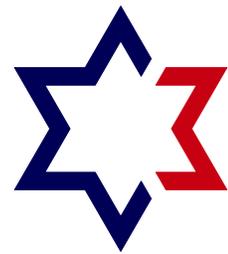


# Our Jewish Life



The Newsletter of Jewish Life at University of Richmond

Spring 2016

## Tikkun Olam: From Richmond to Rwanda



Dana Urban (center) with the children of the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village.  
Photo courtesy of Dana Urban

By Dana Urban '14

*Tikkun olam* is the Jewish concept of “repairing the world.” Since first learning of the concept at “Mitzvah Days” during Hebrew School, *tikkun olam* has remained one of the central tenants of my Jewish identity. The idea of repairing the world – doing my part to make the world a little bit brighter – has inspired countless aspects of my life. However, it was not until I was working in rural Rwanda after graduating from University of Richmond that I began to recognize the universality of *tikkun olam* and of my Jewish identity in a global context.

The University of Richmond has an abundance of opportunities for immersive international experiences, which was perfect for me as a global health major with a serious case of wanderlust. Between study abroad programs, summer stipends and extracurricular trips like the Chaplaincy’s Multifaith pilgrimage, I was fortunate enough to travel to six different countries throughout my time as a Richmond student.

University of Richmond’s Hillel provided me with a strong Jewish community on campus where I was able to strengthen my own Jewish identity, allowing me to connect with my Jewish values while abroad. I found myself celebrating Shabbat

with the Jewish diaspora, in China at Chabad in Beijing, and celebrating Rosh Hashanah with pomegranates bought from street markets in southern India.

After graduating in 2014, I was selected for the Joint Distribution Committee’s Jewish Service Corps Fellowship, a program that places 26 Jewish young professionals around the world working with either Jewish community-building or humanitarian projects. Through an intensive matching process, I was lucky enough to be placed at Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village (ASYV), located in rural Rwanda, a small land-locked country in East Africa, working in Career and Professional Skills Development.

ASYV is a special place that is hard to explain. Home to 500 of Rwanda’s most vulnerable youth, it is neither a boarding school nor an orphanage – though it possesses components of both. Instead, it is a community based off of Yemin Orde, a youth village located in Israel that was founded to provide a home to children orphaned and displaced during the Holocaust. As a part of the first post-genocide generation, the students at Agahozo-Shalom each have their own story, filled with seemingly insurmountable hardships. Though the majority of the

*continued on page 2*

**In This Issue:** Tikkun Olam: From Richmond to Rwanda · Our International Inception ·

Israel: Come One, Come All · From the Rabbi...One Last Time · The Search for A New Director Begins

continued from page 1

children are Christian (none of the kids are Jewish), the values of *tikkun olam* and *tikkun halev* (repairing the heart) are central to their experience at ASYV.

One of my professional roles at ASYV was to help students prepare for interviews. During one session, a recent ASYV graduate explained how *tikkun olam* impacted her life. After raising money with her classmates, she helped to build a new home for a local family who had lost its house.

The students used their own skills to build the house after school, brick by brick. The project gave her the opportunity to help others when she thought she had nothing to give. Before Agahozo-Shalom, she lived in extreme poverty and struggled to think past the uncertainty of her

next meal. Today, she is preparing to study to become a nurse. *Tikkun olam*, she explained, allowed her to realize that she had worth, and it empowered her to realize her dream of future goals to continue to work to “repair the world.”

This experience allowed me to truly understand the universality of Jewish values. Despite living in rural Rwanda, more than 7,000 miles away from my own home, the students at Agahozo-Shalom are inspired by *tikkun olam* – the same concept that inspires me.

This Fall I will be beginning my graduate studies to become a Physician Assistant, with a dual Masters of Public Health focusing on global health.



Photo courtesy of Dana Urban

In my future working in international healthcare, I look forward to continuing to see how my Jewish values inform my experiences, no matter where on the globe I may be.

## Our International Inception

By Dr. Uliana Gabara

Why did I spend 26 years leading the process of internationalization at the University of Richmond and did this work have anything to do with my Judaism? I am convinced that my dedication to international education can be best understood through the prism of my life story, which, by the way, is a good starting point for understanding the work of many, probably most, people.

The little town, a *shtetl* really, where I was born had been part of Poland until the Nazis and the Soviets carved up Poland in 1939, each occupying a part of it. I was one year old when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union.

They were moving East with lightning speed. For everyone, but especially for the Jews of Western Ukraine, the question was whether to stay and live under German occupation or to flee into the Soviet Union. Unlike most Jews, my father decided that, despite the horrible history of Russian pogroms, it was most important to escape from the Nazis, whose anti-Semitic ideology and actions he took seriously.

