

# Yeshiva University Observer

Special Edition

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## Special Report: Operation Torah Shield II Torah Shield II Travels to Israel to Show Support Students Leaders Step-Up to Plan Massive Mission

By Miriam Colton

Last week, 200 Yeshiva students successfully participated in a weeklong solidarity mission to Israel. The mission, known as Operation Torah Shield II, January 13-20, aimed to show support for Israeli citizens, particularly those affected daily by the recent outbreaks of terror, and to train the students to become "tourism ambassadors" for Israel.

The idea for the mission came directly from the student body, which in the past few months hastily came together to plan and implement Torah Shield II. The inspiration came from the original Torah Shield mission eleven years ago, when 400 Yeshiva students flew to Israel to spend time learning in yeshivas during the Gulf War, a mission which drew massive press coverage as the only flight to Israel during that time.

"Torah Shield I went to Israel to learn," said Reuven Brand, one of the trip's organizers. "This time, we had the opportunity to go out and give chizuk to the people of Israel, which they didn't do then, because they went during a war."

In September, a handful of students, such as Reuven Brand and Yehuda Shmidman, independently came up with



the idea of organizing a Torah Shield II. "This was a dream of many individual students for a long time," said Yehudah Shmidman. "We all just somehow merged together." The trip actualized in December, when an executive committee was formed, and the mission was announced to SCW and YC students a few weeks before the winter break. "What most organizations spend months preparing for, we did in a few weeks," said Shmidman.

The executive committee consisted of

*continued on page 4*



**Torah Shield II Organizers**  
(l-r, top row) Josh Kramer, Yehuda Shmidman, Ilan Rosenrauch, Reuven Brand, Rabbi Mayer Waxman, (bottom row) Leba Krupka, Yael Zelman, Julie Pianko, Toby Goldfisher

## Two Hundred Yeshiva Students Become "Tourism Ambassadors"

By Chana Michels

One of the main goals of Operation Torah Shield II was to train the 200 students to become "tourism ambassadors" for Israel. In this vein, on Thursday morning of the mission a workshop was held to describe to students what their role as ambassadors-in-training for Israel's Ministry of Tourism entailed. The numerous speeches and discussions provided them with necessary information and tools to use when educating their communities about Israel's current situation.

Speakers from the Ministry of Tourism and El Al discussed Israel's dilapidating tourism industry, the

increasing importance of foreign tourists, and ways of combating the media's myths. Representatives from the education department of the Jewish Agency also held group training ses-



*Students workshop their ideas for increasing tourism to Israel*

sions where the students learned how to become effective speakers in order to convey the messages of the Mission.

"At first I didn't know what being an ambassador to tourism was," said Ariella Maslow, SCW junior. "When I got here, I learned about the situation and how important it is to go back home, get people to come to Israel, and tell them it's safe."

The workshop began on an inspiring note as the first speaker, Uri Bank, senior advisor to the Minister of Tourism, took off his suit jacket in favor of the Operation Torah Shield II sweat-shirt. Bank spoke of idealism and the power of students.

"I want you to be motivated so you can motivate your community," Bank

*continued on page 5*

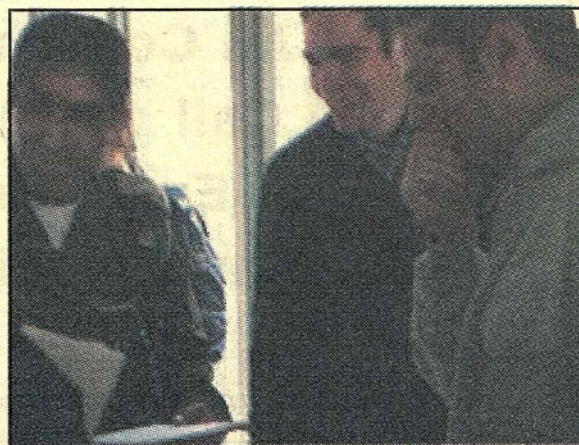
## Kesher Program Organizes Letters, Candy and Clothing for Israelis

By Adina Levine

It wasn't only their toothbrushes and pantyhose that YU students shlepped with them to Israel. Nor was it just the change they carried in their pockets, the half-hearted support of the wealthy. Boasting an assortment of personal letters, new and used clothing, and miscellaneous paraphernalia, the Kesher program organized that every student bring an extra bag on the mission to deliver care packages to needy Israelis.

"We felt that this program epitomized the mantra of mission," commented Reuven Brand, YC senior and one organizer of Operation Torah Shield II. "Being [in Israel] is one level, actually giving to the land is another."

SCW sophomore Ayelet Feinberg brought travel games such as Trouble and Backgammon for the chayalim, collecting toys



*Eitiel Goldwicht and Ari Goldberg, Torah Shield II participants, deliver letters to soldiers in Yesha*

from around her house as well as purchasing new ones. "I think they can get them here in Israel, but we still do it to show support," she commented.

As Brand's brainchild, the Kesher program was designed to strengthen ties to the land and enforce an added impact on Israelis. Participants had been notified two weeks prior to the mission that they should designate one duffel for a drive for Israeli children, rallying their communities

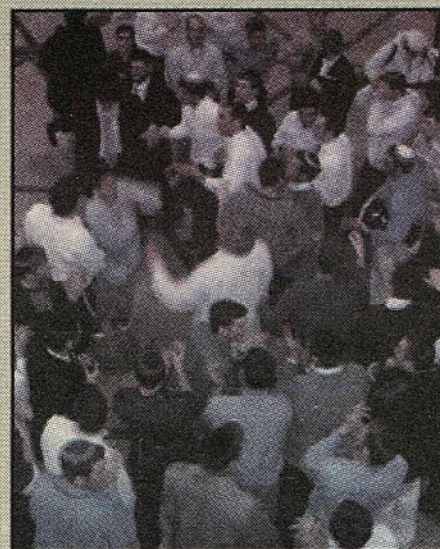
or their schools to collect goods for distribution among hospital patients, chayalim, and settlers.

"It had a snowball effect," commented Yonina Berrsson, SCW junior and program coordinator. "More things just kept coming."

Ranging from a jeop- ardy watch to pink cow- boy boots to roller skates, the paraphernalia that Kesher solicited clearly varied. An approx- imately seven foot high mound of clothing neces- sitated sorting and bag-

*continued on page 4*

### Scenes from the Mission Exclusive Observer Photos



Pages 6 - 7

## I N S I D E



**Students Travel to  
Communities in  
Yesha and  
non-Yesha**  
Page 5



**Students' Journal  
Entries from the  
Mission**  
Page 8



**Tekoa Visit  
Stirs Students**  
Page 11

**EDITORIAL****O' Captain, my Captain**

In one Ambassador-in-training session, the speaker explained how we should be offended when adults called us the leaders of the future. "How dare you call us the leaders of the future?" the speaker emphatically exclaimed. "College students are the leaders of today."

In our university, our college leaders have in the past stepped up the challenge – by creating clubs, organizing speeches, and arranging rallies. But by creating this mission, our student leaders have extended the boundaries and broken the parameters in bringing their leadership beyond the college realm. This mission did not only affect Yeshiva University, it affected Israeli inhabitants and with its ten speaking engagements, is designed to encompass a large portion of American Jewry. We might never know the ripple effect of this mission, but we have seen already that the consequences extend far beyond Yeshiva University's campus.

The seven leaders of the executive committee, as well as the numerous individuals who worked tirelessly without an official title and without any credit, deserve a heartfelt congratulations and a warmest admiration for their initiative, devotion, and ultimately their success. They are truly the leaders of today, and we are proud to call them our peers.

**The Observer****Welcomes****All Comments****Please Call (212)-683-4943****or Email Us at****Observer@ymail.yu.edu****The Observer**

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**in applauding the  
Executive Committee  
and participants of  
Operation Torah Shield II**

**You have exhibited true leadership and dedication to Israel**

# Message from the Editors



Adina Levine  
Editor-in-Chief

A small caravan functioning as a permanent residence overlooks the hills. From its two bedroom perch, it adjoins only pebbles and grass. Eleven other caravans share its fate of no supermarket, no doctor's office. The residents would have constructed a fence around the town to safeguard themselves, but they anticipated expansion and didn't want to box themselves in. But that is, after all, the mentality of this settlement in Eli.

The streets are deserted as a gust of wind rustles the curtain. The fog penetrates the temporary homes with their windows of metal gates and paned glass shattered by bullet holes. Children slowly peek out from under the stairs with bright and watchful eyes like those abandoned and bareboned cats that frequent Yerushalayim. When they see the silver wrapping of our candy, they descend from their homes, summoning siblings, but cautiously, cautiously so they are always within the perimeter of their town. That is how a three year old in Chevron spends his days.

The people of Eli, of Chevron, of Shiloh, of the Muslim quarter – among a host of others whom we didn't visit- they are people who suffer daily, living their routine life for a higher cause. Their lives are unfathomable, their hardships unimaginable to our restricted mental capacities. We catch a glimpse of their lives for ten minutes because we are late to be somewhere else and then we move on. We move on to another settlement whose impression is also short, temporary and then we move on again. We end up in a multi-star hotel, jetlagged and weary but with a catered meal to sustain us and a spontaneous shuk to entertain us. And we think that we are doing a chesed, making a *kiddush Hashem* and giving *chizuk* by being in this country.

How can we, with our insulated sweat-shirts and bullet-proof busses, even think that we can empathize with their lives? With what condescending tone do first graders write to terror victims in the hospital that they want to be pen pals? With what arrogance do we distribute Kit Kats and Mike and Ikes and assume that it matters? How do we entertain them with relics from America and bursts of song and suppose that it is enough?

For those ten minutes in which we dance with young Israeli boys, overcome the language barrier in our discussion with girls in pigtails, and play the bongo and the guitar- if we have brightened their day, then that is enough. But that is only

adequate for those ten minutes that the smile remains on that boy's face – what about tomorrow when he will be escorted by a *melave neshek* to school or be forced to play on the rooftops because the streets are not safe? What good will our Rush Hour games and lemon laffy taffy sweets do then?

The intention of the care packages - and indeed of the overall mission - is to demonstrate that we care. Yet the mounds of clothing and the colorful letters are supposed to be tokens of this support, not the essence of our concern. The gracious gift-giving is moving, significant and appreciated, but it cannot be the epitome of our support, the be-all-and-end-all of our concern. The gift that we give, with smile and charm, cannot only represent our token of appreciation at their dangerous responsibilities, but our sincere desire to be there with the settlers and share their fate. The ultimate goal needs to be to improve our lives so that the daily routine takes on elevated significance. Their living life for a cause stirs within me not only admiration, but jealousy and covetousness that I wish my existence could have such meaning.

So I have come to the conclusion that Israel is not a place where it's appropriate to come for only a one-week visit. It is not a vacation spot, it is not an amusement park, it is not a freak show that we come to look at and then to move on. Israel is more than a place; it is a concept, an embodiment of our hopes and our dreams and our people.

We need Israel as much as Israel needs us. Our American dollars may help support the country economically, but will do nothing to the *neshama* of the state. Our American products may prove convenient, but will in no way improve the safety of the settlements. And our speaking engagements may improve the PR of the land in the public and press, but will ultimately not help the *kedusha* of the land. Israel isn't desperate for, although it certainly appreciates, our money, our products, or our good will, and though it needs our presence in the collective sense of the word, it doesn't need you individually any more than another individual. It is me, as an individual, who needs the spiritual inspiration and the sense of belonging that Israel provides.

The mission was about reconnecting with our roots and pledging our support for our home. *Yasher koach* to the program's organizers who did an amazing job in pulling this trip together, but this mission was only the first step. The final success of the trip is now in our hands: to make *aliya* and make their struggle our struggle.



Miriam Colton  
Editor-in-Chief

"I was raised to believe that one observes the Shabbos, but this week we celebrated it." – Curtis

Nassau, Ministry of Tourism.

Culminating a physically and emotionally draining week, the group really pulled together for Shabbos. The davening was melodic, the speeches powerful, the singing intense, and the group unified. In an impromptu two-minute speech after havdalah, Curtis spoke of being inspired throughout the week by the participants' devotion to Torah and Israel. In those few minutes, Curtis touched upon the unifying core of the group, and what was a crucial part of the trip for me.

