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SAVE
THE
DATE!

ANNUAL GALA

Sunday,
March 11, 2007

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Israel Reflections

BY RABBI JASON
HERMAN
Class of '05

In the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, we who were in YCT at that time were privileged to hear Rabbi Weiss speak on the question “Where was God after September 11th?” I do not intend to recap that entire talk, but to focus instead on one suggested answer. Namely, that God was found in the heroes who responded to the tragedy and rose to extraordinary heights in the face of adversity. The same sentiment was echoed by President Bush, who declared to Congress that he did not need to deliver a State of the Union address after September 11, because the message had already been delivered by the American people.



Rabbi Avi Weiss visits the wounded at Rambam Hospital.

In that spirit, as a framework for reflecting on the week I spent with Rabbi Avi Weiss and colleague Yonah Berman (YCT '07) traveling in Northern Israel immediately after this summer's war with Lebanon, I share with you the message the Israeli people were sending us.



Rabbis Avi Weiss and Jason Herman with a family from Kiryat Shemona.

As one can read in Rabbi Weiss' diary, our trip began with a visit to wounded soldiers in Haifa's Rambam hospital. These soldiers fought bravely for the State of Israel, the entire Jewish people, and fought hard to stay alive. Rambam hospital is more than just a place to treat wounded soldiers. It is home to a team of the most outstanding health care professionals anywhere in the world. 117 soldiers fell during this war, a tremendous and costly number for any country, let alone a country as small as Israel. Though over 5,000 were wounded, that number could have been even more astronomical and even more unbearable were it not for the advancement and dedication of Israel's medical professionals. But it doesn't end there. In addition to treating soldiers, the staff of Rambam worked tirelessly to move most of the hospital underground, setting up whole new wards in the basement to help protect their patients from Katyusha attacks. As impressive as their lifesaving skills were and their rise to the challenge, I was most impressed at seeing the bedside manner of Dr. Jesse Lachter,

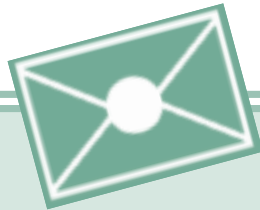
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Our Mission

YCT Rabbinical School's mission is to inspire and professionally train rabbis to lead the Jewish community and to shape its spiritual and intellectual character in consonance with open and modern Orthodox values and commitments.

Our Core Values

- Inspiring a passionate commitment to the study of Torah in all its rich forms and the scrupulous observance of Halakha.
- Cultivating spirituality—God consciousness, piety, and ethical sensitivity—and integrating it into all learning, religious practice, and worldly pursuits.
- Encouraging intellectual openness, questioning and critical thinking as essential components of one's full service to God (*avodat Hashem*).
- Affirming the shared covenantal bond between all Jews. Promoting *ahavat Yisrael* and actively pursuing positive and respectful interaction of all Jewish movements.
- Recognizing the need to enhance and expand the role of women in *talmud Torah*, the halakhic process, religious life and communal leadership within the bounds of Halakha.
- Recognizing *Eretz Yisrael* as our homeland and affirming the religious and historical significance of the State of Israel for all Jews in Israel and the Diaspora.
- Affirming the shared *tzelem Elokim* of all people, our responsibility to improve the world and our capacity to be enriched by it.
- Living our personal, family and public lives guided by the highest ethical and moral standards, reflective of *yosher* and *kiddush shem Shamayim*.



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CHOVEVEI FACTS

In just seven years since its inception, YCT has become a premier rabbinical school developing open Modern Orthodox leaders for *Klal Yisrael*.

