

# THE SUN NEVER SETS ON HUC-JIR'S STUDENTS

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SERVING  
WORLD  
JEWRY

“For decades, students with an interest in connecting with the worldwide Jewish community have sought out placement opportunities with the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ),” says Rabbi Joel Oseran, Associate Director at the WUPJ. “Exposure to the World Union communities and broadening the contact with world Jewry allow them to see the workings of a congregation in which the Diaspora is very different.”

Over the years, during the High Holy Days and Passover, rabbinical students have chosen to serve as student rabbis for congregations around the world. For each of these students, working with congregations abroad provided an additional level of leadership training beyond the fulfillment of the College-Institute’s field work requirements. Jessica Oleon (LA ‘07) Stephen

Wise (NY ‘05), and Carey Brown (NY ‘05) have traveled to congregations in

the Netherlands, Japan, and India, respectively.

The spiritual and religious experience of traveling to Belarus, on a joint program between HUC-JIR and WUPJ during Passover of 2003, was in part what prompted Jessica Oleon to serve as the rabbi for Congregation B’nai Okinawa in Japan. In addition to leading a multi-denominational community during High Holy Day services, Oleon spent much of her time getting to know the Jewish community of servicemen, women, and their families living on the U.S. military base. She recalls one of the many highlights of her trip was the opportunity to lead *Tashlich* services in the East China Sea, an exotic locale for the symbolic casting away of sins.

“The strong connection I made with the Jewish community there reminded me how important it is for us as rabbinical students to recognize other Jewish communities,” explains Oleon. “I will take this experience with me throughout my career.” Remaining true to her support for world Jewry and commitment to her newfound community, she returned to Congregation B’nai Okinawa in March to officiate at a *Bar Mitzvah*.

Working with Hillel in the Jewish communities in and around Moscow during Passover while a first-year rabbinical student in the Year-in-Israel program, as well as a classmate’s remark that serving with one of the WUPJ pulpits was a most transforma-



**Rabbi Stephen Wise and the young congregants of Congregation Shir Hatzafon in Denmark prepare for Havdallah services.**

tive experience for a student rabbi, are what compelled Stephen Wise to inquire about leading a pulpit abroad. Stephen traveled to Copenhagen for the High Holy Days to lead Denmark’s Congregation Shir Hatzafon, a community whose Jewish identity is strongly shaped by the Holocaust. A congregant took him to a village where the Jews of Denmark were rescued from the Nazis in 1943 by fishermen who transported them by boat to Sweden in secrecy. “The whole trip was an intense experience and it inspired me to be ready to enter the New Year with a greater appreciation for the multitude of ties that connect Jews to one another around the world,” adds Wise.

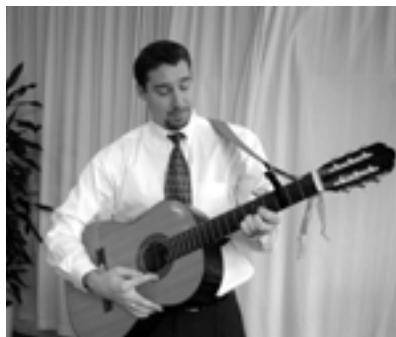
Carey Brown sought out a High Holy Day position through the WUPJ because of conversations with her classmate, Stephen Wise, memories of



**Congregants of B’nai Okinawa join rabbinical student Jessica Oleon for Tashlich services in the East China Sea.**

# DIASPORA PULPITS REINFORCE LINKS TO WORLD JEWRY

her work as a first-year rabbinical student celebrating Passover with renascent Jewish communities in the FSU, and a trip to Poland during her fourth year to participate in an inter-faith dialogue conference on Jewish-Christian relations in a post-Vatican II



**Rabbi Stephen Wise leading services at congregation Shir Hatzafon in Copenhagen.**

world. In Bombay, Carey served as rabbi to the Jewish Religious Union (JRU), also known as Rodeph Shalom. In addition to leading High Holy Day services, Carey taught adult education sessions and met with various Jewish communal organizations in India.

She recalls fondly her experience of learning and interacting with the two Jewish communities in Bombay: the Bene Israel and the Baghdadi Jews. Carey recalls how the entire Bene Israel community gathered together at a wharf to participate in *Tashlich* services, where she witnessed the Bombay Jewish community praying together, including many of the women dressed in brightly colored saris.

“The WUPJ provides students with an understanding of world Jewry in different parts of the world not known in their stateside communities,” explains Oseran. “When they return from these trips it helps communicate the reality

of a Jewish world that is different from what they know in North America.”

Serving these Jewish communities provides a first-hand look at how Reform Judaism is faring outside of the U.S. and Israel. The seventy-five-member Bombay Reform congregation that Carey Brown served for the High Holy Days emphasized to her their need to be more connected with the Progressive Movement. “These liberal Jews are a minority within a minority and are so hungry for support from the rest of the progressive Jewish world,” explains Brown. In Denmark, Stephen Wise witnessed the “ongoing struggle for liberal Judaism to grow in communities where there is a strong Orthodox presence, sometimes the only Jewish presence.”

Student pulpits are not the only contacts that HUC-JIR students have with communities’ abroad. Stacey Nolish (LA ‘07) entered rabbinical school after having served the Polish Jewish community during 2000-2003 through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s Jewish Service Corps. Last Fall, she presented her experience at a panel at the United Jewish Communities’ General Assembly, entitled, “Community Engagement: The Power of Volunteers.”

Furthermore, students are not alone in establishing relationships with Reform communities abroad. Dr. Lewis Barth, Dean of HUC-JIR/Los Angeles, has traveled to Prague for High Holy Day pulpits and Rabbi Shirley Idelson, Acting Dean of HUC-JIR/New York has spent the past two High Holy Days with the liberal congregation in Florence, Italy.

The memorable and meaningful connections that continue to be made through these High Holy Day pulpits and other joint projects with the WUPJ have a lasting impact on both students and world Jewry. These programs empower students to raise awareness, bring support, and continue to build links between Reform Judaism in North America and Progressive Judaism around the world. ■



**Rabbi Carey Brown in a sari at JDC Bombay.**

