



**The International Synagogue
Welcoming the World's Travelers
at JFK Airport**



ESSAY CONTEST

For All 12th Graders Planning To Study In Israel For The Following School Year

These essays represent the expressions of many 12th-grade high school students from across the United States who entered The High School Essay Contest sponsored by The Jewish Press, and the International Synagogue at JFK Airport. If space were not limited, we would gladly print every entry, because each is a winning display of talent, effort and love of Torah and Eretz Yisroel. We greatly acknowledge the encouragement of so many schools and parents to enable this contest. The public is invited to view the essays on exhibit at The International Synagogue at JFK Airport International Arrivals Building, Terminal 4 – 4th floor in Chapel area and on the website of Internationalsynagogue.org and Jewishpress.com.

*Rabbi Dr. Ari Kerenblit, Chaplain
International Synagogue*

DINA ROSSMAN

Yavne High School Cleveland, OH - Keser Chaya Bais Yaakov, Israel

WHY I HOPE STUDYING IN ISRAEL WILL ENRICH MY LIFE

The State of Israel was established on May 14, 1948, when the Provisional Government of Israel declared the establishment of a new Jewish state. This coincided with the United States' acknowledgment of the provisional government as the de facto governing body, with President Truman representing the United States during this recognition.

Israel becoming a state 75 years ago has greatly impacted me and granted me many opportunities as it is the sovereign homeland of the Jewish people. The achievement of my educational goals, feeling comfortable within Israel's system, as well as access to Israel's landmarks, would not have been possible if not for the way the State of Israel is governed.

Israel is proud to be home to countless Yeshivos and Seminaries. There are also functioning systems in place, like any other operating country. The country has a modern road network, with train and bus services between major cities. The Jewish people also have access to many historic landmarks, such as the Western Wall, located in the Old City of Jerusalem. The Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall or the Kotel, is the last remaining outer wall of the ancient Jewish temple and is an incredibly holy site.

The fact that there is a modern State of Israel, meaning that I and the

rest of the Jewish people have the ability to freely return to our homeland, is a huge deal. Because of this, I am able to fulfill my dream and attend Keser Chaya Seminary in the Givat Shaul neighborhood of Jerusalem. I decided to enroll in this seminary because of its excellent academic programs and abundant opportunities to pursue my educational objectives. These include studying the Talmud in-depth, learning about my heritage in the place it occurred, and earning college credits.

Additionally, I was impressed by Keser Chaya's administrators, and I have confidence that they will offer me guidance and mentorship that align with my values and interests. The seminary's location is also great, situated near the central bus station, which allows for easy transportation and exploration of Israel.

To conclude, Israel offers much that would not be possible if not for the existence of the modern State of Israel and the ability of the Jewish people to freely return there. I am grateful for the opportunity to return to my homeland and be able to aim for achievement in my educational goals, feel comfortable within Israel's system of security, as well as have access to the holy landmarks of Israel.

ESSAY CONTEST

ESTHER MORRIS

Bnos Yisroel of Baltimore, MD - Neimas Bais Yaacov Seminary, Israel

HOW I HOPE STUDYING IN ISRAEL WILL ENRICH MY LIFE

Having the once in a lifetime experience to study abroad in Eretz Yisroel is a very unique opportunity with many benefits that can lead to a more fulfilling life. Some positive aspects to studying in Eretz Yisroel include having the ability to grow at one's own pace, gain independence, experience the holiness of the land, as well as create lasting friendships. There is so much to be gained from studying away from home.

One way to enrich a person's life is by always striving for spiritual growth. Being in an atmosphere where one is surrounded by many growth-oriented girls encourages the individual to push herself to continuously reach new levels. For example, noticing what people say, how they act, and what they do in their free time can positively impact those around them. Not only does studying in Eretz Yisroel help with one's internal growth, but it is also beneficial to their personal independence.

