

Mishpacha

Our Israeli Family

icnext Cohort 2, 2013-2015

April 17, 2015



Jewish Federation
OF CLEVELAND

@AKIVA



israel.cleveland.next is a project of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, administered through @Akiva

What is icnext?

icnext Cohort 2, 2013-2015

israel.cleveland.next – also known as icnext - is a two-year program that educates Jewish high school sophomores and juniors from all denominations in the core issues of Israeli society and the geopolitical situation in Israel today.

Students also learn and engage with Israeli peers from Cleveland's sister community of Beit She'an and Valley of the Springs, a region in the North of Israel that is home to many activities supported and coordinated by the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

The first year of icnext (formerly known as AFU/WOFI) involves interactive educational programming and a visit to Cleveland by teens from the Beit She'an region, and culminates in a 10-day Israel exploratory mission. The mission gives participants the opportunity to explore the realities of life in Israel and spend time learning and experiencing with their Israeli counterparts.

In the second year, students initiate, organize and galvanize peer involvement in educational, political or cultural activities designed to build awareness about Israel and support for the Jewish State.

This magazine was produced by students of icnext Cohort 2, who began their studies in Fall 2013, traveled to Israel in 2014, and are completing icnext projects throughout the community during the 2014-2015 school year.

Recruitment is now under way for this fall's icnext participants. Please see back page for details.

Name	High School
Turner Badowski	Solon
Miriam Bennett*	Cleveland Heights
Justin Bernstein	Shaker Heights
Rachel Cohen	Twinsburg
Jacob Cohen^	Hawken
Zoe Farkas	Hathaway Brown
Talia Fleshler	Laurel
Jeremy Gordesky	Solon
Benjamin Gordesky	Solon
Naomi Grant*	Beachwood
Avi Hartstone	Fuchs Mizrachi
Elan Kodish	Shaker Heights
Becky Marcus	Shaker Heights
Rebecca Marek	Shaker Heights
Abigail Ophir	Laurel
Josh Podl	Shaker Heights
Zachary Reizes	Shaker Heights
Elana Ross	Shaker Heights
Monica Sass	Hawken
Gabe Segar	Shaker Heights
Naomi Shapiro	Laurel
Evan Shaw	Shaker Heights
Solomon Wilkoff^	Lawrence
Samara Wyant	Laurel



Jewish Federation
OF CLEVELAND

@AKIVA



israel.cleveland.next is a project of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, administered through @Akiva

*Magazine editors
^Magazine assistant editors

Contents

Mifgash (encounter) in Cleveland....	4-5
Our Israel trip	
Getting Ready	6
Israel's Neighbors	7
Multi-Ethnic Israel	8
Other Peoples	9
The Israeli Family	10
Kibbutzim	11
Our Beit She'an Family	12-15
Israel.....	16
Jerusalem	17
Back Home	18-19
On Exhibit.....	20-21
Sharing Our Story	22
iDay.....	23
Join icnext	Back cover



Learning from Each Other in CLE

By Zoe Farkas

Having the Israelis stay with us was a truly incredible experience.

I was lucky enough to be paired with a girl, Inbal, who spoke fluent English. Bringing her to hang out with my friends, giving her a tour around Shaker Heights, and bringing her to school may have been even more interesting for me than it was for her. While she was experiencing a new culture outside of her own, I was provided with an outside perspective on my daily life, which is rare.

Also, what started out as me interviewing her, ended as us having a real conversation about the differences in our day-to-day culture, and I think a conversation like that is beneficial to everyone. People always focus on the similarities of a culture, but I want to focus on the differences.

I know that I have common ground with people, so I want to understand what we don't have in common. That's what makes interacting with different people intriguing and worthwhile.





Experiencing Fun, Judaism Together

By Naomi Grant

The Cleveland mifgash (encounter) was without a doubt the best part of my junior year. I loved knowing that after school I would get to see my Akiva friends and this group of Israelis that I loved immediately every day that week.

Our activities included working on a mural we were told would be hung in the Jewish Federation of Cleveland building, going to Putt-Putt and Kalahari, and taking the Israelis to our schools for a day. In addition there was some down time that we made fun, especially on Shabbat when there were no planned activities.

We Americans marveled at how excited the Israelis got over basic things like the filthy piles of snow that were left over in April, and the fact that we actually do use giant yellow school buses, just like in the movies.

In terms of Jewish activities, we attended a bat mitzvah service together and had a group discussion afterwards. The service was one of the main events in the mifgash that showed the Israelis that in America, there is something between secular and orthodox, and most of us do not happen to be that "something."

After the Israelis left, seeing each other at Akiva just wasn't the same, but we all reminded each other we only had nine weeks left until we saw them in The Promised Land.



Pre-Mission Reflection

By Jacob Cohen & Naomi Grant

Ever since the Israelis left, we've been counting down the days until we see them again. Reuniting with our Israelis is one of the many reasons we're anxious for our 10-day mission.

Floating in the Dead Sea, hiking Masada, and exploring Hezekiah's tunnel are all fun Israeli experiences, but they are not what icnext is about. Instead we will be doing activities such as visiting an unrecognized Bedouin village, and exploring Israel's borders with Syria and Lebanon. These types of opportunities do not take place on normal teen tours of Israel. This is what makes icnext so special.

The focus of our group's trip this summer is family. We find this focus very fitting for multiple reasons. Over the past eight months our group of 24 has grown exponentially closer to each other. Also, we are part of a large extended family with "our Israelis." Our cohort is made up of the type of people who can make anything fun. So, above all, we expect to have a blast.

