

"GOD IS IN THIS PLACE AND I DID NOT KNOW IT."



[GENESIS 28:16]

Another student pointed out that we were learning from these people so that we could be advocates for them and other impoverished communities. It was our duty to talk about our experiences when we returned and to continue to feel motivated to do something good. In this way, our text study and reflection highlighted elements of our experience and transformed them into inspirational and motivational memories.

When my UCLA Hillel students saw their experiences through a Jewish lens, they felt more connected to their Jewish identities and their Jewish community. They also saw, in concrete terms, Jewish living at its best. They had the chance to determine how to celebrate *Shabbat*, how to accommodate the various levels of *kashrut*, and how to approach one another with *kavod*, even (or perhaps, especially) while living in tight quarters. The trip became a chance to re-imagine their Jewish identities in a way that could then be transferred into their ongoing lives. In fact, some students involved on my trip are now consistent Hillel attendees and have assumed leadership positions in Jewish organizations.

As I reflect on this experience for myself, I realize that Jewish service learning is one of the most powerful ways for young Jewish adults to connect with their Jewish identities and to perceive Judaism as a relevant part of their lives. The opportunity to do acts of kindness and justice in the name of Judaism cannot be passed over. Jewish service learning trips, like this one to Appalachia, expand the participants' worldview, empower them to create Jewish community with their peers, and invite them to consider what it means to be responsible and caring members of society. Armed with Jewish principles and values, they can help to establish the kinds of programs and institutions that will address the issues that the Jewish community and global community will surely face in the future. ■

This year, Medwin will be accompanying an ASB group of students to Yosemite National Park to learn about conservation, create Jewish community, and work to repair fire-damaged trails.

Rabbi Daniel Mikelberg, L '08

I must admit that nothing that I had previously experienced in my 28 years had prepared me for my visit to western Africa as a fifth-year rabbinical student at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles. On January 16, 2008 I set out on a journey to Ghana, returning 10 days later with a totally new perspective on life – acutely aware of the hardships facing the developing world, attuned to the need for global justice, and awestruck by the power of hope, kindness, and trust.

Along with 25 rabbinical students from seminaries across North America (8 of whom were from HUC-JIR), I participated in an American Jewish World Service humanitarian mission to the rural community of Gbi Atabu (near Ho Hoe in the Upper Volta region of Ghana). Our task was to assist the locals in building a community center. We worked alongside our new friends, mixing concrete, carrying materials, constructing bricks, and paving a floor. This was also a week of building relationships, sharing stories, and discovering commonalities. Representing various cultures, denominations and lands, we walked hand in hand, constructing brick by brick a much needed gathering place.

One day, early in our visit, I met a local gentleman named Moses. At first, only the things that separated us were apparent. Moses has never left his hometown of Gbi Atabu. He proudly taught me some Ewe terms: *mua wezo* – you are welcome, *akpe* – thank you, and *honlo* – friend. I asked Moses if he was named after someone special, perhaps his father or grandfather. Moses responded, "Oh no, I am named after a great man who stood at the shore of the seas as he traveled to the holy land of Israel." I admitted that I was familiar with stories of that man, and that he was a hero in my faith too.

HUC-JIR students helping to build a community center in Ghana.



Clearly there wasn't so much that separated us after all.

I also befriended a teen named Brosback, who carried a great burden on his shoulders. As the eldest of three siblings, he served as the designated caregiver in his family. He shared with me that Ghana has overwhelming problems: three percent of the population of Ghana has AIDS, many with no access to treatment; forty-five percent of the population lives on less than a dollar a day; and Ghana still struggles to find a democratic path in its 50th year of independence. And yet, Brosback was hopeful for the future. One of the most spiritual moments of this trip was watching Brosback's church choir perform. The traditional melodies, the incredible enthusiasm – the music formed a truly inspirational *sukkah* of peace.

On the last day of our travels we visited a Liberian displaced persons camp. Ghana plays host to 42,000 Liberian refugees who have found themselves homeless while neighboring Liberia encounters ongoing internal strife. With open sewers and minimal clean water access, the camp is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Encountering such sorrow and pain directly, I couldn't help but wonder what it must have been like for many of our relatives who spent time in displaced persons camps in Europe after the Holocaust. While it was a different time and a different land, this Ghanain story was also my story. Just as my family has found blessing, so too must I consider these and other disadvantaged citizens of the world.

