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Welcome to ic.news – pages written by, for, and about Cleveland's Jewish teens!

In the section titled "ic.news" israel.cleveland.next (icnext) participants reflect on their 10-day Mission to Israel in June, 2016, and comment on current issues of interest to Cleveland's teens. They are creating an ongoing source of news about the community, Jewish teens and Israel, inspired by knowledge gained from the icnext program. They will talk about Jewish identity, changing political, social, and cultural perspectives of Jews and Israelis, the realities of the Israeli conflict, and more. There will be photos that document their 10-day Mission during the summer of 2016, and those that document current events, whether in Jewish Cleveland or Israel. icnext is a two-year program that educates Cleveland's Jewish high school students from all denominations in the core issues of Israeli society and the geopolitical situation in Israel today. icnext is a project of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, administered through @akiva. For information about or to apply for icnext, contact Tina Keller at tkeller@akivacleveland.org.

In "more.teen.news" @akiva presents different teen programs in the community. From preparing students for the challenges that will face them on their future college campus, to learning Hebrew and how to advocate for Israel; from theater (testimony.theater.cleveland) to music (HaZamir Cleveland), there are so many opportunities for our teens to form a special community. Most importantly, this programming fosters an incredibly strong connection to Israel, and trains teens to be Jewish leaders.

The Settlement Resolution

(United Nations Security Council 2334, which passed Dec. 23 by a vote of 14-0 with the U.S. abstaining, describes Israel's settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as illegal and an obstacle to peace with the Palestinians. It was the first time U.S. President Barack Obama declined to block a Security Council resolution that Israel considered hostile, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused him of staging a "shameless ambush" against his country. Netanyahu warned countries that backed the measure they would pay a diplomatic and economic price.)

"Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding."
Albert Einstein

Peace. The terminal solution to all contentions, that somehow independently creates contentious conflict. Is peace justice? Or is it finality? What about a long term resolution of conflict? Or is it just a lack of conflict in the status quo? Regardless of one's specific biases towards the meaning of peace, global denizens can agree that peace is like the fluttering wings of a Monarch butterfly, floating atop a field of Kentucky Bluegrass under a gentle ray of sun- the panacea to pain and the remedy to despair.

While it is clear humanity should move towards peace, the map is muddled with insurmountable obstacles and perplexing scenarios. Like Einstein professed, the key to peace is predicated on empathy. However, when looking at the current situation between Israel, Palestine, and the UN, that key has been bent, broken, and buried. The necessary understanding is not within the scope of the locksmith. Only through hard work and openness can a sustainable solution exist.

The massive dispute between Israel, Palestine and the UN has created a dilemma with no clear solution. Recently, the UN has been taking action that seems to sway away from Jewish and Israeli interests. While Israeli actions are not perfect, the Palestinian actions are not either. As Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz explains, many outsiders think that the simple fix is to stop the settlements, but the solution isn't that simple. As the Washington Institute for Near East Policy found in 2014, 71% of Palestinians would only be happy when Israel is completely gone. This puts the Israeli government in a difficult situation- to make peace and risk retaliation or to retaliate back.

Similarly, the question remains why the world is so overly concerned with Israel's predicament. While there is a complicated situation within the Jewish homeland, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, posits that the conflicts between China, India, Japan, Russia and many other countries go largely unaddressed in comparison with those of Israel.

Moving forward, there seems to be no definitive solution to the ever debated conflict of the Middle East. However, United States policy makers and citizens alike must understand that no side is entirely to blame. Furthermore, upon logical reasoning, it becomes clear that a sustainable solution to the infamous Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not be helped along by an unbalanced UN meeting.

- Gabrielle Sudilovsky, Cleveland 2017

In Israel's Northeast....

(Despite being one of the most picturesque areas in Israel, Ramat Hagolan - The Golan Heights - is woven with the complications Israelis face along their unstable Northern border with Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. We visited the Golan and as I stood in Israel, feeling the protection of my homeland, I could stare into areas of danger in the distance. I was taken aback by having enemies so close.)

- Lilly Rothschild, Cleveland 2017

Day 8 in Israel and we began by taking a drive up to the Golan Heights, the northern part of Israel bordering Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. These countries all want control of this land for one reason: water. The Sea of Galilee is located there and is the largest source of fresh water in the entire region. Prior to 1967, Syria controlled the Golan but it was captured by Israel during the Six Day War. This was a great victory for the Israelis and the Arabs felt defeated. The Arabs would attempt to regain their dignity on October 6, 1973. During the Yom Kippur War Syria invaded the Golan in a surprise attack. At one point in the war 29 Israeli soldiers were trapped in an extremely small stone bunker surrounded by the entire Syrian army. They contacted the Israeli army who sent two different rescue teams but both were detected and killed. It seemed like the end of the road for the soldiers and that they should surrender. Then their commander asked for a volunteer. One soldier stepped forward. His task was to fool the Syrian army making them think he was the only survivor. He succeeded in his mission, was taken captive, and the other 28 soldiers survived. We visited this bunker where all the soldiers were trapped and after hearing their story, I felt a real connection. One soldier had stepped up and become a hero, putting the needs of the many over the needs of the individual. I think this is a lesson we can strive to learn from Israelis, ultimately becoming a stronger community and better people.

- Sam Greene, Israel 2016

And In the Southwest....

