

“God said “*Yehi ohr*” ‘Let there be light.’ *Va’yehi ohr*--And there was light.”

Z.I.P. (ZIONISM IS PEACE) DRIVE
People Of The Book Reclaim The Power Of The Word

One Million Jewish Youth Send Messages of Peace to Muslim Youth

In 1897, Theodore Herzl wrote in his diary: “if not in 5 years then in 50 there will be a Jewish state.” Fifty years later, in 1947, the UN passed Resolution 181 seeking to create a Jewish and an Arab state. On behalf of our youth, we too need a 50 year vision, a faith and determination that by the year 2060 our efforts will make a profound difference.

Zionism Is Peace, ZIP, is a Jewish vision. It is a “Million Youth March.” Imagine one million Jewish youth believing so deeply in their ability to bring peace to the world, that they prepare uniquely personal, Jewish messages of peace for Muslim youth in Iran, the West Bank, Indonesia etc. Imagine Jewish and Muslim youth appearing with Al-Jazeera superstar Faisal al-Qassem on his show *The Opposite Direction*, speaking about the power of words to change reality, about the potential power of Jewish and Muslim messages of peace. And it will not be only Al Jazeera spreading this message, but also CNN, Al Arrabiya, FOX etc. Imagine if on Ramadan and Christmas and other religious holidays, 100,000’s of Jewish youth place messages of peace on FaceBook and YouTube. Imagine if our youth’s efforts were to impact and shape the cyber-space dialogue that is so critical to today’s youth and adults.

Inspired and empowered by the ZIP curriculum, Jewish youth around the world will teach one of the most profound insights of our ancient rabbis – that words are the essential building blocks of creation, with the capacity to transform chaos into order and darkness into light. Our sages also teach that words possess the power to prevent us from entering our Promised Land, to destroy our most sacred Jewish place, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, and finally, to deprive us of our sovereignty over the Land of Israel. If we place even a little trust in our rabbinic tradition, we must know that the stakes could not be higher.

Imagine if the dreams and hard work of 1 million Jewish youth inspire Christian, Muslim, Hindu etc . . . youth to embrace the message of our Sages: our words are the most powerful instruments of lasting change. Imagine if 1 million Jewish messages of peace inspired 5 or 10 or 50 million non-Jewish messages of peace. “God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And there was light.” In the year 2060, may our Jewish youth look back and feel grateful for the 50 years of light that we helped them to spread.

ZIP DRIVE OVERVIEW

I. JERUSALEM SEMINARS FOR ZIP FELLOWS

The ZIP Institute's 10-day, Jerusalem-based seminars will produce an inspired and elite group of Zionist educators and leaders. After their extraordinary, spring-time Seminar experience, ZIP Fellows will return to the U.S. to implement the ZIP vision and curriculum in Jewish summer camps, and then in synagogues and day-schools. ZIP Fellows will represent a wide range of Jewish backgrounds and they will become future Jewish leaders who understand the essence of the Zionist dream and who will translate that dream to the world. Below is a short description of the curriculum (still a work-in-progress), which has four (4) primary components.

1. Zionism is not a dirty word but an inspiring mission! Its time to reclaim the word!– To convey the essence of Zionism, we must look to our founding texts. Abraham, the father of all three major religions, and the first recipient of God's covenant, is commanded in the following ways: be a *bracha*, a blessing, Gen. 12:2, be *tamim*, perfect, Gen. 17:1, and bring *tzedekah u'mishpat*, Gen. 18:19, righteousness and justice to the world. Further, we are told: "Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Deut. 16:20. With these texts and their commentaries, we have a powerful definition: **"Zionism is the privilege of settling one's holy place, and the on-going, sacred striving to transform it into a place of *bracha*, *tzedakah u'mishpat*, blessing, righteousness and justice."**

2. The power of speech and our Zionist dream – We begin our effort *to be a blessing and to do righteousness and justice*, right where the rabbis begin – with the power of speech. According to the ancient rabbis our most powerful weapon may well be bound up in the power of speech. Our words have the capacity to destroy and . . . to create.

