

Inside: Bienvenidos a Costa Rica, USY • A Simple Phone Call...

A'CHSHAV!

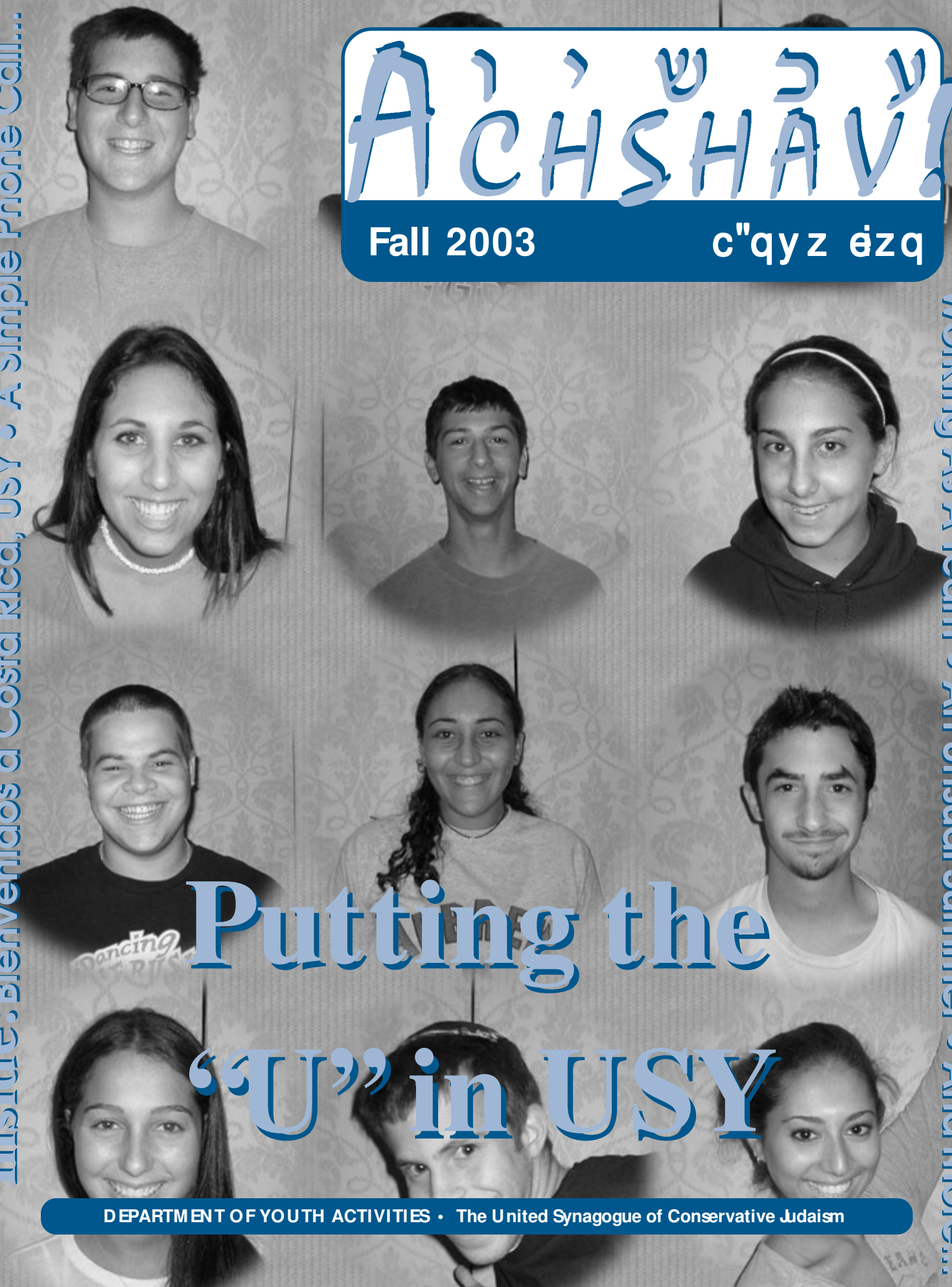
Fall 2003

c"qy z ézq

Working As A Team • An Unusual Summer • And more...

Putting the "U" in USY

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH ACTIVITIES • The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism





This summer, on August 7th, we observed Tisha B'Av, which commemorates the anniversaries of many tragic events in the history of *Am Yisrael*, the Jewish people. On that day, both the First and Second Temples were destroyed. Also on that day, according to our tradition, we were sentenced to forty years in the wilderness, the Jews were expelled from Spain, and even World War I began.

