

Temple Emunah Camp – Israel Shabbat  
October 15, 2016

Shabbat Shalom!

My name is Ethan Aronson, and for the past 7 summers I have attended Camp Young Judaea in Amherst, New Hampshire. This past summer was the climax of the career of a YJ kid: Gadna (YJ's Israel Trip). Gadna is the 5.5 week trip that all rising juniors go on, and come back from with raving reviews. And everyone is already on a "camp high." We have all been waiting for 10 months to be together as a group again. And the summer before we were in the "Dalet" age group, and we were the top dogs. Most of us ignorantly called Dalet summer the best summer of our lives. Boy were we wrong.

This summer, I spent 5.5 weeks traveling in a 64 seat tour bus with our, former motorcycle gang member, driver named Brent, staying in hotels and kibbutzim from Haifa to Eilat. My group went to museums, historical sites, amusement parks, and beaches. It was a blast! We had a lot of fun! There was a good balance between fun and education ... not that the education wasn't fun.

I have one main highlight from my summer to share with you. And it's one you might not expect: the 3 day hike. We hiked from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sea of Galilee. In the course of 3 days, we hiked almost 30 kilometers. To a hardcore hiker, that's nothing. But to a bunch of pampered American Jewish teens, it's brutal. And we had nothing to do. But the boredom was the best part. It forced us to bond. I learned more on that hike about some of my camp friends than I had in the other 6 summers I had spent with them. We also saw some beautiful scenery.

Shabbats in Israel were the best part of the trip. They were the same as Shabbat at camp, where we are free to roam campus and do pretty much whatever we want after services. The difference was in the services. Camp services are traditional services. Our services in Israel were less about praying and more about enjoying and focusing on the fact that we were in Israel! We would play group bonding games in our smaller groups ("families"), and we would have argumentative discussions about Jewish moral dilemmas. Every rabbi's dream!

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