

Keshet Insight Seminar 2016

The Great Balancing Act:

To Be a Democratic, Jewish State with a Large Arab Minority - From Herzl to Today

January 31 – February 6, 2016

When Theodor Herzl envisioned a Jewish State in his book, *Altneuland*, he imagined a country that would be both a Jewish homeland and a liberal society guaranteeing equal rights to Jews and non-Jews alike. In the Declaration of Independence, David Ben Gurion used similar language, despite the fact that he had no illusions about the realities of the historical conflict between Jews and Arabs in what had been Palestine.

Today, the annual **Keshet Insight Seminar (January 31 – February 6, 2016)** will reflect on the progress made by Israel in achieving this goal in light of the harsh realities of the Middle East. We will devote a very intensive week to examining the challenges posed to Israel's political system, morality, security and self-identification in light of the fact that over 20% of its population defines itself as being either Israeli Arab or Palestinian Israeli.

In order to delve into the complexities of the region, it is essential to understand the various communities within Israel's Arab population, each with its own cultural and political narrative, relationship with the modern State of Israel, and visions for the future. In addition to hearing lectures from leading experts, we will also have personal encounters with Bedouin leaders, Christian Arabs serving in the IDF, Palestinian nationalist activists, and more.

Each of these groups exists within the geographical and political context of the State of Israel. An exploration of the mixed Jewish-Arab cities of Lod, Jaffa, Nazareth, Haifa and Jerusalem will shed light on the historical development and contemporary challenges of these places. We will visit the sites of battles that made the existence of Israel possible, but also led to the emergence of the refugee challenge and the Naqba narrative. The most fascinating insights will be gained from personal meetings, including Jewish and Arab municipal figures, Christian and Muslim religious community leaders, and social and educational activists working towards peace and prosperity in these microcosms of Israeli society.

Amidst all of the conflict, we will also learn about the many reconciliation and coexistence efforts between Jews and Arabs, including academic and cultural institutions, dialogue groups and a visit to an intentional community for Jewish and Arab Israelis. These individuals and organizations not only give hope to the region, but also present an added layer of complexity to Israeli-Arab identity.

Over the course of the trip, we will explore some of the most fundamental questions in Israeli society from a multitude of perspectives. How can Israel be both Jewish and democratic, while respecting the rights of its minority populations? Is there a way for Israeli Arabs to simultaneously integrate into Israeli society while working toward independence? What is the relationship between the Christian and Muslim Arab communities in Israel? How can the Israeli government find a reasonable solution to the Bedouin land disputes that respects the claims of both sides?

Our goal is not to find answers to these modern and ancient questions, but rather to go on a journey of exploration that will leave each of us with a deeper and more balanced understanding of the complex human identities behind the political issues that dominate the global conversation about the Israeli-Arab Conflict.