We get to go to one of the coolest countries in the world with an incredible group of people, spend time with our friends who live there, and learn about it in a way that few people do. We expect it to be amazing.

Interviewing Jewish Geography

By Evan Shaw

"Hi! Are you going to Israel?" I asked a lady near the gate for our flight to Tel Aviv.

"Why yes, I am!" she responded.

"Great! I'm on a program that teaches about communicating and advocating for Israel. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Of course."

I started by explaining that our program was through the Jewish Federation of Cleveland. She quickly interrupted me telling me she was also from Cleveland! Of course...

A group of Cleveland Jews traveling together interviews the one person in the entire terminal at Philadelphia International who is not only going to Israel on our flight, is not only from Cleveland, but also currently lives in Beit She'an.

After that, interviewing was a breeze. Our interviewee, Maddy, grew up in Cleveland but has lived in Israel for 37 years. Truly a Zionist, she raised her children in the same way. The mother of five, she raised her children in Israel on the kibbutz of Ma'aleh Gilboa. Talk about a small world.

And yet, the world isn't small enough. Like any Jewish mother, she worries. She worries now, today, as much as ever as her 26-year-old son is called from the reserves to help locate the three missing Israeli teenagers. She says that she feels guilty to be away from her family in these troubling times, and while she is apprehensive to return to the current situation, she will be relieved to be with her family again.



Getting Ready

Responsibility

By Turner Badowski

This morning we visited the Israeli-Gaza border – one of the most tense borders in the world, where missiles cross instead of people. Our group visited Sderot, a city about 1,000 meters from the Gaza Strip, which is also known as the bomb shelter capital of the world.

In America, we have sirens for tornados, floods, and storms, but in Sderot there are sirens for rockets. These days, things such as the Iron Dome, sirens, and bomb shelters protect Sderot. But still Sderot is not protected enough due to the conflict with Hamas, who rules the Gaza strip.

With all the money the Palestinians have received for humanitarian aid, most of it goes into the corrupt officials' pocketbooks, where it is used to further terrorist activities and rocket attacks. In fact, Lt. Noa Krakov stated that Hamas is "arming for the next battle." By planning to force another conflict, the Palestinian leadership has shown its irresponsibility, and ruins hopes of an end to the conflict.

Until the leadership in Gaza can show its responsibility, the border will remain tense, and there is no hope for attaining a peaceful resolution. Until the leadership in Gaza can show its responsibility, the people will be forced to live in fear. Until the leadership in Gaza can show its responsibility, conflict will remain.



Lebanon Update

By Jacob Cohen

One might ask why Hezbollah, an internationally recognized terrorist organization, would keep all of their missiles below a civilian hospital. The reason: the Israeli ideology to cherish the lives of innocent civilian population. Hezbollah knows that the Israelis will not attack a hospital because they refuse to take the risk of killing innocent civilians. This was one of the many fascinating topics Kobi Marom, an IDF reserve colonel, taught us on our tour of the Israel-Lebanon border.

The Iranians use Lebanon as "their puppet." The Lebanese are dependent on the services of the Iranians; therefore in a time of war the Lebanese will be forced do whatever the Iranians say. This worries Israelis including Kobi because if Iran is attacked they could respond using the power of Hezbollah.

The fact that the lives of civilians are used to protect Hezbollah missiles is the disgusting reality of the situation. The Israeli devotion to human rights is sadly taken advantage of by the Hezbollah terrorists. This story, told at the start of our Sunday tour, impacted us more than any other lesson that day.

Jisr az Zarqa

By Naomi Grant

Realizing that the dislike between Arab- and Jewish-Israelis is something so personal, I was very excited and intrigued to visit the Arab village of Jisr az Zarqa today. We took advantage of Jisr az Zarqa being the only Israeli Arab city with a beach, and all rode there in the same bus. The Arabs were exceptionally loud in the same way as our Beit She'anis, which makes me believe that they really could be friends if they tried. As the entire group hung around eating watermelon, I couldn't help but notice that the circles of people starting to form were either all American or all Arab. This was a very different situation than the one with our Beit She'anis. We'd known these Arabs for maybe an hour and had not been learning about their culture for the majority of our lives.

Secondly, the language barrier was much more significant with them. For the most part, their English was extremely limited, and we didn't speak much Arabic, which left us only Hebrew, a second language for both of us, or very basic English. But we not only made it work, we also had a great time. The warm welcome that we received from every Arab we met did not show a hint of dislike for a culture with which they were sometimes at odds, and I hope that they will serve as an example to both Arabs and Jews.

Lecture with Khaled Abu Toameh

By Jeremy Gordesky

This morning, we met with a Muslim Arab-Israeli journalist, Khaled Abu Toameh, from The Jerusalem Post because of his expertise on the Middle Eastern conflict and his ability to discuss both sides of the dilemma of Palestinian leadership and failed peace possibilities with Israel's neighbors. Toameh's 31 years of experience covering the debated topic, including advising Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry regarding peace talks, aided him in expressing his pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian views and his slight hope of a solution.

Like "most Israelis," Toameh wants a two-state solution, but thinks that the reluctance of the parties to agree on a percentage of land for Israel to surrender prolongs negotiations.

"If you want to make peace with Israel, you have to prepare your people for peace," he explained.

Toameh believes that the Arab media has "poisoned the minds of millions of [Arab] people" regarding peace with Israel, which hinders the ability of leaders to negotiate. He suggests that the only workable solution is by physical separation. He compared the two peoples to a couple in need of divorce who would be forced to coexist within the same small house.

