

Friends & Neighbors

Teens Young Adults Seniors Newcomers Volunteers Staffers

Feminist Scholar

This teen finds confidence and independence as she studies classical Jewish texts.

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Special To The Jewish Times



Seventeen-year-old Leebie Grinberg spent last summer in Manhattan, studying Jewish law with 21 other young women through the Drisha Summer High School Program.

"When I interviewed her last spring, it was clear she had a thirst for Jewish learning," said Drisha Director Beth Samuels.

"[Drisha] offers a different approach to Jewish studies," said Grinberg. "A feminist approach," she added. "It is taught by women who know as much as, or more, than men. In many Orthodox communities, women are discouraged from studying what men study; sometimes they're treated like second-class citizens."

That's why she doesn't attend a yeshiva. Instead she's a senior at the New Jewish Community High School in Dunwoody.

"[At Drisha] I found a place where I didn't have to compromise my religion; there were no barriers."

For five weeks she immersed herself in classical Jewish texts. Students studied commentary on the *Mishnah* and participated in *chavruta*, in which two people study together. Mornings were devoted to studying *Gemara*, "which takes the law to its furthest point," followed by an hour with the prominent Rabbi Yitzhak Frank, author of "The Practical Talmud Dictionary" and "Grammar for Gemara." The girls studied Aramaic grammar, philosophy and *halachah* (Jewish law). "The teachers were incredibly learned men and women — all Orthodox," Grinberg said.

She called the program "liberating," teaching her confidence and independence. "The skills I learned, I took with me," she said. "If I have a problem [interpreting law] I can go to Gemara. At Drisha, they want to make you independent."

"I'm not afraid to go away to school anymore; [the experience] changed me a lot. When I had to express my thoughts, I had to open myself up," she said.

Since returning, Grinberg keeps in touch with her new friends. "We lived together like sisters," she said.

Grinberg loves learning for its own sake. But she also loves glamour and fashion. The Jacksonville, Fla., native plans to major in fashion next fall at a design school. Her creativity shows in her love of jewelry, bead making, painting and dance. She took ballet lessons from age 2 to 14, until she moved to Atlanta.

After school, she works part time at a crafts store and volunteers afternoons and Sunday mornings at the Sophie Hirsch Srochi Jewish Discovery Museum at the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.

Leebie Grinberg sees her Drisha summer study experience as a continuation, not an end, of her Jewish learning.

She's also active in Young Judaea and hopes to be a Young Judaea camp counselor this summer in Hendersonville, N.C.

Her mother, Nili Grinberg, is a Hebrew teacher at the Greenfield Hebrew Academy, and Leebie's inspiration: "My mom's a teacher and I go to her with questions." Grinberg's father died when she was 7. She said he was "very artsy and probably influenced me," referring to her own artistic bent.

Leebie Grinberg thinks she was fortunate to be selected for the Drisha program. It was her chance to share knowledge and experiences with other young women. "It's an opportunity I wouldn't get in college," she said, because fashion schools typically don't incorporate Jewish studies.

Grinberg sees her Drisha experience as a continuation, not an end, of her Jewish learning. She said, "It was luck that I was in this program with these people; we helped find each other. At Drisha we studied texts at a very high level. Jewish study appeals to me, but there's still so much I don't know." □

The Drisha Summer High School Program accepts applications from eighth- to twelfth-graders interested in studying in a women's Beit Midrash at Drisha Institute in Manhattan. For information, contact Beth Samuels, (203) 777-1894.

Correction

The correct title of Cantor Laura Levine's CD mentioned in the Nov. 23 *Friends & Neighbors* article is "Shabbat Shalom, Y'all." To order, contact chazlaur@earthlink.net. Cantor Levine conducts a monthly Shabbat service at the Selig Center.

Jeanie Franco Marx is an Atlanta writer.