



Tamar pictured on the right with another Israeli fellow Sara Jensen pictured on the left

Name: **Tamar Paley**

Country: **Israel**

Nominating Community: **Tlamim (IMPJ Young Adult Community)**

Age: **25**

Project: **Re-imagining the Mikveh for Progressive Jews**

Reform Jewish Journey

My whole Jewish upbringing was through the Reform movement in Israel. From Kindergarten to school, to youth movement, to pre- and post-army programs, progressive Judaism has always been a big part of my life. I've always had this connection to my personal Jewish identity where I can question it and think critically about Judaism, and think differently than what's normal or what I'm supposed to believe.

Taking part of a progressive Jewish youth movement and becoming a young educator where I could make a difference was important to me. I also connected with alternative prayers, use of guitar, and making the traditional prayer service more engaging. For my Bat Mitzvah, I went to a Jewish learning center for women, where I got to learn trope and Torah, among many other interesting aspects of Jewish text and learning.

On Being a Reform Jew in Israel

There are challenges with religion in Israel. Just this morning I saw on Facebook a woman on a hunger strike because she can't get a divorce. My progressive Jewish upbringing taught me that I can criticize things like that and know that is not my Judaism. I think this is not something that a lot of Israelis feel that they can do. They are either religious and agree with everything or they are secular and want nothing to do with Judaism. Being a progressive Jew in Israel is pretty unique and different and a huge part of who I am.

Growing up I didn't understand how special and unique it was because I was surrounded by progressive Jews and a sense of equality. When I attended a large school for junior high, a friend of mine became bullied because she had a Bat Mitzvah and we realized we were a small minority. I think there is something significant about being a progressive Jewish woman in Israel, since women are traditionally prohibited from participating in many Jewish rituals and customs. I feel it's our place as progressive Jewish women to fight back and re-envision a woman's place in Jewish life and the state of Israel.

On Being a Young Adult Reform Jewish leader

I want to be a spokesperson for the Reform movement and have difficult conversations about things happening around us and to share alternative perspectives and Jewish ideas. Many people in Israel don't know that progressive Judaism exists, and I want to share the experience and allow people to understand that Judaism can be expressed in many ways.

I also strive to be involved in with fighting for religious freedom. Meeting Rabbi Noa Sattath from IRAC was one of the most meaningful parts of the program so far. It made me feel so proud to know that I am part of a movement fighting not only for progressive Jewish rights, but for everyone to have freedom of religion.

On being a Roswell Klal Yisrael Fellow

The fellowship has made me question what is my responsibility as a Reform Jewish woman in Israel, as opposed to other places. After meeting all the other fellows and hearing their stories, I realized I shouldn't be apologetic in Israel for living my Jewish life the way I do. I've learned a lot, especially in the Berlin seminar- to understand more about how different Jewish life is outside of Israel when Jews are not the majority.

About My Project

The idea for my project came from being exposed to an alternative Mikveh ceremony. I had this taboo in my head for what a Mikveh meant that tied into this Jewish monopoly that dictates how we practice Judaism, and then I saw this beautiful new way of thinking about a mikveh. One of my goals for my project is to bring woman and men to reunite with this old ritual that is a big part of our Jewish life cycle. I want to expose my peers to this ritual and help them understand how we can re-create it and connect with it in our own way. Klal Yisrael has really made me think about the expression "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? But when I am for myself, then what am I"? And if not now, when?". I know that now is the time to act and take advantage of opportunities right in front us to make Jewish life more meaningful.

On Building a Klal Yisrael Alumni Network

I would like to have global network of people that I can connect with beyond just my cohort of friends. It would also be great to have an annual conference or meetup to continue learning and thinking together. It would also be interesting to find ways to celebrate holidays together around the world.