Through his ideologies and experiences, Toameh encouraged our group to wake up and expand our perspective on the unanticipated obstacles making peace in the foreseeable future impossible.



Multi-Ethnic Israel



The Immigrants' Challenge

By Samara Wyant

While studying at a Mechina (pre-Army preparatory program) in South Tel Aviv, we learned about the appalling poverty in this area. Many of the Americans were quick to make a connection between the poverty and the crime, but for many of the Israelis this was less obvious.

Another issue is the next generation of immigrants' children who are born in Israel. These children must be faced with an identity crisis of a severe degree. Though the refugees and foreign workers make up a significant portion of the population in the Jewish state, they are not Jewish. The social and political scene in Israel is affected by this because in order to have a Jewish state, there must remain a Jewish majority. This social issue in Israel, like many others, will only be solved through collaboration.

It requires a uniquely Israeli perspective and an international, outsiders' perspective to find a viable plan of action that will be most beneficial to Israelis and the immigrant population.



What's a Family?

By Rebecca Marek

What is a family? For me, it's immediate family, close friends and teammates. Avital Kopelzadu believes family is a group of people who accepts you for who you are; it's not only blood relatives.

Avital and her husband, Shooki, invited us into their home and shared their story with us. Together, the two have four biological children: Netel, Maayan, Adi and Noam. They also have had four foster children from Beit Zinger, a group home for young abuse victims ages five to 18.

Their first foster child, Tayan, was a gentile from Romania. However, the family still welcomed Tayan into their home and committed themselves to giving her a good education and a bright future. During a parent-teacher conference attended by her foster parents and her biological father, Tayan's teacher praised her work, to which her biological father responded, "Who cares about good grades? She won't amount to anything."

After this comment, Avital insisted that Tayan will "go to university, find a good job and get married." Years later, this was accomplished and Tayan was walked down the aisle by three fathers: Shooki, her father-in-law and her biological father.

Whether "family" signifies teammates, best friends or a biological relation, family is one of the most important things in the world. Shooki and Avital agreed that they wouldn't change a thing.

The Ethiopian Family

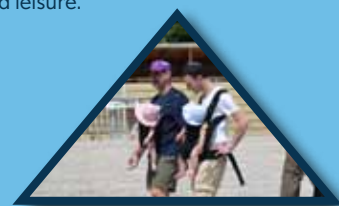
By Elan Kodish

At age 10, Chava, her brother and her aunt started their journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. Chava's brother decided to leave because he heard that the Ethiopian army was forcing young men in their village to enlist. Chava begged her father to allow her to join them, but he said no. However, she followed her aunt and brother anyway, who allowed her to come with them on the condition that she not complain and not cry.

The group was robbed by bandits and lost nearly all of their belongings at the beginning, and when they finally reached the Sudanese border after three months of walking, their guide left them with a stern warning that their journey would only get tougher. Upon entering Sudan, soldiers forced them into a refugee camp where they stayed for 14 months until they were allowed to resume their trek to Jerusalem with very little water. Chava arrived in Jerusalem ready to start a new life on December 10, 1984, after two years of walking across the desert.

When Chava's parents finally joined them in Israel, everything changed. Rather than remaining a patriarchy, as most Ethiopian families are, her father relied on his children for assistance.

In an Israeli family, both partners have relatively equal power. Marriages tend not to be arranged, couples get married much older, and women and men can both hold jobs. Also, every Israeli child is required to go to school, unlike in Ethiopia. According to Chava, "Ethiopian family is love, values and togetherness," while an "Israeli family is education, respect and leisure."



The Cleveland/Family Connection

By Elana Ross

As my group walked down the streets of Emek Refaim last night, we searched for families to interview, hoping to gain insight into their lives and journeys to Israel. I discovered a family speaking English, and I ran up to them. They immediately agreed to the interview.

The Roberts family hails from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and is visiting Israel for their first time. They asked about our program and the mom, Julie was very excited to hear we traveled from Cleveland, because she was born there as well.

"Where in Cleveland?" she asked. "I'm from Shaker Heights."

Who would have thought in a random drugstore on the opposite side of the world, I would run into a woman who went to the same high school as I do? Jewish geography is one of my all time favorite activities.

As the conversation progressed, I found out that Bridget, the younger sister, takes on the same role in her family as I do -- the funny/annoying child. She told me a joke, and no one besides the two of us laughed.

I ran into them twice today, and sat them with them for part of lunch. From just that 6-minute interview, we forged a connection that made me feel comfortable enough to go up to them and talk about their itinerary for the rest of their trip. Hopefully someday, Jackson and Bridget will return to Israel on programs like icnext, and remember my friends and me as those crazy kids that helped make their trip to Israel just a little more fun.



The Israeli Family

Socialism: Yesterday's Tomorrow

By Evan Shaw

"I want you to explain your entire life, all of it; every single detail, in three words."

At Kibbutz Tiraat Tzvi, there is a family that can describe their life in less. The family of Mark and Rina Goldberg have been treated well by kibbutz life. There is a kind of freedom that can be found nowhere else in the world. In a community that stresses cooperation and togetherness, the Goldbergs describe kibbutz life in two words: Gan Eden.

Shabbat on the Mountain

By Gabe Segar

I had the incredible opportunity to spend Shabbat on Mount Gilboa, a mountain located in the north of Israel. I lodged at the kibbutz Ma'aleh Gilboa, a traditional kibbutz which provided an unexpected religious experience.

