

THE YEAR-IN-ISRAEL

Our students discover Judaism’s ancient roots, develop close ties with the land and people of Israel, and deepen their identities during this unique first year of study and exploration. Three students share their unforgettable experiences during this transformative year.



Danielle Rodnizki leading services on the beach.

DANIELLE RODNIZKI '20

Cantorial Student

Although I had previously been to Israel on short, meaningful trips with March of the Living and Birthright, I was excited to spend the year studying in Jerusalem, knowing that it would be a deeper, bigger, more intense experience. This program gave all the first-year students the opportunity to live there and be Reform Jews in Israel, not always the easiest thing. The growing Progressive Movement in Israel triggers conflict in Israeli society as it pushes back on that binary division between the *dati* (literally “religious,” usually referring to Orthodox Jews) and the secular.

It was wonderful to interact with Israeli Rabbinical Program students, Israeli clergy, and activists to hear more about what Reform means to them. Especially meaningful was my yearlong *T’rumah* (volunteer) project at Kibbutz Gezer with Rabbi Miri Gold ‘98, one of the rabbis who fought in the Israel Supreme Court for Reform rabbis’ salaries to be paid by the Israeli government. When I led Shabbat services with Israeli rabbinical student Leora Ezrachi Vered for Project Keshet – a group of Russian women who were recent immigrants to Israel – the only way we could communicate was through prayer and music. It is a big deal for women to pray together publicly and communally in Israel, and as I sensed their gratitude for this opportunity, I felt even more deeply the importance of the work of the Progressive Movement and HUC-JIR in Israel.

The Year-In-Israel program provided amazing opportunities to meet people from all sectors of Israeli society, listen to them and learn from them, and engage in difficult and important conversations about Israel as both a Jewish and democratic state. Our professors and clergy challenged us to consider how we engage with Israel as we continue our studies and begin working in our student pulpits stateside.

My blog, danielledwellsonisrael.wordpress.com, covers some of the impactful moments from this year and reminds me of what I can do to connect with Israel, even when I am not physically there. Each learning opportunity has deepened who I am as a future Jewish leader, and I look forward to drawing on my Year-In-Israel experiences for many years to come.

Danielle Rodnizki is the recipient of the Cantor Israel Goldstein Endowed Scholarship.



Thalia Halpert Rodis with Women of the Wall.

THALIA HALPERT RODIS '21

Rabbinical and Education Student

I loved the Year-In-Israel. The program was packed with so much to learn and do. I got to know and grow from my classmates and teachers – people who have a similar passion for Jewish identity, learning, and community building. It was thrilling to learn with them and be challenged by them.

I loved our Scheuer Israel Seminar days when we got out of the classroom, experienced different parts of the country, and deepened our understanding of Israel from antiquity through the present day. It was wonderful learning about Israel through the lens of nuance, honesty, and complexity. These experiences strengthened my connection to Israel and my commitment to advance religious pluralism and Jewish-Arab relations.

My *T'rumah* site was at Hillel, an organization that supports individuals, usually between 18-40 years of age, who have chosen to leave the *Haredi* world. Often, those who leave the *Haredi* world lose their families, the comforting structures of observance, and their friends. Hillel offers them emergency housing, food, clothing, and tutoring in subjects like math, technology, writing, Hebrew, and English (since their schooling is primarily restricted to Jewish texts). My role, along with three other HUC-JIR students, was to run the English club. I learned about the *haredi* world, and they learned from a Reform Jewish woman who wants to be a rabbi.

Thalia Halpert Rodis is the recipient of the HUC-JIR Grant-in-Aid Scholarship, provided by generous donors.

MEIR BARGERON '20

Rabbinical Student

No one can fully describe the Year-In-Israel for you – you have to experience it for yourself. It is a wonderful, intense experience of learning about text, Hebrew, Israel as a society, and a lot about yourself. It was an amazing and overwhelming year and I did things I never imagined I would do: lead services, travel all over Israel, and engage in difficult conversations with Israelis about life there.

During our weekly Scheuer Israel Seminar, a woman heading an NGO helping young women from the economically disadvantaged periphery of Israeli society gave us a close inside look into her work. Her example of living Jewish values translated into transforming these young women's lives and professional opportunities after the army. She showed us how it was possible to create something that will make Israel stronger.

Every Tuesday, our North American group would pray with the Israeli Rabbinical Program students. We also engaged in learning trips together. A good number of these students are second career, and it was fantastic to find much in common with them. They are visionaries pioneering religious pluralism in Israel.

The Year-In-Israel is essential for our success as future leaders. An appreciation for Israel and Judaism through hands-on experiences gave us a deep understanding of Jewish history, the reciprocal links between the U.S. and Israel, and how the Reform Movement is an incredible lab of innovation. You can't understand Israel unless you live there for a period of time. Israel is a huge part of being a rabbi and representing Jewish life.

Meir Bargeron is the recipient of the Eleanor Shone Seigman Endowed Rabbinic Scholarship.



Meir Bargeron in Havilio Square in Jerusalem.