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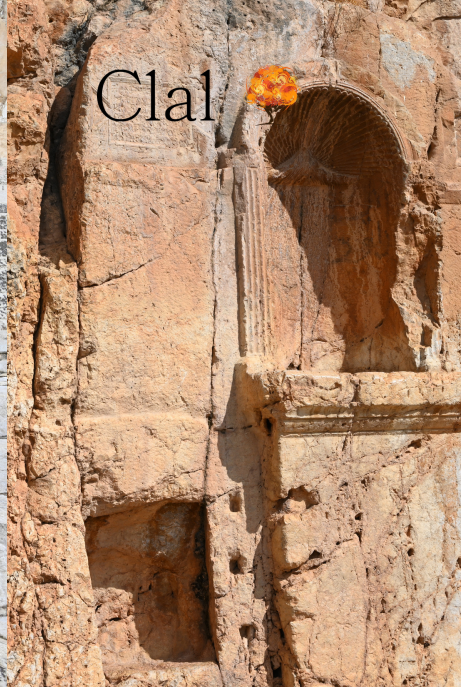
# STRATEGIC STAFF RIDE REPORT



## STAND AND SEE

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**BEGINNING IN THE WINTER OF 2021 AND CONTINUING THROUGH THE PRESENT, CLAL HAS BEEN WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE COMMANDER'S INITIATIVES GROUP (CIG) OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES, AS WELL AS THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF CHAPLAINS, ON A NUMBER OF EMERGING INITIATIVES. OUR FACULTY HAS BEEN ASKED TO CONSULT, STRATEGIZE, TEACH, AND TRAIN IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS AND FOR A NUMBER OF AUDIENCES, INCLUDING OVER 2,000 CHAPLAINS IN THE US ARMY, 300 RISING BRIGADEER GENERALS, AND OVER 1,000 PARTICIPANTS IN A HOLISTIC HEALTH AND FITNESS SUMMIT IN WHICH CLAL FACULTY DELIVERED A KEYNOTE ON HOW TO IMPLEMENT PLURALISM INTO THE SUPPORT OF GEN Z SOLDIERS' MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES.**

In February of 2023, Clal's faculty embarked on its newest initiative in this partnership, a Strategic Staff Ride for 30 of the top-ranking Chaplains in the US Army to explore Israel / The Holy Land through the lens of pluralism and multi-faith leadership. Led by Rabbis Brad Hirschfield, Elan Babchuck, and Ross Singer, as well as Reverend Brian Maguire, the 10 day trip was met with such immediate enthusiasm by the Chief of Chaplains and the rest of CIG that plans are already underway to integrate the trip as part of the holistic training approach to all Chaplains in the Armed Forces, with at least two trips for the coming year in the works.

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**THE FOLLOWING IS A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPATING CHAPLAINS' REFLECTIONS, AND WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A SHORT VIDEO, AND TWO LONG-FORM WRITTEN PIECES BY SENIOR CHAPLAINS, AS WELL.**

# OVERALL RATINGS

(0-10)



9.3

## ACHIEVEMENT

Did the Strategic Staff Ride (SSR) achieve the objectives and desired end-state as described?



9.6

## EFFECTIVENESS

In your opinion, how effective were the preparatory actions and communication from the Commander's Initiatives Group (CIG) in getting you ready for this staff ride?



9.6

## RABBI BRAD HIRSCHFIELD

How would you rate Rabbi Brad Hirschfield's contribution as a guide for this staff ride?



9.3

## RABBI ELAN BABCHUCK

How would you rate Rabbi Elan Babchuck's contribution as a guide for this staff ride?



9.3

## RABBI ROSS SINGER

How would you rate Rabbi Ross Singer's contribution as a guide for this staff ride?



9.7

## REV. BRYAN MAGUIRE

How would you rate Reverend Bryan Maguire's contribution as a guide for this staff ride?

# OVERALL COMMENTS

Professionally, I believe I am better postured to advise commanders of the impact of religion and disputed history upon current conflicts and help them to avoid common pitfalls that result from our national tendency to ignore these foundational issues. "Humility and curiosity" are not hallmarks of military commanders, but we may be able to influence them in that direction - in fact, we must.

The SSR helped me have a paradigm shift from disillusionment to gratitude. Through the SSR I was able to go on a study tour to Israel and my fire has been rekindled. In comparison the SSR has been the best "short course" I've attended in my Army Career.