When one grows up where many things are readily handed on a silver platter it is convenient, but there also comes a time where one needs to learn to be self-sufficient and there is no better time to learn these skills than in seminary. Learning in seminary is the transition period between structured schedules and real life, so to speak. Being prepared for life circumstances is a very valuable tool which one can carry with them forever. In addition to gaining

independence by being away for a full year, one also has the opportunity to experience the Kedusha of the land of Eretz Yisroel.

There is something so uplifting to spending a year living in Eretz Yisroel and touring the land. Many learning programs located in Eretz Yisroel make a great effort to bring the students around to visit holy sites that are written about in the Torah. Through this, they emphasize the importance of learning about one's heritage, which is one of the crucial benefits of studying in Eretz Yisroel. Furthermore, throughout the journey there are many opportunities for creating lasting relationships.

Everyone wants to have a figure in their lives of whom they aspire to be like. Learning in a different environment than one is used to, gives new opportunities to form relationships with others from different communities, or even those out of the country. Forging long term relationships with both friends and mentors, enhances their growth opportunities for the future.

In conclusion, all the above examples are valuable assets in enabling a wholesome life with meaning and purpose. Therefore, before any student leaves to study in Eretz Yisroel, they should be aware of the many benefits which will enable them to take advantage of the numerous opportunities and live a more enriched life.

NACHUM SILVER

New England Jewish Academy West Hartford, CT – Yeshivat HaKotel, Israel

HOW I HOPE STUDYING IN ISRAEL WILL ENRICH MY LIFE

For thousands of years, my ancestors longed to go to the Holy Land, but most weren't able to. Israel is my ancestral homeland. It's also the present-day homeland of the Jewish people. Now, I have the opportunity to go with fewer struggles to face than any of them, so I feel it's my obligation to take advantage of that opportunity. There are three components to my reasoning for wanting to learn in Israel. One, I want to study Torah. Two, I want to be in Israel. Three, I want to study Torah while in Israel. These reasons are all encompassed by one belief of mine; I should study Torah in Israel because I believe that's what G-d wants from me.

Since I was born, I have been raised in an Orthodox-Jewish family built on Torah values. Throughout my life, I attended Jewish day-schools, balancing my secular studies with tefillah and Torah study. In eighth grade, I started attending NCSY events. I took advantage of the numerous opportunities presented to me, eventually becoming the Northeast NCSY Regional Board President and National Board Representative. Throughout my years in NCSY, including attending two summer programs, I have grown tremendously as a Jew and a person. My love for Judaism and Torah has come far. As I leave high school, I want to take the important step of applying to yeshiva in order to make Torah study and Jewish observance a greater part of my life.

Since I was twelve years old, I have known that I want to make Aliyah and move to Israel after high school. As I mentioned before, Israel is not only my ancestral homeland, but also the present-day homeland of the Jewish people. Additionally, there are various mitzvot that can only be performed while in the land of Israel. According to the Gemara Sotah, Moshe Rabbeinu's overarching reason for wanting to enter the Land of Israel was in order to fulfill the mitzvot unique to there (Sotah 14a). My plan to go to yeshiva for at least one year before making Aliyah. Afterwards, I hope to go to the army, college, and start my life in Israel. I view going to yeshiva not only as an opportunity to learn Torah, grow as a person, and form connections, but also as a pathway to eventually integrate into Israeli society.

Learning Torah on its own is special; the same goes for being in Israel. In my opinion, however, learning Torah in Israel is not just a way to kill two birds with one stone, but in of itself a special opportunity. In the Gemara Bava Batra, Rabbi Zeira and Rabbi Ila have a disagreement, in which Rabba—who lives in Babylon—sides with Rabbi Zeira. When Rabbi Zeira goes to Israel, he agrees with Rabbi Ila's opinion over his own; Rabba continues to side with Rabbi Zeira's opinion. Rabbi Zeira comments that "the air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise, as when I ascended to Eretz Yisrael I accepted the opinion of Rabbi Ila, who was also from Eretz Yisrael, whereas Rabba, who remained in Babylonia, accepted my former opinion" (Bava Batra 158b). The argument in the Gemara reveals the unique power of learning in Israel. The fact that Rabbi Zeira was willing to disagree with his own opinion after going to Israel demonstrates the tremendous impact that being in Israel has on Torah study, as well as personal growth.

