

Educational Travel & Student Exchange: Israel and Beyond

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Bathea James

From the Desk of Bathea James, RAVSAK President

Dear Chevre,

I am still feeling the positive reverberations from the success of our January conference. The feedback we have received so far has been amazing. To those of you who were there, I extend my thanks for your participation; to those of you who were not able to attend, you were missed.

I am sure you will agree that the annual pilgrimage to the RAVSAK conference substantiates many of the reasons why stepping out of one's daily environment makes professional development so necessary and worthwhile. Apart from the learning of new skills and techniques and the acquiring of knowledge, nothing beats the networking and support that our colleagues provide for us during our time together and afterwards. It gives us, as educational leaders, a few days to recharge our batteries and become energized and excited about what we do every day.

Likewise for our students, school trips provide them with many unique opportunities to evolve as learners, as Jews, and as independent thinkers:

- Leaving the confines of the classroom, students engage in round-the-clock, hands-on learning. This learning comes not only in terms of subject/content knowledge, but life skills, decision-making, informa-

tion synthesis, and social/emotional growth.

- Research has shown that learning does not take place only in the classroom, but through real life exposure and practical application, which reinforce the many theoretical concepts our modern day students have to internalize.

- For many students, these unique class trips are sometimes the only opportunity they will have to learn formally through travel. Those of us who take our students to Israel rejoice as all they have learned about Israel comes to life and they see first hand the relevance and reality of their many hours of learning Hebrew, Israeli geography and Jewish history.

- Students who may not flourish in the classroom setting are given a new venue in which to demonstrate excellence. Many a time, students who are hesitant to speak in class find that they are eager and able to share in the less structured setting of a tour.

- Class trips can be excellent motivators for good student behavior, increased academic achievement and provide incentives for higher learning.

- While reinforcing the learning that has happened in the classroom, the activities on these trips also encourage bonding between student and teacher, and among the students themselves.

A large number of RAVSAK schools, both day schools and high schools,

incorporate a student travel experience into their curricula. Among the myriad of places visited by RAVSAK students, Israel is- appropriately- the top destination, with students visiting New York, Washington D.C., Eastern Europe, and Los Angeles as well. I am sure the RAVSAK office would be able to provide you with a list of the schools participating in school trips if you would like further information.

In this issue of HaYidion, we investigate the nature of educational exploration. The articles delve into the who, what, where, when and why of student travel experiences from a number of perspectives. The central question is not "should we have a school trip?" but rather, "how do we make student travel a rich educational experience?" I encourage you to be in touch with the authors of these columns for more details.

To conclude: "The longest journey you will ever take is the eighteen inches from your head to your heart". Thank you for all that you do to ensure that this journey happens every day.

L'Shalom,

Bathea James

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FORWARD



Dr. Marc N. Kramer

From The Executive Director

Chevre: children and young teens.

As I am fond of saying, RAVSAK must be one of the single best Jewish organizations for which to

work. Each day, the staff is presented with opportunities great and small to contribute to the ongoing success of the Jewish future. Each year we have the tremendous joy of knowing that hundreds of our students will partake in school trips to Israel and other destinations – trips that will serve as watershed events in their Jewish identity formation. Of course, this is second-hand *naches* as it is you who organize the trips and accompany the

From our perch, we have identified three critical issues that inform successful trip planning and implementation.

Parent Buy-In

At the 2006 RAVSAK Leadership Conference, Joe Septimus challenged us to think about who the “client” is in the work we do. When the topic is Hebrew language, the client is the student. When the topic is using the Hebrew learned in class on Ben Yehuda Street, the client is the parent. Parents and guardians should be involved from the inception. Parents of participating students as well as future student travelers should be given real roles and mean-

ingful work in service of goal setting, trip planning, fund raising, and when appropriate, accompanying students.

Schools should inquire as to their experiences as student travelers as a means of discovering parental concerns in the context of parental hopes and dreams. In addition to asking students to keep travel logs, schools might consider asking parents to write about their experience of watching their children learn and grow through travel. Do you remember how different you were after your first trip to Israel?

Safety and Security

In our increasingly chaotic world, the expression “safety first” takes on new meaning. Before asking about cost, kashrut or itinerary, schools simply must first inquire as to the security measures taken by a given tour provider. The real issues of security must be drawn from the deep sea of the imagined issues and conveyed to parents and students alike. Families need to know that their children will be safe; students need to understand the rationale for the travel guidelines you will impose. It is essential that schools remember that waivers of liability may not indemnify you to the degree you think, and of course, no waiver has any real meaning if, G-d Forbid, a student were injured.

