

JEWISH ORTHODOX FEMINIST ALLIANCE

Jofa Journal

SPECIAL
ISSUE!
Israel Mission

Fall 2002—Kislev 5763

Volume III, Issue III

And So It Began

Many with hair still wet, many with eyes half closed, all jet-lagged, we made our way to a 6:30 women's *tefillah* each morning. A few in *talitot*, one in *tefillin* and the rest unadorned, we prayed together led by the beautiful and powerful voice of Ronnie Becher.



What an extraordinary way to begin our day. Then off to a sumptuous buffet breakfast where each morning a woman scholar engaged us in a text study about Jerusalem. There was Avital Hochstein who taught *Gittin 55*, the story of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's abandonment of Jerusalem during a siege and the ways in which his decisions at that time are relevant today. Rachel Berkovits "bravely" taught *Berakhot 61b*, laws about keeping Jerusalem central in your daily activities. And Rachel Klein led a study of *Tebillim 122*, in which the psalmist enjoins us to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

Then off and running we went to visit institutions of women's learning, to Hadassah hospital to see the many wounded in bomb attacks, to cheer soldiers at a checkpoint, to pack boxes for soldiers and much, much more!!!!

Boker Tov—Good Morning!!! ■

From Our Vice President:

From Jerusalem Without Fear

By Belda Lindenbaum



Since its inception Blu Greenberg has written this column. However, even as I write this, the Greenberg family is sitting Shiva here in Jerusalem, mourning the untimely and tragic death of their son J.J. And so it has fallen to me to express the thoughts that Blu would have expressed so much more eloquently.

The theme for this special edition of our newsletter is Israel, and specifically "*Aliyat Regel*," the personal and physical act of coming to Israel in this time of national need and crisis.

I heard of a beautiful gesture that Rabbi Haskel Lookstein of Kehillath Jeshurun made at the Yom Kippur services. Bracelets with the name of a terror victim were placed on each seat. Many of the names were read aloud by various people throughout the shul. This was a moving act of solidarity by a rabbi who has organized numerous missions to Israel in the past two years. Like the members of Rabbi Lookstein's congregation, we have all sought ways to help the Israeli economy and lift the spirits of Israelis. While all of our efforts are vital and laudable, there is nothing that can compare with the actual presence of visitors in Israel.

My husband and I are fortunate to have a second home here in Jerusalem, and truly fortunate to have spent every holiday here for the past two years.

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Reflections By Paula Gribetz Gottlieb

The eyes of strangers searching me up and down as I come towards them on a Jerusalem street... the voices of the Sephardic and Ashkenazi eighth graders singing Hebrew songs together at my sister's school, Evelina de Rothschild... the determination of the disabled children at Shalva — a lifesaver for parents who are overwhelmed with their care... the eyes of the boy paralyzed by a suicide killer on Ben Yebuda Street lying in his bed in Hadassah hospital... the self-confidence of the female besder soldiers...

The tears of the pediatrician who had just returned from miluim as he told us about the humanity of the Israeli Defense Force... the pride of the female Rabbinic Court advocates as they described helping agunot who were "chained" for years...

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Reflections ...continued from page 1

...the frustration of the Inbal maitre d' as he served and cleaned up the Friday night Shabbat meal by himself...

The generosity of Aharon, our bus driver, to use his free time to drive us to the checkpoint to visit with soldiers... the courage of the American grandmothers in my group as they visited with their sabra grandchildren — many of whom are serving in the army...

The empty streets, the bright blue skies, the guards outside deserted restaurants... the white Jerusalem stone buildings surrounded by vibrant flowers, purple, pink and yellow... and the words that echoed in our ears all week: "Thank you for coming... Thank you from the bottom of our hearts... Thank You."

These are some snapshots from my week-long trip to Israel with JOFA. We were forty-two men and women from all over North America, ranging in age from eight months to 83 years. Although most of us did not know each other when we met at Gate #34 at Newark airport, we found we had much in common. We had each serendipitously seen a JOFA flyer and decided on the spur of the moment to join the mission. Each participant shared the same feeling: I wanted to go to Israel all year to show my support and this is my opportunity! Little did we know how much we would gain.

Some of the group members were active in JOFA, others were learning about the organization for the first time. The mission showcased the dynamic, creative life force of women in Israel, and it was through that lens that we learned about the political, economic and social realities of Israel today.

