

# *Queer Israel*

## A Curriculum Guide for LGBTQ Birthright Trips Operated by the Union for Reform Judaism



Submitted by Barry Shainker  
HUC-JIR, New York  
Spring 2014/5774

Advisor: Dr. Lisa Grant

*Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree  
requirements for Masters of Arts in Religious Education*

## Acknowledgements

For all of her help and guidance with this capstone guide, and throughout my studies at HUC-JIR, I must thank my advisor Dr. Lisa Grant. The life and professional lessons you have helped to teach me will forever guide me in shaping the future of Jewish education in all the communities that I may come to serve

To Evie Rotstein, her predecessor Jo Kay, and all the faculty of HUC-JIR, thanks for guiding me through the course of my studies, celebrating my successes, and helping me to overcome challenges during my tenure as a student.

During the last few years, I have had the opportunity to serve a number of communities and experience the mentorship of many amazing professionals. Thanks to Mara Braunfeld, Jason Nevarez, Felice Miller Baritz, Alix Brown, Harriet Levine, Mara Young, and the countless other educators who have helped me hone my skills and aspire to the professional I hope to become.

In designing this capstone, I also wish to acknowledge the staff at the Union for Reform Judaism and Kesher for giving me the opportunity to share my passions and insights. Without their support, I would not have been able to introduce trip participants to the Israel that I continue to love and struggle with each and every day.

To the participants and staff of Group 231, the first-ever Kesher LGBTQ trip, I must offer my immense appreciation for your passions, time, and commitment to our program. It was my pleasure to help you discover the richness of “queer Israel,” and I thank you for helping me become a better educator and guide in the process.

Finally, I close by thanking my friends and family for their support during my studies and in completing this project. To only name a few, I so appreciate all that you have done for me Mom, Dad, Matt, Stephanie, “Dit,” and “Gram.” Your guidance has helped me become the person that I am, and I will never fully be able to count the ways that your love has been the rock that I need in times of difficulty.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
A Note about Language.....	iii
Introduction & Curriculum Rationale.....	1
Description of Topic.....	1
Intended Learners & Setting.....	3
Rationale: Worthiness of the Unit.....	5
Guide for the Educator/Facilitator.....	9
Resources & Literature Review.....	11
Outcomes.....	15
Mission of the Organization.....	15
Vision of the Organization.....	15
Select Priority Goals for Learners.....	16
Enduring Understandings.....	16
Essential Questions.....	17
Learner Outcomes.....	17
Tools & Prompts for Data Collection.....	18
Design Principles for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.....	19
Unit Outline: Trip Itinerary.....	21
Three Fully-Scripted Lesson Plans.....	22
Lesson 1: Shabbat Text Study.....	22
Lesson 2: Assimilation – Success & Challenges.....	29
Lesson 3: Pluralism (Part II) .....	42
Bibliography.....	50
Listed Resources.....	50
Selected Annotated Bibliography.....	53
Appendix.....	54
Participant Interview Responses.....	54

## A Note about Language

Throughout this capstone, a number of identifiers are used to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. They are to be understood interchangeably, as all-inclusive, and with all respect intended. A comprehensive list of terms applicable to the LGBTQ community can be found in Keshet’s LGBT Jewish Curricula [resource guide](#)<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Keshet

## Introduction & Curriculum Rationale

### Description of Topic

After much discussion and consideration, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) organized its first Keshet Birthright trip specifically designed for the LGBTQ community in the winter of 2013-14. Fortuitously I was asked to lead the group as one of the North American *madrichim*. As I spoke to the leaders of the URJ who were planning the trip in the months beforehand, it was clear that they were committed to creating a wonderful experience for participants. My experience in advocacy within and on behalf of the Jewish LGBTQ community, along with my personal and professional connections to Israel, allowed me to contribute my expertise and insight to creating a program that was challenging, affirming, meaningful, and unique for the participants.

Upon creating the first trip in the fall of 2013, the URJ staff in both New York and Jerusalem set out to create a program that struck a balance between the standard itinerary and one that spoke specifically to the LGBTQ community. As fellow group leaders, my co-staff and I were able to offer our suggestions and ensure that the trip met the social and emotional needs of all the potential participants. We anxiously talked with our partners and tried to create a trip that would give everyone a taste of gay and lesbian life in Israel without taking away too much of “regular” life. In other words, our goal was to find the middle ground between an LGBTQ trip and a trip for LGBTQ individuals.

Wherever possible, we used the broader narrative of minority and/or marginalized groups to generate conversations about the realities of life in Israeli society. As Tessa,<sup>2</sup> a

---

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this capstone, pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of participants

participant on the winter trip who identifies as straight, shared with me, “I came on this trip because I know that the queer community is progressive, and I wanted to see a progressive view of Israel.”<sup>3</sup> She did not want to see a mythic perspective of Israel, but instead wanted to engage with many of the challenges and struggles that complicate the narrative. To her interest, and my own pedagogic goals for Israel engagement, we introduced the perspectives of progressive Judaism, women’s equality, Arab-Israelis, other Arab minorities like the Druze, and so forth.

Issues of personal safety and security were also at the forefront of our minds. Early on in the planning process, we were conscious of the tension that some of the participants might encounter at holy sites or in issues such as housing. We were deliberate in creating strategies that staff could use if a transgender or gender non-conforming participant were to face heckling at the *kotel*; we emphasized the importance of housing students based on personal gender preferences and not by the sex listed on passports; we discussed at length the importance of introducing ourselves early on in the trip by the gendered or non-gendered pronouns that we preferred. We worked hard to ensure the successful creation of a safe, warm, and welcoming community where all participants could find a home.

The curriculum used by the URJ for the Winter 2013-14 trip was the essentially the same as what was used on the non-niche trips, but with a number of add-ons like meetings with LGBTQ individuals and allied organizations. With a few minor tweaks, what follows is a supplement for that existing curriculum, designed to stimulate broader conversations and enhance the experience for all participants on an even deeper level. The learning activities

---

<sup>3</sup> Participant interviews on Winter 2013-14 trip, January 2014

which are outlined are intended to be used while on-site at a corresponding location or during an evening reflection or tie-in session. It is my hope that the capstone which follows – or at least elements of and resources from it – will first be used during the summer 2014 trip season, and then repeated and adapted as necessary for each successive season.

### Intended Learners & Settings

Participants on Birthright trips usually range in age from 18 to 26. They represent a wide array of Jewish experiences and affiliations, and the groups that make up LGBTQ trips are no different. Some have spent years engaged in the Jewish community through religious or day school, camp, youth group, Hillel, or other entry points, while others may not have entered a synagogue or JCC since their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Either way, they have chosen to take part in the Birthright experience for any number of reasons. The experiences on the trip and this supplement, in particular, are intended to be powerful and meaningful for young adults. They will, in turn, help to shape the future of each participant's Jewish journey.

Participants' relationship to Reform Judaism must also be considered in the framing of lesson plans and curricular experiences. Some have grown up well-connected to the Reform movement as alumni of NFTY and URJ camps, and therefore registered for a URJ trip organically and naturally. Others, however, will have picked this trip provider for the convenience of dates, the opportunity to travel with friends from home or school, and/or the Kesher values of experiential learning, progressivism, inclusion, and open-mindedness. Whatever the reason, the trip will capitalize on the opportunity to expose participants to the depth and complexity of Israel through a Reform lens.

There is likely to be a strong minority of participants who do not personally identify as LGBTQ. With rare exception, like Tessa above, they will have self-selected to join this group because of a personal affinity for or comfort with the gay community or someone who is part of it. For that reason, special attention is paid to the amount of explicit LGBTQ content in this supplement: Too much conversation about gay and lesbian life in Israel would be overwhelming, but too little would do a gross disservice to the interests of a majority of participants and the focus of the trip. Therefore, opportunities to build personal connections are at the core of the learning experiences. In this way, participants are given the tools they need to find their own place in the broader Israeli narrative.

Finally, it is clear that this program is explicitly intended for use only a few times each year, and only in the specific niche of the LGBTQ Birthright trip. However, the resources and learning experiences can, and should, be utilized in any number of other settings. It is a fair assumption that participants on other Birthright trips will identify as LGBTQ, so all trip leaders would do well to familiarize themselves with some of these materials and make them available to those individuals. Additionally, congregational LGBTQ affinity groups may find some of the materials listed in the resources section of particular interest for a synagogue program. And, of course, any of these materials can be used in a classroom or youth group setting to teach about Israel through a non-traditional lens.

### Rationale: Worthiness of the Unit

With birthdates no earlier than late 1980s, current Birthright participants have grown up in a world where momentous change has occurred in the Jewish community's response to issues of gay and lesbian inclusion. Liberal and progressive movements have overwhelmingly accepted LGBTQ members, clergy, and life-cycle celebrations, while more traditional wings have, to varying degrees, gradually come to understand the individual human narratives that are found among members of the queer community. Yet, young people often find trouble connecting a broader Jewish narrative to their own personal one; unless they've had the opportunity to explore on a deep and relevant level how they can find their unique place, "Jewish" and "gay" exist separate from one another. For many participants, like Felicity, the LGBTQ trip represents the perfect opportunity to synthesize Jewish and queer identities.<sup>4</sup>

At the core of every Birthright experience is the idea of building Jewish identity, and this trip provides the opportunity to help queer Jews like Felicity to do just that. On nearly all "regular" trips, conversations, some structured and others informal, encourage participants to address the tension between identifying as Jewish and American. The greatest difference between these trips and LGBTQ itineraries, notes Jewish LGBTQ activist Jayson Littman, is the complexities of these conversations: "While many of our heterosexual counterparts may struggle with their desire to remain liberal Jews and support Israel and try to define if they are 'Jewish Americans' or 'American Jews,' the LGBTQ Birthright experience challenges our primary

---

<sup>4</sup> Participant interviews on Winter 2013-14 trip, January 2014

identity during a trip that is meant to connect us to our secondary Jewish identity. Are we gay-Jewish-Americans, American-Jewish-gays, or Jewish-gay-Americans?”<sup>5</sup>

Littman goes on to note that while Judaism may not influence a participant’s day-to-day lifestyle at home, their LGBTQ identity is always present. As discrimination against the gay and lesbian community at home is far more prevalent than anti-Semitism, it is harder to hide the queer part of one’s identity.<sup>6</sup> But, as Shaul Kelner notes, “The tours...are liminal spaces. Those who inhabit them have been removed from many of the roles, relationships, and status systems that ground their understanding of who they are.”<sup>7</sup> For ten days on the trip, participants are immersed in a community that inherently welcomes them for who they are; they can forget about any of the struggles associated with their gay identity, and instead focus on developing their Jewish self.

For that reason, the social needs of participants are also a central concern anchored in the design of this trip. In his extensive research, Kelner indirectly reflects on the importance of an LGBTQ trip to ensure a positive experience: “...in light of the [usual] tour group’s general heteronormativity...[s]ome who are out in their home communities closet themselves during the trip. Some are acutely aware of the absence of a dating market of their own to parallel the robust market enjoyed by their straight peers.”<sup>8</sup> While some are drawn to Birthright by the prospect of meeting their significant other, the often-criticized notion that an underlying goal of the trip is to facilitate the creation of Jewish families is the very reason that gay and lesbian Jews want to participate in an LGBTQ trip.