(Israel is constantly threatened by its bordering neighbors. Although many people might feel too anxious to live near conflict, this was not the case with Kibbutz Erez. Surprisingly, the families living in Kibbutz Erez were not afraid of the constant threat. When asked why, their common response was that they refused to let fear control them. This response not only highlights Israeli resilience, but also showcases the strength of their community.)

- Jessica Linden, Cleveland 2017

Living on Kibbutz Erez . . . living a few football fields away from Gaza . . . living a normal life. These three things might not seem to go together, but on Kibbutz Erez, they do. We met Michal, a member of the Kibbutz, and toured the Kibbutz with her. Situated 18 kilometers south of Ashkelon, and so close to Gaza, the Kibbutz faces three main security threats: airstrikes (if there is a threat from the air, those living on the Kibbutz have approximately 15 seconds to find a bomb shelter to seek safety), people crossing the fence from Gaza to the kibbutz, and the underground tunnels.

However, even more important, visiting this Kibbutz was a lesson in community. For instance, in an emergency situation all children must go immediately to the bomb shelters. Members of the kibbutz have put much thought and care into the way they prepare for emergency situations, so preschool and kindergarten classes are taken to the shelters at least once a week to have a gym class or play time. That way, if an alarm should sound, and it is necessary to take shelter, the kids don't feel as though they are in a foreign place. They have positive memories associated with the room. When I think about a bomb shelter, the first thing that comes to mind is a depressing grey room; the one we visited on Kibbutz Erez was the opposite - there were even happy paintings of Disney characters all over the walls. We were curious about why families stayed on the Kibbutz even with the potential danger. We had the opportunity to ask this question of teens who live on the Kibbutz, and the answer was always family and community. Kibbutz Erez in particular made an impression on me because of how close they all are and how they will not let a threat affect their family and sense of community. They take care of each other, and do not let the "what if?" affect their daily lives.

- Ellie Shafron, Israel 2016

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HaZamir Cleveland...

(Cold and snowy - 10:00am Sunday morning - January 8, 2017. 45 teen singers and their choir directors enter @akiva, ready to spend the entire day rehearsing challenging traditional Jewish choral music,.... Jerusalem of Gold, Eli Tziyon, L'ma-an Tziyon and other pieces....HaZamir Cleveland hosts Mid-Vis," or Midwestern Intervisition.)

Sunday, January 8, 2017, was a magical, day for me! HaZamir Cleveland (my chapter) hosted HaZamir chapters from Columbus, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Pittsburgh for what we lovingly call "Mid-Vis," or Midwestern Intervisitation. To kick-off the weekend, the night prior to our Sunday rehearsal, members of our HaZamir chapter gave a warm Cleveland welcome to HaZamir Minneapolis/St. Paul and HaZamir Chicago with a few rounds of Whirlyball and Issi's Pizza. When I arrived at @akiva on Sunday morning, the other chapters joined us. I met new friends and greeted old ones that I already knew from the prior year. Quickly gathering in our vocal sections, arranged as sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses, we were greeted by each chapter's conductor. HaZamir Cleveland alumna Devra Laserson led our vocal warm-up. Then we ran through our repertoire and split into sectionals to work on individual parts. After that we took a break and participated in activities led by our teen leaders, members of each chapter who coordinate and assist the directors. After lunch and more sectional rehearsals, we came together for an open rehearsal attended by friends and family members. After a whole day we concluded the rehearsal promising to keep in contact with our new friends until we see them at Festival this spring when all 35 chapters meet in the Catskills for an intensive rehearsal retreat, after which we perform the Annual Gala Concert on the acclaimed New York City stage at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

- Jazzy Gold, HaZamir Singer, Cleveland 2017

HaZamir Cleveland is a chapter of HaZamir: The International Jewish High School Choir*, and part of a network of 35 chapters across the U.S. and Israel. All chapters have high-level Jewish choral singing at their core. Members of HaZamir Cleveland meet at @akiva each week to tackle this music with their Conductor, Lynne Leutenberg Yulish.

With the help and vision of Fran Gordon, the Jewish Community Federation has established a partner chapter in Israel: HaZamir Beit Shean. From March 20-23, 2017, @akiva will host HaZamir Beit Shean as they visit Cleveland. After three fun-filled days of Cleveland exploration and home hospitality with their HaZamir Cleveland friends, the two chapters will head off to New York together to join the other members of the network. Then on March 23-26, 2017, the entire international network – nearly 400 singers from 35 chapters - will meet in New York for a 3-day Festival and sing together in a Gala Performance onstage at Lincoln Center!

HaZamir transcends boundaries, giving teenagers a rare and valuable international and inter-denominational experience as they unite in a common goal. It strengthens important relationships between American and Israeli teens - especially between HaZamir Cleveland and HaZamir Beit Shean!

***a program of the Zamir Choral Foundation, Matthew Lazar, Founder and Director.**

(HaZamir Cleveland is grateful to the Daniel and Ethel Hamburger Music Fund, Harold and Sandy Levine, Trustees; and the Gretel B. Bloch Charitable Trust, Sandford and Eppie Shore, Trustees.

Middle and high school students are invited to participate. High school students are invited to audition. Please contact Sandy Laserson, slaserson@zamirchoralfoundation.org

- Sandy Laserson, HaZamir Choir Manager, Cleveland 2017

From Israel advocacy, leadership training and college prep for Jewish students to HaZamir Cleveland Choir and original Jewish theatre, @akiva offers Hebrew and so much more! @akiva is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and a partner agency of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland. For more info visit www.akivacleveland.org.

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