

PART 1: BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL OVERVIEW

OUR VISION – OUR MISSION

Our Vision

Ensuring a vibrant future of the Jewish people by strengthening Jewish identity, Jewish communities, and connections with Israel.

Our Mission

Provide all young Jewish adults with opportunities for transformative and immersive shared experiences in Israel and a foundation for ongoing Jewish connection.

THE SPIRIT OF BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL

Our Philosophy

OUR VISION:

Proactive Jewish Education: Sight vs. Vision

Birthright Israel maintains a clear educational vision, while understanding the important need to be *intentionally reactive* to the disheartening contemporary *sights* around us. Birthright Israel is *strategically proactive* in realizing the fuller potential of solid and positively inclined Jewish and Israel education in the broadest sense. Birthright Israel remains firm in its belief that identity formation processes should rely on *proactive*, rather than *reactive* foundations. Accordingly, our goal is to introduce a multilayered perspective of Judaism that should be celebrated, rather than defended. Neither the defense of Judaism, nor the solicitation of reaction to external threats to Jewish life should ever be an educational goal. Rather, they should be one of the outcomes of positive, meaningful and proactive engagements with Jewish ideas, ideals and values.

OUR CULTURE:

A Counter-Cultural and Positive Educational Intervention

In today's socio-political climate, fraught among other things by such realities as echo chambers, binary modes of thought, intolerance to voices of dissent, cancel culture, lack of distinction between (freedom of) speech vs (unacceptable forms of) expression and the politicization of values, Birthright Israel views its role as offering alternative platforms for responsible, inclusive, safe and brave spaces to unpack difficult, controversial and/or sensitive issues. Some things fall within the ideological or political camps "Right vs Left"; yet others fall under the human moral domain "right vs wrong". Some acts must be wholly set apart from *any* form of acceptable human conduct and have no place whatsoever within legitimate discourse concerning political debates, territorial disputes, historical narratives, social ideals and/or religious ideologies. They should never be allowed to be presented in "necessary context", within "multiple narratives" or from "diverse perspectives". These acts are nothing short of Crimes against Humanity and must be called out as such by any and all decent members of humanity. Accordingly, Birthright Israel is not afraid to take a stance of moral clarity.

OUR FOUNDATION:

A Gift --- not Merely a Free Experience

Birthright Israel is founded on *four* values that are central in the Jewish world: *Unity, Community, Mutual Responsibility* and *Active Solidarity*. Birthright Israel itself is therefore a *gift* of the Jewish people to its younger members, given as a pledge by the State of Israel, worldwide Jewish communities and tens of thousands of individual investors --- all putting partisan and theological differences aside to ensure the vibrant future of world Jewry and the State of Israel.

OUR LANDSCAPE:

A Jewish Educational Experience in Israel

A visit to Israel is a foundational component of well-rounded Jewish identity building. Accordingly, Birthright Israel maintains that immersive and organic experiences of the land, state and people of Israel lie at its essence, as they offer unmediated exposures and critically sound explorations of its multilayered realities.

OUR HEART:

Each Participant

Birthright Israel is rooted in a person-centered educational approach. It regards “people” as the subject matter of the journey, alongside sites, narratives, ideas and values. Birthright Israel views the needs and interests of young people as the starting point of its educational work. Birthright Israel is therefore committed to offering all participants a sense of ownership over the educational process, by empowering the active engagement and involvement of the learners as the captains of their ongoing Jewish journeys.

OUR JUDAISM:

Broadening the Canvas of Jewish Appreciation

Birthright Israel views Judaism and Jewish life as the affirmation of diverse venues which foster a sense of meaning, belonging, relevance and worth both individually, as well as communally. By acknowledging Judaism to be a mosaic of ideas, ideals, values and rituals whose vital evolution combines historic, religious, ethnic, cultural and national foundations, Birthright Israel believes in the legitimate pursuit of Jewish meaning through any or all said foundations – and by so doing foster a sense of resilience, pride, love and commitment to our shared and ongoing story as a people.

OUR APPROACH:

Taking “Fun” Seriously

Birthright Israel takes “fun” seriously. As we continue to invest in a vibrant Jewish present and future, we contribute in transforming the Jewish and Israeli narratives from that of “Oy” to that of “Joy”. While recognizing the undeniable place of tragedy in our historical and contemporary narratives, and while remaining fully committed to their study and commemoration, Birthright Israel seeks to engage participants in a Jewish exploration whose chief foundation is a rhetoric of values, meaning and vitality, rather than catastrophe, war, antisemitism, survival and persecution. We believe that Jewish identity should revolve around engagement of ideas and values from *within* Jewish life, rather than a response to external threats to Jewish living; and that Jewish discourse and experience should be implemented in enjoyable and gratifying ways that are as emotionally engaging as they are intellectually challenging.

