

2017 Y2I
Excerpts of Post-trip Reflections

I was surprised by how similar Israel was compared to the United States. I felt very comfortable because the people who live there were very welcoming. I learned a lot more about Israel and its history and technology. I also learned more about antisemitism. I was not aware of the large amount of antisemitism in my own town. Now that I know so much more about Israel from seeing it, meeting Israelis, and hearing different perspectives from lots of people, I have more knowledge on how to defend Israel if I ever need to. I didn't really understand what it meant to be Jewish before I went and learned on this trip. Now I have a better understanding of the people, place, and culture. **Molly Albert, Marblehead**

Israel came alive. It became part of me. It specifically started in Jerusalem. It was a living continuum of historical greatness and modern wonder. Modern Jerusalem reminded me that even in a young country such as Israel, we will not be held back. We build, create and lead in technologies. How did Y2I impact me? It provided me with a living perspective of Judaism that I only read about in books and could not truly connect with. It expanded my Jewish base of friends and my experience as a Jew. It opened my eyes to history and provided me with an in-depth look of who I am, a Jewish teen. **Joshua Allen, Danvers**

Israel wasn't much more than a foreign country to me. While I knew that Israel is the Jewish homeland, it never truly felt that way to me personally. Now, after spending two weeks in Israel, I came to understand how Israel is the Jewish homeland, thus my homeland. Yes I had learned about that in Hebrew School, but being there just made it much more real to me. My understanding of Israel as my Jewish homeland has drastically increased. Spending time in Old City Jerusalem really made me aware of how Jewish I feel. **Alyssa Ardai, Malden**

This trip enhanced my Jewish identity so much. Y2I made a huge impact on my life. I feel like it just changed me as a person after learning all about what is actually happening there and what the people are like. Before the trip, every time one of my friends made a joke about being Jewish, I usually just let it slide. But now I haven't let a single joke pass. I think it is very important to stay Jewish and to raise children Jewish. I will raise my kids Jewish no matter what, and I will make my kids raise their kids Jewish and so on. I will not be the one to stop it in my family. After this trip, I can walk around proudly and be loud about it, that I am Jewish. **Michael Bader, Peabody**

Y2I has made me realize that being a Jew is something to be proud of. Before going on the trip I did not consider myself Jewish. Listening to all the speakers and thinking about their messages was very impactful and changed my Jewish self. Learning about Israel and how much we have overcome made me appreciative. Nobody realizes how amazing and life changing Israel is until they truly come in contact with it, and that's what Y2I did. Every time I encounter someone who thinks poorly of Israel just because they have heard something untrue, I can defend Israel. Y2I has created relationships that will last a lifetime, and I will never forget this amazing experience. **Erica Blanch, Danvers**

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It's hard to describe the almost immediate sense of belonging that you get when you walk around the streets of Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem. Comfortable is the best way to describe it, as if there is no fear. Being Jewish means representing those who prayed for thousands of years towards the Western Wall dreaming of one day returning home. We, as one of the generations born into the free nation of Israel, need to be proud Jews and stand for those who laid down their lives for Israel to exist. **Ethan Block, Georgetown**

After the trip, Israel means quite a lot to me, without a doubt, more so than beforehand. The people are what give Israel meaning to me. You are not a passerby or a tourist, but a member of the community and ultimately the family. You can look at yourself as insignificant in the scale of time, but also as important, as you are the next generation to visit the holy land, continuing the thousand year chain of generations leading to you. Y2I was not just any other trip or vacation, but I would describe it as a journey. Not one through harsh wilderness and various trials, but one towards self-development and realizations. After Y2I, Israel is not just another country, Israel is home. **Jared Book, Lynnfield**

Israel is a place that you can call home at any time you need, or escape to a place where within 100 feet, you could find a Jewish person and they will help with anything asked, with no questions asked. What Israel means to me is that it's a place I need to protect. It's a place where family is everywhere. I realized for any Jew, Israel is home and the people around you are family. Israel means a place where the Jewish people have been for thousands of years. You may call your home in the U.S. home, but your ancestors have not been in that home for thousands of years. Your ancestors didn't live in Marblehead, Swampscott, or even the North Shore. They lived in Israel, the place where I stood for two weeks. **Jacob Bornstein, Marblehead**

Before I visited my second home (Israel), being a Jew meant celebrating Jewish holidays and a free trip to Israel on Birthright. After being exposed to real Israelis and the multitudinous speakers throughout the trip, I now understand that being Jewish is so much more than that. It is my personal duty, along with other modern Jews, to represent my Jewish culture with pride, and spread knowledge of what Zionism really means. Another step that I plan to take in helping to preserve Judaism is to raise my children Jewish. If every millennial Jew raises a few children Jewish, the number of Jews will rise exponentially, which is a huge help to promote our culture. Thank you to everyone who made it possible for me to go on this life-changing trip. It has given me personal knowledge and exposed me to my responsibility as an active Jew. **Harry Bovee, Newburyport**

On our last night in Israel, I was asked what I would leave behind in Israel and what I would take home with me. I realized that I had left behind a hindering sense of shame and pride. I was no longer afraid to fully express my appreciation and love for those whom I hold dear to me. In Israel, I was shown how to fully love and cherish people I am close to without shame. The fact that here so many were unable to express their love before their lives were cut short shocked me into this new reality. To the United States, I brought with me a new mindset; one of total happiness, appreciation and love. Israel has shown me how to embrace and convey my emotions to truly connect with others. **Eleanore Brown, Beverly**

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The Israelis said that standing up for Israel at my school and in my town is as helpful as what they are doing. One of my good Israeli friends told me that if I stand up to every negative thing said about Israel then I will have made a huge impact on protecting Israel and protecting my friends. I feel as if I can help Israel and support my good Israeli friends even though I am an 11-hour plane ride away. I can't wait to talk to the Israelis when we are older about their experiences in the army and how they felt serving their precious country. And, I hope that I have some stories to share with them about how I stood up for Israel. **Cam Burke, Swampscott**

Y2I was a life changing experience for me and really opened my heart to the situation that is happening in Israel. This experience really made me open my heart to see the importance of raising my future child Jewish. I believe that it is a necessity to raise my child Jewish because of the decrease in Jewish people in the world. The Jewish culture has decreased in population majorly over the past 50 years. I feel that more and more people have to start raising their kids Jewish or else the Jewish religion will be in danger of extinction. I also wanted my child to experience a true homeland where they can go at any time and be accepted. Being Jewish is much more than just following a religion. It's being part of a loving culture that will help you at a time of need. **Cole Cassidy, Swampscott**

Visiting Israel for the first time made me realize why it is important to raise my children Jewish and stand up for Israel back home and at school. I have learned that raising my children Jewish is very important in order to keep the Jewish population growing. Israel is surrounded by enemies and is defending itself every day. In the United States, students in high schools and colleges have been spreading anti-semitic messages and lies about Israel. My Israeli friends and mentors have taught me how to respond to that and defend Israel. Using these techniques that I was taught and defending Israel is more important to me now because I will take it personally. The next time I hear somebody insulting or telling lies about Israel or Jews, I will think of my Israeli friends and the great time I had in my second home before thinking of a thoughtful response to teach the other person about the great State of Israel. **Eli Cohen, Marblehead**

I believe it is extremely important to stay Jewish and raise my children Jewish. Going to Israel has made me realize there is a place where I will always be welcomed. Raising my children Jewish will mean that they will have a place that always welcomes them to be with people like them. The experience Y2I gave me was life changing and I hope my children will get to experience Israel at a young age as I did. **Katie Cohen, Peabody**

I consider 2017 Y2I to be a life changing experience. My Jewish identity was enhanced, I have been inspired to stand up for Israel, and I went outside of my comfort zone on many adventures in the past two weeks. Although all these things are a big deal, they will not be the first thing I think of when I look back on the trip. What makes this trip so life changing to me is the life-long friendships I created. **Sophie Collins, Marblehead**

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There were many parts of the trip that I loved for one reason or another, but one of the most meaningful things for me was when we went to the Western Wall. It was extra special when we went on Shabbat. There were so many people there, which made me think in awe about how many people actually come to this same place to share and experience what I was experiencing. People were singing songs and dancing and everybody could and did join in if they wanted. Everyone was welcome. I am most appreciative that I was able to experience such a meaningful moment at the Western Wall during Shabbat.

Kyle Comeau, Georgetown

The best and most emotional part of the trip with the Israeli teens was at the end in the last hotel in Ma'ale HaHamisha, when we watched a documentary about the IDF and witnessed what our friends would soon be doing with their lives. After taking it all in and talking about it in our counselor groups, my friends and I were all a little bit emotional because we all realized that we would be leaving our new friends and not be seeing them for a very long time and possibly never again. My next favorite experience while in Israel would be visiting the Western Wall three times. When we went during the day the first two times it was meaningful for me to go and touch and pray at the Wall for the very first time, but nothing compares to going during Shabbat. We got to the Wall. Although I did not get to be right in front of the Wall for that long, this was definitely one of the highlights of the trip because just standing back looking at the Wall and realizing how many people have been in your place and how much the Wall has gone through and how much people went through to keep it standing.

