

## *Nitzotzot Min HaNer*

# Kiruv on Campus

*Volume #9, February 2003*

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*This edition of Nitzotzot Min HaNer focuses on outreach efforts on college campuses around the world. In this edition, we endeavor to provide an overview of campus outreach activity models, an overview of the current wave of anti-Semitism on campus and an in-depth look at one approach to outreach from one of the foremost leaders in the field, Rabbi Charles Lebow, of JWALOP (Jews With A Lot of Pride) and SSNAP (Students Spreading Knowledge and Pride)<sup>1</sup>.*

*Campus outreach today seems to lag significantly behind other outreach initiatives for a number of reasons, the most obvious being that the campus constituency lacks the means for supporting any project on its own and as a result, campus work has often suffered from tokenism, with many organizations limiting activities to giving a weekly shiur on campus. On the other hand, the seemingly bleak campus outreach landscape has many bright spots of achievement, commitment and success. We have attempted to overview some of these activities below. This review is far from comprehensive, and we invite our readers to submit information about other organizations or projects for mention in a future Nitzotzot article. We focus here on a number of models for campus outreach rather than on individual initiatives.*

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<sup>1</sup>SSNAP.org and NAJSA.org



## **BY THE STUDENTS FOR THE STUDENTS**

*By Rabbi Charles Lebow*

The largest Jewish community in North America following New York, Los Angeles and Miami is not Chicago. Surprisingly, the fourth-largest Jewish community, with a population of over 400,000, is made up of the Jewish students scattered on campuses throughout North America.

I group Jewish students as a single community because I believe that students perceive themselves that way. A student attending university in Ithaca, New York feels infinitely more connected with a student at Berkeley, California than he does to the "adult" community in Ithaca.

First I explore the pros and cons of doing Kiruv work on the college campus followed by some practical suggestions of how to get seriously involved in this work.

While perhaps not pursued with the necessary or appropriate zeal, college students are a logical target for Kiruv focus. Beginning in the 60s, the first of the Baalei Tshuvah Yeshivot, Yeshivas Dvar Yerushalayim and Diaspora Yeshiva, were populated largely by college students, and charismatic leaders like Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach and Rabbi Meir Kahane attracted large, loyal followings comprising mostly of college-aged youth.

Most of the outreach Yeshivas in Israel (e.g. Aish HaTorah, Ohr Somayach, Neve Yerushalayim, Machon Shlomo) have been primarily filled by university students. They have traditionally seen the not yet committed college student as the most logical focus, a group naturally accustomed to thought, academic pursuit and unencumbered enough to take time off to explore offered suggestions and perhaps, to study in a Yeshiva. Yeshivas would regularly recruit on the college campus, their natural first stop. The reasons justifying the focus of Kiruv efforts on the campus community are clear. College students are easily reachable in a physical sense. Students in residential schools live in close proximity to each other allowing for easy recruitment to programs. Even when students are not living on or near the campus they spend most of their time on campus and their schedules are somewhat predictable. Jewish students are easier to find and to engage than other groups of Jews. In addition, 20% of students at major American colleges are Jewish, a far higher ratio than average Jewish population in most cities. (In other words, Jewish students are much more easy to find than singling out or locating non-observant Jews in the general population).

College students are immersed in a culture that encourages non-academic or semi-academic pursuits. Every campus is loaded with clubs and special interests groups of all types - from the rowing club to the Filipino Friendship Society. Extra-curricular activities are the accepted norm and are considered part and parcel of the campus



experience. The campus is a place where people are really paying attention to the events that go on and seek ways to get involved.

Surprisingly, despite the work and study load, students have substantial free time on their hands. Most students have several vacations a year when they can be encouraged to participate in programs in America and overseas. Additionally, the concept of “taking a year off” to pursue extracurricular activity is acceptable in many schools. There are also times when specific students are taking fewer credits and then have more time on their hands to take on extra-curricular pursuits.

Students are open to diverse intellectual stimulation. To begin with, students are thrust into an environment where they are interacting with people from widely different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore their studies in social science expose them to a variety of philosophies often for the first time in their life. Students are expected to have accumulated intellectual maturity and personal experiences necessary to deal with serious questions. They are expected and encouraged to make decisions that will shape their careers, their ideologies and their future. Students are at a critical juncture before settling on a chosen path, and are more likely to personalize events than at an earlier or later stage in life.

Students have a good degree of independence. They are often living away from home for the first time and free from the restrictions placed on them by their parents. They also have a certain degree of financial independence (be it perceived or real) from their parents that can allow them to choose to attend a program without their parents’ consent.

All of the above-mentioned aspects work together to make college students a worthwhile target for Kiruv investment, but also conspire against the Jewish students who enter college with some Jewish upbringing and connection. In the university’s open environment, college students are also more vulnerable to assimilation. The rich choice of seemingly attractive alternatives such as the possibility of being attracted to some *ashram* in India, or other religious affiliation, and the likelihood to meet and fall in love with someone from another religion (or an orthodox Jew with a reform Jew, etc.) make it difficult for a Jewish student lacking a firm connection to Judaism to maintain his commitment. In many ways the college students represent our last hope to reaching that generation and reaffirming their connection before they so totally assimilated that it becomes almost impossible to find or influence them.

Given the reasons above, I believe that the reasons for lack of sufficient activity on campus are mostly technical rather than substantive.

1. Most college campuses are not located near frum communities. It is difficult to get people to relocate outside of a frum environment. On top of this, the “free” resources of Yeshivas, families for Shabbat and teachers are not readily available outside areas of high orthodox



concentration. Therefore it is easy for kiruv workers to say “the campus is out of reach”.

