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Amy Oppenheimer

## Alumni Profile: Amy Oppenheimer, University of Haifa



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After spending a year studying Jewish texts at the MASA-accredited [Midreshet Lindenbaum](#) seminary in Jerusalem, Amy Oppenheimer – a Jewish day school and summer camp alumna – began pursuing international relations and Jewish studies at the John's Hopkins University. The university's interfaith community and large selection of Middle Eastern courses enabled Amy to explore her interests from new angles.

With several semesters of Arabic courses behind her, Amy decided to participate on another MASA program and study abroad at the [University of Haifa's International School](#) during her Junior year. "I wanted to see another side of Israel than I had previously seen and I knew that Haifa was the location of coexistence," says Amy.

At the University of Haifa, Amy developed close friendships with Arab Christians and secular Israelis. Through many discussions with her peers, Amy learned about what it means to live in both a Jewish and democratic state. She learned much of this through the lens of the marriage process. "Marriage strikes a cord within each of us and many Israelis and non-Israelis have their first encounter with the state Rabbinate during the marriage process," says Amy. Interested by the reactions the topic elicited in those around her, Amy set out for the Haifa Mall to ask people about their views on camera.

"I had never taken a film class in my life but I knew that if I really wanted to connect with people,

I needed to bring the voices to them through a film," says Amy.

The interviews evolved into the seeds of the documentary, *Faces of Israel: A Discussion About Marriage, State and Religion in the Jewish Homeland* ([www.facesthemovie.com](http://www.facesthemovie.com)). *Faces of Israel* features interviews of Israeli Jews with different backgrounds and beliefs, and has been praised and endorsed by a wide spectrum of Jewish leaders, including Rabbi Basil Herring from the Rabbinical Council of America, Rabbi Gordon Tucker from the Masorti movement, Rabbi David Ellenson from Hebrew Union College and Blu Greenberg from the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance.

"I think all opinions have a certain weight and should be respected," says Amy. "It was really important for me to try to be neutral and to put aside any preconceived notions that I had in order to be open to what each person had to say."

On March 24, almost two years after her semester at the University of Haifa, *Faces of Israel* will officially be released to the public at the Riverdale Y. Following the screening, Rabbi Seth Farber of Itim will moderate a cross-denominational panel with Jewish leaders across the spectrum.

"Classically, you go to college and are exposed to viewpoints outside of the ones your community raised you with," says Amy. "After going back to Israel and spending a semester in Haifa, my understanding of Israel and my connection to Israel has deepened but also matured."



**MASA Israel journey is a project of the Government of Israel and Jewish communities around the world, represented by the Jewish Agency for Israel and its partners, United Jewish Communities / the Federations of North America, and Keren Hayesod - UIA.**

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