Mount Gilboa provided an exhilarating spiritual occurrence, which to me trumped the religious element. The tight sense of community within the kibbutz was not dissimilar to that of a family. Their community was so strong, I could feel the bonds.



Family Shabbat on the Mountain

By Monica Sass

Shabbat at Kibbutz Ma'aleh Gilboa, which is in Cleveland's partnership community, was incredible.

The aspect of Shabbat that stood out the most was certainly their deep sense of community and family. Upon arriving at the kibbutz, our Israeli host Tamar's mom explained that we were lighting candles 10 minutes early in an effort to pray for the return of the three Israeli teens who were kidnapped at Gush Etzion. She proceeded to explain that while she certainly didn't think lighting Shabbat candles early would bring back the children, she felt it was worth doing as it was something that brought the country together in a hard time.

The rest of Shabbat most definitely showed me the true meaning of community, as the kibbutz is very closely knit. On Friday night at shul, I was reunited with a woman I had met at the Philly airport as we departed for Israel. After a lively Shabbat dinner spoken in my native tongue of Hebrish, Ben, Avi, Gabe, and Solomon came over with their Israelis to snack and schmooze for hours. I felt the true meaning of family as we all sat around the living room, together with our Israeli Tamar's family.

The next day after lunch the same crew came over, but this time Amnon, Mama Tina, and the Shinshinim joined us as well, which further solidified my sense of family. The religious people in the room accepted the secular, and the secular were happy to be with the religious. Given that this isn't so common in Israel, I knew that I was in the presence of a true family.

Kibbutzim



Our Beit She'an Family

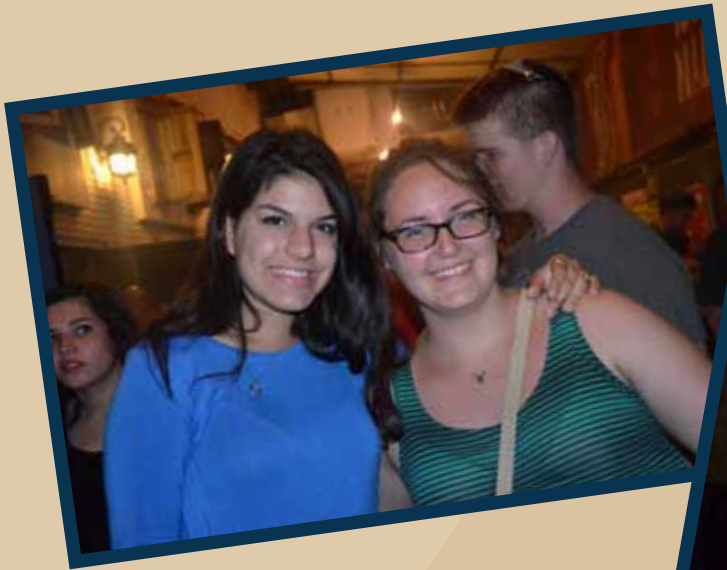
HaChaver Havirtuali Sheli (My Virtual Friend)

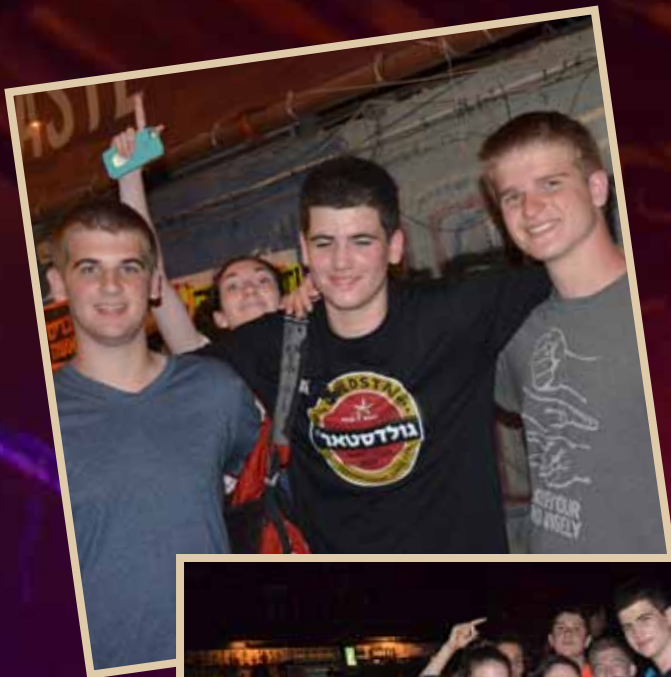
By Justin Bernstein

As a member of icnext, I was given an opportunity to view Israel as an insider and abandon my tourist outlook on the country. I accomplished this goal of connecting and engaging with Israel by living with the Dalal family in Beit She'an.

It seems like forever ago when Amnon had assigned Josh Podl and me our Israeli pen pal, Ron Dalal. Israeli counterparts had arrived in Cleveland in the beginning of April. We played mini golf and learned together in Cleveland, and ultimately Ron and I had the opportunity to bond with one another. My education from Gross Schechter Day School prepared me well so I could interact with my Israeli friends in Hebrew. Looking back, I realize the importance of my Jewish education and continuation at HS@Akiva.

Although all of Amnon's planned activities looked super fun on our itinerary, I knew that nothing would compare to hanging out in Beit She'an with Ron and Josh. Ron and his family are awesome and extremely kind and genuine. I am having a blast and wouldn't trade this experience for anything. My time in Beit She'an has totally made the seven-hour seminars worth it.





