The Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion's Year-in-Israel Program at 50: Toward a Retrospective Historical Analysis

By Yair Walton

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination.
Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion 2021
Referee, Dr. Gary P. Zola

Abstract

The creation of the HUC-JIR Year-in-Israel Program in 1970 marked a significant change for the College curriculum, reflecting a shift in Reform Judaism's opinions about the Jewish state, Hebrew, and Jewish peoplehood. This program marked the culmination of many steps and events, initiated arguably by the 1967 Six-Day War, which subsequently impacted the overall connection American Jews felt to the State of Israel. As then-president of the College, Nelson Glueck's own connection to Israel was a key factor, as were outside pressures to reform how rabbis were educated in the United States. This was expressed initially in the building of the Jerusalem campus.

HUC-JIR had long been seeking a solution to what they saw as a lower-than-desired level of Hebrew mastery. The College first attempted a dual degree program and then a summer residential program in Towanda, Pennsylvania, in an attempt to correct this issue. It finally settled on the Year-in-Israel program as the final answer.

The first academic year of the program, 1970–1971, was not without its challenges. It necessitated a large adjustment from the Jerusalem campus faculty, who were not ready for a much larger and younger group of students than they had worked with before. In addition, communication breakdowns between the various campuses, as well as between students and faculty, led to tensions. Despite this, the College and most of the students deemed the program a success. The students' encounter with Israel helped Reform Judaism reclaim traditional elements of practice, liturgy, and observance that have shaped Reform Judaism today.

Acknowledgments

This project arose out of my own deep connection with Israel and Israel education that began for me more than twenty years ago on a ten-day Birthright trip. That experience began a journey that has led me all over the world and many times to Israel to pursue this work. I became interested in the HUC-JIR Year-in-Israel program through my own experience in 2016 as a first-year student. I wanted to know how it came into being and how it had shaped the thousands of American rabbis, educators, and cantors that have now participated in it.

I would like to thank my wife, Julia Stern, for her hours of help with spelling, grammar, and editing, and for being a source of moral support throughout my time at HUC-JIR.

Additionally, I'd like to express my thanks to Dr. Dana Herman for hours of calls, texts, and emails guiding me through this long project. And, of course, to Dr. Zola for his guidance and support throughout my time at HUC-JIR and this project.

The staff at the American Jewish Archives went above and beyond to help me complete this project. The task of finding and viewing materials was made more complex by the Covid-19 pandemic, which was the backdrop of 90 percent of this thesis.

This project would not have been possible if the members of the 1970–1971 Year-in-Israel class had not participated through their responses to questionnaires and hours of interviews and emails. Their experience and guidance were welcome as I am about to begin my own path as a rabbi.

To all those named and unnamed who have helped me reach this point in my life, I am beyond grateful for your assistance.

Table of Contents

Introduction

During the presidency of Nelson Glueck (1947–1971), Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) went through physical as well as ideological expansion. Glueck was strongly connected—personally and professionally—to the Holy Land and the leaders of the new State of Israel through his many years of work as a world-renowned archeologist and scholar. This connection led him to spearhead the creation of an HUC-JIR campus in Jerusalem—first as a center for archeological studies and later as a required first-year of study for all rabbinical students at the College.

The HUC-JIR Year-in-Israel program, which replaced the first year of what had been the school's five-year graduate-level curriculum, constituted the first time that a major American rabbinical seminary required an entire year of study in the State of Israel. The academic year 2020–2021 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Year-in-Israel program and thus provides an apt opportunity to capture and preserve the details of that first year. The students who attended the program that year are now nearly all retired or close to retirement. Collecting and analyzing their memories of that inaugural program and how that experience shaped them as rabbis is of utmost importance, as the time to collect these firsthand accounts is running out. To this date, no one has done an in-depth discovery and analysis of this topic from either the institutional perspective or the perspective of the students who participated in this change. To undertake this project, questionnaires were sent to as many rabbis from that year as could be identified. Many of them agreed to be interviewed. This work also required extensive research at the American Jewish Archives where the records of the College-Institute are preserved, including the papers of the president's office, the archives of the various campuses and those of the faculty who were involved in the Year-in-Israel program.

This thesis builds upon previously published works on the history of the College. Michael A. Meyer's history of HUC-JIR was indispensable, as was the larger 1976 centennial volume edited by Samuel E. Karff.[1] This work was also heavily informed by C. Ariel Stone's 1990 rabbinic thesis titled, "Ayn Zo Aggadah: A History of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem 1954–1990,"[2] as well as a transcript of an interview that Stanley Chyet conducted with the then-dean of the Jerusalem campus, Ezra Spicehandler, in 1970.[3]

Additionally, this thesis is part of a continuum of studies that have focused on this pivotal period in American and Israeli history as well as broader topics, such as rabbinical education and, particularly, American Jewry's relationship to Israel in the 1960s and 1970s. A 2015 book by Emily Katz, *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture 1948–1967*,[4] provides important background on how the American Jewish community perceived Israel from early statehood until the massive shifts caused by the Six-Day War. Among the more useful articles

---

[1] Michael A. Meyer, *Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion: A Centennial History 1875–1975* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992); Samuel Karff, ed., *Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion: At One Hundred Years* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976).

[2] C. Ariel Stone, "Ayn Zo Aggadah a History of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem 1954–1990," rabbinic thesis, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, 1990.

[3] Transcript of Stanley Chyet interview with Ezra Spicehandler, 1971, SC-11842, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[4] Emily Katz, *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture 1948–1967* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).

was Jack Wertheimer's "American Jews and Israel: A 60-Year Retrospective."[5] Wertheimer provides a solid background of the history and development of American Jews' interaction with Israel and deals a good amount with how American Jews were educated about Israel evolved during this period. But of crucial importance to this work were the two studies commissioned by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and published in 1972 that highlighted issues and growing dissatisfaction with American Reform Rabbinical education as the needs of American Jewry shifted. The first study was by Theodore Lenn, titled *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*[6] and the second was *Reform Is a Verb* by Leonard Fein.[7] These reports found that many rabbis were increasingly dissatisfied with their profession and did not feel that the education they received prepared them for the real work of being a rabbi. These works provide evidence of some of the external factors—particularly pressure from the CCAR and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC, now the Union for Reform Judaism, or URJ)—that caused HUC-JIR to overhaul its curriculum in the years immediately preceding and during the first year of the new program in Israel.

