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## 36 Under 36 2009: Ari Hart, 26



by Randi Sherman

Ari Hart has always seen the future of the Jewish people entwined with the future of the cultures that exist in their midst, whether it be in Biloxi, Miss., Spain or Chicago, all the locations of his youth. He believes that to take care of his own, he must also care for the stranger.

"Encountering people different from me, learning from them, I was seeing my sense of safety and security tied up in these other communities, those local and around the world," he says. "The voice of social justice speaks through Torah, Talmud and halacha. The purpose of Judaism is to create a sacred community on earth."

It is with these beliefs that Hart, now a student at Yeshiva Chovevei Torah, set out to aid his fellow man. With a 2006 grant from the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs in Chicago, he launched Or Tzedek, an immersion program for teenage future social justice leaders. He took Jewish kids from Chicago, Texas and Alaska, living "mostly suburban, sheltered lives," and introduced them to "a whole other Chicago," the Chicago witnessed by his father who works in the public health sector and his mother who worked with underprivileged children, the Chicago with racist housing policies and poor public planning. The program showed the teens how to create social change in their own backyards. Setting an example, he served as the court-appointed advocate for a child in an abuse case.

Not that moving to New York for rabbinical school has slowed him down. Hart joined Uri L'Tzedek, founded by Shmuly Yanklowitz (one of last year's "36 Under 36"), in the fall. He had just moved to Washington Heights, where he is a member of the community board, and where he saw the disconnect between the Jewish community and other residents of the neighborhood. Under the auspices of Uri L'Tzedek, he started a clothing drive to bring the communities together. Another of the organization's projects he feels very strongly speaks to his values is Tav HaYosher, an initiative to make sure that kosher restaurants, in addition to following the laws of kashrut, establish laws of decency toward their workers, ensuring they are justly treated, fairly paid and protected from exploitation.

"We as a community need to think about what our gates are, where our responsibility lies," he said.

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**Extraordinary extracurricular:** Hart serves as an overnight volunteer at Anshe Chesed's men's shelter, setting up cots in the shul's preschool, sleeping there and helping the men get out in the morning.

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