



CONTENTS – Issue # 10

UJCL Encounters - Guadalajara

	<u>Page</u>
- <i>Opening Words at the UJCL 9th Encounter</i> <i>by Jack L. Davidson (President)</i>	2-3
- <i>Letter from the Organizing Committee</i> <i>by María E. Moel</i>	4-5
- <i>“UJCL Encounter”</i> <i>by Jerry Tanenbaum (WUPJ)</i>	6-7
- <i>“Guadalajara, Guadalajara!!”</i> <i>by Ivette Koch (El Salvador)</i>	8
- <i>“Guadalajara 2006...and we keep journeying...”</i> <i>by Eliana Gribnicow (Panamá)</i>	9
- <i>A Few Highlights from Dr. Daniel Fainstein’s Talk on Tikkun Olam”</i>	10-11
- <i>“Mom: I Am Dating a non Jewish boy/girl!”</i> <i>by Rabbi Marcelo Bater</i>	12
- <i>“What Never Was”</i> <i>by Martha E. Lichtenstein</i>	13-14
- <i>“Union”</i> <i>Poem written by Cheryle Tacher</i>	15
- <i>Condolence Letter to Dr. José Miller (z”l)</i>	16

MIFGASH



Union of Jewish Congregations of Latin America and the Caribbean Unión Judía de Congregaciones de Latinoamérica y El Caribe

Good Evening!

It is truly a pleasure being here this evening for the 9th UJCL Convention and especially for the 5th Youth Encounter.

In the name of the Board of Directors I welcome you to the Convention.

First of all, I would like to thank the Hebrew Community of Guadalajara-*Kehilá Masortit*, for the work they have done to make this project a reality.

The annual Conventions and the Encounters are our most important events inasmuch as they confirm and turn into reality the purpose of the creation of the Union of Jewish Congregations of Latin America and the Caribbean, the uniting of small communities to enrich Jewish life and to be the entity that represents us in the presence of the "great Jewish world". United we are recognized and we count, united we grow, united we survive.

"*Kol Israel Arevim ze la ze*", teaches the Talmud. We have the responsibility one for the other. History has shown us that for Jews the Union is not only strength, it may come to represent survival.

Just as we are responsible for each other, the fact that we are privileged to live at a time of relative peace in history, makes us responsible for the welfare of the world around us, a social responsibility that refers to the central topic of this Convention: *TIKKUN OLAM*.

The concept of *Tikkun Olam* unites the Jewish values of justice, compassion, and peace and has come to symbolize the search for social justice, liberty, equality, and the restoration of the environment.

How different our history would have been if the world around us would have felt a social responsibility towards us and would have been concerned about our well-being - *TIKKUN OLAM*. History is the best teacher; let us learn not only from our deeds but also from the deeds and omissions of others. We cannot enjoy our well-being, the privilege of having, without worrying about the condition of our fellow man in our world nor allowing that those that surround us suffer the same discrimination and oppression we have felt.

Each Convention is also an opportunity to rethink our Union and its workings. The year 2005 has been for the UJCL a year of many positive accomplishments as to our contacts and relations.

The creation of our virtual magazine MIFGASH has been a complete success.

The economic support of the WUPJ helped to create the excellent Communications Department headed by Martha Lichtenstein in collaboration with Rabbi Marcelo Bater and Cheryle Tacher. Our gratitude to the WUPJ for the confidence and support it has offered us and our sincere congratulations to all who work so arduously, not only publishing *Mifgash* but also maintaining the UJCL more informed and in communication. *Kol Hakavod!*

MIFGASH



Rabbi Marcelo Bater represented us at the World Conference of Religions for Peace and I had the honor of representing the UJCL at meetings of the American Jewish Committee and the Latin American Jewish Congress.

At these important meetings as in many other aspects of Jewish life in the world, we, members of small communities can say, as did the patriarch Abraham: *HINENI*, here we are! Let us continue to be present and representing our interests with pride and dignity.

Nevertheless, we also have pending matters. Our efforts in stirring up the necessity of other communities to join us have not been as successful as we had desired. In spite of this, our conviction obliges us to keep trying to communicate the need to unite and to participate, in order to survive and to enrich ourselves. There is much that we can give to these communities. It is part of our *TIKKUN OLAM* to help them see that the Union is needed to improve the quality of Jewish life in their communities.

