

Elizabeth McNamara Mueller

“When Operation Cast Lead first began in late December, my first thought was about our soldier friends: where were they, were they going to be okay, and how could I help them?” recalls rabbinical student **Jaclyn Fromer, L ’13**. “Talking with them, even hearing the limited information they could give us, provided a much deeper understanding of the Israeli psyche, the effect of war on a society, and the way in which Israelis live their day-to-day lives.”

Months before the war, Fromer and education/communal service student **LuAnne Tyzzer, RHSOE/MAJCS ’11**, had become the HUC-JIR coordinators for ‘Parallel Lives,’ a program that links Israeli soldiers with Jews of the same age around the world in order to expose Israelis to different streams of Judaism and to promote the integration of Jewish identity in Israeli and Diaspora youth. Through this program, Fromer and Tyzzer were able to ensure that their first-year classmates in the Year-In-Israel Program could accomplish one of the year’s key goals: to become more intimately connected with the people and land of Israel.

From social events and educational get-togethers to being guests at a ‘live drill’ at an Army base, Fromer and Tyzzer brought to-

gether Israeli elite unit soldiers and HUC-JIR students to learn more about one another. The HUC-JIR students were able to get a better understanding of what it is like to come of age in Israel, join the army, and serve one’s country. In turn, the soldiers learned about the Reform Movement and the students’ lives in North America.

“It is so important for us to leave the classroom, to get out and experience the real Israel,” Tyzzer explained. For example, during a joint tour of the tunnels underneath the Western Wall, “the juxtaposition of the civilian HUC-JIR students with the rifle-draped uniformed soldiers symbolized the merging of shared history and common links. We were forging our own personal relationships with the Jewish homeland and its people. As for the soldiers, they were learning about what it’s like to be Jewish in the Diaspora; about maintaining a religious identity in the world outside *Eretz Yisrael*.”

Fromer described a two-day *Shabbaton*, when “we began by welcoming *Kabbalat Shabbat* together in the Murstein Synagogue with five female *sh’lichot tzibbur*, guitar and drums, and men lighting candles and saying *Kiddush*, and concluded with *Havdalah* in our home. Many of these secular soldiers were being introduced to Reform Judaism for the first time. For the soldiers, it crystallized why we’re here in Jerusalem studying at HUC-JIR, and why the Reform Movement is and will continue to be significant for their country, and ours.”

After years of Jewish and Zionist activism at Wheaton College and with AIPAC, it was her year as a DeLeT Fellow at the

Stephen S. Wise Day School that propelled Tyzzer toward the joint master’s program in Jewish education and Jewish communal service at HUC-JIR. In addition to ‘Parallel Lives,’ she said that being the ARZA-ARZENU liaison on campus further enriched her understanding of Israel and Jewish peoplehood. “When I attended the 35th World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem, I felt like I was a part of history,” she noted.

Fromer’s lifelong attachment to Stephen S. Wise Temple inspired her role as a cantorial soloist and worship leader during college at UC Davis, and ultimately led her to define her future aspirations as a Jewish leader. “I was drawn to fuse my love of Judaism with a desire to teach, learn, and help others cultivate their own connection to God and Judaism. I had wanted to study at HUC-JIR for years, especially because of the Year-In-Israel. I knew it would be an amazing education with unparalleled experiences, and that’s exactly what it’s been.” ■

Jaclyn Fromer, L ’13 (top, left), and LuAnne Tyzzer, RHSOE/MAJCS ’11 (top, right) with Israeli elite unit soldiers and HUC-JIR Year-In-Israel Program students (below).