Torah Shield II was about strengthening and being strengthened. As you read through the pages of this issue and find the stories revealed in the photographs, it will become apparent how 200 Yeshiva students, visiting different yishuvim, homes and families of Yesha, the Golan, and Jerusalem, were able to bolster the spirits of some Israelis. They brought their presence, guitars and bongos, gifts from Project Keshet, and an enduring *ruach*. On the other side, the commitment to ideals that characterize the yishuv families and their supreme sacrifices strengthened the Torah Shield II participants.

But it went further than that. The real strengthening, at least for me, came from the group itself.

"I said I know you will keep your commitment, because this week I saw how you live a life of commitment every day."

When we arrived at Ben-Gurion airport on Monday morning, the students danced down the steps of the El Al plane 014 and erupted into song, their faces radiant with the pleasure exclusive to being in Israel. As the students lured the Israeli press into our dancing circles, it was clear that this group had one factor that would prove to be the unifying component of the trip, and perhaps the true unifying component of Yeshiva students in general – a love of Israel. By their zeal and dedication, these students proved themselves of the highest caliber.

While I strongly identify with Yeshiva, I have questioned its unity. Separate campuses, daily bureaucracies, and variant *hashkafas* have contributed to a

somewhat fragmented university. But being in the Jewish state, together with the university that strongly supports this state, proved to be enlightening. What makes Yeshiva so unique in the Orthodox world is this core ideology of Torah and Israel that exists among its administrators, *rebbeim*, and most importantly, students.

"You opened up your lives to me."

A participant of the mission pointed out that the only other time he had seen Yeshiva College and Stern students join together so well was for the Yom Haatzmaut programs and *chagigahs*. This point is astute, for it demonstrates that the only times we have successfully gathered as one community has been for Israel.

Just look at the fact that both Rabbi Lamm and Rabbi Schachter, often representing two divergent segments of Yeshiva, were present at Kennedy airport for the departure party, both emotional in their support and respect for Torah Shield II. Almost all the *roshei yeshivas* firmly encouraged their students to attend the trip. Uptown and midtown joined together naturally in all aspects of the mission. What Torah Shield II, and its organizers, succeeded in achieving, beside showing solidarity with Israel, was revealing to Yeshiva where its unity currently lies. They united us with Israel, and in the process united us.

"You included me and you inspired me."

Yeshiva can hang up posters about its rank as #41 among national universities, feed the press releases about its millions in endowments, boast of its very own Rhodes scholar, and smooth talk donors into contributing money for the latest in scientific technology at Einstein. But Yeshiva's real asset, worthy of its pride, is its student body - its commitment to Torah and Israel.

I leave Torah Shield II with a deepened love of Israel, a glimmer of appreciation of the daily sacrifices Israelis make, and most of all, an incredible respect for my fellow students, both from uptown and midtown. They are the real pride of Yeshiva. And they have inspired me. I look forward to seeing you all at the Yom Haatzmaut *chagigah*.

## The Observer presents...

Malcolm Hoenlein

Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major  
American Jewish Organization

&

Rabbi Lamm

President and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University

For a

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February 4, 2001, 8pm  
Schottenstein Cultural Center

All Yeshiva students and faculty are invited

## The Observer

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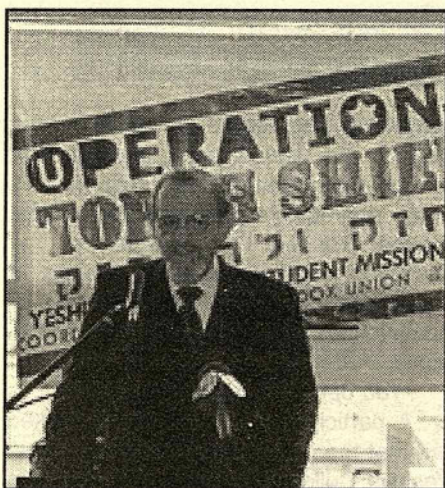
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## Torah Shield II Is a Hit

continued from page 1



Rabbi Lamm addresses students and parents at sending-off party at JFK

seven members including Reuven Brand, TAC president Toby Goldfisher, Josh Kramer, Julie Pianko, SOY president Ilan Rosenrauch, and Israel Club presidents Yehuda Shmidman and Yael Zemelman. Numerous other students also assisted in all aspects of Torah Shield II. "There are dozens of students who helped in all sort of capacities," said Shmidman.

A core difficulty in organizing the trip was securing the funds to enable the committee to charge the participants \$350 dollars. In fact, two days before the acceptances for Torah Shield were to be announced, the executive committee emailed a warning of the possible cancellation of the trip due to the difficulty of securing funding, which they eventually acquired. The trip, costing a rough total of \$200,000, mainly for travel and transportation, was heavily subsidized by the Ministry of Tourism, The Jewish Agency and a handful of private donors.

Surprisingly, Yeshiva did not contribute any money, either publicly or privately. "They didn't want to give money," said Shmidman. "They've been helpful in other ways. A lot of individuals of the Yeshiva staff have given a tremendous amount of guidance."

Organizers of the trip praised these Yeshiva staff, such as Rabbi Zevulun Charlop and Dr. Joseph Frager, both of whom were active in the original Torah Shield and who linked the students with important donors. Many individuals in YU helped facilitate the mission," added Brand. "They didn't write a check, but they were instrumental in coordinating many aspects of the trip."

While the executive committee was quick to point to these individuals, most students criticized a university which boasts of millions in endowments, for not at least financially supporting students in their aims to help Israel, even if they could not undertake the responsibility for security liability. "I think they should have contributed some money to make a point that they support this important mission," said Adina Rozmaryn, an SCW junior.

Unlike Yeshiva, the Orthodox Union was willing to accept liability for Torah Shield II, and was vital in coordinating the mission. Brought in through the connections of Rabbi David Israel and Rabbi Ari Rockoff of the Max Stern Division of Communal Services, the Orthodox Union provided the executive committee with key contacts in the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and organized the security and itinerary components of the trip. According to Rabbi Rockoff, the Orthodox Union, which works as a "tag team" with Yeshiva on many issues, was able to take liability for the trip because they are a communal organization without the financial assets of Yeshiva.

The mission, based at the

Renaissance Hotel in Jerusalem, took the students to numerous cities and yishuvim in Yesha and non-Yesha, including Chevron, the Golan, and Jerusalem. The students met with families from various communities and heard from individuals who were affected by the terror of the recent Intifada.

Torah Shield II drew a lot of press coverage, including the Jewish Week, the Jerusalem Post and WCBS radio.

A key element of the mission was the ambassador-in-training program, a brainchild of the Ministry of Tourism. All 200 students spent one morning of the trip at sessions designed to give them key facts about Israeli tourism and to enable them to focus their experiences on the mission to become "tourism ambassadors" for Israel. "We can promote tourism because that's what we've done," said Rockoff.

"The goal is to get people to visit Israel in good times and bad times," said Curtis Nassau, director of marketing for the Israel Ministry of Tourism, who accompanied the students on the mission. "This ambassador-in-training is a pilot program, and we're hoping to do many more if it is successful."

A reunion meeting of the mission is tentatively scheduled for March 3rd, when the participants will receive diplomas as "tourism ambassadors," as well as a six-minute video of the mission that they can show during their speaking engagements. "The meeting is a follow-up to solidify the training," said Nassau.

In order to participate in the mission, students committed to ten speaking engagements each, for a total of 2,000 engagements, which the Ministry of Tourism hopes will raise the level of tourism. "That's where the success of the mission lies," said Shmidman of the speaking engagements. The mission drew a large group of students, with over 150 Israel devotess applying at each campus. "The price was definitely attractive," said Ouriel Hassan, a YC sophomore. "Yet, the whole proposition got sweeter and sweeter as I learned about the mission, the chesed aspect, and the opportunity to prove to myself that I love Israel."

To be eligible for the mission, students had to be currently enrolled in YC, SCW or RIETS, and 100 students were selected from each campus. The application required a promise of these ten speaking engagements, as well as student involvement on campus and in the Jewish community. "It was a self-selecting process," said Brand. "The application process required that students demonstrate a certain amount of dedication to the Jewish community, which generated on its own a top tier group of participants."

Many students praised the caliber of the student body that participated in the mission, pointing to their enthusiasm and devotion as crucial aspects in making the trip a success. "It's a really great group of people," said Naphtali Weisz, a YC senior from Columbus, Ohio, who participated in the mission. "I hope everyone goes back with as much enthusiasm as there is now."



YC students enjoy mission activities

## Kesher Program a Success

continued from page 1

ging, as students remained awake until all hours of the night organizing the donations. Led by Yonina Berrsson, SCW junior, and Ari Goldberg, SSSB senior, the program yielded more than \$15,000 worth of clothes, toys, and miscellaneous toiletries.

"The amount of work that people have put in is amazing," asserted Berrsson. "It's unbelievable to see that we're accomplishing the goal of mission. It's not just about tiyulim, but we're actually giving back."

In determining what material was appropriate to distribute, the organizers employed a specific selection process. "Basically, the question is 'are you happy to give it away or are you happy that someone is getting it,'" opined Goldberg. "That's the criteria for judging whether the material was appropriate to be given." Indeed, some of the donations were in too worn of a condition to be distributed and had to be disposed of, but for the most part students adhered to the agreement of only donating new items or items in perfect condition.

The 200 duffels that arrived on the plane went to four different organizations. Kids for Kids collected material for children who had survived terrorist attacks. Package for Home is an organization that collects for chayalim, while Yesh Sachar Lifulatech targets specifically those chayalim who protect Kever Rachel, and finally the Yesha Samarian Fund gives to poor people in Yesha.

"The myth is that Jewish Americans don't care about Israel," reflected Goldberg. "With this program, we're showing the exact opposite. We're demonstrating that we care, that we're one nation as a whole and we're thanking them for defending our homeland."

Another component of the program arranged that children of all ages would compose letters that would be distributed among chayalim, children in the settlements, or children in the hospital. Adorned with colorful drawings and scotched taped to candies, these letters varied between Hebrew and English text, with their content often amusing as one



(l-r) Adi Gidali, Steven Eisenberg, Yehudit Weinberger, Stephanie Hartman, Ariella Joel, bag toys for Kesher

first grader asked a soldier if he knew her relative who had served in the army years ago. The organizers read over the letters as much as possible before distributing them, to ensure their appropriateness.

"Children of all ages wrote letters giving koach," commented Berrsson. "The idea was that they would correspond with people their age in Israel who were going through hard times."

For some participants, the highlight of the program was being able to see the expressions on the faces of the recipients of this program. At security checkpoints, students would descend the buses with their candies and letters in hand to greet the chayalim. At settlements in Eli and Chevron, students walked around with bags of candy and manila folders of chick-enscratch letters from first graders, graciously divvying their goods among the children. "It was nice to see where it went," Anna Rachel Krakowsky, SCW junior stated.

At the same time, some students were hesitant in extolling the program's merits, questioning whether Israelis were being treated as charity cases. "The people on this trip were so full of themselves - that they were doing the best thing in the world," commented Shayndi Raice, SCW sophomore.

"To a certain extent, Kesher embodies this problem, with people rushing to give our American toys and our letters to Israelis. The people who live here day-to-day suffer, and our singing does not change that." At the same time, Raice qualified that the program was "still beautiful and very

nice."

The program's organizers responded that Israelis were not being treated as charity cases, but that students were simply accommodating the needs of Israelis. "People say that this is not the Ukraine, why are we giving them old clothes?" commented Berrsson. "They don't realize that people in Israel don't have clothes either."

Some students felt that the choice of distribution material may have offended some Israelis, specifying deoderant as an offensive present. The program's organizers justified themselves by claiming that Israelis had asked for deoderant, and that they appreciated it. Indeed, more than 500 spray cans and sticks of deoderant were donated, according to Goldberg.

"Some people think it's offensive that we're bringing deoderant," asserted Berrsson. "People don't realize that Israelis have a very different mentality. Deoderant is very expensive, and the Israelis are glad to have it from America. They're not taking it as an insult that they smell. On the contrary, they're even thanking us. At first, people were hesitant about giving out bags of candies with deoderant but the soldiers just grabbed them up."

"It doesn't matter what's being given," asserted Goldberg. "It's the act of giving that matters in making a difference to a chayal."

