

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. ■



Rabbi Hanish is the Assistant Rabbi of Kehillat Israel, Pacific Palisades, CA

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-

GETTING THE CALL *(continued)*

lar stories of struggle. Many are not sure about their future yet are slowly drifting away from their past. They are confused about their identity and especially the identity of their young children. They are open and willing to do things they would never consider doing in Israel – simple things, like being Jewish.

Whenever an Israeli hears that I am studying to become a rabbi – after their first response, which is *ata meshuga* (you're crazy) – I see that they have great curiosity and respect for my decision.

Here in the U.S. it feels safe for them to approach Judaism. And once they learn about liberal Judaism, many realize how they actually share its core values. Imagine if in every congregation we serve we each created *havurot* of 20, 30, 40 Israeli families. This means that thousands of Israelis would be exposed to liberal Judaism. These are people who care about Israel and whether they just visit Israel every year, or return to live there, they can deliver our message, in Hebrew, to their families and friends. Imagine the change they can make in Israeli society. Imagine the change they can make in our congregations. Reform Judaism can be to Is-

raelis in America what Birthright Israel is for American college students – an awakening call to reclaim their Jewish spirituality.

The Israeli community in the U.S. has power, they know each other – they seek each other out – and they can spread the message that there is a different kind of Judaism, one that cares not just about territories and land but also about people and life, not just about the politics of conversion but about the possibility of inclusion. One that is open and ethical in a way that aims to make this world a better place.

All we need to do is to reach out. They can be the tipping point for our message in Israel. And working together with them, we can set the discussion about the essence and future of Judaism in Israel.

In West Palm Beach I discovered that being Israeli is just one part of my identity, liberal Judaism is the other. In Israel I was told by the religious community to leave religion to them, so I grew up convinced there was just one way of being Jewish. I think that while in Florida I converted from being Israeli to being Jewish. At HUC-JIR, I am being confirmed. The third phone call is yours to make. ■

JEWISH GEOGRAPHY HUC-JIR EDITED

Jessica Karpay, C '11



Rabbinical school seems to be all about Jewish geography. I think my class spent the entire year in Israel playing long rounds of the game, eventually figuring out how each and every one of us was associated through various camps, NFTY, and on rare occasions non-Jewish connections. When we stop to think about it, it's not really all that amazing that rabbinical students are Jewishly connected, since most of us grew up active in various aspects of Jewish life. But as it turned out, the Year-In-Israel Program (and the first several weeks in Cincinnati each year, meeting the other classes of students) was only the warm up for some intense, country-wide Jewish geography.

Round One: The Frozen North

I received my assignment for my first student pulpit over the last *Shabbat* that I was in Jerusalem. I would begin my experience as a student rabbi in Grand Forks, ND. I had never been to Grand Forks, and I didn't know anyone in the state. My monthly visits made me the closest thing to a rabbi in all of North Dakota. I soon discovered that their current student rabbi, a fifth-year Cincinnati student, was a friend of mine from college Hillel. And so I won round one of North Dakota Jewish Geography. Sometime later, when my older sister was talking to a friend of hers, she mentioned my future student pulpit in Grand Forks, and the friend, Catholic and having never won – or probably played – a round of Jewish Geography, exclaimed that not only did she know someone in Grand Forks, but he was Jewish and would be in my congregation. She won round two. The couple she knew was active in the congregation and promised my



Yoram Kapitulnik, N'10 (at left), leading a Lag Ba'Omer bonfire celebration with Israeli families in New York.