Adult-to-student ratios should be revisited with groups of traveling students. Our students and classes

each and collectively have varying needs and degrees of maturity and sophistication. Likewise, the nature of the travel itself (domestic versus international) dictates the ratio to some degree. The balance to be struck is how best to protect students while allowing for the greatest amount of appropriate autonomy.

Cost

Not a semester goes by without at least one call from a dismayed parent who lacks the financial capacity to afford a student trip above and beyond tuition. Like school itself, travel is costly and with rare exceptions, there are few philanthropic foundations currently interested in supporting 8th grade trips to Israel.

Schools have come up with a wide variety of mechanisms for dealing with travel costs. One model is to add \$250 per year to every year of tuition prior to the year of travel, such that students with school longevity will have “saved” for the trip. Some schools have worked closely with their local Federations to receive student subsidies or to subvent the cost of chaperone travel. In a number of communities, families affiliated with local synagogues find travel scholarships are available through their congregations. Most schools encourage the students themselves to participate in fund raising efforts, although these undertakings tend to be limited in measurable profit, especially given the amount of requisite time and work.

I would suggest three cost-
[continued on page 17]

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Ilisa Cappell

Foundation for the Future: The Eighth Grade Israel Experience

Although an eighth grade trip to Israel encompasses a few short weeks at the end of a student's day school career, the planning begins many months before and the lessons learned will reverberate for many years to come. The foundation begins with the school culture, which reflects the strong ties we are building to the history, people, and culture of Israel.

The Curriculum

In Jewish History in sev-

enth grade our students study the Holocaust and in eighth grade the focus is on the history of Israel leading up to modern day events. Our goal is to inculcate a love of our Jewish homeland, the culture and the people while at the same time exploring the challenges Israel faces. Students visit Israeli newspaper websites such as Haaretz, Maariv, and Yediot Acharonot and explore current events in Israel. We are currently looking into developing a pen-pal relationship with a school in Israel.

The Application

As part of the application process all students write an essay about why they want to go to Israel, what they hope to learn, see and experience. The parents write an essay about why they are sending their child and what they hope their child will gain from the experience.

The Trip

Throughout the two-week journey in Israel, students keep a journal with sections on history, roots, friendships, and reflections. Stu-

dents receive a rubric for how they will be graded on their journals and they are required to write everyday. Faculty members on the trip monitor journal entries. Students use free time in the evening and on the bus to write their reflections and once they are back in school students use their journals, photos and other mementos as a springboard for future written assignments.

Each day in Israel, students are given a focus question or an assignment. For example, on a visit to

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the Israel Museum students were told to choose an object that was meaningful for them. Students had to sketch the object, write a brief description and explain the meaning of the object. When they returned to school, students used their notes to write an essay for their Language Arts class.

In Israel, our students commit themselves to a community service project with their peers in their sister city in Israel, Kiryat Malachi. Through the program Partnership 2000 (P2K) founded in 1994 by the Jewish Agency, United Jewish Communities, and Keren Hayesod-United Israel Appeal, communities in Israel are matched up with sister cities around the world. Through P2K, communities have the opportunity to connect and interpersonal relationships develop between the youth from both countries. In past years we have spent Shabbos in Kiryat Malachi and our students have stayed with host families who warmly welcomed them into their homes. Next year we will plan a community service project for all students to participate in together.

Returning Home

Upon returning from Israel, the eighth graders host a Q & A session with the younger students in the school to talk about the trip. They highlight their favorite parts of the trip and present the student and parent body with a PowerPoint presentation of their experiences. The students are required to give at least one presentation to the community about their experience in Israel. In the

past students have spoken at their synagogue over Shabbos and at a pre-Selichos service. Our students also have taken a leadership role in the planning of the Yom Ha'atzmaut program in the school.

