



Ha'masa sheli



Name: **Wlada S**

Gender: **female**

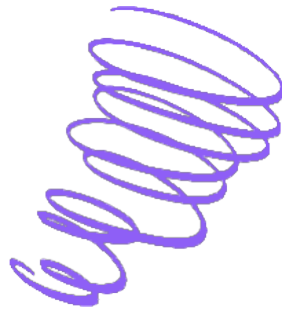
Country of residence: **Switzerland**

My life has been a series of packed suitcases: from Kharkiv to Germany, from city to city, each move reshaping who I am and where I belong.



Hi everyone, my name is Wlada, I'm 25 years old, and I just moved to Basel, Switzerland a month ago. But let me rewind a bit and tell you how I even get here.

I am born into a simple family in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on a sunny spring day. My mother is Jewish, my father is Ukrainian. My family doesn't really live Jewishly, as Judaism isn't actively practiced here.



One cold November day, my mother decides she wants to change our lives 180 degrees. She packs our things, gets into a car with me, and we embark on a journey that changes our lives forever.

After three days, we arrive in a village in Germany, in North Rhine-Westphalia. Everything is different, people speak a different language, and the mentality is a complete culture shock for us.

We settle into a refugee shelter, meet new people, and try to understand this new country. When I am six, we move to Düsseldorf, and I am enrolled in a school that shapes the path I am on today. I attend a Jewish school, "Yitzhak Rabin Schule," in the heart of Düsseldorf.

I learn that I am Jewish, I learn Hebrew, traditions, holidays, and I meet people who show me what my religion means. These are the most colorful years of my childhood. At ten, I go to a German high school and lose contact with my friends and religion. I learn that there are other religions, that Judaism is only a part of the world. I live like this until I am seventeen, unsure of my own identity.



One day, after I come home from school, completely exhausted and worn out, my mother proudly announces:

Mom: "I sign you up for a summer camp."

Me: "No... Mom, I'm 17, what kind of summer camp...?"

But she doesn't open up to discussion.

So, on a sunny Saturday in 2017, I get on a train that takes me to Frankfurt Airport. A group of other kids is already waiting. I am annoyed, nervous, and just plain angry that I have to go through this.

We board a plane heading to Bologna and arrive in sunny Italy, and after a one-hour bus ride, we

finally reach our destination in Gatteo a Mare. I officially arrive at my first Machane.

Honestly? It is a shock. I am confused and don't understand why I don't protest... I don't even want to be here!

But the days pass, I make friends, remember customs, prayers, and traditions from elementary school, and I realize I know them. I carry them in my heart. They are a part of me.

This summer changes me.



I reconnect with my old friends from elementary school and discover the Jewish youth center in Düsseldorf, where I quickly start working as a Madricha. I find my people. I find my belonging. In my whole life, I have never felt so safe and so comfortable as I do with these people—and all thanks to my mother, who stubbornly insists I go to Machane.

I discover Jewrovision (a huge event in Germany, where youth centers from different cities compete in singing and performance), an event that unites Jewish youth in Germany. And that's also where I meet my now-husband (he is the host of the show, and I fall for him instantly!).

We meet at a birthday party of one of my elementary school friends, and our journey together begins in 2018.

I finish school and move to Berlin for my fashion design studies. Through my boyfriend, I find out there is also a Jewish youth center in Berlin, but the pandemic hits hard and the center stays closed.

Just before the end of the pandemic, I stumble back into the Jewish community in Berlin and realize that I need this!

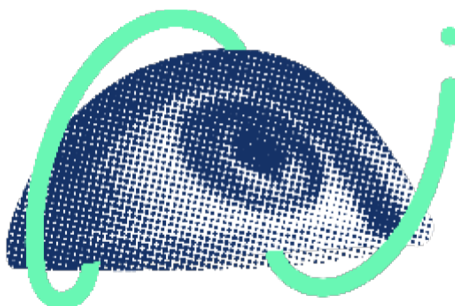
Together with other Madrichim, I help rebuild a safe space at the youth center. I spend every day here, meet friends who become like family, and help shape Jewish life for children.

In the summer of 2022, I go to my first Machane as a Madricha, work for the first time as a fashion designer for the performance of our kids at Jewrovision, and my Jewish life starts to flourish.

But this is only volunteer work, which I handle with the ease of a full-time job.

At the same time, I continue studying, work in photo studios, create my own collections for the About You Fashion Week in Berlin, coordinate the Fashion Week backstage, and work as a hostess at Jewish events.

In my luggage: my Jewish identity and my passion for volunteering.



In 2023, I get a new job in Hamburg as a stylist at About You, pack my things, and embark on a new adventure in northern Germany.

Here too, I fall into the Jewish community in Hamburg. Here too, I work passionately as a volunteer with children and youth, here too, I go to summer camps. My passion hasn't changed; only my location has.

After my studies, I have an existential crisis. I don't want to work in the fashion industry anymore, and I don't know what I want...

That's when I discover my interest in pedagogy and start working at the Jewish daycare in the Joseph Carlebach Bildungshaus.

I learn to work with a different age group, doubt myself every day, and wonder if this is the right path for me. But when I see the children's reactions, I realize this is my path. This is me. This is what I love.

I want to learn more, deepen my knowledge, and in 2024, I start my new studies at the University for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, attending one-week seminars every two months in person.

In September 2025, I marry Jewishly, surrounded by my wonderful husband, my dearest friends who have become my family, accompanying me on my journey, and a part of my Jewish identity.

After this major step, I apply in Basel, Switzerland, for a new position as youth director, where I am more than ready to take responsibility for Jewish youth, bring my ideas and visions to life, and become a co-creator of Jewish youth in Switzerland.

And that's how I got here. My path is long, my path isn't always easy, but that motivates me and confirms my drive to keep going and never give up, no matter how challenging it may be.