The presence at this 9th UJCL Convention of so many people representing Latin American Jewish Organizations, Israel, and the entire world shows us that we, this Union of small communities that history had destined to disappear into oblivion, not only is alive and flourishing but is also being taken into account, a part of the mosaic that forms the Jewish people in the XXI Century.

For this reason I want to acknowledge the presence at this meeting of:

Amb. Daniel Gazit, - Director of the Latin American Dept. of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel,
Dr. Daniel Fainstein – Director of the Hebraic University of Mexico,
Mr. Arie Avir – Director of the Latin American Office of the Jewish Agency (Sochnut)
Mrs. Zuli Dreispiegel and Mr. Eitan Paldi, also of the Sochnut,
Mr. Jerry Tanenbaum - Chairman *Yad b'Yad* Task Force (WUPJ).
Dr. Jorge Schulman – Associate Director of the Latin American Office of the Joint,
Roberto Brzostowski Organization Director of the Latin American Jewish Congress
Lic. Claudio Epelman – Adjunct Director of the Latin American Jewish Congress,
Lic. Enrique Burbinski – Director HIAS Latin America,
Alberto Jabiles – Executive Director *B'nai B'rith* District XXIII,
Prof. Sonia Gabizon - *B'nai B'rith*

Thank you to the rabbis and directors of the communities that form the UJCL; thank you for their constant support.

To each one present here, I am grateful to you for coming here to share these days with us. I hope that when this Convention ends we all return to our homes with a little more knowledge and with the desire to transmit what we learned to our communities in order to improve Jewish life. We will surely also take with us memories of days shared with friends, old and new, which will enrich us.

Each Convention represents an extraordinary event and marks growth for our Jewish experience. Thanks to the UJCL, we and our congregations are more committed to our Judaism. On being here all together, on seeing our youths at this fifth encounter, on appreciating the accomplishments we have achieved in the last years, we are able to affirm with great satisfaction that in Latin America and the Caribbean: “*Am Israel Hai*”, the people of Israel live.

Thank you very much!

(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)

MIFGASH



LETTER FROM THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE UJCL 9TH CONVENTION

Guadalajara, February 15, 2006

Once again I find myself with the task of trying to transmit in writing what we, as hosts, experienced during the organization of our recent Encounters (Ninth and Fifth respectively) and I really do not know where to begin, there are so many marvelous experiences that we shared together it is difficult to do them justice in this letter.

A few months ago, when I was asked to write something with the intention of enthusing those who were coming to Guadalajara I revealed a promise on our part:

“... the commitment the Hebrew Community of Guadalajara made with this event and is as follows: if you honor us with your presence, I assure you that after the Encounter you will take with you a little of our country, not only in your luggage, but principally, also in your hearts, inasmuch as we plan to imbed the flavor of Mexico in each detail of this convention...”

It is with satisfaction I am able to say that I know we fulfilled our promise, since some of you have been very amiable in sending us letters reflecting your impressions.

What we did not count on and that now, we barely are beginning to comprehend is:

The Host Community receives more than it gives.

Thus ideas have the fascinating quality of not weakening those who transmit them and yes, in turn, enrich all those who listen to them. For them I want to take advantage and reproduce here the speech of gratitude I read with much emotion the night of our Gala Dinner, but with one modification, on this occasion it is not directed at all those who helped in the organization of the event, but rather now it is directed at each of the participants in the Encounters in Guadalajara, now they are for you:

“It is said that the only difference between someone who is outstanding and someone who is not, is the belief in oneself.” History has given us many examples and I name just a few...

- When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone (1876), he looked for someone to finance the project. President Rutherford Hayes told him it was an extraordinary invention but commented “Who is going to use it?”
- Albert Einstein did not speak until 4 years of age and he learned to read at 7 as an average student. His teacher qualified him as “mentally slow” and he was later expelled from school.

MIFGASH



- Sir Winston Churchill repeated sixth grade at the primary level and after a very rough life he became the first Prime Minister of England until age 62.
- Thomas Edison made 200 experiments in order to successfully create the light bulb. A young reporter asked him how he felt after so many failures to whom he answered "I did not fail even one time, it turns out that my invention required a process of 200 steps..."