According to the *midrash*, the reason that the Temples were destroyed was the same: we fought each other - we separated ourselves and let our petty differences keep us at each others' throats, so that we couldn't work together. All the hundreds of thousands of Jews in Israel at the time couldn't fight off the Romans by splitting up and not working together; but if we had been able to live side-by-side, then maybe we would have been able to win.

At Spring Board Weekend, where all of the regional Presidents and International board members met to jumpstart the USY year, the theme of the fall issue of *Achshav!* was announced: "Putting the 'U' in USY". There was some confusion as to what exactly it meant: did the "U" stand for "you", or for "united"?

The answer is, both. Ultimately, "you" and "united" are both core parts of what USY is and what it means to all of us. Without any of us, the members, USY would not and could not exist. But at the same time, if we all work towards cross-purposes, and don't work together, then the goals of our organization will be for nothing.

There are almost fifteen thousand USYers living all around the United States and Canada today. We constitute a great force - whether it be in showing solidarity with Israel, improving our communi-

Continued on page 13

Jason Lustig of Tzafon is the International Communications Vice President of USY. E-mail him at communications@usy.org.

From the Editors



To be honest, when we chose the theme for this month's *Achshav!*, neither of us knew what we would write about for our column. We don't even remember coming up with the theme! After endless discussion, we still had nothing. Then we went off to our separate Encampments and came back knowing exactly what to say to all of you reading this. USY is a wonderful organization. It's a place where Jewish youth come to be united together, in an atmosphere where everyone is comfortable, because even if you don't know anybody, you have something in common with everybody. We come together to be united to further advance American Jewry, to support our real homeland - the State of Israel, and to fight the increasingly common trend amongst Jewish teens of hiding their Judaism from the world because it's not socially acceptable to other people.

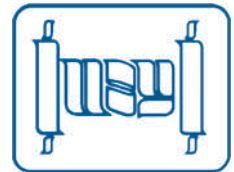
The theme also carries a different message. We need to put "U" in USY. The lay leadership and the USYers who have been elected to serve on board as your leaders can come up with some wonderful programs and events... like International Convention coming in December in Toronto. They can plan Encampments, dances, and Shabbatons. It's all for nothing, however, if you - the USYer - doesn't show up.

So next time there is an event, bring all your friends who aren't involved. Get the word out about what we stand for, what our goals are, and how much fun USY truly is for everyone involved, and how much fun it will be for those we get involved in the future.

If you have questions, comments or want to volunteer to write for **ACHSHAV!**, e-mail Jeremy Moses or Jonathan Schwartz at achshav@usy.org



Achshav!



Fall 2003 c"qy z ézq

Volume 52, Number 3

on the cover: "Putting the 'U' in USY" photo collage, by Hirsch Fishman; the pictures were taken of USYers at the Fall Board Weekend in September.

editor's note: United Synagogue Youth is really the Youth of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. All other interpretations of the name are "midrash".

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bein adam l'haveiro

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Achshav! (USPS 949-640) is published quarterly by the Department of Youth Activities, The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Subscription price is included in USY membership dues. Periodical postage paid at New York, New York. *Achshav!* is the official magazine of United Synagogue Youth.

Postmaster: Send change of address forms to: **Achshav! 155 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010.**

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Your submissions are welcome. Printed in the USA on recycled paper.

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c"qy z ézq iéy kr • 3

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the United Synagogue, founded in 1913 by Dr. Solomon Schechter. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism promotes the role of the synagogue in Jewish life in order to motivate Conservative Jews to perform mitzvot encompassing ethical behavior, spirituality, Judaic learning, and ritual observance. Combining an awareness of communal responsibility with a strong sense of commitment, the United Synagogue is a dynamic force within the Conservative Movement.

Jules Gutin



For me, one of the most moving sections of the liturgy of the *Yamim Noraim* (Days of Awe) is the well-known *musaf* prayer of *Unetaneh Tokef*. One image in particular stands out, when is God is compared to a shepherd.

"All mankind passes before You like a flock of sheep. As a shepherd seeks out his flock, making his sheep pass under his rod, so do You make all living souls pass before You. You count and number your creatures, fixing their lifetime and inscribing their destiny."

It is at once a loving and awesome image. In God's eyes each of us counts, no matter how great or humble we may be.