Jake Culliton, Swampscott

My favorite part of the trip was probably the time we spent in Jerusalem. During the day, you really feel how ancient it is, especially through our first visit to the Western Wall. Everything felt as though it could tell a story, and I felt really connected to all of our Jewish ancestors who had also made the long and much-anticipated journey to the Wall. I also enjoyed our Shabbat trip to the Wall, when so many more were gathered there than during the day, and it made everyone feel so proud to be Jewish. Y2I allowed me to reconnect with my Jewish culture, make new friends, and have an adventure like no other.

Naomi Culliton, Swampscott

Going to Israel was the best decision I made in my life. Not only did it help me connect to my Jewish roots, but in fact helped me with making lots of new friends. Even though I only went to Israel for two weeks that was enough to make me appreciate my life and the people in my life more. Israel is now my favorite place in the whole world. I love that people are so nice, understanding, and caring. Israel is now my home and I love it and pray for its peace every day. Israel is not just a place for vacation anymore. It's evolved to me describing it as a place to worship, and a place to be inspired by the people and the country itself. When I look back on my experience, being in Israel was the most important and inspiring thing that I have ever done.

Nina Cushinsky, Marblehead

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Growing up, I had been surrounded by Israeli and Jewish culture-- my mother constantly spoke Hebrew with family, I ate Israeli treats like Bamba and Crembo as snacks, and celebrated holidays that none of my other friends celebrated. However, I didn't feel truly connected with that part of my family and my story. I felt like it was... well, 6,000 miles away from me and not a part of my life—two puzzle pieces that weren't connected. Being able to truly understand what it meant to be in Israel was the first part of connecting it back to my life back at home. Something I had appreciated the most while on the trip was being educated on topics such as the Jewish religion and the Palestinian conflict. Learning about these topics from another person's perspective was very helpful to me, especially in the classroom-like environment. These topics are often put to the side in public schools, if even talked about at all. I truly feel that I have a much better understanding of the country, its religion, and its conflicts more than I ever did before, and I appreciate learning them because they are important pieces in the world.

Maya D'Amico, Lynn

Boaz Barshay, a speaker at the State of Mind Center in Tel Aviv, said one thing that immediately got me thinking of an answer: "There is a reason you came to Israel. You need to find the reason". I made it my mission to find the reason that I was in Israel. What I didn't know, though, was that I'd find it somewhere I would never expect; the Western Wall. It was Shabbat in Israel, and the group went to the Wall to join in the Shabbat festivities there. My friends wanted to join a group that was singing and dancing, and reluctantly, I joined in as well. We all knew the same songs and dances, and had an absolute blast dancing around in circles. In that moment, I felt the most spiritual and calm I have ever felt. I remember looking up at the Wall that day and actually realizing where I was and who I was with. I wasn't with the seven Jewish kids in Gloucester. I was with people from all over the globe who were Jewish and had traveled to Jerusalem to have Shabbat at the Western Wall. Going on the Y2I trip made me realize that being Jewish doesn't mean I'm alone. **Madison Dempsey, Gloucester**

Despite millennia of non-stop mistreatment, Judaism has always prevailed. The country of Israel and its people are the predominant sign of this fighting spirit ingrained within the Jewish people. Being in the country made me realize how remarkable the Jewish people truly are. Judaism balances new and old. By adapting traditions to the time, Judaism has been able to continue existing for over 3,000 years. And Israel, the Jewish homeland, has served and serves as both a center for knowledge and thought, but also as a refuge, just as Masada once did. But today's Judaism is different from the Judaism of those who escaped to their mountain fortress in the desert. Today Jews do not need to hide, and instead are leaders in technology, medicine, science, entertainment, social justice and education. By using both a mix of old traditions and new innovations, Jews are able to be so successful and resilient. Judaism and Israel cannot exist without both new and old. For me, Tel Aviv represents the new, focusing on technology and the future. Jerusalem represents the old, with its traditions and deep ties to the past. No matter what the statistics say about how small the population of Jews is, I know that our resilience is what will keep Judaism alive. **Rebecca Dowd, Gloucester**

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This trip changed my view on Israel. It showed me that I always had a second home to come to and it helped me realize what Judaism actually meant to me. I feel like I have a second family now because of this trip and I am very grateful I was able to experience this with all of my new amazing friends. **Michaela Edelstein, Manchester**

I really enjoyed my Y2I experience and had a lot of fun, but it also reinforced my belief that I need to raise my children Jewish. I was intending to raise my children Jewish before the Y2I 2017 trip, but the visit to Israel made me more proud to raise my children Jewish. While I already knew of the value of Israel and supported it, this trip gave me a firsthand look at Israel and further convinced me beyond a doubt that Israel is necessary for the survival of the Jewish people and that all Jews have a duty to help and defend Israel, whether in the United States, Russia, England, or Israel itself. **Ben Farfel, Marblehead**

This Y2I experience did not just impact my life, it completely changed it. When I first arrived in Israel I had no idea the importance of the Jewish culture. But as we ventured through the cities, I realized that being part of the Jewish community is a gift. I hope everyone who was with me on the trip had felt as if they were home. I most definitely did. Immediately after I stepped off that plane I had this feeling that I belonged. **Heather Feinberg, Lynnfield**

It's funny to me how two weeks thousands of miles away from home can change you. After scaling Masada, visiting the City of David, staying in various beautiful hotels, going to the Western Wall, learning more about my Judaism, I finally realize how blessed I am to be Jewish. Honestly, I couldn't have come home changed and more happy all because of one person. Someone I now know as the man with a big heart to send hundreds of kids to their homeland. I couldn't have come home a changed Jesse Finn if it weren't for Dr. Lappin himself. **Jesse Finn, Andover**

Like most 16-year-olds, I think I know everything, and even if I don't, I pretend that I do. That is also how I viewed being Jewish until going to Israel. Whether it's to God, or to the thousands of years of history, the connection of Jerusalem to everything made me realize what I was missing in being a Jew. I was missing the connection to the struggle faced by my ancestors, and that being a Jew goes beyond not eating cheeseburgers. My journey to Israel taught me so much about something I thought I already knew everything about, and reminded me that there is so much I still do not know. **Aveen Forman, Swampscott**

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I never really identified with my Judaism, that is until I went to Israel with Y2I. I liked my religion and I knew the history behind it, but I never truly established what it meant to me as a person. Going to Israel really made me realize that Judaism is not just a religion, it is a beautiful and lively culture. Being in Israel just connected me so much to my own Jewish identity. The night I really discovered my spirituality was when we went to the Western Wall on Shabbat. I felt a connection that would change my life forever. I realized that there was no right way to be a Jew. Everyone has their own connection to this religion and culture, and everyone uses it in their own way.

Rachel Frazier, Beverly

My favorite place that we toured was Jerusalem because of how ancient the city was, as well as how special I felt being there. When I arrived in Jerusalem, I felt at home. I wasn't sure of the feeling at first because everything was happening so fast, but as the day went on I started to fully open up to my Jewish faith. Touring Israel has made me feel even more connected to my Jewish faith than I have felt in the last couple of years. **Jake Friedman, Swampscott**

I made friends that I'll have for life and I went through experiences that have surely changed my life forever. I found that spark that will be forever lit inside me. That spark to be Jewish, and to be a proud Jew. Going to Israel also really inspired me to advocate for our country. I learned that just speaking positively about Israel and educating people on the conflicts/problems going on there can go a long way in making the situation better, If more people are correctly educated about the things going on in and around Israel, the better chance these problems will be solved. **Ben Gansenberg, Marblehead**

The moment that impacted me the most on this trip was visiting the Western Wall. So many people, each with prayers and hopes and dreams, that they had worn the Wall smooth with their tears and their pleas. I felt connected to my ancestry then, and ever since then, more deeply than I had before. This is a poem that I wrote after got back to the hotel that night so I could remember my experience. **Miriam Gitelman, Marblehead**

The Wall Has Ears by **Miriam Gitelman, Marblehead**

The limestone wall of the Kotel
Glimmers and beckons.
Prayers of all magnitudes
Fill every crack and crevice.
My hand feels the stones,
And my palm sweats
From the heat and the significance
Of the moment.
Our pain and rapture intermingle
With that of people of 2,000 years.