---

<sup>5</sup> Littman

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Kelner, 179

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 180

When romantic relationships and casual “hook-ups” are removed from the conversation, organic and individual reasons compel queer participants to register for the LGBTQ trip. As the counterpart to Kelner’s research, some participants who remain closeted at home see the ten days abroad as an opportunity to come out. For Tim the trip was an opportunity to “be more out and open, [it was] more comfortable to be social here.”<sup>9</sup> While some participants expressed a desire not to be embraced as the “token gay,” opting instead for a community where they were one of many instead of a minority, others worried about the struggles they might encounter in developing relationships with peers on a general trip. Collectively, nearly all participants on the first trip seemed to appreciate how the self-selection into the LGBTQ group forged the group’s identity from the beginning. Kelner suggests<sup>10</sup> exactly what participants like Molly discovered, that the “connection with place is rooted in the connection with people.”<sup>11</sup>

This supplement, and the LGBTQ trip in a broad sense, also serves the purpose of educating the general Birthright community about the purpose and power of the LGBTQ trip. Littman notes, “Many people are surprised to find out [about the] trip. Most are curious how the trip differs from a ‘regular’ Birthright trip, with one friend asking, ‘Do you guys ride gay camels in the desert?’”<sup>12</sup> Though comical, this comment represents the popular myth that queer trips are designed to be exclusively gay. In fact, there is no “gay hotel” and no gay narrative about Masada. Instead, the trip tries to overlay a few LGBTQ perspectives in a broader and complex Israeli narrative. While participants very much enjoy the gay beach or queer

---

<sup>9</sup> Participant interviews on Winter 2013-14 trip, January 2014

<sup>10</sup> Kelner, 182

<sup>11</sup> Participant interviews on Winter 2013-14 trip, January 2014

<sup>12</sup> Littman

nightlife found in already cosmopolitan Tel Aviv, others are touched by the *Yad Vashem* tour that introduces a few of the voices of homosexual persecution during the Holocaust. These curricular pieces, which are modifications from the general itinerary, only enhance participants' abilities to find their place in Israel and the larger Jewish community.

No matter the trip provider, a hallmark of each trip is the *mifgash*, or meeting, with Israelis. A highlight of the LGBTQ trip is that these young people also identify as members of the LGBTQ community, and the experience is meaningful for all: Yarom participated in the *mifgash* on a straight trip and found it difficult to build relationships since he was the only gay person in the group.<sup>13</sup> He applied for the highly competitive LGBTQ trip so that he could have a more positive experience. Among a group of queer participants from the United States and Canada, he was able to do just that. The stories, perspectives, and voices that Israelis like Yarom bring to the table cannot be understated.<sup>14</sup> As personal relationships between American and Israeli participants develop, these anecdotes help to provide a nuanced, honest perspective of Israel.

With the Israeli participants as a primary source, the successes and challenges of life for a number of minority groups in Israel can be explored on the trip. This supplement explores some of them and lays the foundation for others. For example, Americans are shocked to discover that while the US government was actively creating its "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in 1993, the Israeli Supreme Court was hearing testimony that eventually led to the full-inclusion of gay and lesbian service members in the Israeli military.<sup>15</sup> From this, additional conversations about LGBTQ life in the IDF, particularly in contrast to other areas of the Israeli government, are

---

<sup>13</sup> Participant interviews on Winter 2013-14 trip, January 2014

<sup>14</sup> On the Winter 2013-14 trip, several shared their firsthand accounts of the 2009 shooting at the *Agudah* youth centre in Tel Aviv. North American participants were moved by the brutality of the incident itself, but also the complications that arose when many teens were forced out of the closet in the aftermath.

<sup>15</sup> Eichner

natural. In the process of discussing these challenges, a sincere, honest, and integrated perspective on Israel can be developed.

### Guide for the Educator/Facilitator

Birthright staffing groups are made up of two North American *madrichim*, and two Israelis: the *moreh/morah derekh* and the soldier/medic. All four of them are important partners in ensuring that participants have a meaningful and worthwhile experience while on the trip. The utmost care must be taken to address the comfort and safety of participants, both emotional and physical. Staff should always be receptive to the needs of participants throughout the trip, checking in regularly to ensure that everyone is having a positive experience.

In order to be effective leaders, facilitators must be familiar with the rules and suggestions of both Birthright and URJ Keshet. For this trip, specifically, facilitators should be familiar with the LGBTQ communities in both Israel and North America. The resource list that follows is intended to help facilitators enhance their knowledge base concerning matters that are relevant to those perspectives. Leaders do not need to identify as LGBTQ themselves, but they must be comfortable around the queer community and familiar with issues of relevance to the gay community. In fact, the inclusion of straight allies on the staffing team would represent a powerful statement about the inclusiveness of the trip.

Facilitators should note that the resources, lesson plans, learning activities set out for this trip are only suggestions. The resources can be utilized as pre-trip preparation, on-trip programs, or post-trip engagement tools. Additional resources can be added as needed.

Further, while the materials here are recommend for someone who is not used to working with the demographic, a program leader who is well-versed in the nuances of both Israel and the LGBTQ community can and should add their own contributions.

A number of the topics that are outlined and suggested are written with contemporary relevance in mind; they are designed particularly for the Summer 2014 trip season. In the future, when this content is no longer pressing or current in Israeli society, steps should be taken to ensure that participants understand these topics as historical. But, in the spirit of this curricular supplement, activities should be kept as current as possible. Facilitators on future trips should therefore familiarize themselves with contemporary debates that are taking place. As my sources draw largely on newspapers in both Israel and the United States, group leaders should consult these sources, as well as other mass media, to get a sense of some of the most pressing issues in a given trip season. New articles should replace the ones I've included, and the rest of lessons should be adapted as necessary to address the issues that are being analyzed.

## Resources & Literature Review

### General Birthright Resource Books

- ✧ Glidden, Sarah, and Clem Robins. *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*. New York: Vertigo/DC Comics, 2010.
- ✧ Kelner, Shaul. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

### *LGBTQ Jewish Resources*

#### Prayer Books

- ✧ Edwards, Lisa, and Juval Porat. *Siddur Sukkat Shalom*. Los Angeles: Beth Chayim Chadashim, 2011. ([http://bcc-la.org/pdf/BCC\\_siddur\\_april14\\_2011.pdf](http://bcc-la.org/pdf/BCC_siddur_april14_2011.pdf))
- ✧ Kleinbaum, Sharon. *Siddur B'chol L'vav'cha: With All Your Heart*. New York: Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, 2008.
- ✧ Tyler, Michael, and Leslie Kane. *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*. San Francisco: Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, 2009.

#### Resource Books

- ✧ Address, Richard F., Joel L. Kushner, and Geoffrey Mitelman, eds. *Kulanu: All of Us: A Program and Resource Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Inclusion*. New York: Union for Reform Judaism Press, 2007. Revised and Expanded Edition
- ✧ Brown, Angela, ed. *Mentsch: On Being Jewish and Queer*. Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2004.
- ✧ Drinkwater, Gregg, Joshua Lesser, and David Shneer, eds. *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- ✧ Heger, Heinz. *The Men in the Pink Triangle: The True, Life-and-Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps*. Trans. David Fernbach. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 1994.
- ✧ Schimel, Lawrence. *Found Tribe: Jewish Coming Out Stories*. Sante Fe, NM: Sherman Asher Publishing, 2002.

#### Films

- ✧ [Trembling Before G-d](#)
- ✧ [Hineini: Coming Out in a Jewish High School](#) (produced by Keshet)

#### Organizations

- ✧ [Institute for Judaism & Sexual Orientation](#) (HUC-JIR)
- ✧ [Jeff Herman Virtual Resource Center](#) (HUC-JIR)
- ✧ [Keshet](#)
- ✧ [National Union of Jewish LGBTQ Students](#)
- ✧ [Nehirim](#)
- ✧ [Religious Action Center on LGBT Rights](#)
- ✧ [World Congress of GLBT Jews](#)

## Israeli LGBTQ Resources

### Films

- ✧ [After \("Time Off"\)](#), Eytan Fox (1990)
- ✧ [Yossi and Jagger](#), Eytan Fox (2002)
- ✧ [Walk on Water](#), Eytan Fox (2004)
- ✧ [Say Amen](#), David Deri (2005)
- ✧ [The Bubble](#), Eytan Fox (2006)
- ✧ [Good Boys](#), Yair Hochner (2006)
- ✧ [Gender and Peace](#), Yasmine Novak (2007)
- ✧ [Antarctica](#), Yair Hochner (2008)
- ✧ [Halakeh](#), Avigail Sperber (2008)
- ✧ [Fucking Different Tel Aviv](#), Yair Hochner and others (2008)
- ✧ [Jerusalem is Proud to Present](#), Nitzan Giladi (2008)
- ✧ [And Thou Shalt Love](#), Chaim Elbaum (2008)
- ✧ [Deep Red](#), Eddie Taperio (2009)
- ✧ [Eyes Wide Open](#), Haim Tabakman (2009)
- ✧ [Gay Days](#), Yair Qedar (2009)
- ✧ [That's Gila, That's Me](#), Alon Weinstock (2010)
- ✧ [The Queen Has No Crown](#), Tomer Heymann (2011)
- ✧ [Mom and Dad: I Have Something to Tell You](#) (with Assi Azar), Yair Qedar (2011)
- ✧ [Home is You](#), Yaelle Shwed and Aya Shwed (2012)
- ✧ [The Invisible Men](#), Yariv Mozer (2012)
- ✧ [The Man I Am](#), Shiri Shahar (2012)
- ✧ [Melting Away](#), Doron Eran (2012)
- ✧ [Undressing Israel](#), Michael Lucas (2012)
- ✧ [Yossi](#), Eytan Fox (2012)
- ✧ [Out in the Dark](#), Michael Mayer (2013)
- ✧ [Snails in the Rain](#), Yariv Mozer (2013)

### Music

- ✧ [Korin Allal](#)
- ✧ [Dana International](#)
- ✧ [Yael Deckelbaum](#)
- ✧ [Ellyott](#)
- ✧ [Yehonathan Gatro](#)
- ✧ [Amir Fay Guttman](#)
- ✧ [Ohad Hitman](#)
- ✧ [Rona Kenan](#)
- ✧ [Ivri Lider](#)
- ✧ [Offer Nissim](#)
- ✧ [Inbal Perlmutter](#)
- ✧ [Yehuda Poliker](#) (and Ya'akov Gilad)
- ✧ [Yehudit Ravitz](#)

- ✧ [Harel Skaat](#)
- ✧ [Dudu Yzhaki](#)

#### Arts

- ✧ [Assi Azar](#), TV personality
- ✧ [Sichi Gilad](#), photographer
- ✧ [Tomer Heymann](#), filmmaker
- ✧ [Kobi Israel](#), artist
- ✧ [Yariv Mozer](#), filmmaker
- ✧ [Rafi Peretz](#), painter
- ✧ [Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor](#), stage artists
- ✧ [Ido Tadmor](#), choreographer
- ✧ [Adi Nes](#), photographer
- ✧ [Ilana Zeffren](#), comics artist

#### Politics

- ✧ [Yossi Avni-Levy](#), diplomat & author
- ✧ [Yael Dayan](#), pioneer for LGBT causes and member of Knesset from 1992-2003
- ✧ [Uzi Even](#), first openly gay member of Knesset, served 2002-2003
- ✧ [Marcia Freedman](#), gay pioneer for LGBT causes and member of Knesset 1974-1977
- ✧ [Nitzan Horowitz](#), gay member of Knesset and candidate for Tel Aviv mayor
- ✧ Saar-Ran Netanel, gay member of Jerusalem City Council
- ✧ [Etai Pinkas](#), gay member of Tel Aviv City Council and founder of *The Agudah*

#### Popular Culture

- ✧ [LGBT Israel](#) profiled in *Out* magazine
- ✧ "[Gay Rights](#)" section from *Haaretz* newspaper

#### Social Life & Recreation

- ✧ [Mako](#)
- ✧ [Tel Aviv Gay Vibe](#)
- ✧ [Lethal Lesbian Israeli Film Festival](#)
- ✧ [TLV Fest](#)

#### Synagogues & Religious Groups

- ✧ [Kehilat Kol Haneshama](#)
- ✧ [Beit Daniel](#)
- ✧ [Havruta](#)
- ✧ [Women of the Wall](#)
- ✧ [Bat Kol](#)

#### Community & Advocacy Groups

- ✧ [The Adugah](#)
- ✧ [Eden Mikedem](#)

- ☆ [A Wider Bridge](#)
- ☆ [Jerusalem Open House](#)
- ☆ [Israel Gay Youth](#)
- ☆ [Hoshen](#)
- ☆ [Tehila](#)
- ☆ [New Family](#)
- ☆ [Keshet Families](#)
- ☆ [IDAHO](#) (International Day Against Homophobia & Transphobia)
- ☆ [New Israel Fund](#)

## Outcomes

### Mission of the Organization<sup>16</sup>

- ☆ URJ Kesher Taglit-Birthright Israel recognizes that peer Israel experiences are **vital and enriching to Jewish identity-building**, particularly for young adults.
- ☆ URJ Kesher Taglit-Birthright Israel presents a unique **opportunity to form reciprocal, continuous relationships** between the Reform movement and young adults.
- ☆ URJ Kesher Taglit-Birthright Israel **inspires and supports participants in becoming change agents** in the Jewish community.

