

When I used to think of pioneers, the image of an all-American family sitting in a horse and buggy staring out onto the frontier came to my mind. But I have since learned that a pioneer is truly anyone who not only takes risks to explore uncharted territory, but someone who seeks these windows of opportunities to grow and pave the way for future generations. Throughout my life, I have made an effort to hop off the proverbial saddle and become a pioneer in my own right. Whether it be in the global Jewish community, or walking the halls of my high school, I sought out journeys to forge a unique path. Each of these experiences have shaped my decision to pursue a dual degree program at Tel Aviv University and Columbia.

For as long as I can remember, I have learned about the courage of original Jewish pioneers who turned a 2,000 year dream of having a true homeland into reality. Because of them, I have a physical and spiritual place to embrace our shared ancestry. However, I understand that there are those who don't have a strong connection to our history. As such, I felt the need to give back to the Jewish community in a more global sense. My calling was an international summer program in Szarvas, Hungary that was created as an incubator for Jewish life in communities throughout the world affected by Anti-Semitism after the war. For two weeks, I sang classic Jewish songs with young Hungarian children, created art projects with my peers from Belaruse, and danced with teenagers from Mumbai, some of whom had never met another Jew before. Our Jewish roots became the tool with which to eliminate any potential barriers. This experience showed me that even at the young age of 16, I had the ability to become a pioneer for myself and for others to help strengthen and renew the shared history of my people.

While Hungary was 1,000 miles away and my time there was important, I also recognized that there was rocky terrain in my own backyard. It is no secret that our country, (and the world as a whole) is experiencing a marked rise in Anti-Semitism and my high school is just one microcosm of this larger epidemic. Realizing this, I wanted to take action and apply my passion for Israel and Judaism in a practical way that would allow me to make a difference both locally and beyond. This is why I decided to get involved in the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a pro-Israel lobby group dedicated to strengthening the US-Israel relationship and StandWithUs, an organization devoted to educating about Israel and fighting the rise in Anti-Semitism. Through AIPAC, I

have had the opportunity to attend the Saban Leadership conference, lobbied my state Senators, and was invited to be a guest speaker at the National Policy Conference in D.C, where I shared my work to an audience of over 500 people. Last year, I served as a StandWithUs intern and was able to help educate my community about Anti-Semitism and Israel by strengthening cross-cultural and interfaith relationships within my school.

Through my experiences in Hungary, AIPAC, StandWithUs, and my trips to Israel, I have had many diverse endeavors that have made me realize the importance and value of an international academic program. While these experiences have begun to shape my understanding of Israel, Judaism, politics, and the Middle East, I plan to continue to explore these interdisciplinary passions of mine in a formal academic setting. I feel there is no better way to achieve this goal than by learning and immersing myself in Israel at Tel Aviv University and studying in the Modern Jewish and Israel Studies program. I am confident that global learning will encourage me to become a responsible world citizen and to develop a curiosity of the world around me while ultimately providing the opportunity to make a lasting impact on Israel, America, and the Jewish people. I can think of no better place to study Israel and Jewish studies than in the homeland, the origin, and the epicenter of Jewish life. To me, Israel is a safe-haven for Jews all over the world. It is a historic Tikun, and the epic restoration of an indigenous people to their homeland. Even with its flaws, in just 70+ years, Israel has become a world leader in innovation, technology, agriculture, research, and is a stronghold of democracy.

I hope to bring this newfound global perspective and language skills back to Columbia and combine it with a major in Political Science. The synergy between the two academic programs will give me exposure to diverse and perhaps conflicting perspectives across multiple contexts in order to promote critical self-reflection, a re-evaluation of assumptions, and a renewed self-awareness. As a Jewish person, I stand on the shoulders of the giants that came before me, such as Rabbi Akiva, Golda Meir, Theodore Herzl, Natan Sharansky, and Mrs. Morgenstern - all people committed to the Jewish people and the State of Israel. For as long as I can remember, I have learned about the courage of these Jewish pioneers who shaped Judaism into what it is today. Because of them, I have a physical and spiritual place to embrace our shared ancestry. I feel that now it is my turn. I have a responsibility to continue this legacy and forge my own path by studying Israel and Jewish studies in my homeland. I hope to continue to embody the poignant and timeless words of Mrs.

Hilda Specter Morgenstern when she aptly wrote almost 58 years ago that “As a Jew, I am commanded to be motivated by love of God and to teach my children about God. However, according to my religion, it is not possible to love and serve God unless we also love and serve our fellow men and our community.”

I plan to immerse myself in a career that combines my passion for public policy, Israel, and the Jewish people. Whether it be through advocating for victims of terror, working in a think-tank, or developing effective public policy that positively impacts the future of our society, I believe that my studies combining Modern Jewish and Israel studies and political science, will allow me to reach my academic and career goals in innumerable ways.