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Prior to the trip I imagined Israel as a small, war filled, violent, segregated country in the middle of the desert. However, upon my arrival I quickly learned that my initial thoughts were very wrong. Rather than the desert, and corruption I believed I would see, I saw a beautiful, proud, nationalist country filled with beautiful landscape, culture and gorgeous people. The Y2I trip exposed me to other teens similar to myself and showed me the beauty in an underrated country.
Alex Gladstone, Swampscott

After going on the life-changing Y2I 2017 trip this July, I discovered a newfound urgency and importance to remain Jewish and raise my children Jewish as well. We spent two weeks traveling the magnificent and historic country of Israel and after learning about the culture, society, and history first hand, I knew automatically what my duty was as a Jew. From various public speakers and tour educators, my eyes were opened to the drastically declining numbers of the Jewish population. It was time for me to face the facts. As a member of this shrinking community, I have to do my part in saving the Jewish religion. The point being made is that every single Jew can have such a positive impact on the Jewish community just by raising their kids Jewish and teaching them to do the same. **Tony Gluskin, Marblehead**

Immersing myself in the culture of Israel was an unforgettable experience that I'm certain will stick with me for the remainder of my life. Meeting the Israeli teenagers, I was fascinated by the similarities and differences between our lives. Although they are preparing for service in the IDF at the same point in their lives that American teens are preparing to go off to college, we share many of the same values and even many of the same cultural reference points. Many of us were floored by their welcoming nature upon first meeting them. All in all, Y2I was an incredible journey, start to finish. I made lifelong connections I never would have made otherwise, and I'll look back on this trip fondly for many years to come. **Gabe Goldman, Peabody**

Israel is the place to welcome anyone with open arms, and make them feel alive regardless of the situation before. This could mean a number of things to a number of people, like providing safety and healthcare to Syrian children, offering those in oppressive countries a new home, or welcoming a pack of foreign teenagers into the heart of Israel, and give them two weeks they certainly will never forget. Israel allowed us to see situations, even the simplest of disagreements, with open eyes and an open heart. Additionally, contrary to many thoughts, all of us fully understood the conflicts present to the land. We are not "too young" to be seeing the world through our own eyes. Travel, especially this trip so early in our years, gives us a foundation on how to live. Of all the quotes that could be said and memories shared, to boil it down simply- Israel has shown, and quite frankly proven to us that it is of the utmost importance to love one another. **Lily Goodspeed, Beverly**

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For me, Israel was exactly what I think I needed in my life right now. It did so many things for me that helped me appreciate my life and the world around me so much more. Israel was a reality check for me because before I went, I didn't know much about who went into the IDF or the age or any details of it, but I learned a lot about how American teenagers lives differ from Israelis. I think the people in Israel live a different type of lifestyle that I admire immensely. I think it is a more realistic way of living where they are much more grateful and aware of things around them. I hope from my Y2I experience and my desire to return at some point that I will be able to gather this energy from their lifestyle and incorporate it into my own.

Ava Grady, Newburyport

All that I knew about Israel is what I saw in the news. My trip to Israel has really opened my eyes to what Israel really is. Israel is not just a homeland to Jews. It is much more. Israel is like a second home to me. The Israelis really made us all feel at home. I admit until going and experiencing Israel for myself, I never really thought about it that much. But meeting these great kids who, when they are 18, are going to protect Israel, I also owe it to them and myself to protect my second home. I guess what Israel means to me is my home. I may not live there but it will forever be a part of me no matter what. **Isaac Green, Swampscott**

From the start, I knew this trip would be life-changing. I was greeted by someone saying "Welcome home." Israel will always be a place that I call home. I will always remember this trip in my future. Israel changed me for the better. It made me realize my Jewish heritage and changed my outlook on life. **Amelia Groothuis, Swampscott**

Now that I have been to Israel, it was amazing, to say the very least. However, looking back, it wasn't the sights and the pictures that made it amazing, it was the people, and layers of love embedded in this country. Every stop we made, every market I explored, I felt more and more in love with this nation. Everywhere we walked, locals would ask us where we're from, and welcome us home. They say everyone in Israel is a family, who protects and loves each other. Now that I have been with that family for two weeks, I can say that it's true. I really felt like I was home. You can't feel that kind of love for just anywhere, it has to have a special meaning to you. I was told you come back a changed person, and I feel that I really have a new outlook and perspective. I feel a special responsibility to Israel, that I owe it my efforts to protect its name and pride. Israel means a loving home and family to me, and I plan on returning home someday. **Jordan Heafitz, Marblehead**

I feel grateful for having the opportunity to see all sides of Israel. I look forward to seeing the country grow and expand, and not have it be renowned throughout the world by the name of the land political indecisiveness and terrorism. For it is so much more than that. It is Israel, it is real, and we must be true to that. **Eli Heerter, Marblehead**

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It finally hits me that I'm here: in Israel. The Kotel comes into view. It's only when I reach the Wall that I realize that, for me, the Wall symbolizes the determination of the Jewish people. For centuries we have been persecuted and while we've been hunted and expelled, the Kotel has stood waiting for us to return. I begin to daven and say the words that I have said hundreds of times before. However, the words get stuck and I am moved to say whatever is in my heart. Tears stream down my face and a mixture of emotions swirl inside: pride for my people, fear for my people and an undeniable need to fight for my people. I decided right then and there that I wanted to join the fight for Israel. This trip has also made me see the realities of Israel and what the people must face every single day without fail. I hope that there can be peace, but I hope more that the world can grow to respect Israel and respect the Jewish people's right to live without fear so that each may find everlasting peace. **Alanna Horowitz, Newton**

Israel to me is a safe haven, a place where my friends and family live, but most importantly a place I can call home forever. Y2I was an incredible experience that I was glad to have shared with my closest friends while making new ones in the process. My love for Israel is greater than I could have ever imagined. Even though it wasn't my first time coming to Israel with Y2I, Y2I gave me a different outlook on this incredible country. **Lauren Kagan, Salem**

If it wasn't for this Y2I trip I would not have met other Jewish teens on the North Shore because before the trip I had no Jewish friends and now I do. Seeing and listening to Momo's speeches made me feel more proud to be a Jewish teen. Listening to Charlotte and her talking about Stand With Us made me realize that I have to stand up for Israel and not let anyone talk bad about a country that I love. **Ian Kane, Beverly**

The most important thing to me about being Jewish has always been the community. In fact, the main reason I love being Jewish is that I get to be part of a unique culture, and I have always felt most connected to Judaism when I am surrounded by my Jewish friends. I didn't know very many Jewish people before this trip. However, through Y2I 2017, I got to meet a huge group of Jewish teens from both the US and Israel. This changed my life because it gave me a sense of community and allowed me to feel more connected to my culture. From the moment we arrived in Israel, it became clear just how incredible it is to be surrounded by Jews. One of my favorite moments of the trip was at the Western Wall on Shabbat night when our group decided to start singing. In this moment, I felt connected not only to the Jewish community on the North Shore, but also to the network of Jews worldwide. Another amazing part of the trip was when the Israelis came to stay with us. One of the most surprising things about the trip was how similar we are to the Israeli teens. Even before the end of the first day with the Israelis, we had all made many great new friends. Y2I 2017 was filled with moments like this, and it was these moments that helped me realize being Jewish doesn't just give me a community; it gives me a family. Looking back on this trip, I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity to gain such a large Jewish community at home. Even though the number of Jews in my school remains the same, the number of Jews in my community has grown beyond anything I could have expected. **August Kahle, Manchester**

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Y2I had a bigger impact on my life than I ever could have imagined it would. As soon as the trip began I immediately began to make friends. I think the reason that we all connected so easily was because we're all Jewish. Even though we're from different towns, and many of my new friends and I have extremely different interests and hobbies, our religion is one common strand that unites all of us. The important part of the trip for me was realizing the extent of the Jewish community. There are kids halfway across the world that I share a bond with and just as importantly, there are kids just a few towns away. The sense of community that I experienced on this trip and the opportunity to spend time with people who grew up in and understand Israel was unbelievable. I will be forever thankful that I participated in this program because it changed me and I am a better person because of it. **Caroline Kaplan, Brookline**

Living in America, the facts we hear through media are not always the truth, yet it is what we are taught to believe. I feel as though this trip has supplied me with new facts and a new passion that will allow me to defend my country and advocate for its sincerity. I now have effective ways that will calmly and persuasively educate anyone who may be unsure of Israel's intentions. I now feel a new connection with my religion. All my life I have been taught and spoken to about Israel, however, going to this place made me feel like I have an even bigger connection and place within my religion. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to explore the world and myself. **Drew Kaplan, Boxford**