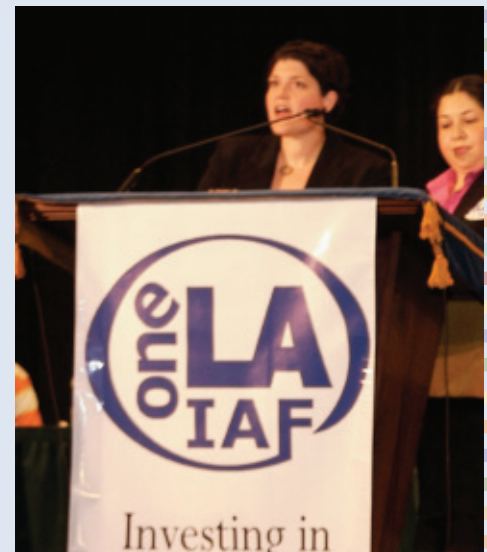
This trip made me acutely aware of my responsibilities as a Jew and as a world citizen. It served as an awakening to the power of human connection. Each one of us, working together, can make a difference. The people of Ghana were among the kindest and most welcoming people that I have ever met. As we prepared for our departure, I was taught one more Ewe phrase: *mau neira* – may God bless you. I now hold in my prayers my new friends in Ghana. Moses, Brosback, and to all those in need: *mau neira*. Together, may we find a path to stand hand in hand, healing the world, spreading and sharing blessings for all. ■

Rabbi Daniel Mikelberg is Assistant Rabbi of Temple Shalom, Vancouver, British Columbia

A number of students come to HUC-JIR with family legacies to uphold. Among them, **Rachel Joseph, L'12**, **Aaron Miller, C'11**, and **Joseph Skloot, N'10**, describe how they are putting their own stamp on their respective rabbinical dynasties.

A third-generation rabbi-to-be and Schusterman Fellow (see page 15) in Cincinnati, **Aaron Miller** has traced his Reform rabbinical ancestry at HUC-JIR. "I did not know my Grandpa Judea as 'Rabbi Miller' until very recently," he explained. "Last year, for my grandmother's birthday present, I researched my grandfather's files at the American Jewish Archives and put together a scrapbook on his life as a rabbi. As I searched through countless sermons, newspaper articles, and letters, it became clear that Grandpa Judea's rabbinical interests extended far beyond his congregation."

Miller learned that his grandfather was an advocate for Soviet Jewry, ardent supporter of the State of Israel, traveled to the South twice during the 1960s to advocate for integration and voter registration, and was involved in



Rachel Joseph, L '12

The family cause of human rights and interfaith relations is a source of inspiration for Miller's vision for his own rabbinate. "My dad has established close relationships with his Christian 'clergy buddies' with whom he has traveled all over the world – Bosnia, Croatia,

ADDING A LINK TO

countless other causes. "I remember growing up that my family would not eat California grapes but never knew why, until I read in his archives how appalled Grandpa was by the unjust treatment of California grape workers. Grandpa dedicated himself to social justice, both in the United States and all over the world."

Miller has a multi-generational perspective on the rabbinate. "I grew up observing and experiencing the life of a congregational rabbi first hand, and it was the congregational rabbinate – that intimate involvement within a contained Jewish community – that drew me toward becoming a rabbi. My dad, Rabbi Jonathan Miller, has loved serving as rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham, AL, and I expect to find the pulpit rabbinate equally rewarding."

Having a rabbi as a father offers many benefits. He notes that "over the years, my dad has become my best rabbinical sounding-board. Whether I am writing a difficult sermon or experiencing some challenge at my student pulpit, I know that he is only a phone call away."

and Southeast Asia – to study the effects of intolerance and strategies for resolution," he says. "This has led to a growing sense of love and respect between the clergy of Birmingham across religious and denominational affiliations, and more importantly, between the congregants of their synagogues and churches."

For Tisch Fellow (see page 16) **Rachel Joseph**, a third-year rabbinical student in Los Angeles, "one of the role models who influenced my decision to become a Jewish professional is a person who serves many roles in my life: that of my rabbi, my teacher, and most importantly, my father, Rabbi Sam Joseph" (see page 60).

Seeking to find a way to bring a Jewish voice into a non-Jewish world, the political arena became an important outlet for Joseph. She began to volunteer at the Food Bank/Free Store of Cincinnati, OH, which was located a block away from her elementary school, and subsequently became engaged in her first political campaign to secure funding for that organization.