Similar Snapshots

By Naomi Shapiro

Meet the Siboni family: Yair, Sarit, Lidor, Dorian and Yoel. Yair is a police officer and Sarit is a preschool teacher. Lidor, the Sibonis' oldest son, is currently serving in the IDF. During my interview and photo shoot, I discovered there were few significant differences and many profound similarities between the Siboni family and my own. When I asked Yair what he thought was the most important aspect of family, he clasped his hands together and replied, "B'yachad. Together."

The togetherness Yair expressed is something which transcends physical separation. It is an unconditional bond. While thinking about this bond, I couldn't help but think of another: a covenant between a land and a people.

Our connection with Israel is a familial one. I was lucky enough to experience this connection as we attended Shabbat dinner with Dorian's entire grade. I probably felt the same confusion at that dinner that Dorian experienced when she came to my USY convention. However, there was still the familiar overabundance of food and I knew most of the songs they sang. Everyone was so incredibly friendly that I couldn't help but feel like I was part of the family. Our similarities were the kinds that transcend physical separation because we are all part of the same people and the same family.

From the Beit She'an Perspective

By Ori Aharoni

icnext was an incredible experience for me, even better than I could have imagined. In this program, I got to know Jewish teens from the U.S. who became my special friends and will stay in my heart forever.

My American friends taught me many things I didn't know about the Jewish community in Cleveland and showed me what it is like to be a Jew outside Israel by taking me to synagogues, Jewish schools and by telling me about all the activities they're doing in the community. I also got to stay with an amazing Jewish American family for a week. They introduced me to their lives as a Jewish family and treated me like I was part of their family. All those experiences completed a picture of the Jew's life in America. Besides the learning, we also go to spend a lot of time together. We went to a water park, to mini golf, a concert, and more--even being together on the bus was fun!

In return, when the Americans came to Israel, we tried to show them what it's like to live in Israel, how great Israel is and most of all, we tried to make them feel at home. We shared some unforgettable moments that made the goodbye a thousand times harder. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and I will be forever grateful for taking part in it.



Our Beit She'an Family

A First Visit to The Kotel

By Solomon Wilkoff

That day we went to the Kotel was the first time I have ever been there. I was awestruck by the Wall. I found it to be so awesome that I had to record my emotions. The first line of the poem came to me the moment I saw the flowers with thorns on them growing from the wall. From there the poem kind of went on its own course. I think I will be going to the Kotel again in the future, to fully realize its power in my mind.

Thorns grow out of it.
The sky burst forth from it.
People pray around it.
What can be said,
of something so cruelly betrayed.

But the thorns have flowers!
Lively birds soar out of the cracks.
Yet one lonely feather,
is forced away by the wind.
Could it have stayed?
Perhaps if it prayed?

Did this feather have a say?
Perhaps it left another way.
Or was it mocked by its kin,
who still had a home on its birds skin?
Perhaps the feather left in shame?
For the prayers it had, it could not claim.

Do birds pray at the wall?
Do thorns drink the fruit of their prayers?
Or do the birds squabble,
with the feathers in a hobble?

Only the wall knows,
which way the wind blows.



For the Cause

By Abby Ophir

"We are fighting for a reason." This is the desire that the lone soldiers at the Golan Military base in Israel shared.

These men left their homes, and found themselves fighting for a country with a purpose. They included Raffi, a passionate young man from New Jersey, and Ansel, a young man from Germany. Raffi came to Israel to study at a Yeshiva, but eventually joined the army because it enabled him to belong as a part of Israel. Alternatively, Ansel left his home in Germany at age 15 so he could be in the IDF, despite his family's disagreement on the matter.

They both expressed their desire to join the IDF so that they might fight and belong in a society they feel proud of ... one where they see the results of their service daily. People are safe because their service in the IDF makes a noticeable difference, they would not have seen elsewhere.



Israel

Separation Wall and Jerusalem History

By Becky Marcus and Avi Hartstone

Although the Kotel, the holiest Jewish site, is in Jerusalem, other nations share in this wonderful city. The holiest site for Muslims outside Saudi Arabia is located in Jerusalem, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is an important place for Christians. Sharing such an important space inevitably leads to both a territorial conflict and a religious conflict within Jerusalem.

To end our time in Jerusalem, we saw the Separation Wall and drove through a security barrier to Mount of Olives overlooking the city. The building of the Separation Wall started in 2003 to protect Israel from Arab terrorists. A similar fence was built first in Gaza and worked so well that the government decided to try it in the West Bank in response to the Second Intifada, where Israelis were being killed daily. In Hebrew, the wall is called the security fence, but in Arabic, it translates to the "apartheid wall." Arabs claim that it is degrading to their human rights, but due to its checkpoints, terrorism has significantly decreased. Israel didn't build this wall to persecute Arabs, but to protect its citizens.

Because of the recent kidnapping of the three Israeli boys in the West Bank, we were not allowed to enter for more than the few minutes it took to drive through the barrier and turn back around. Our bus crossed the barrier into the West Bank for a minute without a problem because we had an Israeli license plate, but could have been stopped when leaving. Arabs coming and going from the West Bank need a card issued by the government in order to enter Israel.

One criticism of the wall is that life on the Arab side is secluded and their movement is restricted. Our bus drove past the checkpoint into a suburb of Ramallah, which is under the Palestinian Authority. There wasn't much to see, and we took a lap around the rotary and entered through the Israeli side. Although the wall may cause inconveniences, it is still possible to go through it.

