

2 [CURIOSITY]

DANIEL MOSES

College Degree Program: BA/MA International and Area Studies

Study Abroad Program: Jerusalem



A Spice Mountain in the Old City of Jerusalem



Jerusalem is a special place. Throughout the centuries it has inspired poets to write and soldiers to fight, and in the spring of 2014, it inspired me to spend a semester studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I started studying the Modern Hebrew language as a freshman at the University of Oklahoma, mostly because I was curious to find out how different the Christian Old Testament was in its original language. This ultimately influenced my decision to study abroad in Jerusalem. As an International and Area Studies major, I knew I needed to spend a semester abroad to graduate, and given my background studying Hebrew and my interest in the Middle East, Jerusalem seemed the most logical destination. I had no idea that my semester in Jerusalem would awaken an intense curiosity in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.

As soon as I stepped out of the airport on a warm January day in Tel Aviv, I hopped into a *sheirut*—a large taxi in Israel—that was filled

with three Jewish Israelis, two Ethiopian Israelis, one international student from China, two Arab Israelis (including the driver) and me. You can study your destination country and the language as much as you want before leaving the United States, but there is no comparison to being on your own in a foreign country for the first time. The *sheirut* driver delivered me from the airport to the student village on Mt. Scopus with no problems, and I settled into what became a transformative semester.

There were so many unforgettable moments in Jerusalem. I deepened my understanding of Hebrew, Judaism and the Middle East conflict in my classes at the Hebrew University—there is nothing quite like studying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a classroom with a direct view of the Israeli separation wall. I learned about Jewish mysticism from one of the world's leading Kabbalah scholars, and I learned new things in conversations with other international



A view of shops in Jerusalem

students and local Israelis every day. I watched 500,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews march on the city in protest against a government bill that required them to serve in the Israeli military. I witnessed Passover and Easter in Jerusalem. I floated the Dead Sea, swam in the Red Sea and hiked from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sea of Galilee. I traveled to Prague, Budapest, Istanbul and Jordan during Passover break. I interned as an intelligence analyst with the Institute for Terrorism Research and Response, where I was on the forefront of knowledge for many pressing security issues. Most of all, I learned that there are many layers to Jerusalem—archaeology, history, religion, cuisine, art, architecture and even the people who live there.

Every now and then while doing simple, everyday tasks, I was overwhelmed by the thought of how many people have been through Jerusalem over the years. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, King Solomon, Alexander the Great, John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles, Muhammad, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud and the list goes on and on. Pope Francis made an appearance while I was there, adding to the list right before my eyes. Each person who has wandered Jerusalem's ancient streets has

shaped the city in some way. Then there was me: an international student from Oklahoma who spoke mediocre Hebrew and was slightly overwhelmed by my view of the Dome of the Rock each time I walked to class. It was hard not to be intrigued by everything around me, and I began to wonder how I fit into it.

This wonder helped stir up an intense curiosity about the city's history and its people, and that is what eventually brought me back to the area. I wanted to understand how and why the city had become so divided, and I wanted to understand why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had persisted for so long. My classes at the Hebrew University certainly helped me understand these things from a theoretical perspective, but my conversations with people only seemed to complicate things. After returning to Oklahoma, I knew that I needed to go back, which happened in the summer of 2015. I returned to teach English in Hebron, the ancient city where Abraham and his family (yes, the Abraham from Genesis) are believed to be buried.

My time in Hebron proved to be as transformative as my time in Jerusalem, influencing the rest of my college career.

Not only did I teach English while living with a Palestinian family, but I also met a staggering number of local activists and leaders in my short time there. Hebron is very insulated from outsiders, which allowed me to quickly make connections with leaders of local nongovernmental and international organizations. My college roommate, Bijan Hosseini, accompanied me on this adventure, and our connections to local leaders in Hebron inspired us to make a short film highlighting the perspectives that people in Hebron have on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We presented *Voices from Hebron* to an audience of national security experts at the 2016 University of Oklahoma Center for Intelligence and National Security Symposium on September 13, 2016. This project would not have been possible without our willingness to pursue answers to our questions. Bijan and I were both curious to learn the perspectives of people who lived the conflict every day and we hope we aptly captured those perspectives in our film.

My curiosity in one particular phenomenon led me to write my master's thesis on the economic relationship between Israel and the Palestinian territories, specifically the role of migrant labor. The father of our host family was a construction worker in Israel. Even though he had a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering, he could not find a job in the West Bank that paid more than a construction job in Israel. I was curious

to find out why and what could be done about it. My thesis, titled *Billions of Dollars Lost Along the Checkpoints? An Econometric Analysis of Labor Mobility, Economic Development, and Violence in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, won the Thomas W. Adams Best Paper on Conflict Resolution in the spring of 2016. I am extremely thankful that I was able to pursue answers to my burning questions, but I do not think that my curiosity will ever be fully satisfied.

Studying abroad opens your eyes to the staggering reality that there are millions of people living with their own dreams, worries, problems and goals, and you might want to check your pulse if they do not make you intensely curious about how they came to be. Jerusalem is my favorite city on earth. I believe that a person can learn everything they need to know about people by studying the history of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. There is a certain impossibility of being in Jerusalem; the Holy City Upon a Hill has been referred to throughout history as the physical incarnation of all that people aspire to as human beings. In a philosophical sense, Jerusalem is meant to be a place in which Heaven has come to earth—a place where man has at last returned to a Garden of Eden sort of existence. The great irony in this is that man's imperfect visions of the future continue to create conflict in Jerusalem, as people try to shape the city into their own likeness.

