



## In Their Own Words

Excerpts of Post-Trip Essays written by 2016 Y2I Teens

“My trip to the beautiful State of Israel was absolutely life-changing. This is what I will be saying to people as they ask, *‘Oh, how was your trip?’*. I will share with them the wonderful experiences I had throughout the duration of two weeks, whether it was rafting on the Jordan River, riding a camel, floating in the Dead Sea, or even experiencing the Western Wall for the first time, and describing to people what it felt like to, in my opinion, almost touch God. This trip has made me more religious and proud to be a Jew, and it makes me feel like I have a second home in Israel.”  
Ben Ames, Beverly

“After touring Israel with Y2I, I am extremely proud to say I am Jewish and thankful to the Lappin Foundation giving teens the opportunity to visit Israel. Learning history about Israel and the conflicts in Gaza and Palestine stood out the most to me. When listening to lectures, I began to realize my life is significantly different than the average Israeli. Tensions have calmed down a little recently, but the past 15 years have been extremely tough years for Israelis. Israel is my second home and after learning more about the culture, I understand the importance to advocate for a Jewish state. Now that I am back in my original home, because of Y2I it is safe to say Israel is my home as well.” Alex Batsinelas, Peabody

“Before going to Israel I did not expect to see what I did. I learned about the culture, how people treated other people and how the country, civilians and soldiers, dealt with the ongoing threats towards Israel. I also learned how to defend Israel in discussions with people back here in the States who oppose Israel. This entire trip was incredible. What I will take away from this trip is knowledge about Israel and its history. I learned so much from the guest speakers we had. They spoke mainly about defending Israel in the media and in social settings. They gave me the tools and knowledge to properly state the facts and truth about Israel. However, I won’t only be taking things away from this trip. I also left something behind, my heart. I fell in love with Israel after that first bus ride to the first hotel. The hilly terrain, the mix of old and new, and the overall feeling of goodness knowing that I was in the Holy Land. I look forward to my next, inevitable, trip to Israel.”  
Eli Bernstein, Hampton, NH

“My Y2I experience changed the way I look at my Jewish heritage. One of the few speakers who I will remember for a long time is Charlotte. Her presence and her attitude kept me so interested throughout her presentations. This was where I was changed as a Jewish teen. I now want to advocate for Israel and try to have even my non-Jewish friends get to learn more about what Israel really is as a community. Also tell them how much Israel means to me. Knowing I am welcomed back with open arms to Israel makes me smile. I encourage anyone who is partially Jewish, fully Jewish or maybe not even Jewish at all but are moved by the Jewish religion to get involved and learn. Expand your knowledge of the religion and culture.”  
Sophia Berquist, Lynnfield



“I had always wanted to go to Israel. Going into the trip the thing that I was looking forward to most was not the sights that we would be seeing, or the activities that we would be doing; but instead I was most excited to actually experience Israel in person. As I would come to see, Israel was better than I had been expecting. On Y2I, I experienced what Israel is like in person. Israel is a very small country that is only about the size of New Jersey. Yet for such a small country, Israel contains all of the three major religions. However, as a Jewish state, Israel is about 80% Jewish. All of these factors contribute to making the people of Israel one big family. This was the best part of Israel. Almost instantly I felt connected to Israel. It was as if I was coming home.”

Benjamin Birnbach, Marblehead

“Over the course of the trip, my group of friends grew at an exponential rate. I went from having no good Jewish friends to having at least several people who I consider to be incredibly close to me. Not only that, but we all share common interests. A few of us have plans to learn Hebrew together as well as explore more information about Israel, which, by the way, Stand With Us presented an incredible new view, Jewish People are indigenous to Israel. This revolutionized the way I thought about the state. I found such a solid sense of belonging there, along with so many amazing people, who were adults as well as teenagers. The memories created in Israel will hopefully bleed into my life in the states with new friends, knowledge, and celebration of Jewish identity.”

Rebecca Black, Stratham, NH

“Before embarking on my trip to Israel, I did not feel a strong connection to this rich beautiful country. Before the trip, advocating for Israel was not part of my agenda; however, this trip has truly changed me: I am so attached to the Israeli community, and I feel a tremendous amount of pride to be Jewish that I cannot wait to start advocating for Israel. I plan on joining clubs and organizations such as “Honest Reporting” to educate adolescents about the veracity behind Israel’s motives for each military action and/or political decision. Before the trip, marrying and raising my children Jewish was not particularly an important aspect of my future; however, I realized that *my* future is the future of the Jewish people. I now feel an obligation to marry and raise my children Jewish, so that we will be around for future generations. I have made so many memories and friends on this trip, and I now have a new look into my Jewish identity that I never thought was even possible before Y2I.”

Jessica Bloom, Lynnfield

“With my Y2I experience, I had the opportunity to meet Israeli teens, and they gave me the Israel that Channel 7 never did. Going from the Bedouin Tents to Mt. Masada to the Dead Sea—and starting the day at a bright 3 am—I realized that all of their positive energy and boisterous conviviality outweighed all of the negativity that I had heard from the media. With hindsight, I cannot fathom how news sources can highlight the darkness when there is so much more light radiating from this incredible place. Traveling with the Israelis, I discerned that the only difference between us and them was where we lived. Yes, I have grown up in America and them in Israel, but we share the same home. As soon as my American peers and I exited the plane, we were greeted like family, not tourists. I still have so much to learn, but I have gained the techniques for proper advocacy and plan to do so. My biggest fear is public speaking, but I will push myself to help represent Israel and showcase the brilliant light that many people are deprived of seeing.”

Samantha Bloom, Lynnfield



“My Y2I experience and my first trip to Israel was an amazing experience that I would not trade for anything. I think that going to Israel was the first time that I felt that I was truly part of the Jewish community. I think it started when we got Ben Gurion airport and Amnon welcomed each and every one of us by shaking our hands and saying “welcome home”. It made me feel like I was actually home again and not in a foreign country. I would love to go back and see Israel again soon because it was such a life changing experience. I will take home everything that I learned about Israel and how to advocate for its acceptance in the world. I will also take home the immense pride that I developed for Israel and being a Jew while I was in Israel.”

Zachary Cabrera, Beverly

“As my interest in politics grew, so did the tension involving Israel and its surrounding countries. I became aware of the unjust representation directed at Israel through the media and even political figures in the U.S government. But until I embarked on the enriching journey with the Lappin Foundation, the only advocating I did for Israel was at the lunch table with a few of my friends. In recent weeks, terror has erupted all around the world. The truth is, there are people who wish to kill innocent civilians, and take out certain groups of race and ethnicity. But let me make something clear, Israel is neither the place nor the home to the people who wish to do so. The beautiful land of Israel is home to a full functioning democracy, which allows Jews, Christians, and Muslims to walk down the street together, with peace in their hearts and minds. Together, all Jews, can survive and prosper, just as we have done throughout history. It is our own job to stand up for our culture, and advocate for our homeland and the truth. WE must truly be proud Jews, for a difference to be made.”

Korey Cohan, Marblehead

“Along with new friendships, I definitely left feeling a much deeper appreciation for the country, its inhabitants, and the Jewish religion. Touring around the country and learning about its history has made me fall in love with the country. That's why it kills me to hear and see just how much hate in the world is directed at the Israeli state. I thank the trip for the lectures we endured even though I might not have liked them at the time. With me, I now have the knowledge to help me inform others of how friendly and peaceful a country Israel is. Already since I have been back, multiple people that I've talked to about the trip were extremely uninformed which was surprising to me. Nevertheless I was able to rightfully fill in their gaps which left me feeling good. The time spent there really made me feel more connected to Judaism now that I've been around more Jews than I have ever could have imagined existed. In conclusion, this trip has definitely opened me up to advocating more to make sure Israel survives its ever increasing persecution.”

Aidan Collins, Marblehead

“The impact of Y2I on my life was amazing. I no longer see Israel as a dangerous place that you should not visit, but instead see it as a friend that would welcome anyone with open arms. When I was at the Western Wall, a stranger came up to my counselor and me asking us if we had had Shabbat dinner. We did; however, if we had not, he was going to get it for us. I've never encountered a situation like that at home. Where we live it is unusual to reach out to strangers, but in Israel it is the norm. This trip enhanced my Jewish identity by showing me the culture it all came from. I am very grateful and appreciative for this experience and know I will remember it always.”

