

Dear Birthright Participant,

My name is Alyssa, I'm 24-years-old and I went on Birthright in March 2018. It was a powerful experience but I'm writing because there are a few things I wish I had known before I went on my trip, and I'd like to share a story about some of those things with you.

I was standing outside of the Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem, crying. There's this point at the very end, after you've wound your way through the museum and thought about fear, hatred, love, how your family did or didn't make it ... and you walk out and see this incredible landscape with a big open sky, and maybe you feel hopeful, or sad, or even grateful. I felt all of those things, and so I cried. I felt connected to the others on my trip, I felt connected to the family I never met, I felt connected to the trees that had been planted in that landscape that gave uprooted families like mine the chance to put down roots again.

But then I thought, "Who lived here before? The land is so beautiful, how could it have been empty before?" I had a creeping feeling that its history wasn't as peaceful as it seemed. Later, I asked my tour guide about the land around Yad Vashem. "It was nothing before," he told me, "just swamp." Just swamp. As I had heard over and over throughout the trip. I later looked up the history of lands near Yad Vashem and read reports that not too far away was once a Palestinian Arab village where, in 1948, over 100 villagers were killed. Why couldn't my group talk about this other history as well?

Birthright was full of these moments. Ten days is a short time and our trip wasn't supposed to be political, so why would I ask for more? I made great friends, I made out with a cute guy at a bar, we skinny-dipped in the ocean at midnight. I loved all of these moments, but why couldn't there be any space for me to ask about the destruction of this village? Why did my friend roll his eyes at me and tell me, "They're never going to answer your questions for real, so why ask?" Wasn't this an educational trip? Why couldn't I have my questions answered for real? So instead of speaking up and asking questions, I shut up. So I wouldn't be a buzzkill. So I wouldn't make confusing for others what was already confusing for me. So I wouldn't seem ungrateful for this incredible opportunity to travel to Israel, for free.

But here I am, a few months later, and those feelings haven't gone away. How do I reconcile with the fact that Birthright, a Jewish space, doesn't uphold the Jewish values I've been taught to cherish? We're encouraged to analyze, to challenge, to question. But why not here? Birthright is missing a crucial component of our Jewish tradition — asking questions. What does this tradition become if we bury some of its most basic values in that process?

I wish I had asked more questions. I wish I had pushed back more on the half-answers. I wish I had asked about the Occupation. I wish I hadn't felt guilty for asking questions because the trip was free. So I encourage you, ask all of your questions. Read this packet without guilt. Read other histories and narratives online. Talk to your new friends. Think critically and openly. Have fun, let it be complicated.

What do you compromise when you tuck away your questions? What do you compromise when you listen to one story without recognizing that there could be others? Please, cry at Yad Vashem, as I did. Cry at the cemetery, cry at the Western Wall, cry when you say goodbye to new friends. But if you can, go to the West Bank afterwards. Go to East Jerusalem. Cry when you see the separation wall. Cry at the statue of the key in Aida refugee camp. Cry that your Palestinian tour guide cannot walk on the same street as you in Hebron.

You can derive meaning wherever you find it. You can cry in one place and still cry in another, because you can celebrate the complexity of a place, of humanity. Is to love blindly to truly love at all? If you choose to love this place and its people, know that you can do it in a way that embraces all of this. You do not have to choose one or the other. Choose it all. Hear it all. Believe it all. Love it all.

— Alyssa

Extending your trip? Here are a few resources and organizations to learn more about the on-the-ground reality.

All That's Left: Anti-Occupation Collective

An Israel-based collective of Jews that take communal action to oppose the Occupation. They are a great group to reach out to with any questions you might have while on the ground. Think of them as your home base when needing support or direction to the right places. High chance that there will be ways to take action this summer to support the communities of Susya and Khan al-Ahmar (both in the West Bank) who are facing threats of home and school demolitions. Message their Facebook page or email AllThatsLeftCollective@gmail.com

July 14th Extend Trip

Extend offers high quality educational programming in the West Bank for visitors interested in better understanding Palestinian and Israeli perspectives. Register here for the 1 day trip on July 14th: ExtendTours.org/summer-tours/

Breaking the Silence Tours

An organization of Israeli veterans who served in the IDF since 2000 and aim to raise awareness about the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories. Already scheduled tours are July 9th in the South Hebron Hills and July 11th in Hebron. You can sign up for these tours at breakingthesilence.org.il/tours/1. If these dates are full or don't work for you, please contact frima@shovrimshatika.org to potentially arrange another tour. They are excited to welcome you and work with you to make sure you get the education you deserve on Israel/Palestine.