This attitude of the greatest from history teaches us no less than two things:

- 1.- Each one of them was committed to what he was doing and firmly believed in himself, even in the presence of adversities they had to face.
- 2.- Their determination was not affected by criticism. They placed the accent on the positive and accepted the negative as part of a necessary process in order to achieve success.

After all on the road to life, some pick up flowers and others remain only with the mud...

Both lessons denote the will and the spirit each one of them had in themselves and in their projects. We are reminded of the words that Dany Fainstein shared with us during his conference: "we need to wake up in each one of us the awareness to be leaders within our small communities, inasmuch as without the participation and without the commitment of each and every one of its members there is no community life."

The invitation, not only from Dany, but also from each one of the excellent presenters we had the privilege of listening to throughout the course of these days is:

to convert each one of us into a leader in our Community.

I believe they all played an excellent role in planting, in each one of the participants, this seed to keep working for the growth of our community life..."

To you who participated in the 9th UJCL Encounter or in the 5th Youth Encounter I want to say thank you! Thank you for coming to Guadalajara, thank you for participating in each conference, in each service, in each activity. There were many very beautiful particulars that you and each and every one of the delegations of the Participating Communities left with us, and with those we again confirm that the marvel of these encounters is that we continue enriching ourselves together.

Maria Elena Moel

(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)

MIFGASH



UJCL Encounter - Guadalajara, México (January 26-29, 2006)

By Jerry Tanenbaum
Executive Director
Yad b'Yad Task Force
World Union for Progressive Judaism

The following are excerpts from Jerry Tanenbaum's address at the 9th UJCL Encounter :
Over a period of years, I have visited many of the other countries that belong to the Union of Jewish Congregations of Latin America and the Caribbean. In fact, I think that I can say that I have been, at one time or another, to almost all of them (well, maybe not every one) but most all of them. In each one of them, I found somewhat unique cultures, topography, and people.

This past week in the USA we celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. I guess that most of you are familiar with his famous "I have a dream" speech. Well, I have a dream, too. I dream of all of us joining hands to work in a cooperative partnership, sharing ideas, but building on the precepts of our ancient faith to make an everlasting and meaningful impact here. Our shared vision is one bound up in mutually beneficial and cooperative partnerships. It is our mandate to guarantee that our children and our children's children are born into a strong and vibrant Jewish community. We can only do this by recognizing that our strength is in our unity. We must set aside all of our differences as we join our hands and our minds to strive to combat assimilation, disinterest, and non-affiliation. I challenge each of you to commit yourselves to work earnestly and diligently over the next few days so that when you leave on Sunday, you will depart with a renewed vigor and a spirit of mutual trust, a lasting beneficial relationship, and boundless enthusiasm. Remember, our only limitations are those we impose on ourselves. We have assembled in this hall today many of the brightest and the most articulate Jewish leaders in this area of the world. You each now bear a heavy responsibility for our success.

I pray that God will give us the wisdom to see a clear path to success. We seek not just Jewish continuity, but Jewish survival. We must counteract the destructive forces at play. The insidiousness of assimilation, secularism, and rigidity are our enemies. To do nothing is to doom posterity to a residual of people who will acknowledge their Jewish heritage, but not a Jewish presence. Twenty first century Judaism must be modern and relevant, meaningful to our youth, and inclusive. The very core values of our faith are important not just to us as Jews, but to democratic values in every nation in this world.

I ask that you share your important ideas with others and with me. We want to hear your thoughts and learn from you. The future is now.

All of us have so much in common—so much to share and learn from each other. We all have common objectives. They are social justice, continuity of Judaism, educating our youth so there will be a Jewish tomorrow.

I am really concerned about our tendency to label each other. We recognize the richness of our Jewish heritage and the beauty of our shared traditions. But, at the same time, we acknowledge that in this modern era we cannot, we will not, be bound by ideas that are no longer meaningful in this modern world.

MIFGASH



Our youth, our intelligent society demands evolutionary changes that allow them to adapt to the society in which they live.

This is our strategy to win back the unaffiliated, to counter assimilation, and to carry the true banner and majestic teachings of Judaism to all people on this earth.

No two of us here are exactly the same. And, why should we be? Diversity is meaningful because it requires us to think and to compromise. It allows us, as modern liberal Jews, to accept or reject the things that are relevant and meaningful.