Before my trip to Israel, I considered myself Jewish, but the weight of that word, and the immense history behind it never really sunk in until this trip. I'm no longer indifferent about my identity. I have realized that it requires no effort or vanity to be who I am. So when someone asks me what religion I belong to, I won't hesitate to tell them I'm Jewish. The part of the trip that influenced me the most was meeting the Israelis. Meeting them personalized the trip, and put a face behind the flag, so when I think of Israel today, the first thing that comes to mind is the friends I made. On the trip, I think most of the American kids realized that the Israelis are no different from us; they are fun loving, great kids, just like everyone on the trip. Y2I was truly a life changing experience worth so much because it brings Jewish people together from across the world. The Y2I experience brought a Jewish community together teaching kids to have a sense of identity in the oldest active religion on the planet. These experiences are truly vital and have changed my world views as a whole. **Nik Karns, Marblehead**

The Israel that I visited is not a nation of one belief system and of unity. No, the Israel of today is beautifully chaotic. For each Israeli I met, I promise I heard at least two different opinions, some nuanced and some not so, but all originating from a common place of active thought and discussion. This same truth applies to the Knesset and the important debates that echo within. I've come to feel more invested in Israel, to truly care for the nation, because it is *not* unified or a single Jewish state. It is instead a confederation of ideals, clamoring to argue and compromise in an effort to form a more perfect union where its citizens may enjoy prosperity, freedom, and sanctuary. I came to love Israel because I saw it not as a perfect state, far from it, but as a home in the same way America is, with great debate and oratory, with so many voices and ideas orbiting around a single goal: bettering the state for posterity, and how can an American not feel a deep kinship with those striving toward such worthy goals? **Harry Katz, Swampscott**

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Before the trip I was a bit nervous to meet the Israelis because I wasn't sure what they were going to be like. I didn't know if we were going to be friends or if we would be so different that we couldn't relate to each other at all. Turns out that the Israeli teens made the trip a hundred times better than it would have been without them. They were outgoing, hilarious, and loud (in the best way possible). Turns out that long bus rides are much more enjoyable when you can't stop laughing for three hours and there's Israeli music blasting in the background. I'm so grateful for this experience because it not only allowed me to visit a country that I now consider my second home, but to make lifelong friends from both the North Shore and Israel.

Maddie Katz, South Hamilton

As the Jewish people are such a small and ancient people, all Jews must both remain Jewish, as well as raise their children to identify as Jewish. Our legacy has been secured by each generation carrying on the traditions and identities of their forefathers. However, the Jewish people are shrinking. As persistent as we are, standing through multiple attempts at destroying or outlasting us, we face a problem; we are shrinking. In order for the Jewish people to continue our vast and historic legacy we must maintain our Jewish heritage. This does not entail simply proclaiming to the world that you identify as Jewish, or even marrying within the Jewish faith. Rather it is a task much more meaningful and permanent; to raise our kids to be Jewish. Raising our children Jewish is the most important and completely necessary act in solidifying our people's presence in the world. It is a gift, a blessing, to be a Jew, and we need to reinstate that within our children. Jews have been an amazingly close-knit and loving community for four thousand years, and if we maintain our Jewish identities and instill them within our children we will continue to be for another four thousand. To not sit by and grow complacent as our Jewish lineage is lost due to our own faulty decisions. To raise our kids as Jews is our honorable duty. **Sam Katz, Marblehead**

My trip to Israel brought me closer to the Jewish community that I live near and to the Jewish community that lives in Israel. I made friends with people that live in the next town over and with people who live in a country on the other side of the world, Israel. Going to Israel really changed my life. Before I had been to Israel, it had no real meaning to me. It was just another country on the map. But after going I understand that it is my home, and the existence of a Jewish state is amazing to believe. Going to Israel inspired me to want to begin Israel activism because after visiting I saw a country that I would gladly call my home, and the fact that people still despise the existence of Israel makes me shocked. After visiting Israel I feel more connected to my Jewish heritage and feel that I have a job to stand up for the country that represents my religion and my family. **Aaron Kleinman, Marblehead**

I would experience many guest speakers throughout the course of the trip and better understand Israel in all aspects. The advocacy for Israel seminars, "Stand with Us," better educated me about the current conflict with Israel and surrounding territories. These lectures also taught me how to advocate and stand up to misinformed people concerning the current state of Israel. I also soon learned how Israel is a "Start-up Nation", and gathered a deep understanding of how much went into the establishment of a Jewish state. Not only did this make me appreciate the country, it also made me realize how much I want to keep coming back to it. Israel is and always will be my home, somewhere I will be accepted. **Kayla Kornitsky, Swampscott**

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After spending two full weeks in Israel, I realized that Israel is truly the homeland of the Jewish people, including myself. Before I left for Israel, I was not sure how I would react to a new and different environment, one I certainly was not accustomed to. However, I found that even though some of our lifestyles are different, we are all Jewish and more similar than we think. Once landing at the Ben Gurion Airport, Amnon greeted us all with one phrase “welcome home” but I did not comprehend the meaning to his statement, at that moment. One of my objectives for the trip was to realize what that phrase meant to me, and as our trip was coming to a close, I finally became aware of my own feelings toward Israel and the Jewish people. I came to the conclusion that the Jewish people are one family and that unity will further promote in keeping peace. I believed I was a proud Jew before this trip, but that does not compare to how much pride I have in the Jewish people and myself right now. The trip to Israel has left a lasting impact in my life to educate others about Israel and eliminate any prejudiced opinions anyone has toward Israel and its people. In addition, I will advocate for Israel and make sure that the 90% of people in the gray area will lean towards being pro-Israel, just like me. I enjoyed my time in Israel and realized how proud I am to be Jewish and have friends who share the same morals and beliefs, those who I can trust because we come from the same ancestry--we are a family. I realized I have a second home away from home in Israel, an accepting and amazing place that truly changed my perspective on life, Israel, and what it means to be a Jew. I will further my efforts in educating others about Israel and advocate for the Jewish people whenever necessary. Being a Jew is great, and I gained so much pride from this incredible trip. I would like to thank everyone involved at the Lappin Foundation for sending us to the homeland and most importantly, changing my life.

Victor Kratik, Swampscott

My Y2I experience was one like no other. Being able to explore the amazing country of Israel was a true eye opener in so many ways. Israel was a place of comfort, warmth, love and happiness. I have decided to stand up for Israel any chance I get, which is why I plan on creating a club for Israel activism at my school with some of my friends from my trip. The goal of this club will be to correct people’s incorrect views of Israel and the terrorism and violence. We want to ensure Israel as a safe place since we have experienced it first-hand. If I could say one thing to the land and people of Israel, it would be thank you so much for being my home away from home and allowing me to feel safe and secure.

Haley Lakind, Swampscott

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Before leaving for the trip, my grandfather asked me if I understood the importance of sending teenaged children to Israel. I shook my head and my ears perked up. I always enjoy hearing about his past trips and adventures to Israel. While listening to this particular story, I learned about how meaningful and important it is for my grandfather to give young men and women the opportunity to discover and embrace a part of their identity. Much to my surprise, he simply repeated the Lappin Foundation's mission statement, emphasizing the importance of “enhancing Jewish identity.” This concept is something I had heard many times, yet I had never grasped its true meaning until completing my own journey through Israel. Whether a journalist or a general in the army, each speaker instilled the same feeling of Jewish pride and overall confidence in the country. As the speakers exemplified, I learned of the importance in promoting Jewish values in future generations. I now truly understand the concept of Judaism as a culture, rather than just a religion. I have no doubt that I have made life-long friends, and I feel extremely fortunate that I have a local community of children my age that share my newly rooted sense of Jewish pride with. **Jackie Lappin, Beverly**

In addition to teaching me to love and appreciate the country of Israel, Y2I has influenced me to advocate for Israel. I have always considered myself to be “pro-Israel,” yet I was never active in this belief. Visiting Israel and learning about several of the most controversial issues surrounding it have both cemented my existing opinions of Israel and inspired me to be an active advocate for Israel in my community and when I attend a university two years from now. Just as all of my new Israeli friends will be fighting for Israel in the military, I will fight for Israel through advocacy and will persuade others to do the same. Y2I has changed my outlook on Israel, on being Jewish, and on the way I want to live the rest of my life.

Juliana Lederman, Marblehead

Y2I 2017 allowed me to fully realize that as an American teen I had let myself slip away from the traditions and practices of Judaism. Being a Jew in Israel is easy because there are so many others. In America, Judaism is such a small religion that we Jews have to make sacrifices and alter our lives to keep the religion and the cultural practices strong. Y2I helped my life by allowing me to experience what life would be like as a Jew if I just put in the small amount of effort that I used to. **Mayan Levin, Salem**

When I finally arrived to this place I have dreamt of going to for so long, it felt so unreal. Israel was nowhere near what I had pictured, but it definitely was not a warzone. Coming off the plane I automatically felt safe and at home. This tiny little country brings us together, strangers or not. Everyone is so inviting and welcoming. Israel is filled with so much positivity while being surrounded by negativity. Coming back from Y2I, I now know how I can better support and defend Israel and continue to tell many how safe and welcoming this land is.