2. In many locations outreach programs on campus have “failed financially”. Since students are not working, the Kiruv organization or individual must be constantly pouring outside funds into campus work. Some organizations have found more “success” teaching baalabatim who can turn around and write a check to support the institution financially. (This attitude is very shortsighted since alumni are often very generous with their support of the colleges that they attended and the institutions there that they participated in, but the gap might be one of 20-30 years.)
3. There are also those Kiruv workers who are scared away by the degree of assimilation that they witness. The college campus can be a place of moral *hefkerus* as a part of the lifestyle. (At times this can be a plus for Kiruv, as the student can easily perceive the degeneracy and abuse that comes from a life without boundaries.)

I believe that the time has come for the frum community to give serious thought as to how it can have an impact on the next generation of American Jews. The campus is the obvious place to start.

Below, I will outline some ideas that, based on my experience, could make a significant and long-term impact on the student population.

#### *Building A Student Movement*

Any attempt to significantly alter the campus must be done through creating a Jewish student movement. Unlike most youth movements today that are run *for* youth, a student movement would be run both *for* and *by* students. The students would have ownership of the movement, set the agenda, control the budget and plan the events.

The main advantage of a student movement is that it will produce highly committed and motivated student leaders. Students who feel an ownership in a project and a responsibility that has been endowed by their peers find that they have tremendous amounts of time and energy to devote to the cause.

A Kiruv professional has limited access to students. No matter how much time he “hangs out” with the students he still is not living on their turf. In terms of initial involvement in programs (meaning recruitment), committed students make much better ‘sales’ representatives than do Kiruv workers for obvious reasons.

Student leaders also know their audience. They will figure out what will sell, what will go over and what will “bomb”. The student leaders are the ones to trust when deciding on what programs to do.



There is actual precedence for this in the student world. Organizations such as the North American Jewish Students' Network and the South African Union of Jewish Students in the early 1980's were producing a large number of Shomer Shabbos leaders, several of whom are still involved in key positions in Kiruv today. Neither organization ever saw themselves as "doing Kiruv" but rather learning torah and doing Shabbos was a natural expression of their Jewish identity and their commitment to the Jewish people.

Today, the Jewish student world in North America is ripe for building a Jewish student movement. Israel-bashing on college campuses has brought out a feeling of "we have to do something" in the student world. The students see that it is up to them to make a difference and realize that the problem is not just limited to their particular campus. We are seeing the emergence of student leadership with the vision and capability of building something significant on a national scale.

### ***Trips***

Up to this point in time, most of the success in Kiruv with college students has been as a result of programs in Israel. Besides Ohr Somayach, Aish HaTorah, Neve Yerushalayim, Livnot Ulihibanot, who recruit for programs geared to college students, Jewish student travelers who wander into Heritage House or are met by Jeff Seidel have positive Jewish experiences that can lead to Jewish growth and commitment.

While the greatest impact on individual students occurs when they come to a yeshiva or seminary in Israel, a broad based kiruv initiative can only take place on the campuses themselves. This is for two basic reasons. Firstly, experiences in Israel are usually not catalytic, meaning that they impact individuals but do not generate their friends' involvement. As a matter of fact the more successful the Kiruv done in Israel, the less likely the student is to return to his campus. Secondly the Israel experience is often perceived exactly as that, an "Israel" experience, something you do in Israel, but do not take "home" and continue in America. Without a local presence on campus in which the student can get involved, the student will quickly lose all the momentum that he gained while in Israel.

I believe that there is one main factor that contributes to the success of Kiruv programs in Israel that can be duplicated in America. Programs in Israel remove students from their environment for an extended period of time. This allows for students to experiment with a different lifestyle without dealing with the pressures of adjustment. This effect can be duplicated in America through summer camps, trips and conferences.

There are also advantages in running "Israel-style" programs in America: Easier transition of concepts back into their life following the program, ease of recruitment and follow-up potential with the same staff resources.



With the ability to recruit for Israel programs diminished due to terrorist threats, some groups have begun to look into other options. The JAM program in Los Angeles, headed by Bracha Zarett has been running trips to New York City and Aish HaTorah has been flying students from Boston for a week in London.

I believe that the summer camp option could be explored to a greater extent. In Europe the European Union of Jewish Students runs an annual "Summer College" for one week in August. The model could be adjusted to a North American setting where the facilities already exist. The principle of getting them out of their environment with time to enjoy and reflect can open the doors to many things.

### *Conferences*

Based on the present analysis of campus life in North America, it is felt that regional or national programs will have the greatest impact on changing the scene on campus. When students gather together for a big event, the energy and momentum created can have a ripple effect. This has been the experience of youth groups (NCSY, USY, BBYO, etc.) as well as campus organizations.

At a regional or national conference one also has the distinct advantage of a captive audience. Students come to the program for a number of different reasons. Even if their primary reason for coming is social, they realize that they have bought into a package deal and are willing to attend classes, or prayer workshops, which they would not normally be attending. At a conference it is easier to help the students feel that they are part of something big and important, something that they will want to continue to be a part of. Leadership-type students will emerge to fill leadership roles. At a conference one can bring together a wider range of top-notch resource personalities who can create an atmosphere of excitement that could probably never be achieved on any one campus.

In order to ensure the success of student conferences, or any other programs for that matter, there must be a proper secular/religious balance. This is a fine line that will vary based on the group and the situation and must be evaluated against long-term objectives. For example, generally speaking, this means that conferences would be mixed, with both men and women attending. Although this may take away from the immediate impact of the session, not allowing this conflicts too strongly with students' interests.

The schedule of the conference should include top name and/or interesting speakers, have kosher entertainment and have good publicity and promotion. If the ingredients are right, the conference will generate an energy of its own which can have a strong influence on the individual participant.

At a conference, students will discuss what they can do afterwards to stimulate Jewish life on their campuses. All students can find something to "do", be it personal Jewish growth or helping others to get involved.