As we prepared for the trip to Israel, some people questioned whether students were socially and emotionally ready for this trip in eighth grade. They thought that perhaps a trip in tenth grade or senior year of high school might have a greater impact. Others felt that two weeks was not enough time and that it was a "better investment" to send kids to Israel in the summer when they could stay for a longer period of time. In my experience, the eighth grade trip has been invaluable for my students, all of whom go on to attend a public high school. In eighth grade students are on the cusp of exploring the new worlds that will open for them in high school, they are learning more about themselves each day and developing their identity. Helping students to forge a strong connection to Israel in eighth grade increases the chances that students will nurture a commitment in the future. When they are in high school and their friends are deciding what to do in the summer of their sophomore year, students who have already had a positive experience in Israel might be more likely to seek out another opportunity to visit their homeland. While in Israel many students commented that they "can't wait to come back in high school."

True growth occurs when we move slightly out of our comfort zone and one student, who was nervous

about going to Israel, wrote in her journal, "This trip has really showed me who I am. I feel that I have grown a lot during this trip. I have learned who true friends really are and how to handle myself in different situations. It was a wonderful experience and I would definitely do it again."

In his article *From T-Shirts to Peak Experiences: Teens, the Israel Trip and Jewish Identity*, Samuel C. Heilman concludes that "it remains for those who have sent them [teens] to help each of them to transform all this into something that becomes absorbed by them, that leads them to the sure knowledge that they have in Israel and among their fellow Jews found out who they are and where they belong" (249). The Israel Experience does not signal

the end of a day school career, but rather the beginning of a lifetime commitment for students to their Jewish heritage, Israel and the Jewish community. It is our job as educators not only to provide our students with the opportunity to explore their homeland at this crucial period, but to ensure the continuity for these students in the years to come.

Source: *Abiding Challenges: Research Perspectives in Jewish Education* edited by Yisrael Rich and Michael Rosenak, London and Tel Aviv: Freund, 1999.

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Chaye Kohl

To March or Not to March? Reflections on March of the Living

Five trips as a bus captain and historian with The March of the Living have left their mark: Those trips have profoundly affected my sense of mission and purpose. I spend my days (and many nights) dedicated to educating Jewish children. Caring for the emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical development of the teens in my school is part of a vow I made to those Jews who are no longer here. Each year, after two weeks of being “on” 24/7, I return from the March and think: Hitler did not win his war against the Jews!

Teenagers who attend Jewish day schools have read novels about the Holocaust and memoirs written by survivors. They have viewed feature films that deal with the horrors of the Nazi regime and analyzed black and white footage. They have gazed at photos taken by the Nazis, by official photographers of liberating troops, and by individual members of the armed forces. Some students have attended assembly programs, listened to survivors share their stories, or seen slide presentations. There are schools where Holocaust education is integrated into history courses; other schools offer electives focused on history and literature of the Holocaust. These students seem to know everything about the Shoah – why send them on a trip to Poland?

I have heard adults argue: Why spend the funds supporting Poland? Why take the students out of classes at a pivotal time of year? Finals and Advanced Placement exams are imminent (some years AP exams are happening during The March). My mantra? Education happens in and out of the classroom. History, Jewish pride, self-awareness and self-

discipline can all be learned during the two week March of the Living program. This self-contained experience has a ripple effect that informs the rest of a participant’s life.

School administrators are clearly promoting much of the new pedagogical research on education methodology. We are training our teachers in Cooperative Learning and teaching them ways to differentiate instruction for a variety of learners. We urge them to address emotional intelligence and celebrate the achievements of all students. The March of the Living is a perfect vehicle where all of these things coalesce.

I eschew soapboxes, but I would like to share my impressions of The March of the Living and similar trips (e.g.: Heritage Seminars; NCSY and USY Poland/ Israel summer programs, etc). They are, in my view, among the most valuable programs in which we should involve Jewish young people.

Students who choose to go on The March of the Living begin a rigorous process once they receive the application. Essay questions and individual interviews make them consider their personal connections to the Shoah. There are pre-sessions where information is shared and journals are written. Students build community within the group that will travel to Poland together. They meet Holocaust survivors who will travel with the students back to the places where they personally grew up and lived through horrors.

As a bus captain who also organizes pre-sessions, I realize that the trip itself provides personal challenges that help the student learn lessons

by extension. Because of space issues on Polish buses and to expedite luggage handling, students may only bring one suitcase and a small backpack for the two week trip. They will be in two climates and are instructed to pack wisely. Whenever I do the unit on ghettoization, students are asked to write in their journals, listing the possessions they would take if they had a backpack and 15 minutes before leaving their homes for an unknown destination. Some students wryly reflect on how they felt when they were told they could only bring one suitcase and a backpack on the trip, using it as a point of reference that drove the lesson home.

