

TAMAR KODISH SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



TAMAR KODISH

is a senior at Shaker Heights High School. One of her passions is working with mentally disabled youth and she is an active volunteer and president of the Friendship Circle of Cleveland. She has traveled to Europe, Central American and Israel. Tamar hopes to major in psychology and minor in international relations so she can help people around the world and educate others.

Five years old, I sit in the backseat of our rental car while my parents navigate the hustle and bustle of Jerusalem. Making a wrong turn, we suddenly realize that we have entered a place possibly dangerous for us as Jews: Silwan, an Arab village. As Arab children pour out of school, my mother sees two young boys bending down to pick up stones. She recognizes that we are unsafe, witnessing the hatred in the children's eyes. These angry youth sling the rocks at our car striking it continuously. It is not until we have safely escaped that I notice the shattered glass, only inches from my head.

After this experience, I wondered: Why did the boys want to harm us? For years, I could not accept that because we were different, they hated us.

Twelve years later, I am walking with my family to Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem. I am dressed in knee-length shorts and a t-shirt. Our route takes us through a neighborhood that is home to religious Jews. My mother is hesitant; she knows as secular Jews, we may be at risk here, but I persuade her to go. As I stroll through Meah Shearim, I am stopped by the shrill voice of an ultra-Orthodox woman. For several long seconds, her eyes piercingly narrow in on mine. I begin to feel uneasy and continue on my way. She beckons me back, slurs hateful words at me, and yells that I should be ashamed of myself.

Instead of taking the easier route and simply ignoring these events, I chose not to close my eyes and have faced the hatred I have been confronted with head on. Because my family travels to Israel yearly, I've had numerous opportunities to educate myself further. I have spent countless hours learning about the conflict separating Israelis and Palestinians. This summer, I spent six weeks on a program in Israel where I participated in very heated discussions with Palestinians, Israeli Arabs, Israeli soldiers and right-wing Jewish settlers. People wept and yelled, their faces struck by anger. One woman even approached a fifteen year old boy, relentlessly screaming at him. She vociferously disagreed with his statement supporting Israelis' movement into the settlements and was so passionate about her views that a staff member had to physically hold her back.

As the days passed in this intense atmosphere, I came to understand something: all of the anger that came forth during these discussions was reconciled by one fact. Ultimately, we all want an end to hatred. These conversations were a vital part of my education; by not running away I was able to appreciate the value of discussing what too many of us believe cannot be discussed. Now, my role is to encourage others to discuss our deepest differences.

To make a difference we must not run away. To make a difference we must discuss these sensitive issues. To make a difference we must believe that we can learn from each other.