### ***Student Cooperative Housing***

Another way of seeding Jewish growth on campus would be through a chain of cooperative Jewish housing projects. The houses or Batim would be student run and would be kosher. Functions in the house would be Shomer Shabbat. It would be important that the students that live there be a mix of religious and not yet religious students and that it have an atmosphere of openness with a special budget to accommodate many guests, especially on Shabbat. Through the Bayit, a sense of community could be built. Guest speakers, informal classes and special projects could create a culture that is attractive to the student who wishes to experiment with Judaism in a non-threatening environment.

### ***Student Off-campus Minyan***

Even though synagogues are generally a turn-off for students, in Montreal the idea of a student shul has taken off. Located in an area primary to students, the shul has a lively Carlebach-style davening on Friday night followed by a free meal. The fact that the place is totally student-run and has an open 'anyone welcome' atmosphere as well as great food contributes to its success.

### ***Student Leadership Training Programs***

Since most of the activities I mention rely on students to carry them out we must invest heavily in finding, training and motivating student leaders. I have found that Israel remains the best place for training leaders. It seems that those student leaders who are the most committed will find a way of convincing their parents to let them go to Israel for a short trip. In 3-4 weeks much can be done to build a group that can give peer support upon their return. The resources that Jerusalem can offer are unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

The program should have a mix of religious and not religious students participating together. This mix is what is needed on campus and we can encourage that taking place by training them to work together.

### ***Working within existing structures***

Hillel remains the main body that services Jewish students on campus. However, they are usually viewed from a negative perspective in regards to Kiruv. Their Federation mandate dictates a policy that must be open to everyone and all "streams of Judaism" on an equal footing. Despite some successes, their general lack of taking a stand translates into hardly influencing or encouraging students to increase their Jewish commitment.

In recent years, however, Hillel has been open to, even seeking "partnerships" with other organizations. It may be possible to negotiate a working relationship with Hillel



that would allow access to their facilities, staff and resources without compromising a committed and specific, religious position. This has been done by the "OU" on several individual campuses with a primary focus on outreach to orthodox students. This start should be extended to encompass a broader relationship.

Key to the approaches mentioned is training professionals skilled and knowledgeable for campus work. Reform women rabbis occupy more positions working on campus than orthodox rabbis because they apply to work with and at Hillel houses on campus. Training programs like Ner LeElef in Israel and Yeshiva University in America must place a greater emphasis in training campus professionals if we are going to succeed in this arena.

*Some points in summation:*

1. A serious outreach campaign on college campuses would produce positive and long-term results for the Jewish community.
2. The initial thrust should be to encourage the building of an independent Jewish student movement run by and for students.
3. The issue of Israel-bashing on campus creates a window of opportunity to find and develop student leaders.
4. Programs that take the students out of their environment for a period of time, such as trips, conferences, and summer camp retreats should be developed and expanded.
5. An emphasis needs to be placed on developing student leaders as well as from campus professionals.
6. Efforts need to be made to explore cooperative relationships with Hillel.

All of this, of course, will cost money. We must find away of pooling our financial resources and make long-term investments in the campus if we wish to see results. I am confident that it is definitely worth the investment.

*Rabbi Charles Lebow heads the campus outreach division of Ner LeElef.*



## CAMPUS OUTREACH: METHODS

Campus projects can be divided into several types or approaches. First are those organizations which apply a classical adult outreach model to the student population. Organizations like JAM of the Zarrets on U.C.L.A or Rabbi Kahn's Center for Return off Queens College<sup>1</sup> work this model. Jeff Seidel working off Hebrew U. and Tel Aviv campuses in Israel, Rabbi Benji Jacobi working on U of T (University of Toronto) for Ohr Somayach-JEP and Rabbi Yisroel Goldman in Melbourne Australia, are a few examples of organizations using this approach. In this approach an organization or individual outreach worker will provide lectures, run events, and any adult outreach initiatives, though the personalities of those involved tend to be particularly warm, and their interpersonal skills higher than the average kiruv worker. The campus world is a four-year deal, and students have a myriad of attractive options beckoning, often lacking the maturity to look for long-term meaning. Yet, these kiruv professionals will tell you, their neshamas work like anyone else's. They may want the added recreational element of a place to hang out (the JAM Center – of Bracha Zarrett, the Jewish Student Information Centers of Jeff Seidel), but they will take Torah seriously. However, because of the specialized nature of campus outreach it is important that the organization be dedicated to student outreach, or primarily focused thereon, to enable success in the campus setting. Rabbi Avraham Jacobowitz of Machon LaTorah working with a couple staying in their center on Ann Arbor campus, near Detroit is a good example of the success of a focused and dedicated approach based on the broader classical Kiruv model.

Chabad, always a significant contributor to Kiruv work in many spheres, has seen the most significant growth in campus kiruv in recent years. Chabad runs "Chabad Houses" off campus<sup>2</sup> near many universities. At the last count there were 61 full-time Chabad Houses on 61 college campuses across North America including Princeton, Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, University of Southern California, amongst many others. In addition, Chabad offers part-time programming at another 80 schools and is planning to open Chabad Houses on another 20 campuses. A clear example of Chabad's success and growth is: in five years at Harvard, Chabad's premises have grown from a tiny, one-bedroom apartment to a 3,800-square-foot building with three floors.

Chabad has one advantage over other classical models to outreach – they are living next to or on campus and are therefore able to provide a whole family experience, all week round. Often other outreach attempts struggle with being available enough for

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<sup>1</sup>Center for Return is an on-campus organization run by student members and staff members. Center for Return has on-campus programming and maintains an off-campus facility, the Bayit, in Kew Gardens, Queens. For more information, visit their website [www.centerforreturn.org](http://www.centerforreturn.org).