There are many lessons to be learned from this beautiful prayer. As we begin a new year, we would do well to draw at least one lesson from *Unetaneh Tokef*, and that is that each and every USY member counts. There is no such thing as a "paper member". Every USYer no matter how active or involved has enormous potential. The first step is to get them in the door, where they can be reached. After that the next step is to do everything we can to get them involved at chapter, regional, and International programs. There are far too many teens in the Conservative Movement who haven't yet walked into our USY door. Each of us should see it as our personal obligation to reach out to these teens and help them find their way into our own unique USY space. Each and every teen from our Movement "counts". Let this be the year when more and more of them become an integral part of our flock.

Jules A. Gutin

Jules Gutin is the International Director of USY. Send your comments directly to Jules at gutin@uscj.org.

David Goldberg



In the Talmud, Sanhedrin 4:5 states, "Whoever preserves a single life - It is as though that person has saved an entire world".

This quotation describes how every living being is important. However, it is implicitly stating that each of us has the potential to make a great difference in the world, simply by helping one person. We all have the power of the individual within us, and it is only a matter of taking action.

While I was unable to visit USY on Wheels, Mission Mitzvah this summer, I understand a great deal about the trip. The group participates in social action activities while still visiting cities and tourist sites all across the United States. These truly incredible USYers take the initiative to have a great summer sightseeing, and also use their individual power to make a great difference.

In November we read *Parshat Vayera*, which begins by telling the story of three angels disguised as men visiting Avraham. Even though he was recuperating after being circumcised, he ran to them, bowed to them, and brought them water and food. He introduced to us the lesson of *hachnasat orchim*, welcoming guests. He aided three complete strangers. In turn, these angels delivered each a message to Avraham: one about the coming birth of Isaac, another about a battle with Sodom, and another to heal Avraham. Rashi comments that each angel only performs one mission, one task. Had he not helped each angel, he would not have heard about their messages, and therefore would have disrupted one of their worlds. He exhibited his individual power to make a difference for an angel and its mission.

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David Goldberg of ECRUSY is the International President of USY. E-mail him at president@usy.org.

Bienvenidos a Costa Rica, USY

Coming together as a group in the jungle

by Omri Levin, Tzafon

It began at the airport. Two smaller circles joined into one large ice-breaker without the help of the staff, and at that moment we all knew that the seventeen other members of our new family would be unforgettable.

Off to Costa Rica we went, with our new group of remarkable people. Once we arrived in San Jose, the capital, we dined at the only kosher restaurant in the whole country and had time to settle in. That was the last moment of civilization we experienced.

The next morning we were off to the rain forest. From seeing amazing animals and butterflies, taking a night hike in the forest, to zip lining five thousand feet above the forest floor at 70 mph, we did it all. Later we took a four-hour tractor ride - at least it was supposed to be four hours - to Rara Avis, a remote mountain lodge. The guide's exact words were, "It should be about four hours, but I've done it in two, it's also been done in one and a half hours, and sometimes it can take more than four hours." So we pretty much were clueless, until the tractor broke down two hours into the ride. From there on, we ended up hiking in the pouring rain through the forest, built a human chain across a raging river, and finally arrived at our "hotel", where

* Hadashot (ז'אָדאַש'אָט) is Hebrew for "news." the only



Exploring Costa Rica: In the jungle ready to go zip-lining (above); whitewater rafting (below).



power was a couple of light bulbs in the kitchen. Not only that, but a huge hippo-sized anteater, Tommy the Tapir, lived in one of the huts there, along with a Golden Orb spider (named the most beautiful spider in National Geographic).

While in Rara Avis, we spent our first Shabbat together, took some Spanish lessons and hikes into the surrounding forest, along the way seeing bats, snakes, and monkeys... you name it! We even played in a waterfall!

This was only the beginning of an amazing three-week adventure. We snorkeled, visited an indigenous tribe that bred iguanas, and swam in pools heated by a volcano. We learned different *b'rachot* for all the things that we saw, and spent time in the hot springs singing "*Hodu L'Shem*".

After Rara Avis, we headed to Punta Mona (Monkey Point). Words cannot explain this place - it is a must see. One man began the community, and the people there live on only the food that they grow and use only natural materials for everything in

Continued on page 13

Omri Levin is the 2003-2004 Regional President of Tzafon.



Thank you for another successful summer with USY Summer Programs!

For pictures and updates of what USY groups did, visit www.usy.org/escape



Looking forward to the summer of 2004?

Find more information and preliminary applications for all USY summer programs at www.usy.org/escape



Attention Seniors: Are you deciding what to do after high school?

Then choose Nativ, USY's College Leadership Year Program in Israel!

