

**M**y journey from Jerusalem to Shanghai to present the keynote address at the First World Curriculum Studies Conference, served as a uniquely memorable catalyst for reflection, quite appropriately during the month of *Elul*.

East China Normal University's faculty, administration, and students literally and figuratively rolled out the red carpet. Meeting on this campus of more than 20,000 pupils, with a huge status of Mao in its center, was exhilarating!

Professor Gabriel Horenczyk, Director of Melton Center of Jewish Education in the Diaspora at Hebrew University, has pointed appropriately to a Chinese Proverb: "nature makes us alike; education makes us different." At the conference, academics from

# From Jerusalem to Shanghai

My initial stop was Beijing and the World Union Progressive *Kehilat Beijing*, where I served as that congregation's rabbi for the High Holy Days and where my wife, Tania, and I encountered a circle of newly-found friends. At such a time of spiritual introspection one looks around for familiar sources of strength and inspiration. Notwithstanding the warmth of the congregation, I clearly felt the *other*, surrounded by dissonant impressions as I tried to make sense of the China that we met on our own and through the eyes of our hosts. As an American passing the Embassy of the United States, I had immediate recollections of the belligerent past and of the Cultural Revolution. And yet, the increasingly strong ties that have grown between China and Israel, the safe haven provided by Shanghai to refugees fleeing Nazism, and the remarkable history of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng also filtered into my consciousness.

At Shanghai's East China Normal University, the site of the conference, I discovered that I was the only delegate from Israel amongst the more than 200 scholar and student delegates from fifteen Asian, Pacific Rim, European, and North American countries. Pleased as I was that HUC-JIR/ Jerusalem in Israel was acknowledged prominently in this academic gathering, clearly the language of education far transcends our institutional diversity and biases. Beyond the words is the spirit that seeks to unite us in the repair of our communities and the world.

by Dr. Shaul R. Feinberg  
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My opening session address was grounded in research conducted in a number of Jerusalem high schools on a curriculum, "You Shall Choose Life: The Value of Human Life in Israeli Society."

The conference presentations stressed the need to know and honor the local traditions and mores of educational milieus beyond our own. While not novel in itself, this perspective was particularly pertinent amidst this vast sea of differences. For example, the Chinese word for 'curriculum' can be rendered as 'enable something to function, many persons gathered in one room and sharing,' pointing also to 'temple, symbolizing great cause,' enhancing our own spirit. While there were proposals for intellectual and technical rethinking of our work, the focus on empathetic relationships was key. My presentation citing Buber in considering integrity as key to enhancing curricular work resonated with quite a few of those present.

across the globe grew to respect differences amongst ourselves. At one session I sat between a delegate from Teheran and one from Malayasia, sharing ideas. The multiplicity of languages was anything but a *babel*, not only because of the technical means of accessing information but of the willingness to listen patiently, continually trying to put into more familiar terms what we were learning from one another and learning about ourselves through acknowledged differences.

Organizationally, I was prompted to initiate steps to forming an Israeli chapter of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, under the guiding spirit of Professor William Pinar, co-chairman of the conference. I look to my Israeli and stateside colleagues at HUC-JIR and elsewhere for guidance and support in this effort.

From feeling pangs of alienation in one setting to a sense of much wider belonging, I joined the concluding friendship circle, with a unique twist. What I hadn't anticipated was that the closing event was to be marked by a sharing of songs of our respective peoples in native languages! I took the plunge, teaching "*shalom chavéirim... lehitraot, shalom*" – quite appropriately, as we kept speaking of the next gathering and continuing contacts. And then, to everyone's delight, a South Korean professor spontaneously translated the Hebrew verse into English and led dancing around the tables to his tune of *hava nagila*! The distance between Jerusalem, Beijing, and Shanghai had narrowed considerably.