<sup>2</sup>Chabad began outreach on campus with visiting yeshiva students in the early 1950s. The first official Chabad house opened at UCLA in 1969, and growth had been steady until the recent spurt of activity.



the students to provide the personal attention and devotion to each Jewish student, which we all know is the key to any successful outreach, and needing to convince them to join for a whole Shabbos in town. Though sincere, such invitations seem so much more intimidating to students than simply being able to pop in, be it for a Shabbos meal or just to hang out during the week. Certainly, Chabad is not the only one to discover and implement this 'secret'. For example, in Israel, Jeff Seidel has a couple living on the Tel Aviv University campus for many years providing a close-up and immediate Jewish haven for students. Recently Rabbi Menachem Schrader of JLI (Jewish Learning Initiative) has embarked upon an ambitious project to place couples off what will ultimately include one hundred major American campuses with more than 1000 Jewish Students<sup>3</sup>. Rabbi Schrader has already placed Jewish couples on the campuses of Yale, Brandeis, Cornell, University of Pennsylvania, UCLA, and Brooklyn College. Steps are currently being taken to do the same at Oxford University in England.

Chabad has also added another interesting element, borrowed from their general approach in the field: They have networked with and cultivated relationships with important figures in the official university faculty. At Harvard, for example, President Lawrence Summers has lit the Chabad menorah on campus, and, more significantly, law professor Alan Dershowitz acts as the liaison between Chabad students and faculty<sup>4</sup>. This approach seems to lend a certain air of serious respectability to the campus efforts and helps students identify with the Jewish activities as being part of the general college experience.

A second form of campus outreach is reflected in the system used by Orthodox and pro-Orthodox Hillel directors, and similarly, the Campus Chaplains (who are all Orthodox) in England. Although constrained by Hillel's 'multi-denominational' policy towards Judaism, there are many tens of students who have gone on to attend yeshivas and committed to lives faithful to Torah-true Judaism directly through their involvement with Hillel in college and the directors' encouraging their students in this direction. In places like Montevideo, Rio and, to a lesser degree, Sao Paulo, the Hillel Board is exclusively Orthodox, and the Hillel is an extension of the outreach done within the broader community. (South American colleges are usually commuter colleges.)

A third, successful approach implemented to interest students and draw them closer to Judaism, are organized (sometimes sponsored) student trips. In the past, these trips were exclusively excursions to Israel, usually involving a Yeshiva component. Ohr

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<sup>3</sup> The program is designed to encourage observant students to study Torah and deepen their religious practice and commitment, while opening up true Torah perspectives to the student and Jewish community at large. It does so by sending a young married Torah Educator couple to be involved in a holistic way on a particular campus.

<sup>4</sup> Ner LeElef has also found that nurturing contacts in the official university hierarchy has led to some positive results. At *Ben-Gurion University* for example, the cooperation of some influential professors in conjunction with the student union, has led to the establishment of a Torah Center, just getting off the ground now. This program will be based upon high quality "Shorashim style" lectures on topics such as: Self-discovery, Mysticism, Relationships, etc. which are proving to be excellent draw cards for students. These lectures will be bolstered by periodic Shabbatonim and seminars and we will ultimately develop second level informal Beit Midrash programs.



Somayach's JLE and Aish's Fellowships are good examples of the success of this program both in terms of participation and continued interest and involvement. In the last few years, there wasn't a baal teshuvah institute that did not have, at minimum, a special summer program. Also, the Birthright program offered a new avenue of funding and recruitment<sup>5</sup> especially for many of the smaller of these excursions.

Founded in 1992, NEIJS<sup>6</sup> aims to bring eighty participants annually, to Israel through these two core programs:

Jewish Professional Ethics & Israel Experience Program for graduate students studying law, business, journalism, education, foreign affairs and architecture<sup>7</sup>.

Jewish Medical Ethics & Israel Experience Program<sup>8</sup>

NEIJS and Ner LeElef are now cooperating to begin a special training course to train a select group of Ner LeElef students in medical and other ethics issues as well as other elements of campus programming with a view to Rabbi Cowan placing these people in part time positions on graduate colleges around North America. These graduates would then work to generate similar discussion and interest both on campus and for these missions.

With the outbreak of the current Intifada, and the greater reluctance of students to travel to Israel, organizations like Aish HaTorah's English Fellowships have led the way with alternative locations such as safaris to South Africa, and trips to New York and Australia. Variations on the 'March of the Living', offering a Europe (Holocaust-related)-Israel combination, have been adopted by NCSY's Rabbi Dovid Felsenthal and others. While these trips attract many students unwilling or unable to travel to Israel at this time and engages them in a stimulating Jewish experience, the danger remains, however, that these non-Israel trips may become so institutionalized that organizations will find it difficult to recall the enormous spiritual benefits of the Israel

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<sup>5</sup> Israelite, Ohr Somayach, Aish HaTorah, NCSY and Chabad have all used the Birthright option. American based organizations were slower to take advantage of this option.

<sup>6</sup> NEIJS is an Official Partner Agency of National Hillel, which helps advertise the program nationally to each campus Hillel. The Jewish Professional Ethics & Israel Experience Program is an official offering of Birthright Israel. For further details see the NEIJS web site, [www.neijs.org](http://www.neijs.org).

<sup>7</sup> The Jewish Professional Ethics & Israel Experience Program offers parallel sessions addressing students' professional fields in Israel as well as their Jewish ethical implications. Law students tour the Supreme Court and Knesset and take classes on international intellectual property law and Jewish legal ethics. MBA students visit hi-tech companies, meet venture capitalists and study Jewish business ethics. The journalism track provides rare insight into one of the top locations worldwide attracting professional journalists and media to cover its dynamic political environment. Included are workshops on international reporting and visits to Israel-based newspaper and Internet publishers. Education students explore the value of education within Judaism and Israeli school systems. Architecture students delve into the uniqueness of blending ancient and modern design in Israeli cities. Foreign affairs students analyze Israeli foreign policy with key strategists.