Nativ carries with it the potential for at least a semester of college credit. It is not a "post USY" program. You can have a full college-level academic experience at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem or choose to devote your time to the study of Torah at the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Nativ offers the unique opportunity to integrate studies, Jewish life, leadership training, touring, and day-to-day Israel life. You will also be able to choose how you spend your second part of the year, living and working on a Kibbutz or leaving and volunteering within Israeli society in a development town.

For more information, visit the USY website at www.usy.org/nativ or contact Yossi Garr, USY Central Shaliach, at garr@uscj.org

How It All Began

USYers share what made them join USY

What made you want to join USY?

Eanna Garick, SWUSY:

I became involved in USY because of two of my cousins, Aryeh and Aviva Kieffer, who were very involved and were both International Presidents. So after hearing all the stories they had, I joined, and have been in USY programs since I was in third grade as a Chalutzimer. Now I am a junior in high school and on Regional General Board.

Debbie Weiser, Pinwheel:

I had been hearing amazing things about Pinwheel USY for a year from my older sister Becca, so I was really excited when I got my first opportunity to go to a regional USY convention. I was a typical shy ninth grader, but my sister and her friends really showed me the ropes and made me feel welcome. I met some of my best friends through USY, am now the co-President of my chapter, and I just finished chairing a convention. USY has definitely changed my life for the better, and I owe that to my sister.

Anna Hutt, CRUSY:

Two of my friends convinced me to come to the CRUSY Regional Convention of my freshman year. I was absolutely blown away by the friendliness of the



complete strangers who become close friends, the respect and interest the USYers held for Judaism, and the room-shaking *ruach* that characterized our entire Shabbat. I knew from then on that a group of teenagers who loved singing, praying, laughing, and learning together was a group I wanted to be a part of.

Nehama Rogozen, CRUSY:

I joined USY because I had heard a lot about it from my counselors at Ramah Palmer, and because my friends from Schechter day school were joining. I also wanted to go on USY on Wheels so bad, which I got to do this summer (Bus B '03!).

Ariella Rosen, Hanefesh:

The USYers were the really cool older kids who had their own section in the back of the shul every Shabbat morning. I wanted to be like them so badly!

Ory Rinat, METNY:

One of my friends forced me to go to my first regional encampment. Before that I had gone to a few chapter meetings, but was never very involved. After that encampment, I absolutely fell in love with USY. I have gone to almost every single regional and divisional event since.

Elena Mayer, Pinwheel:

I joined USY because it allows me to feel like an important part of a Jewish community. I think it's easy to get lost in the hustle and bustle of an entire congregation, even a small one. Through USY, I don't have to be anything but myself to be an integral member of that strong community feeling I value so much in Judaism.

Adam Zarek, ECRUSY:

I was persuaded to join USY by my friends. After going to one program I was hooked on the atmosphere, people, *ruach*, and overall excitement of everything.

Have your own unique reason why you joined USY? You can share your story and see what others have to say as well. Just go to the Achshav! Online Supplement at www.usy.org/achshavonline.

A Simple Phone Call...

...and some encouragement can go a long way

by Josh Altman, CHUSY

The phone rang. I picked up. "Hello, this is _____ from Moriah USY. We're going to Whirleyball this week and I was wondering if you wanted to come," the voice said.

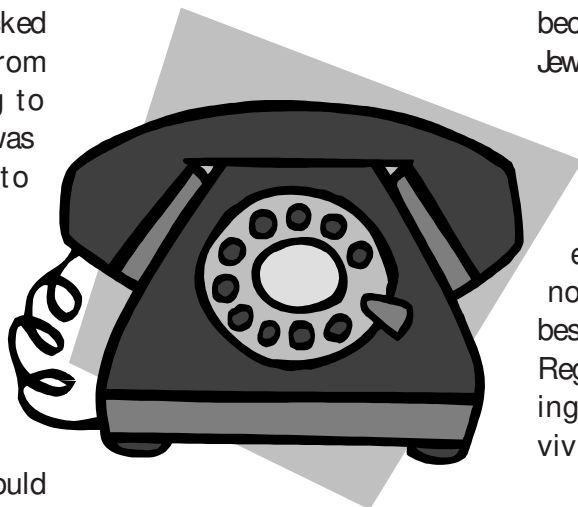
I replied, "No thank you, I won't have friends there."

The voice would not give up. He relentlessly urged me to come by telling me that he would be there and that I would have a good time.

On Sunday morning, I decided to go. I sat on a bus with 20 strangers; I played Whirleyball (a sport that combines, basketball, lacrosse, and bumper cars), ate dinner, and socialized. I didn't meet any best friends, but I did enjoy the afternoon.