TODAY

- Number of students in the program: **44**
- Number of alumni in the field: **27**
- Number of synagogues served by YCT alumni: **15**
- Number of Hillels served by YCT alumni: **4**
- Number of day schools served by YCT alumni: **7**
- Number of lives touched by YCT alumni: **countless** (by our modest calculations, about 10,000)



FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

BY RABBI AVI WEISS

The holiday of Sukkot, which we have just celebrated, is one of contradicting themes. The sukkah itself, built outdoors, symbolizes our openness to the larger world. A universal message. And yet, it is historically the place Jews dwelled in on their way to Israel. A nationalistic message. Here, the sukkah represents opposite ideals: universalism and nationalism.

And the holiday is one of ingathering, *hag haassif*. Here the people of Israel come to Jerusalem to celebrate their success; they've succeeded in plowing, seeding and harvesting. It's a message of human achievement. But in the same breath, the Torah asks us to come to Jerusalem to acknowledge the role of God in the harvest. Without God, it would have been impossible. Hence, we recite *hoshanot*, calling out, "Ana Hashem hoshia na—Oh God, please save us." Here, *hag haassif* represents different assessment of the human condition, achievement and dependency.

What is the significance of Sukkot's conflicting themes? For some, the goal in life is to live with absolutes; something is either right or wrong, black or white, night or day. One is a universalist or particularist, powerful or dependent. They are absolute categories that don't mix.

Sukkot points us in another direction, the direction of dialectic. Dialectic means that opposite ideas can thrive together, they can even be in tension and from that tension true and profound creativity emerges. It's like a thick rope being pulled by powerful people at each of its ends. The rope becomes taut; at the point where the rope is stretched and tight, there is a dialectic.

The goal is not to be a universalist or a particularist, it's not even to be a universalist at times and a particularist at others, it is rather to be both simultaneously, to fuse the two values, and from the tension, from the dialectic, the deeper meaning of life will be found. This is the message of Sukkot's opposites: to allow opposites to live in conflict together.

Let me offer another example of a dialectic. For the past few years I've been referring to Modern or Centrist Orthodoxy as 'Open Orthodoxy.' I've stopped using the term 'modern,' as the word 'modern' is passé in the post modern world. Nor do I use the word 'centrist,' as 'centrist' demands that we be in the middle, that we are defined by our flanks. When they move we must move to retain the center. In that sense, we are reacting rather than acting. I like the term 'open,' which for me means inclusive, non-judgmental, never coercive, allowing input from all, not just the rabbis. Open, but Orthodox.

Orthodox means a commitment to Torah *min hashamayim*, a Torah which at its base, comes from God, what is called heteronymous law. Orthodox means a commitment to the minutia of Halakha. Orthodox is not Orthodox Lite. It is Orthodox, taking prayer and learning and Halakha and *avodat Hashem* as seriously as the Orthodox Right, Agudah or Black Hat and Chassidic Judaism.

And here is the dialectic. Some wonder whether the term 'Open Orthodox' is an oxymoron. Orthodox connotes being closed, rigid and frozen; open is the opposite. In fact, when most people think Orthodox, the ideology that instantly comes to mind is one of withdrawal, of circling the wagons, of insularization, not openness.

We insist, however, that we can be meticulously committed to the minutiae of Halakha and still be open. Open and inclusive of women, of modernity, of the religious significance of the State of Israel, of Conservative and Reform,

of all Jews, of all people. For the Open Orthodox Jew, true and profound religio—legal creativity and spiritual striving emerges from the tension between the poles of strict halakhic adherence and open ideological pursuits. They appear to be opposites when in fact they are one—they live in dialectic.

The Jewish world is changing. Orthodoxy is moving right. At the same time Conservative is moving left, closer to Reform, which in the area of ritual is moving right. In time, I believe, the Conservative and Reform movements will merge. My sense is that after approving homosexual rabbis and marriages, Conservative Judaism will subscribe to Reform's patrilineal descent. Thus, for Conservative and Reform Judaism a new definition of Jewish nationhood will emerge. In between is Open Orthodoxy, which I believe can be the most attractive to the vast multitudes of our people. People want a philosophy which is rooted and yet fluid, anchored and forward thinking still.

