

Maintaining Virtual Contact with the Diaspora

Jewish youth groups from the Diaspora are not visiting Israel, Jewish families are no longer meeting for an Israeli bar mitzva celebration. It's possible to maintain the relationship.

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Arutz 7 (Translated from the Hebrew)

July 20, 2020



Archive

Photograph: Yaron Rosenthal

Ilan Wagner, CEO of Onward Israel, calls to allocate educational and technological resources to strengthening contacts with Diaspora Jewry specifically at this time.

Wagner begins by focusing on the importance of the relationship with the Diaspora, "We have a natural tendency in periods of crisis to look inwards but the relationship with the Jewish world is important for our national strength as a state and as a people, and therefore it is important to invest in it despite the difficulty."

During this period when there is no physical contact due to the closed skies, Wagner proposes “investing in the existing technological tools, to create a virtual connection of experiences in Israel. Both sides want this,” he says, noting the great interest in what is happening in Israel.

“Onward Israel currently has 500 young people interning in Israeli companies without coming here. This exposes them to Israeli culture, Israeli employers and employees, projects, accompanying content, and thus they receive a Jewish Israeli experience, without actually being here,” Wagner notes the contribution to Israeli business owners who receive help from external forces, “Young students who come with passion and a desire to help them.”

Wagner says that these are trends that existed before the coronavirus and will also characterize the days after it, in view of the radical shift that is taking place in the way people are spending their time given the changes of the coronavirus period. This time – in which the world has become a smaller place – is a fitting one for investing in contact through different technologies.

Wagner also proposes renewing the field of Israeli tours and tourism for Jewish groups around the world through the same technological means. He says that the trend is already accelerating and more should be invested in virtual tours.

“People visit different places in Israel through a virtual tour guide, listen to explanations and carry out a current historical discussion. They conduct meetings with Israeli educators and activists. In addition, it is possible to think of a variety of ways of contact such as meetings between groups.”

If we are afraid that the virtual channel will replace the real one in the era after coronavirus, Wagner reassures: “Virtual contact whets appetites for actual contact. Even after it becomes possible, you can do things that combine the worlds, involve more people and reach more places that perhaps are not reached.

In order that the tourism industry will also gain financially from these virtual projects, Wagner emphasizes, the government needs to become involved and “build the models so that it won’t just be a one off virtual visit , but that people will be involved in ongoing contact.”

“This is a place for the government to become involved and develop the subject. Through guidance and shared learning, tourist sites will learn how to be virtually accessible. It is also an opportunity for the Government to help assist the suppliers and agents who come into contact with the target audience, and who have been deeply impacted financially. It is critical to retain and strengthen the relationship with Diaspora Jewry, by investing in content, interaction and dialogue, even when travel is not possible.