

Steve Brown of JTS Consults on Teaching Israel in Difficult Times

Steve Brown, Dean of Distance Learning and Director of the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education at JTS consulted recently with several IJE Leadership Seminar Fellows and alumni during the first IJE distance consultation. He responded to participants' questions and concerns around the issue of teaching Israel during these painful times, stressing that it is the responsibility of educators to acknowledge their own feelings of frustration, passion and confusion, while separating those feelings from their responsibilities to students. Educators' strategies will depend on the age of the students; he urged giving students the "the best shot we can" to form an appreciation and love for Israel while at the same time acknowledging the difficult current realities for those who are old enough. Steve offered support in dealing with this issue, as well as a number of practical suggestions and program ideas (see story, p. 2).

Here are some highlights of the conversation:

Q: When planning camp programming, how can we balance our own love of

Israel with kids' awareness of what's happening in the news?

SB: We can still be committed to teaching feelings about Israel, especially to younger children in whom we can instill a sense of wonder and excitement. With older kids, we can ask: Why do we care so much? What is going on?

Q: It's delicate and problematic to criticize Israel. What does that say about loyalty? How can we teach that?

SB: Use the idea of separating the person from the action. How do you handle it when you're angry with a friend, or when someone you love disappoints you? Look at similar patterns in relationships with people.

Q: In past years we've sent our senior counselors and unit heads to Israel for training but this year they're not going. The educators themselves are not ready to go and there is a lack of staff who feel enough confidence to grapple with the issue of Israel.

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From the Director

At a recent mini-conference on Israel in summer camps I was sitting at the table with four alumni and several faculty from our first year of the Leadership Seminar. We were working as colleagues together on a pressing issue in informal Jewish education—how to maximize the educational value of shlichim during this difficult time. I felt this is why we began the IJE: to create high-level professional discourse on the most pressing issues facing informal Jewish education.

The faculty, fellows and alumni of the IJE are a dynamic group of informal Jewish educators working at the forefront of this field. This newsletter is devoted to keeping us informed about what is new in our work and our lives and what is new in the field. I am delighted to welcome you to this first issue and hope you will see its pages as a vehicle for your news and best ideas. I want to thank Susanne and Bradley for taking the IJE in this new direction.

Wishing you all a productive summer and more peaceful world.

Joe Reimer

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“Person-to-person connection is the surest way to instill a love of Israel into the soul.”

SB: We could have the same conversation around dealing with God. Raising questions without having answers is fine. Sometimes conflicts can't be resolved, just managed. Tell them, “this is a time when people are asking questions... Israel is important in my life because my Judaism is important.” Give the staff permission to not have answers. The worst message they could give is to not deal with it at all. Also, make sure you keep celebrating good things about Israel and make the students feel this is a temporary situation.

Q: Many of the educators in our summer program are Israeli. How can I provide support for them during the abrupt transition to our setting, give participants access to their experiences and be sensitive to what they could be going through?

SB: As you absorb them into the community, make them feel valued, com-

fortable and part of the family. Make sure they stay integrated into the group through the length of the program. Their presence will help participants form emotional connections to Israel through their relationships with these staff. Person-to-person connection is the surest way to instill the love of Israel into the soul.

Q: What suggestions do you have for programming for the overflow of students we expect this summer?

SB: Remember this is a real opportunity to involve them Jewishly. Don't forget to give educators the time and space they need to discuss and think about their own responsibilities and their reactions to the events of the past year.

Program Ideas

Steve had a number of specific ideas for programming to address the situation in Israel:

- For older students: look at a number of news sources online such as CNN, the New York Times, the Jerusalem Post, Ha'aretz, the Washington Post, the Times of London. Look at the headlines and the first few paragraphs of several stories. Divide students into groups to look at the different sources. Ask them, “if this was all we knew about the world and Israel, what would we know? Which one is ‘true’? This will give them tools to grapple with this reality and the ability to analyze critically what they hear and read in the news.
- The vibrancy of Israel's democracy is impressive. Have students take a look at Israel's internal debates via Ha'aretz, the Jerusalem Post, etc. What is Israel saying to itself about itself? This activity lets Israel speak for itself and demonstrates that no one has the inside track on the truth and that Israel is willing to be self-critical.
- On the ethics of criticizing Israel, look at texts on the treatment of others, self-defense and other relevant issues to ground such discussions in Jewish sources.
- Find the writings of Israeli and Palestinian youth talking about their situations, or relevant artwork by youth. Another good source is the documentary “Promises” [www.promisesproject.org]

For more program ideas, see “Make Israel an Every Day Focus,” p. 3.

