



After the Bus Stop Bombing: An ENP Volunteer's Determination to Make a Difference



Many junior year abroad students must confront their friends' and families' concerns about studying in the midst of terrorism and conflict when they choose to study in Israel. One student's personal encounter of the bombing spurred her to share her story of fulfillment in the face of terror.

When I decided to study abroad here in Jerusalem, many of my friends and family members back home could not comprehend my decision. For the three months before I left, I had people tell me time and time again that the Middle East was dangerous and that they were concerned for my safety. These claims, however, did not faze me, as I knew that traveling to and living in Israel was something that I wanted to do. I appreciated their concern, but I did not actually take their words to heart.

About two months into my stay here in Israel, there was a terrorist attack in Jerusalem near the central bus station. Knowing that the attack occurred so close to me, at a place that I visit quite frequently was frightening enough, and learning that the woman who was murdered in the attack was my classmate almost pushed me over the edge. Shortly after the attack and learning about Mary's death, I called my father and discussed the possibility of me returning to the United States early. Suddenly, the apprehensions of my friends and family about my travels began to make sense.

During the days following the attack, I sat back and watched as Jerusalem recovered from this event. Unlike what would occur in most other cities in the world after such an event, life in Jerusalem went on. The public buses remained full. Generally speaking, the people of Jerusalem tucked their fear, anger, and sadness away and carried on with their lives. While I was absolutely in awe of the strength demonstrated by those around me, I myself found this resolution to be unnatural. I was scared and found it difficult to just carry on. Yet, somehow, the behavior of those around me provided a source of comfort and security, and I decided to stay in Israel.

After reading my online postings about Mary's death, my friends and family back in the states began to express their concern once more, pleading that I return home and asking me why I wanted to stay here. Those of us in Israel realize that the media abroad consists of masters in over-exaggeration, thus blowing events such as this one out of proportion, therefore making life here seem much more unsafe than it actually is. Despite this, I began to evaluate what it is about Israel that makes it so appealing to so many people, especially young adults such as myself. The first word that came to mind



when taking this question into consideration was opportunity. Yes, I am here to further my college education, but I could be doing that at Indiana University. The reason I chose to go abroad in Israel was to explore my Jewish faith, but more so, because I wanted to make a difference in the world and felt that this was the place to do it.

Upon arriving at Hebrew University I knew I wanted to get involved as a volunteer, but I was not sure which organization I wanted to volunteer for. I attended an internship/career fair during the first week of school, and in visiting each station, one in particular caught my eye--the Ethiopian National Project. I had learned briefly about Ethiopian Jewry, but I wanted to know more. Upon approaching the ENP station, I listened to Grace's speech about what ENP does, and I was immediately hooked. Helping underprivileged children was right up my alley, and I would also get to learn about an entirely new culture and historical phenomenon. I signed up and made arrangements for an interview. I left my first visit to the ENP office feeling excited and empowered. I knew that if I took advantage of this opportunity, I would be able to leave Jerusalem in the summer knowing that I made a difference, and that the Ethiopian National Project provided me with this ability.

So, what exactly does ENP do? Well, our intention is to provide Ethiopian-Israeli teens with the assistance and resources to address their social and educational needs in hopes of providing them with a bright future. The experience is an enriching one for me personally because I feel that as a college student, I am being given an opportunity to give back and help these teens to get some, if not all of the same experiences that I had at their age. Had I not been provided with a strong education, enriching extra-curricular activities, athletics, and motivating mentors and advisors, I would not be where I am today, and I can only hope that these kids will be provided with the same resources and tools to succeed.

Since beginning my volunteer experience just over two months ago, I have been exposed to several aspects of what makes ENP as successful as it is. I have had the opportunity to work in the office with Grace, contributing to newsletters, and fundraising and awareness projects. Working in the office has been an empowering experience as I have been given tasks that seem different from others that I have done in the past, and I have been trusted to complete them. This trust has not only motivated me, but it has helped me to realize how my past education and fundraising experiences have prepared me for "the real world." Aside from working in the office, I have also had the fortune of traveling to the ENP Youth Center in Beit Shemesh, interacting with not only the children at this center, but also with their coordinator, Hailu. Hailu is so dedicated to his job and the teens in his center. His desire to see them reach their full potential is blatantly obvious after just a few short minutes in his presence. It is such a rewarding experience to get out in the field and interact with the kids and see how the youth centers and people running them really are making a difference in these teenager' lives.



Finally, in addition to working in the office and my weekly travels to Beit Shemesh, I was able to partake in a Purim Youth Encounter in Kiryat Bialik. In attendance were American teens from Boca, South Palm Beach here on a weeklong program, Israeli teens who were hosting the Americans, and Ethiopian-Israeli teens from the ENP Youth Outreach Center in Kiryat Bialik. We spent the day making *mishloach manot* (traditional gifts of food for the Purim holiday) to give to Ethiopian-Israeli families who had recently moved to the area. Seeing these three groups of teens come together in a common cause was extremely rewarding and I feel so fortunate to have taken part in this event. After spending the day answering their questions about the college application process and my favorite parts of my college experience so far, I was reminded of how important mentors are to high school students, and I left feeling accomplished and satisfied.

So, the next time someone asks me why I chose to study abroad in Israel and remain here despite my fear of conflict and terrorism, I will answer them by telling them this: here in Jerusalem, I am granted the gift of opportunity. Perhaps, because of the conflict that exists here, there is a sense of community and trust in this city, one that I believe is different from anywhere else in the world. This notion of community is powerful and inspiring, and thus so many people around me take part in wonderful organizations, such as ENP. Israel is such a young country and has such a diverse community, filled with enthusiasm, inspiration and motivation.

I have chosen to stay in Israel for the remainder of the semester because I want to continue my work with the Ethiopian National Project, in the hope that the next generation of Ethiopian-Israelis will too be able to make a positive change in the world.