The food we serve in Poland is kosher – because it is all flown in from Israel. No one need go hungry, but it is not gourmet cuisine. By the third day, finicky students who have been subsisting on bottled water and granola bars (“Ooh, the tuna looks funny” “I want scrambled eggs for breakfast”) are really hungry and are eating the triple-wrapped-reheated schnitzel for dinner, saying it is the best chicken they ever tasted. It helps some of them understand why prisoners ate ersatz bread.

Those lessons are the “comic relief” but the most profound moments are at mass graves in the Warsaw cemetery, facing the crematoria at Auschwitz or walking past the gallows in the square where prisoners had roll call. Marvin Mayer, a survivor walking with a group of students on his first visit back to Auschwitz, stopped abruptly and pointed to the gallows. He told of being forced to watch men hang. “Their crime?” Marvin intoned, “They stole a piece of potato from the kitchen or did not salute a Nazi guard in a timely manner.”

The students get to visit places where Jews lived and where they died. They sit in the Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin, now a medical college; they make a siyum Mishnayot and their singing reverberates. They leave the magnificent Sandomierz Shul and walk to the square where Jewish blood literally “ran in the streets.” They can see the holes where Zyklon B gas pellets were sent into the gas chambers and they can answer to kaddish at the mound of ashes, flecked with bone chips, at the mausoleum in Majdanik. Students pray in the Nodzyk Synagogue and dialogue with college students from the University of Warsaw who discovered they were Jewish through the “deathbed confessions” of their grandparents. And there is more...

When they can almost take no more, the students are on their way to Israel. On Yom Hashoah participants from all countries, 6,000 strong,

gather in Aushwitz to walk the 3 kilometers from Aushwitz to the selection platform in Birkenau. They gather to hear prayers and speeches given by dignitaries, and to pray mincha with Rabbi Lau, himself a survivor. On Yom Ha’atzmaut they celebrate the independence of Israel with those same 6,000 (or more) teens at the biggest barbecue they will ever attend, hosted by the Israeli army.

They visit places where Jewish Holocaust survivors came to fight for the nascent state. These teens, many of whom are coming to Israel for a first visit, some who have traveled there many times before, have bent to kiss the ground as they deplaned (no longer possible in the new airport). Students who have been to Israel before always remark: “This time it’s different.”

As teachers we understand that primary source material, interviews,

and documentaries enhance any lesson. The March of the Living and similar programs are the best laboratory in which to teach the lessons of the Holocaust. During the visit to Israel, fresh from the hours at Treblinka or Majdanik we can imbue students with the essence of Jewish pride in the accomplishments of our people over the past sixty years. Our students interact with the past, as seen through the eyes of their elders. They bond with each other and with Jews from around the world, learning that there are more things that unite us than divide us.

So, when a parent calls to ask questions about security issues, price and the need for a trip to Poland and Israel, I always remark: One and a half million children perished during the Holocaust. *Mitzad Ha’Chayim*; The March of the Living assures us that Jewish continuity is an important part of the agenda of today’s Jewish community.

Chaye Kohl is the Upper School Director of Samuel Scheck Hillel Community Day School in N. Miami Beach, FL. Chaye can be reached at kohl@hillel-nmb.net



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Betty Winn

Two Trips - One Vision

Eighth Graders Explore the US and Israel

Jewish identity, immigration, tolerance, democracy, and Jewish history are all themes that were explored first-hand this fall by the eighth graders at Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School in Northridge, California. On October 30, twenty-five students of the Class of 2006 departed on El Al Flight 106 for two weeks as members of Heschel's Tel Aviv/Los Angeles delegation. Accompanied by five teachers and three parents, the next two weeks were spent making new friends at the AD Gordon School in Tel Aviv, learning about Israeli life both past and present, and discussing and exploring issues relating to Jews in both Israel and around the world.

The following morning on Monday, October 31, thirty-two other members of Heschel's eighth grade boarded a plane to the East Coast where they spent the next ten days exploring similar themes in their own country. The trip consisted of travel to Washington DC, Philadelphia, and New York.

