

November 2016 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

In June of 1999, the same month that I became a father for the first time, I began working in the national office of the Youth Division of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (known today as the URJ) in New York City. Roughly five years prior to that, a small cadre of Jewish philanthropists (Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt in particular) along with some Israeli government officials (Yossi Beilin in particular) had already begun imagining the potential benefits for the Jewish People if only they could find a way to bring as many young Jews as possible between the ages of 18- 26 to visit Israel. It was out of these discussions that [Birthright Israel](#), a ten-day all-expenses-paid trip to our ancestral homeland was born.

One of my earliest responsibilities at the UAHC in 1999 was to recruit two busloads of young people to become some of the first recipients of this outrageously generous Birthright gift. Easy, right? Well, I certainly thought so. And boy was I wrong!

Since there were not very many seats to give out, you might think we would have had to beat interested participants back with a stick, but that's not exactly how it turned out. Instead, probably because Birthright was so new that no one really trusted that the offer was – as advertised – truly without strings attached. In the end, we succeeded in filling those two buses, but it certainly wasn't easy.

Sixteen years later, in 2015, Taglit (as the organization is called in Hebrew) enabled over 45,000 young people to enjoy the Birthright Israel experience. In total, there are over half a million Taglit alumni around the world today.

Even though there are many more seats available today than there were in 1999, so too are there many more people competing for them. Fortunately, there are ways to enhance your chances of receiving a spot. If you fit the [eligibility requirements](#), I urge you to [apply online](#). But if you do, please let me know at RabbiDubin@jcnwj.org, because I am in position to help make sure you get a seat.

One final related word: A few of you have already approached me about helping with our planning process for the recently-announced JCNWJ community trip to Israel (which will take place at an as-of-yet undetermined date over the next 18 months). If anyone else would like to be part of this process at the ground floor, please let me know (RabbiDubin@jcnwj.org) so we can include you. Keep your eyes posted for the announcement of our first meeting.

L'Shalom,
Rabbi Dubin