"Old" vs. "New"

By Zach Reizes

We began our day in Jerusalem by exploring the Old City and the ruins of the Second Temple. Featuring Rabbi Michael Unterberg as our educator, this tour helped us strengthen our understanding of the ancient connection of Jews to our homeland. Following a visit to the Kotel, as well as the various art exhibits at the Israel Museum and the Shrine of the Book, we ended at the Mamilla shopping mall. There, we bore witness to the way in which our connection to the land of Israel continues to thrive to this day.

One of the most fascinating parallels between the ancient city and the bustling streets of modern Jerusalem lies in the architecture. While exploring the Old City, Rabbi Mike drew our attention to the uniformity of the stone with which everything in Jerusalem is built, a smooth, marble-like rock known simply as "Jerusalem Stone." Rabbi Mike also pointed out the alcoves from which shop owners would sell their wares. When we visited Mamilla in the evening, it was impossible not to notice similarities between the empty and ancient walkways of the Old City and the shops of today's Jerusalem.

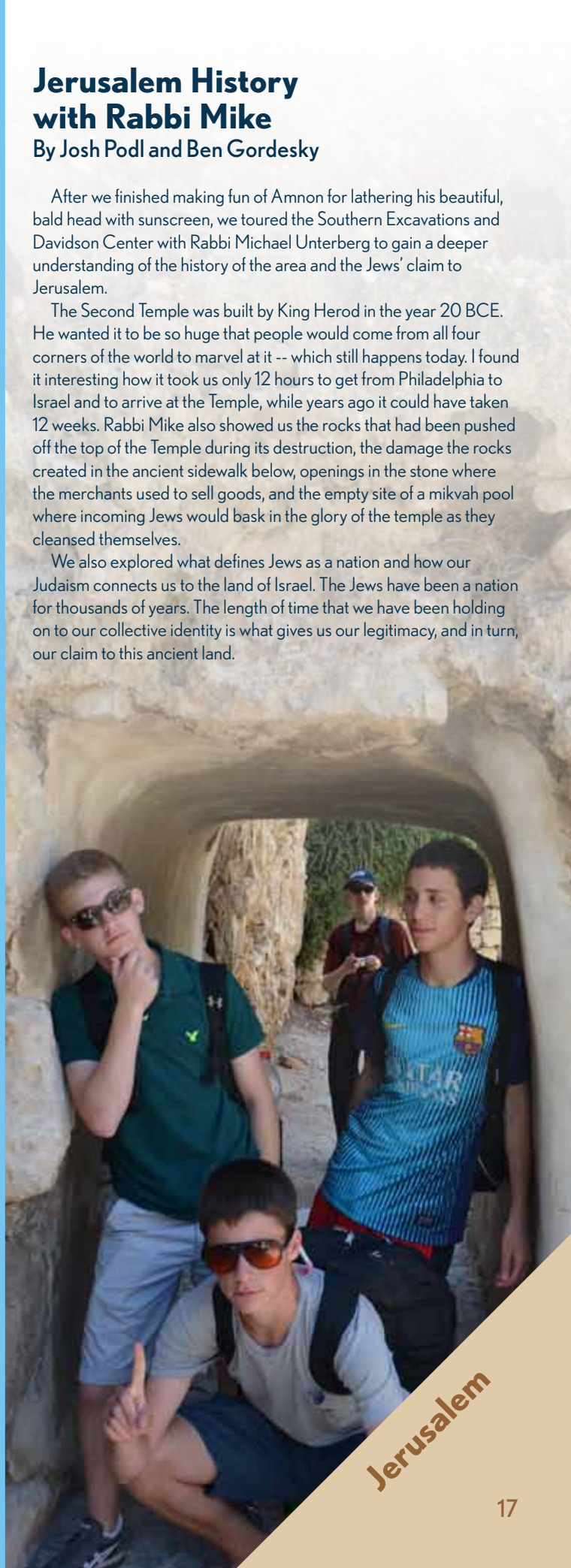
Jerusalem History with Rabbi Mike

By Josh Podl and Ben Gordesky

After we finished making fun of Amnon for lathering his beautiful, bald head with sunscreen, we toured the Southern Excavations and Davidson Center with Rabbi Michael Unterberg to gain a deeper understanding of the history of the area and the Jews' claim to Jerusalem.

The Second Temple was built by King Herod in the year 20 BCE. He wanted it to be so huge that people would come from all four corners of the world to marvel at it -- which still happens today. I found it interesting how it took us only 12 hours to get from Philadelphia to Israel and to arrive at the Temple, while years ago it could have taken 12 weeks. Rabbi Mike also showed us the rocks that had been pushed off the top of the Temple during its destruction, the damage the rocks created in the ancient sidewalk below, openings in the stone where the merchants used to sell goods, and the empty site of a mikvah pool where incoming Jews would bask in the glory of the temple as they cleansed themselves.

We also explored what defines Jews as a nation and how our Judaism connects us to the land of Israel. The Jews have been a nation for thousands of years. The length of time that we have been holding on to our collective identity is what gives us our legitimacy, and in turn, our claim to this ancient land.



Jerusalem





Bringing Our Story Home

By Rachel Cohen

Throughout our Israel trip, each one of us has seen so many unique people and places. There is no way to recreate once-in-a-lifetime experiences. After thinking back on our trip, and most especially on the activity with Assael Romanelli about portraying our stories, I have learned to express myself more and really interact with strangers to learn more about them. Pictures capture the scene, but memories and conversations make the setting come to life with relatable ideas. In the second year of our program, each member will use the techniques learned on the trip to share their stories and memories with people in Cleveland. Hopefully, more Americans will be able to feel a similar connection to the land everybody has come to love from our trip.