The Office of the Chief of Chaplains should highlight the professional development opportunities of the short courses to include the SSR in all their recruiting initiatives and expand the opportunity to the current force for retention purposes.

I will forever be grateful for this Staff Ride. I am truly humbled that I was given the opportunity to be a part of this historic occasion for the Chaplain Corps as this has truly been for me such a life-changing experience. My wife even commented this past Sunday after I got through teaching Bible study at my church that she could tell that my teaching was different. I am convinced that our Corps will only become stronger as more Chaplains have this opportunity to experience the Holy Land.

This was one of the most amazing experiences of my life.

This was an amazing experience and the richness of each site came alive because of the wealth of information in each of our guides.



SEEING THE INTERSECTION OF THE VARIOUS FAITHS AT EACH OF THE SITES AND HOW THOSE HAVE DEVELOPED THROUGH THE YEARS AND LEFT THEIR MARK ON HISTORY DEFINITELY ALLOWED ME TO SEE HOW COMPLEX AND CHANGING RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP CAN BE. THERE IS NOT A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL AND BEING ABLE TO HELP OUR COMMAND TEAMS UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITY WILL BE VITAL IN THE FUTURE AS THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE CONTINUES TO CHANGE.

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THE PRIMARY GOALS OF THIS SSR WERE TO SUPPORT THE PARTICIPANTS' ADVANCEMENT IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC AREAS: RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP, RELIGIOUS ADVISEMENT, MULTIFAITH / PLURALISTIC LEADERSHIP, ABILITY TO SERVE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY, COMMUNAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT, AND INDIVIDUAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT. UPON RETURN TO THE US, PARTICIPANTS WERE ASKED TO OFFER THEIR REFLECTIONS ON THEIR DEVELOPMENT IN EACH OF THE KEY AREAS.

## RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP (MODELING BY RABBIS & REV MAGUIRE, IDF RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENTS)

“I believe the entire trip is was a demonstration in religious leadership. Each chaplain and guide, representing various faith traditions, were able to **come together and truly share / experience different lens' through which faith is being processed.** If this can be accomplished in this type of strategic / academic environment, it can be modeled in every echelon of the military.

“Recommendation for future trips: Sustain the rabbis' leadership. They modeled what chaplains should do (in my opinion). **Though they were a different faith than all the attendees, they made it their mission to do everything possible for us to grow in our faith.**

“The visit to Yad Vashem had made a deep impact on me on the importance of religious leadership in my pastoral role as a chaplain. **The holocaust was a stark reminder that effective spiritual leadership is needed to help a people stand firm in their faith when it seems the whole culture around you stands against you.**

“

Masada was one of those moments for me. What religious and moral leadership may have provided a different outcome from the Jewish hold-out? Religious Leadership not only encourages spiritual fitness and practice, but can literally save innocent lives from destruction by seemingly prideful commanders who kill based on principal rather than military necessity.

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**RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP  
(MODELING BY RABBIS &  
REV MAGUIRE, IDF RELIGIOUS  
ENGAGEMENTS)**

“ The immediate impact was the reminder of how one's religion, faith and/or values influences and impacts the choices that individuals and groups make. Thus by hearing and understanding the basis from which a person or group operates, I will be better positioned to provide effective ministry for both the present and future good of individuals.

“ A paradigm of spirituality that isn't religious. Our first stop of the Save a Heart children's hospital. Rabbi Brad described it as a holy site. I'm used to faith based charities, but upon entering Save a Heart, what struck me is that I did not see any overt symbols of faith. There were no scripture verses; the administrator's story was not one of being motivated by faith; etc. Rather she said that she wanted to connect to something bigger than herself so she left a successful career and joined Save a Heart. The Save a Heart site helped me get a paradigm of what that could look like for my Soldiers who are not religious but nevertheless have a need to cultivate spiritual readiness.

**MULTI-FAITH/PLURALISM**

“ I thought the pluralistic environment and collegiality demonstrated throughout the SSR was indicative the the Chaplain Corps future. Participants were afforded an opportunity to examine the genesis of the Christian and Rabbinic Judaism faiths.