The month-long Medical Ethics trip costs \$2,900, though most students are charged \$700 after scholarships. The Professional Ethics Program is a Birthright program and is therefore free for the first ten days.

<sup>8</sup> The program is run in coordination with the Schlesinger Institute of Medical Ethics and Shaarei Zedek Medical Center, Jerusalem and includes clinical rounds.



trips. The Israel experience impact is, arguably, far greater and lasting. In Israel, unlike say on a safari in South Africa, the participant is exposed to a new sphere of Jewish existence and community, including a more inclusive encounter with a wider array of possibilities he or she could then apply to their personal lives. Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf is a strong advocate of the Israel-or-bust approach as one that not only reflects sound Jewish values, but is also the wisest approach from a practical, outreach point of view. (For more on the opposing view later, see Rabbi Charles Lebow's article, Trips section.)

A fourth approach has been the establishment of Batei Midrash on campuses as a conduit for Kiruv and Jewish enrichment. Ner LeElef's Haifa University Beis HaMidrash (Betzavta), for example, involves students who participate in a four-hour a week learning program for which they receive an official tuition break from the university<sup>9</sup>. None of these students are observant and the Beit Midrash serves as a vehicle to introduce Jewish concepts and connection. Similar Batei Midrash also serve a constituency of already observant students as a focal point of connectedness on campus, (and fighting assimilation forces) such as the Beit Midrash at U. of Penn. As discussed later in this issue, outreach to the already observant student is also a worthy and valuable effort in stemming the tide of assimilation on campus.

Rabbi Lebow's contribution is based on a different approach entirely, namely the idea of empowering students, rather than leading them from above. Students, this approach believes, have a great need to express their own autonomy and need to run their own student organizations. The role of the outreach worker in this case, is to act as an advisor and a mentor, to provide finances, ideas and Torah wisdom, But to leave the programming per se to be done by the students. This approach arose from some of the most fabulous campus outreach efforts of all time, the WUJS-affiliated student movements, SAUJS (South African Union of Jewish Students) and the Canadian Network Students Organization. These organizations were very successful in motivating students and creating a deep sense of community and responsibility along with Jewish affiliation and practice. Unfortunately, the Network is now defunct, and SAUJS, though still active and perhaps even vibrant, is facing challenges due to the fragmentation of its student population. (SJA of England provides a similar, though historically less effective model.) Hundred of students became frum through these student movements, who combined activism, Israel-identity and Judaism as one Jewish package. The author of the article above, Rabbi Charles Lebow, a Network leader graduate, has modeled these ideas in his JWALOP (Jews With a Lot of Pride) initiative in Montreal (funded by the Heritage House) and now his SSNAP (Students Spreading Knowledge and Pride) initiative, funded by Ner LeElef. The SSNAP initiative is important because it answers an important question: "Can the student model work in the U.S.A. given that the States has never had a truly national students organization?"

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<sup>9</sup> The fact that Israel's premier left-wing university agreed to such an initiative indicates that the world of the secular, Israeli upper-middle to upper class, is not as impenetrable as many have claimed. Ner LeElef is currently negotiating this option with other Israeli universities.



It is not easy to relinquish control to the students in the way that Rabbi Lebow does (and even harder to find funding for this), but he has shown how successful this approach can be.

In today's often virulently anti-Semitic environment on the campus pro-Israel activism has become a new key to student activism and involvement.

Recognizing this, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, which invests \$3 million a year in supporting Jewish college students, has, since the latest crisis, pumped hundreds of thousands of additional dollars into the effort. In addition, the foundation organized a consultation session in Washington with representatives of 15 Jewish organizations. Leaders strategized on how to better support and train students to make Israel's case on the campuses.

In order to turn defense into attack, the activist needs to redefine the enemy as being anti-American and pro-terror. In the USA, where there is a lot of patriotism and a lot of anti-terrorist feelings, the opportunity to do this is great.

As former student activist Danny Eisen puts it, "If you ignore the context of people's lives, you cannot move them." Students are feeling besieged and confused, and are looking for guidance. Student leaders, on the other hand, have, for the first time since Soviet Jewry, an activist issue to sink their teeth into. Many of the best Hasbarah experts are not only frum, but also kiruv minded people like David Olesker (independent), Daniel Pipes and Michael Jankelowitz of Hillel. (A lot of local Hillels are not pro-Israel.) Not all the successful activist initiatives are frum – AIPAC is an example that has attracted high quality students<sup>10</sup> - But frum organizations like Aish HaTorah<sup>11</sup>, which has several different initiatives and SSNAP have tended to be the most dynamic in this area, drawing on current issues to deepen and strengthen the Jewish self-image and knowledge base, and thus, pride and level of commitment (practice) with students

In general, for pro-Israel or anti-Semitism challenging activism to succeed as a Kiruv impetus and tool it must be integrated into a broader sense of Jewish consciousness. Students must ultimately perceive that it is their overall Jewish identity that is under attack and not simply far-away Israel and the concept of a Jewish State.

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<sup>10</sup> There are numerous other people involved with Israel Activism, although they reflect a more secular approach. Jeremy Bandler of the Israel Pillar, employed by UJC (United Jewish Communities) for the Israel Pillar, the 12<sup>th</sup> House and Neil Lazarus are all worthy initiatives. The Canadian Israel Congress is funding an initiative and the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) has a person who deals with students, besides the contribution of the local ADL branches. Every Federation has a CRC, although some of these are actually critical of the policies of the Israeli government. There are a number of local, grass roots initiatives like The Boston Israel Action Committee, and Patrick O'Mar, leader of the Concordia Hillel.