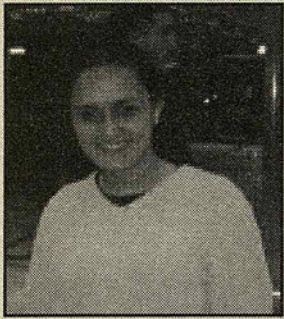
Other students questioned the purpose of the program, supposing that if we should stimulate the Israeli economy, why were students spending thousands of dollars in America. "It's what they asked for," Brand remarked. "Sometimes chayalim appreciate the things they can't otherwise get, davka because they are from America." In fact, the organizers reserved some of the funds to spend in an Israeli makolet in order to stimulate the Israeli economy.



Adina Rozmaryn flaunts a shirt as other students sort through clothing

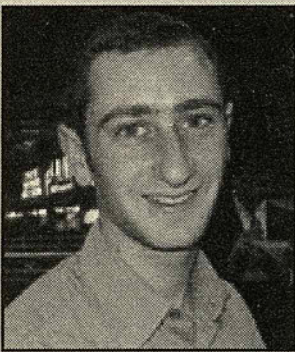
## IN YOUR OWN WORDS

### HOW DID TORAH SHIELD II INSPIRE YOU RELIGIOUSLY?



Esther Freman -

There was one point in the trip where I got very overwhelmed. *Hashem, ad masai?* How many people have to get hurt and taken away from us before the day comes where everything is clear? After sorting through my emotions, thoughts, feelings and ideas, I realized that what has been happening unrelentlessly throughout our history in and of itself proves the existence of Hashem's master plan. The fact that the Jewish nation still lives on although so many nations/people have tried to destroy us. The fact that other nations/people persist in pursuing us, shows there's something unique that we have that bothers them. *Baruch Hashem we have our mesorah...*



Gabriel Jacobson -

One of the more religiously inspirational parts of my visit to Israel on Torah Shield II was meeting the people who lived in dangerous areas such as Chevron, Tekoah, and Shiloh. In a very vivid manner they explained to us their strong love and appreciation for Israel. Through their speeches they told us how they have given up certain conveniences in order to live in such areas, despite the constant danger of attack. They have real faith.



Tova Warburg -

I have always learned about the importance of helping Am Yisrael. However, until going on the mission, I did not realize what this meant. The purpose of Operation Torah Shield, according to the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, was to train us to market tourism to people in our communities in order to help the Israeli economy which relies heavily in tourism. This is a tremendous responsibility to shoulder. Thus, the mission affected my religious commitment in the sense that it broadened my understanding of the obligation that I have toward my fellow Jews, and caused me to internalize the extent of the ability and responsibility of the individual to help Am Yisrael.

## Ambassador-in-Training Program Organized

continued from page 1

said. "We are telling you, You are an ambassador to the State of Israel. You have to go home and tell people what they can do to help Zionism. We don't need their checks, we need them to come and fill up the hotels."

Tzion Ben David, the director for the North American desk of the Ministry of Tourism, presented statistics of how drastically the tourism industry has changed since October of 2000.

"The country was forced to lay off twenty thousand directly employed personnel, but this had a ripple effect and employees in other industries were downsized as well," he commented.

All the speakers implored the students to help change Israel's image. "Israel's problem is not security," said ben David. "People live safely and its a nor-

mal country."

Many students expressed that they felt safe throughout the trip, and are confident they can bring this message home. "The media makes Israel into a war zone," she said. "The trip showed me Israel is safe. If I don't feel safe, how can I tell others it's safe?"

According to David Davour, manager of the marketing department of El Al, heightened security is apparent even before arriving in Israel, and is noticeable when on an El Al flight. "If you talk about security, there is no security, but Ill just say this," explained Davour, "El Al was the first airline to fly to and from New York after September 11th."

Debra Lipson, the Advisor to the Treasury of the Jewish Agency, also offered ideas about perceptions that need to be

changed. "To combat the immense damage done to Israel's image, people should come here for solidarity reasons and because visiting Israel is a statement about being Jewish," Libson said. "Israel isn't just another country with a long history. Coming here, you are part of the past, present, and future of the country."

Many students felt the sessions were informative because they reinforced the Mission's statement and showed the students that they really are ambassadors for tourism. "We have a big responsibility to live up too," said Brad Cherny, YC junior. "And I am looking forward to it. If I can get people to come to Israel, that's not a credit to me, but a credit to the program."

## Vast Majority of Mission Participants Opt to Visit Yesha

By Tamar Ellman

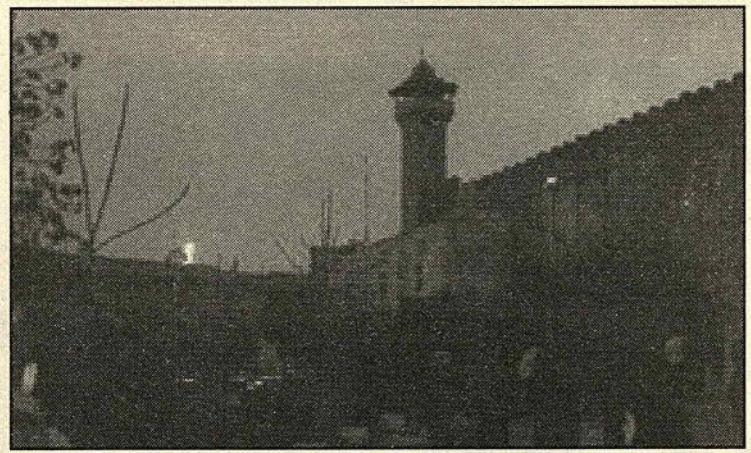
The days of Operation Torah Shield were spent visiting various families and yishuvim in both Yesha and non-Yesha. Before the trip, students had the option to sign up to go on the Yesha portion of the touring component; over 140 participants out of 200 opted to travel to Yesha.

In fact, on the trip many of the remaining 60 or so students changed their mind since they felt the activities in the Yesha-area were more exciting, and there was not enough bus space for all those who wanted to go. On the forms given out at the mission meeting prior to the trip, many students wrote "unsure" if they could visit Yesha, which the trip organizers interpreted as a no, yet on the actual trip these students decided that they did in fact want to visit Yesha. "If someone wrote maybe, we had to read it as no," said one of the mission organizers. "If they then decided they could not travel to Yesha for safety reasons, we had to be prepared to accommodate that."

On the second day of the mission, when Yesha people because if they decided not to go would be travelling to the Chevron and Gush Etzion area and the rest of the group to the Golan, there was mayhem as too many students signed up for the Yesha buses, leaving barely a dozen travelling to the Golan. Unable to order another bus, the organizers of the mission had to quickly rearrange the buses and move students to the non-Yesha buses.

"I didn't go because I couldn't get on the bus," said one SCW junior.

"It wasn't just a matter of shifting people," said Yehudah Shmidman, one of the organizers of the mission. "It's not easy to accommodate last minute requests. You have to understand



Students Daven Mincha at Maaras Hamachpala

that the issue wasn't only adding people to Chevron. We spent a lot of time planning a trip to the Golan, and how would it look if only ten people showed up?"

Besides for the better activities and speeches, students wanted to go to Yesha to show the families there that have support. Yesha is a part of Eretz Yisroel Hakdosha," said Esther Levy, an SCW senior. "Also, [I wanted to go] *kdei lhit-hazek* from the courage and strength of the people who live there, and to realize that the hand of Hakodesh Boruch Hu is everywhere, especially in Eretz Yisrael and these places."

For many, visiting Yesha was not only a matter of religious feelings, but also of Zionist feelings that were it not for these settlers Israel would be smaller and less complete. "I feel that it's an obligation to go visit the Jews who are there," said Rachele Mandil, an SCW junior. "The fact that they live there means that I can say we own this city, and if they leave it means we lost it, so we owe them tremendous gratitude."

"I wanted to give chizuk to those who are particularly touched by the current matzav in Israel," said Rena Frankel, an SCW sophomore.

Torah Shield II participants con-

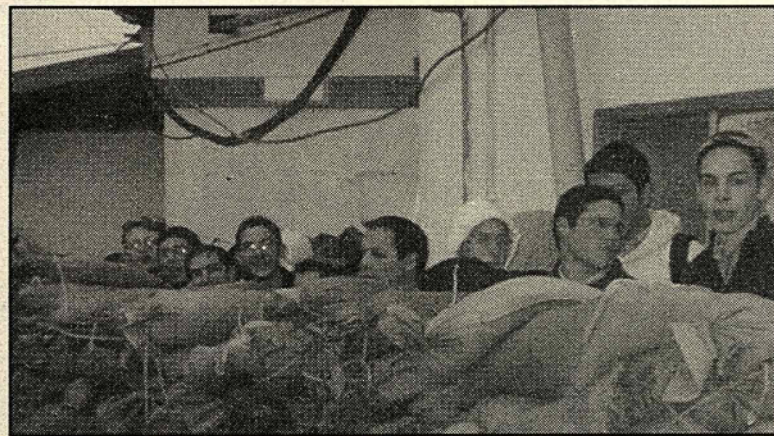
sistently expressed the idea that the settlers of these communities are idealistic role models. "They are living heroes because they actually stand up for what they believe in," said Jodi Schachar, an SCW sophomore. As such it was incredibly important for Torah Shield II to visit these communities because, as Frankel said, "Any people forget that Yesha is part of Israel too and they also need our support."

"I knew I made the right decision when I saw the look on the faces of the Yesha settlers when they saw us pampered Americans were experiencing a little bit of their lives, even if only for a few shorts hours," said Ouriel Hassan, a YC sophomore. "It seemed like we had a big impact on them."

The reason some participants did not travel to Yesha was overwhelmingly because their parents did not allow them. "*Kibbud av vem* is a very important *mitzvah* - number five of the ten commandments," said Toby Josovitz, who travelled on the non-Yesha bus. "My parents worry a lot and asked me not to go 'anywhere dangerous,' so I didn't go to Yesha."

Students who were not allowed to travel to Yesha pointed to the ironic fact that on Thursday of the mission all the students visited the Moslem Quarter of the Old City, an area which many deem equally, if not more, dangerous than Yesha settlements.

Josh Shpayher, YC Sophomore, expressed a different opinion for not wanting to visit Yesha. "I wasn't interested because, although it's an awesome thing to do, I'm not good at giving comfort," said Shpayher. "Talking with hesder students in the Golan Heights is just as important."