That's the mission of Open Orthodoxy. It is one of dialectic. Open and Orthodox appear as contradictory visions, but in the end they merge, leading to deep religious meaning and spiritual yearning and feeling the presence of God. Hence, the challenge today is for Open Orthodox synagogues and schools to be ideologically open, while intensely committed to Halakha. It is in these types of settings where, I believe, Judaism can best thrive.

It is here that our rabbinical school plays a key role. Just recently, we published a map of the United States, indicating where our graduates are serving (see page 4 of newsletter). It was overwhelming to look at the map, and see how our graduates are spreading the message of Open Orthodoxy throughout the country in synagogues, schools, and on campuses. In three short years of ordaining students, we have already impacted mightily upon

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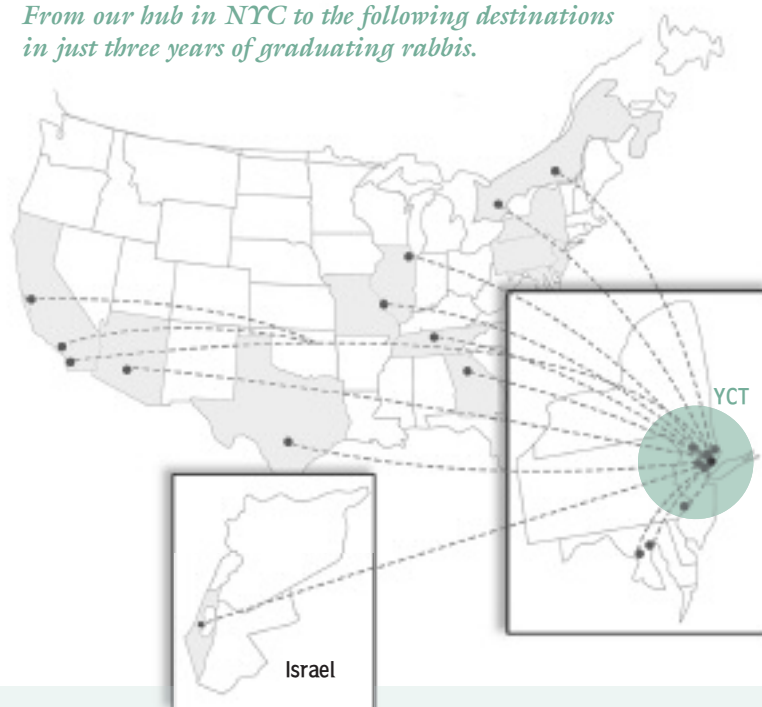
Bringing Open Orthodox Leadership to a Community Near You

Across North America, 27 rabbis ordained at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah come into regular contact with nearly 10,000 people as rabbis of synagogues, Hillels and Jewish educators in Yeshiva High Schools.

They are starting new synagogues and invigorating old ones. They are bringing a vibrant Open Orthodoxy to Jewish students on campus—open to the world and open to all Jews. They are introducing to their schools and classrooms a spirit of intellectual excellence infused with spiritual passion and a love of Torah.

The rabbis ordained at YCT are a fresh breeze into Jewish institutional life. They bring with them profound knowledge of the texts of the tradition, full commitment to Halakha and love of, and with openness to, all Jews. Their continued creative work will enrich the whole of Jewry. Watch them grow.

From our hub in NYC to the following destinations in just three years of graduating rabbis.



