

## THE FIRST JBC-MAYANOT BIRTHRIGHT ISRAEL TRIP RETURNS

In a new initiative, the Jewish Book Council recently teamed up with birthright israel to send a group of young people interested in literature and writing on a special tour of Israel.

The trip was part of an effort by birthright israel to organize tours for people who share the same interests. "There have been birthright israel trips for teachers and for singles," said Carolyn Starman Hessel, the director of the JBC. "I figured why not have a special birthright trip for people interested in books?"

The idea was proposed to Rabbi Shlomo Gestetner of Mayanot, one of the major birthright tour providers, who eagerly embraced the plan. The two organizations work together on another program, the JBC-birthright israel Alumni Association Book Club, which brings together birthright alumni for discussions with Jewish authors. Birthright supplies the alumni and the JBC provides the author and books.

Birthright is a program that aims to send any Jew from the ages of 18 to 26 who has not previously been there with a peer group on a free tour of Israel. The program is financed by American Jewish philanthropists, Jewish Federations and the State of Israel.

About a dozen people signed up for the JBC-Mayanot birthright israel trip, a respectable showing for a first-time tour but not enough to fill a bus. The tour operator put the JBC group together with a group of about

15 students from Yale as well as smaller groups from other universities. As it turned out, many of the 38 participants on the bus were interested in literature and writing.

Ari Goldman, a member of the JBC board and a professor of journalism at Columbia University, was enlisted to join the group and be the JBC resource person on board. "I had been to Israel many, many times before," Ari said, "but seeing it through the eyes of young people who had never been was a

help them find a publication. "One student already published in the *Boston Jewish Advocate*," Ari said. "Others are planning to write for their campus papers or their hometown papers or Websites."

Ari returned to New York in June rather exhausted, but said that he enjoyed the teaching and mentoring role he had on the 10-day trip. He added that he discovered why birthright is just for people from ages of 18 to 26. "The rest of us just can't keep up."



JBC-Mayanot birthright israel "Israel in Print" trip participants with group leader and JBC board member and author Ari Goldman

special adventure I could not turn down."

Ari challenged all the students in the group to write something about the trip, which included visits to Masada, Har Herzl, Yad VaShem, Safed and Lake Tiberias and an address from Natan Sharansky. "Don't try to write about everything you see," he suggested, "just pick one moment or one encounter and write about it." He urged the participants not to let the trip pass without writing about the experience.

Ari even offered to edit their stories and

The JBC hopes to co-sponsor birthright israel trips in the coming years. In addition to inspiring the participants to write, the Council hopes to expose them to Israeli authors such as Amos Oz, who recently won the JBC-administered Everett Family Foundation Jewish Book of the Year Award, and other winners like Michael Oren, author of *Six Days of War*. "This special birthright israel tour helps us strengthen the connection to Israel and the world of Israeli literature," says Hessel.