In that Heschel was offering two study/travel opportunities to the same group of students, we needed to develop a protocol that would allow students some say in which trip they would take part while allowing the school the freedom to place students into an appropriate group that would meet

their needs and capacities. Students filled out a "letter of intent" the spring of their 7th grade year, indicating which trip would be their first choice. They needed to craft a short essay explaining what they thought they would get out of the trip. Group interviews focused students on questions of their learning goals and their self-assessment of the capacity to function in a traveling group, far away from home. At the same time, the administration worked with teachers to assess individual work habits and student behaviors. We examined how students functioned in group activities, levels of required adult intervention, and degrees of maturity and independence.

The Tel Aviv/Los Angeles Partnership, a program of The Jewish Federation, represents a relationship between the Jewish communities of two incredible cities, one in Israel and the other in the Diaspora. Since 2000, Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School has been fortunate to be "twinning" with the AD Gordon School in Tel Aviv. The "twinning" relationship includes an annual visit from the Heschel students to Israel in the fall and a reciprocal visit by the Gordon students to Los Angeles in March. The exchanges include home stays with families and a division of time between the school and travel to various sites in Israel and Los Angeles. This year in Israel the students par-

ticipated in joint curricular projects such as Yom Gibush, an outdoor bonding day, Project Mitzvah, a joint seminar on Jewish identity, and a shabbaton in Jerusalem. The Heschel students spent several days traveling to Massada, swimming in the Dead Sea, exploring the beauty of Galil, the Kinneret, Tiberias, and in Jerusalem spending memorable time at Yad Vashem and the Kotel. Throughout the two weeks they built life-long friendships with the Gordon students as they shared typical teenage experiences.

The number of students

who can participate in the partnership exchange is always limited since "hosting" is such an integral part of the family stays. In past years Heschel has offered two trips during the course of the eighth grade. Depending on the year, thirteen to thirty-two students participated in the Israel trip in the fall, and then all the eighth graders attended the Washington DC trip in the spring. This presented a number of challenges which included tremendous financial burdens (two trips for some of the students) as well as difficulties in maintaining curriculum, staffing, and continuity. As a result





our vision was to provide a meaningful experience for all the students at the beginning of their final year at Heschel, building on prior learning and allowing for continued shared dialogue relating to common themes throughout the school year. We came up with these two amazing opportunities that have many shared experiences and at the same time offer a number of differences.

The alternate trip to the East Coast included the traditional Washington DC trip that took the students to the seat of our government. In Washington, the sites included a Capitol tour and a meeting with our Congressman, Brad Sherman, the Holocaust Museum, various monuments and the Smithsonian Museums. For Shabbat we traveled to Philadelphia where we experienced a shabbaton at Hillel on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. The Shabbat experience at Penn allowed the students flexibility to attend a minyan of their

choice. We also met with several Heschel alumni who are current Penn students. They spoke with the students about their Jewish college experience and answered many of their questions. From Philadelphia we traveled to New York once again keeping in mind our themes of immigration, Jewish identity, and history as we explored Ellis Island, the Lower East Side and the Tenement Museum, Borough Park, the Jewish Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage. The sights and sounds of New York were also highlights of the trip with a tour of the United Nations, Ground Zero, the Empire State Building, ice skating at Rockefeller Center, Times Square, and a Broadway favorite, *Fiddler on the Roof*. Throughout the trip students stayed in hotels and were accompanied by teachers at all times.

Notebooks and curricular materials were prepared for all the students. Students documented their

reflections and emotions in journals. Assignments included the taking of photographs and the collection of artifacts that were meaningful to each student's experience. Upon everyone's safe return on November 14 the dialogue began; students shared their experiences and analyzed the similarities and differences between the cities, culture, and people. The students were then challenged to create, select, and describe in a single photograph, the "essence" of their destination. The inspiration for this project grew from the word *synecdoche*, a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa.

The projects of the students who participated in the Tel Aviv/Los Angeles Partnership delegation to Israel are currently on display through March 5 at The Finegood Gallery in the Federation Building at the Bernard Milken Jewish Community Campus in West Hills, California. The work of students who went

on our first-ever East Coast trip is on exhibit throughout the Heschel campus, honoring Presidents' Day and the history of our country.

In March, Heschel welcomes the AD Gordon students into our homes to reciprocate the experience. Students from both trips will have the opportunity to host students and participate in partnership activities.

