Israel is a familiar place for me. Both of my parents were born in Jerusalem, and my entire family still lives there. As a kid, Israel was always a place of fun, pools, beaches, and delicious snacks. It was a great place to go, and I felt somewhat at home. However, I soon began to read about the conflict, and realized how these pools and beaches only scratched the surface.

Over time, my commitment to peace and justice has become increasingly solidified. With the help of Professor Atshan’s class [PEAC 053 01, Israeli–Palestinian Conflict], I could back my beliefs up with various facts regarding issues ranging from discrimination to hydro-politics. Everyone in our class agreed that they had become mini experts in certain areas of the conflict. We all thought we were prepared for the trip, but very quickly realized otherwise.

The trip itself was planned to perfection. The meetings were phenomenal, and even the order they were structured created a cohesive and interesting picture. In many of these meetings, there are moments that I will never forget, and that have changed the way I see and feel emotion.

On the first day, when visiting the destroyed Palestinian village of Lifta, an ex-resident of the area broke my heart with his poetic description of his lost land. I held back tears as the granddaughter of my host family, living under occupation in the West Bank, drew me and my friend a small picture, commemorating those who have died in the conflict, while
telling us how hard it is to wake up every morning and hear that a mother had lost one of her children.

This trip provided me with the most essential aspect of the conflict, and that is the people themselves. There isn't anything that can teach you the emotional side of the conflict. These are human beings intentionally harming other humans. The things we witnessed were tragic, and left us all wondering how someone could possibly do this to another person. It is very difficult to put such an emotional experience into words, and this is something I have been struggling with since my return. The trip has inspired me in so many ways, and it was hands down the most incredible experience of my life.

Inspiration from Peace Activists
Lang Center Associates, Mohammed Bappe ’19 Reflects on the PEAC 053 Israel/Palestine Study Trip

The trip was truly life changing and experience I will never forget. [It] trip started with my being interrogated at the airport for hours. It was one of the emotional aspects of the trip, facing things like discrimination and oppression head on. It wouldn’t be the first time, going to places like Hebron in the West Bank also brought other aspects of the Israel/Palestine reality to life. Seeing debris thrown by the settlers on the rooftops of markets, confronting settlers blasting music outside of a mosque during Friday prayer, and even hearing some of the terrible things in Arabic one soldier said to our guide in Hebron all put into perspective the topics we learned in class. As prepared as I felt going into this trip, at the same time I don’t think I could have been prepared.

A common theme that I was confronted with was the love of land the people have. This was especially evident in the Lifta village with Yacoub, a native. Yacoub spoke about what used to be his village with love and his poetic words touched all of the students. This was also evident with the Palestinians who came back from the States after college as activists. Everyone was unified with their love for their land by ending the occupation. This made me reflect back to my own roots during late night conversations with my classmates. It hit me that I don’t have much knowledge of Bangladesh, my birth country, and the current issues the nation is facing. After the trip, I’ve been investing a lot of time in learning about the country of my roots and similar to the Palestinians I met I’ve started to develop my own connection.

This trip was eye opening. The little things all the activists were participating in to make a difference weren’t going to solve the overall issue of occupation, but their hopes were that it would contribute to the overall movement. My experience with the Israeli and Palestinian
peace activists was inspiring. I had the opportunity of seeing some of the most worst aspects of humanity but also some of the most beautiful ones.

Enriching Classroom Learning
Lang Center Associate, Therese Ton ’19 Reflections on the PEAC 053 Israel/Palestine Study Trip

After completing the trip to Israel/Palestine for my Peace and Conflict Studies Class, Israeli–Palestinian Conflict with Professor Sa’ed Atshan, I am stunned and inspired by the experiences, speakers, and knowledge I gained during the trip. It was an unforgettable opportunity that I am privileged and incredibly lucky to have. Through this trip I was truly about to grasp the depth and perspectives of what I learned in the classroom about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Seeing the Israeli Wall in the West Bank decorated with graffiti art illustrating peace slogans and solidarity, visiting the Al–Aqsa Mosque, the Wailing Wall, and the Church of Nativity, and walking through checkpoints that mentioned in class were only few of the memories that brought all the information and knowledge in class into reality.

During the trip, several speakers mentioned the importance of incorporating the individual narrative in the conflict that is often overshadowed by a collective narrative. There is an indescribable empathy that I was able to internalize all the speaker’s stories in a personal way. One of the most inspiring speakers was a Palestinian mother and peace activist whose village, Nabi Saleh, was tear gassed every Friday from Israeli Defense Force soldiers in response to the villagers non-violent protests for human rights.

Not only was I able to grow as an individual through this trip but as a class as well. Throughout the trip we grew to become a community that supported, educated, and inspired each other with our strength, ideas, and determination, always striving for a more comprehensive analysis of the conflict. We all agreed as a group to gain a better understanding of the Israeli perspective of the conflict, and this included an interview with an Israeli settler. Participating in this trip not only enriched my learning experience about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict but also motivated me to learn even more and to take action about the conflict. I am so grateful for this opportunity and highly recommend it to any student in the future who will be taking Israeli–Palestinian Conflicts with Professor Atshan... It was truly life changing.