---

[5] Jack Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel: A 60-Year Retrospective," *The American Jewish Yearbook* 108 (2008): 3–79.

[6] Theodore Lenn, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1972).

[7] Leonard Fein, *Reform is a Verb* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1972).

Summary of Thesis

Throughout the history of the College, the role and centrality of Hebrew has been in tension. Many applicants came to the College with lower levels of Hebrew, which impeded their overall language acquisition and, as a result, limited their exposure to canonical texts in their original language. The College partnered with various undergraduate institutions to allow students to attend HUC-JIR, where they could improve Hebrew and Jewish knowledge and complete their secular bachelor's degree concurrently. This program evolved into a summer intensive residential Hebrew learning program outside Towanda, Pennsylvania, and would serve as the foundation for the Year-in-Israel program.

Many people were involved in creating this program, but the central figure was the president of the College, Nelson Glueck. Glueck began his professional life as a noted archeologist. As president of HUC-JIR, he oversaw the expansion of HUC-JIR's program and majors, as well as the establishment of a new HUC-JIR campus in Los Angeles. Glueck wanted HUC-JIR students to study in Israel in some capacity from the onset of his presidency. Through the connections that Glueck and other members and supporters of HUC-JIR had, the College not only obtained a prime location for its new Jerusalem campus, but eventually HUC-JIR students studying in Israel received Israeli government scholarships. These scholarships, combined with fundraising, made it more economically tenable for students to spend a year in Israel.

The creation of the Jerusalem campus in the early 1960s paralleled the student body's intensifying interest in Hebrew study and in the Jewish state. A growing number of HUC-JIR students were adding a year to rabbinical school and studying in Jerusalem at the HUC-JIR campus or Hebrew University. The students who came back from Israel had a stronger foundation and were more successful in their text courses.

Several factors helped shape the Year-in-Israel program. First, the 1967 Six-Day War was a major turning point that shifted American Jewry's relationship with Israel and led to an enthusiasm that had not existed previously. Post-1967, more and more American Jewish organizations began to engage programmatically and institutionally with Israel. This helped Glueck and the College harness the social capital it needed to create the Year-in-Israel program. Second, the program's formation coincided with a time when the College was facing pressure to adapt to the changing needs of the American Jewish community and the ways in which it trained its rabbis. Third, the program came into being during a time of massive social and political changes in the United States. Many of the students who attended the program had been involved in protesting the Vietnam War and antiracist actions on their campuses. These forces, combined with the cultural shifts among the students vis-à-vis their willingness to question authority, led to tensions between students and staff in Jerusalem.

The primary goals of the Year-in-Israel program were to improve students' Hebrew and expose students to the reality of a Jewish state. In achieving these goals, the program was largely successful, even given the understandable challenges of a new, untested program in a foreign country. Many participants reported that the experience affected them deeply—both as individuals and as rabbis. This experience helped to shift the American Reform Jewish community to reclaim traditional Jewish practices and increase the amount of Hebrew in religious services and liturgy and form a more concrete Zionist stance.

Overview of Chapters

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the three main factors that led to the Year-in-Israel program. The first was the ideology, personality, influence, and connections of the president of

HUC-JIR, Nelson Glueck. Glueck was influential in both the American and Israeli Jewish communities and used this influence to benefit the College in the United States and to establish a Jerusalem campus for the school. The second factor was the American Jewish community's massive shift toward engagement with Israel following the Six-Day War. This war solidified the Zionist cause in America and led to an increase in the number of American Jewish students who wanted to study in Israel. The third factor was American rabbis' growing dissatisfaction with their rabbinical education. This thesis will review two major studies by the CCAR and UAHC, which assessed this dissatisfaction among American Reform rabbis, and the subsequent pressure placed on HUC-JIR to adjust the education it provided. These three factors influenced the creation and design of the Year-in-Israel program, which was initially based on the Hebrew-Learning program in Towanda, Pennsylvania.

The second chapter analyzes the Year-in-Israel program from the institution's perspective. The goals of the program were to provide students with a strong background in Hebrew and expose them to the modern Jewish state. The program began at a time when American Jewish institutions were increasingly concerned with providing Jewish collegians with opportunities to participate in programs at Israeli universities. When examining this experience from the College's perspective, a few themes begin to emerge. First, the Jerusalem campus was not ready for a student body nearly three times as large as previous classes. Second, there was a clear breakdown in communication between the Jerusalem and stateside campuses, particularly regarding the goals of the program. Third, the unprecedented nature of this program and the abovementioned factors led to tensions between students and faculty. This chapter also focuses on the respected HUC-JIR faculty member, Ezra Spicehandler, the program's administrator, who struggled with his role and the cultural changes brought on by students of the 1970s. Even with

these challenges, the College felt that the program was able to achieve its goals and therefore considered it a massive success.

The third and final chapter reconstructs the lived experience of that inaugural year from the students' perspective by using responses from interviews and questionnaires. Students came to the program with a wide spectrum of backgrounds and Hebrew mastery. Before attending HUC-JIR, many were active in political protests inspired by the Vietnam War, protesting racial injustice the draft, and the Kent State shooting. This political activism would play a role in their experience of the Year-in-Israel program. Interviews with participants revealed several positives and negatives of that first year. First, students reported a lack of clarity or consistency in communication from faculty, leading to tensions between students and faculty. Second, for many students, this year offered their first encounter with Israeli culture, which sometimes led to cultural clashes. Despite these negative experiences, the program exposed students to more diverse and traditional Jewish practices, leading some to adopt changes in their own observance. The school also provided structured trips throughout Israel to expose students to the country and its history, trips that would serve as a highlight for many students. Overall, students reported an improvement in their Hebrew as well as a strong connection to Israel, Zionism, and Jewish peoplehood, which would continue to affect their personal and professional lives. This would, in turn, change the nature of American Reform Judaism.