I am convinced that I should study Torah in Israel. I believe that there is intrinsic value in studying Torah and in being in Israel. Studying Torah while being in Israel is a powerful combination for achieving personal and religious growth. I trust that studying Torah in Israel is what G-d wants me to do after high school.

ESSAY CONTEST

DAFNA STERN

Yavne High School Cleveland, OH - Bnos Sarah, Israel

MY DREAM YEAR WILL CONSIST OF...

I know it won't all be smooth sailing. But I think the bumps in the road will help me grow and develop into the person I want to become.

I think going to a foreign country by myself will show me how to be my own best friend, work through situations that come up, and trust my gut. I think that the homesickness will eventually envelop me, but I think it will add value to my year by reminding me that I could be at home, but I am choosing to be here; I should make the most of my experience. I think the pressure to fit in and make new friends will form me into a more confident young lady and create stronger more resilient friendships which will support me throughout my life. I think the infamous seminary reports will teach me how to learn, how to be a hard worker, and to know my limits. I know that the shabbos invites to remote places, sleeping on the floor, and eating interesting foods will make

me more open to new experiences and different cultures. It will expose me to different types of Jews and create a precious bond between us - worth one thousand nights on the floor.

My dream year in Israel consists of ice coffees, late nights, and friends. But it also has the moments which will make it the learning experience it's meant to be. It includes times when I will feel sad, lonely, and lost but I know that those moments will shape me into the mature young adult I need to be when I walk off the plane and back onto American soil. The ice coffee seminary experience is so surface level.

My dream year involves true growth, and learning more about myself, my people, and my land. I'm not hoping for the hard times, I just know that when they inevitably happen, it won't be a nightmare - I'll be living my dream.

SAMSON BIERIG

Torah Academy of Bergen County NJ - Lev HaTorah, Israel

Spending a year in Israel, studying torah with other members of כלל ישראל, is a spiritual experience I can't wait to begin. For as long as I can remember, I have had a strong pull towards Israel, a pull that is reaffirmed every summer when I visit my family in Yerushalayim. While living in Israel as a functioning member of society, I will be able to enrich my life by reinforcing my connection with Hashem, Torah, and עם ישראל. I know studying in Israel will enhance my life as this experience will allow me to reinforce my relationship with Hashem, spiritually grow, and experience the joys of Torah with other like minded jews from around the world.

In Israel, building a stronger relationship with Hashem is one of my top priorities. I plan to strengthen my connection with Hashem through the study of his Torah, which will allow me to better grasp and understand the various aspects that make Judaism so enjoyable. Without the distractions of schoolwork and other life obstacles, I will have an almost endless amount of time to focus on Torah, which in turn will enhance my life long relationships with Hashem. By learning torah 24/7, both with enthusiastic fellow talmidim and supportive rabbis, I will also spiritually grow. Despite learning Torah for the last 18 years of my life, I know I can deepen my understanding of Tanach, Gemara, Mishna, and more. Furthermore, all the new knowledge I gain from learning in Israel will enhance my life, as I will now be able to teach the information I learned during my year in Israel to others. Lastly, studying in Israel will allow me to connect with other talmidim from outside my community. Spending a year in Israel will give me the opportunity to create new, possibly long lasting relationships with other Yeshiva bachurim. I will use the בין אדם לתבירו skills I enhanced in Israel to help me form strong connection outside of Yesahiva, such as in college or in the workplace.

The thought that I will soon be able to regularly visit the kotel, and walk down Ben Yehudah excites me. However, the most exciting part about the upcoming gap year is that I will be able to enrich my life by strengthening my bond with Hashem and his Torah, as well as my new found friends. As I see it, this isn't going to be a gap year, but rather a growth year.