I'd like to focus upon three highlights of the trip — experiences that reflect the mixed emotions I had about being an American Jew and a Jewish woman. How could this tiny country so filled with optimism and energy fight back the evil shadows? What was

I doing in my life to join the struggle?

Female Hesder Students

During a visit to Bar Ilan University we met six *bayyalot*, female soldiers, who combine army service with study at a yeshiva on Kibbutz Ein ha-Natziv. All six are officers assigned to new recruits, many of whom are Russian *olim*. The women spoke of their routines — how they teach new recruits to handle weapons, enforce discipline, and direct a curriculum of Hebrew language and Israeli history. Nineteen years old and a bit shy, the women candidly discussed the challenge of supervising a platoon of several hundred men. They spoke of observing Shabbat in the army, and maintaining the laws of personal modesty. They spoke of their love for Torah and desire to continue learning, even as they pursue professions. Their pride at serving in the army rather than in an alternate program of public service was apparent. We were amazed. These young women serve their country with such determination. Their calm quiet heroism was inspirational. What was I doing at their age?

Victims of Terrorism



We visited victims of terrorist attacks being treated in Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus. One young man lay on his bed, paralyzed by a bomb set off on Ben Yehudah Street while he was having coffee. He had been turned on his stomach because of terrible bedsores, and his cheek was resting on his sheet. He could hear us and understand but he could not speak. We filed by one by one and took turns holding his hands and wishing him a *refuah sbeimab*. I don't think I'll ever forget his large eyes looking up at me.

In a nearby room, a young man who had been injured outside Cafe Moment told us the details of his tragedy. The explosion came while he was waiting with his girlfriend outside the popular Rehavia café. He was thrown several blocks away. When he awoke, he was lying on his side and recognized a friend lying nearby. "Am I alive?" he asked his friend. "Yes, you are, but your arm is over there," and he pointed. The young man looked at his friend and said, "You are alive too but your eye is gone." Pale and wan, he told us about his long and difficult road to recovery.

An Israeli Doctor

At Hadassah Hospital, Dr. Zangen, a pediatrician, addressed us. He has asked to speak with every group of visitors to the hospital because he feels it is his duty to speak out. He told us of his experiences as chief medical officer of his army unit in Jenin.

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Jewish Orthodox
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A Personal Touch: Visiting Israeli Soldiers

By Ariel Hurwich Braun

The following are excerpts from a speech given prior to JOFA's visit to Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint.

May 24, 2002

Today, you are scheduled to visit soldiers stationed at the checkpoint between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, about a five-minute drive from here, and I have been asked to introduce this visit to you.

On one of our family visits to the checkpoint we ran into our neighbor, a young man about to finish his army service. He was driving in one car, with a second car close behind. When I told him we had come to bring packages for the soldiers, he exclaimed, "These are my friends. I also brought food, but mine didn't fit into one car so I brought two."

When first asked to speak to you, I was mostly confused. Although I know why I like to visit the checkpoint, I could not quite pinpoint the soldiers' extraordinary gratitude.

So I stopped my neighbor on the street one day and asked him to please tell me: "Why do the soldiers' appreciate our gesture so deeply?"

He explained: feedback from people makes a soldier vividly aware of his mission, he recognizes he is a messenger of the people and that gives him the strength to serve. He added, "*yesh lanu gav*" – "we have support."

The first time my family brought packages to soldiers at the checkpoint, we arrived just as a long convoy of armored personnel carriers was preparing to go into Bethlehem. At the same time a woman arrived carrying two big bunches of roses.



She gave one to each soldier. Although it seemed odd to me, my brother who had once served in the army said, "I wish someone would have done this for us when we were in Lebanon."

And truly, the vision was surreal. Among all the green, khaki and brown – the guns, the uniforms and the equipment – were delicate spots of pink. A soldier atop a vehicle was sitting by himself and smelling his rose, another playfully stuck it into the barrel of his gun, and many others tucked their flowers in nooks and niches on their vehicles or carried them around.

My children shyly gave bags of food to soldiers who, in turn, shyly accepted them.

The thanks, and even more so, the smiles we received for our modest gesture were heartening. Saying thank you is fashionable today. You might have noticed a big ad campaign on buses, on billboards, and in the media showing a blue Magen David

made of six hearts bearing the words "*Today Me-kol Ha-lev*" — Thank you with all our hearts. This campaign exists simply to say thank you to the soldiers defending our country.

You have come on this mission at a very difficult time for us in Israel. Our hotels are empty, our streets are all but deserted, businesses are suffering, and, as a mother, I dread my children's independence. We all carry seeds of fear within us as part of our routine.