As we reach the fiftieth year of this program, it is a good time to reflect on the impact it has had on the thousands of American Reform rabbis who have now participated. This thesis hopes to give voice to the underlying causes that led to the creation of the Year-in-Israel program and share the stories of those who pioneered this experience that led to a change in the American Jewish community.

Chapter 1: HUC-JIR and Israel, The Early Years, 1948–1969

The creation of the Year-in-Israel program during the 1970–1971 academic year not only marked a long process of change in policy and outlook of American Jewry but also set a new precedent for how rabbinical education would be conducted worldwide. While many factors led to the creation of this program, it is clear from archival and historical evidence that there were key factors that made this program a reality.

The most important of these was the personality and ideology of Nelson Glueck. Glueck was the president of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) from 1948 until his death in 1971. It was clear from the beginning of his presidency that a real connection to Jerusalem and Israel would play heavily into how he guided the College. The first step of this connection was the building of the Jerusalem campus, which would open the door for HUC-JIR students to study in Israel as part of their rabbinical education. Glueck placed primacy on Jewish scholarship as the key for building an active and relevant American Reform Jewish community, and he saw the Jerusalem campus as a future center to help build a strong liberal Judaism in Israel. At the same time, Glueck's idea of what a rabbi was and the skills they needed to succeed would continuously be challenged by the students and the alumni of the College. This back-and-forth process between the needs of the shifting rabbinate and the ideology of the College would continue throughout Glueck's tenure and beyond.

Another factor that cannot be overlooked is the tremendous shift in ideology and policy that the 1967 Six-Day War had on how American Jews related to the Jewish state. Even before 1967 the American rabbinate and the American Jewish community were undergoing a shift. Reform rabbis were increasingly dissatisfied with their careers and felt that what they had

learned at HUC-JIR was out of touch with the needs of American Jewry.[8] This feeling was exacerbated by the political instability of the 1950s and 1960s and the backdrop of the Vietnam war. After 1967, there was an electric enthusiasm for the Jewish state and learning Hebrew as a spoken language. American Jews began to increasingly visit and build a lasting connection with Israel. This prompted the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) to begin a process of internal review and self-reflection, which led the organization to push for changes in how HUC-JIR trained rabbis for work in the field—specifically, more of a focus on spoken Hebrew, Israel, and Jewish peoplehood.

Nelson Glueck

Nelson Glueck (1900–1971) was born in Cincinnati and ordained a rabbi in 1923 at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. He received his doctorate in Germany from the University of Jena in Germany . His academic background made him predisposed to the more scholarly and historical study of Judaism; he was more widely known and respected for his important biblical archaeological work in Israel than for being a rabbi.[9] During World War II, Glueck worked with the Allies to leverage his knowledge of the Levant, gained through his extensive archeological work, to create battle plans. Post-1948, Glueck worked with the Israeli government to develop

[8] President's Message to the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the CCAR June 16-18 Houston Texas, *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* (1969): 6–8.

[9] "About." The Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, http://ngsba.org/about/ (accessed November 28, 2019).

irrigation systems based on his findings of large population centers in the Negev.[10] At one point he was interested in becoming the president of Hebrew University in Jerusalem.[11] Only after heavy recruiting did he reluctantly accept the presidency of HUC.[12]

Glueck believed strongly in a Jewish state that would have close ties with the Diaspora. His own life mirrored this ideal. Though he maintained a house in Cincinnati during his presidency, it was clear that he was truly at home and most passionate in Israel.[13] Throughout his professional life, Glueck was deeply shaped by his encounter with the Holy Land.

> Throughout the tense 1930s and 1940s Glueck advanced the idea that the British mandate or an international administration should govern Palestine for as long as possible to avoid the formation of an Arab state, a Jewish state, or both. In 1947, he was named president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in part because he still opposed political Zionism. However, a few months after Israel's founding, Glueck adopted a fervently mystical political Zionism characterized by a belief in the special relationship between the Jewish people and the land, and rejected his previous view that other groups also had a special relationship with the same land. As HUC

[10] "Nelson Glueck," Wikiwand, accessed October 21, 2020, https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Nelson_Glueck.

[11] Meyer, *Centennial History*, 177.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 176–177.

president, he sought to spread this version of Zionism among American Reform Jews.[14]

After the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, Glueck seemed focused not only on Israel's history, but on what the reality of a Jewish state could mean for the Jewish people. This focus deeply influenced his tenure as president.

Upon his acceptance of the presidency, Glueck stated, "It is my avowed purpose to see to it that our program is carried out not only in Cincinnati and New York but eventually *im yirzeh ha Shem* (God willing) in Jerusalem."[15] This statement marked the ideological birth of the Year-in-Israel program and set the trajectory for much of Glueck's tenure at the College. His goal was achieved in two ways: the building of the Jerusalem campus and the creation of the Year-in-Israel program. Glueck formed a friendship with Judah Magnes, who was key in developing The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, as well as leaders at the American School of Oriental Research (ASOR) and the Rockefeller Museum, both respected centers of biblical archaeological research.[16] He drew upon his vast experience and this network of connections as a biblical archeologist to form the framework of the Jerusalem campus. The original idea was to have the campus serve in a similar capacity to the ASOR in Jerusalem, where Glueck had conducted

[14] Brooke Sherrard, "American Biblical Archaeologists and Zionism: The Politics of Historical Ethnography," doctoral dissertation, The Florida State University, 2011, pp. 110–111, https://fsu.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fsu:183526/datastream/PDF/view.

[15] *American Jewish Archives*, 1974 Vol. 26, no. 2, p. 185.

[16] Meyer, *Centennial History*, 176–177.

much of his archaeological work over the years.[17] At that time, Jerusalem was divided; it was increasingly difficult for scholars to access the ASOR, given that it was on the Jordanian side of the city. Outside of the geographical challenges, Glueck also saw the need to have a biblical archaeological program that conducted its work primarily in English.[18] While there were Israeli archeological programs, the language and cultural barriers made it difficult for American and European scholars with little or no Hebrew skills to fully immerse themselves in the field.