This week our Torah portion is called *Va'era* which comes from Exodus. God becomes Adonai. In early chapters of Genesis, God is called "*El Shaddai*". In an earlier passage God changes Jacob's name to Israel.

Later on, in *Va'era*, God reveals the divine four letter name "Y-H-V-H" to Moses. Curiously, this four letter name is related to the Hebrew verb which means "to be". Therefore, just as we continue to grow and mature as spiritual individuals, and society, so does God continue to evolve with us. The point I make here is that names do not change who we are, or who God is. This describes the evolutionary process that today makes us all liberal Jews.

In closing I would remind you that each of us is summoned to symbolically return to Sinai. For many of us, it is a return to a familiar place where we once again see the mountain wrapped in smoke, shaking in volcanic eruption; hear the shofar's echo; and experience the still, small voice that changed the world forever and changes us each time we take the time to listen and hear it.

Sometimes we return to the mountain in hope and anticipation and are greeted by a silence that leaves us lonely and longing. Then, we are challenged to hear that voice and find a way to turn to study and deeds, Torah and *mitzvot* which are the very essence of Jewish life.

Remember always that faith and doubt are twins. Each grows stronger at different times and in different ways within each of us.—in fact, each time we read Torah we take both of them with us to that mountain.

Legend teaches that we were all there at Sinai in the beginning. We are all here together this day in Guadalajara and yes, throughout the world. We may be dispersed, but Judaism is still standing at "our Sinai" for more than 3000 years.

Let's make our time here a grand reunion of the collective Jewish soul. Let us learn that as we all stood together then at Sinai, so should we stand arm in arm—together in this modern age imbued with God's mandate to perfect and repair this broken world.

Ken yehi ratson

MIFGASH



Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Guadalajara!!!

By Ivette Koch (Youth participant from the Youth Encounter) - El Salvador

A warm reception, in spite of the cold, was the first impression we had. Willy and I, arrived at the Hotel Country Plaza to meet with youths from other countries; familiar faces and new faces, a mixture of confusion, tiredness, and happiness invaded us until we left for the community center where a welcome cocktail was prepared for us.

A huge tent, beautifully adorned with typical decorations awaited us to delight us with a fabulous and welcoming soirée together with the other participants. It was the perfect occasion to chat, exchange names, and begin the photograph sessions.

To continue in the tradition, obviously no one slept on any of the days of the convention (and if you ask me, I am still tired), in spite of the fact that on Friday we took an adventurous trip where we walked, climbed, and went rappelling. The place we went to is called Huaxtla, a mountainous place which invited these kinds of exploits. You don't know what a beautiful experience it was, descending an approximately 7 meter cliff where the only things you could observe were rocks, and another of 13 meters near some waterfalls where later, after our efforts we were able to refresh ourselves; and all this with only a rope for support.

Not to mention the fabulous lectures we received, where we were able to reaffirm that we are not unique youths with certain kinds of problems, rather we are a generation who has to fight against them in order to assure the continuity of our tradition.

We had very enriching discussions on themes such as: "How to be Jewish and not die trying?"; "Israeli reality"; "Mom I'm dating a non Jewish boy/girl!"; "In search of lost identities"; among others that were part of the program at the youth convention. And even though there appeared to be many talks, we remained with the urge to hear more.

To close with the punch line, there was the farewell party offered in the community center (only for the youths), in the style of a Mexican fair, with *tacos*, *churros*, and *maíz*, with even a *piñata* filled with delicious sweets to break. The party began with karaoke, where Mr. Gusti came to delight us with his fabulous and inharmonious voice singing "A Dios le pido" by Juanes. Clearly we were to pay the price later, but it was very entertaining. We continued with dance music until about 2 in the morning when we decided to sing again.

After being away from the adults for a while, the moment arrived for the intergenerational encounter where each group (youths and adults) highlighted the best aspects (of the encounters) in order to continue them, those that needed improvement, and new ones we should include in our next encounter. We all agreed to having more intergenerational encounters and to going out in order to get to know a little more about our host city.

What is important is that we all made a commitment to go to Costa Rica next year and bring someone with us, so that those who want to accompany us in living a unique experience are welcome. I assure them that they will have a wonderful time.

(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)

MIFGASH



Guadalajara 2006...and we keep journeying...

