

Memories of Rabbi Richard Hirsch

My first encounter with Rabbi Hirsch was in 1975 when as a 20 year old college junior I was in the UAHC- HUC CAY (College Academic Year Program) on Kibbutz Maaeleh Ha Hamisha. Rabbi Hirsch came to meet with us and my memory of that meeting was that he was the first Reform Rabbi who I ever heard tell us that we should consider making Aliyah. And he told us about the plan already in place to start the Reform Kibbutz which later came to be called Yahel.

My second encounter took place in 1977 in San Francisco during the UAHC Biennial. During the Biennial a decision took place to create a Zionist entity and join the WZO- ie the decision to create ARZA. During the debate in which there was a fairly strong opposition, Dick spoke eloquently of course in support but additionally gave passionate criticism of the Reform Movement for not being Zionist enough- those of us like me from Garin Arava who planned to found Kibbutz Yahel were worried that he was causing more opposition- but it all worked out.

After I made Aliyah to Kibbutz Yahel there were so many encounters with Dick. He was one of the Rabbis who officiated at my wedding with Nirit on the Kibbutz and I remember him prior to the service in a passionate talk with the Sephardic Orthodox Rabbi of Eilat Rabbi Hodiayah- They shook hands and hugged at the end of the service.

So often during weekends in Jerusalem Dick and Bella would host me and Nirit for coffee- so gracious- so supportive so truly interested in our lives.

Since I began working in the IMPJ and especially during the years that Dick moved to Florida- I became Dick's go to person to take care of things for him. He would call me and ask me- "David could you get a few copies of my books and bring them to ... Bougie Herzog"---- David make sure you send me the Aderet Insurance company calendar that they would always give us just before Yom Kippur.- so I would mail these calendars to his home in Florida.

The truth is he would call me once every couple of months-both to get updated about events in Israel in our movement and in the Ntl. Institutions- His last call to me was in late June where he reminded me to not forget to send him the colanders.

I'll miss him so much-but his memory will be an inspiration for me and all of us.

David Bernstein | Deputy Director General IMPJ - Development and Overseas Relations