

Hello everyone!

Shabbat shalom to you all!!

My Name is Noa Ron and I'm the new UJA Shinshinit at Holy Blossom Temple.

Tomorrow I will celebrate my 18th birthday, for the first time away from home and family. And when the age of 18 suddenly arrives, it makes me think that every kid at the age of 18 faces a certain transition, a change in the way we have lived our lives up to now. In Israel, right after graduating high school we go to serve in the army, but in some other places, after graduation you go to university.

About a month ago, the only thing that I had my mind on was packing my luggage, trying to fit "my life" into only two suitcases and asking myself if it's overweight? How many clothes can I fit inside? what shirts are actually wearable in the winter?, and so it goes.

And so when we were at the airport on our way to Toronto it got me thinking about the luggage that I'm carrying with me, literally and metaphorically.

If i go back about month and a half back, I unpacked my bags from a trip to London, UK with my mom. We wanted to spend time together with no interference, just before I'm flying for Shnat Sherut. And then I unpacked again, my dance bag that I used to take everywhere with me, is now no longer in use, and my cabin in the dance studio is now empty.

A month ago I was also helping my friend to pack for the army. She packed, a watch, sheets, white t-shirts, socks, a lot of socks!, advil, duffel bag and more. I watched her load her bag to the bus and drive off to the next chapter of her life. A big chapter, where she'll grow and evolve as a person.

A couple days later my older brother Guy, packed his own bags to go to officers course, and as the time goes on, in a month he's packing his bags again. This time for starting his 3rd year of medical school.

When I first got here, all I thought about was how everything is different, and how these people who are the exact same age as mine, are starting their own lives in a completely different way than me.

But the more I thought about it, I realized that the thing that makes us unique is not where we're heading, it is where we came from and what we bring with us.

So whether you're in the desert starting your army service, at university or just traveling before the army, a part of growing up and reaching adulthood is choosing what luggage you take with you. What do you put in it, and what is ok to let go off and leave behind.

And I want to share what I filled some of my suitcase with. I brought parts of my family with me, they are my rock and safe place. And Even though I already miss them, the values they gave me at home stay with me forever. Respect, honesty, integrity, trust and love, are the things I was raised on, and the values I brought with me from my home.

I also packed my personal experiences, some good and some less, that shaped my personality and made me the person that I am today. I packed the difficulties from the times I taught trainees at Magan David Adom which is a branch of the Red Cross, I packed years of self discipline in the dance studio, I packed the moments I spent with my friends and laughed all night.

But mainly I packed tools, the different ways I learned on how to deal with intense, complex and stressful situations.

I came to Toronto with my own luggage, it was overweight and filled with short sleeve shirts and synagogue clothes. It was filled with my personal experience of being the younger children at home, with letters from my friends and family and with my moms hugs.

So When I leave in 11 months I have no doubt that my luggage will be completely different. That my new suitcase will be even more overweight, with the new things I have learned from my experiences here.

And as scary as it can be to think so far ahead, I am very excited to see what's about to come, and to explore new connections and this Jewish community.

Thank you all, and chag sameach :)