a. Speech -- the power to destroy our Zionist dream – Our curriculum highlights four (4) profound texts. *First*, the way we speak to one another can prevent a whole generation of Jews from entering the land of Israel. According to our Sages, the whole wilderness generation could not enter the land because of the slander spread by the spies. (Rambam, *Mishnah Deot 7:6*.) *Second*, the spoken word is so powerful it can prevent even the greatest amongst us from entering the Promised Land. The Rambam, again, teaches that since Moses spoke to the Israelites with anger, he sacrificed his right to enter the land. (*Shemoneh Perakim*, Ch. 4.) *Third*, our speech, which surely reflects the hatred (*sinat chinam*) that we feel within, has the power to destroy our most sacred building, the Temple, and to terminate our sovereignty over the land. It was not the great Roman army or even Roman anti-semitism, but rather *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, that destroyed the Temple and eliminated our sovereignty over the land. *Finally*, the way we speak to each other can deprive even our most learned scholars of the privilege of living on the land of Israel. Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 *talmidim* died because of their arrogance, and no doubt, how they spoke to each other was central to that arrogance. (BT Yevamot.) (Our speech on this land also has the power to render our dwellings and our bodies impure. *Tazria/Metzorah*).

b. Power of speech to deepen and nurture the Zionist dream – “Death **and life** are in the hand of the tongue.” Proverbs 18:21. The spoken word was the original instrument of creation. It has the power to bring light out of darkness and order out of chaos (*Bereishit* creation story). From Pesach - *PeH Sach*, we learn that the journey from slavery to freedom begins when we reclaim the will to express our highest dreams and values. Thus, the curriculum will ask the participants to focus specifically on one lofty Jewish value among many, including: *B'tzelem Elohim, V'ahavta l'rei'ekha kamokha, ohr la'goyim*.

Imagine if our youth truly internalized these teachings; if they, and we, really believed that the way we speak to each other and to the world will in fact determine the course of our future, particularly in the Land of Israel. Now is the time to faithfully live up to Rav Kook's teaching: if *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, destroyed the Temple and our sovereignty over the land, then *ahavat chinam*, baseless love, must be the response, the cure that will ensure our well-being in the land of Israel.

3. Youth possess enormous potential to bring about social change – In reading our own media these days, it is easy to conclude that the future of the Jewish people and of our beloved homeland depends entirely on the IDF, and a host of hateful dictators who need not be mentioned. The IDF has an absolutely critical job to do; but so does every single Jewish youth and adult! The message of this curriculum, this transformative educational experience, is that our Jewish future and our Zionist dream depend on all of us, and most importantly, on each and every one of our Jewish youth.

In May, 1963, in Birmingham, Ala., the individual and collective messages of peace, of 5000 African American youth, broke the back of institutionalized segregation, a system inspired by fear, anger, hate and arrogance. **The Children's March**, produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center, is an extraordinary film. It teaches that the youth of the world can be the most powerful and inspiring force for change. It is time for our Jewish youth to become the youth of Birmingham. It is time for the Jewish: “I have a dream.”

4. Creating a cyber/video world of peace messages – For each participant, the end product of the ZIP curriculum will be a personal message of peace. Creating the messages is explicitly structured into 5-7, 90 minute sessions. The workshop time will be an invaluable part of the experience, giving students the opportunity to reflect personally on central issues in their lives, including: the role that **fear** (the spies and the community in the wilderness), **anger** (Moses speaking to the people), **hate** (the Temple and our sovereignty over the land) and **arrogance** (Rabbi Akiva's students) play in their own lives, and how those qualities impact the way they communicate. Imagine how powerful it would be for our youth to produce messages in which they thoughtfully and openly reflect on personal experiences driven by **fear, anger, hate** or **arrogance**.

Finally, creating their messages of peace will not be the end. Equally important will be their efforts at organizing friends and peers about: 1) how to use Facebook, YouTube, text-messaging etc. to generate the greatest impact from their messages; and, 2) how to inspire non-Jewish friends to participate. Through this experience, our Jewish youth will directly confront and begin to overcome their pervasive feelings of powerlessness, and in so doing, they will join others in becoming Zionist leaders of the future – struggling to bring *bracha, tzedek, mishpat* and *ahavat chinam* into the world.