

My Israel

By: Timor Balaish

If someone were to ask me how I define myself. I'd say, I play soccer and I sing, but those are just my hobbies, not who I am. When I look back at the time I was preparing for my bat mitzvah, I was trying to define who I was before I really understood what that meant. However, I always knew being Israeli was important to me. I'm still evolving but right now if I were to define myself, I would proudly say I am an American- Israeli Jew. My bat mitzvah day instilled in me an appreciation for who I am, who I want to become, and how I am going to keep reaching for my passion - spreading awareness of Israel's culture and country.

People ask me, if it is safe to go to Israel? And my only reply is, why wouldn't it be? Prior to my bat mitzvah, I thought long and hard about how I could really make an impact on my community. People in my Hebrew class were raising money for many causes they felt strongly about. But I wanted to make an impact on my community and my community at large, it's more than the action, but creating the connection to yourself. Most importantly, I wanted my mitzvah project to mean something to me, not just become another chore I had to fulfill.

I know Israel can be complicated, and people feel it is not safe, that is why I want to spread my message. I want people to appreciate everything Israel is - the good and the bad.

Many people think Israel is all about war and terrorism. Many judge Israel mainly by what the reporters deliver on the news. My torah portion which I read on my bat mitzvah, Metzora, Leviticus 14:1-15:33, teaches that you shouldn't judge people by looking at the surface. People know Israel by the TV screen. I don't want people to view Israel only through a reporter's eyes. But through my eyes as well. I made a video, *My Israel*, to show the incredible beauty, richness, and joy of the country. It is an amazing place, and my hope is that the people can see past the struggles and recognize and appreciate the beauty.

I made band bracelets in blue and white, the colors of the Israeli flag, that say, "*am Israel chi*," *the people of Israel live on forever*. I want the

bracelets to be a symbol of Israel; an Israel that will never die. Even through the rough times, the people will never leave their home; we can all begin to recognize the individual connection we have. The proceeds of the sale of these bracelets were sent to Yad Sarah. Yad Sarah is an Israel based organization which aids the sick, disabled, elderly, isolated and housebound with an array of services aimed at making home care possible. This organization helps all people in Israel and around the world regardless of their background.

In our world today, people look at others who are different as "not normal." Yad Sarah makes it possible for those people to fit into the world. Israel has conflicts that are unique to its country and can seem overwhelming to the rest of us. However, Israel and its people are the same as us. If we take the time and look inside, we will recognize that the people of Israel have the same hopes and dreams as we. I want to show people you can't just look at something one-dimensionally. How can one understand Israel when one hasn't gotten to recognize or appreciate its beauty, richness, and love?

I have sold many bracelets and sent \$1800 to Yad Sarah in Israel. I hope to keep building awareness in people around the world. I hope my message was clear - things are not always what they seem, they are never just one-sided.