Bags of Sand protect residents of Chevron

### PARTIAL TEXT OF LETTER TO A CHAYAL

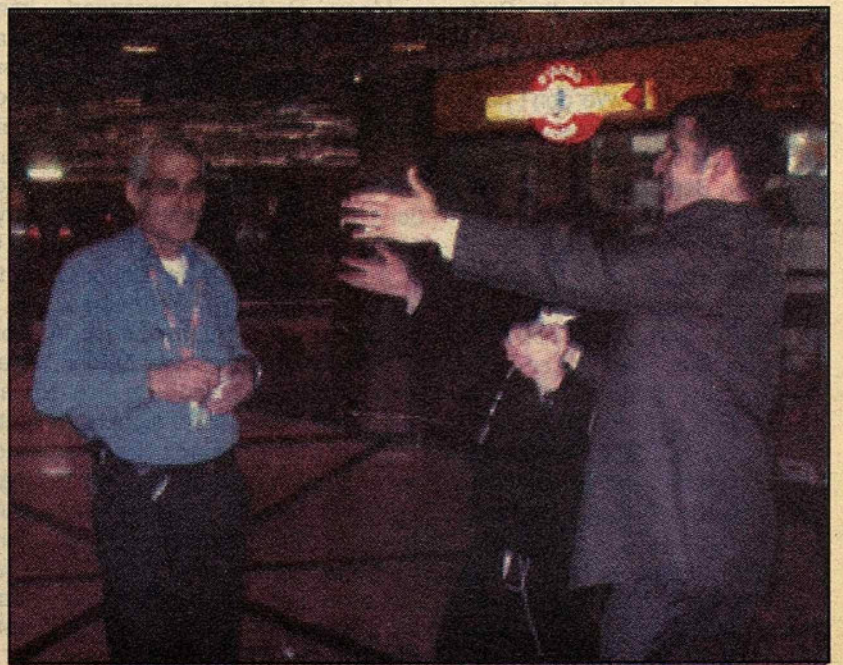
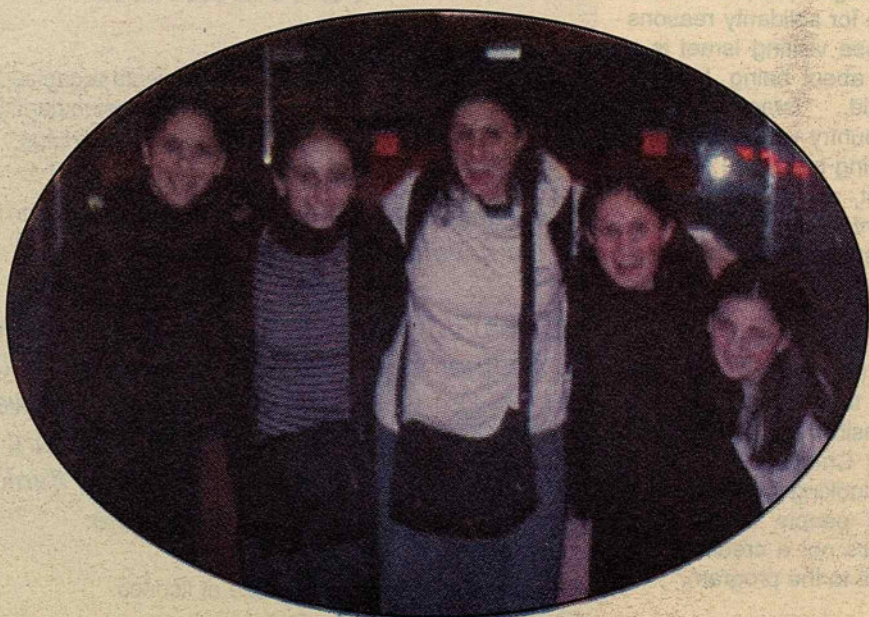
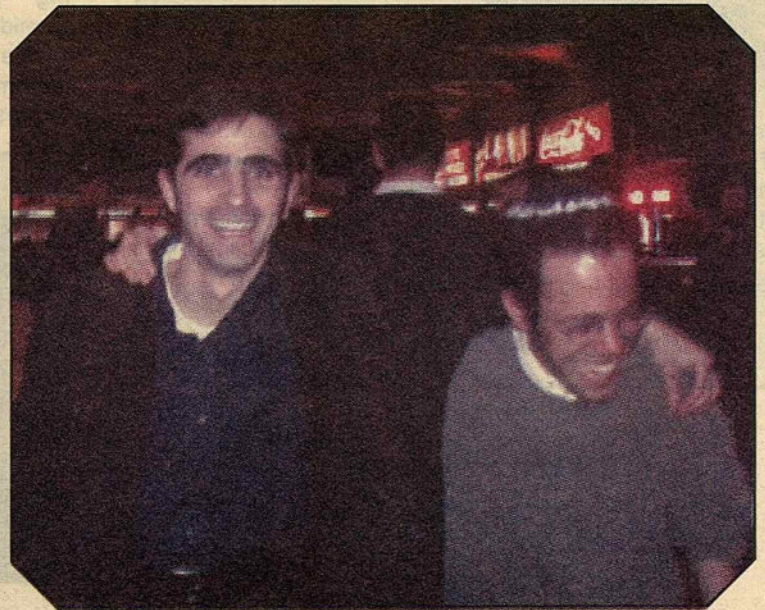
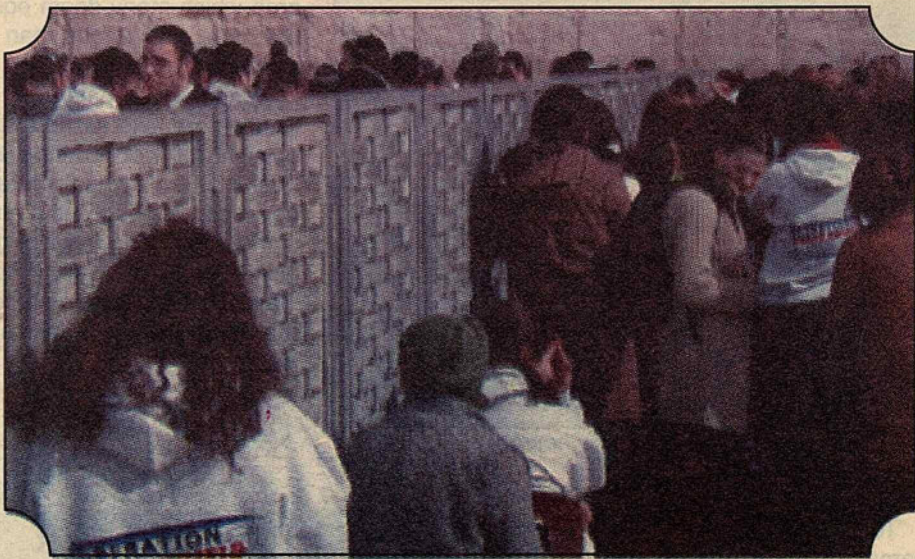
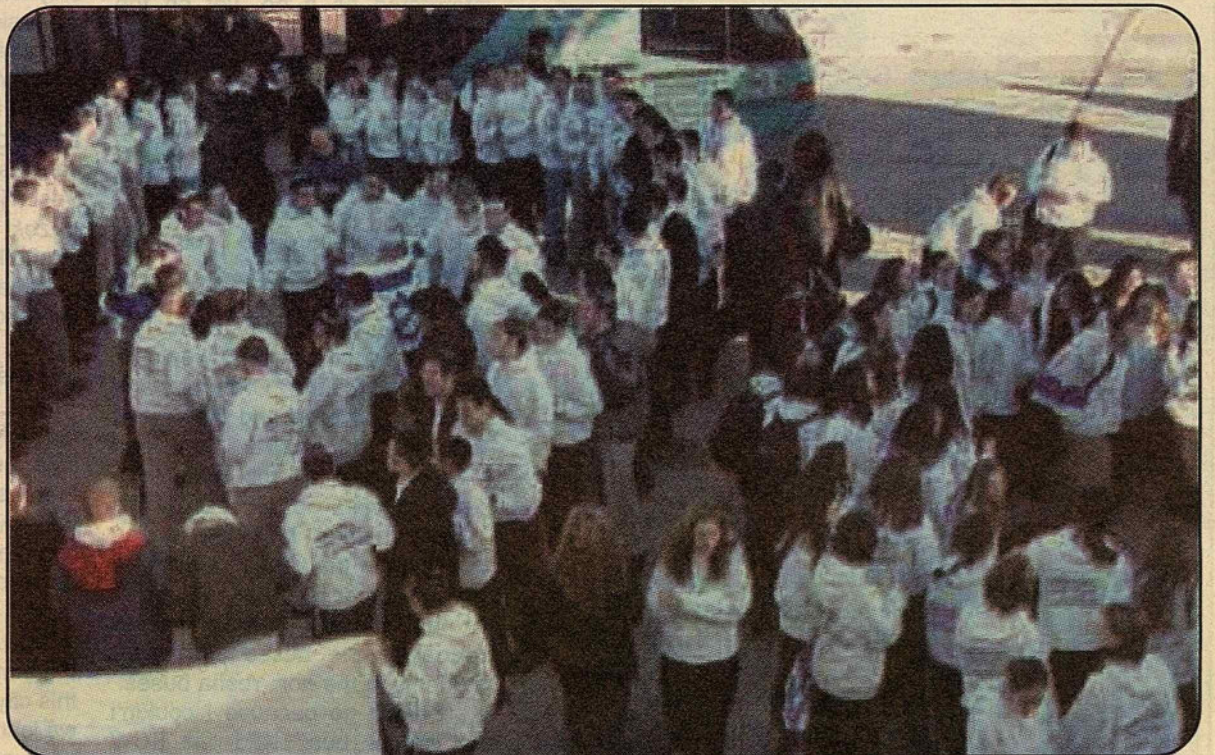
As part of Project Keshet, Yeshiva students organized letters written by elementary school students. The mission participants handed out the letters to chayalim along their bus routes.

Translated from the Hebrew original (Grammatical errors have been left intact)

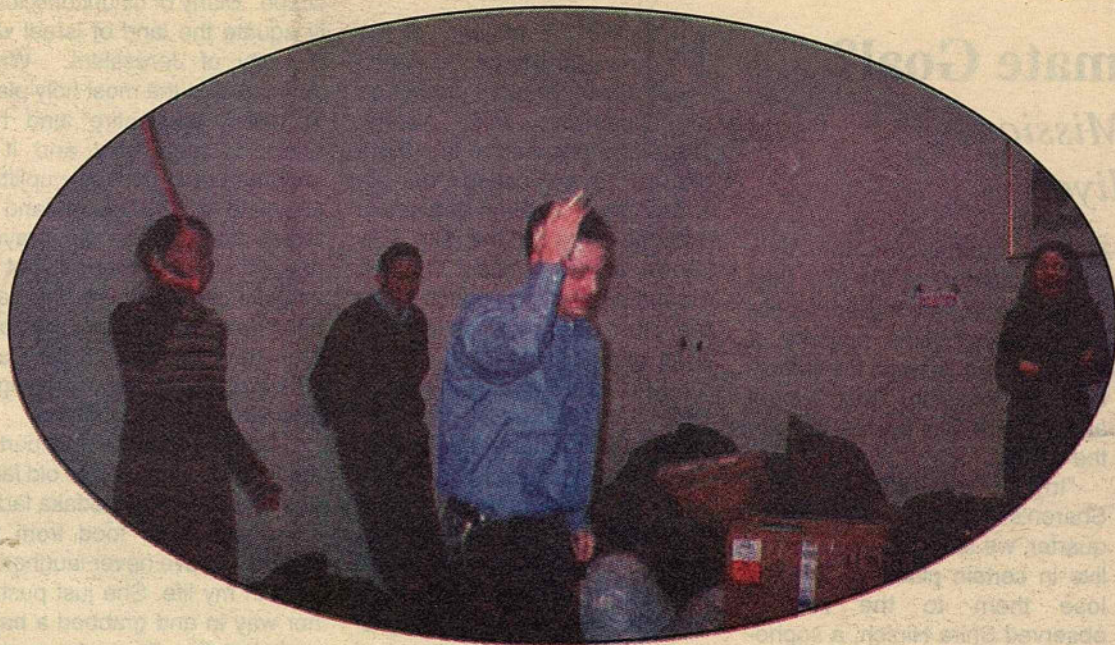
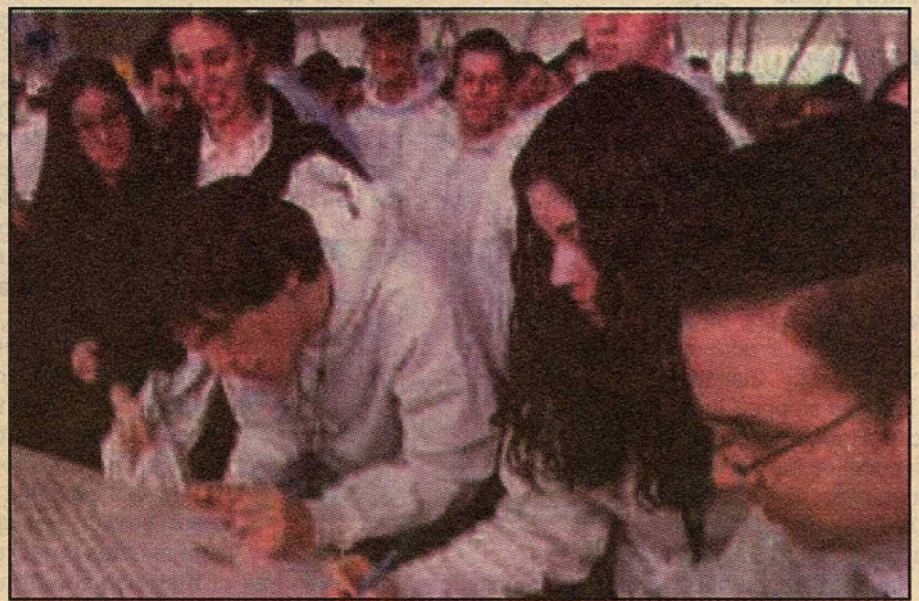
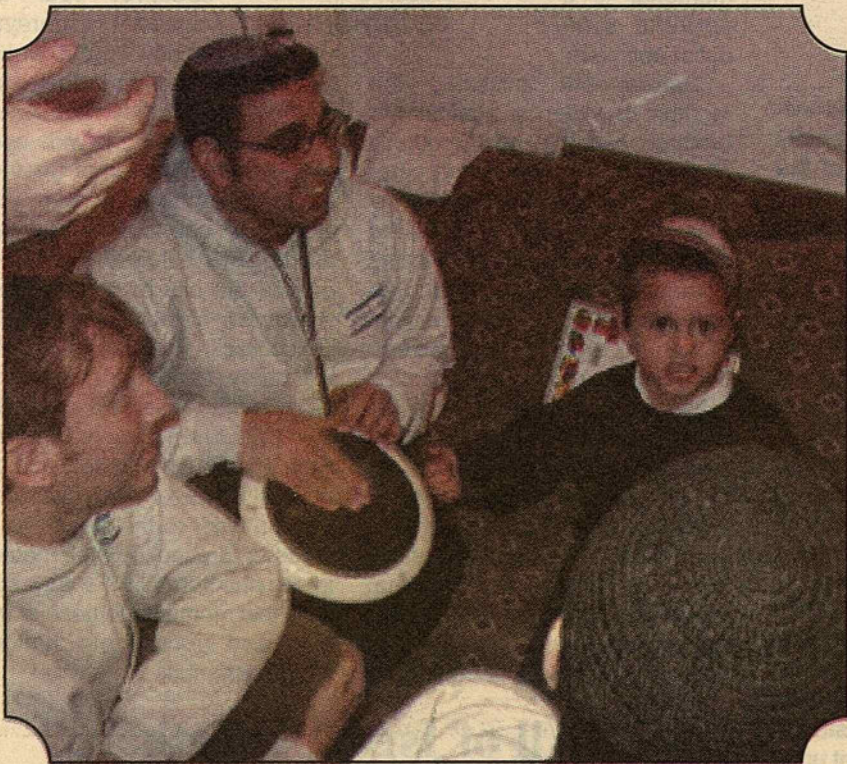
*Shalom. My name is Moshe. I live in America and in another year I came to Israel. I know that you do not like wars and there is a war between the Arabs and the Jews and the Arabs want Israel but Hashem gave Israel to us and I think about you and I want that you do not die.*

