continue to examine the committee's role, structure, and processes, with a view toward potential changes after the 18 month period and IDAC's possible transformation to a standing committee. Norm Loewenthal has been asked to meet with the Board to discuss IDAC's work to date, which he indicated he would be happy to do whenever the Board wishes.

Before concluding, the committee was apprised of anti-Semitic material of a serious nature that was apparently presented as part of the official program at the recent UNC-

Duke Conference on Gaza. Although this matter is beyond the specific purview of IDAC, whose role concerns discourse within the congregation, it is of considerable interest to individual members of the committee, who are attentive to significant developments in the wider community that may have a bearing on IDAC's work.

IDAC will next meet in the months of May and June on dates yet to be determined.

Submitted by Norm Loewenthal, Committee Chair