A Message to Potential Applicants

By Josh Podl

When I applied for this program, I didn't know what I was getting myself into. At first, it was hard for me to connect with everyone, as I only knew a few people. I was scared to host an Israeli my age because I only knew how to say a few words in Hebrew. However, as the first year of this two-year program comes to a close, I have grown much closer to everyone in my cohort, and I am extremely thankful that I had the chance to become great friends with Israeli teens.

Without a doubt my pen pal, Ron Dalal, has made me feel the most connected to Israel. Tonight I had to say goodbye to Ron, not knowing if I will ever see him again. It was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Although I've only really spent about a week or two with Ron, I have grown extremely close to him. When I met Ron in Cleveland, the language difference was a little difficult to overcome, but thanks to staying in touch over the past two months, we've become much, much closer. I know that I'll always remember how kind Ron and his family were and all the jokes we shared together.



Back Home



Turning False Expectations into Amazing Memories

By Gabe Segar

Going to Israel sounded fun to me prior to my commitment in the program, but I began to have very negative expectations when I learned about the somewhat large workload and seemingly colossal time commitment. I don't admit this often, but I was entirely incorrect. The speakers who I assumed would be unbearable were fantastic. Not only did they give great insight into The Israeli Family (the theme of our mission), they also spanned the spectrum from traditional Jew to Arab-Israeli Muslim to African Christian immigrant. This allowed the trip to be a unique and eye-opening experience for me, because I was not familiar with some of the issues and opinions that were shown and discussed through the wide variety of people who talked to us. Looking back at how stubborn and unwilling I was, it's kind of funny that I came to love the program so much. In essence, this was one of the most amazing experiences in my life, and it is well worth your time to check out the icnext program.

Mission Overview

By Miriam Bennett

Our trip included so many different aspects, from seeing a civil war over the Syrian border to playing soccer with non-English speaking Arab teens to explaining what "icnext" means to total strangers. We truly enjoyed ourselves and created new and lasting relationships. One of the most important parts of our trip was growing closer to "our Israelis" in Beit She'an. We built lifelong friendships and learned a lot about the daily lives of Israelis.

Each night of the trip, several of us stayed up all night with Tina writing the blogs that kept you updated on our adventures in Israel. While the blogs analyzed our educational experiences, they did not mention the "behind-the-scenes" mishaps and excitement. Our time sitting on a tour bus (yes, there was a LOT of driving) and in between activities was just as educational. We grew closer as a group and became more comfortable around each other. Our time between planned activities, which was not much, was used to take in the surroundings and learn about Israeli culture and atmosphere first-hand.

Back Home



These photographs are a sample of those that appeared in a traveling photo exhibition after the students returned from Israel.



'CLEarly Mishpacha' - A More Meaningful Photo Album

By Rachel Cohen

As icnext Cohort 2 traveled throughout Israel for 10 days, we had a mission. We had to answer a complex question: "What is family?"

As we worked to better understand Israeli culture, Cindy Dettelbach and Eric Leiser taught us to get to the heart of a story and how to take the best photograph. Whatever you perceive a family to be, you are probably right. There is no perfect definition for a word that describes so much. Throughout our photography exhibit, "CLEarly Mishpacha," we have displayed images varying from one person to a family of 11.

I hope you are able to find a new and deeper meaning for "family" as you look at the pictures and view our understanding of an Israeli family.

From the Philadelphia airport, to the Jerusalem Festival of Light, and to our host families' homes in Beit She'an, we interviewed people and took their pictures. Sometimes it was difficult to approach a stranger, but each time we learned more about Israel and the meaning of the word "family."

Each member of our cohort left Israel with a better understanding of how unique a family can be. We photographed "average" Israelis living their busy lives and Clevelanders visiting for the first time, and even some of our former teachers. Whether you've never been to Israel, or you grew up there, this exhibit should demonstrate the diversity of families and lifestyles that exist, even in a land with such a small population.



On Exhibit



Blurring Boundaries

By Zach Reizes

What is a family?

Who is in your family?

Where do the boundaries between friends and family blur?

Stop reading, and answer the questions above. If you have trouble doing so, that is a good sign. The ambiguity of the word “family,” both culturally and throughout history, makes it an almost impossible term to define. Yet this is what we were asked to do as part of our icnext mission to Israel.

From the moment of touchdown in Tel Aviv our cameras were out, as we tried to decipher the mystery of what a family is. In Israel, a land of the religious and of the secular, artists and scientists, Europeans and Africans, this is particularly difficult to do.

Some excellent moments were captured in the first days of our visit. But when our cohort arrived in Beit She’an, our photographs transitioned to a new level.

In the first days of our trip we had been looking for family. Now, in Beit She’an, we got to experience it. In the moments we captured - the grin on a brother’s face, the crinkle in a father’s eye - an honest definition of family is visible.

What is a family? Who is in your family? Where do the boundaries between friends and family blur?

The answers are just around the corner. Take a look as you are invited to join our global mishpacha.



On Exhibit



Bringing Israel to Hawken

By Monica Sass

At Hawken School in Gates Mills (or Chesterland if you want to be like that), the Israeli Culture Club is one of the most popular student groups. I like to think that this is because of the content of our meetings, but if we're being honest, it's because there's usually free food.

