

## **BI-ANNUAL ISRAEL TRIP**

### **OUR FEBRUARY 2013 TRIP TO ISRAEL**

#### **LEARNING ABOUT ISRAEL THROUGH HER PEOPLE**

*Note: Every other year, our 11th and 12th grade teens travel to Israel with Rabbi Tucker and Nancy Parkes, Director of Congregational Learning (this does not make them ineligible for Birthright when they are in college).*

**Much has been written recently about the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of Israel education in creating an attachment to the land, especially for teens. Peter Beinart, Frank Luntz, Steve Cohen, and Ari Kelman, have all reported that the majority of younger Jews are less connected to Israel than the previous generation. This leads to less positive feelings toward the land of Israel and her people, which leads to less advocacy.**

**Others have reported that the way we teach Israel to our teens needs to change. Teens want to learn about the Israel of today, and confront all of her complexities, as opposed to learning about the fantasy and/or myth. This means educators need to teach the “real” Israel; that is, a country of incredible, perhaps even miraculous accomplishments, but also one with social, religious, and political issues and challenges.**

**David Bryfman, a consultant to the iCenter, a new Israel education think tank/training, believes that the traditional approaches that used to be successful in connecting teens to Israel are no longer effective. Teens are not interested in a one-sided presentation of historical and political facts. What they want instead is to learn about the issues that confront Israel- which include not only the current political and social issues, but also the many accomplishments of the Jewish state.**

**Alex Pomson, senior researcher at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at Hebrew University, believes that the earlier learners are exposed to the “real” Israel,” the stronger their attachment, and that this can be intensified if there are social connections made with Israeli peers.**

**All of this was taken into account as we prepared our HT 11th and 12th graders for their ten day trip to Israel this past February. The following are reflections from a few of our teens:**

*Our trip to Israel was an amazing experience. Though I had been to Israel before with my family this trip was completely different and gave me a chance to not only see the country, but also meet the people that make Israel such a unique place. Our trip was*

*educational, but it also gave me a chance to bond with other teens in the TIC community. Nancy Parkes and Rabbi Tucker were the best chaperones, they were so much fun to spend time with and they had so much knowledge to share with us. I will never forget the ten days we all spent together in Eretz Yisrael, our trip changed the way I feel about being Jewish and made my connection to Israel even stronger than it already was, I can't wait to go back!*

- Sarah Korzec

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*I thought the Israel trip was amazing in every way! I loved seeing my family who I haven't seen in years, as well as, getting to know the Israeli teens. I thought the trip was very educational and that is why I personally think that visiting Sderot was my favorite part. I got a better understanding of the conflict going on and it also made the experience feel very real.*

- Kate Wetchler

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*Although Israel is rife with thorny, intricate conflict, I have come to appreciate through my three visits to the country and my Israel studies at Havurat Torah, that each inhabitant of Israel has his own story and connection to the land, and would not dream of living anywhere else. If I were to report from the land of Israel, 'my beat' would involve covering critical domestic issues, including the Arab-Israeli conflicts, the tough decisions made by the Israeli government, and the internal religious divide. In particular, it would be an opportunity to speak to the people of Israel to convey a deeper, more real, and more palpable understanding of the issues.*

*My recent visit to Israel was less about touring the sites and more focused on exposing me and my fellow Havurat students to the people of Israel. After bonding with seven Israeli teenagers from Haifa, I deeply appreciated both their friendship and the insight into life in Israel that spending time with them afforded me. These teenagers, high school seniors like me, are applying for positions in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Some of them feel an intense excitement to have this experience, and some a desire to follow in the footsteps of their parents and older siblings. For others, it is a duty, but one that they do not question or resent in the least, because it is the norm in Israel, and because they all feel responsible for defending their country and have a true sense of what there is to lose if the IDF were to falter. We also met teenagers in the city of Sderot, which borders Gaza and is constantly bombarded with rockets. Their reality involves constantly running to bomb shelters at the sound of a siren warning that they have only 15 seconds to reach safety. Despite the danger, they have established their lives in Sderot and feel responsible to remain there, because if they and others leave the city, that would place Israel in further jeopardy.*

*I gained a new perspective in the Arab-Israeli conflict when we spoke with Arab teenagers at their high school in Abu Ghosh, Israel. Although they claim to harbor no resentment toward Jews, they perceive that they are often treated like second class*

*citizens, especially when being stopped and checked at Israel's borders. They have a strong sense of their families' ties to the land that Israel inhabits, which go back many generations.*

*For the world to truly understand the conflicts within Israel and consider potential solutions would require reporting that takes into account the motivations, pride and connection that individuals in Israel have to their land and their people. I would find a job like that truly fascinating.*

*- Melissa Gingold*

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*If I had to describe our Havurat Torah trip to Israel in one word, it would be "understanding." Israel is a very complex nation, with many intricacies, the most obvious of which being the many diverse faces of Israeli society. The goal of this trip was to better acquaint us with the "real Israel," namely, its people. In this vein, I would like to share one of my most memorable experiences: our visit to Abu Ghosh.*

*Our group traveled to the Arab village Abu Ghosh, which is located just outside of Jerusalem, and within the Green Line, along with a group of Israeli teens who were staying with us at our hostel, and whom we had become fast friends with. Abu Ghosh is especially famous for its hummus. While, much to everyone's chagrin, we didn't have a chance to try the famed hummus, we did take a visit to the local high school, which was an eye-opening experience for all.*

*The Israeli Ministry of Education develops the curriculum for the school. In Israel, there are separate curricula for Jewish and Arab schools. The students learn many of the same secular subjects that many American students would, such as math, science, and English. In addition, they learn about the history and religion of Islam, including the teachings of Muhammad, and the caliphates. They are also required to learn about Jewish History, in which, according to the students, lessons are mainly on the Holocaust. The students and teachers make a point of highlighting the fact that the Ministry of Education bars them from teaching Palestinian History. Instead, according to the students, they learn about Palestinian History from their families.*

*After learning about their school, we broke off into small groups with the students, to learn more about each other. Although the students, as well as the other residents of Abu Ghosh, are officially Israeli Arabs, the students I met with considered themselves to be Palestinians, and identified with the Palestinian cause. Israeli Arabs are not required to serve in the IDF, and the students said that they wouldn't choose to, as they would feel like they were "killing their brothers." What was most surprising to me was their views of Hamas. In their opinion, Hamas is a protectoral force, rather than a terrorist organization. After these heavy topics, we spent some time talking about sports, hobbies, and school, and discovered that we are not as dissimilar as we may think.*

*While I certainly didn't agree with everything that was said by the Arab teens, it was incredibly rewarding for me to get the chance to meet the "other side" of the conflict, and hear their perspective. It gave me a much clearer picture of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially the Palestinian side of it, one that I haven't been exposed to much. In his recent visit to Israel, President Obama implored Israelis to put themselves in the shoes of the Palestinians, encouraging them to seek peace. We, as American Jews, must also do so, in order to gain a fuller understanding of this conflict, and be advocates for a peaceful end to this bitter conflict. As Maayan, one of the Israeli teens with us, said at the end of the meeting, "The conflict is between the adults, but it doesn't have to be between the kids."*

- Evan Ringel