Chad Comeau, Georgetown



“The Y2I 2016 trip’s ability to enhance my Jewish pride exponentially more than I originally thought possible was one of the very long list of things that made this trip unforgettable. Before the trip, Israel was just a spot on the map somewhere in the Middle East. I could point it out but that was about the extent of my knowledge. I didn’t know nor care to know about much more than that. In my mind it wasn’t important to care about a country that seemed worlds away. However, a short 10 and a half hour plane ride away, my extended family of Jews waited to meet me. The trip awoke a fire in me that I did not know I had. My pride for Israel, a country I have spent no more than 14 days in, is equal if not greater than my pride for America. Y2I has had an irreplaceable impact on my life that will stick with me for my entire life. My newfound pride in being Jewish as well as Israel itself has changed the way I think and act. Now I have a new responsibility as a Jewish kid to stand up for my country and my people. 59,049 Jews in the next 10 generations are relying on me to marry and raise my kids Jewish and I intend to do so. Overall the Y2I trip has opened up many new avenues in my life and given me many new friends to explore them with.”

Andrew Conway, Lynnfield

“By informing me about Israel’s history, and its continuous struggle to make peace in the neighborhood, I realized that I want to help in this constant struggle for peace, and to end the violence. The best way I feel to do that is to advocate for Israel. By living in this country for two weeks I have gotten to know the people and what they stand for. I saw a nation full of strong moral individuals who are willing to do whatever it takes to make the world a safer place. I now feel a stronger connection with Israel not only because I am Jewish and Israel is the land of the Jewish people; but because of the people who actually live there. Their kind heartedness, their fire, and welcoming nature made me feel like I was right at home, and now that is what Israel really is to me, home.”

Jake Daitch, Topsfield

“Israel was truly a life changing experience for me, as it opened my eyes to what Judaism has gone through. I felt a connection to everyone on the trip as I made new friends. Little did I realize as the trip progressed, these so called “friends” turned into my second family. I never thought in my life that a country so small in comparison to the world could make such a big impact. Not just on me but on the world as a whole. Being Jewish is another opportunity that, as a small population, creates a more special experience. Personally, when learning what Israel has done and continues to do to provide for our future, I thought is far more valuable than any course that I could take in a normal school system.”

Alex Derkautsan, Swampscott

“This summer, I embarked on a journey to Israel that forever changed my identity as a Jew. Prior to my trip, I was not really that involved in the Jewish culture. I went to temple on the high holidays and I had my Bar Mitzvah, but that was pretty much it. Before going on this trip, I didn’t have much of a Jewish identity. While on the trip, one of the major activities was visiting the Western Wall twice, once on Thursday, and once on Shabbat. When we first went on Thursday, there were only a few people there and it was not incredibly impressive. Although I put on tefillin and did the Shema prayer, I didn’t really have a real connection to the Wall and to Judaism. That mindset changed on the second visit to the Wall. On that night I felt very emotional as I read through the prayer book, and, not only that, I felt a great surge of pride and happiness. I had finally learned what it meant to be a Jew, and how it was much more than just sitting in a temple back home being bored, but a way of life and a culture that I should be proud to be a part of.”

Harrison Dolin, Marblehead



“Because I’ve lived in Merrimac for my whole life, I have not gotten to meet a lot of Jewish people my age. This made me begin to think that there were not many Jewish teenagers that I could get along with. This trip proved me wrong because every single person on this trip was very easy to get along with. Out of all the interesting things we saw, my favorite part of this trip was meeting all these new people that had similar interests to me. Meeting the Israelis was also really cool because they are so different from us but at the same time they are so similar. Meeting all these new people is going to have such a big impact on my life mainly because now I know there are a lot of friendly Jewish people not only in my area but all over the world.”  
Ian Eichel, Merrimac

“Y2I was the first time I thought about what it means to be Jewish in a personal sense, not a religious sense. The first thing that made me think about being Jewish is when we landed in the Tel Aviv airport. A man I did not know greeted each one of us with a “welcome home”. At first this felt a little odd because there was this stranger welcoming me home to a country I’ve never been to before. But as the two weeks progressed, Israel did begin to feel like home. Even though we live more than 5,500 miles away from Israel, we are still family with those in Israel. We are connected by our Jewish roots whether we practice the religion or not. Israel is a home for any Jew. Before Y2I, I wasn’t really aware of what was going on in Israel. But through Israel advocacy meetings with Charlotte from Stand With Us, I learned more about what Israel has to deal with on a day to day basis. The advocacy training made me realize how many Americans are unaware of the conflict in the Middle East like I was. This has inspired me to continue educating myself on this topic so I can educate others. Being Jewish means supporting my family in Israel by educating others. I hope to take what Israel has taught me and give it back to everyone around me in the hope that they understand or view Israel in the same way I do: home.” Lisa Eichel, Merrimac

“Going into the trip, I wasn’t thinking too much about the destination. From the beginning, what I was really most concerned about was the opportunity to travel. It didn’t matter where; as long as I got to go somewhere, it was good enough for me. It wasn’t until we landed when my thought process changed. This trip wasn’t about just traveling, it was about the destination; it was about Israel. The feelings I had on the trip are some I will be able to recall forever. Israel is a place I am proud to think of as my second home.”  
Scott Eichel, Merrimac

“Y2I played a large role in enhancing my Jewish identity. The trip served as a rare opportunity to be encompassed in an environment composed entirely of Jews. This environment led to my discovery of the complexity of the Jewish people. Every single person on the trip had their own way of observing Judaism, from keeping kosher, to observing Shabbat, to believing in God. My exposure to all of the different ways to be Jewish made me feel so connected within the community, and made me feel more love and pride for being Jewish than I have ever felt. I think it is important to stay connected within the Jewish community, and I plan to do so as I continue through my life.”  
Kayla Fabry, Beverly



“For the first sixteen years of my life, Israel had just been a place I had heard about in stories in Hebrew school and in the news. When I thought about Israel, I imagined all of the things most people probably do; desert, camels, violence, and very religious people roaming the streets. What I thought I knew about Israel was just simply not true. In these short two weeks, I learned more about Israel than I had learned in my whole life. Before I came, I did not realize how severe the problems they face are, and the terrible ways in which the news portrays Israel, giving it an extremely negative and false image. I learned how important it is to advocate for Israel, and to tell people our side of the story. While I was there, I grew such a love for this country. I feel that I not only want to defend it, but I need to. When I hear uneducated people speaking out about Israel in a negative way, I now have the knowledge and feel informed enough to be able to correct their misconceptions and prejudgments. This is a very important tool that I am going to use in order to advocate for this country that now means so much to me.”

Sydney Faulkner, Swampscott

“Throughout my journey to Israel, in combination with hearing Charlotte from Stand With Us and Momo speak, I can surely say that I feel a stronger, more meaningful connection to the land of Israel, and a burning desire to return home to Israel. As we settled into this final hotel, I realized that this adventure of a lifetime was coming to an end. I’d made so many great friends, done so many things that seemed like a far-off dream just a few months ago, and most of all, was able to feel a true connection to my Judaism and the land of Israel. In stark contrast to my doubt and pessimism, I can say with certainty that this trip was one of a lifetime, and an experience I will surely never forget. Despite the late nights and early mornings, I was always ready and excited for what each new day would bring.”

Ben Fein, Arlington

“After studying Israeli history for many years in religious school at Temple Beth Shalom, I developed a deep interest in learning more about Israel. This trip to Israel turned this interest into a love for Israel. Everything about this country made me want to learn more about what it means to be Israeli and what it means to be Jewish. My favorite part of the trip was being able to connect with Israeli teens. The friendships that I made with these teens will last a lifetime. Talking to them gave me a new perspective and appreciation for Israel and all the people that call it home.”

Owen Foley, Lynnfield

“I have always identified as Jewish, but I can’t say that I have always been emotionally connected to Judaism. There wasn’t a single experience throughout Y2I that I could pinpoint as that defining moment. But just being in Israel, and experiencing the community and sense of family with my newfound friends was deeply moving. I won’t forget the big stuff, like watching the sun rise from the top of Masada. But to me, all of the smaller moments on the trip add up to make me feel more connected to Israel and its people.”

Amy Freed, Danvers



“As I reflect back on my memorable journey to the State of Israel, some words that come to mind that resemble my experience are: inspirational, incredible, and life changing. For me this trip exceeded all previous expectations. When I remember back to only two weeks ago, it seems hard to believe how little motivation I had for this gift of a lifetime. Two weeks ago I was too worried about missing football, work, and my friends. Little did I know at the time that the visit to the small nation would provide enormous benefits. These included countless new friends (American and Israeli) and exciting encounters, which revealed what Israel was truly about. The Youth to Israel trip was amazing. It was very enjoyable and the activities exceeded my expectations. However, more importantly, the journey opened my eyes up to life outside of the U.S. and made me think about the lives of Jews in Israel.”