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Rosh Kollel, Atlanta Torah MiTzion

Baltimore, MD | Rabbi Jack Nahmod

Rabbinic Associate, Beth Tfiloh
Congregation; Judaic Studies Instructor,
Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School

Berkeley, CA | Rabbi Yonatan Cohen

Rabbi, Congregation Beth Israel

Chicago, IL | Rabbi Joshua Feigelson

Campus Rabbi, The Louis and Saeree Fiedler
Hillel Center of Northwestern University

Jerusalem, Israel | Rabbi Jonathan Duker

Faculty, Midreshet Lindenbaum

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Judaic Studies Faculty, Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School

Los Angeles, CA | Rabbi Ari Leubitz

Assistant Rabbi, B'nai David-Judea Congregation

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Rabbi, Congregation Shaar Hashomayim

Nashville, TN | Rabbi Saul Strosberg

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New York, NY

Rabbi David Almog

Campus Rabbi, Columbia/Barnard Hillel

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Creating Community

BY RABBI YAMIN LEVY
VICE PRESIDENT
OF YESHIVA AFFAIRS

One of the most important skills I sought to develop during my eighteen years in the Rabbinate, was the ability to teach Judaism in a manner that would resonate meaningfully with Jews of various backgrounds. Though I served Orthodox Sephardic communities in New Jersey, Seattle and Long Island, each community was made up of people with starkly different backgrounds, varying levels of observance and diverse beliefs. I knew from the very start of my career how important it would be to actively reach out

"...we must embrace the values of all Jews, encourage questions, debate, and thought, reflect on our differences and ensure those differences make us stronger."

to all Jews—regardless of religious observance—and cast out a net as broad as possible in order to fulfill my personal mission of creating an inclusive community. It was Rabbi Weiss who first taught me, early on in my career, that my charge as a rabbi was to fight indifference—persuade Jews of all backgrounds to confront their identity, their culture, and their history. He helped me

realize that the purpose of my rabbinic training was not so much to provide answers to Halakhic questions, but rather to engage Jews in the process of creating questions. The process of creating an open, all-inclusive community, a community without boundaries, borders or litmus tests, should be the goal of all emerging rabbis. Since Rabbi Weiss had modeled this for us, I knew that this was the only way to build a strong Judaism; a Judaism that is ready to tackle the problems and meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The teachings of Maimonides have always been a source of inspiration and guidance for me in my work with God and Community. Rambam's approach to Torah, as expressed in his *Guide to the Perplexed*, has been especially useful. In the Maimonidean tradition, I also learned that a true teacher must begin his/her lesson where the students are in their world. In order to do this effectively, one must master the art of listening before speaking.

This, more than any other aspect of my rabbinic training, was the most difficult and most frightening. It is not enough to hear about one's estrangement—listening is empathizing; it is feeling that sense of deep alienation from tradition and trying to understand its roots. I had to painstakingly demonstrate patience and put on hold the answers I was armed with from my training in rabbinical school, in order to be clear about the questions that were emerging.

With this in mind, as I begin my tenure at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, it is clear to me more than ever, that those of us embarking on the sacred task of creating a community in a generation that includes many who are indifferent and alienated from their Jewish roots and apathetic to their spiritual center cannot begin by demanding observance. Too many Jews are simply not engaged in a serious fashion with their Judaism. Judaism, Maimonides taught 800 years ago, will always hold contemporary relevance because it is a religion that focuses on how the practices and conceptual frameworks of Jewish law and theology can influence a person's character and perspective on life.

Ours is a tradition that demands we assume responsibility for our community. Our sages were fully aware of the numerous risks that Jewish communal spirituality entailed. One who seeks absolute certainty will find little comfort in a tradition whose response to the disagreements between Hillel and Shamai is that both schools of thought were the word of the living God.

Yet, it is this very principle that is at the foundation of my personal philosophy. Together, we must embrace the values of all Jews, encourage questions, debate, and thought, reflect on our differences and ensure those differences make us stronger, and not ever—God forbid—break us apart or divide us in any way.

But how can we do this? How, in a world that is so insular, can we truly be accepting and all-inclusive? How can observance, by its very nature a practice that separates those who do from those who don't, bind us together?