Ir Amim Tours

Ir Amim leads study tours of Jerusalem to introduce participants to the social, economic, and political issues impacting life in the city for its multiple religious, cultural, and national groups as well as Jerusalem's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. You can join tours on June 22nd & July 20th by registering here: ir-amim.org.il/en/tours

Birthleft

Trips are on July 5th or July 6th. They are an alternative education around Israel/Palestine organized by locals in Israel. Please contact All That's Left on their Facebook page at facebook.com/AllThatsLeftCollective/ or send them an email at AllThatsLeftCollective@gmail.com

Imbala

Imbala is a vegan café/library/event space created by activists and artists which hosts events, lectures, language exchanges, parties, and more. There are a ton of great events this summer and you can see them all on their Facebook [page: bit.ly/ImbalaCafe](https://bit.ly/ImbalaCafe)

Visiting Ramallah

Ramallah is a bustling city in Palestine. It is worth a trip to walk around and get a sense of life and community there. In order to get to Ramallah, you must go through the Qalandiya checkpoint when coming back from Ramallah to Jerusalem. When going through this checkpoint you will begin to get an idea about the daily obstacles and restrictions that Palestinians experience in their pursuit to live regular lives. You can take Bus #18 from the bus center near Damascus Gate.

You must bring your passport with you.

Visiting Bethlehem

Bethlehem, home of an important religious site for Christians, the Church of the Nativity. The site marks where Jesus was thought to have been born. This is also a major Palestinian city with a market and areas to walk around. You must go through Checkpoint 300 on the way back which will give you a sense of the daily obstacles and restrictions that Palestinians experience in their pursuit to live regular lives. The Palestinian bus company operates a public line from East Jerusalem Bus Station. Bus 21 operates from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, there is no timetable available but service is frequent.

You must bring your passport with you.

Sumud Freedom Camp

A Palestinian-led community space in Sarura, Palestine (South Hebron Hills). It was built in an unprecedented coalition made up of Palestinians, Israelis, and international Jews in an incredible act of nonviolent resistance. Send a message on Facebook to arrange visits or contact All That's [Left AllThatsLeftCollective@gmail.com](mailto:LeftAllThatsLeftCollective@gmail.com) facebook.com/SumudCamp/

Thank you for reading!

If you need any additional assistance while you're traveling, reach out to info@IfNotNowMovement.org



Facts & Stats to Think About

General Facts

Nearly 5 million Palestinians live in the occupied Palestinian territories, including 3 million in the West Bank and nearly 2 million in Gaza. All are under direct or indirect Israeli military control.

Source: *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

Since 1967, Israel has uprooted 800,000 Palestinian olive trees, equal to 33 Central Parks. This has resulted in over \$12M/year in lost income to the thousands of families who relied on the olive harvest.

Source: *Visualizing Palestine*

As of April 2018, 315 Palestinian children were being held in Israeli prison.

Source: *B'Tselem*

Between 800 – 1,000 children are detained each year

Source: *militarycourtwatch.org*

Half of all detained children are arrested at night and report physical and psychological distress and trauma as a result of their capture and interrogation.

Source: *militarycourtwatch.org*

99% of all trials in military court result in conviction.

Source: *militarycourtwatch.org*

Gaza

In June 2007, Israel imposed a land, sea, and air blockade in the Gaza Strip, creating a massive humanitarian crisis in the region. 97% of piped water in Gaza is unfit for human consumption, and nearly half of all Gazan households suffer from severe food insecurity.

Source: *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

Unemployment in Gaza is among the highest in the world. 40% in the general population and 60% among young people.

Source: *B'Tselem*

Palestinians in Gaza only receive 8-12 hours of electricity per day.

Source: *Visualizing Palestine*

The West Bank

As a result of the Oslo Accords of the mid-1990s, the West Bank was divided into three areas — Areas A, B, and C. Areas A and B are non-contiguous (made up of hundreds of small "islands") and are ostensibly under the civil control of the Palestinian Authority.

Source: *B'Tselem*

The West Bank (Cont.)

Area C (60% of the total land area of the West Bank) is under full municipal and security control of Israel, is contiguous, and contains all Israeli settlements. In reality, Israel has direct or indirect control over the entirety of the West Bank.

Source: *B'tselem*

71,666 Palestinians in the West Bank live in communities without running water.

Source: *B'Tselem*

611,000 Israeli settlers live in 250 settlements in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in contravention of international law.

Source: *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

Over 400 kilometers of West Bank roads are prohibited for Palestinian use and are exclusively for settlers.