Ethan Friedman, Swampscott

“Preceding the trip, I had no emotional attachment to the country and very little to Judaism. I personally only practice Judaism culturally and I felt like I was bad Jew for this. Y2I has showed me that I am a good Jew, a Jew who is unique but still a Jew who carries out Jewish values. This trip has enhanced my knowledge about Judaism, its aspects, and Israel. Upon arrival, I felt a strong connection and sense of love for the country. I have made lifelong friends and hope to return back in the near future. Y2I has had a profound impact on my life and I do believe that I am different person. My faith has been restored that I can be a Jew no matter what I believe, because Judaism is not exclusive. The three biggest impacts that Y2I has had on my life are the friends I have made, my connection to Israel, and my pride for being Jewish.”

Jamie Friedman, Mansfield

“Going on Y2I made me realize a home is not a place where you live but a place where you feel accepted and loved. This trip didn't take me away from my home. This trip brought me to my new home, a home that I will have for the rest of my life. I took a journey to my homeland and was able to reconnect with my Jewish identity. For me going to Israel was life changing and I only wish more kids my age are able to experience what it is like to go to Israel and feel as though you are home. Meeting other Jews from Massachusetts gave me a new perspective on what it meant to be Jewish. I go to a school with a very little Jewish population. This trip was a whole new experience because I was able to be with so many Jewish teens my age. I no longer felt as though it was different to be Jewish. I felt as though I was with my family, my new larger Jewish family.”

Jake Gamble, Danvers

“Y2I had a huge and important impact on my life. My favorite part about the trip was Jerusalem. I enjoyed Jerusalem so much because it made me feel more connected to my homeland. When I visited the Kotel, there were guys wrapping tefillin around people's arms. I reluctantly joined the group to get tefillin wrapped around my arm. I had never learned about wrapping tefillin before, so I was excited to experience this for the first time at the Kotel. After I said the prayer while wearing tefillin, I was ready, and excited to visit the Kotel for the first time. I eagerly made my way towards the Kotel with my group of new friends. We all approached the Wall, excited to put our notes in. I found a good place to put my note, and had the amazing opportunity to touch the Wall. I also got to pray at the Wall, which I had been looking forward to for many months. Thank you so much for the incredible opportunity to visit my homeland. It truly was the trip of a lifetime.”

Mitchell Godes, Marblehead



“Two fun and eye opening weeks have transpired rather quickly, and have caused me to reassess my stance on Israel and Judaism (in a good way), but also have given me new friendships that will hopefully last a long time. Being with such a large number of people that are my age and share the same religion was special to say the least. It really cemented the idea of community/family into my head, especially with the Israelis, who we had become very attached to after only four days. Albeit this was not my first rodeo in Israel (or second or tenth for that matter), this trip made me look at Israel from a basic perspective, one that showed me just how much I had taken it for granted. It still awes me that we as Jews had overcome so much in our history, be it our temple's destruction twice, the Holocaust, or the creation of the state of Israel. And particularly in Israel's infancy, literally every single one of its neighbors would stop at nothing to prevent its existence, and yet we're still here. The resilience that the Jewish people possess is incredible. If I were to bring to Israel an individual with no prior knowledge of the place, and then after two weeks tell him its historical background up to today, he would be in utter disbelief. This place shows no traces of a “war-torn country”. Even though it wasn't perfect, though nothing really is, it was far beyond my expectations, and really helped me understand the importance of being active in the Jewish, but also Israeli community.”

Roy Golan, Brookline

“Nothing more than the soft silence of the atmosphere can explain the impact of this trip on me, because no word, sentence or phrase comes close to how Y2I made me feel. I thought I knew Israel like the back of my hand, but really, I knew nothing. Coming to Israel as a tourist completely changed my delusional perception of the country I once thought I knew. Y2I has taught me so many lessons. Not only how to advocate for Israel, but also lessons for life. One of the most important ones: trust. Learning to trust the people around you and to have faith in your country. You also need to be able to find trustworthy resources when advocating for Israel, otherwise people won't take your claims seriously. Y2I has taught me the importance of awareness. Thanks to Y2I, I will start using social media to my advantage. My goal is to spread informative and accurate information about Israel that tells the full story. I will avoid bias sources and stay away from assumptions to avoid further ignorance to show the world what an incredibly unique, secure country Israel is.”

Shira Golan, Brookline

“Before traveling to Israel with Y2I, Israel was just another country in the world. I knew that Israel was the birthplace of Judaism and a Jewish state, and therefore; because I am Jewish, I should take pride in it and support it. On my journey throughout Israel I was introduced to amazing history, insightful presenters, a place that I can truly call my second home, and friendships that will last forever. After returning to the United States, I have realized that prior to my Y2I experience I had really been barely informally educated about Israel. I did not know nearly enough about the importance of the country, advocacy for it, and the importance of taking pride in the Jewish state and Judaism. Before the trip, my three close friends and I were Jewish, but most of the people at our school, and in the neighborhoods around us were not. After traveling on the Y2I trip, I have met over one hundred new amazing friends, many of whom live between 5 and 20 minutes away from me. As a result of this life changing experience, I have made many new friends and have formed unbreakable bonds with people my age who are all Jewish. This trip has created an opportunity for me to explore Jewish identity in the birthplace of Judaism with people who are exactly like me--Jewish. My Youth to Israel journey is one that has affected my life in more ways than one, and is an experience that I will never forget.”

Maya Goldman, Marblehead



“I predicted, or at least hoped, that Y2I would give me a life changing experience where my Jewish identity would be enhanced, and Israel would become more than a Hebrew school topic. The two weeks there gave me so much more than I ever could have imagined. Israel is statistically one of the happiest countries on Earth. So, we tried to figure out what the difference was between us and them. The answer: our attitude. From my experience, Israelis seem to have a glass half full outlook on life, while Americans often seem to have a glass half empty perspective. Our minds were blown when we were greeted in Israel with beaming faces, hugs, and singing. Everywhere I looked I saw people laughing, and complete strangers complimenting, or inviting each other to Shabbat dinner. In America, the ‘stranger danger’ alarms would be going off in our heads, but in Israel we are all a family. I didn’t realize it until I got home, but during our trip I was able to live in the moment for the first time in years, and I don’t think I have ever smiled bigger or laughed harder. I personally have always been a positive person, and the fact that I was still inspired by the Israelis’ optimism is incredible to me.” Hannah Gonzalez, Newton

“Going on Y2I to Israel made my connection to Israel so much stronger. I fell in love with the country right away. Everything about it wants me to make Aliyah--the culture, the people, and the history. Despite all that is going on with Israel and the Middle East, Israel keeps living on and doesn't let it stop them from being happy and excelling in many different fields of knowledge. Israel is not just the holy land that I keep hearing about; but it is my second home and I hope that soon it could be my permanent home. My knowledge of the history of Israel has increased so much and I hope I can expand other’s understanding of Israel.”  
David Gould, Newton

“Prior to this amazing Y2I experience, I had a pretty normal Jewish view on Israel. I had no real “connection”. All I knew was that it was the homeland of the Jewish people and that there are many countries against the independence of Israel. Since 2010, there have been over 215 attacks and over 161 casualties caused by these attacks. So yes, you should “watch your back” and “be aware of your surroundings”. However, as a part of the Jewish nation, you should not turn your back, and you should stand up for your homeland, because violence is not the only way people can make others fear or hate Israel. In fact, one of the largest ways people express anti-semitism is through public advertisement on the streets, in protests and on college campuses. This trip helped raise my awareness of how real, extreme, and serious the Arab- Israeli conflict really is. This is not a war against a country, this is a war against a religion. On my Youth 2 Israel experience, I got to learn a lot about the state of Israel and why I need to advocate. I now view Israel in a totally different way. I feel that it is my home, and I feel that I should stand up for it all the time. This trip really made me appreciate everything I have and appreciate my religious background along with my heritage.”  
Jesse Gould, Newton



“Overall Y2I 2016 was an amazing experience I will never forget. I loved getting to see what Israel was really about and meeting many new people and lifetime friends. The trip has encouraged me to stand up for Israel more now that I know what is actually going on and can inform friends and family. Throughout the trip I fell in love with the country and the people in it, and I am proud to be able to call Israel home. Before the trip I didn’t understand how important it was for me to visit and understand what is happening in Israel, but I came home with a new love and appreciation for such a beautiful place. I am very grateful to have had been able to go on the trip of a lifetime.”  
Serena Govaert, Middleton

“All I could think about when strolling into the terminal was how I was missing two important baseball tournaments. I had no interest in going to Israel, especially when I was missing my passion. I was raised Jewish, and only felt close to my religion once or twice a year. Y2I was full of memories and activities that were remarkable experiences. The parts of Y2I that I will never forget are the traditions and values that I witnessed in Israel. We were up at the crack of dawn and went to sleep after the sun set. I wanted more time to process the beauty of where I was in the world. I was in the middle of over 2000 years of history, and it was overwhelming. From Mt. Masada to the Western Wall, history was everywhere, and it was a lot to take in and realize where I was in the world. I am very thankful for the opportunity to go to Israel, and it was a trip that I will never forget.” Jacob Grant, Beverly