Thea Levine, Swampscott

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My time in Israel on the 2017 Y2I trip filled me with a great sense of pride. Seeing 2000 years of history in a democratic Jewish state made me thankful for every minute spent in the country. Israelis are constantly fighting to keep their country alive and, as Jews living abroad, we must do our part to maintain the Jewish state. The Y2I experience strengthened and validated my need to fight against anti-Semitism and taught me how to defend Israel. I return to the United States unafraid to speak out against hatred. Prior to the trip, I lacked the confidence to try to instill change. I sat on the sidelines saying nothing when confronted by adversity. However, I learned through the trip that it is no longer enough for me to merely accept hateful encounters as part of growing up Jewish in the US. It is necessary to stand up to anti-Israel and anti-Semitic sentiments, not just for myself but for the Jewish people as a whole.

Joshua Liberman, Reading

After my experience in Israel and after listening to many talented speakers, it has made me realize that I need to stand up for Israel, my people, and my family. Living in Marblehead there could be many anti-semitic acts that occur, and going to high school there I experience antisemitism daily. If it's just from a friend calling me a "Kike" or telling me that I "don't look Jewish" it still hurts and I shouldn't be singled out for being Jewish. Coming back from Israel I have stood up for myself and my religion and it has made me feel so good about myself and what I believe in. **Simone Likterov, Marblehead**

I plan to do a lot to stand up for Israel. A few of my friends and I are going to start a club for the Jewish kids in our school. I am also going to go to the teen advocacy meetings every month. I want to be able to answer anyone's questions about Israel in order to open their mind and change their opinion. My goal is to change at least a few people's minds about the country. I plan to continue to stand up for Israel throughout my life. **Sarah Lipsky, Marblehead**

Going on this year's Y2I trip was an eye opening experience. Early on, the trip taught us that taking risks and embracing the incredible culture around us is the most important thing that Israel strives to show its visitors. We learned new ways to fight anti-semitism, and along with that we learned how to educate people about Israel. Enjoying the beauty of Israel with over one hundred other teens has been the most immersive and interesting experience I have ever had in my life. **Dan Litvak, Marblehead**

When we came back to the Wall for Shabbat, I truly felt as if I belonged in Israel. I danced and sang with people from all over the world, all connected by the same songs and traditions. No matter our differences, we had all grown up hearing the same songs in the same language and were able to connect to our history and each other because of this. Everything was so full of joy and love. There was nowhere else I wanted to be in that moment. That's what Israel gave to me: a sense of gratitude and appreciation. I thank my family for raising me the way they did; everyone who made it possible for me to go on this trip; the great people who made this trip as wonderful as it was. I even had a Bat Mitzvah on the last Saturday, which was more than I ever could have hoped for. I spent my time surrounded by amazing people in a truly amazing country and I felt, and still feel, grateful. **Tovah Lockwood, Rowley**

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I did enjoy the trip. Of course I will raise my kids Jewish but I want them to choose their options. I do plan to become an Israel activist. I do have dreams and hopes for Israel seeing peace with their neighbors, but I am not someone that will become the same old activist. I always think we can get the message better across if we do it through music, because everyone likes music. To solve the anti-Semitism problem now is to fight through music because I believe everyone has musical talent. I believe music is a better weapon than words because though words can hurt, you have a higher chance with music, where people won't be hurt by your words because music is the most peaceful way to get a point of view across to someone. That is how I would be an Israel activist and I would even do it for world peace. **Nathan Maibor, Winthrop**

How do I go about raising my kids Jewish and ensuring they will also raise their kids Jewish? I would send them to Israel. I didn't think that my connection with Judaism could deepen anymore, but it did. Seeing the Western Wall is an indescribable feeling. The history and perseverance that the Wall represents are incredible and it is exemplary of the history and perseverance that our religion also holds. If my children and any Jewish children are able to experience what I did at the Wall and Israel as a whole, I think it will be very hard to turn their back on the history that brought them to be standing in such a holy and ancient land. Going to Israel this summer was truly life changing. My outlook on life is more positive, more intellectual, more careful, and more meaningful. **Emma Mair, Middleton**

From the minute we stepped into Logan Airport on July 2nd, to greeting our families at 5:00 in the morning on Sunday, July 16th, Israel truly had changed the way I feel about myself and about my religion. Israel isn't just a country that faces conflict, but a country that faces conflict and is able to bounce back and come back stronger than before. Taking in all the sights and sounds of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Tiberias and many other exciting locations, definitely had a major impact on my two week experience in Israel. Y2I helped me see who I am as a Jewish teen, and I couldn't be more grateful. **Julia Michaud, Wakefield**

Candidly speaking, I did not think that my trip to Israel would be life changing in any drastic way. Looking back on the past two weeks, Israel proved me wrong. Every element of the experience, from the people on the streets to the bustling markets and upbeat atmosphere, gave me very important lessons to take away. Surrounding yourself with an aura of positivity and kindness can get you very far in life. Despite what the media and news portray, Israel was full of excitement and light and love. Israel taught me that it is important to not take things for granted because every moment is precious and you have a chance to do something beautiful with it. Israel taught me that if you are dissatisfied with the way something works, to go out and change it. **Samantha Mintzer, Swampscott**

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This trip was a truly life-changing experience that I will always remember. The Israeli teens that were with us for part of the trip were some of the most amazing people I've ever met. It was very interesting to talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with them and hear the perspective of people who actually live in Israel. Learning about all the challenges they face on a daily basis and hearing all the heartbreaking stories that they told us really inspired me to advocate for Israel. I now know how to respond when I hear people say negative things about Israel or anti-semitic things, and I fully understand the importance of having a homeland for the Jewish people. I also learned about how much media bias there is against Israel; that is something that I never really knew about before. Learning about the long history of Israel and all the challenges the Jewish people have overcome made me more proud to be Jewish.

Rebecca Mitlin, Swampscott

The magnitude of what life is like in Israel did not truly impact me until the Israeli teens came to travel with us for a few nights. The Israelis had a huge impact on how I view Israel. I remember asking one Israeli on the bus if he was nervous about joining the army. His response surprised me as he told me he was excited to serve, as it is his duty to his country. That one comment truly changed my entire opinion of the country. It was not just his country, but also mine. Just because I do not physically live there doesn't make it any less of my homeland. These feelings inspired me to want to take action. My Israeli friends continuously told me that I would be doing just as much for Israel as they are if I stand up against anti-semitism or opinions formed by ignorance. Y2I 2017 made me realize that Israel is a safe place for me to go, and whether I am in Israel or America, it is my home, and therefore, it is my duty to defend her. **Simone Nardizzi, Nahant**

Before going on the trip I rarely thought about being Jewish or what being Jewish meant to me. But when I did think about it, I found myself questioning the typical Jewish beliefs. On Y2I I found an answer to my questions. I learned that I didn't necessarily need to practice Judaism to be Jewish. Being Jewish is an identity, not just a religion. Another way Y2I impacted me is through meeting the Israeli teens. Had I not gone on the trip I would never have even thought about teenagers from Israel, but now that I met them I feel like I have a stronger connection to both Israel and Judaism. The final way Y2I impacted me is by teaching me what it means to be an Israel advocate and how to properly stand up for Israel. Throughout the trip we had many different speakers who spoke about how Israel is the Jews' rightful homeland, and that it is our duty as Jews to stand up and protect her. What really made it hit home were the stories from people who had actually seen the violence or who had actually experienced anti-Semitism. Those first hand experiences are what showed me that I need to stand up for Israel and for Jews everywhere. **Fred Paster, Swampscott**

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When I was in Israel, I felt as if I was home away from home. It felt like I belonged. When the Israeli teens had to leave and go back to their own lives, everyone realized that American or Israeli, we were not that different. We had the same music and same jokes. We were all 'family'. I plan on doing my part and advocating for Israel and teaching people that Israel is home to people, not terrorists or monsters. Its home to the Jewish people and we deserve to have a complete and full country. In Israel my favorite part was visiting the Western Wall because the Wall is one of the most religious and historic landmarks in Israel. When we were there I felt proud to be Jewish and felt as if I should do whatever it takes to do my part to help my family, the Jewish people. **Russell Paster, Swampscott**

This trip has ignited within me a feeling of pride in my Jewish identity and an appreciation for our ancestral homeland. My new friends, both from Israel and America, have given me a sense of belonging where I felt safe from the anti-semitism that unfortunately plagues our public schools. Israel means to me a place that I can always find a second home with my Jewish brethren, a place that must stand tall in this world of hate, with its acceptance and generosity. **Robert Quinn, Georgetown**