### Vision of the Organization

URJ Kesher Taglit-Birthright Israel is a ten-day compelling Israel experience where young adults become active members of a Reform Jewish community of peers. **We believe that Birthright is an entry point to continuous engagement in Jewish communal life, personal Jewish exploration, and with Israel.** Through participation, North American and Israeli participants are inspired to find meaning and engage in Jewish living and form relationships that will strengthen their engagement with the Jewish people and Israel.

---

<sup>16</sup> Note that the bold text copied is from the original in both the mission and vision statements found in the staff training binder.

### Select Priority Goals for Learners

- ✧ Participants will continue the process of developing an adult Jewish identity, one that is enhanced by nuance, critical thought, and meaning
- ✧ Participants will be inspired to cultivate honest, substantive, and long-lasting connections between other participants – Israeli and North American – and Israel itself
- ✧ Participants will be motivated to become active members of Jewish and/or LGBTQ communities at home, working to create the most inclusive environment possible

### Enduring Understandings

1. Reform Judaism and the URJ Keshet program provide a platform for a nuanced conversation about the realities of life for minority communities.
2. Analysis of the many and varied successes and challenges of Israeli society can give participants a number of points from which to draw personal connections.
3. A meaningful relationship with Israel is developed only with continued and sincere engagement that takes multiple forms and lasts years.

### Essential Questions

1. How might an understanding of the complexities of life for what might be considered non-traditional communities in Israel enhance your personal relationship with the modern state?
2. What are the connections between the struggles of daily life in Israel and my personal struggles as an LGBTQ Jew?
3. How can I transform a ten-day experience into something that shapes and guides my Jewish life at home?

### Learner Outcomes

*Know* - Learners will identify some of the lived complexities of Israeli life, and then articulate how these compare to what they've encountered or witnessed at home.

*Do* - Learners will engage in a process of an inquiry, investigation, and identity-building as they seek to draw parallels between their lives and the lives of their Israeli counterparts.

*Believe* – Learners will articulate the obstacles or hurdles that have defined their Jewish experiences before the trip, and the ways they can work to overcome these challenges after returning home.

*Belong* – Learners will remain in regular conversation with themselves, other members of the group (participants and staff), and Jewish leaders at home in an effort to gain new insights and define their place in the larger Jewish community.

### Tools & Prompts for Data Collection

Throughout the entire trip process, there are a number of opportunities to collect feedback from participants as a measure of their personal journey. Even before the trip begins, facilitators and *madrichim* should begin to solicit from participants any personal or learning goals during one-to-one introductory phone calls. Additionally, to build excitement and alleviate any anxiety, one or two emails should be sent to participants each week during the month before departure with logistical details. Included in these messages should be details about some of the sites the group will visit, cultural resources, and provocative questions about current issues that Israel is facing. And of course, the group's Facebook page is an excellent resource for reaching out to participants about these issues and concerns.

While immersed in the trip, structured learning activities like the lessons outlined in this supplement will be used to stimulate conversations on any number of topics. But it is important not to over-program participants, as any well-intended activity will prove unsuccessful if people are not invested in it. Therefore, facilitators can use the reflection sessions that occur on most evenings to check-in with participants to debrief the activities that happened during the preceding day or prepare for any activities that will occur in the upcoming days. More informal conversations that take place on the bus, over meals, or in the common areas of hotels in the evening also can be effective settings for assessment of the day's big questions or themes.

Participants should also be encouraged to write down their thoughts, comments, reflections, and/or questions about any or all of the activities and sites on the itinerary. Each day's theme can serve as a prompt, or facilitators can ask a specific, targeted question based on participants' interests as related to that setting. For example, a staff member might wish to ask

the female-identified participants about their experiences at the *kotel*, particularly in comparison to their male-identified counterparts. The responses may be recorded in a personal journal, either written or perhaps virtual, a group journal in which different participants are assigned entries on different days, or on any number of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Foursquare, etc.

Following the trip, formal evaluation forms will serve as the traditional assessment of the entire trip experience. Created by both Birthright and the URJ, these surveys ask participants to reflect on everything from meals and housing to staff and curriculum; they will showcase how effective the trip was in developing each person's connection to both Israel and their own Jewish identity. More informally, continued use of the group's Facebook page is recommended, as participants and staff can continue to share comments and questions. The history of postings will showcase the journey that each respondent has made as well as the quality of questions that have been posed.

### Design Principles for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The contemporary Design Principles for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are visible in much of the learning that will occur on the LGBTQ Birthright trip. As the itinerary attempts to break down the traditional monolithic views of Israel, the nuances of life for traditionally minority communities like women, liberal/secular Jews, Arabs, and LGBTQ Israelis are presented with all the successes and challenges they offer. Participants will address all that Israel has to offer, beautiful and troubling, and in the process draw parallels to their own lives. They will engage in ongoing conversation with themselves, other participants and staff, and the world around

them. The setting of the learning on the trip allows for both formal and informal structures, always giving participants the opportunity to raise their own questions of one another or of Israel itself. Within the respectful and comfortable community of the group, each person will support one another as they follow the path of their Jewish journey.

### Unit Outline: Trip Itinerary & Supplemental Additions

Day	Theme/Core Concept	Sites & Activities	Supplemental Additions
0	Bon Voyage & <i>Nesiyah Tovah</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Departure from USA</li> </ul>	
1	Welcome Home: <i>Lekh Lekha</i> & Personal Call to Journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Tel Gezer</i></li> <li>Opening ceremony</li> <li>Orientation</li> <li>Meeting at Open House</li> <li>Meeting at <i>Kol HaNeshama</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overview of LGBTQ &amp; minority life in Israel: past, present, and future</li> </ul>
2	From Family to Tribes to Nation: A Collective Journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Old City</li> <li>Western Wall (<i>Kotel</i>)</li> <li>Travel to Desert</li> <li>Camel rides &amp; Bedouin hospitality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Religious pluralism in Israel</li> <li>Personal narratives and stories</li> </ul>
3	Sovereignty Lost: Responses to Destruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Masada</li> <li><i>Ein Gedi</i> &amp; Dead Sea</li> <li>Drive north to Galilee</li> </ul>	
4	Trek & Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin <i>mifgash</i> with Israelis</li> <li>Olive oil factory</li> <li>Syrian border</li> <li>Shabbat – services &amp; Dinner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introductions and connections with <i>mifgash</i> participants</li> </ul>
5	Shabbat: Sustenance for the Soul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Morning service/study</li> <li>Learning activities</li> <li>Havdalah</li> <li>Group evening out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Text study***</li> </ul>
6	Spiritual Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tsfat</li> <li>Tzippori</li> <li>Return to Jerusalem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensory experiences</li> <li>Assimilation – successes and challenges***</li> </ul>
7	From Holocaust to Hope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Yad Vashem</i></li> <li>Re-Jew-Veh-Nation (green) project</li> <li>Cultural (music) activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Pink Triangle” tour</li> </ul>
8	Complexities of Statehood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Har Herzl</i> cemetery</li> <li>Old City (Part II)</li> <li>Farewell to Israelis</li> <li>Conversation with IRAC</li> <li>Conversation with <i>Bat Kol</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Military experiences</li> <li>Pluralism (Part II)***</li> </ul>
9	Looking to the Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Gan Meir</i> LGBTQ Center</li> <li>Independence Hall</li> <li>Group evening out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The Bubble” – LGBTQ life in Tel Aviv</li> </ul>
10	<i>L’hitraot</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trip debrief and reflections</li> <li>Return flight to the USA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflection conversation</li> </ul>

### Three Fully-Scripted Lesson Plans

#### Lesson 1: Shabbat Text Study (Day 5)

*Relevant Enduring Understanding for this lesson:*

Analysis of the many and varied successes and challenges of Israeli society can give participants a number of points from which to draw connections.

*Relevant Essential Question for this lesson:*

What are the connections between the struggles of daily life in Israel and my personal struggles as an LGBTQ Jew?

*Relevant KDBB for this lesson:*

Learners will identify some of the lived complexities of Israeli life, and then articulate how these mirror what they've encountered or witnessed at home.

*Core Concept:*

Asserting our voices and standing up for our core values at times when we feel like our opinion is unpopular ultimately leaves us feeling more fulfilled and satisfied.

*Evidence of Understanding:*

Participants will identify a time when they "rose up" for an unpopular cause, and then reflect on how their experience compares with the biblical story and/or modern Israeli society.

*Materials:*

- Copies of text study handout for each participant
- Copies of "Women of the Wall/Questions for Discussion" handout for each participant

*Lesson Outline (90 minutes):*

Set Induction (15 minutes) – Feeling like an Outcast

- Split participants into 8 groups, roughly of even size
  - Use the numbers which participants were given at the start of the trip to create the groups, trying to shuffle any patterns that may have been used in the past.
  - If the Israeli participants are with the group, there should be no more than 1 in each of the groups. (If there are fewer than 8 Israeli participants, adjust the group sizes as necessary.)
  - If at all possible, the four staff members should participate in the activity and be split among the groups as well.
- Have participants sit in a circle, facing one another
- Ask them to respond to the following prompts, sharing their answers with one another:
  - Think about a time when you felt like an outcast amongst your peers
  - Describe the situation for your peers.
  - Why did you pick this incident? Why does it stand out for you?

- What did you learn from the experience?
- Were you able to find success? Why or why not?

#### Text Study (45 minutes)

- Frame the text study and its place on Shabbat in a broader Jewish context.
  - The Torah is divided into weekly portions, called *parshiyot*, which are read over the course of the year.
  - Since Torah is traditionally read and studied on Shabbat, our community reads it today
  - First we look at, analyze, and unpack the focal text.
    - We are in the book of Numbers. All of the action in this book takes place after the Exodus from Egypt as the Israelites are wandering through the desert before they get to the Promised Land.
    - In this text, Moses sends out twelve scouts (one from each tribe) to survey the Land and return with a report about what lies in store when the Israelites finally enter.
    - 10 of 12 come back saying the land is lush with abundant produce but also with powerful giants that make the scouts appear like “grasshoppers in their eyes.” They urge Israelites to not even try entering the land.
    - The Israelites respond in frustration, dreaming that they could return to Egypt; Moses and Aaron are overcome with anger.
    - Only two scouts, Joshua (who will later succeed Moses) and Caleb come forward with a favorable report that changes the tone of the conversation for the entire community.
    - God rewards the two for stepping up by not sickening them with a lethal plague.
  - Now that we’ve figured out what is going on, we can look more deeply at the focal text.
- Pass out copies of the text study handout and ask participants to discuss the text.
  - Remind participants that the listed questions are intended to get the conversation started. They are free to disagree or pose additional thoughts or questions that come to mind.
- After 20 minutes, pass out copies of the “Women of the Wall” handout and encourage participants to read the organizational biography first, then move on to the quotes and discussion questions.
- Conclude the conversation after 20 minutes.
- Take a final 5 minutes for comments and highlights from each group

#### Applying to Israel and Home (25 minutes)

- Ask each participant to refer back to the opening incident about feeling like an outcast.
- Participants should try to identify what social category their incident falls into, and the entire group should reorganize into similar groups: race, money, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- In these new groups, participants share a quick summary of their stories with one another. While doing so, ask participants to find the similarities between each one.