The Hebrew Union College Biblical Archaeological School (HUCBAS) would fill this need as well as provide a way for Christian and Jewish scholars to work together in biblical research. While this was the more publicized goal of creating the Jerusalem campus, it was Glueck's goal from the outset to have rabbinical students study at the Jerusalem campus along with rabbis and other scholars.[19]

Glueck worked hard to expand the College both physically and programmatically. Early on, he oversaw the merger of HUC with the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City as well as the building of two new campuses, one in Los Angeles and one in Jerusalem. He greatly increased the enrollment of the College and expanded the academic programs beyond the

[17] Jonathan M. Brown and Laurence Kutler, *Nelson Glueck: Biblical Archaeologist and President of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 2006), 178.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 179.

rabbinical school by adding a school of education as well as a cantorial school.[20] Glueck, however, always considered the College's main focus to be the education and training of rabbis.[21] His desire to increase enrollment was not only borne out of his outlook and goals but by the fast growth of the Reform movement post–World War II, when the United States was the de facto population and intellectual center of Jewish life. The demand for rabbis and Jewish educators was blossoming along with the number of synagogues that were formally joining the Reform movement. To meet the increased demand, the College needed to change and grow. Glueck succeeded in growing the number of students, even while some rabbis in the field opposed the larger class sizes.[22]

Glueck was not only well known in America but was prominent in Israel as well. He was able to leverage his close connections with key Israeli leaders to overcome the complex social and political hurdles to not only build a physical campus in Jerusalem but also begin the Year-in-Israel program.[23] His archaeological work in the Negev earned him the nickname "ha professor,"

---

[20] "Although enrollment did not increase consistently… A comparison between 1950 when New York and Cincinnati had about 120 students, and in 1970 when the combined campuses had double that number indicates an overall pattern of remarkable growth." Karff, 225.

[21] Meyer, *Centennial History*, 180–187.

[22] "A most basic concern of many CCAR members was the number of graduates which the HUC-JIR produced every year. They feared that a surfeit of rabbi would soon make it difficult to place new ordinees and would create more competition." Karff, 234.

[23] Indeed, at the founding of the Jerusalem campus in 1963 many key players in Israeli politics attended such as Ben Gurion, Moshe Sharett the ex-head of the Jewish agency and Abba Eban

the professor, among Israelis.[24] In the 1950s, Glueck formed a relationship with the country's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, that would continue for some time. Additionally, Glueck was given the title of citizen of Eilat during one of the meetings of the Israel Exploration Society. This society offered highly sought-after and well-attended lectures to thousands of Israelis and politicians.[25] Glueck also had a close association with Golda Meir and other leaders of Israel who actively read his publications. In America, Glueck was given a medallion by former President Harry Truman for "his personal role in strengthening the relationship between the United States and Israel."[26] Glueck wrote well-received articles for *National Geographic* and was on the cover of *Time Magazine*.

The relationship between Glueck, HUC, and Israeli leadership was not one-sided. Documents show that outside of a personal connection with Glueck and other HUC staff members, many Israeli leaders felt that building strong ties with a powerful American Jewish rabbinical seminary could help shape American Jews' beliefs and actions toward the new Jewish state.[27] This led the Jewish Agency and the Israeli government to provide partial funding for the

---

along with Golda Meir and the mayor of Jerusalem. Afterwards a reception was held at the presidents' home. Meyer, *Centennial History*, 211–212.

[24] Ibid., 147.

[25] Brown and Kutler, *Nelson Glueck*, 147.

[26] Ibid., 174.

[27] Ibid., 208–209.

Year-in-Israel program.[28] Glueck also heavily relied on personal donations from CCAR members and Reform congregations nationwide.[29] Without this financial support the Year-in-Israel program would not have started in the summer of 1970.

Hebrew at HUC-JIR Before the Year-in-Israel Program

One of the perennial challenges of rabbinical education for HUC-JIR has been Hebrew proficiency among those students entering the College. HUC-JIR has prided itself on being a center for Jewish learning and scholarship, but many of the key texts and ideas taught to rabbinical students rely heavily on some level of Hebrew understanding. This need for students to achieve a knowledge of spoken Hebrew was significantly out of step with the American Reform Jewish experience, in which Hebrew played a small role in worship services. Although some first-year students came to the College with a relatively strong Hebrew background that they gained through undergraduate studies or their own life experiences, many came with, at best, a rudimentary knowledge of the language. Most members of Reform congregations knew little (if any) Hebrew, and for those raised in Reform synagogues, the ability to decode a Hebrew text was not a central objective of their education. Additionally, Hebrew was not commonly taught at undergraduate universities until the post-1967 period, making Hebrew acquisition even

[28] Presidents Report to the Board of Governors of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, Feb. 8, 1968, 11–14. Board of Governors Minutes 1967-1968, MS-20, B-16-G, American Jewish Archives (hereafter AJA), Cincinnati, Ohio.

[29] Nelson Glueck to Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff, MS-20, Box A1a-172, AJA.

more pressing.[30] Students' weakness in Hebrew was often compounded by a low level of Judaic knowledge—something that HUC-JIR had been aware of for some time.[31] Not only was the gap between what the school required and what the students knew wide, the gap between individual students' abilities was wide as well.

The College attempted to overcome this issue in two ways. First, the school had a long-standing dual degree program with the University of Cincinnati in which undergraduate students could enroll at UC and HUC-JIR Cincinnati and take classes at both institutions; they would focus on improving their Hebrew and Judaic knowledge and at the same time gain a bachelor of arts degree. Their work at HUC-JIR during their undergraduate tenure would serve as an introductory year, and these students would be admitted to the College often in the second year of the program. The option to attend a local university was later granted to students on the Los Angeles campus as well. The resulting degrees would be a bachelor of Hebrew letters (BHL) and a bachelor of arts degree in a secular subject. This dual degree program was also seen as a tool for recruiting new students who would have some familiarity with Jewish texts and history, in addition to Hebrew, before they formally began their rabbinic studies. The HUC-JIR catalog from 1961–1963 describes how the undergraduate school and the first rabbinic year worked:

> The main objective of these programs is to equip the incoming student with the requisite language skills for competent Rabbinic study for entrance to the Rabbinic school. This preparatory study may be fulfilled in one of the following ways.

[30] Conversation with Richard Sarason March 26, 2020.

