

GHIS GRADUATES 2021

Selected Reflections From Our Students

GHIS

בית הספר הבינלאומי בגבעת חביבה
المدرسة الدولية في جبعات حبيبه
Givat Haviva International School

Yuval Dvir

Head of School



My favorite wizard, Gandalf the White [Grey] once said: “It is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keeps the darkness at bay. Simple acts of love and kindness”. GHIS students are not ordinary in any way - they are courageous trailblazers. Yet simple acts pave their way through two challenging two years at GHIS. They leave GHIS with new insights, new understanding of their life’s path and with new realizations as to their role in our world.

My main request to our wonderful graduates as they start the new stage of their journeys is to always remember the skills they have been taught in critical thinking and never accept supposed truths without analysing them from every angle. As leaders, they will need compassion and sound judgement.

Hadas Talmon

Director of Boarding



To our cohort most impacted by the pandemic, I say that we have learned so many things. But the most important thing we gained is a deep appreciation for our community which became our family. As family members we loved, supported and cared for each other in the midst of so many challenges.

I know that our graduates will take with them all the lessons from GHIS, keeping them with them always. They will inspire others as they put them into practice in their voluntary service, higher education and careers.

I look forward to watching as GHIS graduates have a deep and positive impact on our world and I will say - I knew they could do this!



Salma – Kfar Kara, Israel

"GHIS has guided me through a process which began with me shouting at those whose opinions were different from mine, to understanding that people hear me most clearly when I speak calmly and quietly – a crucial lesson for life."

Salma's Muslim family made an active decision to be part of shared society in Israel. Salma attended the bilingual elementary Hand in Hand school, 'Gesher Al Hawadi', where she learned together with Jews in both Arabic and Hebrew. Growing up, Salma attended seminars at Givat Haviva which further solidified her commitment to building bridges between Arabs and Jews.

Applying to GHIS was a natural continuation of Salma's journey. It was, however, a different experience from her elementary school where all students and their families had 'bought in' to the ideology. At GHIS, her peers were from many different backgrounds – Israeli and international. In finding her place, and explaining her principles, she was obliged to look deeply into her identity and to challenge it. Like many of her peers, Salma's art was a critical element to her self-exploration. Two years on, with a greater knowledge and self-awareness, Salma is surer than ever that her future will be in the field of education of shared society. She is taking a gap year to volunteer in schools in her community.



Basak - Istanbul, Turkey

> "I forged my opinions about Israel from the Turkish media. Being at GHIS has shown me how there are at least two sides to every reality and I will openly share my positive experiences, when I go back"

Basak grew up in Istanbul when ISIS attacks were a regular occurrence. It was not until she attended an international camp in Italy that she understood that conflict and war could be aberrations rather than the norm. Basak, a Turkish Muslim, knew that to become a force for change in the region, she needed to understand the underlying reasons for the many conflicts. She bravely chose to move to the heart of another conflict zone to learn and study with students from different cultures, religions, and economic backgrounds to develop new conflict resolution tools - key to the GHIS mission. Basak's particularly loved her Global Politics and World Religions classes, and represented the Turkish position with our Armenian students who learned a great deal from her.

Basak was proud to be selected as one of GHIS's representatives for the Human Family Project headed by the CBB Community of Santa Barbara. She has become a vocal ambassador for Israel among friends and family in Turkey, changing deep-rooted prejudices. She is determined to one day be a leader who helps bridge divides both within Turkey and bilaterally with Israel. Basak has been accepted with a scholarship to study Political Science in the Dual BA program through Sciences Po and Columbia University program in New York City and France.



Cedric - Erfurt, Germany

> "At GHIS, I discovered that these two words can be used in the same sentence: pleasure and academics."

Cedric is a very talented and clever young man who could not find his academic home. After dropping out of 10th grade in his school in Germany and with his father posted in Israel, he moved to a kibbutz program with no expectation of completing high school. Then he heard about GHIS and was drawn to the idea of living and learning in a diverse environment, which he found immediately in the dorm that he shared with a local Arab and a Jew; the three became close friends.

The positive living and learning environment of GHIS encouraged Cedric not only to pursue the academic path which had eluded him, but also to become a student leader. This culminated in his being elected onto the Student Leadership Council, which bridges students and administration with an goal of making community life at GHIS the richest it can be.

