



# DRUMMING MY WAY TO DAVENNING

David Vaisberg, N '11, Mandel Fellow

Although I am a trained guitarist, most of the time I play on my drum, which I still find fascinating as I never actually learned how to play the drum. I only started because one of the traditional egalitarian *minyanim* in Jerusalem asked, at the beginning of my Year-In-Israel, if there was anyone who could drum for their services. I was the only one to volunteer, and I'm still drumming two-and -a-half years later.

The following year, I arrived in New York with its cantorial school and community of trained musicians. When my turn came to lead services as a rabbinical student, rather than as an accompanist, I suddenly had to figure out how to create this same mood with words rather than beats. I learned how to collaborate at a higher level with a cantorial student, and how to lead, rather than follow, with the musical ensemble.

At HUC-JIR we learn to build sacred environments. We have countless chances to try new things, we tell stories and we teach, we bring in new melodies and new translations, and we build moods. Sometimes our ideas and efforts soar, and sometimes they do not. And that's ok, because it is all part of the learning experience.

We all have the opportunity to workshop our skills and build a repertoire of ways to make worship meaningful. We learn from each other and from our incredible faculty. There are other forums for learning as well. I sit on the Worship Working Group, a committee of students and faculty responsible for planning the overall worship and spiritual experience of students. On the committee we learn what it is to envision and implement long-term ideas and projects.

We learn from our pulpits and intern-

ships, where we leave the protective HUC-JIR atmosphere and transpose what we've learned to communities with their own unique traditions. My own pulpit outside of Toronto likes to have its own blend of melodies in Hebrew and English, with a touch of whimsical spontaneity. They even have an accordionist. Thanks to the skills and knowledge taught at HUC-JIR, I have been able to adapt to that environment and learn even more.

We have also had some training in theater. Dr. Lawrence Hoffman has taught us that the service is a 'sacred drama.' For example, when we read *Torah* we are not just reading from a sacred book; we are actually standing at Sinai and receiving divine words. In sacred dramas, intonation, words, and feelings matter. Movement and choreography are crucial.

HUC-JIR has hosted several workshops in this area. In the past, choreographer Liz Lerman has been a visit-

ing faculty member and taught us about movement. Amichai Lau-Lavie's 'Storah-telling' organization has led a five-day workshop on how to bring the *Torah* text to life through dramatic storytelling. We have ongoing speech and communication classes to teach us the basics.

The *Talmud* (*Berachot* 55a) teaches us that Bezalel, the artist commissioned to build the Tabernacle and its holy vessels, was able to bring the experience of God to the Israelites. Likewise, it is through our art, as future rabbis and cantors, that we can bring the experience of the sacred to our communities. HUC-JIR gives us a tremendous gift by developing in us the skills necessary to build our own tabernacles for our future communities. ■



# ISRAELI AGENTS FOR CHANGE

Jean Bloch Rosensaft

Among the 22 students enrolled in the Israel Rabbinical Program, there is a broad diversity of background but a shared passion and commitment to advancing Reform Judaism in the Jewish State. These students will ultimately join the 59 Israeli rabbinical alumni who are transforming the Orthodox-secular divide in Israeli society by introducing a liberal, egalitarian, and inclusive form of Jewish identity, spirituality, and religious practice.

**Benjie Gruber**, who will be ordained this Fall, serves as the student rabbi of Kibbutz Yahel and teaches adult education, provides conversion programs for soldiers in the Israeli Army, and works at the *beit midrash* at Congregation Mevasseret Zion and at the Reform *mechina* in Jaffa. He says, "My four years at HUC-JIR have given me the chance to study Talmud, *midrash*, *halakhah*, theology, Bible, and more with wonderful faculty, and to be introduced to the world of pastoral care by teachers and mentors who are experts in both theory and practice."

*Here are some of his classmates who are entering their second year of the Israel Rabbinical Program, and who will be Reform leaders and agents of change in Israel in the years to come:*

**Na'ama Dafni-Kellen** was exposed to Reform Judaism through her high school studies at the Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa and has been involved in the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism ever since. Upon completing her Army service, she moved to Jerusalem and studied Jewish philosophy and community work at Hebrew University, while at the same time working as the national director of the Reform Students' Association. After completing an M.A. in non-profit management, Na'ama became the director of Kehilat Tzedek, a training center for congregational social action that works with Reform,

Conservative, Secular, and Modern-Orthodox congregations in Israel, under the auspices of the Israel Religious Action Center.

