



ISRAEL & URJ CAMPS/IMMERSIVES 2024

URJ Camps represent the vision we aspire to for our Jewish community and humanity: increased kindness, justice, joy, inclusion, and wholeness, rooted in our Reform and universal Jewish values. Over 15,000 individuals – campers, staff, faculty, lay leadership, donors, and alumni – eagerly anticipate coming together at our URJ camps this summer.

Countless hours will be devoted to the special essence of URJ camp: simultaneously deepening Jewish community and values, fostering friendships, mentorship, role models, personal growth, learning, prayer, play, laughter, and creating memories that shape our lives. Our goal is that this “secret sauce” will be carried back to our non-camp communities to advance this vision.

Building a Sukkat Shalom, a Shelter of Peace & Belonging

The conflict with Hamas, triggered by their heinous attack on Israel, primarily targeting civilians, continues to deeply affect Israelis and those living in Israel. Our hearts ache with every story of loss, harm, and hatred. We will nurture our Israeli guests, recognizing their ongoing mourning, and follow the teachings of our cherished Jewish values – listening, standing by their side, and providing nourishment for their minds, bodies, and souls.

We also acknowledge the pain felt by many North American campers, staff, and faculty, experiencing the empathy and compassion that arises when loved ones suffer. For many within our North American community, antisemitism has resurfaced, instilling fear and anxiety.

We will provide a *sukkat shalom* – a shelter of love and peace – for all of us, Israeli and North American, focusing on fostering a holy community of healing, joy, and belonging.

Empathy, Compassion, Understanding, Learning, Kavod (Respect)

The conflict sparked by Hamas has resulted in immeasurable suffering, loss, and pain for our Palestinian neighbors, many of whom are friends, and for the devastating harm inflicted on innocent civilians. We are shattered by the trauma experienced by all in the region. We hope and pray for a future where everyone in the region can live in peace, security, and dignity, raising their children with the values we share as human beings.

We recognize that there are diverse perspectives and viewpoints regarding Israel's actions and policies toward Palestinians, Arab Israelis, Gaza, the West Bank, and the broader region. We embrace these differing perspectives as a core tenet of Judaism while affirming our unwavering support for Israel as a

Jewish homeland, with its blessings and challenges. We are committed to engaging in Israel's journey toward becoming a beacon of light among nations, even in moments of falling short.

At camp, we acknowledge that our adolescent, young adult, and older staff and faculty hold a range of views on Israel's ongoing management of the conflict and its treatment of Palestinians and others. We have full confidence in our professional leadership teams, supported by seasonal leadership, to navigate these complexities with professionalism, sound judgment, discretion, and a commitment to our mission.

We have dedicated significant time to preparing for this summer and the difficult, messy, and sacred moments it will bring. We are grateful to the URJ professional and lay leadership, the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), the Jewish Agency for Israel, the I-Center, RootOne, and many others for their contributions to our learning, growth, and conversations, laying the groundwork for our camp leadership to address the challenges ahead. We have a support team ready to assist with any challenges that arise.

TFAC (Talk for a Change) & MESSH (Mental, Emotional, Social, Spiritual Health) Wellness

"A time for every purpose under heaven," serves as one of our scriptural guiding principles for this year's camp: balancing the enduring joys and blessings of Israel with dialogue, deeper learning, and understanding of the conflict and its broader implications.

Our primary focus remains on the joys of community, learning, and growth – the essence of camp – alongside our celebration of Israel's light and the nurturing of relationships with our Israeli guests. Since we anticipate the need for some difficult conversations due to differing viewpoints, we are exploring the use of TFAC (Talk for a Change), a new URJ initiative promoting healthy dialogue amid complexity.

These conversations will be age-appropriate and anchored in our MESSH (mental, emotional, social, spiritual) health guidelines, our values of belonging, and the core values of URJ. Our hope is that these discussions enrich the sacred work of relationship-building, deepen empathy and compassion for our shared humanity, and provide lasting benefits beyond the camp experience.

Our aim is to honor each other's perspectives and build bridges of understanding informed by our lived experiences, starting from childhood. We view this opportunity as a gift, not only for navigating the current challenges but for learning a lifelong asset.

Israel & Jewish Peoplehood in Our Hearts

A significant aspect of the magic and impact of our URJ camps, spanning many decades, has been our connection with Israel and Israelis. We eagerly anticipate welcoming over 300 Israeli staff members and at least 50 Israeli campers to our URJ camp communities this summer. Our Israeli staff, known as *shlichim* (emissaries), bring their souls to camp, fostering relationships with staff, campers, and faculty, forging a sacred link between our Israeli friends, families, and communities residing in Israel and the

broader Jewish community in North America. These friendships endure, providing homes for North American campers/staff during visits to Israel and for Israelis traveling through North America. These relationships, and the countless stories shared within them, have always deepened our understanding and connection to Israel. Israel and Jewish Peoplehood are integral to our URJ and Reform Movement's mission, vision, and core values – and the Israelis joining us at camp this summer play a fundamental role in bringing this vision to life.

Simcha & Healing

Camp brings the gift of *simcha* (joy) – the joy of play, friendship, song, laughter, and all the magical moments that define camp. Being together at camp offers respite, restoration, rejuvenation, and light. Our Israeli and North American staff, numbering over 2,500 professional young adults, come to camp to lead, live, and embody the spirit of camp, including nurturing children and providing the care, joy, growth, and unconditional love they seek. Many staff return to give back to the place and community that helped shape them, often in profound ways.

Despite the challenges in the world, whether from the conflict with Hamas or other societal issues, at camp we shed much of the darkness and embrace the joys of Judaism and shared humanity – building resilience, guiding campers and staff through difficult times, celebrating the good, learning, growing, and working toward a brighter future.

Years from now, we believe our children, teens, young adults, and older community members will look back on this time not only as a period of hardship but also as one of growth, learning, inspiration, empathy, and compassion. We embrace our shared goals as Jews, Israelis, lovers of Israel, and agents of change for a better world. We eagerly anticipate welcoming 15,000 souls to URJ camps in the summer of 2024.



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