Coming to Israel at this time, traveling around, not so differently from the way we do, and ending your busy week by showing support for our soldiers reminds us of how beautiful and wonderful our country is.

It all boils down to what my wise young neighbor said so well: We lean on the support – the *gav* – that you give us. ■

Ariel Hurwich Braun lives in Jerusalem. Formerly a curator of Judaica, she is now working for the Adi Foundation that is dedicated to bridging the gap between art and Judaism.

**Don't Miss the Next JOFA Mission to Israel
May 21-27, 2003 • Memorial Day Weekend**

From Jerusalem Without Fear ...continued from page 1

Many of these trips have included our children and grandchildren. Am I braver than the next person? Do I love my children less than those who urge theirs not to come? I think not.

What motivates me is best expressed by the comment of a friend from New York. At a chance meeting at a restaurant in Jerusalem we started to discuss "the *matzav*," the "situation," as it is referred to here. When I

mentioned how nice it was to meet her eating out with friends despite the *matzav*, she replied, "I have a feeling that when we all get to the world to come we will not be asked how many *mitzvot* we observed. Rather, the question will be, where were you when Israel was in need?"

I remember asking my parents what they had done to help the Jews in Europe during World War II, and

someday our children and grandchildren will pose the same question to us. We will each have to answer for our action or inaction, and I hope that our love will outweigh our fears.

There is a lovely Israeli song that says – "All of the world is a narrow bridge but the essence is not to fear – not to fear at all." I hope this is the message all Jews will heed. ■

"Everything brought tears to my eyes. It was a very emotional week.

I didn't think I would feel safe walking in the street, but I did."



"I had no idea what I was getting into. JOFA was not me at all.

But I have never felt more connected to women and to an organization."

One Voice:

Jewish Women for Israel

JOFA, through the efforts of President Blu Greenberg and board member Adena Berkowitz helped spearhead the newly formed coalition known as "One Voice: Jewish Women for Israel." One Voice is a coalition of eleven women's organizations representing the broad spectrum of Jewish political and religious views in a united effort to support Israel. One Voice has sponsored two successful nationwide call-in days on which the Jewish community was encouraged to call members of Congress and the President in support of Israel. The presidents and executive directors of the coalition organizations will bring the message of support for Israel in person to Washington D.C. at the start of 2003.

If you would like to receive action alerts on One Voice activities, please send a request by e-mail to jofa@rcn.com.



I Stretched My Soul By Ray Walker

I stretched my soul all week, and then
It shrunk back to its usual size.
My soul could not maintain its new expansion,
The atmosphere too rarified for earthbound me.
Methinks a little soulstretching each day,
Goes a long way
And will not overtax the soul's elasticity.

At 83, Ray Walker was the oldest, but perhaps the most energetic participant in the JOFA mission to Israel. Ray composed and recited – from memory – the above poem at se'udab shelisbit on our final night in Israel.

Visiting Israel at a Time of Danger By Chana Kehat

Before Shavuot, Kolech was privileged to host a moving "gathering of sisters" when the JOFA mission came to support and express their solidarity with Israel. This visit warmed our hearts and we would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks.

For the last two years Israelis have found themselves in a situation of terror. During this time Jews from all over the world have visited in order to demonstrate their solidarity and support. This gesture should be seen as a *mitzvah* on two accounts; on the one hand, as an act of *g'milut chasadim*, a charitable deed, and on the other as strengthening the settlement of the Land. Traveling to Israel at such a time can be compared to the *mitzvah* of visiting a sick person. R. Dimi calls this a "reviving of souls" because of its capacity to comfort the depressed and lonely.¹ Similarly, by visiting Israel, where the population feels abandoned and deserted, every visitor offers encouragement and support.

But is it permissible for the sake of a *mitzvah* to take a risk and visit Israel in the face of repeated warnings of possible terror attacks?

This question is worthy of examination since the *halakha* clearly states that one must not knowingly put oneself into danger; as it is said in the Talmud: "A person should never stand in a place of danger and say that a miracle will be wrought – lest it is not. And if a miracle is wrought, it is deducted from his or her merits."² While *halakha* allows us to take such a risk for the sake of our livelihood,³ are we permitted to put ourselves in danger for the sake of a *mitzvah*?