Born in New York and raised in Tel Aviv, **Galit Cohen Kedem** serves as program director at Kehilat Tzur Hadassah, is a graduate of Tehuda-Beit Midrash for Jewish Leadership in Israel (Hamidrasha and Kolot), and a former community organizer at Beit Tefilah Israeli in Tel Aviv. She received her B.A. in Hebrew Language and Literature from Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She studied in several pluralistic *batei midrash*

can Jewish Conversion website into Portuguese. He received a degree in psychology from the Institute of Psychology, University of Sao Paolo in 1995 and the master in philosophy at Pontificia Universidade Catolica in Sao Paolo in 2003.

An instructor and lecturer in Jewish Thought and Jewish Education at Oranim College, **Telalit Shavit** is one of the founders of “Nigun Shel Nashim” College (a pluralistic women’s *beit midrash*), which she directed for many years. Telalit taught at several pluralistic *batei midrash* and learning

faith Dialog” on the radio. Orr writes on Judaism, *Kabbalah*, and other spiritual topics, for the on-line *Ma’ariv* newspaper.

**Meirav Kalush** returned home from England after three years as an emissary of the Jewish Agency for Israel. In England she worked with the community and with the Netzer Youth Movement. Prior to this position, Meirav worked as an education supervisor and director of the “*Amitim*” program of the Jewish Agency. Meirav is a graduate of Hebrew University’s Jewish Studies program. She grew up in Kibbutz Masuot



(including Beit Shmuel/HUC-JIR and the Hartman Institute) and worked for Geshar to promote dialogue between secular and religious high school students. Galit served as a Hebrew teacher at the school for overseas students at Hebrew University. She is moving to Holon, where she will be part of a city-wide effort for Jewish renaissance.

Since 2005, **Uri Lam** has been a rabbinical assistant at *Congregacao Israelita Paulista (CIP)*, in Sao Paola, Brazil, where he was responsible for *Shabbat Neshama*, the egalitarian *minyan*, and taught *b’nei mitzvah* classes and introductory Judaism courses to candidates for conversion. As a translator, he worked on the first translation of the *Tanakh* into Portuguese, was responsible for assembling, translating, and transliterating the new *siddur*, *Shavua Tov*, and is currently working on the new *siddur*, *Chag Sameach*. He also translated Reform responsa and the Ameri-

*Israel Rabbinical Program students (from right) Na’ama Dafni-Kellen, J ’12, Gila Caine, J ’11, Benje Gruber, J ’09, Ariella Graetz-Bartuv, J ’10, and Haim Shalom, J ’10.*

communities in the northern part of Israel. Currently, she is working as a curricular advisor and director of Educators’ Seminars under the Partnership 2000 Tel Aviv and Los Angeles program. She is moving to Modiin and will join Kehillat Yozma as they transform the fastest growing city in Israel.

**Orr Zohar** is a student and teacher of *Kabbalah*, a writer and performer of music, and an instructor of musical texts related to the Jewish tradition. He is a doctoral student of *Kabbalah* research at the School of Jewish Studies at Tel Aviv University. He teaches *Kabbalah* and the *Zohar* for the Conservative Movement in Tel Aviv, at the Mousayoff Center at Bar Ilan University, and elsewhere. He presents programs such as “*Kabalat Shabbat*” and “The Holy Trinity – an Inter-

Yitzhak, and believes that a thought can create a reality, and that we all have a part in mending our world.

**Eli Yoel Levin** was born in Tel Aviv in 1960. His Polish father, the only survivor of his family after the Holocaust, immigrated to Israel in 1949. Eli’s mother was born in Argentina and came to Israel in 1953. Eli graduated from Tel Aviv University with a degree in dentistry in 1989. Since then, he has been working as a dentist dividing his time among two *kibbutzim* and his own clinic in Netanya. Eight years ago, he started to study the history of the Jews at Tel Aviv University. He is a member of the Reform Congregation “Netan-ya” and at times serves as rabbi in conducting services and ceremonies. ■