- Participants should speak to the parallels in the text by commenting on the ways in which they were or were not able to be like Caleb or Joshua in overcoming the challenges to success.
- Then ask participants to think about any parallel experiences they have seen in Israel.
  - By this point, participants have been in Israel for 4-5 days and should have (at the very least) a sense of the challenges of modern life in Jerusalem (where they spent the first ½ to 1 ½ days) and the basics of LGBTQ and Arab life.
  - In addition, this is an opportunity to highlight the personal experiences of the Israeli participants, particularly around gender issues or LGBTQ inclusion.
- As a group, discuss how the players involved in the Israeli parallel examples are like Joshua and Caleb.
  - If group members feel like they represent the 10 majority scouts, discuss why? What limits their success?
- Have the Israeli participant conclude the activity by talking about the challenges they've experienced in their country and illustrating some of the strategies or techniques taken to overcome them.

#### Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to share their reflections
  - How did this activity reframe your thinking about the idea of an "outcast?"
  - In what ways are you now inspired to be more like Caleb and Joshua?
  - What lessons or take-aways did you glean from the Torah text, the quotes, or the people in your group?

Text Study Handout  
(Page 1 of 2)

June 13-14, 2014  
16 Sivan 5774

*Parashat Shlach* (Numbers 13:1-15:41)  
Focal Text: Numbers 13:25-14:8

**25** At the end of forty days they returned from scouting the land. **26** They went straight to Moses and Aaron and whole Israelites community at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran, and they made their report to them and to the whole community, as they showed them the fruit of the land. **27** This what they told them: "We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is the fruit. **28** However, the people who inhabit the country are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we saw Anakites there. **29** Amalekites dwell in the Negeb region; Hittittes, Jebusites, and Amorites dwell by sea and along the Jordan." **30** Caleb hushed the people before Moses and said, "Let us by all means go up, and well shall gain possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it." **31** But the emissaries who had gone up with him said, "We cannot attack that people for it is stronger than we." **32** Thus they spread calumnies among the Israelites about the land they had scouted, saying, "The country that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its settlers. All the people that we saw in it are of great size; **33** we saw the Nephilim there – the Anakites are part of the Nephilim – and we looked like grasshopper to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them. **1** The whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night. **2** All the Israelites railed against Moses and Aaron: "If only we had died in the land of Egypt," the whole community shouted at them, "or if only we might die in this wilderness!" **3** "Why is Adonai taking us to that land to fall by the sword?" "Our wives and our children will be a carried off! It would be better for us to go back Egypt?" **4** And they said to one another, "Let us head back for Egypt." **5** Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembled congregation of Israelites. **6** And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who scouted the land, rent their clothes, **7** and exhorted the whole Israelite community: "The land that we traversed and scouted is an exceeding good land. **8** If pleased with us, Adonai will bring us into that land, and land that flows with milk and honey, and give it to us..."

- What is the basic narrative of the text? What is going on?
- How did the majority of the scouts see themselves, especially in comparison to the inhabitants of Canaan (the land they were scouting)?
- Why did the scouts presume that the other nations would see them as the grasshoppers that they saw themselves as?
- Why were the Israelites so angry with Moses and Aaron? Is their motivation justified?
- What, if anything, is surprising about the Israelites to mention of Egypt – first their comment about dying there, and then their request to return?
- Put yourself in the mindset of Joshua and Caleb. How were they able to rise to the occasion and refocus the entire situation?

Text Study Handout  
(Page 2 of 2)

**כה** וישבו מתור הארץ מקץ ארבעים יום. **כו** וילכו ויבאו אל-משה ואל-אהרן  
ואל-כל-עדת בני-ישראל אל-מדבר פארו קדשה וישבו אתם דבר ואת-כל-העדה,  
ויראום את-פרי הארץ. **כז** ויספרו-לו ויאמרו באנו אל-הארץ אשר שלחתנו וגם  
זבת חלב ודבש הוא וזה-פריה. **כח** אפס כי-עז העם הישב בארץ והערים בצרות  
גדלות מאד וגם-ילדי הענק ראינו שם. **כט** עמלק יושב בארץ הנגב והחתי והיבوسی  
והאמרי יושב בהר והכנעני יושב על-הים, ועל יד הירדן. **ל** ויהס כלב את-העם  
אל-משה ויאמר עלה נעלה וירשנו אתה כי-יכול נוכל לה. **לא** והאנשים אשר-עלו  
עמו אמרו לא נוכל לעלות אל-העם כי-חזק הוא ממנו. **לב** ויצאו דבת הארץ אשר  
תרו אתה אל-בני ישראל לאמר הארץ אשר עברנו בה לתור אתה ארץ אכלת  
יושביה הוא וכל-העם אשר-ראינו בתוכה אנשי מדות. **לג** ושם ראינו את-הנפילים  
בני ענק מן-הנפילים ונהי בעינינו כחגבים וכן היינו בעיניהם. **לד** ותשא כל-העדה  
ויתנו את-קולם ויבכו העם בלילה ההוא. **לה** וילנו על-משה ועל-אהרן כל בני  
ישראל ויאמרו אליהם כל-העדה לו-מתנו בארץ מצרים או במדבר הזה לו-מתנו.  
**לו** ולמה יהיה מביא אתנו אל-הארץ הזאת לנפל בחרב נשינו וטפנו יהיו לבז הלוא  
טוב לנו שוב מצרימה. **לז** ויאמרו איש אל-אחיו נתנה ראש ונשובה מצרימה. **לח**  
ויפל משה ואהרן על-פניהם לפני כל-קהל עדת בני ישראל. **לט** ויהושע בן-נון וכלב  
בן-יפנה מן-התרים את-הארץ קרעו בגדיהם. **מ** ויאמרו אל-כל-עדת בני-ישראל  
לאמר הארץ אשר עברנו בה לתור אתה טובה הארץ מאד מאד. **מא** אם-חפץ בנו  
יהיה והביא אתנו אל-הארץ הזאת ונתנה לנו ארץ אשר-הוא זבת חלב ודבש.

Understanding the “Women of the Wall” (*Nashot HaKotel*) Handout  
(Page 1 of 2)

### Mission

As Women of the Wall, our central mission to achieve the social and legal recognition of our right, as women, to wear prayer shawls, pray, and read from the Torah collectively and out loud at the Western Wall... We work to further our mission through social advocacy, education, and empowerment.

### Vision

...our vision is to strengthen and expand our organization, to reach out and influence policy makers and leaders, to demand full access to prayer at the Western Wall for women. In addition, Women of the Wall works to expand our network of allies and partners around the world who will advocate and take action with us.<sup>17</sup>

### Historical Highlights

- 1988 – First International Jewish Feminist Conference held in Jerusalem. One hundred Jewish women gather for a prayer service and Torah reading at the *Kotel*. Service is disrupted by verbal and physical assaults from some ultra-Orthodox men and women.
- 1989 - A new regulation is issued by the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Justice to “prohibit any religious ceremony at a holy place that is not in accordance with the custom of the holy site and which offends the sensitivities of the worshipers at the place.” The penalty for violating this regulation is 6 months in jail and/or a fine. This regulation is still in effect today.
- 1990s – A series of back-and-forth legal arguments take place before the *Knesset* (Israeli parliament) and Supreme Court. The now-named Women of the Wall (WOW) argue for basic and “Jewishly legal” rights to prayer while the ultra-Orthodox argue that such requests are against Jewish law.
- 1999 - The State submits an affidavit by Jerusalem Chief of Police Yair Yitzhaki arguing that it is WOW who provokes violence. The Supreme Court quickly holds a two-hour hearing on the petition of WOW to pray as a group at the Western Wall, with Torah and *tallit*.
- 2003 - The Court issued a ruling saying that, despite the state’s claims to the contrary, WOW maintained a legal right to pray at the Western Wall. Nevertheless, such right was not without boundaries, and the Court ruled that the Robinson’s Arch area “next to the Western Wall” would allow WOW to pray according to their practice.
- 2010 - WOW Chairperson, Anat Hoffman, was arrested in July for carrying a *sefer* Torah at the *Kotel*. Hoffman was detained under the pretext that she was not praying according to the traditional customs of the site. She was taken into police custody, interrogated for five hours and then released. She was banned from the *Kotel* for 30 days.
- May 2013 - Hundreds of women prayed at the *Kotel* freely, many with *tallitot* and *tefillin*, with the protection of police, despite protests from the ultra-Orthodox community.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Source: <http://womenofthewall.org.il/about/mission-statement>

<sup>18</sup> Source: <http://womenofthewall.org.il/about/history>

Quotes & Discussion Prompts Handout  
(Page 2 of 2)

We have been a target of Israeli Police, who are ordered by the rabbi in charge of the wall to enforce his opinion that our voices, our pray shawls and attempts to read Torah are an unacceptable injury to the holiness of the wall and that we must be silenced and stopped. However in 23 years of praying this way every month, not one ultra-Orthodox attacker has been charged for spitting, cursing or assaulting the Women of the Wall. (Anat Hoffman, Women of the Wall, October 2012)<sup>19</sup>

- How is Hoffman's experience symbolic of the larger narrative of women in Israeli religious matters? What is its connection to the Numbers text?
- Women of the Wall is working to achieve religious equity at the *Kotel*, a site which (as you saw a few days ago) is subject to the most stringent religious laws. What are some of the challenges Hoffman's group faces? How are they able to work towards overcoming them?
- How do you think has Hoffman perceived herself over the years? How might others have perceived her? How has this perception affected the work of Women of the Wall?

As Chair of Women of the Wall, my prayers are being answered. For the last 24 years we have been going to the Western Wall with only one goal in mind: to pray as a community of women with Torah and *tallit*, in full voice. This struggle for our rights as Jewish women has put me in newspapers as well as in prison; however, my intention from the beginning was neither of these things. I simply wanted to pray at Judaism's holiest site. That is still my desire. Last week Judge Moshe Sobel of the Jerusalem District Court issued a groundbreaking ruling, stating that our group's prayer is not "contrary to local custom." The implication of this ruling is that we will be allowed to pray at the Wall without fear of further arrests [But our battle is not over.] The District Court decision is a stopgap measure that ends the current wave of harassment and intimidation that we have been experiencing for so many months, but this does not make the Wall an inclusive site for all Jews. This latest decision safeguards women's rights to religious expression at the Wall and that is a revolutionary victory. Both Women of the Wall, as an organization, and I personally and as chair, feel a collective sense of relief that our harassment is over, but we are only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to making the Western Wall a home for all Jews. (Anat Hoffman, Women of the Wall, May 2013)<sup>20</sup>

- What are some of the successes that Hoffman and her group have achieved since they first began? What work do they still have left to do?
- How are Hoffman and the members of her group like Joshua and Caleb?
- Why is Women of the Wall important when it comes to LGBTQ advocacy?

Final Rhetorical Question *[This will appear at the bottom of the text handout sheet, in keeping with the style of text studies for other groups, but will not be directly addressed in the program. It is instead only a thinking, take-away question for participants to ponder as they wish.]*

- What is our role in being a Caleb or Joshua when we see inequalities in the world?