GHIS encourages students to develop a thirst for knowledge. Immersed in this environment, Cedric surprised himself as he discovered a passion for learning. Almost two years on, rather than giving up on high school, Cedric now finds himself with a choice of two top universities and careers: Mechanical Engineering at the Technion or Business Administration and Economics at the IDC. Quite a turnaround for a formerly disillusioned teen.



Gleb - Perm, Russia

> "Before I came to GHIS, I valued only my brain. My two years here has shown me the route to my heart."

Gleb is a genius who was accustomed to winning academic competitions and prizes. The common currency among his friends was intellectual excellence.

Arriving at GHIS, for Gleb, was akin to being dropped on Mars. So many cultural and religious differences, so many opinions, so much debate and discussion. Gleb soon began to live in a new way as his heart partnered for the first time with his head.

He took his Global Politics studies seriously, both intellectually and personally; he even attended a protest. When the Israeli police did not attack those protesting, Gleb understood the nature of repression in Russia.

Back home, Gleb's primary focus was on the hard sciences. At GHIS, he discovered a love for the humanities and grew to appreciate their relevance to his life. His biggest revelation came when he took on the central role in GHIS's Profound Kindness program, through which he learned and taught that it is only through listening to others that we can foster meaningful relationships.

Although he was also accepted to the top-ranking Polytechnic Institute of Paris, Gleb decided to study Economics on a full scholarship at Boccini University in Milan.



Grigor- Gyumri, Armenia

"When we return home we, the Armenian students will never forget the love, compassion and understanding of the GHIS community towards us as we suffered during the recent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Let us all hope that future conflicts can be solved through peaceful means."

Students choose GHIS for many reasons. For Grigor and his fellow Armenians, Israel represents something that they aspire to. They see a small country with global influence. Through GHIS, they observe that despite all the years of conflict, Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel can exist in relative peace and in friendship. It gives them hope for the future of Armenia.

Grigor is an outstanding student, not only for his academic achievement and determination to succeed, but also as a tireless community builder. He was selected as a GHIS representative for the Human Family Project headed by the CBB Community of Santa Barbara.

Grigor will study International Economics at NYU Shanghai.



Mira - Washington DC, USA

"As an American Jew, I only learned about 'Jewish' Israel. Being at GHIS has shown me the wonderful, if sometimes complex, diversity of this country and this makes it so much more interesting."

Mira smiles every time she passes the flowers that were planted outside the classrooms. Determined to beautify campus, she established *The Carebears* with this vision. It is the activity for which she is most proud and she sees it as her legacy to GHIS. This small action led to a shift in community culture with each student taking responsibility for and pride in the shared environment.

Mira could have chosen to attend the high school of her choice, but after coming to Givat Haviva as part of her youth movement's Israel trip, and hearing about the newly established school there, it was GHIS that she chose. Fiercely academic, passionate about community and committed to diversity, Mira has eloquently represented GHIS in numerous meetings with prospective donors and students from across the world.

Mira has chosen to join a dual campus degree program at Tel Aviv University and Columbia University. We are thrilled that she will be staying with us in Israel for the next two years where she can continue in her role as a GHIS ambassador.



Mohammad - Issawiya, Israel

"GHIS gave me the chance of a lifetime that I could not have dreamed of. I learned so much academically and personally. But most importantly, I discovered that Jews are not our enemies and I now count many among my closest friends - something I never knew was possible."

Brought up by his grandmother in abject poverty, Mohammad was afraid to tell her he had applied to GHIS, as she would fear his becoming corrupted by living with Jews. While many of his friends had been arrested for stone-throwing, he reached out to create a different future for himself by teaching himself English.

Over the two years, his grandmother and others in his community realized that not only were their fears unfounded, but GHIS provided opportunities for him to thrive academically and in the wider world. Indeed, his cousins are now excited to apply to GHIS. Mohammad gives us, and his family and friends, hope for a different future in the region as he and other GHIS graduates take their places as leaders of their communities.

Mohammad remains a hugely popular student, as evidenced by his election to the Student Leadership Council. With his constant smile and engaging personality, he will be sorely missed when he continues his planned studies in Canada.



Didi – Paynesville, Liberia

"Everyone at home knows what GHIS has given me - Israel will always be a country that I love and very close to my heart."