OUR IDENTITY:

Positive Jewish Identity Building

We are the ever-living people, not the ever-dying people: Birthright Israel recognizes that Jewish identity should be founded on the *inner mechanisms* of Jewish life, rather than founded on *external* threats to Jewish living. Our goal is therefore, to foster an informed and positively experienced sense of Jewish pride, belonging and resilience.

OUR COMMUNITY:

Unity --- not Uniformity

While seeking to connect young Jewish adults with each other, with their home communities and with Israel, Birthright Israel refrains from any political, ideological and/or religious partisanship in its platform. Our educational experience therefore endorses unity yet does not seek any uniformity in either opinion or practice. Birthright Israel regards the *group* experience indispensable to personal identity formation, and therefore strives to build a traveling community of young Jews whose members exercise mutual recognition, tolerance, responsibility and trust, without undermining their diversity.

OUR ISRAEL; OUR ZIONISM:

Past, Present & Future

Birthright Israel regards itself as an experience that weaves together past, present and future into a fascinating tapestry of the evolving Jewish and Israeli civilization, in which we all are active engagers, rather than passive heirs. Accordingly, Birthright Israel is committed to *reaffirming our narrative* as a people and a civilization from our ancient roots and unto our contemporary expressions.

OUR RELATIONSHIPS:

Reciprocal Recognition, Respect and Responsibly

The importance of Israel's sites and landmarks notwithstanding, true conversations and shared impact can only occur between people. Birthright Israel therefore offers a platform for ongoing dialogue between worldwide and Israeli peers ("*mifgash*"), and as a vehicle for mutual insight into the lives of contemporary young Jewish adults. As Birthright Israel renders both Israeli and world Jewry indispensable for ensuring the thriving existence of Israel and the Jewish people, it endorses a process wherein young members of both communities learn to appreciate each other's assets, challenges and unique contributions to the contemporary Jewish world, as well as to its future course. This approach values a mutual and reciprocal recognition, interest and responsibility as a means to forge meaningful and lasting relationships of young Jews (and their respective communities) with each other.

OUR JOURNEY:

Insight-Seeing --- not Merely Site-Seeing

In today's technological era, "information" or "content" are readily accessible to anyone who seeks them, and their acquisition – albeit important – no longer requires a formal educational process. What is needed far more is the ability to *situate content in appropriate context*, and by doing so realize the fuller *depth and complexity* of the issues we aim to explore. Birthright Israel therefore wishes to broaden the scope by which our participants engage diverse topics and turn those into lasting insights, and to foster a process that does not necessarily resolve all issues, as much as it offers tools to explore them further thoughtfully and responsibly. Birthright Israel is an educational journey committed to the exploration of ideas, values and narratives in critical forms, while practicing a mature desire to thoughtfully wrestle with contexts, complexities and even ambiguities. The goal of Birthright Israel is to evoke insights whose value, relevance and effects stretch far beyond the educational trip itself.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY:

Tracking Outcomes, Getting Feedback and Advancing Self-Reflection

Birthright Israel views continued effectiveness, relevance and success as reliant on the ability to sustain constant and unyielding learning curves. We are therefore committed to research and evaluation protocols that are extensive, rigorous and regularly evolving, as well as thorough participants' feedback protocols, which pay close attention to the ever-changing landscape of global young Jewish adulthood. Looking into educational process evaluation, as well as outcomes measurement, allows Birthright Israel to assess Trip Organizers' adherence to its standards; to acclimate its educational approach, implementation and offerings based on the shifting characteristics, needs and interests of Jewish young adults; and to view short and long-term impact of our programs in appropriate context. This concern with outcomes and measurements reflects our strong commitment to feedback, reflective upgrading, ongoing change and improvement.

Our Pedagogy

An Integrative Approach

Birthright Israel endorses an integrative model, which is an educational approach that enables participants to seek and establish connections between the different experiences of their educational journey in Israel. It calls upon the Trip Organizer to create a comprehensive mosaic of diverse themes, core questions, and values whose various associations present a meaningful narrative concerning contemporary Jewish identity, Jewish Peoplehood, and contemporary Israel.

The purpose of the integrative approach is to guarantee an educational coherence that underlies the diverse experiences of the educational journey. It comes to ensure a reflective synthesis of experiences and knowledge as a way to link the personal story of the participant to the greater story of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

An Experiential Approach

Birthright Israel believes that an experiential approach is an important dimension of its educational agenda. It regards Israel as a diverse landscape encompassing a rich array of experiences, narratives, ideas, and places – historical as much as contemporary – that can be effectively presented throughout the course of the trip.

A Thematic Approach

Birthright Israel bases its educational structure on themes, rather than specific sites, activities, and/or programs. By doing so, it offers the overarching thematic framework for all its educational journeys leaving open the possibility for multiple sites/activities/programs that may fit within each respective theme. This structure allows the Trip Organizers to creatively diversify their sites/activities/program offerings, while maintaining a coherent thematic flow for the entirety of the educational journey.