<sup>19</sup> Source: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anat-hoffman/arrested-for-praying-at-western-wall\\_b\\_1987099.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anat-hoffman/arrested-for-praying-at-western-wall_b_1987099.html)

<sup>20</sup> Source: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anat-hoffman/answered-prayers\\_b\\_3208221.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anat-hoffman/answered-prayers_b_3208221.html)

## Lesson 2: Assimilation – Success & Challenges (Day 6)

### *Relevant Enduring Understanding for this lesson:*

Reform Judaism and the URJ Keshet program provide a platform for a nuanced conversation about the realities of life for minority communities.

### *Relevant Essential Question for this lesson:*

How can I transform a ten-day experience into something that shapes and guides my Jewish life at home?

### *Relevant KDBB for this lesson:*

Learners will articulate the obstacles or hurdles that have defined their Jewish experiences before the trip, and the ways they can work to overcome these challenges after returning home.

### *Core Concept:*

Comparing my social justice (*tikkun olam*) work to the challenges that others have faced adds depth and meaning to my Jewish identity.

### *Evidence of Understanding:*

- Participants will identify one or two reasons why participate in advocacy efforts.
- Participants will record one or two challenges they face in trying to practice that work and then come up with a strategy for overcoming those difficulties.

### *Materials:*

- Writing surface for each participant
  - Journal or paper and pen
  - Tablet or iPad
- Large “Post-It” paper for each group
- Newspaper articles for each participant
  - [The Saga of Ethiopian Jewish Integration](#) (Jerusalem Post, 30-Aug-2010)
  - [Russian Immigration is a Success](#) (*Ha'aretz*, 1-Jan-2014)
- Technology
  - Computer with [Sigd celebration](#) & [Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade 2010](#) video clips
  - Projector and screen with connector cables
  - Speakers or audio equipment

### *Lesson Outline (60 minutes):*

#### Set Induction (10 minutes)

- Split participants into two or three groups to make things a bit smaller
- Pass out paper and pens (or ask participants to take out their tablets) and ask participants to write down a time when they participated in a social change advocacy on behalf of a marginalized group or community
- They should note why they participated in the effort.
- Provide a few examples (personal is preferred) if participants seem confused or unsure:
  - Advocating for a gay-straight alliance on campus
  - Participation in a march or rally for hate crime victims
  - Volunteering at a soup kitchen
  - Working for inclusion of people with special needs
  - Lobbying Congress or state legislature on a particular cause
    - Particularly immigration advocacy and/or reform
- Remind participants to think creatively about advocacy work; it can be something that is not necessarily interactive or physical (i.e., writing letters). If they haven't advocated on behalf of a group, ask them to think about what has stopped them. Are their concerns logistical or emotional?
- Ask participants to share their responses and have one person record them all on the large "Post-It" paper.
- Facilitator should be sure to connect all of these responses in the Jewish lens of *tikkun olam* – social justice or repairing the world.

#### Assimilation in the land of Israel (10 minutes)

- Open the conversation by connecting back to the site visit at Tzipori, and ask a few participants to share their summary and reflections of the visit.
- Transition by asking a few participants the following questions and take a few responses.
- Record the responses on another section of the large sheet at the front of the room.
  - How was the community at Tzipori successful in practicing their Jewish traditions and customs amidst the broader non-Jewish Roman society around them?
  - What lessons can you take from their experience in thinking about your advocacy work at home? What were the similarities and/or differences?
  - What challenges have you previously faced from the broader, mainstream society in your advocacy work?
- Introduce the concept of modern assimilation in Israel by framing the waves of Soviet and Ethiopian immigration
  - Throughout the 1970s and '80s, international pressure was placed on the USSR to allow Jews to immigrate to Israel.
  - Gradually, limited numbers of visas were issued.

- Following the break-up of the USSR in the late '80s, a massive wave of Soviets began to descend on Israel as all restrictions were lifted. Ultimately, almost 1.5 million people immigrated to Israel; the vast majority of them have remained.
- Meanwhile, the Israeli government found that the “Beta Israel” community in Ethiopia were descendants of the ancient Israelites and permitted to hold citizenship by the “Law of Return.”
- Three times – 1981, 1985, and 1991 – Israeli military forces airlifted thousands of Ethiopians from life-threatening conditions in Africa to safety in Israel. Today, there are over 100,000 Jews of Ethiopian descent in Israel
- Together, these waves of immigration resulted in many changes to the demographics of Israeli society.
- Almost twenty-five years later, conversations about the positive and negative effects of both migrations are very much alive.

#### Comparing Narratives (25 minutes)

- Pass out copies of the two long articles and ask participants to break into small groups.
  - [The Saga of Ethiopian Jewish Integration](#) (Jerusalem Post, 30-Aug-2010)
  - [Russian Immigration is a Success](#) (*Ha'aretz*, 1-Jan-2014)
- Participants that are welcome to skim the articles if necessary, focusing their attention on comparing and contrasting the two collective stories.
- After about 20 minutes, bring the group back together and take some reflections. Try to identify why Ethiopian integration has been so much harder.
- Share some statistics with participants, noting the source date of 26-Dec-2011:<sup>21</sup>
  - Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute conducted the study
  - 2,000 teens ages 12-17 – children of Soviets, Ethiopians, and Israeli veterans
  - Percentage who passed all classes – 60% Russian, 58% veterans, 28% Ethiopian
  - Failed three classes or more – 8% veterans, 10% Russian, 31% Ethiopian
  - Use public school assistance – 15% veterans and Russian, 55% Ethiopian
  - Identify as “solely Israeli” – 68% Russian, 13% Ethiopian
- Close by sharing the that the future is somewhat optimistic for the Ethiopian community
  - Show the video of [Sigd celebration](#) in Jerusalem, noting that the holiday did not become an official state holiday until 2008 (though it is not an official “day off” from work, school, etc.).

#### LGBTQ Assimilation (5 minutes)

- Remind participants that the LGBTQ community, particularly in Jerusalem, struggles with its own challenges of complete assimilation into the larger Israeli society
- Show the clip of the [Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade 2010](#).

---

<sup>21</sup> Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/study-children-of-soviet-immigrants-fully-assimilated-into-israeli-society-1.403749>

### Closing Journal Reflection (10 minutes)

- Ask participants to think about the experience of both the Soviet and Ethiopian immigrants, as well the LGBTQ community, for a moment. In particular, think about they would respond to the challenges of integration into Israeli society if they were in each group. Race is certainly one factor, but try to go beyond that in reflecting on the differences
- Ask participants to return to their initial advocacy example(s).
  - Think again about the initial responses they wrote. Revisit their journal entry and compose a second entry thinking about the challenges the outlined earlier in the activity.
  - How do their personal challenges compare with the Ethiopian and Soviet (or LGBTQ) experiences?
  - What lessons can they take from the assimilation challenges in Israeli society?
  - How can they work to overcome the challenges they encounter?

## Two decades on, wave of Russian immigration to Israel is an outstanding success



**Russian immigrant success stands in marked contrast to the ongoing challenges faced by Ethiopian immigrants, who arrived in Israel in large numbers at around the same time.**

Ariel deputy mayor Pavel Polev. Photo by JTA

By [JTA](#)

1 Jan 2014

<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-features/.premium-1.566484>

Growing up in the Urals, Pavel Polev was a precocious ice skater and a member of the Soviet Union's national youth figure-skating team.

But in 1992, at age 15, Polev's life was upended when he joined the massive wave of Jews immigrating to Israel from the crumbling Soviet Union. After serving a mandatory three years in the Israel Defense Forces following high school, Polev took a job as a custodian.

Two decades later, Polev is a successful small-business owner and rising politician. He runs an air-conditioning store and serves as deputy mayor of Ariel, the Israeli West Bank settlement city that is home to a large Russian-speaking population.

"It's impossible to compare now with the situation 22 years ago," said Polev, a member of the Russian immigrant-founded Yisrael Beiteinu party.

Polev's immigrant success story resembles those of many of the million-strong Russian-speaking immigrants who arrived in Israel in the 1990s. Along with their descendants, Russian speakers now comprise nearly one-fifth of all Israelis.

Unlike other immigrant groups that moved en masse to Israel only to find themselves poor and socially marginalized, the Russian aliyah has been, by many metrics, a story of resounding success. They have had a palpable impact on Israeli society, from the countless storefronts with signs in Cyrillic characters to the many Russian-speaking immigrants who have assumed critical roles in the highest echelons of Israeli politics.

Though many Soviet immigrants, especially the older ones, still face poverty and significant cultural barriers, overall statistics show a community on the rise. According to a 2013 report by

the Adva Center, an Israeli social policy think tank, 56 percent of Russian immigrants in 1992 were in the poorest third of Israeli society — below the poverty line or at risk of poverty. By 2010, the figure had dropped to 38 percent. Over the same period, the percentage of Russians in the upper third of Israeli earners grew from 10 to 27 percent.

“You won’t find such huge success with any other group of new immigrants in any country,” Natan Sharansky, the famous Soviet refusenik who now serves as chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, told JTA. “If you look at service in the army, medicine and science, you can see how deeply it’s entering Israeli society.”

Russian immigrant success stands in marked contrast to the ongoing challenges faced by Ethiopian immigrants, who arrived in Israel in large numbers at around the same time. More than half of Ethiopian Israelis live below the poverty line, according to the Adva report. Ethiopians also lag the broader Israeli public in education and have salaries about one-third lower than the average Israeli.

At least part of the Russian success is due to the education and skills that enabled them to succeed in a modern economy. Ethiopians emigrated from an agrarian subsistence economy and have struggled to adjust their traditional lifestyles to a Western society.

“The education there was at a high level,” said Chen Bram, an expert on Russian Jewry at Hebrew University’s Truman Institute. “So their ability to direct themselves was very high.”

Russian success is all the more startling considering how ill-prepared Israel was to absorb them when they first arrived. At the time, stories abounded of highly trained Russian scientists forced to take jobs cleaning streets.

“They got here and they felt that there was no one who was caring for them,” said Betzael Shif, a law professor who immigrated from Tashkent, a Soviet city in Uzbekistan, in 1971. “Thank God they understood how to survive in Russia and survive here.”

Shif was a founding member of the Zionists Forum, a Russian immigrant advocacy group that was the precursor organization to Israel B’Aliyah, a Russian immigrant party founded by Sharansky that won seven seats in its first Knesset election in 1996.

The party merged with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party in 2003, helping to cement the mounting political influence that has been a hallmark of Russian success and another distinguishing feature of Russian integration.

Moldovan-born Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman’s Yisrael Beiteinu party, a faction that also counts Russian immigrants as its primary constituency, won 15 seats in the 2009 elections before joining lists with Likud last year. Lieberman is one of two Russian-speaking ministers and one deputy minister in the governing coalition, compared to just two Ethiopians in the entire Knesset.

Polev said Yisrael Beiteinu has passed the stage of appealing only to narrow Russian interests and is now aiming to present itself as a mainstream party — a shift that also speaks to the success of Russian integration. In their first years in Israel, Russian politics focused largely on securing government support for communal priorities. Now, Russians are beginning to deal with the consequences of their successful integration.

“There are some kids who grow up here and feel bad about their Russianness, they want to forget their language,” said Alexey Tashaev, an organizer of the Russian Israeli youth organization Fishka. “That’s a problem. On the other hand, some don’t identify with Israel.”

Even as the community grows more successful, challenges remain for elderly Russians and those living in Israel’s economically disadvantaged periphery. Nadejda Tatarenko, 70, who moved from the Ukraine at 47, said that older immigrants often do not receive all of their government benefits and encounter disrespectful conduct at government offices. But as the Russian community continues to integrate, she added, such challenges likely will become a thing of the past.