The answer is not easy, but it is simple. In order to build a spiritual life within a living community, one must give up the idealized notion of viewing religion in terms of salvation of the soul. Torah finds its fullest expression when it emerges from a sense of responsibility and solidarity with community. The biblical narratives are not like some theologians would have us believe: stories of rebellion and sin. Though there is plenty of that in the Torah, those stories are precisely a testament to the fact that God gave the Torah to a community of human beings and not angels. A community that learned from its mistakes, not reveled in its triumphs. These stories are a tribute to God's belief in man's potential of becoming responsible and capable of fulfilling its historic task of becoming a holy people. They are a mark of God's understanding of the limitless potential that human beings encompass to include those who have traditionally been left out of the limelight. It is this, the bringing in of the traditionally outcast, the ingathering of the exiled, that we so often and earnestly pray for. It is this that is at the very heart of the YCT mission. ■

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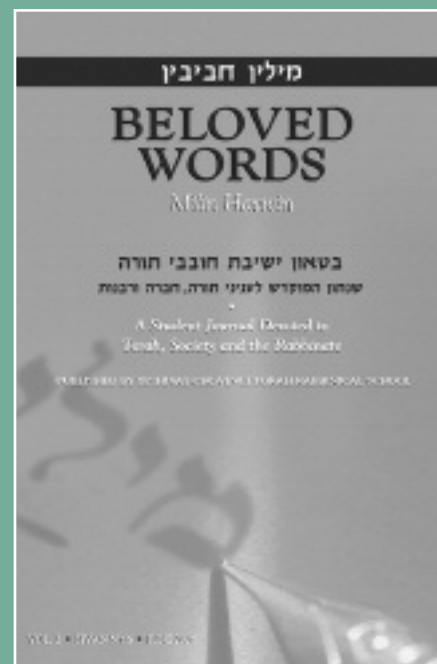
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Community Profile: Congregation Kehillat Darom Ma'arav

YCT Alumnus Brings Open Orthodoxy to the Southwest

KiDma (Kehillat Darom Ma'arav) translates to “The Southwest Community” and also means “progress” in Hebrew. The synagogue, founded by Rabbi Darren Kleinberg (YCT '05), is a new open and Modern Orthodox congregation in Phoenix, Arizona. Established in 2006, KiDma is a Modern Orthodox community that welcomes Jews from all walks of Jewish life and is committed to prayer, study, community, pluralism and passionate Judaism.



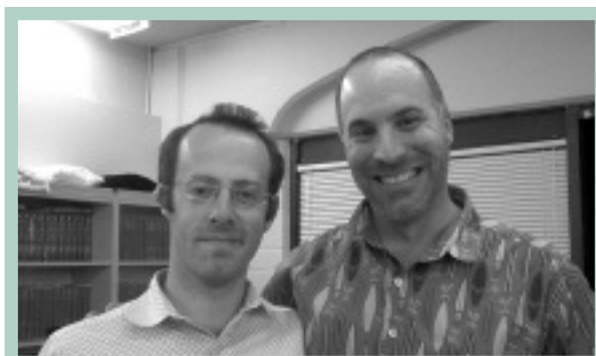
Services at KiDma

Members of KiDma have offered glowing praise for the emerging community.

Mr. Evan Bernstein proclaims: *“Rabbi Kleinberg has been a wonderful addition to the Phoenix Jewish Community. The starting of KiDma has been wonderful in helping people that are interested in Orthodox Judaism to have a comfortable, warm place to pray. Rabbi Kleinberg has brought in dynamic speakers, like Rabbi Saul Berman, who have helped the shul grow and gain notoriety. On a personal note, if it was not for Rabbi Kleinberg, I would not be as observant a Jew as I am today.”*

“My wife and I have been coming to KiDma since the first Shabbat. We appreciate the relaxed atmosphere in the synagogue and the fact that it is all inclusive. My wife likes the “friendly” mechitza and I like to be in an upcoming community and to be part of its growth. Rabbi Kleinberg is very knowledgeable and his derashot are inspiring,”

Fred Greenwood shared.