Source: *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

As of 2016, there were 96 permanent checkpoints in the West Bank, plus an average of 107 "flying," or temporary, checkpoints erected each week. These checkpoints restrict Palestinians' ability to access work and to move freely.

Source: *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

The 700 km-long separation barrier is built almost entirely on privately owned Palestinian land, and 85% of it is in the West Bank — meaning thousands of Palestinians are separated from their own agricultural lands, families, and communities.

Source: *B'Tselem*

East Jerusalem

Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem is not recognized under international law. Today, 212,000 Israeli settlers live in East Jerusalem.

Source: *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

140,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem live in neighborhoods encircled by the separation barrier - meaning they are totally cut off from the rest of their community.

Source: *B'Tselem*

Since 1967, Israel has revoked the permanent residency status of 14,500 Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

Source: *B'Tselem*



#LIBERATIONSYLLABUS

This syllabus was created as part of IfNotNow's [#YouNeverToldMe campaign](#) to model for Jewish schools, camps and youth groups that it is possible and necessary for students of all ages to engage with the reality of the Occupation. The resources listed here were submitted by Rabbis, teachers, parents, alumni, journalists and other members of the Jewish community.

*Though these materials were sourced through the IfNotNow #LiberationSyllabus project, their inclusion does not reflect an endorsement by IfNotNow. We hope you find these resources useful in furthering your learning.



PICTURE BOOKS

One City, Two Brothers

by Chris Smith & Aurelia Fronty (ages 4-8)

Sitti's Secrets

by Naomi Shihab & Nye Nancy Carpenter (ages 6-10)

Snow in Jerusalem

by Deborah Da Costa, Ying-Hwa Hu, & Cornelius Van Wright (ages 6-10)

The Story of Hurry

by Emma Williams & Ibrahim Quraishi (ages 3-7)



YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

A Bottle in the Gaza Sea

by Valérie Zenatti (ages 12+)

A Little Piece of Ground

by Elizabeth Laird (ages 10-14)

A Stone in My Hand

by Cathryn Clinton (ages 10-14)

Habibi

by Naomi Shihab Nye (ages 11-14)

Samir and Yonatan

by Daniella Carmi (ages 12+)

Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood

by Ibtisam Barakat (ages 13+)

The Cat at the Wall

by Deborah Ellis (ages 10-13)

The Shepherd's Granddaughter

by Anne Laurel Carter (ages 13+)

The Wall

by William Sutcliffe (ages 12+)

When I Was a Soldier

by Valérie Zenatti (ages 15+)

Where the Streets Had a Name

by Randa Abdel-Fattah (ages 12+)



FICTION

A Tale of Love and Darkness

by Amos Oz

A Psalm in Jenin

by Brett Goldberg

Dancing Arabs (Aravim Rokdim, in Hebrew)

by Sayed Qashua

Men in the Sun

by Ghassan Kanafani

Mornings in Jenin

by Susan Abulhawa

Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories

by Ghassan Kanafani

Ruination

by Fatima V. Mansour

Salt Houses

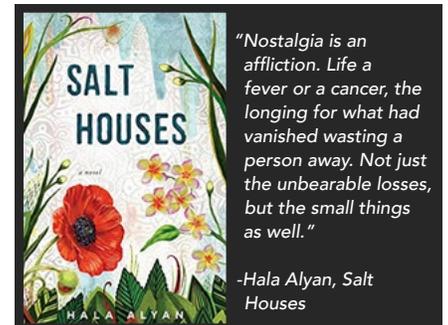
by Hala Alyan

Specters

by Radwa Ashour

The Lemon Tree

by Sandy Tolan



POETRY

19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East

by Naomi Shihab Nye

A Poet Behind Bars

by Dareen Tatour

The Butterfly's Burden & Memory for Forgetfulness

by Mahmoud Darwish

NON-FICTION

A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
by Mark Tessler

Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question
by Edward Said & Christopher Hitchens

**Connecting with the Enemy:
A Century of Palestinian-Israeli Joint Nonviolence**
by Sheila H. Katz

I Saw Ramallah
by Mourid Barghouti

In Search Of Fatima
by Ghada Karmi

In the Land of Israel
by Amos Oz

**Kingdom of Olives and Ash:
Writers Confront the Occupation**
edited by Michael Chabon & Ayelet Waldman

Our Harsh Logic: Israeli Soldiers' Testimonies from the Occupied Territories
by Breaking the Silence

Palestinian Identity
by Rashid Khalidi

Righteous Victims
by Benny Morris

Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine
edited by Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, & Eyal Naveh