So we fled and did not stop until we reached Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. This is where I learned to walk and talk. My first language was Russian, but my parents spoke Yiddish to each other and Polish to my sister who was already 12 years old. Life was hard in Tashkent, but we survived the war, unlike practically all of our relatives who stayed.

And in 1945 we “returned” to Poland. By then its new borders did not include our town. As refugees for a second time, we were settled in Western territories of Poland, which were part of Germany before the war.

This is when I learned Polish, but my early schooling was in a Yiddish language elementary school. Three years later my family moved to Warsaw and I completed grades 4 to 11 in a Polish language school.

But I was clearly a Polish Jew — this is how I thought of myself and how others saw me. I identified with Jewish history and culture. I took anti-Semitic jokes personally. But I knew very little about Judaism, and had never been in a synagogue for a service or celebrated a Jewish holiday. Then in 1968, the

English was the third language in which I have lived and worked. But my first job in the U.S., at the University of Virginia, was teaching Russian and Polish. A few years later I moved to Richmond and to UR, doing the same work.

When the university announced the search for a director of international education, someone whose charge it would be to work to internationalize the university, I jumped at the opportunity. I saw the need to take the university beyond its horizons, to introduce a wider frame of reference and to create opportunities for students and faculty to experience learning and living in the world outside the US.

The rest of this 26-year-long project is history: study abroad in which more than 60 percent of students participate, a faculty seminar abroad, the number of international students reaching 12 percent of the total student population, creation of the Carole Weinstein International Center, and much more.

“Rootless cosmopolitans” was what Stalin, and after him the party and governments in the Soviet Empire, called us Jews. As with other terms of opprobrium, we should own it. At least part of it; rootless we need not be. Our history as a people who have lived, suffered and contributed to many nations and cultures (even though we are not the only such people), gives us the opportunity, perhaps even the obligation, to go beyond parochial views and commitments.

My particular heritage and life story played an important role in shaping my commitment to internationalizing the University of Richmond.

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Communist party anti-Semitic campaign happened and we left Poland. A refugee yet again, I came to Virginia and have been here ever since.

“Coming to America” for us meant redefining ourselves as American Jews. I read “The Tablet” and “The Forward,” I contribute to the Federation and many other Jewish organizations, and for many years, while my husband and I were raising two daughters, we were members of a synagogue in Charlottesville and then of Or Ami, a progressive synagogue in Richmond. These are only some of the many ways I live as an American Jew.

# Israel: Come One, Come All

By Matthew Waxman '16

Entering my sophomore year, the time had come for me to choose where I wanted to study abroad. My friends were quick to begin discussing places such as Sydney, Rome, Paris and other famous cities that would be most college students' dream destinations. But ever since I had visited Israel during my sophomore year of high school, I had made a pact with myself that if I were to go abroad, I would return to Israel and study in the "homeland."

There was something about looking across the street and, for the first time in my life, being able to assume that person was Jewish. I remember thinking that was so cool.

As I matured and eventually came to Richmond, this desire only grew stronger. During my freshman and sophomore years, I became more interested in Israeli politics. I strove to find the perspectives offered on both sides of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

I began to feel a sort of Jewish responsibility unlike one I had ever felt before: an urge to become more educated with regard to the ongoing hostilities that existed between the two cultures, but also to go and immerse myself within Israeli culture.

As a Jew who was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to have such an experience, I knew couldn't turn it down. Choosing to study abroad at the University of Haifa in Israel, a place where very few Spiders had studied before me, I didn't know

what to expect. I had an idea of what Israel was like because I had been there twice before, but little in regards to what it would be like to actually live there.

As I now reflect back on my experience, I realize how Israel introduced me to many facets of Judaism that I

their own personal reason for why they felt inclined to make the journey. Whether it was a 60-year-old from South Africa, a 23-year-old from Germany or a 19-year-old from Taiwan, it was truly incredible to see the different ways in which Israel touched the lives of so many people.

Living in Israel also completely changed my preconceived notion of what being Jewish meant and looked like. I was accustomed to a particular appearance, a particular culture. With most Jews in America being from the coasts and many living in New York, I had never previously noticed that I had created a complete archetype in my mind of what it meant to be a Jew. These notions were completely altered after being in Israel.

I quickly learned that Jewish people truly come from all over the world. The stereotypical "New York Jew" that I had grown accustomed to was simply one example. Many Israeli Jews looked nothing like me and came from cultures that were totally different.