Didi was raised by her older sister after her parents passed away. Despite very limited opportunities, from a young age her academic abilities were apparent. Hungry for education, she studied every subject she could. When recommended to apply to GHIS by a local GHIS friend, she jumped at the chance. Once accepted, she began a series of new experiences – getting on a plane, leaving Africa, an education that she could only dream of, studying with people from across the globe. For her, GHIS represents a dream she could never have imagined.

Coming from Africa where girls are not encouraged to voice their opinions, she expected to be a passive member of the community. To her surprise, she became one of GHIS's top students, and actively lead and participat fully in school life. Didi could never have imagined how eye-opening these two years have been - so removed from the insular life she knew before. She intends to share this new open-mindedness with her community when she returns to Africa, where she is determined to encourage her peers to dream big, as she did.

Didi has applied to universities in the US and on the African continent. She prefers to be in Africa where she will study public health. She feels sad that so many Liberians who study abroad decide not to return to improve the lives of those who have had no choice but to remain. Like so many GHIS students, she wants to be part of the change.



Odem - Kibbutz Maagan Michael, Israel

"GHIS has opened my eyes, mind and soul, as well as doors and possibilities. I now feel like an essential cog in the machine that is called 'the world'. I feel I have power to fight for my beliefs and to promote my ideals. From a girl that thought she knew everything, I now realize she has a lot to learn, and is excited to find out what she is missing."

Before coming to GHIS, Odem wasn't curious about the world beyond the homogenous environment where she grew up. GHIS has introduced her to her passions. She has become wholly committed to bringing diverse communities together in Israel through education which would no longer be separated by the Jewish/Arab, religious/secular divide. GHIS has taught her that there are no boundaries to achieve her goals.

At GHIS, Odem edited the newsletter and represented GHIS on various panels. For her national service in the IDF, she has been selected to the extremely competitive position as a spokesperson to international personnel and media. Her long-term goal is to be the Minister of Education because she believes that education rather than politics is the route to a better society.



Randa - Kfar Kara, Israel

> “GHIS has helped me shape my identity as an Israeli Arab - I really want to be part of the change.”

Randa wouldn’t trade GHIS for anything. Growing up in Kfar Kara and Germany, she needed to be adaptable – a quality that grew during her time at GHIS. She was particularly impacted by the pandemic because she was unable to return to campus from Germany and continued her studies virtually, longer than her peers. Randa explains that before coming to GHIS she was very unfocused, uncertain about who she was or what impact she wanted to have on the world. Now she laughs that she cannot recognize that young girl who, having been so open to all the academic opportunities that she found at GHIS, is now confidently moving forward on a clear path.

For Randa, the most significant outcome of her time at GHIS, is the deep and lifelong relationships that she has forged with friends from Israel, the closest of whom are Jewish. Together they understand that it is their generation's responsibility to create a different reality for the future of Arab and Jewish relations in Israel. They are committed to working together to find solutions in the region - as Randa says, it’s time for change!

Next academic year, Randa will be doing a gap year in the UK interning at a non-profit focused on international education.



Tohar - Golan Heights, Israel

"My GHIS journey has taken me outside my comfort zone. It has been challenging and exciting, giving me renewed confidence in my own beliefs. I never imagined that my best friends would be a secular Jew and a Muslim!"

Tohar came to GHIS because she was interested in finding a more diverse educational environment after attending an Orthodox female-only seminary. Indeed, as she had hoped, Tohar's experience at GHIS proved academically and personally fulfilling. What she had not considered was her role in a greater understanding of and tolerance towards Orthodoxy from secular Israeli Jews, while at the same time enlightening her international friends about her faith.

By explaining her life choices and leading by example, Tohar has consistently dispelled deeply held myths about traditional Jews. Never was this more apparent than during the pandemic when all students were stuck on campus for weeks on end. In respect for her practices, Tohar's peers ensured that some areas were music and device-free on Shabbat.

Tohar is passionate about sustainability and protecting the planet for future generations - something that she hopes to study in the future. But first, she will study Judaism in a pre-military volunteer program.



Sydney - North Carolina, USA

"As a Christian from the US, coming to Israel was an unusual choice. Studying here has demonstrated the warmth and hospitality of this country. I know that this region will remain central to my adult life."

Sydney has always been someone who thought outside the box, as demonstrated by her attending the State Department's YES program in Morocco. It was there that she learned about GHIS and knew it needed to be the next stage in her journey.

