

**Oranim Welcomes Student Delegation from Columbia University**

*Student Leadership for Jewish Peoplehood, a program funded by the UJA Federation of New York, brings together three cadres of Jewish student leaders from Germany, Israel, and the US. As a result of academic and experiential learning, joint study, dialogue, interacting with each other, and experiencing Israel, Germany, and the US together, students are able to create local and international initiatives designed to strengthen their own communities and to promote future connections between Israel and world Jewry. As part of the Student Leadership for Jewish Peoplehood program, a group of students from Columbia/Barnard Hillel visited Israel and Oranim this winter. Shana Zions, Director of Student Life at Columbia/Barnard Hillel, describes their experience here.*



“Questions!” “Identity!” “Perspectives!” “Dialogue!” “Community!” These were just some of the words that the Columbia/Barnard Hillel Peoplehood Project cohort shouted out during a reflection experience with Kol Ha’Ot, an interactive, arts-based program in Jerusalem. We had spent 16 days traveling around Israel, using the lens of Jewish Peoplehood to delve into questions of identity, community, and pluralism. Our educator at Kol Ha’Ot was surprised – “Usually I hear ‘Masada,’ ‘Dead Sea,’ and ‘Kotel.’”

But this was not another trip to Israel, and they weren’t just another group of college students looking for a fun way to spend winter break. These two weeks were a result of a partnership between Oranim College and Columbia/Barnard Hillel, two organizations committed to giving future Jewish leaders the tools and experiences they need to grow individually and lead their communities in the future.

The New York cohort was made up of 16 students from varying Jewish backgrounds who met weekly over the course of the fall semester, getting to know one another and starting to explore how their individual narratives inform who they are as Jews, and use that understanding to strengthen their community here at school.

To that end, our two weeks in Israel weren't about sightseeing, or passively taking in facts and dates about Israel's history. Rather, the sites we visited throughout the country became a context for meaningful dialogue, deep conversations, and challenging questions. A meeting with a Chareidi (ultra-Orthodox) leader about his community's relationship with the rest of Israeli society sparked conversations about perspectives on feminism and insularity within the Jewish community, while a morning with Bina, the secular yeshiva in south Tel Aviv, prompted thoughtful observations about the role of social justice in our texts and in our practice.

The highlight, of course, was a three day *mifgash* (encounter) with Oranim's cohort of students, who had also spent the semester together as part of an academic course at Oranim. From the moment the two groups met over icebreakers at Oranim's campus, through a beautiful Havdalah service to close Shabbat and our time together, the two cohorts utilized their short time together by always asking, always pushing, and always trying to come to some kind of mutual understanding. While the structured programs – presentations about the challenges of the American and Israeli Jewish communities, small group discussions about individual Jewish identity, etc – were fruitful, the best moments were found in the hike through the hills surrounding the field school where we spent Shabbat, or the communal Kabbalat Shabbat that many of our students chose to participate in.

Back in New York City, the Columbia/Barnard students have spent the semester processing their experience, and turning their learning into action, as they create new programs and initiatives to serve the broader Jewish community on campus. Whether it's a monthly Havdalah program for Jews from differing backgrounds, or an interactive map of the various spaces to find Jewish life at Columbia, our students are using their trip to Israel as a springboard for continued engagement and leadership.

For more information about Student Leadership for Jewish Peoplehood, see the [website](#).