Allen Orich and Steven Emerson (who is an expert on Arab terror) have also made worthy contributions, who could be trotted out to go from campus to campus to deal with the Israel issues. In England, the UJS (Union of Jewish Students), SAUJS in South African and in Australia, AUJS (Australian Union of Jewish Students) have had to respond to a barrage of mainly Moslem anti-Israelism and Anti-Semitism.

<sup>11</sup> Project SICK (Stop Inciting Children to Kill) was started by Aish. Rabbi Moshe Zeldman has now given it over to the students themselves to run off Maryland's College Park Campus.



For a short while, the Israeli Foreign Ministry had a budget for hasbarah and Aish HaTorah organized Hasbara Fellowships with a \$50 000 grant from the Foreign Ministry. The Hasbara Fellowships, which brings students to Israel to train them to be pro-Israel activists and leaders on campus, brought nearly 200 students from over 50 campuses to Israel last year.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the most effective experts on Israel Hasbarah are Orthodox (and some are Chareidi) gives the students positive models of Orthodoxy, which they see as a package deal, i.e. Israel and Judaism. Their interest in Israel activism usually ignites a broader interest in Judaism. Interest in Israel ultimately leads to deeper questions of what it is that we stand for and what we are fighting for.

The campus activist approach has a particular advantage to Kiruv in a region with numerous campuses. By encouraging the students to create a regional movement and regional cooperation around a common goal, it is possible to organize regional Shabatonim and the like, turning a haggard kiruv worker running from campus to campus into someone who is successfully enabling a whole cadre of empowered students to assist him in his mission. Ideally one should find one student who is being paid to be the regional coordinator (to work in conjunction with any student elected [student] leader). \$1,500 a month will generally suffice to provide a full-time, student resource person (taking a year off or just graduated), while \$500 a month will usually suffice for someone who is still studying. FFB (frum from birth) students may be the handiest to get hold of but are usually too different to the secular student to act as an inspiring and appealing role model. Experience has shown that the most successful student leaders are those who are getting involved with Judaism, are very enthusiastic about Torah and Mitzvos, but are not quite frum yet. It is his/her job, in turn, to seek out a core student leadership on each campus, whom you can then “train” in various aspects of Jewish leadership.

On a more visionary level, it would be wonderful and highly productive to coordinate the efforts of all those involved in campus outreach to establish a world body of Jewish students with regional chapters. The only current body, WUJS (the World Union of Jewish Students) is not as inclusive as this vision and is neutral to Torah Judaism. The benefits of such a movement would be considerable:

1. It would provide students with a sense that they are a part of something much bigger than their individual campus effort. This would inspire and motivate them. This year, SSNAP held a convention in the USA to which 60 new students also attended. The ripple effect would continue to expand, reaching more and more students exponentially.

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<sup>12</sup> The goal of the two week program is in the words of Elliot Mathias: “To give students the information, materials, tools and motivation to fight for the Jewish people at a time when anti-Semitism and blood libels are abundant. We feel that by fighting for the Jewish people and Israel, first of all, these students will reach out to many other students who’s Jewish identity is tied to the State of Israel yet they feel uncomfortable supporting it – thus their Jewish identity is bashed. Second, the leaders themselves will become more connected to the Jewish People and Judaism by being activists.”



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2. It would allow us to access more sophisticated students (such as some of the SSNAP students) to help some of the less sophisticated ones.
3. It would provide the impetus to establish more 'branches' of this movement in other campuses and countries.
4. It would provide a clear direction, leadership and goals towards which the students will work.

It is this authors' belief that such a scenario is not so fanciful.

Any number of rabbis could be involved to contribute content for the world body charter and tips on the specifics of fighting our enemies could be articulated and collected (which the experts in this field will happily share<sup>13</sup>) making the resources available to all the chapters. A galvanizing manifesto of Jewish defense can then be expressed through a series of conventions at which the emergence of this Alliance would be announced. This body would cover areas of defense of Israel, a student coalition against terror and a central stronghold for Jewish values. I believe that this would give the students a shared vision and the knowledge that they are part of the larger picture and making a real-world difference.

(As an aside: although conventions are not specifically labeled as Shabatons, experience has shown that with some known, reliable students on board and participating, the students usually do expect a convention to include davening, proper Shabbos meals and Divrei Torah, with a Rabbi or Rabbis present.)

Midway between the two models of classical Kiruv and student led activism is yet another model represented in Ner LeElef's initiatives in Argentina, accomplished in conjunction with Rabbis Isaac Sacca and Avraham Serruya. Here student leaders are given a monthly stipend in return for a commitment to four hours of weekly Torah study, four hours of leadership training and an equivalent number of hours of field work. These students not only run campus activities, but also have initiated several projects in the broader community. Several began a Sunday Talmud Torah in an area of Buenos Aires that previously had none, while others went out every Shabbos to more isolated communities in Argentina where they ran Shabbos services, gave shiurim and, in general, organized the Jewish community. One group developed a multi-media presentation, while another group created a school-aged youth movement, with hundreds in attendance. Similarly, Aish HaTorah's fellowships in

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<sup>13</sup> For example, identify where they have violated hate laws and take them to court. Make sure that every event is videoed so that if they turn violent you can hand it to the FBI. You could have an emergency conference on Israel, inviting all kind of existing student organizations and individual students. But this would require a clear follow-up plan in place in advance. It is important to note that for this whole approach to work, you have to produce something that really works, which undermines the local PLO guy. It will have to be a sophisticated program. If you do not believe that the program itself has any value other than as an entry gate to doing Kiruv, you probably will lack the commitment to achieve the desired results. To some degree, you have to be in the trenches with them, otherwise they won't believe that you really understand what they are going through.



England are exploring a similar model. These models are, in a way, more sophisticated versions of the more secular Steinhard fellows.

