

The Abrahamic Reunion hosted an interfaith journey to the Galilee on TuBishvat, the Jewish new Year of the Trees, Wednesday, Feb. 4th. An event of World Interfaith Harmony Week, we came from all over the country, 100 of us on three buses, from East and West Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Hebron, Husan, Bethlehem, Gush Etzion, Nablus, the Galilee, Jews, Christians and Muslims.

At the Ma'ale Gilboa Yeshiva, Rabbi Mordechai Zeller, with Sheikh Ghassan Manasra translating, led us in a TuBishvat Seder, a ritual for the new year of the trees. We drank four cups of grape juice, the fully white representing winter, to the fully red, spring, and ate different kinds of fruits representing the four worlds of Kabbalah. Reb Mordechai said, "though we all praise 'our father in heaven', TuBishvat reminds us of our need to honor the land, which is like our mother. Instead of fighting over who this land belongs to, our responsibility is to the land, to heal the earth". Rabbi Yehuda Gilad shared the teaching of Rabbi Hillel 'standing on one foot', the essence of the Torah is 'not to do to the other what you would not have done to yourselves'. Love another... with these meetings, you fulfill the words of Rabbi Hillel."

Rev. Wolfgang Schmidt, Propst (provost) of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem said this holiday reminds him of the trials, sufferings in the body of Jesus, how they are transformed to lessons for spiritual growth. "We of the monotheistic faiths, we all connect to this sacred time...continue this important work." Then at a viewpoint overlooking the Beit She'an valley, Head of the Yeshiva Rabbi David Bigman said in this shmittah (sabbatical) year everyone living on this land receives a blessing.

We then ascended to the summit of Mount Tabor, with stunning views of the Galilee and northern Samaria mountains, where we shared a kosher hummus meal and sweets together. We visited the Church of the Transfiguration and monastery run by Franciscan Catholic monks. Near the church we did a prayer circle for peace in Arabic and Hebrew.

At the nearby Kfar Kamma, we were welcomed by the Circassian Muslim community at their Circassian Heritage Museum. We had guided tours in Arabic and English, about their fascinating warrior culture and history. These formally Christian warriors, now practicing Muslims, they fled Czarist persecution in their ancient homeland, ending up in a diaspora all over the Middle East, including a few villages in Israel. A young couple in Circassian costume, with musical accompaniment, gave a dance performance, ending with huge applause from everyone. The locals showered us with sweets and coffee as we left.

To close a special day, we ended up in Tiberias for a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. Under a full moon, cruising through shimmering water on a large wood-decked boat, we saw views of the Golan Heights, Tsfat/Safed and Mt. Meron in the distance, and the shoreline of the lit up city. We celebrated together, dancing in separate men's and women's circles, to Arabic and Hasidic Jewish music. At the closing prayer circle we chanted "Allah-hu Akbar", and "HaShalom Tenatzach"- 'Peace will Prevail'. Sheikh Jamal al-Din from Beit Haninah closed saying, "Thank Allah for creating us, for sending Muhammad, and the prophets, to guide us on the right path, the path to peace. Let us purify ourselves to serve his will. We gather for hope, for tranquility, for a life without danger, or wars, a good future for all in this region." Everyone was inspired to spread the message of harmony and unity that our trip together embodies, to their communities, to continue this work in a challenging time.

Shalom, Salaam,

Rodef Shalom Eliyahu McLean, and Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, coordinators.

Thanks to our Palestinian coordinators, Raed Hashima- Ras al-Amud, Daniel Aqleh
-Bethlehem, Arafat Abu Ras – Nablus.

Thanks for the support of the German Global Hope Fund and Abrahamic Reunion USA.