There were Iranian Jews, Ethiopian Jews, Syrian Jews and Russian Jews each with their own cultures and distinctive qualities but all tied together through their Judaism. It is this sense of community and brotherhood that Judaism offers that is unlike anything else.

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may not have considered before. I remember one of my first takeaways being how surprised I was at the number of non-Jewish students from abroad studying at the University of Haifa. At first I was confused. I knew that Judaism lay at the core of why I chose to go to Israel, so what was it that inspired them to come?

What I soon came to learn was that Israel was a place so rich with history and culture that every person had

# From the Rabbi ... One Last Time

By Rabbi Andrew Goodman



Photo courtesy of Rabbi Goodman

I come to this article with mixed emotions. It is with a bittersweet feeling that I must let you know that I will be departing the University of Richmond in June.

Over the past five years, it has been a pleasure and joy to work with our students, faculty, staff and alumni at University of Richmond in many different capacities.

As an educator, it was gratifying to see your eager brains want to learn more about Judaism. As a ritual leader, it was wonderful to see how you integrated Shabbat and the holidays into your college lives in meaningful ways.

As a pastoral presence, it was humbling to hear the struggles you've shared and the strength you've demonstrated in resolving them.

And, most importantly, as a part of this community, it was amazing to see the

way the Jewish community developed, galvanized and strengthened during this time.

I have loved all of the time and energy we've spent together; I could not imagine a more fulfilling five years.

Starting July 1, I will become the Assistant Director in the National Office of Recruitment and Admissions for Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, the great Reform seminary in the U.S. (and my alma mater). I will be based out of the New York City campus and will get to focus on the east coast in helping to find and form future leadership of Reform Judaism.

In this time of transition, the Office of the Chaplaincy has committed to searching for an interim replacement. We plan to have someone in place when the fall semester begins to ensure that there is no gap in programming.

Thank you for always sharing your brains, hearts and souls with me. The University of Richmond will always have a soft spot in my heart because of the wonderful people with whom I have been blessed to work.

# The Search for A New Director Begins

By Rebecca Fradkin '16

Rabbi Andrew Goodman will be leaving the University of Richmond after five years of being the first-ever campus rabbi. He announced his resignation via email on Jan. 26 after accepting an assistant director position in the national office of recruitment and admissions for Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion.

This news leaves a vacancy in the Office of the Chaplaincy. The office is looking to hire an interim Director of Jewish Life. The available position is part-time and will run from August 2016 to May 2017.

"This was done intentionally so we can do a more thorough and nationwide search for the director of Jewish life beginning in the fall," said Bryn Taylor, director of spiritual formation and the hiring manager for this position. She is also working with Christine Creery, a talent acquisition specialist in Human Resources, to recruit a good match for the Jewish life program.

Rabbi Goodman will not be involved in the search for the new director. "It's a bad policy to hire your successor," he said, because he would be pre-disposed to like someone who was similar to himself.

However, he wants the university to embrace the transition, even though it is bittersweet. "In some ways having a new person come in at year six of

this new Jewish life program, to bring in a new set of eyes, a new set of energy, a new set of creative ideas, I think that's a really good thing."

Part of what has made Rabbi Goodman a popular and important addition to the university community is the intersection of identities that makes him relatable to a diverse group. Rabbi Goodman is Jewish, a rabbi, was in the Navy, is married to a man and together they have adorable twin boys.

"I bring my own skill set to bear and that's my unique self," Rabbi Goodman said. "As long my successor brings their true selves to bear, then they're going to be successful."

In the meantime, student leaders in Hillel do not think the transition of their faculty adviser will negatively affect the progress in programming that they have made this past year.

"Our Hillel is so focused as a student-run organization, and we're going to be such a well-oiled machine going forward," said sophomore Jeff Kreisler, education coordinator for Hillel. "When the new rabbi comes in, it's probably going to be an easy transition for him."

"No matter who fills the role, our path that we're on right now is going to continue," Kreisler said. "We have a bright future."

## We Couldn't Do it Without You

If you have any ideas for stories, know of Jewish alumni who are not on our list, or know of something great one of our alumni is doing, please give us a call or drop us an email.

Also, we would love to see photographs from your time celebrating the holidays or marking your Judaism at the University of Richmond.

All of our Hillel and Jewish Life events are provided free of cost for students, faculty and staff members on campus. The programming is made possible through the hard work of the Office of the Chaplaincy and our wonderful on-campus partners. If you feel inclined to make a contribution to help us with our dynamic programming, please do so through the [University's secure website](#). Please select "Other" under the designation and specify "Jewish Life."

Thank you.



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