[31] Ibid.

1. For University graduates the undergraduate program is fully available in Cincinnati and Los Angeles or a related program [may] also exist in New York. High school graduates may come to Cincinnati or Los Angeles and take courses at the College-Institute while pursuing his [*sic*] BS degree at the University of Cincinnati or a Los Angeles College.

2. For University graduates, the first Rabbinic year is an accelerated preparatory year. It consists of a summer intensive concentration in Hebrew and full-time work for one year on one of three campuses.[32]

Students with advanced Hebrew could be exempt from the first-year program altogether.

Until 1956, HUC had a Hebrew entrance exam that was required for admission.[33] At times this caused otherwise qualified applicants to be turned down, even though the demand for Reform rabbinic leadership was high. Eliminating the prerequisite Hebrew knowledge was one way the school sought to increase entry for applicants. This new standard led to the creation of the Towanda program, an eight-week intensive Hebrew program.

In 1954 the College was given a large estate near Towanda, Pennsylvania, which was to be the location for a "crash course" in Hebrew, as stated in a 1955 packet for the program:

> The primary purpose is the study of Hebrew. Classes will be held six days a week. In addition to formal classes, there is a daily two hour supervised study period. A course of orientation lectures and discussions will be given twice weekly. These

[32] Hebrew Union College- Jewish institute of Religion Nearprint Series C: Admissions and Student Affairs catalogues 1960–1970, MS-20, Box c-12, AJA.

[33] Karff, 280.

> lectures aim to acquaint him with the key problems of Jewish life and thought. On weekends you will have the privilege of meeting informally with a number of Jewish scholars. Sports and social activities will be a regular part of the program. Daily and Shabbat services will be conducted by students and the faculty. Through religious services, ceremonies, study, and play you will create an ideal Jewish environment.[34]

The students who attended Towanda were expected to perform well during this intensive learning experience. Students who did not were asked to leave the program.[35] In some ways this program also afforded the College time to get to know students to make sure that they were ready for the pressures of the rabbinate. Towanda was usually run under the direction of a few professors and some senior HUC-JIR students. In the early years, Ezra Spicehandler, assistant professor of Hebrew literature at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati (who would later go on to serve as the director of the Year-in-Israel program in 1970–1971), was the educational director.[36] In addition to the lectures and studies, Towanda participants visited local Jewish communities. While both faculty and students generally approved of the program, it was not a panacea for the issues of Hebrew comprehension among incoming students. As Dr. Elias L. Epstein wrote in an undated letter to the faculty of HUC-JIR:

[34] Letter to students from the director, MS-22, Ala-40/9 Towanda, AJA.

[35] Karff, 222.

[36] Memo to Students of the HUC-JIR Summer school from Department of admissions, May 29, 1955 MS-22, Ala-40/9 Towanda, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio

> We must not permit Davan Lodge (Towanda) to become the cure all for the unprepared pre-Rabbinic Student. Even a very successful program at Davan Lodge of (8) weeks cannot perform a miracle, namely, to teach a person to read Hebrew accurately and fluently in that brief a period. Students preparing for the Rabbinate should be conditioned by their own local Hebrew training at once, and not wait for either Davan Lodge or Hebrew 1 Special.[37]

As time progressed, the methods of instruction as well as the location of the program changed. In 1957, a new master plan was created in response to the College's increased recruitment and the growing needs of congregations.[38] For example, in 1960, the College graduated one of its largest classes—more than one hundred rabbis, educators, and cantors.[39] The master plan not only looked at the physical needs of graduating larger and larger classes of rabbis, but the challenges that now faced the American Jewish community. Glueck and others had to raise significant funds to make this master plan—which called for physical improvements at the campus locations, aid for students, salaries for staff and faculty, and a heavy focus on recruiting qualified applicants—a reality. As part of this plan, the Cincinnati campus underwent

[37] Elias Epstein letter to the faculty about the Towanda Program, undated, MS-20, A1a-40/9 AJA.

[38] Meyer, *A Centennial History*, 1992.

[39] "100 Rabbis. Educators and Cantors Graduate from H.U.C. J.I.R.," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (June 7, 1960), https://www.jta.org/1960/06/07/archive/100-Rabbis-educators-and-cantors-graduate-from-h-u-c-j-i-r.

significant improvements: A major library was built, and air conditioning was added to the dorms.[40]

Glueck, in his November 3, 1966, report to the Board of Governors, gave some of the credit to increased enrollment in the Towanda program:

> One of the reasons we have been able to accept so many new students in our regular Rabbinic program is that most of them successfully participated in the eight week Towanda Summer School program held on our Cincinnati campus…. We had the largest enrollment ever, namely 48, in this intensive program which went on six days a week, and from ten to twelve hours a day, for the entire two months period. In addition to the intensive study of Hebrew, the weeks spent here served as an important orientation for them.[41]

All this expansion and change placed a financial strain on the seminary. If the Towanda program were to grow to meet the demands of the school, the estate would require costly upkeep and needed improvements. For this reason, the College sold the Towanda property and transferred the summer Hebrew program to Cincinnati.[42] Despite the location change, the program retained its name until it ended in 1971.[43]

---

[40] Meyer, *A Centennial History*, 205–207.

[41] President's Report to the Board of Governors, Nov. 3, 1966, Board of Governors minutes 1964-1967, MS-20, B16-5, AJA.

[42] President's Report to the Board of Governors, New York, February, MS-20 B-16/5, 1968, AJA.

[43] Meyer, *A Centennial History*, 222.

Origins of the HUC-JIR Jerusalem Campus

Glueck set about the complex task of building an HUC-JIR campus in Jerusalem to serve as an archaeological research center for visiting scholars from the United States and abroad as well as a place for students of the College to learn. To make this a reality, Glueck would have to not only overcome Israeli bureaucratic hurdles but seek the approval of his own Board of Governors. He first discussed a campus in Jerusalem to the Board of Governors in 1952:

> [Glueck] told the Board of his suggestion to the Israeli government that the College-Institute was prepared to erect a building in Jerusalem that would contain a library, a chapel and a small lecture hall…. [I]t would serve as both headquarters for students and faculty while studying in Jerusalem and a base for the proposed department of Archaeology.[44]

Thanks to his and other HUC-JIR members' close relationships with Israeli political leaders, Glueck was able to secure a prime location for the campus next to the King David Hotel.[45] After some internal discussions, the Board approved the plan. As noted in a 1954 Jewish

---

[44] Brown and Kutler, *Nelson Glueck*, 179–180.