Later that week, I called B'nai Tikvah, my *shul*, which had long been without a youth program. I was given the number of the new youth director that was hired, whom I had met a few weeks before. I decided to plan an event where B'nai Tikvah USY would go to Whirleyball. I urged my friends to go and over 30 of them showed up. We had an amazing time. I couldn't stop thinking about how amazing USY was. (That chapter won the Most Improved Chapter of CHUSY that year AND now has over 70 members.)

Later that year I went to



my first regional convention, Spring *Kinnus*. I had a good time, but I did not know most of the people and they did not talk to me. I went home not sure how I felt about USY, but with some encouragement I signed up for Camp CHUSY at the end of the summer.

One person at Camp CHUSY started talking to me, asking me about myself, and just making small talk. She introduced me to her friends, and them to theirs. After Camp CHUSY, I had 30 amazing USY friends. I was in USY and would never leave.

At our LTI in October, I decided I was going to begin observing Judaism more strictly. Over the course of the year, I had developed from a lost freshman to a confident Jew. In USY, I learned that Judaism is cool, and now all I wanted to be was a Jew. It didn't matter what year I was in school, where I lived, or even what gender I was,

because now I knew that I was a Jew.

That year flew by, and before I knew it I was at Spring *Kinnus* again. The same *Kinnus* that I had mildly enjoyed my freshman year was now a time to be with 50 of my best friends, and a time to run for Regional Board. *Kinnus* was amazing. I remember one experience vividly.

As Shabbat drew to an end, Havdalah began with the customary senior circle and then all of the others around the outside. After the last bang of "Ya-da-da-dai", we all began hugging and wishing out friends a *Shavua Tov*. As I made my way through all of the crying seniors, I found the boy from Moriah who had first invited me to come to USY. I looked him in the eye and as a tear dripped I told him, "You are the reason I am here. You are the reason I love USY and being Jewish, and because I may never see you again, I wanted to thank you - so thank you."

He was speechless.

Who said a phone call doesn't make a difference?

Josh Altman is the 2003-2004 Regional President of CHUSY, and is a member of the Membership/Kadima IGB Committee.

Does the “U” Belong in USY?

The real meaning behind the word “United”

by Matt Brown, Far West

USY: three simple letters. Only two, however, have simple meanings. “S” stands for synagogue, the place we meet to pray, and “Y” stands for youth. Simple enough. But that “U”, that crafty “U”. It stands for united... but what exactly does “united” mean? Do we all have the same goals? Are we unified geographically? Rivers, mountains, borders, and the expense of travel separate us. So then, does the “U” really belong in USY? Do we merely have to change the word it stands for? Or should we just call ourselves SYers from now on? That actually sounds like a pre-existing word; maybe people wouldn’t look at us so strangely if we announced ourselves as SYers.

I purposely left out one thing from the last paragraph. I’m sure you can all agree with me when I state that we are, in fact, united. We are all Conservative Jews living in North America.

Now, I realize Conservative Judaism in Los Angeles may be slightly different from Conservative Judaism in Montreal, Miami, or Manlius- Conservative Judaism in one neighborhood can even be different from Conservative Judaism in the next - but the basic principles are all the same. But so what if we aren’t united in little nuances? What matters is that a Conservative Jew in West Hartford has the same fundamental beliefs as a Conservative Jew in Ohio, Portland, or anywhere else. I for one think that plurality is one of the greatest components of the Conservative Movement.

Now that I have established that the word “united” can stay, it’s time to get a little figurative. How do we get “U” into USY? Now it becomes a good old membership question. To get professional advice, consult your chapter and regional Mem/Kad Vice Presidents. But the gist of it is:

throw yourself into the USY world. Go to any and every event you can. Make yourself known; be a little crazier than you might be at school (it’s actually a lot more fun when you are). Build a strong base of friends that will last you at least through college, but most likely way beyond. Always smile, and make it a goal to meet as many new people as possible at events. You won’t regret it.

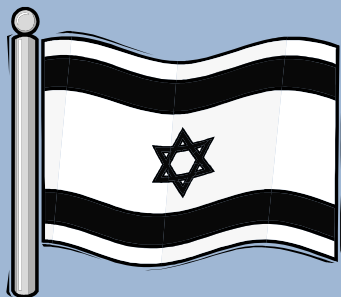
USY allows you to have friends all across North America and remain close to them. It is because we are all united that we can stay close. Without the “U”, USY is empty and hollow. Both because no one would be in the organization, and because being united is what makes USY so special.

Matt Brown is the 2003-2004 Regional Executive/Programming Vice President of Far West.

