

HINENI — HERE I AM

Rear Admiral Rabbi Harold Robinson, C '74, Deputy Chief of Chaplains for Reserve Matters, Director of Religious Programs in the Marine Force Reserve, and the highest ranking Jewish chaplain in the Navy, addressed the students of the New York campus on October 5, 2006. He came to HUC-JIR only 48 hours after returning from spending the High Holy Days ministering to U.S. soldiers in Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa, and offered a moving perspective on pastoral care in some of the most unlikely places on earth.

I have just come from the Horn of Africa. I was on the Swahili coast in Kenya just south of Somalia where the United States Navy is training small boat crews for the Kenyan Navy, which has been trying to prevent human trafficking between this coast of Kenya and along the Somali coast up into the Arabian Peninsula.

We have provided the Kenyan Navy with very high-speed inflatable boats that can overtake the slave traders before the smugglers dispose of all evidence of their human cargo by throwing their weighted bodies overboard to drown. As a chaplain, I was there the first time they were deployed and, traveling at 45 knots, were able to intercept a smuggling boat and save human lives.

In Djibouti on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, I met David, a captain in the United States Army, an expert on infantry tactics, who grew up in a Reform congregation in southern Florida. In a couple of weeks, David will be the military adviser to the African Union Forces in Darfur. He will be responsible for helping to nudge them from complacency and inaction to real action, although they are too small an organization to do the whole job. David will probably be the only Jew with the African Union Forces in Darfur.

I met a young woman during the war in Afghanistan, just before the start of the war in Iraq, when I was there for the High Holy



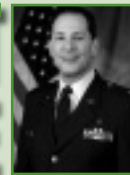
Rear Admiral Rabbi Harold Robinson, C '74, Dr. Aaron Panken, and third-year rabbinical student Jordana Gerson on the USS Intrepid.

Days. She had been flown over from one of the small ships to the aircraft carrier for services. She told me about how she had grown up in our movement, gone to our camps, and was a regional officer in our youth movement. Here she was, a graduate of Annapolis and a naval officer, 23 years old, doing everything she ever had dreamed of doing on a cruiser, in the Indian Ocean. She stood tall and proud and capable.

After *Yom Kippur* morning services, a plane was waiting on the deck to take me off to the next spot where I would conduct afternoon services. There she was standing, after everybody was gone, and you just knew that look in her eye. As rabbis, cantors, and educators, you'll have this experience in your congregations. Somebody who hangs back, and you can tell they need you for a moment. She just looked at me and said, with her lip quivering, "Rabbi, can I just have a hug?"

There was no one on that cruiser on *Yom Kippur* of whom she could have asked that human question. I gave her a hug and we each cried just a little bit as I went up the ladderway and out to the flight deck. I was her Jewish world at that moment, I was home and family. I've had many wonderful moments in congregational life, moments that I wouldn't trade for anything, but none as powerful. That one moment when I was able to say, "*Hineni*, here I am," for her, validated all the other 32 years of my rabbinical career. ■

FROM THE PULPIT TO THE PENTAGON



Chaplain, Colonel Samuel R. Weinstein, C '82, commutes between his civilian synagogue pulpit and the Pentagon, where he works several days a month in his capacity as mobilization assistant to the Deputy Chief of the Air Force Chaplain Service. He advises the Deputy Chief on issues relating to the training, readiness, and utilization of 560 Air Reserve Chaplain Service personnel, assists in developing the Air Force Chaplain Service strategic plan, total force policy, and strategic planning objective for the Air Force Reserve Chaplain program, and serves on the Reserve Chaplain Service Council.

"As a chaplain for 25 years I have had many interesting opportunities, especially in these later years as I help to shape policy for the Air Force Chaplain Service," Weinstein explains. "I have attended Pentagon meetings, worked cooperatively with Navy, Marine and Army Chaplains, met Presidents, administered the commissioning oath to new military rabbis, and participated in military readiness exercises."

A loyal alumnus who has served on the adjunct faculty of HUC-JIR as a Mayerson Fieldwork Supervisor, Weinstein has received numerous promotions, and major awards and decorations. Among the highlights of his assignments was his assistance in hosting the 50th anniversary of North Atlantic Treaty Organization Air Forces Chiefs of Chaplains Conference.