[45] Meyer, *A Centennial History*, 190. See also at the CCAR convention in Jerusalem where Glueck stated that "four men worked diligently with me to create this school Herbert A. Bloch Jr. Chairman of the Board of Governors, Jack Lichter, a member of that board, Moshe Sharett, then prime minister and Levi Eshkol, then its Finance minister. As quoted from the *CCAR Yearbook* 80 (1971):71–74. Additionally, Glueck penned a fundraising letter dated March 10, 1970 wherein he stated that "I cannot refrain from telling you of the fabulous reception our new program has had. Mrs. (Golda) Meir has mobilized every government resource for our assistance, and

Telegraphic Agency article, "Dr. Glueck said, not only students from the Cincinnati institution but also other scholars, of all religions, interested in graduate study of the Bible, the Hebrew language or history, will be accommodated at the research center."[46]

From the beginning, the construction of a synagogue or chapel was part of the building plan. This reflected Glueck's larger goals of the Jerusalem campus as more than a purely academic site. Glueck and the Board knew that including a chapel would place the College in line for a confrontation between the Orthodox elements in Israeli society and politics. Most Israelis did not have a strong idea of what Reform Judaism was. There were only a handful of Reform congregations in the country, and they were scattered throughout the various regions. Orthodox elements in Israeli society saw Reform at best as a path towards assimilation and ruin and at worst a stain on the soul of the Jewish people. Glueck noted some of these criticisms in a 1964 letter: "The Orthodox Rabbinate in Israel had been saying in regard to me in particular, that I was the envoy of assimilation and that Reform Judaism meant an intermediate step on the road

---

President Harman at the University has been more than kind. They realize, as you do, that every one of our students will return to America, ultimately to serve as a forceful and persuasive advocate of our common cause. This program is one of the most important steps that we have taken both for American Jewry and for Israel. Nelson Glueck Fundraising letter, March 10, 1970, Ms-20, Box A1A, folder 157, AJA.

[46] "Reform Jews to Establish School of Oriental Research in Israel," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* August 4, 1954, https://www.jta.org/1954/08/04/archive/reform-jews-to-establish-school-of-oriental-research-in-israel (accessed March 9, 2021).

toward assimilation to Christianity."[47] To avoid confrontation, the construction of a chapel was not included when the building plan was first announced to the Israeli press.[48] Interestingly, however, it was made public in the United States, as shown in a 1954 *Cincinnati Enquirer* article that discussed the HUCBAS:

> The School would train a score of scholars each year. They will study archaeology, history, geography, and languages of the Holy Land. There will be both Jewish and Christian religious students, as in the case of the parent institution in Cincinnati. The School will have its own chapel, which presumably will reflect the reformed Judaism of the American college.[49]

The HUCBAS initially was intended to serve American and other non-Israeli scholars. However, Glueck noted that another goal of a Jerusalem campus was to meet "the real hunger of most of the people of Israel for an attractive form of Judaism, separated from state Authority."[50] By creating a chapel and a space for liberal Judaism in the Holy Land, the HUCBAS could be a foothold for a new progressive Judaism in Israel. It was clear to Glueck and others, however, that a liberal Judaism largely based off of an English liturgy would not fit in the context of a Hebrew-speaking country.

---

[47] Letter to Rabbi Hillel Cohn Jan 23,1964 in the Collection of Jonathan Brown. Brown and Kutler, *Nelson Glueck*, 141.

[48] Ibid., 180.

[49] Stone, "Ayn Zo Aggadah," 13.

[50] Daniel Syme, "Growth of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in the U.S. and Abroad," rabbinical thesis, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, 1972, 119.

Opening of the Jerusalem Campus

After some delays and setbacks, the school officially opened in the summer of 1963 with an archaeology program for visiting students and professors from the United States. Glueck formed a consortium with American universities to allow their students and teachers to attend the school.[51] The program focused on lectures by Glueck and scholars from HUC-JIR or Hebrew University as well as other speakers. It also afforded its participants the chance to tour key sites in biblical archaeology.

In 1963, Jakob Josef Petuchowski, a professor and expert in liturgy from the Cincinnati HUC-JIR campus, came to the Jerusalem campus to give weekly lectures and classes for the visiting American and Israeli public as well as conduct Shabbat morning services. These services not only offered the innovation of music, but the prayers were in Hebrew and Petuchowski altered the Reform prayerbook to include references to Zion and Jerusalem.[52] This marked an ideological shift from the American Reform tradition that had removed these references to Jewish peoplehood and nationality. Petuchowski also encouraged the use of a tallit as well as head coverings. The response to Petuchowski's services were very positive. Many attendees found them meaningful and vibrant. Glueck noted, "Almost all our alumni who visit Jerusalem and attend our services say that they want to introduce similar music in their own

[51] *HUC-JIR Catalogue*, 1966–1968, 119–120.

[52] Conversation with Richard Sarason, March 2020.

congregations."[53] Increasingly, the College was serving overflow crowds—mostly Israelis—during the High Holy Days.[54]

After the founding of the Jerusalem campus, more and more students chose to spend a portion of their studies in Israel each year—a phenomenon that had existed even before 1948. While not the norm, it was not unheard of for some students to take a leave of absence for a summer or a year to take ulpan classes or study at Hebrew University or another institution. Some students also took time off from HUC-JIR to work and live on a kibbutz. The faculty took note that students who had immersed themselves in Hebrew while living in Israel had much more success engaging with the Hebrew academic requirements upon their return.[55] It did not come without hardship, however. Outside of the obvious commitment of time, including possibly extending their studies by a year or more, the students also incurred a financial and logistical burden: having to travel to another country, find housing, and arrange their own academic program without financial support from the College.

