

OLMERT COMMENDS REFORM STUDENTS ON VISIT

By Haim Shapiro

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert visited HUC-JIR's Jerusalem School and met with Rabbi Ellenson, Burton Lehman, Chairman of HUC-JIR's Board of Governors, and rabbinical, cantorial, and education students in the Year-in-Israel Program.

Jerusalem (August 15)

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, who in June announced he was severing all ties with the US Reform Movement after it canceled its youth trips to Israel this summer, yesterday visited Hebrew Union College and met with HUC-JIR president Rabbi David Ellenson and a group of Reform rabbinical students from the US.



▲ *Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert and Dr. Ellenson*

The mayor told the students and Burton Lehman, the chairman of the HUC-JIR board of governors who is accompanying Ellenson, how important it is that they came at this time, despite the security situation. Their decision is good for the sense of Jewish unity, Olmert said.

Ellenson, a scholar specializing in modern Jewish history, said later that he is concerned the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora is weakening. At HUC-JIR, he said, the year in Israel is seen as a crucial part of the training for Jewish leadership.

“The education in Israel is more than language. I really believe they must have

Ellenson noted that while more Jews are apathetic to Israel, those who do identify with the Jewish state see this as the prime facet of their Jewishness.

Thus, he said, while far more Jews are drawn to his lectures on modern Jewish thinking than to his lectures on Israel, those who come to the latter are far more involved.

Speaking about American Jewry as a whole, Ellenson said one no longer sees ethnic rivalry between Jews originating from Germany and those whose families came from Eastern Europe, which in the past was often distinguished by loyalty to either the Reform or Conservative movements. American Jews today, he said, are far more likely to affiliate with a synagogue on the basis of other factors, such as the rabbi.

There is, he said, a trend toward disaffiliation and indifference to Jewish tradition, while on the other hand a trend toward greater Jewish literacy and increased observance all along the religious spectrum. “HUC-JIR and the Reform Movement have to understand and confront this post-denominational age and identify with the more committed elements in the Jewish population, and at the same time claim the most disaffected elements,” Ellenson said.

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exposure to the reality of restored Jewish sovereignty in their homeland,” Ellenson said.

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Jerusalem — Few American Jews are visiting Israel this summer. While federations and synagogues have made extraordinary efforts to organize solidarity missions, many American Jews see images of terrorism and violence and conclude that now is not the best time to spend a summer vacation in Israel.

As a first year rabbinical student at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I am required to spend this year studying at the school's Jerusalem campus. Before leaving Milwaukee for Israel, I was anxious about my own safety as well as the peace of mind of my family and friends.

My grandfather persistently said that the program in Jerusalem would be canceled. Friends suggested deferring for a year and finding a job in the United States.

I considered various options, but knew all the time in my heart that I would board the plane on June 19 for Israel. It's not that I am not scared. It would be foolhardy to pretend that all is well and good in the Middle East. Yet, I am compelled to face the challenge of learning and growing as part of a Jewish society living through uncertain and difficult times.

Writing to students in the first year rabbinical class, the dean of the Jerusalem campus of HUC-JIR said, "Solidarity is itself a part of the process by which we grow, and through which we may become leaders of the Jewish community."

Reading his letter and talking with my classmates and those students who preceded us strengthened my commitment to leaving behind safe and familiar environs. I became firmer in my conviction that no Jewish leader



NO WOULD-BE JEWISH LEADER SHOULD AVOID SHARING ISRAEL'S JOYS AND SORROWS

By **Evan Moffic**

could or should avoid sharing in the joys and sorrows faced by the people of Israel.

Lest I sound courageous and self-righteous, I must admit that day-to-day life is not overly dangerous or scary. In my neighborhood, men and women walk their dogs, children run through the streets, and parks and buses are filled with people.

My classmates and I talk about learning Hebrew and finding the best restaurants and coffeehouses and do not dwell on security issues. None of us, as far as I can tell, wants to become isolated from the richness and unparalleled excitement of Jewish life in Jerusalem.

Perhaps even more challenging than living in Israel is confronting the moral questions faced by Israelis and all Jews who support the state of Israel, but who are increasingly frustrated by narrow-minded hatred and a lack of commitment, among both Israelis and Palestinians, to building a just and lasting peace.

While walking back to my apartment from class, I have been confronted by groups of Jews supporting the expulsion of Palestinians from East Jerusalem and, without waiting for a response, demanding to know if I was with or against them. A couple of taxi drivers have asked me why Americans love Palestinian

◀ *Deborah Graetz, Dr. Ellenson, Paul Jacobson, and Evan Moffic at Year-in-Israel Program reception at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem*

Authority President Yasser Arafat so much and are meeting with him rather than figuring out a good way to kill him.

It is nearly impossible to imagine what Israeli families who lost a son or daughter in the army or in a terrorist attack feel. Equally difficult is putting oneself in the shoes of young Palestinian men and women prevented from making a decent living and worshipping at their holy sights because of border closings, and constantly encountering suspicious looks because of the language in which they are conversing.

Jewish thinker and social activist Leibel Fein recently wrote an opinion article entitled "A Lack of Hope and Glory." An emerging crisis of vigilantism is taking hold among Palestinians and Israelis, argues Fein, increasing the likelihood that radicals on both sides will use dramatic acts of terrorism to accelerate the downward spiral toward war.

Yet my conversations with neighbors, teachers, and some young Israelis, along with my faith in our tradition's promise of peace with justice, have led me to think that many Israelis would welcome Palestinian voices of sanity and moderation with a willingness to undertake far-reaching concessions in both territory and ideology.

What is required now are unequivocal commitments from the United States, Israel and the Palestinian Authority to condemn, stop and prevent violence from destroying our common dreams.

Evan Moffic, a graduate of Stanford University, is a first-year rabbinical student at the HUC-JIR/Jerusalem.

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