To me, serving in the army is about defending one's nation, and that was the only means of defense I knew prior to Y2I. Now, I can confidently say I plan on defending Israel for as long as I live and I do not need to enlist in order to so. I do know I have time to advocate for Israel though. I cannot wait to initiate debates, assemblies, public gatherings, and educational seminars for my peers throughout my life. Y2I gave me the tools to defend Israel and it is my job, among my fellow Jews, to now work to protect our homeland. We all know how hard our ancestors worked to obtain a homeland. Now the torch is handed to us. I pledge to fight for my country each and every day, and I would not have dreamed this possible without the entire Y2I program teaching me what it takes to be an advocate for Israel and why Israel needs to be defended. **Gaby Rabinovich, Marblehead**

Y2I has definitely impacted my life positively and has opened up a few doors in my near future. Being a part of this amazing opportunity of going to Israel has opened my eyes to more things happening all around the world and has taught me not only to be appreciative of what I have, but to also stand up for others in need of help and or support. When I was in Israel, I felt like I was uncovering a new land and I felt like I was at home. Now that I am home from Israel, I have come back with more knowledge about the land than I had first expected. I can gladly say that I am more educated on what it's like to be Jewish and how to protect it and pass it along the generations. **Naudia Resnek, Lynn**

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Prior to my involvement with the Y2I program, I was very unaware of what it really meant to be a Jew. Being in Israel helped me understand the significance of Judaism. Speaking about the fact that I am Jewish is something that before I would rarely bring up, which I will admit is probably because I felt ashamed or weird. However, now I know that I will not be afraid to admit that I am Jewish, but will also be the one that proudly brings up the fact that I am Jewish. Through the trip I found that Y2I is not just a trip to Israel, rather it is an eye-opening educational experience. It is something that I believe everyone has to experience for themselves to fully comprehend not just what it means to be a Jew, but to be a proud Jew. To help summarize, once our plane home took off, my heart was instantly heavy with a feeling of homesickness, not for my home in America, but for my new home in Israel. **Georgia Ring, Norwell**

My identity within the Jewish religion has increased significantly. My role as a Jewish activist was also further enhanced. I enjoyed my time and experiences during the trip 100 % as I have no regrets from past goals for the trip. I strive for a Jewish present and future Jewish life and want to raise my future family Jewish. I feel that it is crucial to stay loyal to my religion no matter what other religion might become associated with mine. **Brandon Roth, Swampscott**

I had no idea how much of an impact going to Israel would have on me. Something that stood out to me was when we went to the market in Jerusalem on Friday afternoon. I bought something and the shop owner said to me, "Shabbat Shalom." That was when it really clicked for me. We had only been in Israel for about four days, but I hadn't yet realized how special it truly is to be in a place where Judaism is the majority. Being surrounded by Jews was certainly meaningful, but the most special part of the trip for me was meeting the Israeli teens. They really have such a dynamic culture. It was incredible to see how different we were, but also how similar we are to each other as well. So, although the food was delicious, the culture was thriving, and the place was beautiful, I have to say the one thing that really made the trip were the people I met. I developed deep friendships, both with teens from the North Shore and from Israel, and it really was an amazing experience. **Marissa Samuels, Marblehead**

To me, Israel is just as much of a physical place as a spiritual one. It is a place where one of Jewish identity can feel safe and in the protective arms of his own people. It is a place the Jewish people have inhabited for thousands of years as an ancient people. Our history binds us to the land of Israel with invisible chains. It will forever be the land which the Jewish people call home, a place we all unconditionally love. Israel is the place for a Jew to be.

Matt Serdukoff, Marblehead

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This trip has opened my eyes to the fact that my ancestors have been praying for this land for thousands of years. I am part of one of the first generations that can visit my ancestor's homeland with the feeling of safety and security. With this knowledge, I felt more Jewish in Israel than I ever have. Today, I can say that the trip impacted me in a way that strengthened my Jewish identity in a way that makes me proud to be a Jew. On the last night of my trip to Israel, many of the Israelis I had gotten so close to expressed their need for teens like me to break stereotypes that have been formed in America. They urged us to advocate for our homeland of Israel. This trip to Israel exceeded all of my expectations, and it has impacted my life unlike anything else I have experienced. **Julia Shactman, Newburyport**

Israel was a cross between a surprise, a gift and a realization, all of which I appreciated observing. Y2I brought me to another side of the world I never thought I could reach, and gave me a connection to that seemingly eternally different place across the world I barely knew anything about. It made me understand that although the Israeli people seem so different, we share our same religion with them, and that makes them our family. **Neil Sherman, Peabody**

Israel is unique. The feeling you get when you go there is different than any other place. Israel has a sense of community; it is very different than the United States of America. Israel has so many places to go in such a small country. This trip helped me see what is so special about Israel that people can work together to defend their homeland. The people in Israel are so nice, like the teens that we meet on the trip. In just three days they felt like family.

Ian Shevory, Marblehead

I had never fully embraced my Jewish identity until this trip. I was raised in a Jewish-Christian household in which religion wasn't emphasized. Because of this trip I understand the responsibilities I have being a Jew and also feel pride in being Jewish. On the trip I even had a Bat-Mitzvah in Jerusalem to mark my complete acceptance of the Jewish faith. With this new found appreciation for Judaism and for Israel as a whole, I feel the need to become an activist. I want to stand up for Israel as it is a country of love, history, culture, and the Jewish people. I am so thankful that Y2I offers the fellowship following the trip as I am already looking forward to joining the class. Especially with all the anti-Israel movements on college campuses, I know in a short two years I must be prepared to fight my battle for the country I have fallen in love with.

Michelle Shub, Marblehead

Experiencing Israel through Y2I had a profound impact on my life. This trip taught me what it feels like to be a part of a Jewish community. Every time I went to the Wall, it meant more to me. On the third trip to the Wall our group went on Shabbat. There were thousands of people packed onto the limestone streets, and I will never forget when my friends and I started a Hora circle, which escalated to a full on Shabbat dance party accompanied by a chorus of off tune Jews singing at full volume. The circle kept expanding until it had almost all of the Y2I kids, as well as many Israelis and Jews from all around the world, singing and dancing together. This really left an impact on me and showed me how powerful the Jewish community can be. The community is one where anybody has a place in our circle to dance and be like family. The biggest difference between the Joseph that boarded a plane bound to Israel and the Joseph now is pride. I am proud that I share a culture with all the hectic Israelis and eccentric tour guides, and I am proud of being a part of one of the oldest religions on Earth. **Joseph Sirois, Ipswich**

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When we went to the Western Wall during Shabbat, this became one of my favorite things we did on the trip because it opened my eyes to the kind of community that I am a part of. I felt so connected with everyone when we were dancing and singing my favorite Jewish songs. I truly felt like we were all becoming a family and that I have a second home. Not only was I opened up to a whole community that I didn't know was out there, my eyes were opened to the reality of living in Israel. It's not the dangerous, racist country that is described in the news. It is a place that should be fought for, not destroyed. The thing I brought home with me wasn't just a bunch of souvenirs, but a new found perspective on Israel and I feel a sense of hope that I will be back.
Michelle Slezinger, Swampscott

Israel, despite being 5,510 miles away from Salem, is also my home. This trip has changed my view of Israel in a way that I never thought possible. The experiences, from riding a camel to visiting a college to floating in the Dead Sea, helped me to realize just how much this small country has to offer not only to me, but also to the world. I hold a special place in my heart for it, and will take everything I have learned back to America where I now feel empowered to stand up for this amazing State. After visiting Israel, I now have my own definition for the word "home". "Home" is not a place where you must live permanently. It is simply a place that you can rely on to always be there for you, a place where your family can be found, and a place that holds special meaning in your heart. It is also a place that can count on you to defend it. Israel, as I now know thanks to this trip, is my home. The words that we were shown at the airport the day we first arrived- "Welcome Home" -could not have been more accurate. **Maggi Smart, Salem**

If I had known half the impact that Y2I would have on me, I would have been too excited to study for finals. If only I had known what being a Jew meant to me before the trip, I could have embraced it as a huge part of my life even earlier on. Like anyone else, I expected to have a great time on the trip, but I certainly did not expect a country in the Middle East and 100 perfect strangers to become my new home and my new family. That said, even if we weren't welcomed in the Ben Gurion airport with a sign that read 'Welcome Home' we all would have felt it anyways. There's a certain bond between the people in Israel, a certain appreciation for life as they know how easily it can be taken away. If I took nothing away from this trip except the infectious Israeli zest for life, I still would have gained more than from any of my hometown friends this summer. **Hannah Sotnek, Georgetown**

Israel affected me in ways I don't really know how to put onto paper, or into words. I'm not even sure if there are words that could describe it. Just the feeling of being at home, feeling connected to a place that you've never been too before. It's indescribable. Some of the more special moments were at the Wall and on Masada and at the Syrian border in the Golan Heights. Seeing the willingness of people to lay down their lives for a Jewish state, and how it stood the test of time, from the gladius to the gun, the Roman tortoise to the Syrian and Israeli tanks, really drove home how much those before us were willing to sacrifice. Looking back on the trip, I have made friends, and bonded with people I would have never normally met. I've learned that I will always have a home there. I now have an additional 6 million brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. The sense of history and heritage that I felt is unimaginable.
Jonah Spritz, Swampscott

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My Jewish identity means that I am part of something as a whole. Even though we are proud, everyday our numbers shrink because people convert or lose their hope and faith. We need to stay Jewish because we need to have our bonds and our family be forever strong. My Judaism is more than my religion. It is in my blood. It is who I am. I believe that Judaism is one of the most important aspects of my life because I belong to a greater cause than myself. It means that I will have a family and someone to lean on wherever I go and I am forever grateful for that. Nobody will ever be able to change my religious standpoint because I love being Jewish way too much.