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*m'xacc

USY High 2004: Make Israel Your Classroom!



Summer isn’t your only chance to experience Israel with USY. Come spend two exciting months getting to know Israel in an exciting and unique way. Israel’s history will come alive as you learn both in the classroom and by using the land of Israel as your text book!

This program is open to high school juniors and seniors.

Dates: February 1st - March 26th, 2004

For more information, visit the USY website at www.usy.org/high, or e-mail garr@uscj.org.

The Unity of USY

It's what makes us alike more than anything

by Jenna Citron, Hanegev

In 2001, the word "united" was everywhere. You couldn't eat, sleep, or breathe without hearing it or saying it. Regardless of the place or situation, Americans were set on one thing - unifying as one, as Americans. Mottos such as "United We Stand" and "United We Stand, Divided We Fall" were put on flags, flyers, posters, and billboards, on television, in magazines and in newspapers. Unity was everywhere.

2001 also takes me back to my freshman year, and more importantly my first year of USY. And what a great year it was. From starting a new chapter in the wonderful town of Boynton Beach, Florida, to attending our first sub-regional and regional events as a

chapter, 2001 was the year. It was a year of unity - "united", the first word of USY and quite possibly the most important.

But while unity is important, without the "you" in USY, USY would just be another organization. USY does many things for all of us. It gives us a chance to make new friends, both at home and afar. It teaches you, it helps you to experience, but most importantly it helps you to unify. USY has helped me come together with my friends, new and old, as one, as USYers, and as Jews.

It is the unity in USY that is what makes us alike more than anything else. And it is the unity that brings teenagers back for more and more every year. Just like my

first year of USY, for decades USY has been unifying Jewish teens at chapter meetings or programs, regional events big and small, or by bringing thousands of us together at International events. It has done so because we have something in common that allows us to come together. And this is where you must tie together the "U", the "S", and the "Y". United Synagogue Youth - our name says it for itself. We are all Jewish teenagers from all over coming together - to pray, to sing, to learn, to dance, to talk, or to just have a good time with our friends. That we can successfully unify the youth of synagogues across North America on so many different levels is what makes USY so special.

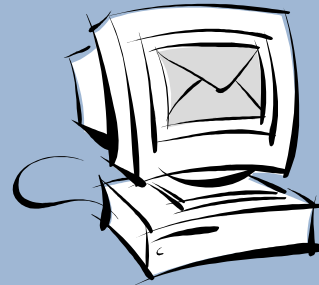


Write for Achshav!

Achshav! is looking for article writers for the Winter 2003 issue. The theme will be:
"Back To Our Roots"

Send your articles to achshav@usy.org
no later than **November 14, 2003**

www.usy.org/achshav



Achshav Online Supplement!

Want to: Read more articles? Get more information on the programs in this issue? And see other special content? Share your thoughts on the "What You Say" question?

Then go to the **Achshav Online Supplement!**

www.usy.org/achshavonline/

Working As a Team

That is what the "United" is all about

by Leora Jackson, ECRUSY

This past summer, our Israel Pilgrimage group shared an incredible experience. During a week of "short" hikes in the north of Israel, our group leader decided it was time for a change.

The bus dropped us off in the middle of a hot, dry field. We walked along a rocky path framed on both sides by a bristly, straw-like grass. We followed this path for a quarter of an hour, and eventually arrived at a huge cavern.

The light dimmed as we descended into the dampness. The rocks were a bit slippery and coated with slime, as we had to be careful not to trip. After a while we reached the bottom of the cavern, and a small hole in the ground of the cave. By this point, five or six of the group, including myself, had fallen behind the others. We decided to join up and rely on one another in order to maneuver through the underground tunnels. We shared three flashlights, and directed each other in the placement of hands and feet as, one by one, we climbed down into the hole.

As the first person leaned in towards the depths and reached for the first handhold, I got a little nervous. Climbing and hiking are not my specialty, and I held my



Coming together as a group: After the hike through the caves and the darkness (above).

breath as my friend grasped the rock. She slid down the slope easily, and I relaxed.

As we proceeded to climb through the tunnels we worked as a team. Every underground room we passed through was a new accomplishment, a victory we won on our own. Once, a flashlight dropped, and we heard the echoes as it clattered through the cracks below us, but we just continued through the cave, one step at a time.

In time, we arrived at a bay in the rock where the rest of our group had assembled, and we joined them there. Our group leader then asked everyone to switch off their flashlights and sit, for one minute, in silence. In that darkness, it was impossible to see your hand wave in front of your face.