CHANA RIVKIN

Beis Rivkah High School New Orleans, LA - Beis Chana, Israel

MY DREAM YEAR WILL CONSIST OF

I am attending a seminary in Israel this upcoming school year. My dream year consists of many things, and I decided to write it down in the form of an acrostic, spelling out MY DREAM YEAR.

Making new friends is one of the many things I hope to gain from my year in Israel. I'll be going to a program with many girls I've never met before and girls from all over the world and I hope to make many new friends.

Year filled with personal growth, an opportunity to focus on becoming a better person.

Doing things I won't have the opportunity to do again, taking advantage of the trips my seminary takes me on.

Really learning, taking time to focus on the classes and internalizing the lessons I am being taught.

Exciting experiences that I'll have, such as trips or programs. Being in Israel for a whole year will definitely make that happen. There will be opportunities for historical trips, informative trips and fun trips.

Amazing teachers. I know that the program I'm going to has amazing and inspiring teachers and I'm looking forward to hearing and learning from them.

Me. A year to focus on becoming the best me that I can be, through classes, workshops, a farbrengen or talking with my friends.

Yiddishkeit. A year full of learning and growth in every area, but specifically in my yiddishkeit, growing in my connection to Hashem, learning more Torah and spreading Yiddishkeit to others.

Entering the «bubble» seminary provides, allowing me to be fully focused on the learning, opportunities for growth and friendships without getting distracted by everything going around me and in the world.

Accomplishing the goals I make at the beginning of the year, whether a spiritual goal or skill I want to learn. My dream year would consist of accomplishing this list of goals.

Realizing the potential I have by using my skills to help others, get involved in the programs seminary offers, grab any opportunities that come my way, recognizing that these are once in a lifetime chances.

ESSAY CONTEST

LIBA POSNER

Skokie, IL - Machon Shoshanat, Israel

HOW I HOPE STUDYING IN ISRAEL WILL ENRICH MY LIFE

They say studying in Israel is a life changing experience, but I believe making positive change isn't quite that simple. In order to really grow, you need to be interested and consciously looking for possibility. With this type of mindset, Israel really can be a life changing experience. That's why I plan on entering my year in Israel with my eyes wide open. I want to be receptive to all of the opportunities that Israel has to offer me. I intend for my year in Israel to strongly enrich my life. Here's how: G-d willing, I will be attending seminary in Jerusalem, which means that I will be able to visit the Kotel regularly. Speaking to G-d in the holiest place on earth is certain to awaken my soul. Additionally, being in Israel will give me a unique opportunity to connect to my history and roots. The stories of Torah will come alive to me. There is an idea in Judaism that “

לראיה שמיעה דומה אינה”- “seeing does not compare to hearing.”

When you hear about something, it can feel disputable, vague, and impersonal. Contrast this with seeing: once you have seen something, it becomes tangible, concrete, and established. In Israel, I will finally be able to see things I have only heard about: Har Habayit, Kever Rachel, and the City of David. Not only will the Torah I have learned in the past take on a new dimension, but I also intend to learn new Torah. I specifically chose my seminary because of their very strong academic program; I love Torah and am passionate about learning. I'm sure that being intellectually stimulated by Jewish ideas while being surrounded Jewish culture and Jewish people, all of whom are my family, will uplift me. Hopefully my year will be one of growth, learning, and new experience.

RIVKAH LAZAROFF

Lubavitch Girls High School Chicago, IL - Machon Shoshanat, Israel

Studying In Israel Attending a seminary in Israel is an incredible opportunity that can enrich my life in many ways. From gaining perspective on Jewish history and heritage to learning how to navigate a new country, a seminary experience in Israel can have a great impact on both spiritual and personal growth. This year will also allow me to form meaningful connections with fellow students and teachers unique to Israel. My hope is that studying in Israel will give me a new appreciation and outlook on the land and the connection it brings. Foremost, studying in Israel offers an opportunity to truly explore my Jewish heritage at its source.