By: Eliana Gribnicow (Youth participant from the Youth Encounter) - Panamá

The Youth Encounter that took place in Guadalajara Mexico was an unforgettable experience. We were able to meet youths from Mexico who had not participated in previous conventions and sharing with them in their place was very special. The friendships that we maintain today are the fruits of these encounters organized by the UJCL.

One of our concerns that was seen reflected in many of the opinions that we brought up in the conferences was the importance of maintaining contact among the youths with whom we are sharing in order to be able to exchange activities and meet, why not?, at another time during the year without always depending on the UJCL.

The themes of the Youth Encounter were very real and at the same time objective, combined with some activities to get to know one another and express ourselves in a better way. The sum of all this made it so, that the final result of this trip was a WOW!!!

What was most moving and incredible was that despite the fact that we are from different communities and countries, our communities have the same problems. Abandonment and disinterest were the most difficult problems for which we tried to find solutions. Little by little we began resolving doubts and removing obstacles that had been in our communities and we realized the importance we have as youths in them. We are the future and we are able to change and to correct those errors that had been committed in the past. And with our power we can obtain it, always together and fighting for the same purpose...to be Jewish and to feel proud that we are.

I believe that at this convention I was able to complete my understanding of the importance of being a Jew, and the importance of our history, of our legacy that we will pass on to our children, and they to their children, and so will continue, if, and only if, we remain within Judaism and we win the battle against assimilation that ends up being the easiest path. But, as we said during one of the discussions, to be Jewish is not easy, and less when we are a world minority. Besides this, we are a people who still live and exist and will be so for a long time. The importance of being Jewish walks hand in hand with the importance that Israel should have in our lives.

And today, weeks after the convention, I repeat to myself... I AM JEWISH AND I'M PROUD AND I SHOUT IT OUT LOUD!!!

In conclusion, I wish to thank the UJCL for making this year's convention possible, for enriching the experience of the conventions, and for believing in us, the youth, who have a great responsibility on our hands.

(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)

MIFGASH



A FEW HIGHLIGHTS FROM DR. DANIEL FAINSTEIN'S TALK ON TIKKUN OLAM: THE ROLE OF SMALL COMMUNITIES IN THE XXI CENTURY

Referring to communities, Dr. Fainstein differentiated between Collectivity (all Jewish inhabitants of a certain place) and Community.

The community has a certain organized structure, a geographic space, with symbolic value. Today we have actual and virtual communities.

Moral communities have a network of ethical responsibilities and long range commitments. A *kehilá kedoshá*¹ is much more than the sum of its members. The first fundamental component is a clear sense of moral values.

For the first International Day of the Commemoration of the *Shoa*, Dr. Fainstein urged us not to make sacred nor trite the Holocaust.

The paradigm of Judaism is Jerusalem, not Treblinka. Sinaí, not Auschwitz.

"...I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose then, life. (*Deuteronomy 30:19*).

Our duty: not only to survive but to live life to the fullest.

According to Emil Fackenheim, after the *Shoa* the 614th Commandment is DO NOT GIVE A POSTHUMOUS VICTORY TO HITLER, AFFIRM LIFE IN ALL OF ITS DIMENSIONS.

In Judaism there are fundamental concepts that still continue to be in force, a vision not to be refuted but, in order for this to happen we need to assume them.

The Jewish concept of history connects us with the tree that, according to the story of our tradition, we have to plant even though we may not get to reap its fruits, for our children surely will.

Judaism exists only when it is put into action; we have to translate its ideas and values into daily life.

For its existence a small community needs:

- a) Significant bonds, not to be isolated from the society around it. The transmission of our values is our first responsibility.
- b) In addition, it has to unite with other communities that energize it with practical ideas and motivate its members even more to live as Jews.
- c) The third important connection is with Israel, the collective representation of the Jewish people. It is also the key to strengthening our *kehilot*². As was said by Achad Haam, Israel is the source of Jewish vitality.

(Dr. Fainstein expressed, as notable data, that for the first time in 2000 years, the major concentration of Jews is in Tel Aviv and its surroundings).

Due to limitations at the demographic level in these communities, it is necessary to incorporate new members into Judaism. This, at times can bring about a social problem: acculturation and integration are not easy.

¹ sacred community

² communities

MIFGASH



Nevertheless, in these communities of reduced numbers there is warmth and a feeling of being one big, happy family.