In 1966, the school changed its policy to allow students to obtain loans to help pay for their time in Israel,[56] enabling more rabbinical students of limited resources the opportunity to

---

[53] President's Report to the Board of Governors, Cincinnati, Nov. 3, 1966, p. 17, Board of Governors minutes 1964–1967, MS-20, B16-5, AJA.

[54] Letter from Ezra Spicehandler to Rabbi Kenneth Roseman, May 1, 1969, MS-20, K2-4 Folder 7, AJA.

[55] Conversation with Michael Meyer, August 28, 2020.

[56] Letter from Samuel Sandmel to Rabbinic Students -Cincinnati-Los Angeles-New York, April 7, 1966, MS-20.a1a.126.006, AJA.

immerse themselves in the Jewish state. This policy change formally signified an institutional shift toward study in Israel that had been taking place under Glueck's presidency. The formalization of the status of the Jerusalem campus and the institutional commitment to Israel would only deepen and accelerate in the years to come. With the financial burden somewhat lifted, there was increased interest and participation in the Jerusalem campus program. Glueck, with the help of HUC-JIR supporters, had successfully petitioned the Israeli government through the Jewish Agency to offer one-off scholarships, meaning that the students could only use the grant money from the Jewish Agency for their studies at HUC's Jerusalem campus that year.[57]

By 1966, Ezra Spicehandler, who had played a role in the early days of the Towanda program, had become the director of Jewish studies at the Jerusalem campus and was offering a robust number of courses for HUC-JIR students in Israel. As Glueck noted in his president's report of that year:

> Professor Spicehandler, our Director of Jewish Studies at our Jerusalem school, has written to me that all of our HUC-JIR students in addition to their studies at various Ulpanim and with other private instructors, are each of them taking at our Jerusalem school 8 hours of courses as follows: [1] The book of Job 2 hours; (2) New Hebrew Poetry 2 hours, Professor Spicehandler; (3) Rabbinic Literature 2

[57] President's Report to the Board of Governors, Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 3, 1966, p. 11, Board of Governors minutes 1964–1967, MS-20, box B16-5, AJA.

hours Professor Spicehandler; (4) The Archaeology of Palestine 2 hours with Dr. William G. Dever.[58]

Both stateside and in Israel, more people were noticing HUC-JIR's Jerusalem campus with its prime location and its academic offerings. The next four years would see a continued increase in activity and historical and political shifts that would lead to the creation of the Year-in-Israel program itself. As previously noted, neither the Jerusalem campus nor the Year-in-Israel program would have come to fruition without Glueck's direction and commitment. The Year-in-Israel program was always close to his mind, even at the earliest discussions about building a Jerusalem campus. In many of his notes to faculty and to the Board of Governors, he made it clear that creating this program and was his goal:

> One of the main purposes of our Jerusalem School, but not the sole one, is to serve as the headquarters for our HUC-JIR students studying in Israel, with the hope, frequently expresses in my Board reports, that the day would come when it would help translate into the reality my dream that every class of our Rabbinic candidates would spend one year, preferably the third year, studying in Israel.[59]

This idea is further deepened and clarified in a report to the Board of Governors later that same year:

---

[58] President's Report to the Board of Governors, Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 3, 1966, p. 12, Board of Governors minutes 1964-1967 MS20 B16-5, AJA.

[59] Ibid.

> It has always been my hope that somehow or other one entire class of our Rabbinic students would spend an entire year in Israel, and particularly in Jerusalem under the careful supervision of one or more members of our faculty. One of the main reasons is the comparative ease with which the indispensable basic knowledge of Hebrew can be gained by those students who apply themselves as compared with the best possible circumstances here at home. There are many other benefits which need not be spelled out. I would want to have our students spend an entire calendar year, and not just an academic year in Israel, so that there would be ample time for visiting throughout the country, working at some of the kibbutzim and so on, without detracting from the requisite numbers of weeks of instruction whether for credit or not.[60]

In a later Board of Governors meeting, he laid out his feelings about the program and how it might affect the College:

> I believe, indeed, that the capstone of our entire Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion is represented by the coming into being of our Jerusalem School, by the spiritual relationship between Israel and America that it represents, by the idea of serving Kelal Yisrael that it incorporates, by the ideals of Jewish

[60] President's Report to the Board of Governors, Cincinnati, Ohio, June 3, 1965, p. 9, Board of Governors Minutes, MS-20, box B16-5, AJA.

> scholarship and free and objective inquiry to which it, together with the rest of our entire Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, is devoted.[61]

Events occurring on HUC-JIR's stateside campuses would solidify and accelerate the creation of the Year-in-Israel program. By 1967, certain faculty members were calling for a review of the rabbinic program, noting that more could be done to optimize use of the Jerusalem campus, since a number of students were already studying in Israel. Although Glueck articulated his vision of how the campus could serve HUC-JIR students, Werner Weinberg's February 17, 1967, memorandum demonstrates that some members of the faculty felt that the school had fallen short of its ambitions:

> Our students have gone to Israel without any official encouragement on the part of the College, without receiving credit for academic work done (except two or three courses which are now being offered by the Professor-in-Residence), and until last year without any financial help. Worst of all, they have gone to Israel without any program. They have improved their studying there, utilizing existing setups including the H. Greenberg Institute, the Friends of Hebrew University Program, The Ulpan Etsion in Jerusalem, Kibbutz programs, auditing Hebrew University courses, private tutoring and some have just been drifting. The fact that we have a school in Jerusalem has often formed a source of bitterness and

[61] President's Report to the Board of Governors, Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 3, 1966, p. 20, Board of Governors Minutes, MS-20, box B16-5, AJA.

> frustration to our students rather than affording them the security and the guidance of a center for their studies.[62]

The Six-Day War and its Effect on HUC-JIR

Without a doubt, 1967 was a critical year in the development of the Year-in-Israel program—as well as the American Jewish community's relationship with Israel. The Six-Day War was an almost-messianic victory of David vs. Goliath. It began a new era of Jewish political power and lobbying of the American government on behalf of the Jewish state and led to new levels of fundraising and philanthropy. In the New York City area alone, the United Jewish Appeal raised more than $20 million during the week of the war.[63] The years following the Six-Day War would see a flurry of activity that would push the idea of having HUC-JIR students' study in Israel from an option to a requirement. After the war, Israel was flooded by American study abroad students and volunteers who wanted to work on kibbutzim. American academic institutions outside of the

[62] Letter from Werner Weinberg to the Chairman and the members of the academic counsel, February 17, 1967, Ms0663.022.022, AJA.