For the purpose of comparison we find in the G'mara⁴ that Rabbi Yehoshua went to teach those who were stricken by boils. Contrary to other Sages who stayed away from these very sick people, Rabbi Yehoshua was not afraid and, as a reward for studying Torah, he was not infected. In his book, *Tzitz Eliezer*,⁵ Rabbi Eliezer Judah Waldenberg, gives a long response to the question of whether a person is permitted to put him - or her-

self at risk in order to save a friend. He quotes the Radbaz⁶ who believed that one must not exaggerate and face mortal danger in such a situation. If a person is especially stubborn and insists on saving a friend in spite of the danger, this person is considered a *Chasid shoteh* (a foolish *Chasid*.) Rabbi Waldenberg attacks this opinion and says that if so, a doctor is not obligated to put himself at risk in order to save the life of another.

*"Traveling to Israel at
such a time can be
compared to the Mitzvah
of visiting a sick person."*

Furthermore, in *Sefer Chasidim*⁷ it says that if a heavy man is drowning in the river one should not jump in to save him for fear of drowning. Rabbi Waldenberg rejects this approach as well and, relying on the Rema⁸, he concludes that one should take a risk when there is a good reason, especially for the sake of a *mitzvah*. Doctors, for example, must treat patients because after all, in addition to doing a *mitzvah* by visiting the sick,⁹ they also perform additional *mitzvot* of healing and restoring the body.¹⁰ Consequently it is said that one may depend on the merits of fulfilling important *mitzvot* in order to be protected from danger.

Rabbi Waldenberg considers that the Radbaz only prohibits a person from entering dangerous situations for the sake of a *mitzvah* when there is concrete physical danger, such as removal of a limb, going to a place of bandits and ferocious animals or going to the depths of the sea, because a person who puts himself at the mercy of man, beast or the forces of nature needs great merit for God to spare him. This is not the case when there is only the possibility of danger because one must take the risk in order to help a person in need. Whereas the Rema says that God controls the outcomes, it is obvious that when the danger is certain then not only are we

not obliged to expose ourselves to it, but we are even prohibited from doing so.

Quoting from *Nishmat Kol Chai* by Rabbi Chayim Palache in a discussion of doctors confronting an epidemic, Rabbi Waldenberg says it is obvious that doctors should be permitted to expose themselves to danger for the sake of their patients.

Rabbi Waldenberg adds that in such circumstances, when entering a situation of potential danger for the sake of a *mitzvah*, a special prayer cited by the Sages must be said, asking the Almighty for protection: "One who travels in a dangerous place prays a short prayer and says save your nation, O' God at every *Parshat Ha'ibur*... and they asked, what is the meaning of *Parshat Ha'ibur*? Rav Hisda said in the name of Mar Ukva: even at a time that you become filled with anger against them..."¹¹ Thus, by walking in a place of danger one violates the commandment "take good care of yourselves"¹² and angers God, but if one must enter into this situation for a livelihood or for a *mitzvah* our Sages, instruct one to first say this prayer.

To return to the original question, visiting Israel at this time in order to strengthen the morale of the people is permissible and is above all, a *mitzvah*. Rabbi Waldenberg's conclusion is that when performing a *mitzvah*, a person does not have to be afraid because it is said: "one who observes a *mitzvah* will not know a bad thing."¹³ ■

Chana Kehat is one of the founders and the chair of Kolech, a women's organization which is the ideological counterpart of JOFA in Israel.

1. *Nedarim*, 40a
2. *Shabbat*, 32a and *Ta'anit*, 20
3. *Bava Metziab*, 112a
4. *Ketubbot*, 77b
5. Rabbi Eliezer Judah Waldenberg, *Tzitz Eliezer* (1945-1970), 9, no. 17, *Kuntras Refu'ah, Shabbat*, 5
6. Rabbi David ben Zimra of Spain, 1480
7. *Sefer Chasidim*, paragraph 674
8. Rabbi Moshe Isserles
9. *Nedarim*, 40a
10. *Yoreh De'ah*, part 336, paragraph 1
11. *Brachot*, 29b
12. *Deuteronomy*, 4, 15
13. *Ecclesiastes*, 8,8

Jewish Buildings, Building Jews

The JOFA group visited some of Israel's renowned institutions of women's learning, such as Midreshet Lindenbaum, Evelina de Rothschild High School, Nishmat, Matan and the Pelech High School. At the end of this event-filled day, we sat outdoors in the hotel courtyard and shared our impressions.



"I was born a generation too early."



"I am impressed with the sense of self-confidence of the women in their own learning and ability."



