

Dear Mercaz,

Firstly, thank you so much for helping me fund my dream to attend the Israel program Tichon Ramah Yerushaliyim, TRY, for the 2015 spring semester. I just returned home to New Jersey about a week ago, and I am still processing all of the amazing experiences I had had over the past few months.

This was my first time in Israel, and although prior to going I was a Zionist, I was really just a Zionist because everyone else around me was also one. It was not something I strongly identified with. Over the course of the four months that I spent in Israel, I learned what it



Me (right) and a friend (left) on our campus in Jerusalem when it snowed!

actually meant to be a Zionist, and I became a Zionist not because it was the thing to do, but because it is something that I believe in.

Israel is an incredible country and being there made me proud to be a Jew. When most people read books about Jews, they are usually about the Holocaust, anti-Semitic actions, or other tragedies. When my Christian friends ask me what Jewish holidays are about, before I start to explain, they usually interject – “someone probably tried to kill you guys, and you got pretty hurt, but survived, and then you eat.” For millennia, the Jews had been persecuted against. However, in Israel, the weak oppressed Jew is not the one that you see, rather a strong, powerful, in control Jew. A new Jew that shows that we are not a people to be trodden upon.

One of the highlights of the TRY program is the Israel Core Course (ICC). In the class, you learn Jewish history from Abraham until modern times, which included Tzuk Eitan, from this past summer. As we learned about something, we went there. For example, when we learned about the events of Masada, we went to Masada. We did not even visit the Kotel until we got there in history (and then plenty of times after that). It was not a silly fun trip where we hiked mountains for the fun of it. Every place we went to had some sort of meaning to us. Ein Gedi was not just a fun hike, it was also a place where King David went to hide from Saul. Learning about our history in our land deepened the ties of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael for me.

One of the highlights of the TRY program is the Israel Core



Me (far left in blue shirt) with my Gadna unit and commander. Gadna is a week-long basic training simulation on an army base.

One of the other incredible things that TRY did was, towards the end of the program, we heard from three different political speakers – a left wing speaker, a right wing speaker, and a

Palestinian speaker. A problem with many Israel programs is that they present an extremely unbalanced political view or come with a clear political agenda. TRY, on the other hand, let us hear from three very interesting speakers about their political views. We were also allowed to ask them questions. The most interesting, by far, was the Palestinian speaker. It is one thing to hear a Jew speak about his political views in a Jewish state, but it is completely different to hear a Palestinian speak about his views in a Jewish state. This added another dimension to my understanding of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. My personal political views are still rather muddled because all of the speakers brought up good points – but I am definitely a Zionist.

Going on TRY was one of the most incredible things to ever happen to me, and I am so grateful for helping make the dream of studying there this past semester a reality.

Thank you very much,

Shari Boiskin