The above was taped to a piece of licorice.

# Scenes From



# Torah Shield !!



# WORDS FROM JERUSALEM: Journal Entries from Mission Participants

## Soldiers of Words

By Yael Shmuel

As I walked through the streets of the armed holy city of Hebron, the words of Rabbi Reichman echoed in my head. "Soldiers of Words" is what he called us and that is truly what we were. The comparison became clearer as we visited more and more cities and met with our brothers and sisters living in the Holy Land. This lead me to think of the first day of the mission, when we stepped off the plane, kissed the ground, and made our way to the Kotel. The Kotel, the Western Wall, the holiest place in the world - how appropriate. From that moment on, we were no longer 200 college students touring, but we were now 200 "soldiers of words" dedicated to strengthening the Land of Israel, not physically but emotionally.

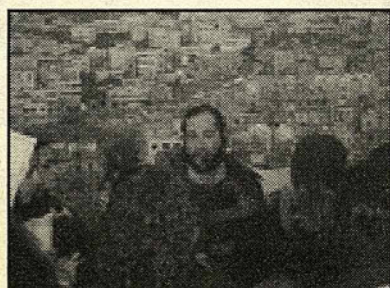
## In the Steps of Our Forefathers

By Jeffrey Weiss

Ya'anacha Hashem Beyom Tzara, Yesagevcha Sheim Elokei Yaakov." May Hashem answer you on the day of distress, and may the name of Yaakov's G-d make you impregnable - Tehillim 20:2.

Throughout the generations many have sought to come and pray to Hashem for help and guidance at the *Maaras Hamachpeilah* place of burial of our forefathers and mothers. Chazal say that *Kaleiv ben Yefunah* stopped there to implore Hashem for Divine providence in his mission of the *meraglim* spies of the land.

On Torah Shield II, a group of approximately 150 individuals after touring around the Jewish community of Chevron packed into buses and were privileged to follow the footsteps of those who came before and visited this holy place. We came to pray, cry out and sing to G-d in Heaven in the time of Israel's distress.



In Chevron

We arrived at the Kotel, just as the pioneers in 1948 arrived after the War of Independence, just as so many soldiers gather today at the Kotel to be sworn in and accept their mission. We arrived with a proclamation that read: "As a student of Yeshiva University and as a participant in Operation Torah Shield II, I have arrived today in Artzeinu Hakdosha...Standing before Har Habayit, the holiest site of Judaism, I declare my support and love for Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael."

Lechazek U'lehitchazek was our mission statement and that is exactly what we did. Whether it be singing in the streets of Shiloh, or packing into a small caravan delivering gifts to the children of Eli, we were soldiers - soldiers of words.

The spiritual ambiance of the place was evident as we passed through the second security check to enter the mainly deserted tomb of the patriarchs and matriarchs. Besides our group, there was barely anyone to absorb the serenity of this holy place. The spiritual ambiance was present and influenced each person's prayers be it the communal *Mincha*, group recitation of Tehilim or each individual's personal supplications. The *kedusha*, sanctity, and purity of the place were able to influence all.

As we gathered to depart from the *Maaras Hamachpeilah*, I couldn't help but sympathize with those who insisted on remaining for just a few more moments within this peaceful place. They were saying just give me five more minutes to recite a prayer for myself and all of Klal Yisrael. Let my tears flow from the *Maaras Hamachpeilah* down the stream of tears of the Jewish people and go straight up to *Avinu Bashamayim*, G-d in Heaven.

## The Sign of Faith

By Avi Robinson

On a windswept, barren mountain at the outskirts of Tekoa stands a silent testimonial to the Jewish people's unwavering faith. There a simple placard marks the entrance to the cave where two teenagers, Yosef Ishran and Kobi Mandell, were brutally murdered last year. A single phrase, four words long, transforms this sign from a standard memorial to a powerful symbol of optimism.

Before our mission, the months of violence against our brethren had left me thoroughly depressed. At our initiation ceremony, tourism minister Benny Elon charged us to reverse the sin of the spies by convincing potential visitors that, in Yehoshua and Calev's words, "Tovah ha'aretz me'od me'od," the land is exceedingly good. I regarded his directive with an uneasy skepticism. How could I summon the courage to set aside the images of war that had been cluttering our television screens and behold a beautiful, inspiring country? When reading that memorial sign, however, I was astonished to encounter the very phrase that I was struggling to

internalize. The murders, the placard insists, took place al ha'aretz hatovah hazot, on this good land. If two grieving families could continue to affirm their belief in the land's goodness, I could do no less than follow their example.

For the residents of Yehuda and Shomron, sacrificing for the land of Israel brings out only a deeper love for the land. The next time you visit Israel, spend some time with these courageous people and try to identify with their perspective. Tour the newest caravan colony in Eli, whose

**A single phrase transforms this sign from a standard memorial to a powerful symbol of optimism.**

residents take pride in their simple homes as if they were luxurious palaces. Greet the wide-eyed smiles of the children of Chevron as they run to play with you, seemingly oblivious to the hundreds of soldiers stationed around the city to protect them. Watch Avi Milstein, our guide in Tekoa, pick up a clod of dirt with his beefy hand and announce, "This is the reason we are here." Join Ezra and Rina Ishran, Rabbi Seth and Sherri Mandell, and the rest of Tekoa on their tiyul next Lag Ba'omer to the Dead Sea in commemoration of their nature-loving children. On the way, stop for a few moments to gaze at that sign and ponder our nation's indomitable faith.

## All of Israel Together

By Nili Epstein

Unlike the majority of the participants on Operation Torah Shield, I did not go to Chevron and Yesha. Therefore, despite the fact that I did go to so called "danger zones" such as East Jerusalem and the area in the Old City known as the Moslem Quarter, the nature and experience of my trip was different than that of other participants.

One day, I was privileged to travel north to the Golan and we went to a Midrasha, a women's yeshiva, where we spent time with the girls learning there. They took us on a short hike through ankle deep mud where we climbed to the top of a bunker where we were given an exquisite view of the snow peaked mountains of the golan. The last few times I had been to Israel, I had not left Jerusalem. Sometimes, it is hard to remember that Israel, while it is a small country, has the most internally

diverse and exquisite landscape. Many of us unconsciously equate the land of Israel with the city of Jerusalem. While Jerusalem is the most holy place in Israel, the entire land has been deemed holy and it is important and spiritually uplifting to relate to the entire land of Israel, not only by our prayers and with moral support, but by actually experiencing the land upon which our history was built and developed and the land where our future is beginning to and will continue to unfold.

(Actually- my favorite part of the trip was when a little old lady-one of those kotel tzedaka ladies came and stole food from the mission. I have never laughed so hard in my life. She just pushed her way in and grabbed a bagel and a muffin. Then she pushed everyone out of her way as she went back to her post. This is a fine example of the kind of "giving back" that Torah Shield and Project Keshet did.)

during Operation Torah Shield II. Green had always considered Aliyah but it was never a concrete plan until going on the YU mission. "Being there for the week, I felt like I was really contributing to Israel and individually making a difference," said Green. Most importantly though, according to Green, is, "supporting Israel at whatever level you can, whether it be touring or contributions or any other means."

It is unclear if Torah Shield II will have any lasting effects with regard to increasing Aliyah. When

asked about her view on Aliyah, Jodi Schachar, and SCW sophomore, described her feelings. "As I stood in Tekoa, I felt the immense desire to make Aliyah, I really respect the people who don't just talk about the way they feel, but actually put their beliefs into action. I realize that at this stage in my life I can't foresee living in Israel, maybe when I'm older G-d willing. Hopefully I'll be able to overcome shallow American things that I'm attached to."

## Is Torah Shield II the Ultimate Goal?

### Relationship Between the Mission and Attitudes Toward Aliyah

By Tamar Belsh

Undoubtedly, the main goal of Operation Torah Shield II was *Lechazek U'lehitchazek* and though encouraging aliyah was not the top priority of the mission, students felt that this message presented an undercurrent penetrating every facet of the trip.

Many of the speakers on the mission specifically addressed the issue of Aliyah. In Tekoa, Rabbi Seth Mandell discussed the importance of Aliyah despite the murder of his 13 year old son, Koby. Mandell said that he could not imagine living any place else, nor would he ever consider leaving, even under the most treacherous present circumstances. With tears in his eyes, Mandell described the extent of Koby's talmudic knowledge which he attributed to life in Eretz Yisrael.

Students were showered with the ideals of Aliyah through speeches from great Torah leaders as well. Rav Simcha HaCohen Kook, Rav of Rechovot, stressed that Eretz Yisrael is the most important place religiously for Jews, and that all Jews are truly "from Eretz Yisrael." During the day of learning at Michlelet Mevaseret

Yerushalayim, Rav Azarya Berzon, Rosh Yeshiva of Mevaseret institutions, stressed the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael, and the ahava aspect of our relationship to Eretz Yisrael.

In her D'var Torah delivered on Shabbos, Julie Pianko, SCW student coordinator for Operation Torah Shield II, quoted the famous passage from Ketubot 110b: "He who dwells in Eretz Yisrael is like one who has a G-d, and he who dwells outside the land is like one who does not have a G-d." Pianko stressed that the importance of Eretz Yisrael, insisting that aliyah is something every Jew must think about. Pianko also discussed Eim Habanim Semeichah as a book that "everyone must read."

Written by Rav Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal in the midst of the holocaust, this book describes the only hope left for the Jews- the hope of Eretz Yisrael, a Jewish homeland. Rav Teichtal brings proof after proof citing the sanctity of the land, and the obligation of the Jewish people to settle there to bring Mashiach, rather than waiting for Mashiach to bring them there.

In addition to the lectures, several other aspects of the trip demonstrated the importance of Aliyah. Visiting places like the

Muslim quarter (or the new Jewish quarter) of the Old City, and Chevron, where Jewish people live amongst a majority of Arabs, demonstrated the importance of living in Eretz Yisrael and in those holy places, despite the danger.