"I am struck by the enthusiasm of the principal at Evelina, and at how she integrates different societies in Israel. I am also struck at how one of the girls at Midreshet Lindenbaum, when asked what she planned on doing with her learning, remarked that she was learning 'just to learn.' This is a new level – when we have girls who are just learning lishma."



"I am struck by the contrast between the current situation in Israel and the beauty of the day and the reality of the wonderful things going on in the country."



"I grew up in Israel and I had dreams as a child. I didn't do a thing, and today I saw that they all came true!"



Reflections ...continued from page 1

Dr. Zangen described the difficult situation the Israeli soldiers in Jenin faced: booby trapped houses and mined roads. The soldiers were ordered to progress carefully from house to house to make sure that no unnecessary deaths were perpetrated. Many of the soldiers could not follow orders — as they approached a house, women and children would sit down in front. The soldiers could not shoot. Twenty-four soldiers were killed —

among them several medics shot in cold blood as they arrived to rescue wounded friends.

As chief medical officer of his unit, Dr. Zangen met with many of the international visitors and media people who came to Jenin. Outraged by the lies perpetrated in the media, he took it upon himself to speak of what he saw in Jenin — the morality of the Israeli soldiers, the care for the life of the innocent. Dr. Zangen told us that his media battle is the hardest fighting he has ever done.

And so the never-ending story

continues: suicide bombers, fear of Iraqi attacks, UN resolutions. Through it all Israelis try to navigate daily life. Back in the United States, JOFA mission members absorb the news, react and reflect. We are forever changed by our week together in Israel in May. Our trip was a unique opportunity to meet friends, reinvigorate our connection to Israel and continue our quest to make meaning of our own lives. Next Year in Jerusalem. ■

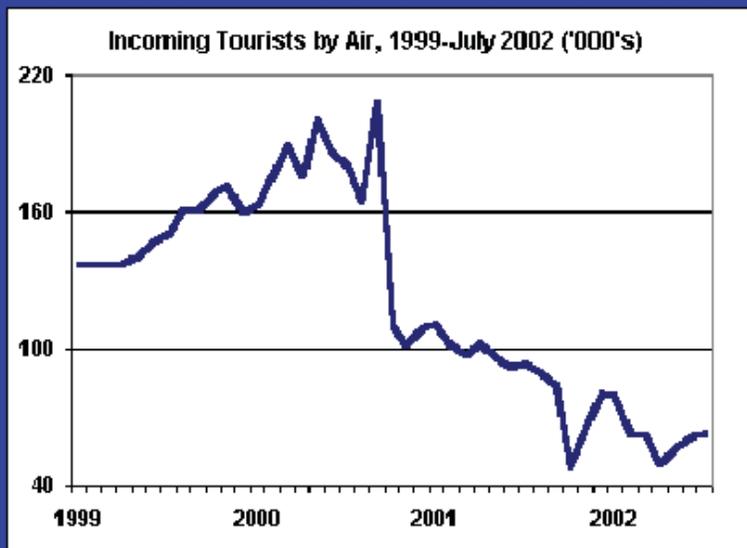
Paula Gribetz Gottlieb is a family therapist and consultant in Westchester

"I've been to Israel many times. This was unique, because of the power of women. I am going home with an uplifted sense of what is happening in this country and what is possible. I was very touched by the hesder program and by these strong girls that want to serve their country. I think everything is going to be all right in Israel."



"There was no preaching on this mission, but the message really came through the learning. The capacity of women to study was really very exciting."

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All Jews are responsible for one another



Since September of 2000, tourism is down by 70%. This enormous drop in tourism continues to badly hurt Israel's local merchants. ShopinIsrael.com is entirely dedicated to helping local Israeli businesses, stores, manufacturers and artists sell their products to people throughout the world. Each one of us can help Israel by shopping. Log on to ShopinIsrael.com.



Mission Statement of
The Jewish Orthodox
Feminist Alliance

The Alliance's mission is to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual, and political opportunities for women within the framework of *halacha*. We advocate meaningful participation and equality for women in family life, synagogues, houses of learning, and Jewish communal organizations to the full extent possible within *halacha*. Our commitment is rooted in the belief that fulfilling this mission will enrich and uplift individual and communal life for all Jews.

Yes! I want to support JOFA's work in expanding the spiritual, ritual, intellectual and communal opportunities for Orthodox women within the framework of *halacha*.

Enclosed is my gift of: \$1,000 \$500 \$100 \$50 Other \$ _____

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