The lack of economic and human resources makes the bond with Israel very important.

The vocation of leadership and service is fundamental. It can make the difference between a community which survives and another that becomes extinct.

The speaker also mentioned Najshón ben Aminadav, the first who dared to submerge himself in the sea when the Hebrews were being followed by the Egyptian army. As a reward they gave him the honor of being the first to bring his offering when the *mishkan*³ was inaugurated.

We should “submerge ourselves” without fear: **in small communities each one of us should be a leader.**

A “nation of *kohanim*”⁴ should have a Jewish vision.

Communities don’t always know how to capitalize on the experience of their leaders, professionals, and volunteers. They have to face challenges with VISION and VALOR.

Dr. Fainstein cited A Tale of Two Cities:

*It was the best of times
It was the worst of times.*

The Jewish people never had as many options as in the present. For this reason we need will and spirit to affirm that in which we believe.

According to Achad Haam, nations, as the animal species, have an instinct for living, but this becomes weakened in the Diáspora.

To be Jewish is to learn to swim against the current while advancing in it.

He completed his dissertation with a story from Meyer: a youth learned all the facets needed in becoming a blacksmith. Not wanting to continue being an apprentice he left his town in order to establish himself independently. Nevertheless, he was never able to work in his trade because it was not possible for him to light the fire. No one had taught him...

THE SPARK OF PASSION IS NECESSARY TO LIGHT UP JEWISH LIFE.

In answer to one of the questions of the participants about how to transmit vision and passion to the youths our speaker said: Just like we first put on our oxygen mask in order to help our son/daughter during a flight, in the same way we need to first live this passion, that should be transmitted daily, and brightened with the spark of Israel.

(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)

3 sanctuary

4 priests

MIFGASH



Mom: I am dating a non Jewish boy/girl!

By Rabbi Marcelo Bater

With this title I began a discussion with the youths on Saturday at the UJCL Encounter last January in Guadalajara. Some will ask me why I chose this theme, and the answer is fairly simple: I believe that it reflects on one of the greatest problems we have in our communities today: the difficulty in finding a mate with our same identity.

I would like to share with you, the readers, a bit of the theme of this activity. It began with the youths having to represent different situations where they played roles as parents, acting to show the problems or lack of, that a mixed relationship might have to confront. Upon the conclusion of the performances (which were very funny and creative), I handed out a text with the following question for reflection and debate:

“Rabbi, I am not consulting you for a sermon, I have enough of that with my parents. What I need now is an explanation.

I fell in love with a girl who is as I have always dreamed. She is intelligent, beautiful, amusing. We really get along very well together, and this is what I always dreamed of when becoming a suitor. But you Rabbi can imagine.....she is not Jewish. My parents refused to meet her and told me that it is impossible to continue this courtship.

I have the following question for you or someone else to answer: my parents are not religious. We never keep kosher, or celebrate the Jewish holidays. There was no Judaica in our house. Why so suddenly, are my parents “so Jewish” when I speak of the person with whom I have a relationship? By chance is this not totally hypocritical? When I asked them this same thing, they only responded: “This is different”. But I do not agree with their response. Why is this different?

Perhaps, here is where each one has a different response to give this young man who could very well be any of our sons or daughters. However, it was very interesting for me to observe that for our youths, this theme is relevant at the outset, but at the time to define a serious relationship with the other person, it passes to a not so significant level.

Perhaps, this is the greatest challenge of our generation for parents and children. For the parents: the ability to find an explanation as to why this is different, and to realize that by just saying “no” many times is insufficient.

For the sons and daughters: the discovery of why our identity is important and to preserve it and put it into perspective to be able to transmit it to our children and grandchildren, as it was transmitted to us.

“Why is this different?” Now it is your turn to answer the question.

(The original version of this article can be found in the Spanish Edition of Mifgash)

MIFGASH



WHAT NEVER WAS

Have you ever heard a song that brings back a memory almost lost in time? Two weeks ago, as I was driving to school for my Hebrew class, absent mindedly as usual, I suddenly heard on the radio an Israeli melody that I had already forgotten: it was a love story between two perfect strangers, in which a casual meeting brings them together, but only for a while.

I suddenly thought of Erez, who used to hum it, and whom I had not seen in twenty- five years, since we exchanged our good-byes at the Theodor Herzl ship when it docked in Naples.