Interested in the next distance consultation? Look for an email over the summer about next year's schedule.

Project Mizrach: Stand up and Face East

by Doug Lynn

A group of Jewish camp directors from the Northeast gathered in May under the direction of Lauren Tishler Mindlin and the IJE to discuss how best to integrate Israel into camp life. The conference had two major strands: making Israel an every day focus, and Israel programs at camp. There was a lot of roundtable discussion and presentations of model programs that were brought by the faculty.

Our greatest resource in making Israel relevant to the next generation of youth has for many years been the youth who have come back from Israel experiences with their stories, connections and a tangible love in their hearts. Many educators have become “fat” off the success of Israel experience programs. We have let the trip itself become the sum total of Israel education. We felt no need to incorporate any more

than a basic Israel education into our curricula, figuring that Israel would be taken care of when our youth went on their year course, summer experience, or Birthright.

Our Israel trip alumni have been our ambassadors and recruiters. With this resource gone and the excitement surrounding Israel changing to fear and apprehension, we as informal Jewish educators must take a hard look at our current Israel programming.

Following are some of the highlights and ideas that came out of the conference. From my perspective, most of the things outlined below are very doable at camp, and can be adapted to almost any informal educational setting.

Make Israel an Every Day Focus

Track your camp /movement trip on a large map of Israel. Have your participants in Israel e-mail you every day and read the messages aloud.

Incorporate Israeli cheers into your bunk/Aydah. Use Betar chants instead of generic American sports chants.

Use sport jerseys from Israeli teams as opposed to random colored pinnys for scrimmages.

Instead of diving for pennies at the pool, dive for Israeli phone cards

Have a Maccabia games instead of color war.

At sports, use cities, places, etc. as cones for drills. Make them the cities where your Israeli staff lives.

In the dining hall have a “hero of Israel” in full costume come out and give a 2-minute speech about who he/she is. Using music, lights, smoke, etc.

On your bulletin board put an Israel question of the day. Award prizes for the correct answers. Make a public presentation of these awards.

Use an Army style wake up at camp for a different cabin each day

Play popular Israeli music during Nikayon and clean to the beat.

During flagpole raise the flag of Israel as well as the American Flag.

Israel Programs at Camp

Media Literacy: Teach campers how a news segment is created. The set induction is that something happened at camp and the campers need to report on it (print or video). Each group will go to the site and interview appropriate people and then create their news segment.

Voice of Memory: Take campers on a tour of the Jewish story. Characters from history in full costume will be on pedestals along a trail in camp. As a group passed by, the characters come to life and give their story. The culmination is the last station is the Kotel. Instead of writing a letter and putting in the wall, the twist is that the camper writes a letter from the wall to him/her self.

Flag making: Have campers make a flag that they feel represents the State of Israel. Compare and contrast this flag with the actual flag. Compare and contrast the process of coming up with a flag with the way the actual flag was created. Talk about what is important in a flag as representing what is important in community; talk about difficulties in coming to consensus on the flag as an analogy for Israeli politics.

Birkat Hamazon: Use the Birkat Hamazon as a tool for teaching about the land of Israel.

In these times when many youth are not going to Israel, and when most of what they hear about Israel is negative, it is imperative that Israel stay in our curricula. For now, we cannot rely on trips to Israel to instill our youth with a connection and a love. It is now necessary to create a new connection with Israel through our programs.

What Are You Up To?

David Beker will be marrying Moran Lutfi in Jerusalem this summer.

Renee Feldstein: "I am still working as Regional Director for Youth and Informal Education for the UAHC-Pennsylvania Council and spending the rest of my time preparing (mentally, physically, emotionally) for the birth of our first child sometime at the end of August, beginning of September."

Howard Goldberg, his wife Jill and three-year-old son Samson are expecting a new addition to their family (God willing) this August. They are very excited about the latest member of the IJE family!

David Goldstein: "Our biggest news is that our daughter, Ranya Matana, is turning one on May 27. She is in the amazingly adorable stage! Also we are taking a family vacation to New Mexico this summer."



