

## **Background on Ilan Ramon:**

On January 16, 2003, Israel's first astronaut - Air Force Col. Ilan Ramon - was launched into space in the NASA Space Shuttle Columbia. Shuttle STS-107 was a 16-day multi-discipline microgravity and earth science research mission conducted continuously during the 16 days in orbit.

Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated in the skies over Texas on Saturday, February 1, killing all seven crew members, including Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon, just 16 minutes before its scheduled landing at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Col. Ilan Ramon was a decorated pilot and commander in the Israeli air force who had been part of a mission that destroyed Iraq's suspected nuclear weapons program in June of 1981. Since 1988, he had been training at the Space Center in Houston, representing the Israel Space Agency. His role this time, however, was purely scientific. His main responsibility in space was to use a multispectral camera to track dust particles from the sandstorms that blow from the Sahara over the Mediterranean and Middle East. The study - the Mediterranean Israeli Dust Experiment, designed at Tel Aviv University - was intended to provide information on how dust affects rainfall.

Prior to the launching into space, Ilan Ramon contacted Yad Vashem requesting a Holocaust related item to take with him on his launch into space on the shuttle Columbia. Yad Vashem chose "Moon Landscape" created by Petr Ginz, a 14-year-old Jewish boy, during his incarceration in the Theresienstadt ghetto. Ramon also took with him a microfiche copy of the Torah given to him by the Israeli president and a miniature Torah scroll (from the Holocaust) that was given him by Prof. Yehoyachin Yossef, a Bergen Belsen survivor. Ramon asked the 1939 Club, a Holocaust survivor organization in Los Angeles, for a symbol of the Holocaust to take into outer space with him. A barbed wire mezuzah by the San Francisco artist Aimee Golant was selected.

You could have a student or camper read the below quote from Ilan Ramon:

"Personally I think it's very peculiar to be the first Israeli up in space. Especially because of my background, which is kind of a symbol of a lot of other Israelis' background. My mother is a Holocaust survivor. She was in Auschwitz. My father fought for the independence of Israel, not so long ago. I was born in Israel and I'm kind of the proof for them, and for the whole Israeli people, that whatever we fought for and we've been going through in the last century (or maybe in the last two thousand years), is becoming true."

## **Background on Space IL**

Space IL is a non-profit organization established by a multidisciplinary team of Israeli space enthusiasts to compete with privately-funded space teams in the Google Lunar X Prize. The Google Lunar X Prize is a global race of lunar exploration offering the largest international incentive prize of all time: a total of \$30 million.

The challenge is to become the first team to successfully launch, fly and land a robotic spacecraft on the Moon. The team must operate the spacecraft across the lunar surface and transmit video, images, and data back to Earth. The spacecraft that the Space IL program chose is a nanosatellite carrying the Israeli flag.

This is their mission: "To reinvigorate the Israeli start-up nation by undertaking a challenging task that will ignite the imagination of the country's young generation. Driven by a national mission to advance Israel's scientific and technological fields, Space IL is determined to push ingenuity further than ever before. We are proceeding apace in realizing the objective of becoming the third country in the world to place a flag on the Moon."

We strive to stimulate the young to take an interest in space exploration, propelling us to new frontiers where science and technology are sought-after occupation fields that captivate the imagination of Israelis.