“ Pluralism was the number one theme of the entire staff ride. Almost every site illustrated this and the point was hammered home by Rabbi Brad throughout the staff ride. Even on the Mount of Olives as you look over the Old City - the complicated co-existence of Jews, Muslims, and Christians is obvious. The tension will always exist. A good Chaplain will be able to navigate these difficult waters with an expanded and appreciative view of everyone under his/her care.

“ Humility, curiosity, determination, discipline, and passion go a long way in building community from wildly diverse populations.

“ You don't have to be wrong for me to be right.” I've already had an opportunity to utilize it in a dispute with my cousin, which I turned from a likely acrimonious exchange about definitions and meaning on a contentious political issue into an opportunity for him to tell me more about himself in a way that strengthened our bond.

## PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

“ In our staff ride, I was exposed to the meaning, centrality, and cause of strife that religion plays in the complex and complicated dynamic that exists with the thousands of Christian pilgrims that we were beside every day, along with the Jewish and Palestinian population that received us.

“ Again, the rabbis desire to help me grow in my faith was inspiring. It made me want to do more to help Soldiers with a faith different from my own to get more out of their spirituality.

“ We must understand that everything is complicated and that it's our job to sit with people in the mess to help find a way out.

## COMMUNAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT

“ It would not have been 1/10th as impactful if they had merely delivered their thoughts remotely, or even in person in a neutral environment. The spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual depth and influence were largely dependent upon the synergy between place and people.

“ Faith is meant to lived out among others, within close faith communities where we find deep meaning/existential purpose, and also the larger community where we seek to understand/respect those of different faiths/viewpoints.

“ The SSR helped me appreciate the diverse role a faith community has in experiencing the divine.



## PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

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**THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT IS ONE OF AWE AND WONDER. OF UNDERSTANDING WHAT TRUTH IS AND HOW WE CAN RELATE THAT TO THE PEOPLE THAT WE LEAD.**

REGARDLESS OF THEIR FAITH BACKGROUND PEOPLE WANT TO HAVE HOPE AND SEEING THE SIGNIFICANT PLACES AND LOCATIONS OF THE HOLY LAND CERTAINLY INSTILLS THAT.

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CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT IN HOW TO MAINTAIN FIDELITY TO MYSELF (MY BELIEFS) WHILE SEEKING GROWTH AND UNDERSTANDING OF OTHERS. **HOW TO ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION WITH OTHERS WHO DIFFER FROM ME IN A WAY TO UNDERSTAND AND BE UNDERSTOOD.**

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**I FEEL LIKE I SEE IN COLOR THE THINGS THAT WERE ONCE ONLY IN BLACK AND WHITE.**

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THE LARGEST AREA OF GROWTH FOR ME HAS BEEN THE EXPANSION OF **MY CAPACITY TO EMBRACE "OTHERNESS".**

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MY LIFE HAS BEEN FOREVER CHANGED BECAUSE OF THIS EXPERIENCE. **I WILL NEVER TEACH AND PREACH THE BIBLE THE SAME WAY AGAIN BECAUSE OF THE CONNECTION I NOW HAVE WITH THE HOLY LAND.**

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## PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

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I THINK THIS IS BEST SUMMED BY AN EXPRESSION I HEARD BRIAN REPEAT SEVERAL TIMES, "IT'S COMPLICATED." **I MUST NOW BE OPEN TO EXPANDING MY UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURE, ETHNICITY, GENDER, POLITICS, ETC. THROUGH A BROADER LENS. MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY HAS BECOME A BIT LARGER AND IS COMPLICATED.**

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**IN THE PRESENCE OF VARIOUS BELIEF SYSTEMS, I WAS REGULARLY CHALLENGED TO CONSIDER WHAT DO I BELIEVE AND WHY.** I WAS ALSO ENCOURAGED TO CONSIDER THE RATIONALITY BEHIND THE BELIEFS OF OTHERS AND HOW I CAN CAN I BEST DEMONSTRATE LOVE AND PRACTICE COLLABORATION WITH OTHERS OF DIFFERENT FAITH GROUPS, WHETHER THE PERSON IS ATHEIST, AGNOSTIC, OR OF SOME RELIGIOUS IDENTITY.

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**I FEEL LIKE I SEE IN COLOR THE THINGS THAT WERE ONCE ONLY IN BLACK AND WHITE.**

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**SSR MET/EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS WITH REGARD TO DEEPENING INDIVIDUAL FAITH AND EXPANDING WORLDVIEW.**

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