**Birthing educational leaders**

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As my teacher Rabbi Sacks zt’l frequently said, “Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope”. Educators, as we saw repeatedly during our mission, are people of hope. They are people who not only look to the future but build it through the students they inspire and the hope that they instil in them. The educational leaders we spoke to epitomised the Israeli spirit of resilience and determination but also the positivity to look beyond their current trauma to focus on building the future.

That future of Jewish engagement must be one of positive identity that is constructed not by dwelling on antisemitism, but on fostering a love for the Jewish people in Israel and around the world. As we were told by Zohar Raviv, director of Birthright, “we cannot sustain the Jewish body on a diet of tragedies”. October 7 was an interruption to our story; it is not the story. We have learnt that the Holocaust was not a strong basis for a positive Jewish identity. Instead, we need an understanding of our proud history, our vibrant present and a belief in our shared destiny.

It is our teachers and educators who strengthen Jewish engagement and connection to Israel through transmitting this history and tradition, Jewish pride and sense of peoplehood.

LSJS, the London School of Jewish Studies (formerly Jews College), the organisation I am privileged to lead has focussed for 170 years on building educational leaders. We run teacher training programmes which include formal professional qualifications, teacher development initiatives and degrees in Jewish education. I see every day how dedicated these teachers are to our people’s future.

The experience of meeting so many inspiring individuals in Israel cemented my resolve as to the critical importance of teachers in our community and the importance of doubling down to invest in them and support them as the absolute leaders and guardians of our community’s future.

Since October 7 many of us have felt overwhelmed. One key takeaway from the mission is that, whilst there is plenty to do from advocacy online, to political lobbying to fighting anti-semitism, that is not our role. Our role in birthing inspiring educational leaders is just as, if not more, critical to safeguarding the future security of our community.

There is nothing more powerful than instilling a love of the Jewish people in the next generation. To do that we need to recruit well, particularly those with leadership qualities that are often developed through years of youth movement involvement, we need to provide them with professional pedagogical skills to be effective and we need to support them and nurture them as much as we possibly can. Above all, we need to create a cultural shift whereby we honour our teachers and educators for the critical role that they play.