Isabelle Stacks, Newton

This sounds cheesy, but my trip to Israel changed me. From the cultural aspect, to meeting my people, my family, I will never be the same. I met my new best friends who live just twenty or thirty minutes away from me. And, I met my other new best friends who live 5,470 miles away from me, back in Israel. I cannot wait to stay connected with these people, with my new family. But most of all, I cannot wait to go back to the place that I now call home. I think one's home is a place in which one feels comfortable, safe, and at ease. A home consists of people and places one loves surrounding them. There is no better way to say it, Y2I was a *life-changing* experience and I will forever remember my first trip to Israel.

Ella Stock, Wenham

Spending time with Israeli teens was a huge motivation for me to begin advocating for Israel. After talking with them I realized how passionate they are about Israel and how much they do not want war. Within the next few years my new friends will all be going to serve in the Israeli Military, and I will certainly be advocating for Israel at home to defend my friends. Spending time with Israelis and learning more about the conflict has led me to want to go out and advocate for Israel. Along with motivating me to advocate for Israel, the Y2I trip also led me to fall in love with Israel. Y2I had a tremendous impact on me and my opinions of Israel, and I will certainly be advocating for this country throughout the rest of my life!

Camille Szotffried, Marblehead

Going to Israel changed my life in so many ways. When I got off the plane, someone came up to me and said, "Welcome home". Hearing that put a huge smile on my face because it was the land of the Jewish people and I was accepted by everyone. It is important to be involved with the Jewish community and meeting new people who are like you is rewarding. This trip was one of the most rewarding things in my life. I met so many people and learned so much. As I begin my junior year of high school, I hope to participate in programs that will help me contribute to the Jewish community and prepare me to act as an advocate for Israel.

Joshua Tabenkin, Georgetown

I am strongly confident in the fact that there is no place more beautiful than Israel. Everything about being in Israel just felt right. Even right off the plane, the first moment I set foot in the country, I get welcomed home. I felt so drawn to the country by just being there. Israel is the place that I am meant to live in and fight for because that's what I believe in.

Colby Tarbox, Gloucester

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Perhaps the most important thing I learned from Y2I was the urgency and utmost importance of standing up for Israel. While I am 5,509 miles away from Israel, somewhere that I can truly call home, I have never felt closer. I feel like one half of my heart is over there and the other half travels with me, so being over there just made me feel complete and so proud to be with my other half. It was somewhat saddening to learn that the Israeli teens we met, each and every one of them, will be in the Israeli military, some as soon as August. It was a stark reminder of the lifestyle Israelis lead. They are part of a strong country, the only democracy in the Middle East and the shining beacon of hope in a region filled with conflict, but they must continue to protect themselves. My Y2I trip has opened up new opportunities for me and I am thankful beyond words for this amazing experience. **Max Tkach, Danvers**

The trip gave me a whole different outlook on my Judaism as a whole. Being in Israel I felt more connected to my Judaism than ever. Millions of my ancestors, the people I am in some way connected to, have passed through and fought for this beautiful place and home of ours for the past 4,000 years, and this is an incredible and mind blowing thing to think about. Many of the morals of Judaism are based around ideas and acts of mitzvah, forgiveness, compassion, etc., and these are the types of things I saw in Israel. Being immersed in this culture- my culture- was an experience like no other and I hope and pray that my children and their children, as well as all future generations, get to see and experience the wonders of beautiful Israel. Unfortunately, before I came to Israel, I believed what I saw in the daily news about the fights and wars with Israel's surrounding Middle Eastern countries. I let biased newscasts completely form my opinion on the nation, and it is safe to say that I am incredibly heartbroken that not only I, but millions of Americans, as well as people from all over the world, view Israel as a dangerous and nasty place. On this trip I learned and saw for myself just how incredibly safe Israel is...and this is something you can only truly comprehend once you are there and experience it for yourself. It is all of our duties to advocate for Israel and educate those who may be misinformed.

Natasha Tsaryuk, Swampscott

Before I went on Y2I I didn't know what it meant to be Jewish. I believe that the only way you can understand your Jewish identity is by traveling to the homeland. The moment that everything I believed changed was my first visit to the Kotel. That single moment at the Wall enhanced my Jewish identity more than anything else; that was the moment I realized I have to stick to my faith. Even though I cannot explain it and it may not make sense, I feel obligated to be a Jew. My new understanding of Judaism and my new Jewish identity has traveled home with me from the trip and has impacted me greatly. After meeting Israelis first hand, like our tour guides and the teens, I feel obligated to stand up for Israel. Knowing how kind, hardworking, and strong the people are, I cannot allow an antisemitic comment get by without remembering the people I met. Remembering them and wondering how anybody could ever make a negative comment towards them. In these ways, seeing Israel has helped me understand and enhance my Jewish identity. **Mirabella Vulikh, Marblehead**

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The most valuable thing I gained from Israel was a sense of community. In Israel, the feeling of kinsmanship among the Jewish people is infectious and uplifting. The love and friendliness all around us encouraged the swift blooming of friendships among our fellow North Shore teens in a way that had not been tangible in America. By the time that our trip was over, I had formed strong friendships with Israelis and Americans alike, and I knew that when I returned home, my Jewish community would be so much bigger. For this I am grateful. **Sarah Welford, Danvers**

Israel means more to me than I originally thought before the Y2I trip. To many people Israel is a small country that is plagued with terrorism and brutal, corrupt IDF soldiers. To me it is not at all like that. Israel, while it has its drawbacks, is actually pretty safe in most parts. The Iron Dome takes care of most of the missiles fired into populated areas, and Israel does a pretty good job keeping terrorists at bay. **Jeremy Wilde, North Reading**

Even though we were only in Israel for two short weeks, the connections I have made to Israel, Judaism, and my new friends will last a lifetime. Being in Israel surrounded by other Jews I had felt safe. This trip has forever changed my view on the world and brought upon me a stronger feeling of Judaism. I have not taken off any of my jewelry that I bought in Israel and find myself bringing my necklace in front of my shirt when it falls behind because I am proud to show off who I am. I was never fully informed about the situation in Israel, but now I am very determined to stick up for Israel and tell people what is really going on there. Since I've been home I have received one question many times, that being "did you feel safe?" My answer is yes, I had never felt safer in my life surrounded by the best people in the world in the best place in the world. **Marlana Winschel, Peabody**

This trip showed me how diverse Israel actually is. This trip also increased my Jewish pride in ways I didn't think it would. Before entering the Wall itself, we all stood in a circle and sang "oseh shalom" along with a couple others, and people were stopping above us to listen, and it was just such a peaceful moment where I felt like I really belonged. After that we walked to the Wall for Shabbat and I saw the wall in a completely different way than during the day. It felt so spiritual standing with the women praying at the Wall and putting in a message for myself and a friend. After that we also stood in a circle and began dancing and singing and were joined by people from all over the world who knew the same songs and dances we were doing. It really showed me how connected we all are, and it added to my Jewish pride. The trip was packed full of wonderful speakers who in the end all had a similar message for us, which was, if for whatever horrific reason, the Jews are forced out of their homes or don't feel safe wherever they're living, Israel is ready to protect them and welcome them with open arms.