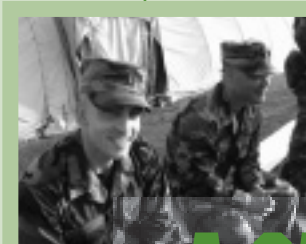
He recalls one of the most challenging moments of his chaplaincy, when he was called upon to be a member of a death notification detail. "Our base received word that an Air Force Sergeant was murdered during an altercation. It was the middle of the night and I, as a chaplain, was required to travel with the team to the home

of the victim's parents to notify them and help plan funeral arrangements. We arrived in a small Ohio town in the early hours of the morning and encountering a sheriff parked at a gas station, we informed him of our grim task. He directed us to the house. As the officer in charge rang the door bell, I remained by the staff car in my full dress uniform, filled with anxiety about my mission and apprehensive about how I was going to assist a non-Jewish family. The parents, obviously surprised by our presence, but knowing what the sight of the blue staff care in their driveway meant, began crying uncontrollably. We spent the better part of three hours in their home as the sun came up, and I left there exhausted, but satisfied that I had helped this family through horrible circumstances. As we were preparing to leave, the father of the victim turned to me and said, 'Chaplain, would you please officiate at the funeral of my daughter?' 'Perhaps you didn't notice my insignia,' I said. 'I'm a rabbi, not a Protestant chaplain.' 'I served in the military, rabbi. I recognize your insignia,' the father said, 'but I want you to conduct my daughter's funeral.'"

This experience epitomizes the nature of the military chaplaincy for Rabbi Weinstein, where chaplains meet the needs of people, regardless of their race, ethnicity or religion. "There are many times when I am a rabbi, but sometimes I am a chaplain who just happens to be a rabbi. In times of great need, a person's religion doesn't matter to me and my religion doesn't matter to them. All that matters is that as a chaplain I am present to others as a compassionate and caring individual. The word 'religion' comes from the Latin root 'to bind together' and as a chaplain my work binds me not just to Jews, but to all created in God's image." ■

Fourth-year rabbinical student Marshal Klaven is training for 'a calling within a calling.' While Klaven studies Talmud and Jewish history at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati, he also travels to boot camps and Air Force Bases throughout the United States to learn to stand beside and counsel members of the U.S. Armed Forces during wartime and times of peace.

Klaven, the grandson of two World War II veterans and the great-grandson of a World War I veteran, was inspired to become a military chaplain at age 13, after touring the Pentagon. There he viewed the stained-glass window dedicated to the memory of 'The Four Chaplains,' one of whom, Rabbi Alexander D. Goode, graduated from the University of Cincinnati and Hebrew Union College. These four chaplains of Jewish, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Dutch Reformed faiths served during World War II on the sinking U.S.A.T. *Dorchester*. As the ship went down, they shed their clothes to cover the injured and gave up their seats on life boats, remaining behind to comfort those unable to escape. Klaven



A CALLING WITHIN A CALLING

Amanda Septimus

was moved by the image of the four clergy locking arms as the ship sank, each reciting prayers from his own liturgical tradition.

"Within their dedication, unity, and understanding of a higher calling, especially in the face of great physical, emotional, and spiritual peril, there was a message that I felt deep within my heart," explained Klaven.

"I responded to this message's call."

Last year Klaven spent five weeks at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama for Commissioned Officer Training. He woke up at 4:15 am each day for physical training, and studied the history of the U.S. Air Force as

well as leadership and teamwork principles and techniques. He participated in a week-long mock deployment. Klaven took the oath as a United States Officer and future chaplain and participated in the Chaplain Candidate Course, studying religious diversity and tolerance with other candidates of all faiths.

Klaven's first tour of duty was at Lackland Air Force Base outside of San Antonio, Texas, where he sat beside Airmen in Hummers, bunkers, and entrenched positions during Urban Warfare combat training. He also had the opportunity to counsel, teach, and lead *Shabbat* services for a group of 20 Jewish recruits.

He recalls his participation one Friday afternoon in the Muslim *jumma* service, "where Lt. Rachman introduced me to the Muslim worshipers as the Jewish Chaplain Candidate. The foreign military personnel attending the U.S. Military's Defense Language Institute from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Yemen invited me to stay for the celebratory meal afterwards. From the most unlikely of places, within a military environment, brotherhood among different faiths and different people was reached."

Klaven feels that the Jewish community should support service members regardless of personal positions on the war in Iraq. "Write letters of support, send extra ritual items to the Jewish Welfare Board, organize your synagogue to have a 'Support Our Troops Day,' anything that will comfort our sisters and brothers as they engage in battle. They need to know that they are not alone. Please keep them in your prayers and support them with your actions."

As Klaven fulfills his calling to become a military chaplain, he also looks for strength explaining, "I hope that as the worst part of human nature unfolds before our very eyes, that God does not close His." ■

[Excerpted from the article published in *David's Voice* at www.huc.edu/read/chaplain]