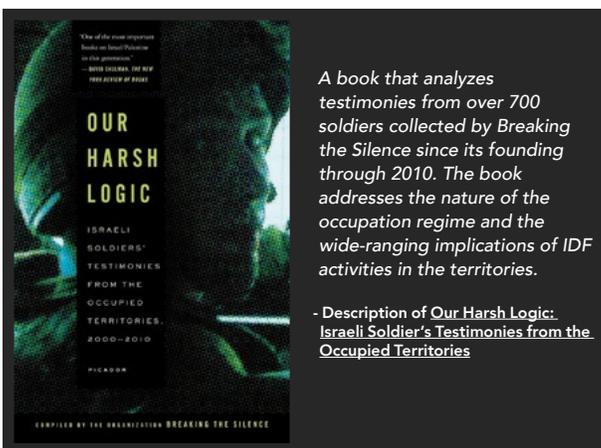
The Accidental Empire & The Unmaking of Israel
by Gershom Gorenberg

The Israel-Arab Reader
by Walter Laqueur

The Question of Palestine
by Edward Said

The Wall and the Gate
by Michael Sford

The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948
by Avi Shlaim & Eugene Rogan



A book that analyzes testimonies from over 700 soldiers collected by Breaking the Silence since its founding through 2010. The book addresses the nature of the occupation regime and the wide-ranging implications of IDF activities in the territories.

- Description of Our Harsh Logic: Israeli Soldier's Testimonies from the Occupied Territories

(COOKBOOKS)

Jerusalem: A Cookbook
by Sami Tamimi and Yotam Ottolenghi

Palestine on a Plate
by Joudie Kalla

The Gaza Kitchen
by Laila El-Haddad and Maggie Schmitt



FILMS & TV EPISODES (DO(CUMENTARY & FICTION))

5 Broken Cameras

Anthony Bourdain. Parts Unknown – Jerusalem
CNN

Disturbing the Peace

The Ancestral Sin

The Conflict Zone: Understanding Both Sides of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
National Geographic

The Gatekeepers

The Law in These Parts

The Lemon Tree

PODCASTS

Photo Op
from This American Life

The Story of Sumud
from Unsettled

What Happens When You Empathize With The Enemy
from Hidden Brain

ARTICLES

[Conscientious Objector: Hadas Tal](#)
by Orly Noy

[Kale Project Challenges Israeli Control Over Palestinian Agriculture](#)
by Alex Shams

[Palestinian Mushroom Farm Blighted by Israeli Occupation](#)
by Lorena Rios

[Seeds of Resistance: The Woman Fighting Occupation with Agriculture](#)
by Joshua Leifer

[Tell Me A Story With A Happy Ending](#)
by Sayed Kashua, Etgar Keret

[Why I March in Gaza](#)
by Fadi Abu Shammalah

JEWISH RITUAL & TEXT STUDY

[A New Prayer for Israel and Palestine](#)
IfNotNow's Dvar Torah Blog

[Truah's Campaign for Bedouin Rights](#)

[Truah's Text Study on Occupation: Yovel/Jubilee: Fifty Years Since 1967](#)
Jerusalem - Text study & discussion
Security - Text study & discussion
Liberation - Text study & discussion

ARTISTS

[Banksy](#)
Artwork in Israel/Palestine

[Dina Matar](#)
(Painter, Gaza)

[Jacqueline Reem Salloum](#)
(Artist and Filmmaker, New York)

[Marguerite Dabaie](#)
Author of The Hookah Girl (Illustrator, New York)

[Mohammed Al Hawajri](#)
(Mixed media artist, Gaza)

[Suhel Nafar](#)
(Musician, Filmmaker and Motion Graphics Artist, New York)

[Tanya Habjouqa](#)
(Photographer, Jerusalem)

MUSIC

[The Stars As My Compass](#)
Song by Omnia Hegazy & Suhel Nafar

[DAM](#)
(Palestinian hip-hop group)

[Heartbeat.fm](#)
(Palestinian and Israeli Youth Musicians)



Cold in Gaza, 2015
By Mohammed Al Hawajri
Acrylic on Canvas

CURRICULUM

[Peace Research Institute in the Middle East](#)
[Reframing Israel](#)

WEBSITES & ORGANIZATIONS

[BTselem](#)

[Breaking the Silence](#)

[Combatants for Peace](#)

[Gisha](#)

[Holy Land Trust](#)

[Ir Amim](#)

[MA'AN Development Center](#)

[Mesarvot](#)

[MERIP- Primer On Palestine](#)

[The Parents Circle – Families Forum](#)

[Visualizing Palestine](#)

[Zochrot](#)

[+972 Mag](#)

Thank you for reading!

For questions or inquiries, reach out to info@ifnotnowmovement.org



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