



RATIONALE:

What is Jewish Travel and Why Should I Do It?

One of the best ways to encourage our students to understand the power of belonging to the Jewish People and help them gain skills to play an active role in the future of that People, is to offer them an experience of Jewish Travel.

Every time you take your students or campers on a deliberate outing to visit Jewish sites, meet Jewish people outside your community or have Jewish experiences in unfamiliar places (whether Jewish or not), you are doing what we consider to be Jewish travel. As you can imagine, Jewish travel can be enormously varied.

It includes the well-known programs, such as trips to Israel ranging from the traditional six-week teen program to the mass phenomenon of Taglit-Birthright Israel, and trips to Poland and Eastern Europe. It also includes trips to visit the cemeteries of our families, trips to Jewish museums and tours of ghettos and Jewish neighborhoods.

Jewish travel might include visits to far-away countries, or it might be a short visit down the road or to a nearby city. It might be something

we do with our family, our congregation, our class or our friends. Whatever form it takes, we encourage you to see it as a powerful and effective means to access stories of the Jewish People.

When we embark on a Jewish journey, we have the ability to travel both through space – to new places and sites – and also through time. We go back in history to “visit” and “meet” Jews of yesteryear, in their communities and the places they lived.

Whether we are encountering the Jewish people of today or yesterday, we can create conversations with them; with the heroes and heroines, the leaders and the “common” people. These are important Peoplehood encounters and they have the power to transform our own sense of self and belonging.

Pedagogic Rationale – Why is Jewish Travel Also Good Education?

Travel is one of the most powerful tools for exper-

riential education. Travel combined with Jewish content can provide our students with transformative Jewish experiences in which they meet and interact with their fellow members of the Jewish People, whether alive or dead.

The realities of traveling, of leaving home (even for a short time), create enormous educational possibilities that do not exist in our daily, familiar environment. Much research has been done on the nature of tourism, with sociologists and anthropologists pointing to what happens when a person leaves home and enters unfamiliar terrain, either alone or in a group.

There is an openness to new experiences, a lack of stability that creates what is called “liminality;” a sort of in-between-ness, when a person is in an unfamiliar place¹. And as educators, we know that amazing things can happen in this space.

Additionally, travel is an all-encompassing experience. We use our bodies, our senses, as well as our minds, and this is the stuff of the best experiential education! We smell new smells, eat new foods, hear new languages and participate physically in the unfamiliar. This is all fertile territory for the educator who wants to offer his or her students new opportunities and experiences.

[1] For more information see: Dean MacCannell, Daniel Boorstin, Shaul Kelner, Victor Turner, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.