I was returning to my hometown, and from Naples we would be flying to Buenos Aires via Zurich, together with one hundred and twenty teenagers, whose supervision I was sharing with other *madrichim*¹.

My fascination with *siddurim*² dated from the time I was able to decipher the Hebrew letters that held countless mystic messages for me. So, as I was sitting on deck absorbed in the reading of a prayer book I had gotten in Israel in preparation for a *Shabbat* service we would be holding on the ship, I did not notice Erez's presence until he spoke:

"I might help you with that", he said, and smiled.

I looked up and felt an undeniable attraction to this very handsome *sabra*.

Of course, I instantly forgot all about the *siddur* and we started talking about a thousand things. Time went by unnoticed, but not my encounter with Erez that became a source of humorous teasing by the group, immediately aware of my absence in the Activities Room.

"I cannot understand why you are returning to your country. Israel is your home", he declared. It made me feel like a liberated slave yearning for the fleshpots of Egypt.

I tried to explain: "My whole family is there, I have a good job at a hospital, and I really don't feel ready to grow new roots in Israel."

Of course I did not tell him that, for a whole year prior to my trip, I had been secretly in love with a guy who did not seem to notice my presence until, on the day before I left, confessed he corresponded to my feelings but was afraid I would decide to settle in Israel and never come back. My need to find out if he really meant it was great and the only way to know was seeing him again.

We stayed together for the duration of the trip, both well aware that, when the Zim liner docked, Erez would be heading to Germany to settle his father's war repairs claim, and I would continue with my life. What a great irony it was that we met on a ship that had been paid precisely with money from German war repairs, and that the great suffering of our people had brought about our encounter!

MIFGASH



On the last night, unexpectedly, a very dense fog settled on the port, whose lights became ghostly. The captain announced that the ship was not allowed to dock under those conditions that would persist for 24 hours and, much to his regret, he could not have us disembark at the appointed time early next morning.

We were holding hands, looked at each other and smiled. Perhaps the captain was trying to help us?

Unbelievably, we spent the rest of the night talking and finding much in common in our worldview. Erez challenged all my preconceptions about Israelis: once you got to know him he was extremely sensitive and understanding, with a fine sense of humor.

I was torn between returning to Israel, thus cutting all my ties to my country of birth, and the comfortable life that awaited me in Buenos Aires.

I was able to convince myself that I would make *alyah*³ as soon as I settled my affairs.

Unfortunately, I never did, nor did I see Erez again after we parted ways in Naples. We did exchange letters and pictures but that was not enough to sustain the flame that quickly died out.

My experience, however, taught me a lot about having the courage to listen to one's feelings, and about a Judaism that can only be expressed in deeds.

Sometimes I look at Erez' faded picture and wonder about all the possibilities my indecision precluded. Then I remember the lyrics of our song, understanding that life offers us precious moments to sustain us when our dreams are not fulfilled, and softly hum it, smiling at my reverie.

Martha E. Lichtenstein
February 2006

(Footnotes)

1 group leaders

2 prayer books

3 immigrate to Israel

MIFGASH



Union

By Cheryle Tacher

Amalgamation, fusion, blending,
Mixture, combination, merger,
The coming together
Of hearts, minds, and ideals,
The sharing of realities,
Preparing for a future
Beyond our wildest dreams.

Differences, confusions,
Diversity, illusions,
Yet the driving force,
Remains a constant,
As we strive to continue,
Millenniums of traditions,
That must go on forever.

Tolerance, forgiveness,
Growing, changing,
Transformation, Explanation,
Strength, desire,
Willingness, honesty,
Integrity, love,
Union.

MIFGASH



Dear Friends,

We share your deep sorrow at the passing of Dr. José Miller, z”l, who in life was a pillar of the Hebrew Community of Cuba.

We had the honor of meeting Dr. Miller during our Encounters. He left an indelible impression of the tenacity and determination of your congregation to incorporate into your lives the rich Jewish heritage.

May the passing of time bring comfort to his family and his many friends, and may his life serve as an inspiration to those like him, who never gave up or abandoned the struggle to preserve our roots in the members of your very special community.

A strong embrace from all of us at the UJCL.

Martha E. Lichtenstein
UJCL Communications Department