Throughout my school years we have learned about all kinds of Jewish life, history, and culture in connection with the Holy Land. Living and learning there will add even more context to appreciate what it's all about. Israel is the land that was given to us as a nation and has since had countless historical events and landmarks that have shaped Jewish history and identity. By studying in Israel, I will have the opportunity to visit these sites and gain a deeper understanding of their significance. Whether it's exploring the ancient ruins of Yerushalayim or visiting the gravesite of our Avot, every experience will be an opportunity to deepen my connection to Jewish heritage.

Additionally, studying in Israel provides the opportunity to connect to teachers and students that I would not generally meet. The teachers at Machon Shoshanat Yerushalayim are ones with great knowledge and wisdom and I believe that this year I will gain a deeper perspective and appreciation of Torah learning from them. I will also have the chance to meet students from around the world and form friendships that can last a lifetime. Being in Israel will give me the gift of rare meaningful connections.

Finally, studying in Israel can be an incredibly transformative experience on a personal level. Living in a foreign country can be challenging, but it also provides a unique opportunity for personal growth. Being in a new environment and culture gives a different perspective of others and the world at large. Through the challenges and successes that come my way while studying in Israel, I will have the opportunity to learn more about myself and grow from my experiences. As you can see, attending a seminary in Israel can enrich my life on a spiritual level and help me grow as a person. By living in the land of our Jewish nation and learning from experienced teachers, I can strengthen my appreciation of Torah at its roots. The connection with fellow students from all over, as well as personal development, seminary can have a big impact on my life. Learning in Israel is an experience that is simply not possible anywhere else in the world. I am excited to study in Israel and look forward to the opportunities that are in store.

JOSEPH OSTROFF

Maimonides High School Brookline, MA - Aish Geshar Yeshiva, Israel

HOW I HOPE STUDYING IN ISRAEL WILL ENRICH MY LIFE

“Students admitted from the waitlist are not eligible for deferred enrollment.” After all the sleepless nights, the stress over grades, and the constant juggling of attractive extracurriculars, I never thought those eleven words would be relevant to me. I had worked hard, hadn’t I? In any event, I was presented with a choice: Accept the offer of a position on the waitlist or decline the position and give up on my dreams of attending my dream school. Accepting meant giving up the opportunity to take a yeshiva gap year, declining meant giving up what I had wanted for years. It was a hard decision, knowing that what I would choose would affect my life, family, and entire future. You always hear about the mid-life crisis, but never the early-life crisis. I took a deep breath – and hit ‘decline.’

I’ll be honest, I wasn’t even sure I wanted to go to yeshiva until about a year ago. The thought process likely stemmed from the fact that I had no family that had ever gone to yeshiva before; I’d be the very first. It took a long time to come around to the idea, but the concept seemed increasingly intriguing. When else in your life can you take a year off and go devote yourself to your religion, your growth, and most importantly, yourself? Instead of seeing it as a waste of time, I started to see a gap year as an opportunity. An opportunity to connect to my yiddishkeit in a way I never had before, an opportunity to explore my own Jewish identity.

But it’s not just about the spiritual side of things. Studying in Israel will give me the tools I need to be an observant Jew for the rest of my life. I’ve been lucky enough to attend Jewish schools since preschool, but I worry that all that knowledge will be wasted if I don’t learn how to apply it in the real world. That’s where Israel comes in. My hope is that it’s going to bridge the gap between theory and practice, showing me how to live out the values I’ve been taught in a way that feels authentic and meaningful. I never grew up as part of a particularly large Jewish community, and spending a year in Israel will allow me to be part of a large Jewish community for the first time, to interact with Jews of all beliefs and practices.

A long time ago, God told my ancestor Abraham, לְיִרְעָה אֶתְּךָ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת “To your descendants I will give this land”. He repeated that promise to Isaac and Jacob, and that legacy has been passed down through every generation to me. I am the living embodiment of that promise. The inheritance of the land of Israel is not just a distant dream, but a tangible reality within my grasp. I am a rightful heir to the most coveted legacy of all, and it’s about time I claim my inheritance.

RACHEL KHAIMOV

Ezra Academy Flushing, NY - Baer Miriam Seminary, Israel

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