Finally, we would like to mention a novel idea, proposed by Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Travis<sup>14</sup>. Rabbi Travis suggests an urgent need to channel suitable candidates into the academic programs for Jewish Studies “so that the Universities are not so overwhelmingly dominated by those who would misguide - innocently or not. ... Most Kiruv workers have no idea how ridiculously miniscule every successful Kiruv encounter is in comparison with the damage wrought by hours upon hours of the myriad of college students drinking in less than kosher approaches to Torah from "scholars" of Judaica. There is a need for the Kiruv community to address this issue,” Rabbi Travis believes that an important key to ‘turning the tide’ on campus assimilation and generating accurate Jewish knowledge and perception among students is to increase the presence of frum, even Kiruv-minded lecturers and professors in Jewish Studies Departments<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup><sup>15</sup> Rabbi Yakov Travis, Ph.D., Siegal College of Judaic Studies (formerly, "Cleveland College of Jewish Studies"), [ytravis@siegalcollege.edu](mailto:ytravis@siegalcollege.edu), 216-464-4050 x112

<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup> The idea was presented to by Rabbi Travis to AJOP, in the context of offering his services as a speaker.



## **CAMPUS ANTI-SEMITISM:**

A catalyst for much recent Jewish activism on campus, the current state of the campus climate in view of recent events in the Middle East warrants a more detailed look. Below we focus on some important aspects of this recently urgent problem.

For nearly two and a half years now, the Intifada has caused a massive outpouring of Palestinian violence all over Israel and the territories. This, in turn, triggered acts of violence and vandalism to thousands of Jewish targets world-wide, including synagogues, schools and individuals. More than 60 synagogues were attacked, the largest number of attacks on synagogues since 1938.

While other countries have shied away from stating policy or condemning Israel outright (opening the door to these acts of violence) the one notable exception is the United States. After initially wavering, President George W. Bush came out in strong support of Israel<sup>1</sup>, as did the broader public as well as Republican representatives overall. (Support amongst the Democratic Party, however, was muted or absent<sup>2</sup>, though this does not seem to have effected their loyal Jewish constituency to any great degree.)

Conservative journalists also generally supported Israel. The editorials of The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Times; the columns of Charles Krauthammer, George Will, Irving Kristol, John Leo, Bill Kristol, Michael Kelly — all came out solidly in support of Israel as did the Christian right.

However, on the campuses and in the liberal media an entirely different climate prevails. Here, pro-Palestinian biases reign supreme. More than 100 anti-Semitic incidents, including graffiti, vandalism, hate speeches, and violence occurred on US campuses between January and April 2002 alone. Many campuses' maintained public silence on anti-Semitic incidents, with Harvard noted as an exception rather than the rule.

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<sup>1</sup> 300 USA congressmen sent a letter to President Bush urging him to rethink America's relations with the PA. Members of official PA security services were committing terrorism with impunity, they claimed, and the PLO had again run "summer camps" that provided weapons training 30,000 youths. President Bush, who in the earlier days of the military campaign repeatedly stated Israel's right to defend itself from terror, did an about face one day, and without warning, demanded that Israel leave all West Bank towns immediately. When he saw that he was being criticized by even his own party, he sent Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz to a huge Washington rally in support of Israel. (Mr. Wolfowitz is Jewish. Mr. Wolfowitz's father escaped Poland after World War I. The rest of his father's family perished in the Holocaust.)

<sup>2</sup> Clinton himself, no longer president, took the Palestinian side that "there cannot be a cease-fire without a withdrawal" and equated Arafat and Ariel Sharon as "bull-headed." Democrat Tom Daschle, Senate majority leader, then blocked a bipartisan resolution by Senators Mitch McConnell and Dianne Feinstein to designate the PLO as a terrorist group. Democrat Joe Biden refused to allow Bibi Netanyahu to appear before Senate Foreign Relations. The former prime minister's purpose was to call attention to Sharon's acceptance of — and Arafat's rejection of — the U.S. proposal for a cease-fire that would have saved hundreds of civilian lives. This forced Joe Lieberman to go against the Democratic leadership. He said Bush's call to stop the counterattack "muddled our moral clarity" in the war against terror. Even formerly pro-Israel Al Gore, refused to take a stand in favor of Israel, preferring to fall silent.



At a pro-Palestinian rally outside the AIPAC conference, demonstrators chanted "Yes to Jews. No to Zionists!", but on America's liberal college campuses, the line between anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiment has become unrecognizable or nonexistent. Jewish students feel harassed and insecure. There is a sense of loneliness and ineptitude in defending Israel, the nuances of the historic conflict hard for them to recall during pointed debates.

Sometimes the situation is exacerbated when fellow Jews, not Muslims, become the loudest critics of Israel on campus. In 2002, 70 campuses across the USA had coordinated pro-Palestinian Yom HaShoa events.

There is much greater force on the pro-Palestinian side than Jewish power. Some examples are: In Berkeley, 79 pro-Palestinian protestors were arrested, when they stormed into a classroom after a rally. The Berkeley Hillel was broken into and 4 students were beaten up. In Canada alone Arab countries poured \$10 million into pro-Palestinian student activism.

In the Bay area, anti-Israel protests have been the norm for decades. After being surrounded by a mob of students shouting, "Hitler didn't finish the job," and "Get out or we'll kill you," pro-Israel students at San Francisco State University finally found an ally in the university president who asked the local district attorney's office to help bring pro-Palestinian hate-mongers to justice. One staff member reported: "As the counter-demonstrators poured into the plaza, screaming at the Jews to 'Get out or we'll kill you' and 'Hitler didn't finish the job,' one Jewish Hillel staff member turned to the campus police and to every administrator he could find and asked them to remove the counter-demonstrators from the plaza, to maintain the separation of 100 feet that we had been promised. The police told him that they had been told not to arrest anyone, and that if they did, 'it would start a riot.' He told them that it already was a riot." The San Francisco Police then had to be called who marched the pro-Israel rally to the campus Hillel House and a guard was posted at the door.