"This is how someone who is deaf or someone who is blind feels all the time," he said. I didn't know if my eyes were open or closed. Then, flashlights were relit and we climbed back to the entrance of the cavern and out to the field.

Leaving the cave was much easier and faster than entering, even though it was the same route. As I entered the bright summer day, my

eyestearing at the brilliant light, I understood. Our group had just united. We became a team, working together, despite our individual disabilities, to become something stronger. By cooperating, we had done something each of us would have been unable to do as an individual, and by doing so, we changed ourselves as individuals and as a group.

For me, this is what USY is all about. It is about uniting together and making yourself an integral part of the team. For me, that is putting the "U" in USY.

Leora Jackson is the 2003-2004 Regional President of ECRUSY, and is a member of the Membership/Kadima IGB Committee.

My Challenge To You

Make the most out of your time in USY

by Becky Rabinovitch, Pinwheel

You get out of it what you put in. These are the words I hear every summer at camp. But there are no better words than those to describe what USY can be. Look around at your next convention or chapter program. You'll see the people that are always there, the people that occasionally turn up, and those you've never seen before. Each of these people is experiencing something different, simply because of what they've put into being there. It may take someone else to get you to try USY for the first time, but once you're there, live it and love it. If you take every opportunity you can to go to a chapter program, or a convention, you'll find a kind of joy that can be found nowhere else. Go to a chapter meeting and make your voice heard. Not only will the board love your input, but they'll also love that

It may take someone else to get you to try USY for the first time, but once you're there, live it and love it.

you're that you're getting involved.

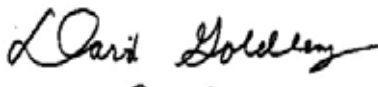
Let's face it, USY can cost a lot, both of money and time, but in the end, isn't it worth every penny and every minute spent? The friends you make

are going to last you a lifetime. The skills you learn will help to ease you through life. But most importantly are the experiences. Nowhere else will you get the chance to sing and dance with 1,200 other Jewish teenagers, as you would at International Convention. Only in USY will you have the opportunities to travel around North America and the world with your closest friends. There is simply nothing else like it.

So I challenge each of you to put your everything into your USY years, because the more you give to it, the more you'll take home.

David Goldberg, from Page 4:

Putting the "U" into "USY" is all about the power of the individual. Each one of us possesses the potential to make a difference, and there is no mission that is too small. But, we can only do so by being involved. Beyond attending programs and conventions, we must also absorb all that this wonderful Jewish youth organization has to offer, and then share it with our family and friends. If each of us can pass on our love for Conservative Judaism, if each of us utilizes the amazing powers that we teenagers retain, then each one of us is the "U" that forms "USY".



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- David Goldberg,
USY President

Jason Lustig from Page 2:

ties through social action, or supporting our congregations.

We can do great things, so all the more we should be sobered by the lesson of Tisha B'Av - that we can only accomplish our goals with unity, by working with each other. We don't have to agree on everything, but while we are strong in numbers, being strong and unified in *ruach*, in spirit, is just as important.



- Jason Lustig,
USY Communications VP

Costa Rica, from Page 5:

life. Even their buildings were built from fallen trees. We davened Shacharit on our own one morning and I chose to head to the beach. While we were there, we also kayaked into the sunset riding the waves of the ocean; played dominoes with a 70-year old man named Padi; spent our second Shabbat together; and learned so much about how easy it is to change the world if

you try. We also learned about our responsibilities as Jews to the earth and environment.

Later in the trip we also helped plant food for a small town near the camp and for the school there, so that they could eat from those trees and have a beautiful garden. After our stay in Punta Mona we spent two days rafting in Class-4 rapids, staying overnight along the river in an amazing campsite.

And then finally, after over two weeks, we arrived back in civilization. Our last Shabbat was spent in San Jose, where we attended services and had meals at the local synagogue. There is a Jewish



An amazing experience: Davening Shacharit on the beach in Costa Rica (above).

community with over 400 family members right in San Jose, and the synagogue is housed in an area that has changed over the years. They recently sold the building and are currently building a new one about 3 miles away. The people that we met were intrigued by our group and USY.

The time we spent on the trip getting to know each other only brought us further together as a group. One night we were given the

chance to go dancing in the city or shopping. Everyone began as two groups, but ended as one by the end of the night. We had become an inseparable family. This trip has impacted all of our lives in so many ways. Every person came out not only completing all of our goals but also as a better, more confident person.

For more information from Outdoor Adventure: Costa Rica 2003, including more pictures and daily updates from the road, visit the USY website, www.usy.org.

