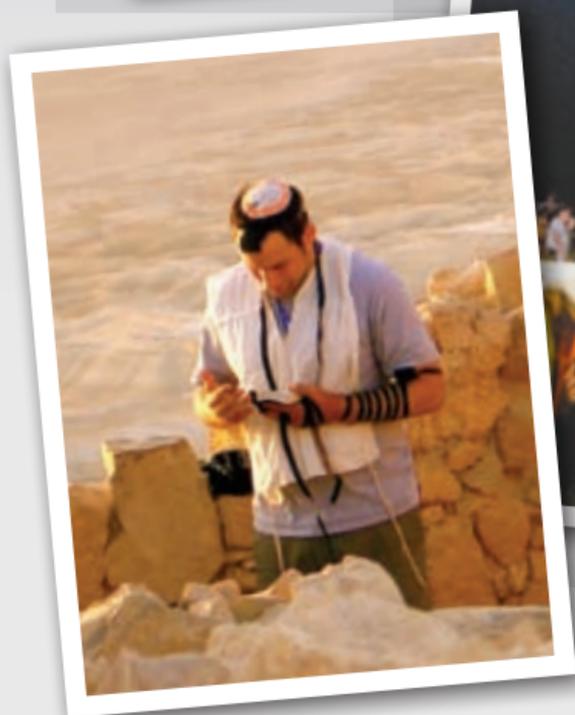
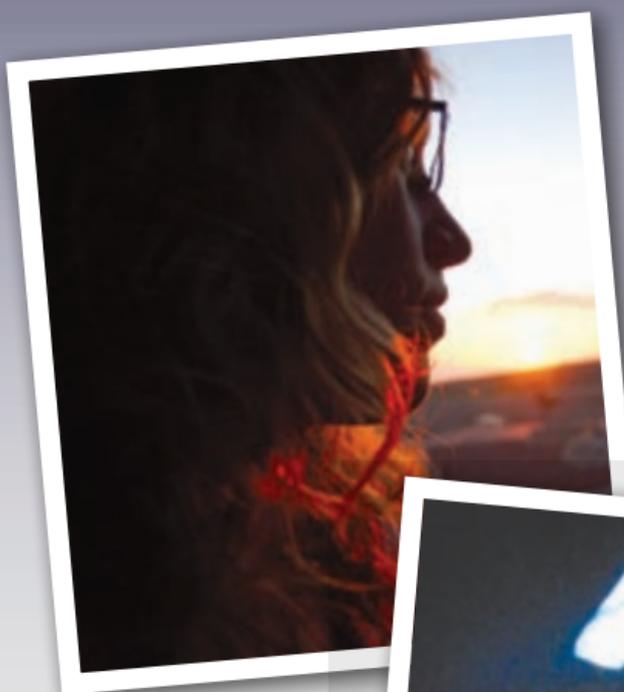


***“I came to love  
a homeland  
I hardly knew  
existed.  
My life will never  
be the same.”***



**BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL  
FOUNDATION**  
[www.birthrightisrael.org](http://www.birthrightisrael.org)

**“I grew up in Arkansas, in a county with 33 churches. The nearest synagogue was two hours away.”**

**M**y mother left Judaism behind when she left her parents' home, so it should be no surprise that I ended up at church instead of synagogue. For many reasons, though, Christianity never fit for me. Despite those feelings, church became a large part of my life, as it is for most families in the south.

This didn't begin to change until college, when I began to seriously question different aspects of my life. Wanting to be part of something, I took a world religions course. That was my introduction to Judaism.

I was thrilled to learn about a religion that valued community, morality, education, and fighting for the underdog. But I didn't get past the basics until I went to graduate school in Kansas. There, for the first time, I lived in a place with a Jewish community.

Still, entering the Jewish community wasn't easy. I felt awkward, like an outsider. At services, everyone else knew when to stand and when to sit. As much as I struggled to learn, I wasn't connecting with Judaism. Then I found the Birthright Israel website, which led me to a life-changing experience.

On my Birthright Israel trip, I had my first Shabbat dinner, lit Chanukah candles with my peers, went to my first Shabbat morning service, and attended my first bar mitzvah. I also came to love a homeland I hardly knew existed. My life will never be the same.

Since then, I have moved into a vibrant Jewish community in Los Angeles, and my connections with Israel and Judaism continue to grow. I have been back to Israel twice, am now a member of a nearby synagogue and fit as many 22 people into my home for Birthright alumni Shabbat dinners! Birthright Israel changed my life and for that, I am eternally grateful.

—Sophie Ambrose, Los Angeles, CA



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**Tens of thousands of eligible Jewish young adults are waiting to take this life-changing trip.**

**We need more funds.**

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