



Shabbat Sparks from People of the South

We spent Shabbat in the Neve Ilan Hotel in the Judean Hills with hundreds of residents from the Gaza periphery and other southern communities. On this memorable Shabbat, sparks of inspiration came from the following:

Prayer. Lighting Shabbat candles is always inspiring, but especially at this time. There is a sense that all of our private prayers are being combined into a single large collective prayer. Thanks to whoever composed a special prayer for the hostages that all of us recited with passionate longing.

History. On Shabbat I heard stories that will soon be written about as part of our history – how Moshav Shokeda and Kibbutz Zikim and Kibbutz Yad Mordechai were saved. Members of the rapid response team of Shokeda watched from their roofs in horror as the adjacent Kibbutz Be'eri was going up in flames. They feared that they could be next. What exactly happened there? This is a story that is yet to be told.

Hope. I asked the teenagers to describe their present feelings in one word. One said "process." One said "test." They understand that something extraordinary is happening in the here and now. One of the girls told me that the most difficult moment was when they

were told that they would be in the hotel until Hanukkah, but then her friend said that this was also the easiest moment since she now understood that she had to adapt, to step back, to take a breath. This morning, by the way, the kids will finally start to study in a classroom again. Where? In the school for instruction about the Holocaust at Yad Vashem.

Soul-searching. I was embarrassed when a resident father of Zikim told me about the routine messages he was getting on his cell phone: "The explosions that you heard are from Hamas training exercises. Continue with your routine as usual." Why exactly were they training? His children now have the ability to reach their safe room within 15 seconds. They were born under the threat of missile attack, but must they continue to live like this? Where have we been all these years?

Strength. I asked what gives them strength. One of the girls said: "My parents." I received many other answers and then another girl said that in the first days of the war the residents of her moshav went to live in Arad where a community of Gur Chasidim looked after them. Afterwards they stayed at the Sde Boker Field School where they got close to the local community. "I

am in great distress since I cannot be in my home," the girl admitted, "but exposure to the true people of Israel gives strength."

Future: On Shabbat afternoon, a boy sat and studied for his Bar Mitzvah. His Torah portion is Korach and it's half a year away. He does not know where he will celebrate this event but he diligently continues to practice for it all the same. ■



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