"In the old city, at Ariel Sharon's house in the Muslim quarter, we saw that you have to live in certain places or we will lose them to the Arabs," observed Shira Hirsch, a sophomore in SCW, "and if we don't live in Chevron, we're going to lose it too!" While Hirsch always felt committed to the ideal of Aliyah, seeing the convictions of those parents who lost children but continued to have such strong faith in God strengthened her commitment.

Seeing the ten families living in caravans in Chevron especially struck some students as incredibly self-sacrificing "It helped bring me closer to my brothers and sisters whom are living in Eretz Yisrael," said SCW junior Shayna Waldman.

Although probably a good portion of the students had already planned to make Aliyah for many years, other students, like Debbie Green, sophomore at SCW, began to realize the importance of living in Eretz Yisrael



## Day-by-Day Account of Mission's Activities

By Mimi Sternberg

The sendoff at JFK international airport on January 13, 2002, included singing, dancing, and addresses by speakers such as Dr. Norman Lamm and Congressman Nadler.

### Day 1

The mission arrived in Israel Monday morning, graciously greeted by the film crew hired to cover the trip, where students



Dancing at the airport

sang and danced on the runway of Ben-Gurion.

The buses left the airport and headed immediately for the Kotel, where the mission participants davened mincha and Musaf in honor of Rosh Chodesh. Another ceremony was conducted at the Kotel with guest speakers that included Rav Goldwicht and Rabbi Benny Elon, the Israeli Minister of Tourism. Elon painfully opened his speech by speaking of his appointment as minister of tourism due to the tragic death of Reuchavam Ze'evi, the former Minister of Tourism who was assassinated only a few short months ago by Palestinian extremists.

The trip then split into two groups – those who toured settlements in Yesha and those who visited the National Biblical Reserve. The Yesha group went to Shiloh, driving through the Yishuv to Tel-Shiloh where they went to a museum and were shown a model of the Mishkan. They toured the archeological site and saw a movie about the Mishkan. They then went to Eli,

where they visited caravans and gave toys to the children there and visited Yeshivat B'nei David, where they visited the Mechona program.

The non-Yesha group went to Neot Kedumim, the Biblical Natural Reserve, where things mentioned in the Tanach and Gemarah were planted to show how the fruits and plants of Eretz Yisrael are very much connected to the Torah and the Jewish people.

### Day 2

On Tuesday, the non-Yesha group went on a three hour bus ride to the Golan where they visited a pre and post-high school girl's Midrasha, and one of the teachers spoke about her experience moving from Jerusalem and living in a different environment. They toured army bunkers and stopped at a mall on the way there and back – a stop designed to help out the econo-



Planting trees

my.

The Yesha group went to the Gush where they visited Tekoa and planted trees in honor of Koby Mandell and Yosef Ishran who were stoned to death by Arabs in the backyard of their settlement last May. The students went to the exact cave where the two boys' bodies were found, and were addressed by Koby's father and Yosef's mother, who spoke of how they are channeling the tragedy that hit their family into something that will be used positively for the Jewish community at large. The Yesha group then went to Kfar

Etzion where they viewed a film on how the Jews regained the territory of the Gush and the struggles that they had to go through in order to attain it. They then went to a gift shop there to further support the Israel economy.

After the Gush, the Yesha group went to Chevron. They toured the small Jewish neighborhood of Avraham Avinu, where the 30 Jewish families of Chevron live, and they visited Tel-Romeda, where they saw how eleven Jewish families live in a few small temporary caravans, literally surrounded on all sides by Arab neighbors. The Jews of these two small neighborhoods came there in order to maintain a Jewish presence in Chevron in order to make sure that Chevron stays in Jewish hands. As Tziporah Kapustin, SCW senior, said, "The contribution of these Jews to Am Yisrael is amazing. It is simply through the presence of these Jews in places like Chevron which keeps these places in Jewish hands."

The group davened Mincha at *Mearat Hamachapelah*. A poignant part of the trip was when the Arabs started their late



Another bus ride

afternoon prayers during Kedusha, and, instead of being discouraged by the interruption, the group simply said the holy words of praise to Hashem louder and stronger than the Arabs' microphone-enhanced wailing sounds of prayer.

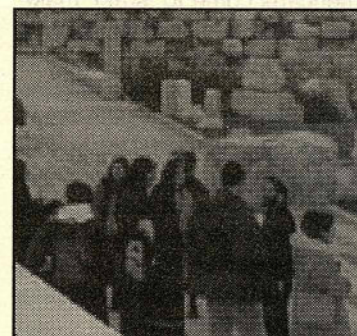
### Day 3

Wednesday was a special day devoted to learning in

yeshivot. The real purpose of the day was to fulfill the title of the mission, "Torah Shield"— to learn Torah in Eretz Yisrael and use that as a shield against terrorism.

### Day 4

On Thursday, half the day was dedicated to a training seminar intended to train the participants in how to encourage Americans to visit Israel. The



At the Southern Excavation

group was divided into five groups in which we discussed strategies on how to convey the message to others. This part of the trip was very significant, as it enabled participants to fulfill the greater part of their mission upon their return to America.

After the seminar, the mission participants visited Ateret Kohanim, an organization committed to returning a Jewish presence to the Old City. The mission toured the Muslim quarter of the Old City and went into Ariel Sharon's house there, which he owns in order to declare the Jewish right to *Ir HaAtikah*. The mission also toured the southern wall excavations and saw a video of a "virtual Beit Hamikdash," showing the *Beit Hamikdash* as it was and its corresponding parts in the archeological excavations of today. In the evening, the students were treated to a concert by Yehuda Katz from Reva L'sheva.

### Day 5

On Friday, the mission davened Shacharit at the *kever* of Shimon Hatzadik, which is located in East Jerusalem and is sig-



At Shimon Hatzadik's Kever

nificant because, as Sari Strulowitz, SCW senior said, "Our schedule was intense and action-packed, but certain places were specifically scheduled at that time to make a political statement, such as the *kever* of Shimon HaTzadik, being that it was in East Jerusalem and only recently gained back by the Jews. It was inspiring to hear the personal stories of what people went through daily to regain this and other pieces of land."

The mission then went to Kibbutz Ramat Rochel where they saw the beautiful sight and scenery of Yerushalayim.

### Days 6-7

Shabbos was spent in the hotel, where mission participants enjoyed inspiring and beautiful kumzitz, davening, zmirot at the meals, and shiurim, most notably one by Rav Yigal Lerer of Merkaz HaRav.

On *Motzei Shabbat*, the mission participants quickly packed and departed for the airport, but even the airport was filled the



Dancing farewell

vibrant energy of the mission, as students danced and sang as a parting farewell to Israel.

## Spreading the Experience: Fulfilling the Requirements of Torah Shield II

By Rivky Guber

Most of the two hundred participants of Torah Shield II who stumbled bleary-eyed off their return flight to America probably had no thoughts in their heads aside for reflections on their emotionally charged and activity packed week in Israel. However, Torah Shield II is not completely in the past yet, as the Yeshiva University solidarity mission is nowhere near over despite the return to the states.

The students who participated on this mission were made aware of a number of requirements that would have to be fulfilled upon their return from the actual trip to Israel. These requirements include fulfilling ten speaking engagements and enlisting ten Orthodox people to register to vote in the World Zionist Organization.

Initially, many students felt overwhelmed by the number of speaking engagements required but now, post-mission, reactions have calmed somewhat. Dassie Wagner, a junior who participated in the mission, commented that, "I think it's very fair that they ask us to give back to the American Jewish community because

this trip has given a lot to us. I'm even looking forward to speaking to share the experiences I've been privileged to have." Still, Wagner continued, "I think it's a lot to expect us to fulfill some of them immediately, at the beginning of a semester."

Other students have voiced complaints about the nature of the requirements. "I think that speaking engagements are not so effective, since we have nothing really new to say," said one SCW junior. "Something more productive would have been to organize concrete projects that could help Israel directly."

The requirements are considered important, however, because the goal of the Orthodox Union, the Israel Ministry of Tourism, and the other sponsors of Torah Shield II, was to send Yeshiva University students who could assume leadership positions and spread their experiences as far and wide as possible. The students' "efforts to reach out to their communities and promote tourism will make a tremendous difference to us," said Consul Rami Levi, the-North America Israel Commissioner for Tourism.

Before leaving for the mission, students had to have submitted a

tentative list of speaking engagements. Speaking engagements could include addressing youth groups, such as Bnei Akiva and NCSY, about visiting Israel and spending a year there post-high school, running programs in local shuls, YM/YWHAs, and Jewish Community Centers, and even informal dialogue with a group of youth or adults in which mission participants discuss why Israel is a great and safe place to visit and why the Jews of America need the support of the Jews of America now more than ever, specifically in the form of visiting Israel. "This mission has many purposes," said Chana Michels, a mission participant. "One of the main purposes was for us to gain a greater understanding and to increase the personal awareness we feel individually through refreshing spiritual experiences. With these experiences we have to come back to the states and promote tourism to Israel from within our communities."

The overall consensus seems to be that the speeches and the WZO voter recruitments are small prices to pay for the opportunity to have been a part of this historical event.

### Random Stats for Torah Shield II

9 Divrei Torah given on Shabbos  
6:00am typical wakeup time  
20 Mentors  
13 cities visited  
4 hours spent on bus daily (average)  
500 toothbrushes donated to Project Keshet  
3 guitars and 2 bongos brought by students

### The Observer

Joins student leaders  
in wishing a  
hearty Mazel Tov  
to Commentator Editor  
Pinky Shapiro  
on his upcoming marriage  
to Aura Brandwein

# Opinions

## Too Much to the Right

By Shayndi Raice

I have a problem with solidarity missions with a clear political agenda. Operation Torah Shield II was one of them.

Before the trip I was excited about the opportunity to give chizuk to Israelis and in the process be strengthened in my



Students tour Muslim Quarter with right-wing perspective

belief that Jews have an inherent right to the land of Israel. I also felt angered, like I'm sure so many other American Jews, about the media coverage of Israel. I saw this trip as an opportunity to show my solidarity with all of the people of Israel. However, this trip was not for all the people of Israel. It was meant to give solidarity to those Jews whom the organizers of the trip felt were worthy i.e. politically right wing Israelis. I believe in showing solidarity with Jews in the settlements. They are civilian victims of terror and they should not be neglected because of their political views. They need our support. However, I was saddened that Operation Torah Shield II felt that only those Jews needed our support.

The participants of the mission were offered the option of visiting the West Bank. There were students, like myself, whose parents were uncomfortable with this, so there was also the option of visiting non-Yesha places. I assumed that would mean visiting other victims of terror inside of Israel proper, such as victims of the Tel Aviv, Hadera, or Netanya bombings. This was not the case. We were taken to a nature reserve. While it was a very pretty nature reserve (that I had visited on previous trips), I wasn't sure how that fit into the purpose of the trip. That was only the first day, so I didn't ponder it deeply. As the days passed, I slowly realized that this trip was only there to promote the right wing political agenda, not to show solidarity with all of Israel.

My main problem with this type of political agenda is that since that I am an American citizen, and an Israeli (although one day I would hope for that to change), I don't believe we have the right to impose our ideas if we don't have to live with the consequences. I think we can have opinions, but I start to have issues when that opinion turns to action.

For example, on Thursday we were taken on a tour of the Moslem Quarter of the Old City by a group called Atret Kohanim who have been attempting to repopulate Arab areas. This is a worthy cause. However, I think that two hundred American students marching through the Arab

quarter of Jerusalem waving Israeli flags and screaming Jewish songs crosses a certain line. When I told my uncle who has been living in Israel for the past twenty five years about this experience, he said "the Americans come to Israel, make a big ruckus, go home and leave us with the bullets."

This is a debate as old as the State of Israel: What role do American Jews play in public policy in Israel? I hope that most would agree that doing something so provocative, something that could literally push Arabs over the edge, is where Americans should draw the line.

If Israelis want to do something like that then they have the complete and total right since they live with the consequences.

If it was only this singular experience perhaps I wouldn't feel so distraught. Yet throughout the trip the radical extremisms of American right-wing Jews was showcased as truth and fact and anyone, Israeli or American, who disagreed with that was not deserving of respect, let alone solidarity. One day, on the buses, we passed people protesting the "occupation." I'll admit to disagreeing with them, but I would not have taken my opinion to the extent of booing out the window as many suggested we should. Was nobody humble enough to admit that perhaps they don't understand the experience of every Israeli? Perhaps people who live there have a right to voice an opinion, even though we as Americans disagree?