This culminated two years of posters around campus equating Zionism with racism and Jews with Nazis, and pictures of cans of soup labeled "Canned Palestinian Children Meat, slaughtered according to Jewish rites under American license."

Jewish students on Canadian campuses have been particularly hard-hit, with a string of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic incidents. In September 2002, pro-Palestinian students at Concordia rioted in advance of an address by Foreign Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, forcing him to cancel his appearance, and a Jewish student was physically assaulted soon after while removing an anti-Israel poster from a campus wall.

On December 2, Concordia's student union voted to revoke the status and funding of the Jewish student group Hillel as a recognized campus organization and suspended its annual funding. This has prompted Concordia Hillel members to file a civil suit against the student union. The university recently imposed a three-month moratorium on all Middle East-related events, which the student union claimed the Hillel had transgressed by displaying brochures for Mahal 2000, a program for foreign volunteers in the IDF. The union accused Hillel of recruiting for a foreign army, which it said is illegal under Canadian law. On Concordia's Web site, university



officials wrote that the vote took place on the last day of class, at midnight and with little notice. They noted that just one third of the student union's 27 officers showed up, producing a vote of 8-1. The student union, an accredited organization under Quebec law, is not accountable to the university<sup>3</sup>.

Concordia also held an occupation day, when pro-Palestinians dressed up as Israeli soldiers and harassed people, asking them for ID. Harvard held a similar rally in Harvard yard, simulating Israeli soldiers beating up women.

The situation on other campuses is hardly better. An increasing number of students in universities and colleges say that they fear reprisals if they challenge prevailing pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel views. If they argue that Israel has the right to exist, they are often greeted with threats, even physical assault.

In some cases, the pro-Palestinians wore yellow Magen David stars, drawing parallels between the victims of the Nazis and the Palestinians. Exhibits displayed in the student union of Detroit's Wayne State University said that Israelis are "The murderers of innocents," "US taxes to massacre Palestinians must stop," "It is our Aksa not their Temple," and "Zionism is Racism."

At the University of Michigan, about 50 protestors, some with arms tied and mouths gagged, paraded mutely through the Ann Arbor campus. One young man, clad only in underwear, bore a sign saying he was representing the "Palestinians who were asked to strip naked by the Israeli Army, lie on their stomachs and then taken to an unknown location."

At Ohio State University, about 60 protestors lined a campus sidewalk that faces a busy Columbus thoroughfare and chanted: "Stop the hate. Stop the crime. Help save Palestine." Some also wore yellow armbands.

At the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Michigan and the University of California, Berkeley, students dressed like Israeli soldiers, have set up mock checkpoints on campus to "harass" students playing Palestinians.

Unlike twenty years ago, many of the Arabs today are very Americanized and speak with a fluent American accent. They are much easier to identify with.

In addition to the pro-Palestinian student initiatives and covert support from university management and faculty, many campuses now have divestment campaigns, targeting companies that do business with Israel. Petitions for divestment have circulated at more than 50 campuses<sup>4</sup>. Some of the divestment activists come from the anti-globalism movement or from campus groups for Muslim students. A few of the

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<sup>3</sup> As reported by Meillas Radler, Jerusalem Post, Dec. 8, 2002

<sup>4</sup> In the University of California system, more than 7,000 students and faculty members have signed. A pro-divestment group at Princeton has singled out 16 companies as targets, including General Electric, IBM and McDonald's. At the University of Texas, a small group of about 10 students meet once a week to look over the school's investment portfolio, hunting for companies that do substantial business with Israel. Students sympathetic to the Palestinian cause have been circulating a petition around the Austin campus since July, calling on the university to sell off the stock of those firms.



groups, like those at the University of Michigan and U.C. Berkeley, take pains to point out that they have Jewish students among their supporters.

All the above-mentioned aspects of anti-Semitism which students are increasingly confronted with on campus generates a deeply felt motivation to become knowledgeable and articulate enough to respond effectively, visibly and powerfully. In addition all this conflict and outpouring of hate prompts many students to question and seek to discover what it is that is being so violently attacked. Students who barely identify themselves as Jewish suddenly need to know why they are singled out as different and are facing antagonism. This opens the unique opportunity to reach out to these students and provide them with a real sense of what it is to be Jewish, what it is they are defending as well as to give them the informational facts and tools they need to respond. Kiruv efforts can and should build on the initiative to support Israel to stimulate students to deepen their personal ties to Judaism.

As mentioned earlier, and as an example, Aish HaTorah's Hasbara Fellowship program ([www.israelactivism.com](http://www.israelactivism.com)) pursues just this approach. Led by Rabbi Elliot Mathias, galvanized by the horror of the beating Israel and Jewish students were taking on campus, the program stepped in to create and lead an initiative which educates and empowers students. By focusing heavily on the Jewish connection to Eretz Yisroel/Israel, Rabbi Mathias has found that students initially interested in shoring up their knowledge and idea base in the pro-Israel activist forum, grew (grow) in many different ways from joining other learning programs such as Jewel and Essentials to participating in authentic Shabbos experiences and meals to even committing to keep Shabbos themselves, etc.

These are times of urgency, where the great need to reach out to so many of our youth is overwhelming. From Israel, where one would assume at minimum a basic sense of Jewishness among youth, the truth is that most of the 148,200 university students there are unaffiliated, largely unknowledgeable and even antagonistic towards their own Jewish heritage, to their Russian counterparts who are sometimes hearing about the meaning of being Jewish for the first time in three generations, the need seems endless and the concerns great. At the same time, these are times of great opportunity where a number of factors mentioned combine to enable a sea-change, which we must act upon.