



CHAPTER 3: YOU'VE ARRIVED -- NOW WHAT?

At this point you're in the good hands of your host organization and the leader(s) of the church or other facility that will be housing your group. The chances are high that they've pretty much seen everything before and are prepared to deal with almost any issue as it arises. So, rather than attempt to choreograph your experience from this point, it may be more valuable to focus on a few more issues involving group dynamics that may occur over the course of the week.

One of the first observations I remember having is that the individuals in the group each come with their own expectations and imagination about what the accommodations, town, host organization, work involved and amount of work that will be accomplished will include. Obviously, this is only natural and part of the fun of looking forward to a new, exciting experience. Of course, it should also come as little surprise that when you arrive many, if not all, of these expectations may be different than the reality you encounter. Perhaps the accommodations aren't as nice as you expected, or the host organization appears a little more disorganized than you would have liked. It is important to realize that these observations do not mean that you have made some terrible mistake and that you will now have a less than ideal experience. To the contrary, part of the learning process for each member of the group will be to process this new information and learn that although it may not be exactly as expected, the week will

nevertheless offer a valuable opportunity to do tikkun olam for a needy population in a needy community.

It is important for each group member to realize that when they arrive at a new place in a different part of the country that they are guests of the host organization and, to a large extent, must give up the desire to control the situation. For example, on my trip to Cumberland, the host organization devoted the first day to purchasing the building supplies that the group would need for the week and to distributing the supplies to the proper work sites along with the appropriate tools that would be needed. This frustrated several members of the group who thought that this work should have been done before we arrived. Unfortunately, because the host organization was short-handed, they were not able to have everything in place before we arrived. The reaction of some members of the group was to begin to critique the operation as inefficient and to start formulating better ways that the host organization could have handled the situation. Although this may be a natural reaction on the part of any of us, the fact of the matter is that most organizations have their own way of doing things that evolved over time because of a number of circumstances including things like cash flow, available hands, and the need to prioritize goals and objectives with limited resources and time. Try not to be too quick to judge others in this situation because they are likely to be working under less than ideal circumstances with insufficient financial resources.

Sometimes you may question why the host organization is not fixing Broken Thing A instead of Broken Thing B, which seems more in need of repair. As guests of the host organization it is helpful if you allow the host to determine the priorities and make yourselves available to accomplish the short-term goals established for your group

for the week that you will be there. Letting go of control is vital to establishing a trusting relationship with your host. Most of the control issues concern method rather than goal.

It is important that the group not permit itself, rather than the host organization to decide what the “mission” is because the group has come to help not to “take over.”

The group members will need time and some “processing” to be able to absorb these concepts and their reactions to the first day or two of work in particular. Try to plan some time at the end of each day, especially the first day, to get together as a group and talk about how things are going. Perhaps have each person tell the group what their “high” and “low” was during the day. Give people a chance to express their feelings (positive and negative) in a structured circle-like setting, so that you can move on to the next day with a clear mind and a sense that others may be feeling the same as, or different from, others in the group.



CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

First, give yourselves a big pat on the back for taking this project on and doing the work necessary to make it happen. Although it may seem like a lot, you and the kids will really treasure this experience and look back on it with great pride. The kids on the Cumberland trip bonded with each other in ways I never thought possible at that age. At night they hung out together playing cards, singing and talking. It was a beautiful sight. By the end of the week, they were giving out awards to the parents (I got the “Steve August Award”). We’ve since met as a group for dinner at the home of one of the group members, and watched a beautiful digital slide show of all the photos we took during the trip. I hope your trips will provide similar loads of fun and satisfaction -- actually I’m sure they will! Good luck to all of you.