

constructed alongside one another, creating a form of fixed prayer (*keva*). This structure becomes a genre allowing others to both replicate and deviate, hoping to evoke an emotional response and offer a meaningful interpretation.

In order for prayer to be complete, intention (*kavanah*) is also necessary. This is something that each of us must offer individually. The role of clergy is to provide the atmosphere for meaningful worship experiences that can range from quiet spaces with little distraction to a box of finger paints or sidewalk chalk.

As part of the alternative *minyán*, which meets on Tuesdays and Wednesdays on HUC-JIR's Los Angeles campus, students have often led morning worship services with a creative twist. From a service held in August, the sidewalk leading up to the campus's main doors remained decorated with vibrant, colorful depictions of the morning *shacharit* service long after *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot* had come and gone. Following President Obama's inauguration speech on January 20, 2009, students gathered once again to offer their visual hope for the new administration, sharing the juncture at which these

hopes meet themes in the daily morning service. Personally, I take these ideas to my student pulpit in Spokane, WA, welcoming creative interpretations of the prayer service from adult worshippers alongside pre-*b'nei mitzvah* participants during a Saturday morning creative service.

At HUC-JIR, we are learning to take what inspires us and integrate this inspiration into our Jewish leadership. We have our individual boxes of raw materials to create, fine tune, and strengthen. In training to become Jewish professionals, we are provided with many white canvasses to experiment on and a studio space that offers supervision, instruction, and imagination. Then, we take our portfolio out into the world, hoping to collaborate and create alongside others.

As God created, so too do we. It is a *mitzvah* (*hiddur mitzvah*) to make things beautiful. By bringing art into worship we encourage an openness to the divine through our creative processes. We are given guidance (*keva*) but we are also in need of our imaginative self (*kavanah*) to internalize Jewish prayer and create a meaningful relationship with God, and our own creative communities. ■

Arab and Israeli Coexistence... in the Most Unlikely of Places

Jennifer Gubitz, NY '12

During my first year of rabbinical studies at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem, I spent a considerable amount of time in Israel working with inmates – both Jewish and Arab – who had committed a variety of crimes, the details of which I was generally unaware. They would show up at 8:30 a.m. at a *Kibbutz* educational garden. Thrilled to see us, they would approach us with handshakes and hugs, and chain smoke cigarettes and drink instant coffee until we called them over to the benches in front of the outdoor Ark. My classmate **Evan Schultz** and I would lead them in a few songs – a camp singalong really – and the men would clap and smile and continue smoking, thrilled to be outdoors, relatively free, and amused by two Americans with poor Hebrew. The Jews and Arabs sat side by side on the wooden benches, Isaac and Ishmael literally and figuratively, grinning and relaxed.

Occasionally, one would share a story with me about how he found his way to jail. One took the fall for a ring of lawyers involved in a scandal; another killed his best friend in a drunk driving accident. Some made their crime in America and asked to be jailed in Israel because the Israeli jail system has a unique aspect to it. In Israel, one of the equivalent words used for parole is "*Teshuvah*." Translated literally this word means "turning or returning," but we also translate it as repentance, a theme most relevant to *Yom Kippur*. It is intrinsic in the Israeli criminal justice system that one is able to repent



Chalk drawings on the Los Angeles campus sidewalk enrich worship through creativity.



for wrongdoings and turn away from sin in order to return to society. Part of this is the beauty and the challenge of the Hebrew language – many words used for secular life also hold religious meaning.

After gathering together for morning songs and prayers, we got to work. Some days we picked citrus from the trees, other days we shook down olives from branches. We created mosaic artwork as stepping-stones, did lots of landscaping, and lots of *shlepping*. I even learned how to brine olives.



Jennifer Gubitz, N'12

After working for a bit, we would eat breakfast together. Following our meal, we would sit together for *Torah* study. Now remember – Arabs and Jews studying *Torah*, together.

One morning in November, we were looking at the *Torah* portion *Vayishlach* – when Jacob wrestles with a man or angel possibly, after which he is given the new name, Israel, planting in him the yoke of fathering a nation. “What does it mean to make a name for yourselves,” we asked them, “how can you grow and change and earn a good reputation?”

Every day these guys have *Yom Kippur*. Every day as they sit in jail they are reminded of what act they committed to find themselves there. Once a month when they

come to the *Kibbutz* for the morning, they are reminded of the beauty of fresh air and freedom. They understand that Judaism and, therefore, the Jewish State, gives them an opportunity for renewal, repentance, and return. They can repent for their crime – and it might take a long, long time. They can renew their commitment to humanity through hard work and determination to changing their ways. They can return to society and hopefully will not return to jail.

A complete act of *Teshuvah*, as both repentance and turning, occurs when we are

confronted with the situation once more – but make the choice that is healthy, not harmful, challenging but courageous. There is no “mapquest” route that ensures success or happiness and, at times, we might find it easier to drive along the path recklessly. Or at least, it’s faster than stopping to ask for directions. It is a true struggle to make a change in our lives. *Yom Kippur* is that warning sign – the pit stop in our year, reminding us to make a change, repent, and return – turn around, retrace our path, and begin again. ■

Excerpted from Jennifer Gubitz's Yom Kippur Sermon during her rabbinical student pulpit at Temple Beth El in Rocky Mount, NC.



Poland Diary

Rabbi Jonathan Hanish, L '08

During my rabbinical studies at HUC-JIR, I arrived in Poland to participate in a seminar on Jewish-Christian relations, organized by Dr. Michael Signer, z”l, and Betty Signer, with the University of Notre Dame. I came two days early so that I could celebrate *Simhat Torah* in a country filled with the souls of my ancestors.

So there I was, in the only synagogue to have survived World War II – a synagogue that was inside the walls of the Warsaw ghetto and then, as the ghetto shrunk, outside its walls. The Germans used it as a storehouse and then as a stable. Today it is the only synagogue remaining in Warsaw, but not the only congregation.

Within minutes of entering the synagogue I was caught up in the frenzy of dancing. Over 200 people filled the room but most were spectators, either too afraid or not knowledgeable enough to participate in the festivity of the *hakafot*.

I traveled to Lublin, once the largest center of Jews in southeast Poland. I joined 50 seminary and theology students – 40 Roman Catholic students and 10 Jewish students – from Poland, Germany, the United States, and Israel. My function was to help today’s generation of Poles and Germans process their ancestor’s role in the destruction of Polish Jewry. Our first full day in Lublin

