

Wednesday, May 27th
Old City of Jerusalem
Written by Jeremy Hiken

Today was one of the most spiritual days of the trip so far. After departing the hostel at 8:15, we went to the Old City, where we learned about Second Temple Period Judaism. First, we had some time to ourselves at the Kotel, where many decided to say their own *tefillot* or place notes in the wall.

We learned that Herod built the wall, and it was a retaining wall for the Temple, which he refurbished. The area of the wall where we pray is only a small fraction of the western retaining wall. After we spent our time at the Kotel, we went to the southern wall, where we learned about the various roles of the people who participated in the Temple rituals 2000 years ago. For instance, we spoke about the fact that only the Kohen Gadol entered the holy of holies, and even he only entered on Yom Kippur. We also looked into a *mikvah* where the people would have purified themselves before ascending to the Temple.

After visiting the southern wall, we saw a presentation on the City of Jerusalem from the Second Temple Period. The presentation was a 3-D simulation of what life was like during that time, and the activities that surrounded the Temple mount. Everyone found the presentation very insightful, and it helped us put the story into perspective.

We then had some free time for lunch where we explored the Jewish Quarter for both food and gifts. After this, we left the Old City, and went to two areas near the separation line between Jerusalem and the West Bank. We learned about the borders and how they've changed since 1948. We were able to see the differences between the Palestinian cities and the Jewish settlements, from over the hill and beyond the "green line". The two stops included a brief discussion on the current situation and tensions that exist between Israelis and Palestinians. After hearing about the conflict in the news on a regular basis, it was eye-opening to be able to see how it affects people, right in front of us.

After learning about the political situation, we returned to the hostel to get ready for dinner and our two evening activities. First, we gathered for a discussion on Jewish survival, in preparation for tomorrow's visit to Yad Vashem. We read several selections that illustrated people's sentiment regarding Jews, and we spoke about our expectations for visiting the museum.

Following the discussion, we had dinner at the hostel, then had some free time on Ben Yehuda Street where we got dessert and shopped around a bit. In order to have a keepsake of our Israel experience, Rabbi Seltzer generously purchased each of us a gift. The boys all chose kippot, and the girls chose either a necklace or traveling Shabbat candle holders. Everybody is very grateful to Rabbi Seltzer for this kind gesture.