A few final notes: This 2-trip model works in part because of how we prepare students, and in part because of how we prepare staff and parents. The students have input into the decision-making process, must study and prepare in advance, and are required to bring what they learn back to school. This not only heightens student learning, but increases our school presence in the community. Teachers, both those who travel with the class and those who stay back, are engaged in the planning and re-integration process to ensure that the learning of the trip has meaning before and after the actual travel. Parents participate not only as fund raisers, but also as decision-makers, chaperones, and later, ambassadors from the school to our larger community, promoting the excellent travel experience as a benchmark of the school's overall commitment to excellence.

Betty Winn in the Head of School at the Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School in Northridge, CA and a participant in Project SuLaM. Betty can be reached at betty_winn@ajhds.com



Jerry D. Isaak-Shapiro

Bridging the Gap

In 2004, it was twenty very tall eighth graders from Buenos Aires, who thought that their southern hemisphere “winter” jackets could really hold up against a Midwestern January (they were wrong)... In 2005, there were ten Israelis, five

from Beit Shean and five from Netanya, who lived with our middle schoolers’ families, went tobogganing with their adopted “siblings” and who cried at the airport until we peeled them away from their American “parents”. This year, another ten Israeli eighth graders descended upon our school and our homes and our classes – and ever so slightly began to bridge the gap between the *Golah* and Israel.

Three years, forty new friends and hundreds of changed relationships later, I’m more convinced than ever that this program – the ORT Lipson International Student Program – is worth every headache (there are a few) and every dollar (more than a few) it takes. We’ve tweaked and altered and modified since our first experiment in cross-cultural bonding. We discovered that what we were told about English language facility was a bit exaggerated, and we had to rush to find an ESL teacher. We learned that too many centralized evening programs were... too many – and that, oddly enough, too few were, yes, too few. We gradually developed a very realistic picture for our prospective host families about expectations (in terms of time, schlepping and finances); and we were able to persuade our faculty that having six or eight or even ten new students in class, for five weeks in the middle of the school year wasn’t that disruptive to their classes.

We also were reminded about pre-assumptions – they’re not healthy (and truth to tell, even more embarrassing for educators). Argentineans are, as a rule, far more comfortable than Midwesterners about physicality (read: they hug a lot – parents, adopted parents, younger siblings). To them,

Americans were aloof – to the extent that they wondered if it was something they did or said. And to our adopting parents, who opened up their homes and their lives, they couldn’t figure out what the problem was. Cultural relativism was clearly one of the learning by-products of the program. Since that first year, we understood that preparing visitors and adopting families for the “little” differences was essential.

Another vignette from the first year: Cleveland is fortunate to have a *shlichah* “attached to the schools, and one of the units we asked her to prepare was a course on Tzahal (the IDF – Israeli Defense Force). The heart of the lesson was to understand and appreciate the role of the army in Israel, as a social equalizer and a step toward Zionist fulfillment – as much as an obvious means for security and for national protection, she added a new twist, putting our 12- and 13-year olds through their paces, marching and going through “basic training.”

The American students got into it – and the Argentineans ran out of the room.

We ended up doing a semi-impromptu values clarification exercise, with Argentinean, Israeli and American students and teachers reacting to military-related words and images and concepts. The words with which the Americans described the military: power, pride, strength (remember this is on the heels of going into Baghdad); the Argentineans came up with fear, fascist and anti-Semitic. And the Israelis (OK, and some of the rest of us, silently mouthing the same words): Jewish identity, Zionism, family, brother.

All Jews. All reacting to ostensibly the same images and concepts – yet all reacting differently because of our radically different backgrounds and contexts. The Argentineans’ army was an instrument of an anti-Semitic government; Jews were disproportionately amongst the “disappeared” – and they legitimately feared anyone in uniform. American suburban Jews, who to a per-

son didn’t know and would likely never know someone personally in uniform, only echoed what they knew from the then-favorable news accounts. And Israelis saw uniforms in general, and Israeli uniforms in particular as something they see every day – something very personal. It was a great teaching moment.

We prepped our teachers and our families and the school itself – it helped, and of course it didn’t help at all (that first year). Now, after three years, families understand what’s expected of them, teachers know that for four weeks things will be different. The upshot? Families keeping in touch with their adopted son/daughter through e-mails and phone calls (anyone write letters anymore?). A couple of face-to-face meetings “in the middle” (evidently Epcot Center is smack dab in the middle of Buenos Aires and Cleveland). And our eighth grade trip in the spring now deters to the home city of our adopted Israeli students – which partially closes that loop.