“The difference between people without roots here and people who do have them and who know their rights will last for a long time,” said Tatarenko, the founder of the nonprofit Immigrants for a Successful Absorption. “Now we have the third generation, and they’re Israeli. I don’t see many differences between them and sabras.”



## **The saga of Ethiopian Jewish integration** **Leaders of Beta Israel tell of the joy, pain and prospects of their journey home.**

By Shalle McDonald  
 Aug 30, 2010

Photo by: Courtesy Ruppin Academic Center

<http://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Features/The-saga-of-Ethiopian-Jewish-integration>

Recently, the State of Israel paid tribute to some 4,000 Ethiopian Jews who perished on their way to Israel in the first large wave of Ethiopian immigration to Israel in 1983-84. Approximately 12,000 Jews from the Beta Israel community had set off by foot from the remote Gondar region, where they had lived as a distinct Jewish community for more than 2,000 years. The perils they faced on the exhausting threemonth walk to Israel were too numerous and horrific to recall. This included hunger, thirst, attacks by bandits and wild animals, and living in refugee camps with rampant disease and malnutrition. One-third of their number died along the way.

For the survivors, painful memories of those arduous times were quickly buried and never really dealt with, producing an endless stream of new problems when these newcomers began the process of integrating into a society that did not understand the grueling trials they had just experienced.

As these new Ethiopian immigrants began settling in Israel, local aid agencies focused on providing them with food, shelter and clothing – the basics of life. Yet the trauma of their long and arduous journey remained hidden inside – an unseen root that hindered their ability to adjust to their new, modern surroundings.

Such were the traumatic beginnings of the Ethiopian Jewish community's return to *Eretz Israel* – a dream they had carried for centuries, which met with a harsh reality along the way.

The Israeli government had officially accepted the Beta Israel as Jews in 1975 for the purpose of the Law of Return but required that they undergo a pro forma Jewish conversion process. Their return seemed inevitable, but it soon became an urgent matter as civil war and famine engulfed Ethiopia.

When that first mass wave of returnees exacted a heavy toll, Israel launched rescue efforts dubbed "Operation Moses" in 1984 and then the larger 1991 emergency airlift known as "Operation Solomon," which brought nearly 15,000 Ethiopians Jews to Israel in just one

weekend. The latter involved an unprecedented and secret 36-hour flight plan carried out by 34 El Al planes whose seats had been removed to accommodate more passengers. Several children were born on the way. Some of the passengers were so unused to the modern surroundings, they even lit cooking fires aboard the planes.

As the final line of planes tipped their wings over Jerusalem and landed at Ben-Gurion Airport on a quiet Shabbat afternoon 19 years ago, word began to spread of the new arrivals, and Israelis rejoiced at their coming.

However, their assimilation into Israeli society has proven more difficult than imagined. Most members of the ancient Ethiopian Jewish community of more than 120,000 people now reside in Israel. Their absorption into Israel has presented many unique challenges. From the outset, workers from the absorptions centers did not understand that they should have been helping the Ethiopians adjust to more than just a modern world of sinks, toilets, elevators and paying bills on time. Many Ethiopian Jews faced the shock of trying to transition from living in a close-knit rural community that shared everything to an increasingly urbanized setting where family life often becomes fractured.

Today, some 70 percent of Ethiopian Jews in Israel live below the poverty line. The rate of suicide attempts is significantly higher within the Ethiopian community than in Israeli society overall. Many youngsters end up dropping out of school and are eventually placed in detention centers. Most Ethiopian Jews still struggle to adjust to Israel and feel greatly discriminated against by fellow Israelis.

The Israeli media has contributed to the negative portrayals of Ethiopian immigrants, according to a study by the University of Haifa conducted by Germaw Mengistu. The study, based on newspapers surveyed between 1970 and 2004, showed that media reports on cultural aspects of the Ethiopian community have been mostly negative, for the most part focusing on immigrants' ignorance of basic technological skills compared to immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who were presented as "belonging."

"When the media continuously portrays immigrants in a negative light and attaches stereotypes to them, the public, whose main source of information is the media, begins to internalize these stereotypes," Mengistu explained to *The Christian Edition*.

The results of another poll released in January revealed that a majority (52%) of Israelis blame immigrants from former the Soviet Union and Ethiopia for the rise in crime.

The Israeli Ministry of Immigration and Absorption's chief researcher, Ze'ev Khanin, believes the results indicate that Israelis are not necessarily xenophobic but are prejudiced.

Still, some great strides have been made, and more and more Ethiopian Jews are rising above the obstacles and rejection to become successful and respected members of Israeli society.

Recently, *The Christian Edition* surveyed a number of community leaders to learn of their accomplishments and how they are now helping others to succeed as well. They are overcoming racism and becoming leaders who break through the walls of misconceptions and ignorance that had held others back. They are not forcing acceptance but are reshaping attitudes and beliefs about the Ethiopian people so that the walls come down naturally. Together, they are rewriting the story of Ethiopian Jewry's difficult return home to Israel.

DAVID YASO was 14 when he left Ethiopia via Sudan to reach Israel. He remembers the harsh conditions that Ethiopians had to face for endless days in refugee camps before the Operation Moses rescue operation airlifted them into Israel. But dire circumstances did not hold him back. Yaso has been working as the director of the Ethiopian Department at the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption since 2002.

"This office is special because it is the only government office geared toward Ethiopians," he told *The Christian Edition*.

Since 1992, his department has been dealing with all areas of immigration, education, employment and housing — essentially trying to provide everything necessary to help Ethiopian Jews fit into society from the moment they arrive.

"New Ethiopian immigrants come from primitive villages and must learn how to do everything we consider simple. The process is hard but is successful," Yaso explained.

"The biggest challenge we face is that we have been given a budget to integrate, but Israeli society still does not accept them even after a new immigrant has received some education," Yaso added. "Besides that, for the individual the biggest challenge is getting a job. But once they get their foot in the door, they prove to be efficient workers."

Yaso notes three main positives in his dealings with new immigrants from Ethiopia: 1) the sheer success of physically journeying and arriving in Israel; 2) the funds for living expenses provided by the government for these immigrants who came with nothing; 3) the ability to receive higher education for free.

ASHER RAHAMIM had an easy absorption process when he arrived in Israel as a teen, but he has dedicated his life to helping other Ethiopians work through the hardships most face upon coming here. Today, he is the coordinator of services for the Ethiopian community at the Center for Psychotrauma at Herzog Hospital.

"In the process of integration, new immigrants don't always get what they need in terms of psychological healing and help. The basic missing piece is that they need to know and recognize the trauma they've been through," Rahamim explained.

With so many Ethiopians living below the poverty line, psychological healing "usually gets forgotten, as daily needs are continually pressing. The first thing a person needs is to eat and

drink, so that is obviously the focus, and inner healing is secondary,” he added.

However, after 26 years in Israel, Rahamim acknowledged that the proper authorities are now more aware of the unique problems and the best solutions for Ethiopian olim. Much of this is thanks to Dr. Daniel Brom, head of the psychotherapy unit at Herzog, who helped found a trauma unit especially for the Ethiopian newcomers. His workshops showed that their higher suicide rate was a result of not dealing with trauma, stress, cultural conflict, socioeconomic differences and not feeling accepted in Israeli society.

Rahamim said, “For example, just the perilous journey to Israel through Sudan alone brought many unspoken traumatic issues to the new immigrant. It is believed that 4,000 died in Sudan, and many living in the refugee camps there witnessed countless burials, [and] experienced starvation and disease.”

Rahamim uses his education, training and own cultural knowledge to create a safe place for Ethiopian patients to deal with private emotions. The trauma center team documents their experience(s) via video because they believe that therapeutic video documentation can help the patient heal.

“When they tell the journey, the whole atmosphere changes,” he said. “Documentary [video] enables them to see the process they’ve been through and essentially closes the circle.”

EDDIE SAHALO is an Ethiopian Jewish student who immigrated with his family in 1990 at age 10. He was an excellent athlete, ranked as the seventh-best runner in the world for 400 and 800 meters. However, he couldn’t finish sports training professionally because of health issues, so he finished regular high school and then joined the army.

Today, he is a promising student at the Ruppin Academic Center, a prominent college in Israel that has an innovative program for Ethiopians. Within the Institute for Immigration and Social Integration, Ethiopian students can participate in a leadership program that offers a full scholarship and an extensive support network to earn a BA in business administration and professional training in community volunteering.

“Though I cannot say I personally have the same problems because I have a very supportive and warm family that loves me, still I am aware of what the community is going through,” Eddie said.

He started his academic studies at the Wingate Institute, a prestigious national sports school near Netanya, but he had a dream to study business administration. But a barrier was in the way – the psychometric exam. Many Ethiopian students find it difficult to pass this entrance exam for university studies because the test is based on Israeli cultural standards, putting them at a disadvantage.

Eddie has one more year in the program, but he has already opened his own business with his

brother. And twice he has received the President's Award for volunteering and starting new volunteer initiatives.

PNINA FALEGO-GADAI journeyed from Ethiopia to Israel with her mother and sister as a very young girl, so she cannot recall the difficulties of that long trek in 1984. But she does remember the challenges she faced growing up in Israel, such as being the only Ethiopian student in her school.

Falego-Gadai is now the director of the Hillel chapter at Tel Aviv University, making her the first Ethiopian Jew to head one of the 500 centers of the largest Jewish campus organization in the world. Her job is to direct and supervise Jewish cultural and educational activities at the university.

Falego-Gadai sees three main challenges to fighting ignorance. First, "Ignorance starts in education," she insists. "If Ethiopians don't see their own face everywhere, how will they know which sector of work is possible to pursue?" For example, she notes that there are only 90 Ethiopian teachers in all of Israel.

"The sense is that we don't exist, except in the news and then it's negative. And it's sensational," she adds. "We're not good with sharing and don't talk about [the positive things that] happen in the community – we're very quiet. We need to give more respect to ourselves first, by sharing our real stories."

The second challenge she sees is a lack of motivation and self-respect. "The gap between parents and the next generation is huge. Kids from three to 12 can be integrated very well, but with parents who are above age 40, it's too late because learning a new language is difficult and they tend to only know agricultural or cleaning skills."

Finally, she says there is a disconnect between mainstream Jewish community life today that follows evolving rabbinical rulings and the Beta Israel from Ethiopia who adhere to a strict observance of biblical laws from several millennia ago.

"Are we Jewish?" she asks rhetorically. "According to Israeli standards, the question is not resolved."

DANNY ADMASU was 10 when he immigrated to Israel in 1984 through Sudan. Today he is the executive director of the International Association of Ethiopian Jews. Admasu chose not to focus on his absorption process because he sees it as the smallest of challenges when compared to others. But his integration experience became a catalyst to helping others integrate successfully.

He believes the IAEJ is in a good position to help Ethiopian Jews because it is not government funded, "so we can really focus on the problems. We are trying to give tools to the community so they handle as a group what their rights are as citizens."

IAEJ successfully campaigned for the annual Sigd festival to become an official national holiday in Israel in 2008. Sigd, which refers to prostrating oneself, is the day on the Ethiopian Jewish religious calendar when the community fasts to commemorate the nation's acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai. But it also marks a return of the community to the homeland with hopes of rebuilding the Temple.

The greatest disappointment Admasu sees is Israel's "recognizing the Ethiopian community as part of society but, at the same time, seeing that there are special needs for someone integrating from that place to here. For the bureaucrats, it's very difficult for them to understand because on one hand we are asking for equal opportunity, and on the other hand we are asking for help."