## In the Land of the Promise

In the land of milk and honey.  
The people are very honest,  
And they use shekels for their money.  
The sun is the hottest,  
The milk attracts stray cats.  
No matter what the business,  
you shouldn't forget your hat.  
They like to eat their hummus,  
With pita or with bread.  
The food israeli flawless,  
But the wakeup is what I dread!  
The kotel, israeli solid.  
The water is crystal clear.  
In the shook, don't lose your wallet,  
Or a mouthful is what you'll hear!  
It doesn't matter what you call it,  
Israel is the nicest.  
Ron is our the רלן,  
SHALOM ISIS!  
The land we all relish.  
The trip of our lives.  
The bedouin was a bit Yokelish,  
He had three wives!  
How could he accomplish,  
What we thought was absurd?  
Perhaps like Jacob they were a catfish,  
But we were too distracted, Ron said "LOOK AT THE BIRD!"  
The day before to our gladness,  
The Israeli friends we made,  
(Maybe never again to our sadness),  
Had a few glorious days stayed.  
In those days we cherished,  
Our new friends we host.  
Then to a land of the perished,  
And to a museum that housed our ghosts.  
And with that the rhyme ends,  
And our story too.  
Goodbye to all my friends,  
I'll miss you through and true.

Ben Grosz, Marblehead



“My trip to Israel made me realize the value of the Jewish community. What Y2I made me realize is that Judaism is a part of me. Israel re-sparked my 10 years of Hebrew school, my childhood summers at a Jewish day camp, and made me proud that I was a Bar Mitzvah. I went from feeling as though I lacked a connection with Judaism to realizing that I was a Jew. Y2I made being an advocate for Israel an easy option. By educating us on the history of the conflict in Israel, as well as common misconceptions about it, the program made it easy to understand the argument in Israel’s defense, and that the country was not the apartheid state it is sometimes portrayed as. By teaching us how to effectively communicate about Israel and defend against anti-Israel arguments, it became easy to get behind spreading a Pro-Israel viewpoint. Going to Israel with Y2I offered me an experience I could not have had otherwise. I was able to see the beauty of Israel, further realize my Jewish Identity, learn the importance of Israel as a Jewish State, and keep contact with Jews from all over.”

Noah Habbe, Sharon

“Before my two week long trip to Israel, you could have asked me to tell you one aspect of the current conflict in Israel, and I wouldn’t have been able to state a single fact. You could have asked me to state a single sentence in Hebrew, and I would be lost for words. You could have asked me what my favorite Israeli dish was, and I would stare at you blank-faced. Before my trip to Israel, I had an extremely limited connection to the place I now call my second home. Before the trip, I had no idea what to expect. My extremely limited knowledge of the country provided me with two assumptions. The first was that Israel was a land plagued with violence and war. Secondly, it was a hot, dry desert. The second I stepped off the plane and was greeted with the words “Welcome Home”, both assumptions were invalidated. I knew from that moment on that I would come to truly love the state of Israel. During my time in the country, I was able to take part in several hours of Israel Advocacy training. I have always loved to stand up for what I believe in, and the training that I endured allowed me to learn the truth about Israel, and gain the correct knowledge and ability to stand up and advocate for the country. I received the correct tools and understanding of the situation that the country is in. The ability to undergo training from different people who represented a variety of advocacy organizations allowed me to better understand the different views toward Israel.”

Samantha Hano, Beverly



“Before my trip to Israel, I had not given the country of Israel much thought. I figured it was a desert with a lot of Jewish people and camels. After a few short hours when traveling from the airport to the Sea of Galilee, I realized that I was completely wrong. Within a few short days, I realized Israel is a place for everyone. I mean EVERYONE!!! It doesn't matter your color, race, gender, religion or sexual identity, it truly is the land of all people. I think that it is very important that there is a place in the world that everyone can call home, that home being Israel. Y2I has opened my eyes to what it means to be Jewish. Because of Y2I, I can proudly tell anyone and everyone that I am Jewish. This trip has allowed me to not only know who I am as a Jew, but to be proud of being Jewish. I feel like I can rightfully say, and say it proudly, that I am Jewish. I now realize why it is important to raise my children Jewish, considering before the trip it was important to my mother and bubble, but didn't make a huge impact on me. Now I understand what they have always been talking about and how it is so important to preserve the Jewish religion and be proud to grow up that way. But because of this trip, I am ready in full force to defend this incredible country of Israel in upcoming controversial debates. I am ready to defend Israel the right way. From all the touring, discussions, learning and fun times with friends, I can say with 100% certainty that Y2I has impacted my life now and as my future as a Jew. When my mom, who went on the trip in 1985, would talk about how much fun I was going to have and all the incredible things I would see and learn about would impact my life, I admit it, I rolled my eyes (a lot). I now know I will be talking about the friends I have made, the adventures I have been on and all the knowledge I have learned 30 years from now with my kids before they go on the adventure of a lifetime.”

Michal Hickerson, North Andover

“As I stepped on the El Al flight to Israel with the hundred some odd other teens, I had no expectations for the trip in front of me. I knew little about the Israel, which was pretty surprising because I like to think I know a thing or two about global politics. I felt no connection whatsoever to Israel; it was just another country in the Middle East with problems. Before my Y2I experience my knowledge of Israel consisted of a couple of statistics in an article or words in a politician's speech. I looked at Israel through a calculated eye, an eye with little compassion and no empathy. Since I am Jewish I saw Israel's right to exist but saw no reason why Palestine could not coexist with Israel or why Israel felt the need to be hyper-militaristic and kill innocent Palestinian civilian lives. Israel seemed to be a slight eye sore with in American politics and I thought little of it. But I went into my Y2I experience with an open mind, ready to learn. Y2I exposed me to a new passion and a new sense of purpose, to advocate for a country I have grown to love so dearly. My Y2I experience was truly life-changing. I am a different person writing this essay than the person that stepped on the El Al flight on July 3rd. Y2I expanded my interest and passion for Israel and boosted my self-confidence to a place it had never gone before. Now looking back I have realized that I gained so much love on Y2I, a love for Israel, a love for my new friends and a new love for myself.”

Maggie Hubbard, Arlington



“Before I went on Y2I, I figured it was just going to be another trip, or a vacation. I was so, incredibly wrong. What I experienced instead was a life-changing, truly amazing journey that I will never forget. After Y2I, I look at Israel differently, and I look at my Jewish faith differently. Actually being in Israel taught me way more about the country than I would ever learn in a classroom. I feel more knowledgeable and enriched, and as a result, I feel more connected to Israel as a whole. Before the trip, I didn't feel all that connected to my religion, but now I truly understand what it means to be a Jew, and have a much greater appreciation towards my religion. Possibly the most valuable thing I gained from Israel, were friends. I formed incredibly strong bonds with both Americans and Israelis, and have created friendships that will last a lifetime. Israel was a life changing experience, and I can't wait to go back.”

Josh Hyman, Georgetown

“In everyone's life they experience something special, something they know that will change them forever. For me that experience was the Y2I, better known as Youth 2 Israel, trip. This trip gives pride to those who don't have any. It gives them a reason to want to go back to Israel and raise their children in a community where everyone feels connected and together. It really is something that I think is special to Judaism. Even though we are all spread about the world, we still believe in the same rules that were laid about over 2,000 years ago. With speakers from organizations such as Stand With Us and Honest Reporting I have learned to be proud of my country and how to defend it if need be. I have learned that no matter what, I have a second home that will welcome me if I need it. I believe that is a feeling that every person of the Jewish faith should feel, especially in an awkward time as our teenage years. This is why I think this trip is important for teens to go on.”

Arden Hyte, Marblehead

“Listening to insightful words, spoken with a passion to serve and advocate for the Jewish people, my life was completely changed for the better. My roommates at that time were sitting beside me in the hotel room, perseverating on what was just said. Then in that moment, I truly came to terms with what Y2I is all about: connecting Jewish teens with their Jewish heritage and the land of Israel. I saw the hope for the Jewish future. Y2I was an astonishing trip that not only enables Jewish teens to be proud of their religion, but embraces it. Combining Jews from America and Israel was an incredible opportunity to learn and grow from each other. I could not stop thinking about future life involving Israel. Immediately after returning home, I told my parents about my adventure and the friendships I created. I told them that Y2I was a gift and a privilege to be part of. For one of the first times in my life, I feel part of a larger community. The Israeli teens helped me realize that we are family and together, we can make a difference in this world. Personally, I am now more proud of my religion than ever before. I have a strong urge to give back to the Jewish community, and hopefully the land of Israel.”