Rabbi Darren Kleinberg teaching at a joint program with Rabbi Peter Levi of Temple Chai

KiDma Facts:

- The new, flourishing community boasts over 50 people at Shabbat services.
- Congregants range from babies to octogenarians.
- Non-Shabbat programs, including lectures, musical and social events, all attract a minimum of 50 people. A recent showing of the film “Mekudeshet” followed by a panel discussion attracted over 250 attendees.
- Recent donations by committed individuals include 2 Sifrei Torah, 100 Artscroll Siddurim, an Ark and a Bimah—including 200 Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Machzorim.
- KiDma has received over 100 individual donations ranging from \$18.00 to \$10,000.00.
- Due to KiDma’s effect, a number of couples move or intend to move from locations outside of the *eruv* into the *eruv*, in order to be within walking distance of the shul.



Purim Carnival participants at KiDma



Student Profile

Daniel Braune Friedman | Class of '09

It's 3:30am. I am quickly awakened by my beeper. I rip myself out of bed and dial into the medical intensive care unit. They tell me that Maria Florenza¹ is actively dying and needs a priest. I ask to speak with the family, but they do not want to talk, as they have just been told that their mother is in critical condition. The attending physician tells me that she could die at any time. I ascertain that the sacrament of the sick has not been given and I contact the priest on call.

The next morning I check in with the family. By this point, only her daughter is there and she doesn't seem to know how critical the condition of her mother is. I am able to take her aside and talk with her a bit. It is obvious how difficult it is for her to experience the possible loss of her parent. Towards the end of the conversation, I offer to give a prayer and she gladly accepts. I pray that God grant her mother peace during this time, that He give strength to her and her siblings, and that God grant compassion and wisdom to her health care workers. It is clear that prayer gives her some comfort but even though I intentionally leave out a prayer for healing, I know she is still holding on to hope. I am in no position to challenge this hope, but I know it's also important to begin suggesting the idea that her mother may very well pass away.

At times of great need, we go back to our tradition. When the physical world seems to be failing us, we turn to the spiritual plane for answers. The rabbi is the obvious manifestation of this action, and the best person to help the distressed person find spiritual comfort.

My experience with this family was one of several similar experiences this summer. A nagging thought I had in my head asked me, "What right do I have to be in these situations? Why did I get access to restricted intensive care units? Why did families appreciate and even request the presence of second-year rabbinical student to tell me about their dying mothers, dysfunctional livers and heroine addictions? Why was my prayer at their bed side far more meaningful than their own?"

These questions came up almost daily as I walked the halls as a Chaplain Intern at Beth Israel Medical Center this past summer. I know it's a question many of us ask as rabbinical students and may even stay with us after the mighty hands of *Semikha* are laid upon us.

Intellectually, this question is an easy one to answer. At times of great need, we go back to our tradition. When the physical world seems to be failing us, we turn to the spiritual plane for answers. The rabbi is the obvious manifestation of this action, and the best person to help the distressed person find spiritual comfort. "*Mimankim karaticha HaShem*—from the depths I call to you, God."

But rabbinical students have heard this answer before, and still the question of "why us?" remains. Perhaps in our minds we must know that the patient, family member, congregant, needs a rabbi or even a rabbinical student, and we also know that in our hearts there will be a side to us that feels fearful to be the voice of God. Instead of running from this fear, we can use it to connect to the person sitting with us, as that person is also feeling fear, and we now can better relate to it. ■

¹Fictitious Name

Continued from page 3:

From the Desk of the President | RABBI AVI WEISS

the Jewish community. We've only been able to do this with your help and support, for which we are so grateful.

To be sure, there is something very comforting about living in a world of absolutes. Life is much easier. There is something soothing about getting easy answers to life's hard questions.

Sukkot, which is the only holiday called *bag simchatinu*, the holiday of joy, suggests an alternative. True joy emerges when recognizing that life is not simple; it often encompasses opposites, a dialectic from which comes significant growth, fulfillment, and happiness. It may not be the easier way, but it is the better way. ■

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from YCT, information on
upcoming events, and a
thought on the weekly Parsha.