Sophia Winschel, Peabody

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This trip provided me with an eye opening experience. I was able to learn about the culture and history of Israel while maintaining and developing relationships with new and exciting people. This trip allowed me to come in contact with and travel through the state and learn more about my treasured homeland. The food, music, dance, and diverse individuals allowed me to fully comprehend and appreciate how unique and special the land truly is. I was able to fully become a Jewish adult in society during my Bat Mitzvah. I am grateful for the experience and that it was able to take place in such a holy site. **Haley Wolfe, Gloucester**

Y2I had a huge impact on my life. Before going on the trip, I did not think very highly of Israel. At the time, I thought that Israel was not the best place to visit mainly because of how it was portrayed in the media. After going on Y2I, I not only have a completely different outlook on the country, but I also have a greater appreciation for my religious practices throughout my life. Y2I impacted my life by giving me a newfound respect for others around me. Before going on Y2I, I was very sheltered and did not really think about how other people were in other countries and the manner of lifestyle which they lived by. Post Y2I, I have so much respect for Israelis in general and the fact that everyone has to serve in the IDF. It was a truly unforgettable experience and I wouldn't change it for the world. **Amy Wolpert, Newburyport**

I've grown as a person, made friendships, and gotten to celebrate my Jewish identity all because of this trip. Being in Israel allowed me to foster many wonderful relationships in a short amount of time, both with my fellow American teens from Y2I and the Israeli teens from Petah Tikvah. Something about the shared experience of being in the Holy Land made it easier to connect with others. While I already had a strong relationship with Judaism, the trip most definitely impacted my relationship with other Jewish teens, making it even more positive. Doing such extraordinary things as visiting the Western Wall, riding a camel, and going to the Dead Sea allowed me to form a unique bond with other teens on the trip. Another example of how quickly connections were able to be formed on Y2I 2017 is the visit to the Western Wall on Shabbat. When we were there, I sang prayers and celebrated with my new friends. Engaging in such a spiritual moment truly bonded us all together in a way like no other. These uncommon experiences are ones that will stick with all of the American teens long after we have returned. **Emily Zieff, Beverly**

Next year, in Jerusalem by Jessica Cohen, Marblehead

1.

We bought a wild plum¹
at the market² today, purple skin dual sided:

one cheek smooth, milk and honey³
dipped in sawdust-soft desert sand
packed stiff together on top like brown sugar,

the other dusted in Old Testament eminent domain, purple underneath the
layers like the bruises here. they run like prune juice,
100 years deep in November⁴, leaving the fingers that feel them sticky from stealing land⁵
and singing so long. farewell

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to the skin, it falls in strips like a snake's post-ecdysis⁶ off the hotel balcony. the flesh on the inside is yellow
as genesis sin and holds twin hearts in the middle. suspended
in gold nuggets, they say wild plums have no core;
in barely three bites my teeth reach buffer zone⁷, and both pits slip under

my tongue, where my widest veins transfuse bloodstreams with riverwater and translate
God's voice until they're tinged blue with blood money⁸. the wooden plum stones cup each artery;

their rivets, fruit-fashioned holes and hell pits, mirror holy mountain's mole hill
topography; tribulations strong and shallow like Dixie cups of Bedouin camp coffee⁹ and
Dead Sea tides. one rolls around my mouth like I imagine a wild almond would,
the kind that grow on trees but we're told we can't eat¹⁰--
they leak cyanide, dyed Prussian blue¹¹

¹ "Wild Plums", a short story by Grace Stone Coates about autonomy and coming of age

² Shuk, Jerusalem

³ Israel is the land of Milk and Honey

⁴ 2 November 1917 - Balfour Declaration

⁵ Hebron

⁶ The process of shedding old skin

⁷ Land between Israel and Palestine; we drove through on our way to Tiberius from the Dead Sea

⁸ "Blood money" is what Steven Spielberg called his own paycheck from Schindler's List after he refused to cash it, instead donating it back to the Jewish community. We were spoken to in Tel Aviv by Hadassah and Clila Bau, whose parents' wedding was shown in Schindler's List

⁹ At the Bedouin tents, they gave us Dixie cups of coffee. The tradition is to give wanted guests three shallow cups, or give unwanted guests a single, full cup.

¹⁰ On our hike in Jerusalem, Ron showed us the wild almonds that grow on trees, but are full of cyanide, and therefore inedible. He said joked that it's one of those things you learn through trial and error.

¹¹ Prussian blue is created in a test to isolate cyanide in a chemical solution. I learned this through a poem called Art Class by another Jewish teen poet, Rhiannon McGavin

like the trial and error of history and her story and the story of Eve playing on a
loop each evening Historians look to the past to answer questions about the
future:

Is there power in picking on something that can't pick you back?

fruit on vines, fish in barrels

Is there pride in occupation?¹²

The plums have no stickers here.

2.

In market near the old city, the streets were lined in milk¹³

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bottles, dribbling half dollar coins next to two left trashcan sneakers, donned by diaspora legs dried up in the sun like tomatoes. Mothers spoke in tongues that I could only decipher common words from Land and God and Cry and Pretty Girl I only ever learned rudimentary Hebrew¹⁴ but I knew

they gasped babbled sentences the same way I saw them wail¹⁵ and wander before the mountain stone bricks at the Holy of Holies

grasping Children of Israel's wrists with one palm, pulling them through slim slits in the crowds, leaving their free hand open to God to receive what they fit notes into limestone fissures for, somehow still using their elbows garbed in white cotton to widen wedges in between daughters of the Lord¹⁶ to force a path where one isn't for the daughters of their own while their sons are

on the other side, antediluvian degrees of separation stretching across borrowed borders They all wail for the peace they want and wish for Samaria, what they lost in the west

1.

Bank men in suits with fashioned canes¹⁷ are smoking cigars on the hotel pool's patio, ember ends shining through stale-scented vapor and lighting up the only city in the world that's able¹⁸ to sleep on Friday nights I stand on the corner room's balcony and let the tobacco smoke, so thick I could take a bite if i didn't know better, frizz autochthonous curls to frame my face like my very own halo let me be ethereal like I know I shouldn't before I atone for the sins I was born with: I had swallowed the first plum pit before I taught myself not to.

¹² Street art I saw in Tel Aviv, "שיא הרוואג שוביכב" (There is no pride in occupation)

¹³ 'Streets of milk (and honey)'

¹⁴ I left Cohen Hillel after 4th Grade, and I while a lot of Hebrew came back to me while in Israel, and I can still easily sight read, I only really know baby words. I can tell you what I eat, or what I love, or what I want, and not much else.

¹⁵ "Western Wall" → "Wailing Wall"

¹⁶ The Daughters of Jerusalem are young, unmarried women of Jerusalem, mentioned seven times in the Song of Solomon. They're implied to light skinned, non-arab, and affluent.

¹⁷ Fashioned canes... that's able" the story of Cain and Abel-- Cain is banished to become a wanderer. His name means master and power, but also sin, and he is described as a city-builder.

¹⁸ Able in hebrew is יָבִיל, the root of which means breath, and the rest of this stanza discusses breathing/inhaling

From the sixth floor¹⁹, I sacrifice the second stone on purpose

spit it into the chlorine water and watch it make waves

I know I'm supposed to pretend that the stones of plum pits and conflict are two dimensional so I can skip them like Hebrew school

but fruit and history go hand in hand and come full circle like they're dancing grapevines

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It's the day of rest and the palm trees sway along to each breeze like they're windchime music hammered metal and heartbreak²⁰, they're survivors too, like our grandparents who will sing in South Florida seven hours from now²¹, holding glasses of prune juice

around the world, it's children high pitched peals of laughter that break the night's silence with the sound of tumbling temple walls and crushed wine glasses²²

cacophony of coalescing congressmen²³ calling out in a dead language²⁴ to a million and a half candle lit²⁵ yellow stars dying light years²⁶ away
pray for the broken, pray for the new²⁷,
Next year, in Jerusalem²⁸

¹⁹ My hotel room in Jerusalem was on the sixth floor, overlooking the pool. I wrote some of this poem while sitting on the balcony on Shabbat, eating plum I had bought earlier at the Shuk.

²⁰ Statue of Yanush Korzack and His Children at Yad Vashem

²¹ Seven hour time difference between Jerusalem and Palm Beach

²² Broken glass at weddings to commemorate the destruction of the temple, but broken glass at night is Kristallnacht, The Night of Broken Glass

²³ I wrote this line after we visited the Herzl Museum, and watched reenactment of the first meeting of the Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897

²⁴ Herzl imagined Israel to be a land of many (primarily European) languages, but the actor who played him in the Herzl museum was amazed that Hebrew, a "dead language", took root

²⁵ Children's memorial at Yad Vashem for the 1.5 million children who died in the Holocaust. When we were in there, and we saw the thousands and thousands of yellow lights reflected, it felt so wrong to see the little blue lights from our museum-provided audio guides in the mirrors.

²⁶ "Light years away" At the time, they had no idea of the horrors the World War 2 would bring

²⁷ Prayer for the new = שֶׁחַיָּהוּ (Shehecheyanu). We say it to be thankful, so it's a prayer for holidays (not the sad ones, like Tisha B'av), prayer for eating a fruit for the first time since Rosh Hashanna (like a wild plum). Translates to "who has given us life" - death and life are a theme in this last stanza, and an overarching theme to so many Jewish holidays and events

²⁸ Something you hear your whole life, every holiday, every celebration, every mitzvah.