

David Lauterbach

How do I describe my relationship with Israel? I see it as a relationship builder and an essential home to the Jewish people. This summer, I climbed Mount Shlomo with my NFTY group. Before this part of the trip, we didn't really know each other well, but while climbing through this incredibly challenging hike we helped each other out, one step at a time. After we got to the top, we looked out and could see into Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Eilat, and the Red Sea. We saw four countries, only one Jewish. We had grown stronger as a group and as I saw how vulnerable this small country is, my recognition of the importance of Israel became much stronger. Israel is what binds the Jewish people together and without it, we might not be able to survive.

Rachel Grant

Many of us have never been confronted with living in a country that didn't have peaceful borders. I once heard a story about a man living in on a Kibbutz in the Negev during one of Israel's wars. He noticed that Jordanian soldiers would sneak over the border and steal his pomelo fruits. He decided to put these fruits out in a crate for them to take – rather than having to steal them. As a North American Jewish teen who has grown up thinking that peace between countries was a grand process full of treaties and negotiations, I was inspired by this man's story to try to make peace through small actions. I believe that people doing small acts of kindness for other people can create a true peace where people can live and thrive together. My relationship with Israel has taught me to pray that those involved in the conflicts in Israel will respect each other as human beings and that acts of peace will lead to peace in the region.

James Patterson

I believe that from my trip to Israel over the summer I am more in touch with this country. I feel like my relationship has grown because I had the chance to witness the land, the people and the culture first hand. My relationship before this trip was unremarkable. I did not really feel attached to Israel – it was just another mundane place in the world. Since I have returned from walking the streets, deserts and museums of Israel, I have paid more attention to what is going on in that country - I try and help out. I am actually planning right now for another trip to that country. I feel not only that this country speaks to me religiously, but also many other ways. I can honestly say that Israel is my second home. My relationship with Israel began through my Judaism as a religious connection. Even though that was the case to start with, I feel like I am now interested in and connected to the country through the culture and the landscape and even the struggles that Israel experiences. Even though I do strongly support Israel, I don't agree with everything. Sometimes I struggle with the amount of power the Orthodox Jews have on the rules of Israel. I believe that the women should be able to pray at the Western Wall without being boxed into their own section. Even though Israel is an old religious place the world is advancing and women are having more and more rights around the world. It sometimes seems that Israel is a country that is not taking the same steps forward in equal rights as other countries.