



Réparer le monde une personne à la fois To repair the world one person at a time



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ABOUT TIKUN OLAM



An interview with Taglit – Birthright Israel co-founder, CHARLES BRONFMAN

As we celebrate the past decade of Montreal's relationship with Israel, Taglit – Birthright Israel is celebrating its tenth anniversary. We recently had the opportunity to speak with Charles Bronfman, who co-founded the initiative, about the contribution it has made to strengthening the relationship between Israelis and Jews of the Diaspora, and reinforcing Jewish identity.

1. Could you comment on the special relationship Montrealers have with Israel?

Montrealers, and Canadians in general, show an emotional closeness to Israel that we don't find in the United States. Americans care, but not as passionately. This is probably because Jewish communities in Canada tend to be younger.

I always try to visit with the Canadian groups that come to Jerusalem. And I have a special spot for Montrealers. Of the 225,000 Birthright participants, 5,500 have come from Montreal. I love it when young people from Montreal come up to me to say hello and tell me about their families.

2. What is the impact of a visit to Israel on a young person's Jewish identity?

When we started Birthright there were three goals, and we've done honest

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Reflections on Israel



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Hold the Dates

research over the ten years to check our performance. To strengthen Jewish identity, love of Israel, and love of the Jewish people. The research from Brandeis University shows that we have not only met, but surpassed, all our hopes and aspirations for every goal.

You can take any returnee, especially those who came on Birthright after being turned off and disconnected, and everyone has a story, and says, "It changed my life."

3. What do you see as the greatest challenges/opportunities for Birthright over the next decade?

We hope to have 51,000 young adults in Israel annually by 2015. That is our aspiration. The challenge, however, as always is money. All-in, including post-programming, it costs over \$3,000 per participant, so, do the math. Still, the goal is attainable. But we need to raise a lot more money through communities and federations and individuals. We also hope for an increase in funding on a percentage basis from the Israeli government. They've seen the tremendous benefits of this program. Not only have we changed the lives of 225,000 young people from the Diaspora, but also of the 40,000 young Israelis who participate in touring with the kids. It is great for the Israelis – it opens their minds. From the beginning, part of my vision was that we get young Israelis and Diaspora kids together.

4. You are a great participant in, and observer of, the relationship between the Diaspora and Israel. How has this relationship changed over the last decade?

Over the last five years, the Canadian government has been the strongest in the world toward Israel, next to the US. That said, the relationship has been difficult because there's too much bad press directed at Israel. When the young people go on Birthright, they discover that what they have seen in the press are myths. They understand, by being here, that it's nice for people to pontificate about how Israel should act, but sitting in Israel they see a different story.

5. What do you think is the most important thing that the Jews in Montreal can do at this time in order to support Israel and to further build our relationship?

Go there. If you haven't been, or haven't been in the past few years, go and get involved in something. Montreal has a twin city – Beer Sheva/ Bnei Shimon. Go there. See what's happening. Form a partnership with Israelis. The Israelis are standing on their own feet. They are looking to partner with us. The old slogan, "We are one," can now be a reality. Go to Israel and find out, and do it with Israeli partners.

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