What I found even more disturbing was the pamphlets by Meir Kahane and the Kach party that was given out in the hotel shul. As I read through the pamphlet I was disgusted. It described how the grave of the "great zaidik" Baruch Goldstein was being desecrated and how we weren't taking enough action to prevent it. It quoted Kahane as describing the difference between gentiles and Jews as greater than the difference between human beings and beasts. Not only were those pamphlets illegal (because the Kach party is considered a terrorist organization in itself) they were incredibly inappropriate to be passed around by an American solidarity mission.

Our purpose in Israel was to support the Israeli people and return to America to promote tourism. Instead the trip was used as an opportunity to further divide the Jewish people by ignoring the Israeli left and any Jews who disagreed with Torah Shield's political agenda. I can only imagine what a Kiddush Hashem it would have been to visit non-religious Israelis or those with different political beliefs than us, and show them that as religious Jews in the diaspora we will fight for their right to live freely as Jews in our homeland. A wonderful opportunity was sadly missed.

## Much to Respond

By Yehuda Shmidman  
Organizing Committee Member  
Operation Torah Shield II

Thank you for your thoughts regarding what has already been documented as one of the most historic and successful missions to Israel in recent times. However, while all constructive criticism has been welcomed from the start of Operation Torah Shield II, I feel compelled to dispel your accusations that were presented on the basis of multiple fallacies in an apparent attempt to delude those who did not attend the mission during January break.

Before dissecting your premises, I should point out that your entire dissertation is riddled with fascinating (and telling) ironies:

(1) While you are supposedly open-minded and in favor of full exposure to all sides of a given scenario (such as a political one), you are remarkably selective and one-sided with your presentation of facts. For example, you discuss the trip to Neot Kidumim and various optional trips to the "West Bank", yet you conveniently neglect to point out that the majority of the trip was spent in Jerusalem proper – be it in the Ramada Hotel, the Kotel, Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, the hospital for cancer patients, or otherwise.

(2) A second underlying irony that stems from your cynicism is regarding your 'concern' with Jewish unity – as, for example, you are 'saddened' by the mission's alleged intention of "further divid[ing] the Jewish people by promoting hatred of the Israeli left and Jews who disagreed with Torah Shield's political agenda." It should be noted that you feel the need to discuss the problem with intentionally dividing the Jewish community. Yet – in all ironies – you, of all people, chose to write an accusatory piece to be published in the public arena which seeks to bash not only the organizers of Operation Torah Shield II, but also, as you frame them, "Americans Jews" who go to Israel to 'provoke Arabs' and then proceed to "then go home to America when [they] very safely don't have to live with the consequences."

And this – the summation of the top two imbedded ironies in your writing – is the essence of what is so blatantly wrong about your expose: You are paradoxically critical of the mission's alleged biased agenda, yet you yourself are guilty of one-dimensional bias in your own presentation.

On that note, let us now reveal the whole truth about Operation Torah Shield II – and with that the readers of The Observer will finally be able to conclude if the mission was or was not politically charged.

The mission, which spent 6 days (and 5

nights) in Israel, was led with the motto l'Chazek u'l'Hit'chazek – to strengthen and be strengthened. Coordinated by the Orthodox Union and sponsored mostly by the Israel Ministry of Tourism, the Jewish Agency, and private donors, 200 Yeshiva University participants went to visit the people of Israel in order to return to America as official Tourism Ambassadors for the State of Israel.

The itinerary, therefore, was modeled in a way to best educate the participants about the current climate in Israel so they could return to America with the message that Israel is the place to visit today.

As such, we conducted a ceremony with the Minister of Tourism at the Kotel, distributed over 200 suitcases worth of donated goods to children and soldiers across the landscape of Israel, invited local Israeli vendors to sell products in the hotel, heard presentations from various Israelis about the economy (such as the owner of the Ramada Hotel), experienced an extensive half-day Tourism training program in the hotel, and provided nightly shuttles to the Kotel. All of which either directly educated the participants about the economy or indirectly exposed the situation through interaction with random people in the land of Israel.

In addition, we were joined by Rabbi Stav (from KBY) as we celebrated Shabbat in Jerusalem, and we even (collectively) spent one full day of learning spread across over 20 unique Yeshivot and seminaries in Israel.

During the program we were also addressed by such rabbinic personalities as Rabbis Willig, Rosensweig, Reichman, and Kook.

Further more, on one morning we offered students the option of visiting the Yehuda area (Chevron, Cfar Etzion, Tekoa, etc) or the Golan. On a separate occasion we offered a tour of the Old City or a visit to the local hospital (with a focus on cancer patients).

All in all, the mission aimed to be intensive in that we tried to accomplish as much as possible in the limited time frame we had available, with a unified focus on the Israeli economy.

Were the mission's objectives politically charged, left or right? Not in the least. Indeed, as was correctly reflected in Ha'aretz, the Jerusalem Post, the Jewish Week, Yidot Achronot, on WCBS radio, and many other media outlets: Operation Torah Shield II was a mission designed to promote tourism to Israel in its time of need, irrespective of any and all personal political stances.

### Benny Elon Addresses Mission on at Ramat Rachel Kibbutz



Benny Elon, Israeli Minister of Tourism



Naphtali Weiss, a YC senior, asks question at Ramat Rachel speech

## The Original Torah Shield Mission

By Observer Staff

The recent Torah Shield II mission was not the first time Yeshiva University students expressed their support for Israel during a precarious time. Eleven years ago, as Israel faced escalating threats of missile attacks during the Gulf War, YU sent 400 students to the stricken country.

The original Torah Shield mission took place during winter break, 1991. Sponsored by the American Friends of Ateret Kohanim, the Jerusalem Reclamation Project, Yeshiva University students paid \$50 to spend two weeks in Israel. Students spent one week learning in a yeshiva setting and one week volunteering.

While Torah Shield participants did visit the kneset and had the opportunity to hear cabinet members and MKs speak, the emphasis of the mission seems to have been on learning. As Rabbi Norman Lamm said at the time, the purpose of the trip was to "exercise our spiritual strength."

Indeed, at a time when many people, including U.N. officials, were leaving Israel and the U.S. State Department was issuing serious warnings not to travel to the region, YU students saw their support as crucial - while at the same time realizing that they were putting themselves in danger. Upon their arrival in Israel, students were given gas masks, provided by the American Embassy. During the two week

trip, the students were forced more than once to don the masks and enter shelters as sirens wailed throughout the country signaling scud missile attacks.

The extremely dangerous conditions in Israel prevented many YU students from signing up for the mission. SCW was allotted 170 applications but used only around 120 of them. Students who did go signed extensive waivers removing liability, in case of harm, from the university. Cancellations continued until right before the flight was scheduled to leave.

The devotion of those students who did ultimately travel to Israel did not go unrecognized. The mission received a large amount of publicity at the time, and the group was greeted at Ben Gurion airport by then deputy foreign minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the rosh yeshiva of Sha'alvim and Kerem B'Yavneh and YU rabbis who had previously arrived in Israel. Upon their return, participants recounted the appreciation Israelis, from yeshiva students to cab drivers, had expressed to them.

Around a month after the mission's return, Yeshiva University hosted an "Operation Torah Shield II - Erev Iyun." The event, which featured YU and guest rabbis, sought to place the Gulf crisis in a Torah and Jewish perspective.

### Yeshiva and Israel: Interesting Stats

319 men enrolled this year in the S. Daniel Abraham Joint Israel Program

258 women enrolled in the Joint Program

27 of these men are learning at Gush

20 learned in Gush last year

10 deans and administration visited this winter

27 men are currently studying at Gruss

12 Israeli citizens are learning on student visas at Yeshiva

## Rockoff at MSDCS

continued from page 12



to our programs," said Rockoff.

One of the Youth and Outreach's most popular programs is Torah Tours. Over 400 YC, SCW and RIETS students have traveled to over 57 Jewish communities across America for Simchat Torah and Shavuot, to enhance the holiday atmosphere. "It's to help the Rabbis of

the communities that we send these students, and it's also for the students to show them their potential," said Rockoff.

"It's an excellent program for making a difference in Jewish communities," said Toby Josovitz, an SCW junior who has participated in Torah Tours. "The kids in the community I went to had a great time and were begging us to come back."

There are three departments in the MSDCS, all under the leadership of Rabbi David Israel. The Education Department imparts ideals of curriculum development and other educational services, mainly through the Association of Modern Orthodox Day Schools. The Rabbinic Department assists RIETS graduates in finding rabbinical placements, and organizes educational programs for them on practical pulpit responsibilities.

Rockoff's department, where he has been for a year and a half, "bridges the other two departments," by organizing programs that educate high school and college students, and providing Yeshiva students with a vehicle for communal service. Currently there are two other part time staffers in this department, as well as six interns, two of whom were on the executive committee of Torah Shield II.

Rockoff, who is now Rabbi Rockoff, did his rabbinic internship as assistant rabbi in Mt Vernon where he along with a group of RIETS students started a kollel, but plans on continuing in Jewish organizational work. And according to many participants of Torah Shield II, he has certainly found his niche.

Rabbi Ari Rockoff can be reached at yuyouth@aol.com.

## Security on Mission

continued from page 12

take when necessary."

When asked whether monetary considerations motivated using bullet-proof buses only when necessary, Shmidman emphatically responded, "We never compromise security for monetary considerations." He proceeded to elaborate on other factors beside money that would prevent the use of bullet-proof buses. "It's an issue of availability," Shmidman remarked. "These bullet-proof buses have other priorities - maybe they are used to pick up kids in the settlements of Eli and Chevron, which is more of a priority than our visiting Yerushalayim."

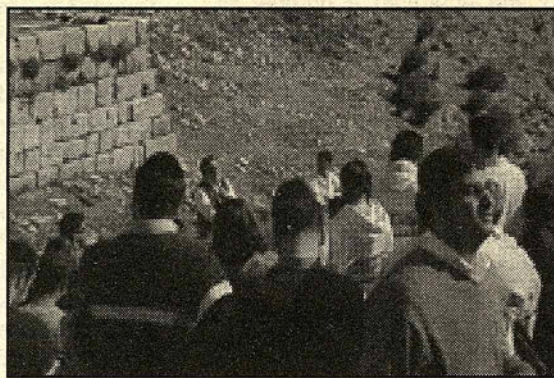
Security considerations also mandated that students remain in the hotel at night, excepting the optional bus to the hotel. Students were not allowed to venture out on their own, nor to walk around yerushalayim, even on shabbos. "The reason nobody was allowed out is that it would jeopardize our liability - meaning the OU's liability," asserted Shmidman. "Part of having an intense mission is not to have people going off on their own. The purpose is to have people come back if they want to go around on their own. This is not a tour, it's a mission."

## Special Ceremony at Tekoa Highlights Yesha Visit

By Adina Levine

After planting trees at Tekoa and pulling a bus out of a ditch, what many students have referred to as "the most memorable part of the trip" occurred. Standing outside the waddy where their two 13 year-old children had been brutally murdered by Arab terrorists, the parents addressed the assembly of Torah Shield participants, relaying a message of hope and inspiration.

"It was extremely moving to hear from the parents that no matter how much they have suffered, they still



Mandell movingly addresses students about his son Koby

believe in what they do," asserted one SCW senior.

Rena Ishran, the mother of Yosef, addressed the crowd in Hebrew, followed by Seth Mandell, father of Koby, with his moving words in English.

"I came to Israel because I wanted to give my kids a *Yiddishkeit* that was the best the world had to offer, that was something I wished my parents gave to me," asserted Mandell as he recounted the "beatific smile" on his son's face during his bar mitzvah.

He further recollected how one time he was sitting at the shabbos table while his son recited the pages of Gemara like the back of his hand. "That's another reason I came," commented Mandell. "I wanted my kid to be so familiar with the culture of *Yiddishkeit* that the pages of the Gemara are like a comic book for him."

Despite the tragedy that has wrecked their lives, both families pledged their utmost support to the land of Israel and specifically to Tekoa, and expressed the need to remain in the settlement despite - indeed, because of - the boys' murders.

"People tell me to give up living in Tekoa," commented Ishran in Hebrew. "But that's impossible. Living in Tekoa, knowing my life has a purpose, is my answer to dealing with tragedy."

