



## Opening Hearts and Minds: LGBT Engagement in Jerusalem

Sponsored by *A Wider Bridge* and *Keshet*

Hosting:

- **Sarah Weil** (Jerusalem LGBT activist and Director of the Meeting Place initiative for the *Yerushalmit Movement*)
- **Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz** (Jerusalem City Councilman and founder of *Hashgacha Pratit*, private kashrut supervision)

Dates: March 14th-22<sup>nd</sup>

14th	15 <sup>th</sup>	16th	19th	20th	21 <sup>st</sup>	22nd
Boston	New York	New York	San Diego	San Francisco	San Francisco	Los Angeles

### Presenting the Meeting Place:

The Meeting Place transformed the murder of Shira Banki into a catalyst for bringing people from different backgrounds together to discuss LGBT issues in the city street. Through weekly dialogue circles in Zion Square, it has grown into a “brave space” for difficult conversation on broader issues affecting Israeli society. Opposite the radical-right homophobic group *Lehava*, *Meeting Place* is countering a polarized and hostile street with grassroots dissemination of pluralistic values.

### Project Background

On July 30th, 2015, 6 people were stabbed in the Jerusalem LGBTQ Pride March. Three days later, 16-year-old Shira Banki died of her wounds. Immediately following the news of Shira’s passing, the Yerushalmit Movement organized a public *Shiva* in Zion Square. Professionally facilitated dialogue circles allowed thousands of people from across the social, political and religious spectrum to meet face to face, and confront painful disagreements. For seven days, Zion Square was transformed from a place of violence and racism to one of reconciliation and hope. And a new model of social engagement in the public sphere emerged as the *Meeting Place* project. Every Thursday night since Shira’s death, the Yerushalmit Movement sponsors dialogue circles on various controversial issues affecting Israeli society in Zion Square. Together these circles fill the square facing *Lehava*, a radical-right, homophobic organization, countering their message by offering an open, accepting space for all people, including *Lehava* members, to discuss difficult and painful issues. The initiative is in partnership with *Shira Banki's Way*, an organization started by Shira's parents to keep her memory alive through social action.

### Yerushalmit Movement

The Yerushalmit Movement fosters Jerusalem as a "community of communities", a pluralistic society that benefits all its residents by strengthening different communities and building bridges of cooperation between them through cross-sectoral activism. We empower residents through community organizing, transform public spaces into places of encounter, and promote an ethos of ‘shared society’.

### Tour Description

The *Opening Hearts and Minds: LGBT Engagement in Jerusalem* Tour will bring the Director of *Meeting Place*, Sarah Weil, to share her remarkable story, and convey how the Meeting Place is at the forefront of LGBT activism in Jerusalem, engaging the most homophobic elements of society face to face through non-violent communication. Accompanying her will be Jerusalem City Councilman and orthodox Rabbi, Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz, who will present an inspiring picture of Jerusalem as a hub of pluralistic activism and shared society through the lens of the ground-breaking work of the Yerushalmit Movement. He will explain how the the *Meeting Place* project offers a crucial contribution to the city, in the present and future. The *Meeting Place* project will be offered as an innovative model for confronting increasing polarization and sectarianism in Israel and the US.

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