Daniel Jacobson, Swampscott



“As a person, I have always felt confident with my religion, and felt that I had a strong sense of my Jewish identity. Even with all of these factors, nothing I had ever studied or heard about from others could have fully prepared me for what it was like to truly experience traveling across Israel and seeing all the beautiful sights first hand. 2016 Y2I gave me so many gifts, it’s nearly impossible to focus on just one. Before going to Israel, I knew what it meant to be Jewish. But after this trip, I have a proud new Jewish identity. No matter how many hours I spent learning and teaching Hebrew, or reading about Israel, or hearing what it means to be Jewish, I could never have been prepared for all the things I saw, did, and witnessed. Y2I left me with new Israel advocacy skills, lifelong friends, and hundreds of unforgettable memories. I am so grateful for this opportunity, and am looking forward to sharing the pride I now have for Israel with all of the members of the Jewish community here on the North Shore. This once in a lifetime experience truly changed who I will be as a person for the rest of my life.”

Halle Johnson, Beverly

“While my own experience in Israel is only a blink in time for the long history that Israel has endured, it was long enough to show me the importance of remembering Israel’s past and protecting its future. Our tours through monuments, historical sights, and museums gave me a vast amount of knowledge about the story of Israel. With this information I am now able to formulate a fuller picture of Israel’s struggle and what it has gone through. Just as important as learning about Israel’s history is protecting it from those who wish to smear its past. Our time with Charlotte from Stand With Us and Honest Reporting gave us the tools and guidance to defend Israel. The information given to us in order to protect Israel is certainly valuable, but without the education about Israel’s history, this information would have proven to be far less important. By understanding Israel’s story, motivation towards defending Israel becomes much easier through the connections between past and present that were created in order to secure the future. It is this pairing of information and instruction that made Y2I such an incredible trip.”

Harrison Kaplan, Newburyport

“Prior to the trip, to be honest, I seldom told people that I was Jewish. I did this because I was worried people would make fun of me due to past experiences when people have done so. However, this trip brought a whole new mindset, almost like I was a new person. The aftermath of this journey now makes me happy to be Jewish and to be able to stand up for my second country. Being able to defend all of the misassumptions and such from other people's views may be tough, however with all I learned from the seminars, presentations and conversations with the Israeli teens, I know that I will be able to at least try to do the right thing. Before this trip, I was quite pessimistic mainly because I didn't think the two weeks was going to help me connect more with my religion. To be able to express my true devotion for being Jewish wasn't shown until after this trip, and what I was able to connect with was outstanding.”

Dustin Koocher, Newburyport



“My Y2I experience impacted my life in the most meaningful way possible. I learned so much about the Israeli and Jewish cultures and met so many new friends I know I will stay close with for a long time. This trip was about connections. I feel so lucky to have connected so quickly with other teens and counselors, and I also instantly felt a connection with Israel and its people. Little did I know it would take a trip out of the country to become best friends with people who lived an hour away from me at the most. Most importantly, this trip unfurled the enormous amount of love I have for Israel. In all its beauty and history and holiness, I wouldn’t want any other place on the planet to be my home. I am so incredibly proud to be Jewish and to have said I’ve been to such an important place in history. I will never forget this trip, the people, the places, and especially all of the many memories that were made over the course of two weeks.”

Elana Kotler, Lynnfield

“On Sunday July 3rd, my life changed forever. I didn't know this at the time of course. No one knows when their life is going to change. Before my trip to Israel I was uninformed, unconnected and I didn't see how Israel really had anything to do with me. If we look at who I am now, you'd find a completely different person. I am educated and most importantly I am involved and feel strongly about my country. I have a home unlike any other across the world. To be honest, the existence of Israel had never been that important to me. Of course I had heard about going my whole life and was shown pictures and stories, but none of it meant much to me. I knew there was a conflict and Israel could possibly lose a battle and it'd be gone, but to me it was just sad. I was unconnected and couldn't see how this really affected my life. After my trip I have come home different. I am educated, I am passionate and most importantly I'm active. I have spoken to my rabbi, who is letting me do presentation on Shabbat. I've contacted every organization I could. I emailed my school, colleges, almost anyone I could. Israel has become one of the most important topics and places in my life. I am so thankful for my Y2I trip because it has given me a purpose, something to fight for. It's not just my battle, I am in it with some amazing teens and adults who shared my experience. I am in it with the Jewish people.”

Hannah Kotz Olszewski, Swampscott

“Growing up, Judaism has always been important to me whether it was going to services with my family, being a bar mitzvah, or participating in NFTY. However, I never felt a true personal connection with Israel. Throughout this life-changing trip I learned more about Israel than I ever had. The *Stand With Us* lectures by Charlotte and Momo really provided us with a greater understanding of the struggles Israel has gone through and continues to go through every day. We also learned that what we see on the news or learn about in school is not always what is truly happening in Israel. I have seen that we all must be advocates for Israel. If we are not, then the world will continue to have a biased view against Israelis because that is all they are taught. If we do not show them the daily horrors that Israel faces then they will never truly understand why we must defend the Jewish homeland of Israel. I will never forget the amazing sights we saw, the stories we heard, and the people I met, both American and Israeli. I cannot wait to tell my friends and family the stories I have from this life-changing trip and to show them the truths about Israel.”

Brian Krentzman, Mansfield



“Ever since I was relatively young, I remember loving Israel. As a child with both a profound interest in history and a strong Jewish upbringing, I always was fascinated by and drawn to Israel. I watched documentaries, I read books, and from afar I got to know and love my second homeland. As such, unlike many of the other teens I entered Y2I with a relatively detailed understanding of the situation and the history. However what I lacked was personal experience with the land. I had read extensively about it, but I had never really gotten to see and know the land or the people. For me, getting to know both the land and the people, even just a little bit, was the most rewarding and amazing part of my Youth to Israel experience, and it is an experience that I am extremely grateful for.”

Jake Levin, Concord

“Y2I accomplished a nearly impossible task. It forced me to face my fears. From the moment I got off the plane at Ben Gurion Airport, I had to adapt. In the first hour, waiting to get to the busses to our first hotel, I accomplished what scared me the most, I tried to making friends. After that, the trip was a series of nonstop challenges that I never imagined I could accomplish. I didn't break down, or back down like I thought I would. I even made friendships that could last a lifetime with people I never expected would want to be my friend. I can say that I've left so much of my fear behind in Israel. I got to come home a new person, ready to take on challenges. I brought home the strength to stand up for what is right. I learned I can't afford to back down when people say things, or make jokes at the expense of my Judaism, without knowledge. I always felt uncomfortable when people at my school made Nazi jokes, but never stood up and told them to stop. I know now that I have to defend my Jewish identity. Most importantly, I know that I need to make sure I can help explain and defend Israel, to those who don't understand and react only on what they see in the biased media, and don't try to look deeper. Going on Y2I was “life changing” for me, just as every major decision has been for me, just as I expected it to be, but also in unexpected ways. For me the best way to describe Y2I is eye-opening, awe-inspiring, and something that will make you a stronger person.”

Willie MackRosen, Marblehead

“My time spent in Israel was time I will never forget. At the first meeting, I heard “once in a lifetime trip” several times, At the time I did not know the true meaning of what that meant. That was until I landed back home in Tel Aviv. The thought of being so far away from home did not daze me until Shabbat at the Western Wall. A wave of emotion overcame me and I felt that this trip played a piece in my pursuit of happiness. All the places we went to, no matter if I enjoyed the activity or not, I enjoyed the presence of where I was. Being 5,000 miles away from home with 100 teens my age widened my eyes. I met people that lived only 5 minutes away from me. We found similar things in common besides our faith. The people I met are the living embodiments of the memories I had during this amazing trip. Memories may fade, but people will not, and with the strong friendships I built, the life of Israel lives on.”

Andrew Maglio, Lynnfield



“My trip to Israel was an important experience that was not only fun, but educational. Before my trip, I did not know very much about Israel. I did not often follow the news about it, and really only knew some basic facts about the location. While I was there I learned a great amount about not only the location, but also about my heritage as a Jewish teen. One of the many things that I enjoyed on the trip was hearing about Israel’s long history, and about all of the times it went through. I learned how important that small strip of land was to the history of the world. It was amazing to me how in Israel there were marvels to look at, both extremely new and old. Overall, I feel much more educated about Israel after this trip. Now having seen part of Israel, I have an image of what it truly is and why it is something that should be protected.”