A “Less is More” Approach

Birthright Israel structures the educational journey as an opportunity to address important concepts and questions, as well as to explore sites and landmarks in due depth and context. It therefore does not seek to overload its itinerary at the expense of ‘rushed’ visits and transitions between programs; rather, it seeks a thoughtful organization of program components which are a) allowed the needed time to be properly explored and addressed; b) allow participants to reflect, dialogue, discuss, and process the offered experiences.

A Balanced Approach

Birthright Israel is committed to introducing its participants to the diversities that characterize contemporary Israeli life. It maintains that the unity of the Jewish people does not suggest uniformity of opinions about Judaism and Israel, or about approaches and practices of Jewish living. Birthright Israel emphasizes the democratic roots of Israeli society as expressed in Israel’s Declaration of Independence, and the many ethnic, religious, political, ideological, and cultural viewpoints that have shaped the formation of Israeli society in the past and in the present. It is committed to a balanced presentation of alternative views on complex issues, and it aims to enable participants to understand the subtleties of diversity within a contemporary democratic Jewish state. Birthright Israel does not promulgate any specific ideology about forms of Jewish practice, religious affiliation, politics, or the conflict between Israel and some of its neighbors; Trip Organizers should therefore introduce the existence of multiple perspectives within the context of the broader discourse in contemporary Israeli society.

A Dialogic Approach

In a social climate fraught by *parallel monologues*, where people talk *at* each other, rather than *with* each other, and wherein political or ideological divisions become the chief meridians for social or communal cohesion, Birthright Israel highlights the value of serious and committed dialogue among its participants, educational staff and all those who come into contact with our groups. As a leading educational enterprise, committed to our participants intelligent and critically sound exploration of ideas, Birthright Israel believes that our mandate lies not with “*what* people think,” but rather with “*how* people think” — thereby offering tools for critically sound processes that may assist our participants in forming whatever opinions, responsibly.

Our Voice

Owning Your Jewish Journey

Birthright Israel reaffirms the place of each individual participant and commits to empowering each individual’s unique voice, as an adequate contributor to the overall group experience. Likewise, Birthright Israel is committed to offering our young adults important empowerment through frameworks, tools and existing supportive

networks so that each participant recognizes their place at the center of their individual and ongoing Jewish journey.

Mutual Responsibility

Birthright Israel regards the immersive experiences between worldwide young Jewish adults, their Israeli peers and Israeli society by and large a foundational element within its programs. The ability to familiarize, explore, discuss and engage with each other not only serves as a platform for enduring interpersonal bonds, but also highlights the central values of community, solidarity and mutual responsibility as indispensable to Jewish identity and a sense of peoplehood.

A Part of Jewish Past, Present and Future

The gift of Birthright Israel is a link in an ongoing chain; it affirms the standing of each participant as a present recipient of this experience by right, while also aiming to inspire each participant to embrace the value of paying it forward, the responsibility each of us holds toward future generations.

Unity, not Uniformity

Unity between Jews should be completely distinct from any form of uniformity between Jews; for while “unity” has always been a foundational Jewish value, “uniformity” has never been a value, let alone a goal. Quite the contrary – the very fuel that has always ignited Jewish life throughout history was the diversity of opinions brushing against each other. Judaism never found difference in opinions to be a threat to its cohesive evolution; rather, it is indifference that it fears the most. Accordingly, we wish to identify and articulate a base of shared/unifying values, upon which we can address our different opinions and celebrate our non-uniformity in a safe and brave climate.

Zionism

There is no modern “State” of Israel without the ancient “Land” of Israel; and there is no modern Zionist “Movement” without the ancient Zionist “Ideal”. The land of Israel has continuously been hardwired within the Jewish collective consciousness, life force, practice, communal life and aspirations throughout history. Similarly, Zionism cannot be discussed as a modern movement without its imperative contextualization as an ancient Jewish ideal. Zionism encapsulates the innate connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel as equally vital components within the millennia-long Jewish ethos. Birthright Israel is committed to preserving Israel’s historic and eternal standing as the homeland of the entire Jewish people.

Israel

Birthright Israel regards Israel as a diverse mosaic of experiences, narratives, ideas and places that can be effectively explored throughout the various journeys. As we maintain that Israel is a state of ideas and ideals, rather than an ideal state, Birthright Israel is committed to understanding Israel’s place as a Jewish, democratic and sovereign state among the family of nations.

Central Values of Judaism

The contemporary Jewish world and the state of Israel are rooted in a diversity of ideas and value systems, reflective of the ongoing heritage and evolving civilization of the Jewish people. Being in Israel offers participants an extraordinary, exciting, and challenging setting to examine how such formative values to Jewish life are expressed in various and creative ways to shape Israel into the modern society that it has become. Addressing such ideas and values within the Israeli landscape offers our participants deeper understanding of multiple interpretations, debates and/or controversies concerning them, as well as their place both in Israel and in contemporary Jewish life as a whole.