"It gives you to live here such a sense of oneness of achdus with klal yisroel that lifts you up," asserted Mandell. "Living in galus is like swimming upstream... We came here to be part of Jewish History, and I don't regret one minute of it."

In memory of the children, the parents have established a foundation entitled the Koby Mandell foundation, which will attempt to organize a Camp Koby, a series of short overnight camps for the children and siblings of people killed or injured in terrorist attacks or other traumatic events, The Mothers Healing Retreat a two day respite program for mothers whose husband or children were killed or injured in terrorist attacks and The Koby Mandell Sports Integration Program, a Jerusalem-wide baseball and leadership program combining boys and girls from different communities in the Jerusalem area.

"There are consequences to being Jewish no matter where you are," reflected Mandell. "For us, the consequences are never ending. Not a day goes by when I don't think of Koby. It is so difficult going through day to day. The only way we get through it is the belief that we will use Koby's murder to make the world a better place. We need to make meaning out of the tragedy because if we don't do it, there's no reason to get up in the morning."

For the *yartzeit* of the boys in May, 1000 people plan to assemble and walk from the graveside to the Dead Sea, an approximately 6 hour walk.

"Going to Tekoa was incredibly important because showed the Arabs and the world that we're not afraid and murders won't kick us out from any place," asserted Tamar Ellman, SCW junior.

## Learning at Yeshiva

continued from page 12

that day. Many other people had the experience of not being able to take classes with the teachers from their year because either the school was closed for break or they had taken their students on a trip.

However, most people felt that even if they couldn't spend the day visiting their first choice it was still a very worthwhile trip. Some decided to just have time alone and found an opportunity for reflection. Aliza Bogner, a former student at Midreshet Moriah, said, "it was very important for us to have a day to ourselves and reflect on the experiences we had there. It helped me for the rest of the trip because it made me remember that year." Other students chose to spend the day learning by themselves in the Beit Midrash and still found this just as fulfilling. Beth Meshel was happy to go back and visit even though the American program was on a trip that day. "It was absolutely worthwhile, I had time to sit

in the Beit Midrash and learn whatever I wanted. enjoyed being in the Old City and I had a Chavruta with one of my Israeli friends."

Most of the students, however, had something prepared for them by their school. Because Michlala and MMY were the only institutions to have prepare programs, most of the women visited either of the two schools. YU's student mission was not the only on visiting Israel around this time of year, and there were many alumnae of various yehivot in Israel over winter vacation, so some schools had large programs and special classes for their visitors. MMY had prepared lunch for their guests and, even though the American students at Michlalah were away on the day designated for learning, the school had lectures that alumna could attend.

# Torah Shield II

## Rockoff Garners Praise from Mission Participants

### MSDCS Plays Key Role in Student Activism

By Miriam Colton

There's nothing like seeing the fruits of your labor. Last Shabbos in Jerusalem, Rabbi Ari Rockoff, one of the organizers of Torah Shield II, was able to do just that. Igor, Rockoff's former student from YUSSR, joined the group at the Renaissance Hotel for Shabbos. When Rockoff first met him in the Ukraine six years ago, Igor didn't speak Hebrew and was unclear about his Jewish identity; he is now an Israeli citizen and a member of the Israeli Navy.

Igor is an example of what persuaded Rockoff to change his mind about attending law school, and to instead enter a career in Jewish communal service, currently serving as the head of the Youth and Outreach Department of the Max Stern Division of Communal Services (MSDCS).

Gradually emerging as an important arm of RIETS under the tutelage of Rabbi David Israel, MSDCS is at the forefront of student activism and communal service. Approached by student leaders, MSDCS was a key facilitator of Torah Shield II. Rockoff, who attended the mission last week as one of the few non-student organizers, said he was inspired by the students' commitment to Israel. "I personally felt very strongly about the mission," said Rockoff.

While many of the mission's participants had previously received emails from Rockoff about programs he runs, for most, the mission was their first personal exposure to Rockoff and they left the trip hugely impressed. "Working with Ari has helped me become an all-around better person," said Reuven Brand, one of the organizers of the mission and an intern in the Youth and Outreach Department. "It has been a true *zechus* to work with him."

Rockoff, 27, majored in business at Sy Syms, and as an undergraduate was involved in Torah Tours and YUSSR, a stu-

dent-run kiruv program in the Jewish communities of the former Soviet Union for the past ten years. Rockoff first encountered YUSSR when he spent a summer at its camp in the southern Ukraine. He, along with a team of students, organized the activities for the campers and he reminisces about 30-hour train rides where the only kosher drink to buy was beer.

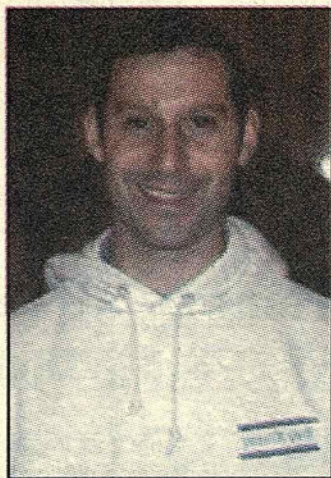
"It was through YUSSR and Torah Tours that I decided to go into Jewish communal service," said Rockoff, who is originally from Boston. "It was my first hands-on experience in creating programs and I really enjoyed it." In fact, it was on Torah Tours in Mamaroneck, New York, that Rockoff met his wife, with whom he has a one-year-old daughter.

Rockoff decided to forgo law school and instead entered RIETS, where he recently received his smicha in June 2001. "Instead of going into regular law, I went into Jewish law," joked Rockoff.

In addition to his heavy involvement, together with Rabbi David Israel, in bringing Torah Shield II to fruition, Rockoff's Youth and Outreach Department has implemented and improved a number of programs in which Yeshiva students participate. This year his department instituted Eimatai, a program for high school students, to increase awareness of Jewish issues and to mold future Jewish leadership. Drawing over 60 high school students, the program also enabled YC and SCW students to serve as mentors on the program, thereby developing their own leadership abilities.

Panim, the college outreach program of the MSDCS of 25 years, was recently reshaped after a few years' lapse. Panim "aims to cooperate with Hillel in creating a renaissance of Jewish identity and activism in the collegiate community," and sends Yeshiva students to various college communities to do Jewish outreach. "We're constantly adding new dimensions

*continued on page 11*



Rabbi Ari Rockoff

## Matzav in Israel Mandates Heightened Security

By Adina Levine

With an itinerary including such dangerous locations as Chevron, the Muslim quarter, and Takoa, Operation Torah Shield security needed to be tight. Including *melave neshek* and bullet proof buses, the security varied depending on the day and the intended location of the trip, with Yesha buses receiving additional medics and security guards, while the non-Yesha buses were without additional protection. Explaining the disparity, the organizers asserted that the standard for security was set by the government, and that it was altered based on the relative danger of the scene.

"The security on this trip was on par with the industry standard for all missions to Israel," said Yael Zemelman, SCW junior.

"It wasn't done based on a standard before the trip," commented Yehuda Shmidman, YC junior and program organizer. "We worked on the fly. [On Thursday,] there was a pigua, so [on Friday] there were more security guards."

The amount of security played a pivotal role in students' decisions whether to attend Yesha or not. Many students opted for the non-Yesha bus which went to a nature reserve on Monday and the Golan on Tuesday - rather than attending the more dangerous locations of Eli, Chevron and Gush. Kever Rachel, although originally scheduled as part of the itinerary, was omitted from the trip, because of security and time considerations. Nevertheless, the majority of the 200 students wanted to go to Yesha, and the Yesha buses were filled to capacity. Apparently, students did not feel that security was a prohibitive factor stopping them from attending the dangerous locations.

"Security was fine," commented Chezky Fruchter, SSSB sophomore. "Soldiers were all over the place, and there were no Arabs. You got this excited feeling because something could happen, but I felt pretty safe."

On the other hand, some students



Security escorts students through Moslem Quarter

disagreed. When asked whether security was adequate for the trip, Shayndi Raice, SCW sophomore, responded, "Not at all, especially when taking us to such dangerous places. Muslim quarter, security needed to be tight but all they had were two guards who were not paying attention at all. We passed by Muslims holding signs that said 'Bin Laden is waiting for You.' The guys were singing *v'lirushilayim*, being obviously provocative. Any person could have gotten mad and taken out a gun. It was utter stupidity to walk around with so much exposure and so little security."

For some students, the issue was not their personal reservations that prevented them from attending dangerous locations, but the fears of their parents that precluded some students from attending Yesha, and others from even joining the mission. "I really wanted to go," commented one YC junior. "But my parents wouldn't let me because of the Matzav."

"Every parent does what they feel was in the best interests for their children," reflected Yael Zemelman.

The optional kotel bus that departed nightly went through East Jerusalem one night without the added protection of being bullet proof, as did the trip to the Kever of Shimon Hazadik in East Jerusalem. The program's organizers maintained that in such instances, the additional precautions were unnecessary.

"In determining security measures, there are two realities we deal with," commented Shmidman. "The first is terrorism, which is not limited to Israel...The second is precautions, because you can't live in a box. Bullet proof busses are precautions, that you

*continued on page 11*

### BREAK-DOWN WHERE PARTICIPANTS SPENT THE DAY

MMY 30  
Michalalah 22  
Midreshet Moriah 17  
Midreshet Lindenbaum 8  
Michelet Esther 6  
Neve Yerushalayim 4  
Machon Gold 3  
Midreshet Harovah 3

KBY 23  
Shaalavim 17  
Gush 11  
Mevaseret 9  
Hakotel 7  
Resheit 6  
Mir 3  
OJ 2  
Mercaz HaRav 2  
Hamivtar 2  
BMT 1  
Rav Ilsen's 1  
Toras Moshe 1  
Shaare Yerushalayim 1

Additionally, 20 mentors were divided up between the men and women's yeshivot

## STUDENTS SPEND DAY LEARNING AT YESHIVOT

By Shayndi Raice

In addition to showing solidarity and learning how to be ambassadors to Israel, the students on Operation Torah Shield II had the opportunity to spend a day learning in the Yeshivot of their choice.

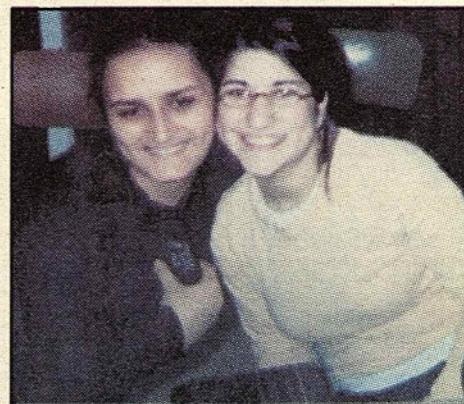
Ilan Rosenrauch, one of the organizers of the program, felt that it wasn't only important for students to spend a day learning but "it provided them with an opportunity to be mechazek the students and teachers in Israel." Rosenrauch recounted a story of an Israeli student in Yeshivat Har Etzion in the Gush who told him that it was so exciting to hear of American students coming to visit them in Yeshiva. "It made them feel like even though we are in America we still think about them," said Rosenrauch.

On the day of learning, Torah Shield participants spread out to

twenty one different yeshivot. The most popular yeshivot were Kerem B'Yavneh, Sha'alvim, Yeshivat Har Etzion, Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim, Michlalah, and Midreshet Moriah.

YU students were enthusiastic about spending a day learning. "In addition to going to Israel and showing solidarity it's important to supplement time with Torah," said Shira Hirsch, an SCW sophomore who spent her day learning in Michlalah. Many felt this fit into the aspect of creating Torah as a shield to the tragedies the Israelis have had to live through the past year and a half. "You could look at it in different ways," said Beth Meshel, who spent her day at Midreshet Harova. "It's filling up Batei Midrashot but it's also giving us an opportunity to tell people why we're there. The Israelis asked what I was doing there and they thought it was amazing. We aren't just tourists; you still need to take advantage of the opportunity to learn."

Most students chose to learn in the school they had studied at the year before coming to college. However, for various reasons some students had to opt for



Previous Michlalah students spend day learning

other institutions. Because there was only one day to go and visit, and because of the already tight scheduling it was impossible to negotiate timing and many schools already had plans for their student body. For example, Darchei Bina was not holding classes on the day set aside for learning because the students were on a trip

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