Andrew Maldonado, Swampscott

“One of my favorite, if not my most favorite, place was visiting the Western Wall during Shabbat. Right when I walked in from above, and I could see the enormous populace, the great feeling swept in and blissfully dictated my soul. It was a feeling of immense jubilation almost to the point of euphoria. Then when I walked down, instead of looking from above, I was belonging and breathing beneath with the people. No longer was I a foreigner from away, but a native from nearby. The whole experience was extremely emotional and powerful. Seeing all of the people, ranging from Hasidic Jew to common pedestrian, was incredible, as they all, despite their differences, felt united. Hearing all of the surrounding sounds and prayers was exceptionally memorable. The extreme devotion to the Jewish faith, our Jewish faith, was something especially touching. It speaks to the importance of this religion, and that it will never, under any circumstances, die out. I realized that Judaism speaks to every single follower in a special, unique and different way. It is a transcending religion, one that speaks to the soul of every individual. It is definitely one of the most extraordinary places in the world. Israel is not just an ordinary land in the middle of conflict, that I had noticed in my youth. But, it’s a nation of great people, culture, language, and religion. It’s a nation of heart and spirit, of unity and compassion. It’s a nation of life.”

Sam Mayblyum, Swampscott

“There were many reasons why Y2I will leave a life lasting impact on me. For starters, I made plenty of new friends on the trip that I plan to keep in touch with them and hopefully get to see them again. The most import impact from Y2I I received was wisdom about Israel. With the experience I got from actually going to Israel and all the seminars we had from Charlotte, I now understand how to stand up for Israel. I can now say something to my friends or people in my community if they have a question about Israel or if they want to have a discussion about it. I am so glad I was able to experience this trip and I really hope I am able to visit Israel again. This trip really changed my life and I hope it continues to change others.”

Jake McIntire, Swampscott



“Before experiencing Israel on the Y2I trip this summer, my Jewish heritage, culture and religion had never meant as much to me. But ironically enough, in Israel I felt at home, comfortable and a part of the Y2I 2016 family. For the first time in my life, I found myself surrounded by friends that were all Jewish and grew up going to Hebrew school, attending bar mitzvahs and going to Passover seders just like I had. During the Y2I trip we got the opportunity to meet and talk with the Israeli teens. These conversations were eye opening to me. Through exploring Israel on this Y2I trip I discovered the strength and perseverance of the Israeli people. Despite all their hardships, Israelis stay positive and continue to love life and humanity for all its good and this is what made me proud to be Jewish. To be able to consider myself a part of a group of people that I admire so much fills me with every-growing pride and joy for the Jewish people.”

Kyra Michaels, Marblehead

“Before going on Y2I, I definitely believed many of the misconceptions about Israel. I thought that the Israeli people would dislike Americans because we weren’t all Orthodox, we didn’t wear long skirts or yarmulkes, and we didn’t keep kosher. Even after learning about the reality of Israel at every pre-trip meeting, I still couldn’t shake the image of a war-torn country from my head. It wasn’t until we landed at Ben Gurion Airport, that the reality that Israel is no different than any other country fully resonated for me. The more I saw and the more I learned about Israel and its people, the more I knew I wanted to come back with my family. This trip has transformed my perception of Israel from a picture painted in my head, to a reality. Going to Israel was a once in a lifetime experience that allowed me to venture outside of my comfort zone and not just do amazing things, but meet amazing people too. Y2I allowed me to make lifelong friends, create lifelong memories, and enjoy the experience of a lifetime. When I was two years old, I walked across a plastic blow-up map of Israel. Now, at the age of 16, I have hiked, climbed, camel-riden, swam, and floated my way across the beautiful land of Israel.”

Ali New, Marblehead

“My experience in Israel was extraordinary. The creation of new friends and new memories was unbelievable. However, the biggest impact that this trip has given me is my Israeli and Jewish pride. I have become remarkably more invested in my connection to the country after my Y2I trip. The presentations offered to us exposed me of the incredible advocacy methods for the nation of Israel and the people. I learned that Israel deserves a better reputation and image for how innovative and defensive the country is. After the *Stand With Us* program, my empathy grew for the people of Israel. It made me sick to see how the media and various other groups attacked Israel verbally and physically. I knew that if I didn’t advocate for the Israelis, my connection to the nation and the people would soon fade. I remembered back to what Charlotte had taught us. She told us that providing new information to one person helps because they will always come back to you to hear more information. I felt excited for the potential of what I could do.”

Nina Perel, Danvers



“One of the most life-changing experiences I had was my trip to Israel. Israel was full of history, and it was the history of the old city of Jerusalem that fascinated me the most. As I made my way to the Kotel (Western Wall) what I saw changed my views of the Jewish people, and my life in a way that it so difficult for me to put into words. There were thousands of Jews standing by the wall praying together. It didn’t matter if they were Orthodox, Reformed, or Conservative. Their religious diversities were all united by the holiest site of worship in Judaism. As I got closer to the Western Wall, I could feel an immediate connection to my religion and its past. As Shabbat approached the vibe at the Kotel changed. The number of people went from what felt like hundreds to thousands. I couldn’t believe how connected everyone appeared as they were hugging and dancing together. I was not surprised to see the overwhelming numbers of Jews happy that they were in their homeland, and at the holiest site in Jewish history. My most powerful walk in life will definitely be the one I took to the Kotel on that memorable day. I feel so blessed to have had this experience because I knew traveling to Israel with autism could be challenging for me. Israel was full of history, experiences and joy, and I felt like I was home. I will always be thankful to the Lappin Foundation for giving kids like me the gift of traveling to Israel.”

Ross Pergament, Middleton

“Not only were the people amazing but so was the country itself. The view of the sunrise and the surrounding area from Mount Masada was astounding. The baby blue waters of the Dead Sea were nicer than any I had ever seen before. The view of Jerusalem from a nearby mountain was also quite beautiful. Even the views from our bus windows were breathtaking at times. Everything about the country was truly amazing. Now that I have firsthand experience in Israel I can tell others about the country a lot more meaningfully. I can also use my personal experience and the experiences of people I met to advocate for Israel instead of just what I am told and what I read online about the country. I also plan on returning to Israel as many times as possible throughout the rest of my life to expand on my knowledge and ability to advocate for the country.”

Mason Quintero, Marblehead

“Before my trip to Israel, advocacy for the State was never on my mind. I would always just have debates on racism or gay rights, but advocating for Israel was never top of the list. I never listened to the news so I never was educated on the State of Israel. I never understood the real issues Israel faced until I was there for two weeks. Listening to Charlotte from “Stand With Us” and hearing her personal stories and her pride and love for Israel made me think of what I could do to better advocate for Israel. After hearing and learning a lot about Israel, I have decided I want to be an Israel advocate and inform people on what I believe and share what wonderful things Israel has created and the advancements they have brought to our world. I still remember when I got off the plane in Israel and one man was standing there welcoming us home. At first, we didn’t know why he was there, but the last night we were in Israel he came to see us and he gave a little speech and told us why he was there and it just made me so happy to know and to be able to call myself a Jew and to know I have a second home.”

Nadia Reed, Peabody



“Y2I impacted my life in countless ways. First and foremost, it brought a holy and sacred unbreakable bond with not only the land of Israel but its people, my people. I can truly say I am a Zionist and I know what that means. It happened the moment I landed in Israel. Even though I was exhausted, as soon as I stepped foot in the airport a huge smile grew across my face and I was singing all through the customs area. I felt like I was going to visit my grandparents and cousins that I haven't seen in a long time. I felt connected to Israel in such a way that I've never felt before. I felt this excitement, no fear, no trouble in the world existed, I felt safe. I felt welcomed. The trip pushed me to new personal boundaries physically, emotionally and spiritually. Emotionally, I became a new Jonathan. My shyness melted away. I was truly happy being in Israel. When I went to the Western Wall, I felt a strong spiritual connection between me and the Wall. It is something that I can't put into words but something I will treasure for the rest of my life. Y2I also gave me a second family. I felt connected to a multitude of people and made so many new friendships. I learned so much by attending the Israel advocacy programs with Charlotte from Stand With Us . And the great Momo told us, that, "Us Jews are family and we need to look out for each other." This really got to me. My parents always told me that but now I really feel it. Israel has my love and support and I cannot wait to go back.”