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At Yeshivat Chovevei Torah's new website you can:

- Download *shiurim*
- See how our students and alumni are putting the message of Open Orthodoxy into practice
- Read YCT news and publications
- Find upcoming events
- and more!

Continued from cover:

Israel Reflections | RABBI JASON HERMAN

a talented gastroenterologist and our guide in the hospital. He warmly sat by each soldier we visited, clutching his/her hand and making each feel cared for. The message sent by the doctors and staff at Rambam is of a people who will go to any lengths to perpetuate life in Israel, to protect life, and to do so with love.

That same message could have been heard from Sarit Gomez, standing over the grave of her fallen husband Daniel Gomez, the helicopter pilot shot down over Lebanon less than two days before the cease fire. She promised him that she would look after their unborn child in this world, if he looked after the child from heaven. In a moment of heart wrenching grief and sorrow was a promise to live on.

The message was heard from the son of Yosef Himi, a factory owner in Kiryat Shemona who had an entire building of his plant destroyed by a Katyusha. Sitting in Yosef's office and speaking about the economic hardships that have been hurting his town even before the recent war, we heard the powerful message of the younger Himi, who promised that after touring the world, he would return to Kiryat Shemona, because that was his home.

The same message was heard from the brave *chayalim* returning from battle across the Lebanon border. Feeling like they had been sent into a situation that could generously be described as disorganized, these soldiers wanted to fight and do their part to defend *Am Yisrael*. I was touched at being able to see how much my colleague Yonah Berman (class of '07) had been hoping that his unit would be called up as well, so that he could serve with these soldiers we were greeting.

The message was heard yet again by all the volunteers at Livnot U'lehibanot in Tzfat who worked tirelessly (under fire) to bring food to the residents of Tzfat during the war and candy to the wounded soldiers in the Tzfat hospital.

Again, we heard it from the family of Ehud Goldwasser, who remains in captivity despite the costly war fought to save him. While the reality of the situation was beginning to sink in for them, they were occupied with the struggle of what to do next in order to bring him home. The time right after the war was clearly a confusing time for them, but the resolve was the same.

After hearing these messages for three days in the North, we returned to Yerushalayim to attend the wedding of Ofer Bedolah and Hadar Schonfeld. It was at their wed-

ding, however, that the message was delivered louder and clearer. Many of Ofer and Hadar's friends had families that had just returned from the war. Hadar comes from Nechalim, the moshav of Daniel Gomez, whose funeral we had attended 3 nights earlier and saw many of the same faces at the funeral and the wedding. Earlier that week, it was unclear whether Hadar's brother Matan would even make it to wedding. Watching the friends and families of Ofer and Hadar dance and smile until the wee hours of the morning, it was clear what the Israeli people were telling us.

In the face of so much tragedy, devastation and sorrow, the Israeli people, really the entire Jewish people, were telling us that the most important thing for them is to continue to live, and to live at home in Israel in happiness and peace, and they would spare no effort to attain that goal.

Od Yishama B'arei Yehuda U'Vechutzot Yerushalayim Kol Sasson V'Kol Simkha, Kol Chatan V'kol Kallah. ■

Rabbi Jason Herman graduated YCT in 2005. He now serves as the Rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel-West Side Jewish Center in New York City.

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Save the Date!

Sunday, March 11, 2007

5 pm

Pier 60, New York City

An event not to be missed!

YCT's Fourth Annual Gala Dinner
and Torah Dedication

Honoring:

Rabbi Joseph and Mrs. Sandra Ehrenkranz
Lifetime Rabbinic Achievement Award

Mr. Michael Brill and Ms. Judy Abel
Keter Shem Tov Award

and The S. Daniel Abraham Semikha Fellows of 2007
YCT's 4th graduating class

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