Here’s a bonus from the program: since I came to wintry Ohio, I started yakking to anyone within earshot of a program in which our students would live with Israeli families, developing even closer ties to the Land and People. I pretty much threw the idea on the back burner, thinking it’d take a little longer to develop the home-grown core constituency. Two days ago at a debriefing meeting of host parents, the idea bubbled up from them, organically and naturally. We’re now talking about tacking on two weeks prior to the eighth grade trip, during which time we’ll match our students with Israeli counterparts. It might not be for everyone (it’ll take some time to weave it seamlessly into the culture) – but it’s absolutely and directly attributable to the program over the last three years. Call it a sea change – or a paradigm shift – or just call it really, really good stuff. These programs are transformational.

Lots of time and energy and not a few dollars are required to make it work.

Initially, it'll demand hours and focus from Heads and administrative support and chief lay leadership. Forget the payoff in terms of PR and good will (both of which are huge and tangible); leave aside the community relations, partner-building aspects with other institutions and the Federation (very real, very – very – beneficial to the school). And for the moment, don't focus on the implicit statement it makes about your school: that we take risks, that we can do something different and exciting.

I'd do it all over again, in a heartbeat, for the other reasons. We can talk about *klal Yisrael* until we're blue in the face – but putting it into action makes it come alive. To teach about Israel to middle schoolers becomes developing a relationship with Israel – when an Israeli student their age lives in their home. On a very human, very adolescent level, they see that they wear the same jeans, listen to much of the same music and have similar family tree stories – if they go back far enough. At the same time, they might see that growing up Jewish in the free and insular Midwest is very, very different from what their new brothers and sisters experi-

ence in Argentina, where Jews have a dramatically different public profile. They learn that they both have a different perspective from that of their Israeli counterparts.

The details are the easy part. We happen to benefit from terrific communal partners in our local American ORT chapter, and there's now a fair amount of wisdom generated from some of the glorious mistakes we've all made over the first few years of the program. It takes extra money and extra time and extra energy – and the payoff is in an invigorated school, a programmatic opportunity second-to-none and positive community visibility that no amount of money could buy.

But the really important part is that this is a program that absolutely changes lives and transforms the Jewish world, one relationship at a time.

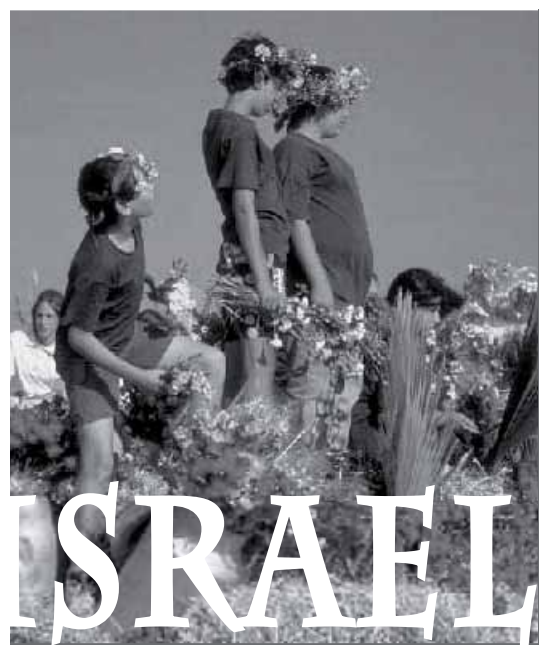
Jerry D. Isaak-Shapiro is the Head of School at The Agnon School in Beachwood, OH and a mentor in Project SuLaM. Jerry can be reached at isaak-shapiro@agnon.org

Follow Up from Our Special-Ed Edition

As a private teacher, I have worked with numerous children who have a range of learning challenges. All of them have successfully learned to read Hebrew. One of the tools at my fingertips has been the Sarah and David system for Hebrew reading; a system designed to make the process of learning to read Hebrew doable for both special needs and mainstream learners.