Jonathan Resnic, Swampscott

“Welcome home. These were the first two words that were addressed to me in Israel. At the time, it made no sense to why anyone would say welcome home to a boy who had never step foot in Israel, or anywhere near. I cannot explain how I felt towards that welcoming, but all I can say is that these two words were some of the most salient words that were ever addressed towards me. These words were the main thing I took away with me from this trip. The Western Wall was undoubtedly the most incredible place I have ever been too. I always remembered reading about it in history class, and it never meant anything to me. It was just words on paper. I never thought I would be touching it, and praying in the presence of the Wall, and hundreds of different Jews from all around the world. Here, is where I discovered the meaning of the trip, as well as my Jewish identity. It was more than just praying to an old wall, but I was praying to the remains of a struggle. A struggle that the Jews have faced for thousands of years. Exiled, slaughtered, exploited, etc. The Wall showed me that after all these years of hardship, as a religion, culture, and nation, here we were, as one, praying in a place designated just to us. A place we fought for, for centuries, and a place we continue to fight for today. I could not stop looking around, seeing my friends and fellow Jews praying and crying. It made me so elated, and beyond grateful and there I realized that this trip was not so much of a vacation, but truly a trip of a lifetime. I can ask of no greater gift than this trip. The experiences I have gone through, and the friends I have made will be with me my whole life.”

Isak Ring, Norwell



“Y2I has had a huge impact on my life by changing my idea of Israel and the people there. Before I was on this trip, I always pictured Israel as a dangerous place where there was always terrorist attacks happening. I thought that everyone there was constantly scared because of all the bad things happening there. Now that I've been there, I see it completely different than I had before. I now will always remember it as a very safe place that has better security than any other place I've ever been too. It is clear that Y2I has had a huge impact on my life, with changing my perspective of Israel. It's a beautiful place that I believe everyone should get a chance to visit, because of all the amazing sites and the people. The trip is a life changing experience, and makes you realize that what they say in the media isn't the whole truth most of the time. I was scared to go at first because of the media's stories, but felt very safe when I got there. From now on, I will start advocating for Israel since I have been there, and can mention that it's absolutely nothing like the news describes it.”

Madi Roach, Chestnut Hill

“Going on this trip was one of the best experiences of my life, and I'm so excited I went on this once in a lifetime trip. Before this trip I never thought being Jewish was a big deal and I would just go to Temple on the High Holidays and celebrate with my family. I was just going through the motions of being Jewish. I never embraced my Judaism. After going to Israel I have a completely different view on being Jewish, and I have become a proud Jew due to this trip.”

Alex Rosen, Marblehead

“I always considered myself a Jew; however I never before considered exactly which aspects of Judaism were important to me. Visiting a place that I had never been to, but I will now have a forever connection to, was not what I was expecting from my visit to Israel. From visiting the historic Golan Heights to the old city of Jerusalem, each experience was unique and showed me a part of my history, my connection to Israel and my Judaism that I had never really known. Wherever you go in Israel there are thousands of years of history standing before you. It was my history, all of our history.”

Andrew Schutzman, Beverly

“I identify as Jewish, I was born and raised Jewish, I will live my life and likely raise my children Jewish as well. Israel is the Jewish homeland. It is my home, and having gone there, it feels like home. This trip brought me to a place I was afraid to go to because of what the world says happens over there, and I fell in love. I fell in love with this land that my people have dreamed of returning to for thousands of years, that my people have fought and died and suffered to get and keep hold of. Israel is a beautiful place and though I had never been there before it really did feel comfortable and familiar, like coming home. I walked down the streets of Israel proudly wearing my Star of David necklace and I felt at home. To me Israel is now a place of friendship and comfort, of acceptance and family. This trip has helped me to grow up, no matter how childish I may have acted during it, and I know I have made friends that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Israel is where this all happened. It is a safe home, and a place to grow, one where wishes and hopes and dreams can become reality.”

Jesse Schwed, Marblehead



“Before my trip, I lacked any knowledge about Israel. All I understood was that my parents and family supported Israel, and therefore I should as well. I didn't understand that Israel had won the War of Independence, a war it hadn't waged. I didn't understand that Israel supplies the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with water, food, electricity, and all other basic living necessities. I didn't recognize that Israel is the only Democracy in the Middle East. I assumed this trip would be fun, but I didn't realize it would strengthen my Zionist connections so deeply, and will me to become an advocate for Israel and her people. Recently, in my town and in the greater North Shore area, there have been a slew of anti-Semitic actions. I watched the fallout from each one, standing quietly upset. Sometimes, I would be daring enough to broach the existence of anti-Semitism in a conversation with my friends. Silence was more often a choice for me. Israel taught me to not just accept my heritage, but to be proud of it. Already, I've noticed myself sharing stories and facts supporting Israel and the Jewish people. My friends have noted it too, finding more interest in Israel and supporting our cause. I never realized how little I knew about the conflict until I learned more. Now, I have a thirst for knowledge and need to protect our homeland. I now yearn for the day I return to Israel and hope to learn Hebrew. Additionally, I wish to further my advocacy education, in hopes of one day educating my whole school. I have never felt so accepted and free as when I was in Israel. I now feel proud of my Jewish ties and support of Israel.” Tenley Seidel, Swampscott

“What's different about Y2I is that the people will accept you. Doesn't matter who you are, your age, or anything. They will accept you. There were no labels or different groups of people, as Momo said, we are one family. Y2I has truly changed my perspective of Israel, made me proud of who I am, and have confidence to stand up to people who say anything negative about Israel or Jews. I miss all my friends that I had an excellent time with, and miss Israel. I am absolutely positive that I will go back to Israel, meet up with friends, and explore Israel again, because there is always something to learn, and to do in Israel. Sababa.” Ari Shteynberg, Marblehead

Early on in the trip, I had asked Rachel, one of the two teen leaders on the trip, what her favorite part of the 2015 trip was. She had told me that the people she met were the best part. Now back home and done, I have to agree with her that the people were undeniably the best part. Overall, the trip didn't change how religious I was, nor did it change how often I went to Saturday services. However, it did change my look on people and how they work.” Samantha Silverman, Swampscott



“If you asked me what my Jewish identity was before the trip, I most likely would have laughed or just said I didn't know. When I arrived in Israel after an exhausting 12 hour flight, my favorite memory of my trip happened. After getting off the plane and walking a little farther inside the airport, a man reached out his hand and said two words that changed my life. "Welcome Home." By the end of the trip, I understand why he said that. Israel is my home. Israel is a welcoming country with its arms wide open for Jews all over the world, along with other religions and ethnicities. If there's anything I want you to take away from this essay is to know that being in Israel has given me strive to be Jewish and to advocate for Israel and its rights as a Jewish state and even a state at all. I don't say I'm Jewish because that's what my parents are. I don't say I'm Jewish because that's how I was brought up. I'm Jewish because Israel is my home and I want to be Jewish. Many people will take other life lessons out of this trip as I have taken many more myself, but thanks to this amazing trip I am now proud to say; My name is Sophie Silverman, and I'm a proud Jew.”

Sophie Silverman, Peabody

“Before my trip I never felt enthusiastic about my religion, or cared about it. I went to Hebrew school, and I'm a teacher's assistant there, and I would go to temple on all the important holidays, but still never felt a connection. Ever since the trip though I am proud to be a Jew, and would defend it against anyone who disrespects it. Being a Jew isn't just a religion; it's being a part of a community. A community you can always count on. One of my favorite memories in Israel was when we went to the Western Wall on Shabbat, and I witnessed a man ask a group of my friends to dinner. He was a stranger, yet we had a common bond. A bond of Judaism, and because of it we didn't feel like strangers. My job now as a proud Jew is to stick up for my country and people, and to educate the ignorant public. Growing up near DC there's every type of race, and religion. I've experienced anti-Semitism from elementary school, to high school. But now I have the tools to stand up for myself, and I thank Y2I for giving me those tools.”

Jessica Simon, Virginia

“I did not have half as much knowledge for the Jewish religion until I visited Israel. I learned more about the culture, the food, and the people of Israel. Israel means so much to me now. I have realized I have a second home and a place I can go where everyone will be accepting of me. It is a place of comfort, peace and happiness. Everyone in Israel is family and that is important to me. Visiting Israel gave me such a strong passion for the religion and I now feel like it is my job to defend the country. When I hear someone talking about Israel in a good or bad way I will engage in their conversation. I also learned that keeping your children Jewish is extremely important. Average family has 3 kids. In 3 generations you have already created 27 Jewish people by keeping your kids Jewish. If every family does that the Jewish population will increase not decrease. Going to Israel was the most fun I have ever had and I hope to go back again someday.”

Joel Skaff, Newburyport



“My Y2I experience was life changing for me in many ways. This whole trip has changed my views on the world, who I am and what I can do to help change this world. I loved visiting the place I have heard about my whole life in Temple. I didn’t know for sure what to expect but I had a feeling I would love it. While touring, learning and looking at the beautiful views I fell quickly in love with this land. Y2I definitely had a major impact on my Jewish Identity. I have always been proud of who I was, but after being on this trip I now have a huge amount of pride for being Jewish. Being in Israel gave me a different perspective on life. Meeting my new Israeli teen friends, and after the Stand With Us presentations, I really got a new view on how people think about Israel and how we can all change that. I truly came to love this country and knowing how misinformed people are is really sad. I want to tell everybody my story about visiting this beautiful place and how much I loved it. I want to get involved with Stand With Us and stand up for this country I love. Y2I was an amazing experience for me and it really was life changing.”