He then lists his greatest joys. "When you see Ethiopian Knesset members on Channel One TV; that you can change the law for the Sigd holiday; to see the institute for Ethiopians who died in Sudan set up on Mount Herzl; when you see more Ethiopian organizations trying to effect change; when I see the Ethiopian community represented in the Prime Minister's Office."

He says that "As human beings, we always want more and more, but in 30 years from the place we come from, to learn another language, in short, to overcome – the most important things haven't been done, but there is a hope that if you work hard, you can do it."

In terms of the future, Admasu hopes for "more legal action against racism and discrimination" so that people do not get refused a job because of color. He also wants his people "to be a part of society and be able to say what they really feel – not what sounds good, not what is expected."

"I am first a human being, then a Jew, then a Jew who came from Ethiopia, and then Israeli. Israel cannot be my first identity because of my history experience," Admasu said. "Don't put me where you want me to be; I choose my identity."

### Lesson 3: Pluralism – Part II (Day 8)

#### *Relevant Enduring Understanding for this lesson:*

Reform Judaism and the URJ Keshet program provide a platform for a nuanced conversation about the realities of life for minority communities.

#### *Relevant Essential Question for this lesson:*

How might an understanding of the complexities of life for non-traditional communities in Israel enhance your personal relationship with the modern state?

#### *Relevant KDBB for this lesson:*

Learners will engage in a process of an inquiry, investigation, and identity-building as they seek to draw parallels between their lives and the lives of their Israeli counterparts.

#### *Core Concept:*

Uncovering the challenges that exist when deeply-rooted emotions guide policy decisions helps me to better contextualize my own dilemmas.

#### *Evidence of Understanding:*

Participants will demonstrate some of the similarities and differences between governmental regulations in Israel and the United States or Canada.

#### *Materials:*

- Computer, iPad, or tablet – ideally one for each participant
- WiFi connection
- Newspaper two articles for each participant (if needed)
  - [No Homosexuals in Beit Shemesh](#) (Times of Israel, 10-Nov-2013)
  - [Israel to Phase out Religious Exemptions](#) (NY Times, 12-Mar-2014)

#### *Lesson Outline (60 minutes):*

##### Set Induction (10 minutes)

- Ask participants to identify at time when they felt like their hopes and dreams were limited by the government.
- Using [PollEverywhere](#) (or another platform), ask participants to share their responses.
  - Facilitator should create the “poll question” ahead of time.
  - A unique website URL will be created that participants should visit on their computer or device to post their response.
  - Posts are recorded anonymously.
- Debrief the postings as a group
  - First, solicit feedback from participants about their impressions of the responses.
  - Try to group the responses into categories. In doing so, see if it’s possible to distinguish any that are uniquely Israeli (contributed by Israelis) vs. uniquely American/Canadian.

### Orthodox in Charge (10 minutes)

- Ask Israelis to share their experiences with progressive religious matters in Israeli society.
  - If the Israelis are still part of the group, ask them to share some reflections
  - If the Israelis are no longer with the group, ask the *moreh derekh* and the soldier/medic to lead the presentation.
- Be sure that participants understand that due to Israel's Status Quo agreement of June 19, 1947, Orthodox standards control all Jewish religious matters in Israeli society.<sup>22</sup>
  - For context, facilitators should understand the background behind the Status Quo and its enduring relevance. Any number of resources can be consulted in the Israeli press, or Ilan Fuchs's [article](#) at Jewish Virtual Library.<sup>23</sup>

### Current Matters (30 minutes)

- Instruct participants that the group will now be looking at two contemporary issues that address firsthand the Orthodox community.
  - The first is the homophobia found in Beit Shemsh, a community of mixed demographics, but an increasingly Orthodox/Haredi town.
  - The second is the recent bill passed by the *Knesset* (Israeli Parliament) to end the decades-long exception for Haredi military service.
- Encourage any of the Israelis with the group, participants or staff, to facilitate the conversation on these two topics.
  - A short time for preparation will be needed to guide the Israelis on how to facilitate the conversation as impartially as possible.
- If no Israelis want to facilitate the conversation, pass out copies of the articles to each participant:
  - [No Homosexuals in Beit Shemesh](#) (Times of Israel, 10-Nov-2013)
  - [Israel to Phase out Religious Exemptions](#) (NY Times, 12-Mar-2014)
  - Have participants split into groups and look over each article, one at a time.
- Be sure that participants are familiar with the narratives of the two situations.
  - Note that Moshe Abitbul, Beit Shemesh mayor, was narrowly reelected in a second round of voting in March 2014
- After either presenting or reading each article, take some time for questions and answers. Ask participants questions if needed:
  - What arguments does each side offer to support their claim?
  - Why do issues of pluralism incite such contentious responses?
  - How can Israel work to achieve pluralism when it is a home for all Jews, of all religious backgrounds? Should it?

<sup>22</sup> <http://books.google.cz/books?id=iVJR9UZnTVAC&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58#v=onepage&q&f=false>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/fuchs.html>

### Final Poll

- Return to the [PollEverywhere](#) (or another platform) used in the opening.
- Participants should respond to two questions. In between each, process and debrief:
  - *For North Americans* only: How would my initial response be different if I lived in Israel?
  - How do I approach my dilemma now, after understanding the situation in the other participants' home country?

## No homosexuals in Beit Shemesh, mayor asserts



**Recently reelected Moshe Abutbul of Shas says gays should 'be taken care of' by the Health Ministry, police**

By Gavriel Fiske November 10, 2013

Beit Shemesh Mayor Moshe Abutbul. (photo credit: Flash90)

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/no-homosexuals-in-beit-shemesh-mayor-asserts/>

Beit Shemesh Mayor Moshe Abutbul asserted Friday that there are no homosexuals in his “holy and pure” city and suggested that it was the responsibility of the Health Ministry and the police to “take care of them.”

Ultra-Orthodox Abutbul, of the Shas party, narrowly won reelection in October against secular challenger Eli Cohen, although voting irregularities caused a citizen protest and a police investigation into voter fraud. Beit Shemesh in recent years has been a flashpoint for secular-religious tensions.

In a Friday interview on Channel 10, Abutbul, when asked about the presence of homosexuals in the city, said that “we have no such things...Thank God this city is holy and pure.” The mayor said that he “was not involved” in the issue, and it was up to the Health Ministry and the police to “take care of them.”

The same segment featured an interview with a gay man, a resident of Beit Shemesh, who said there were actually “a lot” of LGBT citizens in the city.

Abutbul insisted that “you will hear only good things” from him about Beit Shemesh, which he called a “garden of Eden.” Abutbul also asserted that there are no women on the Shas party list because they “don’t want” to be involved in politics, but rather prefer to stay at home to “raise and educate their children... each one according their nature, what can you do?”

Rabbi Yitzhak Hagar, a Beit Shemesh resident, told Channel 10 that as far as “gays” are concerned, “the central problem is a psychological problem, which needs treatment... in our community the problem is treated very, very well.”

In response to the Channel 10 report, Beit Shemesh native Elinor Sidi, head of the Jerusalem Open House, told Ynet News that “I can only regret the change the city has undergone in recent

years,” which she characterized as “hatred, ignorance, homophobia and racism.” The LGBT community was in the city “before Abutbul,” whose “Judaism is not the Judaism I was raised on,” she added.

Beit Shemesh, a city of 75,000 in the Judean hills west of Jerusalem, has become deeply divided in recent years as neighborhoods have seen a large influx of ultra-Orthodox residents.

The city has been the scene of sometimes violent tensions between the Haredi population and other residents. In 2011, 8-year-old Naama Margolese was spat on and insulted by Haredi men while walking to her school at the edge of an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood, bringing national and international attention to the city.

In July 2012, Egged was ordered to compensate a young girl who was forced by ultra-Orthodox passengers to sit at the back of a bus in the city. The presiding judge ruled that gender segregation on a public bus was illegal and it was the driver’s responsibility to prevent it.

In July of this year, a group of Haredi men reportedly smashed the windows of a bus after a woman refused to give up her seat and sit in the back. Haredi rioters have also violently protested construction at a Beit Shemesh site that once may have been a burial ground.

*Stuart Winer contributed to this report.*

# Israel to Phase Out Religious Exemptions

By ISABEL KERSHNER

MARCH 12, 2014

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/world/middleeast/israel-restricts-exemptions-from-military-service.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/world/middleeast/israel-restricts-exemptions-from-military-service.html?_r=0)

JERUSALEM — After years of heated public debate and political wrangling, Israel's Parliament on Wednesday approved landmark legislation that will eventually eliminate exemptions from compulsory military service for many ultra-Orthodox students enrolled in seminaries.

The issue has become a social and political lightning rod in a country where most Jewish 18-year-olds are subjected to compulsory military service for up to three years. Many Israelis, who see conscription as part of a deeper culture war between the secular and modern Orthodox Jews and the ultra-Orthodox, have been demanding a more equitable sharing of the responsibilities of citizenship and voted in last year's elections on that basis.

Yair Lapid, the leader of the centrist Yesh Atid, one of the parties that promoted the new legislation in the governing coalition, wrote on his Facebook page soon after the vote, "To the 543,458 citizens of Israel who elected Yesh Atid: Today you have passed the equal sharing of the burden."



On March 2, hundreds of thousands of ultra-Orthodox brought much of Jerusalem to a standstill with a mass prayer gathering to protest the legislation. Credit Oded Balilty/Associated Press

But the law, approved by 65-to-1, is unlikely to allay the acrimony over ultra-Orthodox recruitment and might even exacerbate tensions. The opposition in the 120-seat Parliament, the Knesset, boycotted the vote in an uproar over what it has called unfair political dealing within the coalition as it moved to pass military service legislation and two other contentious bills this week.

Ultra-Orthodox leaders have reacted with fury and are threatening to roll back the slow, voluntary trend that was already underway in their community toward military and national service. And nongovernmental monitoring groups immediately petitioned Israel's Supreme Court, seeking to overturn the new law on grounds that it does not go far enough in enforcing the principle of equality.

For one thing, the law includes an adjustment period of three years in which increased service will be encouraged but not mandatory. It also gives the ultra-Orthodox, known as Haredim, or those who fear God, a choice between military service and civilian national service, unlike ordinary recruits, and it allows students at seminaries, or yeshivas, to defer service for several years beyond the age of 18.

"The whole idea that the law promotes equality is not really convincing," said Prof. Mordechai Kremnitzer, vice president of research at the Israel Democracy Institute, an independent research organization here, and former dean of the law faculty at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

By the end of the three-year period, Professor Kremnitzer said, there will be new elections and a new government, possibly including Haredi parties, "and the whole law would become thin air." Given the delay, he said, "It is questionable whether the Knesset accomplished anything."

Although the law stops far short of enforcing conscription for all Haredi young men, ultra-Orthodox leaders are outraged over its more symbolic aspects. They argue that Torah study should be a priority in Israel, a country that defines itself as the Jewish state, and that the yeshiva students perform a spiritual duty that is crucial for protecting the country. On March 2 hundreds of thousands of ultra-Orthodox paralyzed much of Jerusalem with a mass prayer gathering to protest the legislation. Tens of thousands of Haredim held a similar gathering in Lower Manhattan on Sunday.

Moshe Gafni of the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party, said, "Today Israel lost the right to be called a Jewish state," according to the Ynet Hebrew news site. He said the Haredim "will not forget or forgive" Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his associates for what he called the affront to the Haredi public and to Torah study.

Until a year ago Mr. Netanyahu and the Haredi parties were political allies. Those parties are not in the current coalition after years of having wielded disproportionate political power as coalition linchpins.

In the streets and at the ballot box, mainstream Israelis have displayed growing resentment over benefits granted for decades to members of the ultra-Orthodox community who chose full-time Torah study. Many Israelis view the enlistment of the ultra-Orthodox minority and its integration into the work force as crucial for the country's economy and viability. The ultra-Orthodox sector now makes up about 10 percent of the population of 8 million, but favoring large families, it is expanding rapidly.