Since arriving, she has been an active community builder. Sydney regularly represented the school on panels with donors and potential students. Her inspired leadership in charge of GHIS's Facebook presence, has resulted in superb posts which promoted all elements of the school. Sydney was also an active member of the Student Leadership Council.

Her experience as a Christian from the US, sharing a dorm with Tohar (an Orthodox Jew), proved the catalyst for her choice of Extended Essay. Entitled, "The Impact of the 6-Day War on Religious Zionism," this is an accomplished piece of original research which caught the eye of top colleges around the world. After being accepted to six international universities, Sydney, a fluent French speaker, will attend Sciences Po in Paris to study Political Science, International Relations and the Middle East.



Freya - Vinh Tru, Vietnam

"I have been away from home for almost two years. But the love I have received from the GHIS community and my wonderful host family has meant that I have not been lonely even for one minute. I feel like the luckiest person in the world."

Freya always knew that Israel is a country that values academics and it was therefore a natural choice to pursue GHIS when she learned about it. As our first Vietnamese student and the only one in her cohort, Freya constantly uses social media platforms to promote GHIS as the natural choice for her compatriots. Little wonder that we have new leads daily from Vietnam!

Freya is the type of person you want on your team. She is always ready to say 'yes, I will' and it was this positive attitude that encouraged her to grab any opportunities that came her way. She is deeply loved both within campus and by her host families, who plan to be involved in her life beyond her time at GHIS. So loved is she, that the host families would argue about which one of them would host her during holidays!

Freya is very ambitious. She plans to continue her international education and is currently raising funds for this purpose. She has always dreamed of being an innovative educator and feels that the skills she has learned at GHIS will help her achieve this. She hopes to attend the University of Western Trinity in Canada.



Niva - Tel Aviv, Israel

> "For many of my peers here, the IB was the main attraction for GHIS. For me, it was leaving my comfortable bubble to live in a cross-cultural, interfaith and international community."

As Niva says, “life was awesome in Tel Aviv,” with her Jewish left-wing friends. Choosing to leave this was very brave, but she knew that she had to do it to really understand the country as a whole and its position in the world. She joined GHIS three days after visiting, enthusiastically embracing a new diverse community.

Niva has become best friends with her roommates, Randa, a Muslim Arab and Tohar, an Orthodox Jew. In Tel Aviv, getting to know either of them would have been unlikely. Through hearing their experiences, she has understood the racism they experience in a much more personal way. Now, as she says it, while most of us watch racism and hatred regretfully, they live this harsh reality. GHIS has taught her that she needs to be the change she wants to see. As one of the most charismatic of our students, we are sure that Niva will encourage others every step of the way and not be deterred.

Niva was selected as one of eight participants from hundreds of applicants to spend a gap year working with at-risk youth, before beginning her national service.

Message from Nurit Gery

Executive Director GHIS



When we launched GHIS, we understood from the start that our relationship with students would need to be deeper and longer than normal for most schools. Our mission of developing world changers with strong connections to one another extends our focus into the years beyond GHIS. With the generous support of our GHIS family and friends, we are rolling out our alumni program.

As we come to the end of our third year, despite the curveball of the pandemic, we can begin to see longer lasting results. Our graduates have taken the lessons learned at GHIS and are spreading them into all spheres of life.

The potential of GHIS for me lies in its impact which is resonating as we reach out to the world to attract both new students and stakeholders; individuals who appreciate that they can be part of a project that is creating a new cohort of leaders for change.





Together, people of all faiths, from the United States and around the world, are building a like-minded community much larger than the GHIS population. This is the GHIS impact, a sort of ripple effect across the globe. I am grateful for the incredible commitment and contribution of all supporters, the most recent of which are from diverse communities in the US, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Morocco with many more in development.

Through the work of GHIS, we are bringing together communities who understand the value of educating students through a lens of shared experience. At GHIS, we are looking for a mix of passionate and ambitious students from developing as well as developed countries, with varying economic backgrounds. All will gain a global perspective, top class education and practical skills such as training in public speaking, and the opportunity to meet influencers from around the world which they will take with them on their future journey.






Donations are essential to build and run GHIS.

Operational Costs – cover student scholarships and special programs.
Capital Projects – there are many infrastructure and naming opportunities for donors at GHIS, from dorms, labs and classrooms, to an educational center for the entire GHIS community.
All donations are tax-deductible.

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For information about GHIS, please call +972 54 979 7167

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