Ashley Sliva, Peabody

“Before going on Y2I, I had never thought about my Jewish identity or my connection to Israel. Israel was just the Jewish country in the Middle East, and Judaism was just a religion that my family practiced, even though we stopped going to temple when I was six years old. That was it. I had no connection to Israel. I originally only saw Y2I as a chance to go on a trip to a different country. I didn’t think that it would change me, but I couldn’t have been more wrong. Y2I was not only a great trip, but it completely changed my views on Israel and being Jewish. I now have pride in my Jewish identity, and when the time comes I would like for my children to feel the same way. In addition, I now see the importance of having Israel as a Jewish state. Israel is now a part of my life and I plan to help defend it. This trip helped me truly understand what it meant when I was told “Welcome home” in the Tel Aviv airport and was one of the best experiences of my life.”

Adam Smith, Marblehead

“This trip was not about discovering WHAT Israel is, it was about discovering WHO Israel is, and Y2I was able to show me the real people of Israel. Y2I introduced me to some of the most amazing people I had ever met, and it taught me that Israeli teens aren’t that much different than us. We liked the same music, played the same sports, even read the same books! Communication was not a problem, and we were able to have very deep conversations about the challenges faced by both American and Israeli teenagers. The incredible thing was, even though they face international scrutiny and threats of internal violence on a daily basis, they were able to relate to and talk to us about our troubles in our own communities. This trip taught me that however different we may seem, Americans and Israelis are really quite similar, and these new friends made me realize that Israel is as much my home as America. Therefore I have promised to use the knowledge I learned in our advocacy training to stand up for Israel and my new friends whenever I can. If there was only one thing the Israeli teens wanted us to know and remember, it was that we are family. All of us, no matter our age, our race, gender, or nationality. We are Jews, and thanks to Y2I, I can stand up for my family and help make a difference.”

Jonathan Soferr, Beverly



“For such a small place, Israel made such a big impact on my life. Whether it be the people, the culture, or the history, everything about Israel made me feel at home. I know that had I not gone to Israel with Y2I, I definitely would not be who I am. Before going on Y2I, I was very skeptical about Israel and traveling to a foreign country with people I barely knew. To be honest, when I thought of Israel, I imagined desert with stone houses and some camels. I could not have been more wrong. When we first stepped off the plane, we were literally “welcomed home”, and that’s when it all connected for me. At that moment, I truly felt that I was in a place where being a Jew was worn with pride. Before Y2I, I was never really passionate about Israel and I didn't know that much about it either, but I never thought about it as a country that needed help. Again, I was wrong. I learned from these lectures about the situation that Israel is in with its bordering countries, and what kind of information that is being passed around. I know now, how to be a good advocate for Israel and how educate people that might have anti-semitic views. Getting to explore Israel as well as the lectures, allowed me to open my eyes and realize how important advocating for Israel really is.”

Carly Sontz, Marblehead

“I have to admit, going to Israel scared me and I had no interest in going. I have never been someone that is super proud of being Jewish and brings it up every chance I get, but going to Israel changed me. I never felt a strong connection with being Jewish or felt like I had to stand up for myself if someone made a joke about being Jewish because I never really cared too much. After being in Israel for 2 weeks, having our group discussions and talking with the Israelis, it made me realize how proud I am to be Jewish. We are only about .2% of the world population and I am extremely proud to be part of that.”

Libby Sugarman, Marblehead

“I had no idea at the time that this trip would not only connect me to other Jewish teens but also reconnect me to Israel in a whole new way. Before this Y2I trip I didn't really feel the specialness of Israel. To me Israel was special because I grew up there, but it's real specialness, as the homeland and the tie that connects all Jewish people in the world, I did not discover until after my amazing experience on this Y2I 2016 trip. Now I truly feel that Israel is my home forever, a home I can always come back too. Because of this 2016 Y2I, I now have friends in so many places, that I know will always be there for me. Even on the last day of the trip, I was still making new friends. Throughout the trip we were meeting new people and learning so many things about Israel and Judaism and having fun doing it. I am proud of my Jewish identity and because of what I learned on this trip, I can now defend and help make changes to how people see Israel and Jews. This trip might have only been two weeks of my life, but it changed everything about it! I will try my best to take everything I've learned and apply it to make a difference for Israel and for the Jewish People all over the world.”

Naomi Weisman, Beverly

“Israel means much more now than it ever did before this trip. Israel is now a second home to me that I plan on taking my whole family to visit and introduce to them. The Israelis are some of the kindest and friendliest people I have ever met. After talking with some of the Israeli teens I realized all the issues they face every day and how different my worries are from theirs. But we also share some of the same likes and most importantly we are all Jewish. The trip has had an enormous impact on my life. I am now extremely proud of my religion and cannot wait to become more involved.”

Rachael Weiss, Swampscott



“At the beginning of our Y2I trip I was a bit skeptical about the experience. Although I wasn't very religious, I was still anxious to take part in the Jewish culture in Israel. Over the course of the two weeks Israel became to feel like a second home. The overwhelming hospitality from the Israeli teens was comforting, especially on the long bus rides. The rich culture and diversity in Israel impacted my views on Israel heavily. Thanks to the many speakers we met, including Charlotte from Stand With Us, I was informed and properly educated on the history of Israel and how to advocate for it.”

Troy Welling, Salem

“The Y2I trip sent me to the Western Wall. The counselors on the trip just told us to do whatever we want to do for the hour. I used that hour for myself. Right as I got there my instincts were telling me to put a Teflin on and kiss that Wall. I don't know if I necessarily talked to God. I was talking to myself but in a way I found out about myself, who I am and what my roots are. It was a time for me to stop and think, and talk to something that I can't explain. I felt as if I was connected to the way I was raised the whole time. As I was touching the Wall, talking to God, I learned about myself and who I really am. I could go on and on how it made me feel but it feels personal to me. I can't even describe it and I'm still putting together how it enhanced my identity. I don't feel any more religious, but I feel more connected to my Jewish and Israeli roots. I want to thank peers, the counselors and the Lappin Foundation for helping me to enhance my Jewish identity.”

Afik Zaarur, Brookline

“On the trip we discussed many topics regarding Israel advocacy and the importance of raising your children Jewish, which is the topic that I want to explore more. All my life my parents had told me that I needed to marry someone Jewish and make sure that I raise my kids Jewish, and I never totally understood why that was so important to them. Y2I got me to understand just how important this is and why it was my duty. On the trip we had a talk with a man called Shlomo “Momo”. He talked to us about how Israel and the Jewish people in America are brothers and sisters who face similar problems. He talked about how the Jewish people are less than 1 percent of the world's population and we somehow have around 1/3 of the Nobel prizes in total. This fact totally astonished me, and when he talked about how many Jewish people that there could've been had the Holocaust not happened, it made me think about how much talent and culture was lost, not with just the initial 6 million, but with their children and grandchildren, the total number of people lost to the Holocaust can never actually be counted. After this talk I fully understood that it was my duty to marry and raise my children Jewish because if I don't then slowly the Jewish people will not be a people anymore, and being one of the most prolific people in the world that would be a huge tragedy. Another very important thing that I gained from my Y2I was a deep sense that Israel is my home. Y2I also taught me that it is also my responsibility to defend Israel in the eyes of the world, giving me the tools necessary to advocate for Israel at my school and on any future college campuses.

Liad Zafrani, Swampscott



“Before my trip to Israel, advocacy for Israel was never on my radar of things to advocate for. I was always interested in large debates such as international racism and sexism because I felt a deep connection to both topics, but the Israeli conflict was never “my problem”, despite the fact I identified as Jewish. The presentations and lessons provided by the wonderful speakers such as Charlotte from “Stand With Us” or Shlomo Lifshitz opened my eyes to a new topic I felt passionate about: advocacy for Israel. Because of my journey to Israel, I can say, “I am Jewish.” with more pride than I would have before. I have a more positive outlook on marrying and raising my children Jewish, considering before the trip it was not an important aspect of my future. Despite battling homesickness for the first few days in Israel, the homesickness towards Israel is much stronger than I planned to face. I am excited to start the new chapter of my life where I am more active and involved in the Jewish community. I am also excited to begin advocating for Israel with a newfound pride and connection.” Mae-Lou Zaleski, Danvers