

Teen feels strongly about Jewish homeland



JAMIE BERKOWITZ

As a teen, I believe my involvement in Jewish organizations have helped me feel close and connected to Israel, even though I never have been there.

After reading about a recent study commissioned by the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, titled, "Attachment to Israel Declining Among Young American Jews," I was shocked. The article said that only 20 percent of Jews under the age of 35 are "highly attached" to Israel, with the numbers not expected to rise anytime soon. These statistics show the falling interest people of my generation have in Israel, and I am appalled.

Aside from discovering a growing disconnection, the study also found a strong attachment develops as soon as someone travels to Israel. This discovery strengthens the argument that programs such as Birthright Israel have a positive effect.

These findings should be a call to action. There are several programs available to travel to Israel for every teen with every type of interest. BBYO, for example, offers a trip called Passport to Israel (P2I), where you can explore the geographic beauty of Israel, as well as walk in the footsteps of Jewish history and meet other Jews in BBYO from all over the world.

My brother participated in this program two summers ago and had the most amazing time. When I asked him about it, he said his trip to Israel with BBYO was an awesome experience, where he felt a sense of belonging.

This upcoming summer I am going on Passport to Israel, and I cannot even begin to explain my excitement. Not only am I excited for the outdoor activities, meeting friends I will have forever, seeing the Dead Sea, watching the sunrise from the top of Masada and seeing the place where so much of my Jewish history occurred, but I'm also excited about finding my Jewish identity and feeling even more connected to Israel.

However, going to Israel is not the only way of feeling connected to our Jewish homeland; Even though I never have visited Israel, I am proud to say that I am one of the 20 percent from the Bronfman study who feels so strongly about our Jewish homeland. I credit this belief to my involvement in Hebrew school and BBYO, which both make me feel more Zionist.

With so many options to get involved in Jewish life today and strengthen that connection, let's work together to combat this growing problem.

Jamie Berkowitz, a 16-year-old Houston teenager, is a junior at Bellaire High School. She is the daughter of Michael and Mimi Berkowitz.

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