

## Moving Forward from the Inauguration

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On election night in November, shortly after 8pm pacific time, the major news networks announced that Barack Obama was to be our next president. Just a few minutes later, our daughter Mira, a legislative director on Capitol Hill, called and said "you and mom are coming to the inauguration!"

So, Gail and I began to make plans to attend ... to be on hand for the making of history. We were excited about the trip that we were planning, but not entirely prepared for the feelings that it would generate.

Six weeks after the election, our beloved State of Israel found itself engaged in military activities in Gaza. Missiles were flying into Israel from Gaza. Israel's military - the army, air force, and navy - set out to remove the threat of Hamas on a growing sector of her civilian population. As the entire world watched and waited, we kept planning our trip – inspired by the events that were unfolding both here in America, and in Israel.

In some of the world's countries, the transfer of power comes as a result of acts of violence. The winner is often the last person standing. Not so here in America – or in Israel for that matter – two shining examples of democracy in action!

Our trip to Washington was marked by a number of remarkable elements. First, it was COLD! Those of us who made the trip to DC from the West Coast were confronted by freezing temperatures.

Second, the inaugural events represented a coming together of many different segments of our beloved United States of America. On Sunday afternoon, we attended a concert at the Lincoln Memorial that featured many of the greatest names in film, music, and nation building ... and over 500,000 people!

On Sunday afternoon, we attended a "Jewish DC" reception ... attended by ambassadors from around the world and Jewish leadership – professional and lay – from across the US and Canada. Those in attendance heard stirring words from the Israel Consul General Sallai Meridor, and author laureate Elie Wiesel. All who spoke addressed the moment at hand - and the need for America and Israel to move forward together. We spoke with many individuals at this concert who were moved by the music of artists like James Taylor, Don Mclean, Stevie Wonder, Bono, and more. It was a true "happening" – and all attending - Americans of all colors and denominations, felt the energy!

Inauguration Day itself brought more frigid temperatures. The weather did not discourage nearly 2,000,000 people from attending and marking the swearing

in of our first African-American president. Each of the living past presidents were in attendance – further emphasizing the smooth and peaceful transition of power.

At the inauguration itself, we had moving conversations with people from all over the country, even a couple from Alabama whose parents had marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As they were discussing Civil Rights and social programs, they asked me if I appreciated the role that Jews had played in this movement. When I told them that I knew Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel (who had marched with Dr. King), they said that their parents had spoken with reverence about “those rabbis” who had marched arm in arm with “Martin.”

Following the inauguration, we attended the Western States Inaugural Ball. Over 5,000 people delighted in being together, sharing stories of being frozen together, delighting in a concert of salsa music by Mark Anthony -- and saluting first the Bidens and then the Obamas as they were introduced for the first time in their current roles. We met individuals from all over the western states, all of whom had stories to tell about the coming age of engagement that they felt was at hand.

Our flight home was more reflective than celebratory. It was as if all on the plane were “celebrated out.” I was engaged in many discussions on the new administration and its relationship with Israel. The consensus on our flight was that we are at a unique crossroads - that America and Israel, and more importantly Americans and Israelis - must partner as never before to advance humanitarian and social causes. They must learn from each other and share ways of staying safe and reducing (if not entirely eliminating) the ongoing threat of terror.

More importantly, those on our flight felt secure in the reality that if we work together to meet these goals we can accomplish anything!

In our ongoing work with Bnai Zion and its wondrous projects in Israel, we understand the need to continuously bolster the connection between Israel and America – and between America and Israel. As we continue pressing forward, we do so with the understanding that the acts of “*chesed*” (righteousness) that we perform are transformative and lead to the building of a world in which we all may take pride. As we continue to work tirelessly in support of our Bnai Zion projects, we do so with the hope that by doing so, we allow medicine, music and education, parenting, and caring for the challenged to continue unabated.