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An Unusual Summer

My Mission Mitzvah experience

by Joshua Avarit, Hagesher

I don't know where to begin. This summer was a once in a lifetime experience and I'm so proud to say that I got a chance to spend it with 34 other wonderful people on USY on Wheels, Mission Mitzvah. For those of you that do not know what Mission Mitzvah is, it's regular Wheels, but instead of sightseeing all the time, we did community service and mitzvah projects as well, and had a chance to be in cities for twice as long as the regular Wheels buses did.

When I boarded the plane to Chicago, I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know a single soul, and when I got to Chicago I was greeted by all of these strangers who I thought at first were a bit strange. Well, first impressions aren't accurate, because as I got to know these people day in and day out I realized they were awesome.

The first day we did our first mitzvah project. This was one of my favorites because of what it meant not just to me, but to the people whose lives we were about to change. We went to a nursing home and were separated into three different groups. Each group interviewed a resident at the nursing home and asked them if there was any certain thing that they wanted to accomplish that they never had a chance to. The person whom my group interviewed



A summer of memories: Singing with residents at the nursing home in Chicago (above); volunteering at the San Francisco AIDS Walk (below).



had a brain tumor, so he wasn't really able to talk, but he was trying to hard to communicate with us. Then we went to the dining area where the residents were eating lunch, and we got a chance to talk with them some more. The one thing I remember most about that day was in the dining area when one of the other Wheelniks took out his guitar and played the Beatles' song "Hey Jude" while we all gathered in a circle and put our arms around each other and sang. It was one of my favorite moments on Wheels - and the summer was just beginning!

Throughout the summer we also did many more mitzvah projects. In Indianapolis, we heard a lecture about HIV at the Damian Center and then visited a children's

Continued on next page

* Bein Adam l'Haveiro (exagl mc` da) is Hebrew for "for one another"

Continued from previous page:

park ranger. We did Habitat for Humanity in Las Vegas, cleaned up the beach in San Diego, and volunteered at the AIDS Walk in San Francisco. We cleaned houses at the Ronald McDonald House in Sacramento, did an environmental project in Oregon, and did more painting of houses in Minnesota.

You all are probably saying, I would never spend my summer doing this, but we also did plenty of fun things in between. In Chicago we played whirleyball, a combination of bumper cars, basketball, and lacrosse. We checked out the Indy 500 in Indianapolis, the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, toured Graceland in Memphis, and in Oklahoma City we went to the bombing memorial. In Amarillo, Texas we went to a Boys' Ranch and an amusement park, and went ice-skating in Phoenix. In Las Vegas we walked around the strip. In San Francisco we went to Alcatraz and went to see a



Mission Mitzvah Wheelniks working on a re-vegetation project at the Grand Canyon.

Giants' baseball game. Somewhere in Idaho we went to Yellowstone Bears world. And in Cody, Wyoming, we went to a rodeo!

At the end of the summer, we revisited the same nursing home we went to on the first day of the trip and completed some of the dreams with residents that they had never done. My group did a Spanish dance that a lady wanted to do. Another group was supposed to bake a cake with

another resident, but she wasn't feeling up to it, so they left the supplies with the home so they could do it with her when she felt up to it.

Just seeing the smiles on their faces made our summer.

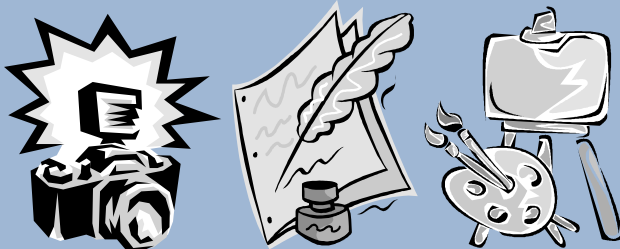
For more information from USY on Wheels, Mission Mitzvah 2003, including more pictures and daily updates from the road, visit the USY website, www.usy.org.

Think about a risk you took...

A challenge you rose to...

Or any one of a hundred other things..

Have an entire summer's worth of memories? Share them with USY!



Photographers, Artists, and Writers in USY are invited to contribute their work to Shalhevet, USY's Creative Arts Magazine.

Submissions can be about anything and everything related to USY and Judaism.

Shalhevet is published annually in December at International Convention.

All material must be submitted by October 1st, 2003

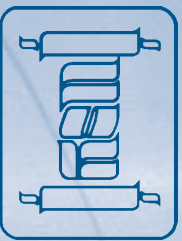
Contact **Navah Kogen, Shalhevet Editor**, at shalhevet@usy.org, www.usy.org/shalhevet

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