



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



consisted of touring “Jewish Sites.” There were no Jewish sites remaining. Mostly markers. Yet, our Polish professors and the Polish participants kept talking about Jewish renewal; a cultural renaissance. The only things that remain of Lublin’s Jewish population are ghosts and remnants of a past that can no longer be recreated. The leader of my discussion group, a Pole, headed the Lublin efforts to revive Jewish culture. How can you revive a culture when there is no Jewish population?

We toured Majdanek, the concentration camp just outside of Lublin. I had been learning about the Holocaust since the 4th grade. That day in Majdanek was a culmination of all the memorials, museums, and studies that I had experienced.

Today the Poles search for their culture. So they turn to the Jews who used to live in their country, whose culture thrived in their country. And they try to make Jewish culture part of their culture. They hold Jewish festivals. They have restaurants that serve Jewish food. Klezmer music rings out everywhere. The only thing they’re missing is Jews. I went to Poland wondering – what remains? I learned that little remains.

Those 11 days were a journey into my emotional past and Poland’s developing future. The Germans and the Poles that I met are not the same as their grandparents. They study the Holocaust. They search out Jews so they can dialogue. They attempt to understand.

May the memory of the victims of the *Shoah* never be forgotten. May the Poles and Germans that I met have the strength to continue their search to understand the destruction perpetrated by their ancestors. May we all live in peace together. ■



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Rabbi Jonathan Hanish at the Mila 18 memorial marking the site of the bunker of the last Jewish resistance fighters during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.



GETTING THE CALL

Yaron Kapitulnik, N ‘10

This is a story about three phone calls. During the Passover *Seder* in 2002, a bomb exploded at the Park Hotel in Netanya, taking the life of 30 innocent people. The next morning Israel went to war. Like many others, I was called to report to my reserve unit.

I was part of the Yerushalmi brigade that fought in Beit Lechem for over a week and was now surrounding the Church of the Nativity where several hundred Palestinian terrorists were hiding. I was on the roof of a nearby building – I’d been on duty for a few hours, looking at the church, trying to spot any movement. The tension was high: at any moment a Palestinian sniper could try to hit us – after all we were easy targets, sitting ducks. I was counting the minutes until my replacement would arrive.

Suddenly...my cellphone rang – you didn’t think an Israeli would go to war without his cell? I answered, not knowing at the time that this call would change my life forever.

On the line was Jeffrey Klein, the Executive Director of the Jewish Federation in Palm Beach, FL. “What are you doing in July?” he asked. “Why?” I answered. “Would you want to come and work as the Jewish educator for the JCC here?” “Well, Jeffrey,” I said – holding my M-16 in one hand and the cell phone in the other – “let me get home alive in a few weeks and we can talk then.”

Three months later, I found myself with my family on a plane to Florida. We left behind our friends, family, and a land we love. We left Beit Lechem behind. For the first time in my life I was forced to question my relationship with Israel.

We landed in West Palm Beach with eight huge suitcases, a dog, and a lot of good will. Two weeks after we arrived, the phone rang again. Once again I answered not knowing how significant this call was going

to be. On the line were Rabbi Joel Levine and his wife Susan, whom I had met when I was a tour guide in Israel. They invited me to the High Holy Day services at Temple Judea. If it were not for their phone call, I would have probably stayed home or gone to the Chabad service. Rabbi Levine and Susan opened the door for me, and continued to encourage me to develop my Jewish spirituality. They guided me as I found the path that has led me to where I am today – an Israeli rabbinical student in the North American rabbinical program at HUC-JIR.

In its first 60 years, Israel mainly fought for its security and survival. In the next 60 years the battle needs to be a spiritual one – a battle that will determine what kind of a Jewish state Israel will be. We have a role as a Movement in this battle and we need to make sure that our vision for Israel does not remain just beautiful words we utter on our pulpits a few times a year. We must continue to send missions, form connections with Israeli congregations, offer adult education, integrate Israel in our Hebrew Schools and worship, support the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism – we must continue doing all of these and more.

The beauty and uniqueness of Reform ideology is our ability to put words into action. But there is also a new opportunity that we have been missing. I am talking about our relationship with the Israeli community in the U.S. No one can say exactly how many Israelis currently live in the U.S. Figures indicate that anywhere between 100,000 to 300,000 Israelis live here today, and that in the past 20 years, that same number has lived here for a significant time and then returned to Israel. This means that on a regular basis a significant part of the American Jewish community are Israelis – and yet we as a Movement do almost nothing to connect and be partners with them.

Israelis that live in the U.S. share simi-