Every summer, there are a number of kids who travel to Israel, and this year was no exception, despite the conflict. Hawken junior Jacob Cohen joined me in representing Hawken on @Akiva's icnext program, during which we spent 10 days travelling through the country, travelling to cities coincidentally the day before rockets landed there, or other attacks occurred. Having stayed in Israel longer to visit with family, I arrived home in Pepper Pike just hours before the bodies of the three kidnapped Israeli teens -- Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Shaar, and Naftali Fraenkell -- were found ... and hours before the conflict in the place that feels most like home began to escalate.

When school resumed in August, as Israeli Culture Club president, I felt obligated to somehow inform the community of the events that took place all summer, and of the rampant misconceptions that came along with them. Hawken junior Leah Meisel had also spent the summer in Israel, but arrived just after I left, which meant that her summer was filled with time in bomb shelters and rerouting her trip with BBYO. So, at the beginning of the fall, Leah addressed the Israeli Culture Club, explaining why she felt that she should go to Israel for a month despite the rising conflict. Roughly 50 students and faculty attended her presentation of the scenario in Israel this summer - facts which are usually buried in media reports.

I couldn't be more proud of her for sharing her story, and am honored to represent the icnext program with Jacob at Hawken.

The Need to Stay Informed, Involved

By Elana Ross

Before attending the AIPAC policy conference, my only experience with political action committees was learning about them in government class. They seemed like a foreign concept. But when I entered the Washington Convention Center with 16,000 others, I didn't feel out of place. My friends and I belonged there; we came to help ensure a strong, secure future for Israel.

Throughout our three days in Washington, D.C., I realized the importance of staying involved with Israel advocacy in the remainder of my high school career and beyond. After the escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict this summer, defending the Jewish state and Jewish people has become a great concern not just in America, but all over the world. At AIPAC, I met and listened to passionate, dedicated individuals talk about containing the Iranian nuclear threat, combatting the boycott-divestment-sanction movement on college campuses and defending Israel's legitimacy wherever I go.

I didn't understand everything I heard, so I asked questions and looked up things. I found myself becoming more and more interested in the issues I thought I already understood. I learned that now more than ever I need to stay informed, and always look at issues from various sides.

My friends and I were there with people who donate generously to AIPAC every year. But our presence was every bit as important. At the conference, 16,000 of us came together to fight for a common goal, Israel's safety, and each person there was a reminder of the unwavering support this country will continue to have for Israel.

iDay Brings Community Together

By Talia Fleshler

On iDay, the whole Jewish community came together to learn about and celebrate Israeli culture. There was much planning and hard work that went into the day, which is presented each year by the icnext seniors as a day of learning to share Israel with teens throughout Cleveland.

Many of our cohort members were working in different areas like registration and games, but I secretly liked my station the best because it was food - who doesn't love food? We served krembos (an Israeli snack made with chocolate and marshmallows), Israeli candy, and smoothies.

Throughout the day there were breakout sessions to learn about Israel. The one I attended about upcoming Israeli elections was fun and informative. Each team chose a party and we debated issues with the other parties.

The day culminated in a raffle with really cool prizes. My favorite prize was Cavs tickets (I'm VERY jealous of the winner). I can't wait to see what Cohort 3 does next year!



iDay

You Know You're in icnext When...

- "Yesh po WiFi?" and "Yesh po sherutim?" (Is there WiFi here? A bathroom?) are always the first two questions you ask in any new place
- The adults in charge do a headcount *after* the bus starts moving
- The order of activities is in the least logical order possible
- You solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in under an hour, only to forget the solution the next day
- Your group takes selfies with Arab-Israelis and Jewish Israelis within 24 hours
- You become a dysfunctional family after spending almost 90 hours together without any other teens, even though you do get tired of each other, because it's impossible not to become some sort of family

By Naomi Grant

israel.cleveland.next (icnext) is accepting 24 students for Cohort 4 (2015-2017). Apply today!

Learn about Israel.

Travel to Israel.

Connect others to Israel.

Want to join us?

...commit to seven Sundays (one per month) in the first year, host an Israeli teen in your home for a week, travel to Israel for a 10-day summer experience, and lead a second-year project for your community.

Applications for the next Cohort are now being accepted.
Cost for the program is \$1,800 (financial aid available).

WHAT? israel.cleveland.next (icnext) is a unique two-year program that educates a dedicated group of Jewish high school sophomores and juniors from all denominations on the core issues of Israeli society and the geopolitical situation in Israel today. In addition, students learn, engage and work with a group of Israeli peers from Beit She'an/Emek HaMayanot, Cleveland's partnership region. The first year culminates in a 10-day Israel exploratory mission, giving participants the opportunity to experience the realities of life in Israel. In the second year, students will be involved in initiating, organizing and galvanizing peer involvement in educational, political or cultural activities designed to build support for the State of Israel. Students will become expert Israel engagers in order to educate others about Israel.

WHO? icnext applications are open now for Cleveland-area high school students who have a strong interest in Israel and will be entering 10th or 11th grades in the fall. Applicants will be judged on essays, recommendations and a personal interview. The selection committee will choose 24 students to participate in the program.

HOW TO APPLY? Go to www.icnext.org to download the Participant Application and the 2015-2017 Calendar. Applications and information are also available by calling 216.367.1388 or by emailing us at tkeller@akivacleveland.org



Jewish Federation
OF CLEVELAND

@AKIVA



israel.cleveland.next is a project of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, administered through @Akiva

israel.cleveland
next
icnext.org