The law sets modest annual quotas for the drafting of yeshiva students for military or national service and holds open the threat of criminal penalties against those who evade the draft if the quotas are not met voluntarily by mid-2017 — an unlikely possibility that has nonetheless enraged ultra-Orthodox opponents.

The roots of the tensions date to the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister, granted full-time yeshiva students state financing and exemption from army service to refill the ranks of Torah scholarship decimated in the Holocaust. At the time 400 students were of draftable age. Today there are tens of thousands.

In 2012, Israel's Supreme Court invalidated a law that formalized exemptions for yeshiva students, ruling that it contradicted the principle of equality. The new legislation will face a similar test, though the court deliberations could proceed for at least a year.

Israel's parliamentary opposition, led by Isaac Herzog, leader of the Labor Party, was not uniformly against the new law. But the opposition took the unusual measure of boycotting the discussions in the full assembly and the votes on this and two other bills. Opposition members argued that democratic debate had been stifled because the coalition parties made a pact that all their members would vote for all three pieces of legislation. On their own, none of the bills would have garnered a majority.

One of the bills, which passed into law on Tuesday, raises the electoral threshold for political parties from two percent to 3.25 percent — a move that could harm the electoral chances of small parties, including those that represent the politically fragmented Arab minority. Another bill, which passed later Thursday, calls for a national referendum on any withdrawal from sovereign Israeli territory as part of a future peace treaty with Israel's Arab neighbors.

## Bibliography

### Listed Resources

Drinkwater, Gregg, Joshua Lesser, and David Shneer, eds. *Torah Queeries: Weekly*

*Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Eichner, Itamar. "Follow Israel's Example on Gays in the Military, US Study Says." *Ynet News*.

2 Aug. 2007. Web. 4 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3362505,00.html>>.

Fiske, Gavriel. "No Homosexuals in Beit Shemesh, Mayor Asserts." *The Times of Israel*.

10 Nov. 2013. Web. 10 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/no-homosexuals-in-beit-shemesh-mayor-asserts/>>.

Fuchs, Ilan. "Israel Studies An Anthology: Religion in Israel." *Jewish Virtual Library*. Web. 10 Apr.

2014. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/fuchs.html>>.

Glidden, Sarah. *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*. New York: Vertigo/DC Comics, 2010.

Greenberg, Steven. *Wrestling with God & Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 2004.

"History." *Women of the Wall*. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.

<<http://womenofthewall.org.il/about/history/>>.

Hoffman, Anat. "Answered Prayers?" *The Huffington Post*. 03 May 2013. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.

<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anat-hoffman/answered-prayers\\_b\\_3208221.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anat-hoffman/answered-prayers_b_3208221.html)>.

Hoffman, Anat. "Why I Was Arrested for Praying at the Western Wall." *The Huffington Post*.

21 Oct. 2012. Web. 5 Feb. 2014. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anat-hoffman/arrested-for-praying-at-western-wall\\_b\\_1987099.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anat-hoffman/arrested-for-praying-at-western-wall_b_1987099.html)>.

*Israel Celebrates Ethiopian Jewish Holiday. YouTube.* 11 Feb. 2011. Web. 6 Apr. 2014. <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K\\_lv-Y268aQ&feature=related](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_lv-Y268aQ&feature=related)>.

*Israeli Gays: Jerusalem LGBT Pride Parade. YouTube.* 4 Aug. 2010. Web. 6 Apr. 2014. <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOCGRTWzK\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOCGRTWzK_A)>.

JTA. "Two Decades On, Wave of Russian Immigration to Israel Is an Outstanding Success." *Haaretz*. 1 Jan. 2014. Web. 4 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-features/.premium-1.566484>>.

Kelner, Shaul. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Kershner, Isabel. "Israel to Phase Out Religious Exemptions." *The New York Times*. 12 Mar. 2014. Web. 10 Apr. 2014. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/world/middleeast/israel-restricts-exemptions-from-military-service.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/world/middleeast/israel-restricts-exemptions-from-military-service.html?_r=2)>.

Keshet. "LGBTQI Terminology." *Keshet*. Web. 30 Mar. 2014. <<http://keshet.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/LGBTQI-Terminology.pdf>>

Kessler, Rachael. *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000.

Littman, Jayson. "Birthright's Lesser-known Rainbow Colors." *Haaretz*. 16 Aug. 2012. Web.

11 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/birthright-s-lesser-known-rainbow-colors-1.458681>>.

McDonald, Shalle. "The Saga of Ethiopian Jewish Integration." *Jerusalem Post*. 30 Aug. 2010.

Web. 4 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Features/The-saga-of-Ethiopian-Jewish-integration>>.

"Mission Statement." *Women of the Wall*. Web. 5 Feb. 2014.

<<http://womenofthewall.org.il/about/mission-statement>>.

Various Respondents. "Why Did You Select to Participate in This Trip?" Personal interview. Jan. 2014.

### Selected Annotated Bibliography

Glidden, Sarah. *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*. New York: Vertigo/DC Comics, 2010.

A Birthright alumna herself, Glidden presents her personal account of the trip experience. She enters the trip ready to dispel all the myths that she's heard about the program and about Israel, in general, but she quickly finds that things are more complicated than she first thought. Her well-illustrated testimony reminds all leaders and facilitators that participants enter the trip with varied levels of knowledge and pre-conceived notions that must be nurtured. Participants may, like Sarah, find themselves questioning the Israel they thought they knew, and leaders should be aware of these personal journeys as they work to support their participants' emotional development.

Kelner, Shaul. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Stemming from author's extensive research on the program that has become the defining experience for most Jewish young adults, the book explores the many facets of the Birthright experience. It examines the tensions and contradictions that exist in the program, as well as the ways that participants develop a better understanding of self and Israel. Anchored in the experience of participants, Kelner's research addresses the goals, both inherent and explicit, in the Birthright program and looks to uncover where there is additional room for growth. His account is an invaluable tool for a Birthright group facilitator seeking to understand more about how trip participants respond to overwhelming intensity of the trip.

Littman, Jayson. "Birthright's Lesser-known Rainbow Colors." *Haaretz*. 16 Aug. 2012. Web. 11 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/birthright-s-lesser-known-rainbow-colors-1.458681>>.

Littman speaks about both the common myths and lasting impressions of the LGBTQ itinerary. Dispelling some of the comical questions that he's heard about the trip, he focus on the value of the identity-building that can occur for queer Jews in the supportive environment of the trip. His article speaks to the overall purpose of the trip, and addresses the nuances of life of that the gay and lesbian community faces. The social development of participants takes center stage as Littman illustrates the power that a like-minded group of individuals can have in defining an immersive and experiential program.

## Appendix

### Participant Interview Responses

*Participants responded to the question “Why did you want to participate in this trip?” in one-on-one interviews. The responses are recorded below. Please note that some may have been paraphrased or edited, trying at all times to keep the themes of responses as intact as possible.*

Ted - Would not bond as well with gay people on straight people, developed concerns about gay inclusion on religious trip. Bonds among queer people are rooted differently in the shared experience of being different. Bonds with gay women have been special since communities are isolated at home, discovered richness in friendships with gay women vs straight women. URJ was natural option b/c mom works for URJ. LGBT trip was about going to Israel in group where I could be comfortable.

Jimmy - No idea why I picked it, but saw LGBT on list and looked like a cool option to see things through LGBT lens. Friends thought it was cool. Great opportunity to see what is the LGBT life like in Israel. I did not want to be the gay "that guy" in a larger group. Can't recall the exact reason why I picked URJ as provider. Waited for URJ to offer gay trip after regular trip was cancelled last summer.

Tim - URJ came up first in Google search. I wanted LGBT b/c I wanted to be part of community where I would not be ostracized or the odd one out in social situations. I was closeted in high school, and while my college is educated, it is still "behind" in progressiveness. The trip was a chance to be out and open; it was more organic and comfortable to be social here.

Susan – I was anti-Birther b/c of myths of propaganda and heteronormativity. My cousin went last winter, and two other cousins went last summer; they changed my mind slowly. I was connected to your co-leader and a few participants beforehand, so this trip was natural. I wanted the LGBT trip for the political and social frames. The URJ provider was just a coincidence. LGBT was also the kicker b/c most of my life is in queer community. The stress of a new situation and traveling would be a killer on another trip.

Alicia – I picked trip at random from providers of LGBT trips. Wanted LGBT to fit in, since I was nervous to be among peers who I worried weren't really peers (straight). I planned to come with a friend on a non-queer trip, but this trip was about being with a group of like people to share an experience: connection with place rooted in connection with people.

Yarom [*mifgash* participant] – I participated with a straight group before. I was only gay person in that group, and found it hard to be honest with myself and the rest of group. It is very competitive among soldiers to get an LGBT trip. This was my first time with Reform/Progressive movement.

Richard – I don't like being in the closet or walking on egg shells, so I didn't want to be judged for LGBT identity as a flaw. I wanted Reform to avoid the rigid religious structures. I was also interested in the fluidity of views and progressive, they are more in sync with my personal ideals.

Micah – I really wanted to find a safe space for people like "me," a community where we could bond over issues that others have not had to deal with. The Judaism that we've experienced as LGBTQ people can only be validated in this community. I thought there would be much more to learn in this community set in Israel than in a general group. URJ is part of my identity and I believe in the values and teachings, especially inclusiveness and progressivism

Rachel T – I wanted the URJ trips when I was an undergraduate, but I did not get accepted. The URJ was natural since I was a NFTY kid. I identify as bisexual but usually date men. It was important to me to be on trip with gay friends from home, and therefore maintain my LGBT social community from home. I thought I'd have a better opportunity to make friends in a queer setting.

Julia – I was unsure about Birthright b/c I wasn't really connected to Judaism anymore; there was too much praying. Gay Birthright piqued my interest on a lesbian social website. I wanted the gay group b/c traveling to Israel with people who wouldn't be like me would be stressful enough.

Tessa – I am a straight ally but my views on Israel are left-wing. I thought that trip participants would be left-wing since the queer community tends to be left in Israel as well. I came on this trip because I know that the queer community is progressive, and I wanted to see a progressive view of Israel. I am not religious, so Reform would be least strict in its adherence to religion. The URJ Keshet brand presented itself as focusing on culture and community, liberal and not traditional.

Jordan – I was looking at many options and didn't want the "rainbow" logo that others had. I have more in common with other queers and wanted that community.

Jane – I wasn't looking at Birthright trips until I realized that your co-staff would be on the trip! The LGBTQ was appealing since I find community and a social life in queer settings. I consider myself cultural Jewish and spiritual but not religious, so the Reform movement spoke to that. I also saw this trip as an opportunity to explore some intersections of various parts of my identity.

Felicity – I wanted to synthesize my Jewish and queer identities since my peers are usually queers. It was important for me to be in accepting space as a gender expression non-confirming person. I was in NFTY so URJ was natural. I have many experiences with the “queer bubble” of A-Camp. The trip did not have to be gay one, but I wanted to experience the LGBT nightlife and queer soldiers. Since queer people question the world, I wanted a proactive group. I did not want to hear the “make Jewish babies” narrative. There is lots to unpack in Israel already, so much more enriching to do it as a gay Israel. The trip was also a chance to bring together all letters of acronym.

Lindsey – I picked Keshet b/c of connections with URJ staff coordinator, and I picked the LGBT trip to travel with my gay best friend and his boyfriend. At first, I wasn't sure about the queer trip but said yes for that friend. That said, I feel more comfortable around gay boys, anyway, and I worried about meshing with a straight group. I identify as queer emotionally but not necessarily sexually, so I would be worried about not hooking up on a straight trip.