



Orthodox Kibbutz-Hotel Lavi

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Kibbutz-Hotel Lavi is the only Orthodox hotel in Israel with a tradition of pilgrimage hospitality.

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brings Christians and Jews together for study

What exactly does Rabbi Akiva mean by that statement?", asks one student. "I think he means that loving your neighbor is equal to the entire Torah," answers the second.

Such conversations take place in *Yeshivot* (Rabbinical colleges) all over the world on a daily basis, but the two students participating in the above scholarly exchange are Christian clergymen from the United States in the *Bet Midrash* (Study Hall) of Kibbutz Lavi. There is no doubt that this is an unusual sight. What are they doing at Lavi, an Orthodox Kibbutz?

For over thirty years, Kibbutz-Hotel Lavi served as a favourite Galilee base for Christians the world over. At Lavi they participated in lectures about life on a religious kibbutz and toured the kibbutz and the synagogue. Over the years, many of these visitors expressed a desire to study and learn more about Judaism and traditional Jewish life. As a result, Kibbutz Lavi established the Lavi Education Centre in 1993 to expand the programmes and seminars for Christians and Jews interested in a more "in-depth" perspective. The centre serves the guests of the hotel by organising lectures and enrichment programs for tour programmes, and organises groups on its own as well.

"There is no religious contradiction in engaging in our type of work with Christians", says Yitzchak Snitkoff, the former American Jewish educator who organises the centre. Snitkoff adds, "After all, Jews and Christians are primarily interested in creating a better, more merciful world. By helping Christians better understand Judaism and the ancient Jewish roots of their own beliefs, we are striving towards this end."

Groups from all over the world regularly take advantage of this opportunity, including soldiers in the United Nations Observer Force and young adults studying for the ministry from Great Britain and the United States.

The Christian connection to the Galilee is one of the prime reasons that Christians find Lavi to be so special. "In the ancient days", says Yitzchak Flanzer, General Manager of Kibbutz-Hotel Lavi, "The rabbis of Tiberias and Zippori would regularly stop at the "Pundak Lavi" to rest, eat and study." He proudly adds, "We are the only hotel mentioned in the Talmud, and this is certainly a fact which is not lost upon those who are in Israel to connect with that spiritual past."

Participants are usually very surprised by what they find at Lavi. A visitor from Holland said, "I never knew that a traditional Jewish community would be so open to folks from a different religious background. The hotel is absolutely fabulous, and the Biblical tour of the kibbutz is simply inspiring. Where else could we study and immerse ourselves totally in an authentic Jewish context? Nobody is performing for us. This is the real thing."

The programmes offered are multifaceted and tailored to the needs and requirements of every group. They come for a week, a day, or just for lunch, but the main goal, says Snitkoff, is "To ensure that every tour programme turning to us leaves Lavi enriched and better equipped to understand the spiritual beauty of this land." The groups study subjects such as Kibbutz Lavi as a Biblical Community, Spiritual Space and Galilean Synagogues, The Rabbinic World, The Jewish Roots of Early Christianity in the Galilee, and Making Peace in the Jewish Tradition.

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