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Lily Yacobi is a private teacher of Hebrew and Bar/Bat Mitzvah. She is also co-author of the Sarah and David Hebrew reading curriculum. www.sarahdavid.com



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Young Judea

Young Judea is the Zionist youth movement of Hadassah. Founded in 1909, Young Judea serves to enhance Jewish identity and Zionist commitment among American

[continued on page 17]

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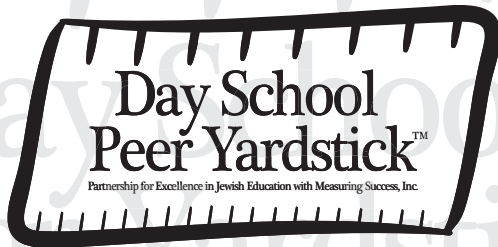
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PEJE Page

(Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education)

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The Day School Peer Yardstick is a tool for the day school field that enables schools to track data and benchmark their performance in areas that have been quantified as indicators of enrollment growth.

For more information and to register, contact Colin Codner at colin@peje.org or 617-367-0001, ext. 132.

Communities of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of professionals who share a concern or set of problems and systematically share knowledge and expertise about how to improve their practice, and the practice of their organization, by interacting on an ongoing basis.

At PEJE, Communities of Practice are ways for individu-

als in the day school field to stay connected and access expertise through conference calls and listservs. At the PEJE Assembly for Jewish Day School Education in March, members of the current CoPs had a chance to meet in person. PEJE Staff serve as facilitators for the following CoPs—please contact them to join!

Admission Professionals -

Rebecca Egolf rebecca@peje.org

Lay Leaders -

Mollie Aczel mgacz@aol.com

Financial Managers & Treasurers - Stephane Acel
stephane@peje.org

Development Professionals representing MATCH schools - Sheila Alexander sheila@peje.org

PEJE Publications

Looking for new ideas to help grow your enrollment? Be sure to review PEJE's latest volume in the Noteworthy Practices series, Trends in Growing Enrollment. The publication—available for free download at www.peje.org—contains noteworthy practices from schools that are achieving success in recruitment, retention, and admission. You'll learn more about projects like Akiba Hebrew Academy's "First Tuesday" open houses, the N.E. Miles Jewish Day School's Preschool Story Time, Minneapolis Jewish Day School's Taste of Kindergarten, and Austin Jewish Academy's Magical Middle School Mystery Tour, among others.

Watch for the next volume of Noteworthy Practices, which focuses on how Jewish day schools are meeting the needs of diverse learners. Publication coming this spring.

Correction:

For those of you who received a bulletin at the RAV-SAK conference, please make note that the Facing History and Ourselves "Teaching the Holocaust in a Jewish Setting" information is inaccurate. The dates are July 16-21, 2006 and it will take place at Hebrew College in Newton, MA.

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[continued from page 14]

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From the Executive Director

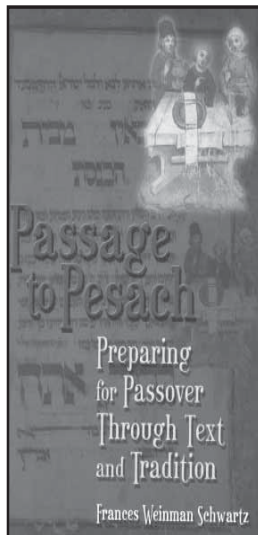
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related issues not be overlooked: When possible, trip fees should be structured such that each student is charged slightly more than the actual per-person cost, creating from those who can afford the trip a subsidy for those for whom the cost is a significant burden. Attempt to reduce costs related to lodging through home hospitality (camping can be as – if not more- expensive than a tourist class hotel). Finally, be forthright with prospective tour providers about what your families can afford and do not hesitate to negotiate with them prior to signing a contract.

All of the critical issues are served well with clear educational goals, confident, consistent communications, and effective planning. Keep in mind the words of the Congressional Record from March of 2003: "Student travel is a vital component of the educational process and should be encouraged so that Americans, young and old, can participate in travel, the perfect freedom."

Nesiyah tovah (travel well).

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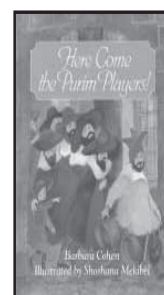
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This year RAVSAK embarked on its first Annual Campaign. We are pleased to report that to date, we have reached 75% of our total goal and with your support we are confident that we will see 100%. Although we have yet to realize our entire financial goal, we have achieved two other important goals – 100% participation of the Executive Committee and 100% participation of the RAVSAK staff. We look forward to have 100% support from our entire membership.

We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to the RAVSAK Annual Campaign:

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