Adam Kaye: "I am changing jobs after almost 5 years from Makor-AJY, Centre for Informal Jewish Education to UJS (the Union of Jewish Students of Great Britain & Ireland) where I will be the campus coordinator and educator. I will still be based in swingin' ol' London, moving to the funky beat of Jewish education."

Josh Lake: "I [got] married here on Sunday, May 19th, the day after Shavuot. This summer I am working with Karen Stein to take 25 USYers to the Pacific Northwest for an Outdoor Extravaganza! We will hike, kayak and learn about nature in a completely kosher and Shomer Shabbat lifestyle. Also, we have about 200 kids coming to learn about nature and Judaism at our residential Shalom Teva program."

Melanie Kohler Levav is busy launching the new Madrich Program at the Jewish



Community House of Bensonhurst. Madrich is part of the IJE's innovative programs initiative with funding from The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, Inc.

Ira Miller will begin a new position this summer as Director of Youth Programs at Washington Hebrew Congregation in Washington, DC.

Mark Miller: After spending nine years as a Jewish camp director, Mark recently moved to Jerusalem for the first year of Hebrew Union College's rabbinical program.

Valerie Mitrani: "I just accepted a new position here in Miami as the principal of the Central Agency for Jewish Education Judaica High School."

Rob Morais: "We are participating in the UAHC's Youth Initiatives Process, which is total evaluation and redesign of youth programs. I have just signed a 3 year contract. I am looking forward to the summer and to my time at camp."

Ruthie Saragosti: "I'm getting ready to make that move to the Holy Land and I finally have a departure date! My last day at the office is June 14th and off to Israel on July 8th. I'm doubly excited because we're going on a Nefesh B'Nefesh group

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What Are You Up To? continued



flight from New York! It's never happened before in the history of the Jewish people that there is a group flight of new immigrants to the sovereign State of Israel from a country where they are not fleeing hardship or persecution! I can hardly wait for the energy on that plane!"

Josh Share: "I have announced my resignation with BBYO and the JCC. I have been accepted to study at the MBA Graduate school program in Calgary, Alberta (Canada). The program is two years in length and I plan on moving mid-summer."

Bradley Solmsen: "I am eagerly anticipating the 80 participants who have registered for Genesis this summer. We just completed an invigorating four-day training session for our informal educators. June 1st is my one-year anniversary at Genesis and I am still loving everything about Brandeis."

Alina Gerlovin Spaulding: "I am still working at the American Hebrew Academy as the Dean of Admissions. This summer I am also coordinating a summer camp program in Greensboro's sister city, which is Beltzy, Moldova. It will be my first time back to that side of the world since we emigrated in 1979."

Karen Stein: "Josh Lake and I have started a project together for this summer — we are running the USY Outdoor Adventure, a three-week camping program in Washington State. It's been an exciting joint venture for the Shalom Nature Center and USY and Josh and I have really enjoyed working together on this. The program, which is sponsored by USY, will have 3 staff members who have worked with USY Summer programs before as well as Josh and another staffer with whom he's worked."

Rachel Mersky Woda: "Starting this summer, I will serve as the director of NFTY Education!"



Do you know a good candidate for the Leadership Seminar?

- The IJE will be recruiting for the third group of fellows in late summer 2002.
- Applications and full information will be available on July 15, 2002 at www.brandeis.edu/ije.
- The first seminar session will meet in March 2003.

IJE Chooses Four Programs for Innovation Grants

Last summer the IJE issued a Request for Proposals for innovative programming in the field of Jewish youth. Our hope is to enhance and expand the field with the ultimate goal of attracting, activating and retaining under-engaged youth.

Eighty-six proposals were submitted for \$200,000 in two-year grants from The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, Inc.

After a rigorous selection process, four programs were chosen:

- Wilderness Rites of Passage, Camp Tawonga, CA
- Educating Educators, Canada Israel Experience and York University, Ontario
- Teens Give Back, JCC Manhattan, NY
- Madrich, Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst, NY

Teams from these programs will be working in partnership with IJE staff over the next two years. The IJE is particularly interested in how these programs may serve as models for other organizations and communities.

Full information about the programs is on our website: www.brandeis.edu/ije

Congratulations to Melanie Kohler Levav (Madrich) and Adam Minsky (Educating Educators) for their successful proposals!

We depend on you to:

- Tell us about the new program you're working on.
- Write about a question you're struggling with.
- Report on a conference.
- Send in some pictures of your event.
- Let us know about a great resource you've found.
- As always, we welcome your feedback about the newsletter.

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