[63] "U.S. Jewish Communities Report on Their Speedy Response to Israel's Crisis," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, June 12, 1967, www.jta.org/1967/06/12/archive/u-s-jewish-communities-report-on-their-speedy-response-to-israels-crisis?_ga=2.167087934.1828095127.1602031529-1184258955.1601340841 (accessed March 9, 2021).

Jewish world began to forge partnerships with their Israeli counterparts. This period also saw an increase in universities joining the HUCBAS's archeological program.[64]

In December of 1967, under the direction of students and faculty, the services in the synagogue in Cincinnati changed their Hebrew pronunciation from Ashkenazi to Sephardi to be more in line with the modern Israeli pronunciation.[65] Outside of the College, the larger institutions of Reform Judaism swept up in the post-1967 fever were rapidly shifting toward a pro-Zionist stance. In 1970, the CCAR held its first convention in Jerusalem, in which it made a series of profoundly strong Zionist resolutions, including that Israeli Independence Day should be celebrated in religious schools. Additionally, the CCAR Committee on Liturgy and Music approved a new hymnal with the transliterations in Sephardic.[66]

Many of these positions would have seemed impossible to Reform Jewish leaders a generation before. Reform had typically de-emphasized the national character of Judaism and instead championed the idea that Judaism was a religion. Post-1967 saw several Jewish denominations building centers and programs in Israel—the Conservative movement along with Modern Orthodoxy began to establish or expand their programs in Israel. There was a zeal in the

---

[64] See HUC course catalogues 1963–1971, HUC-JIR nearprint, series C: Admissions and student Affairs catalogues 1960–1970 box c-12, AJA.

[65] Karff, 228.

[66] *CCAR yearbook* (1970): 17. HUC-JIR nearprint, series c: Admissions and student Affairs catalogues 1960-1970 box c-12, AJA.

American Jewish community and a pride in what the young country had accomplished against terrible odds. The great desire of the American Jewish community to support Israel without question gave the College the social and political capital it needed to create the Year-in-Israel program. An idea that Glueck had first proposed in the 1940s—a proposal that many had believed was a pipe dream—had come to be seen as an achievable goal. After 1967, the question for the College was not if a formal Year-in-Israel program would be created but when and what it would look like.

A Changing American Rabbinate

The American religious landscape was undergoing massive shifts in the post–World War II era. These shifts were only exacerbated by the political climate of the 1960s and the willingness of the postwar generation to question traditional societal and religious norms. The American Jewish community was not immune from the larger waves of social change. By 1961, members of the student body began to call for a curricular review. As stated in an HUC-JIR student publication of the period:

> Things aren't quite the same these days in the once architecturally dormant seminary on the hill. In their new office on top of the gleaming new library, administrators of the College-Institute look with pride at the shiny new buildings they have built, and work on plans to finance them. But floors below, in the classrooms and corridors, students look with somewhat less pride at the sameness they perceive in their curriculum.
>
> For those who are interested in an active, practical Rabbinate, keyed to service to congregants and community, to meaningful worship and stirring sermons, who feel that there is something wrong with their text courses and not enough

> materials to guide them in the non-academic paths of their calling. There are also those who would like a scholarly Rabbinate, even those who wish to become scholars first and Rabbis second, and who are dissatisfied with the preparation they are receiving for a career in Jewish Scholarship.[67]

The College was challenged not only by increased class sizes but by pressure from its student body, the UAHC, and the CCAR to seriously look at the education and training it was offering the future leaders of the American Reform movement. In recognition of the evolving needs of the American Jewish community and the changing role of the rabbi, the College began an internal review of its curriculum in 1964.

The calls of dissatisfaction with the program and the need for change would increase throughout Glueck's term as president. He acknowledged this in his 1964 report to the Board of Governors:

> The Faculty is continually reexamining our curriculum to attempt to improve it and keep it in consonance with the unalterable demands for competence in Jewish knowledge and the modern disciplines that the Rabbi must be at home in, within the frame of the reference of belief in the God our Fathers, the centrality of the Synagogue, the immeasurable importance of Judaism for ourselves, our children, and our world.[68]

---

[67] Brown and Kutler, *Nelson Glueck*, 172–173.

[68] President's Report to the Board of Governors, Cincinnati, Ohio, Oct. 22, 1964, p. 5, Board of Governors Minutes, 1964–1967, MS-20, B16-5, AJA.

In response, student and faculty committees were created to discuss the issue and offer suggestions. Glueck also began to talk to alumni about work in the field and whether it was in line with the education that they received.

By 1966, these dissenting voices became louder within the school and especially within the CCAR and its journal. Additionally, the external pressures to change how HUC-JIR educated its rabbinical students were intensifying. In June 1969, the CCAR made public its intention to study how rabbis could be more meaningful to American Jews. Rabbi David Polish, chair of the CCAR's rabbinic training committee, announced the study at the closing session of the 80th annual convention of the CCAR. Polish and other speakers at the convention expressed concern that an " archaic synagogue is unable to meet the religious needs of Jews, especially youth, and does not aid them in resolving social problems."[69] This disconnect was not just an issue facing the Jewish community alone. The institutions that had served American Jewish and non-Jewish civil and religious life were all undergoing a radical societal reassessment. This sentiment was confirmed by then–vice president of the CCAR Polish when he said that "Judaism was faced with the same challenge confronting other faiths in the secular age." He said, "It is becoming irrelevant to many on an accelerating scale, and the verdict of irrelevance and alienation is being pronounced from within our own institutions."[70]

---

[69] "Reform Rabbis Will Study Means of Making Synagogue More Relevant to Us Jewry," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, June 23, 1969, https://www.jta.org/1969/06/23/archive/reform-rabbis-will-study-means-of-making-synagogue-more-relevant-to-us-jewry (accessed March 9, 2021).

[70] Ibid.

Glueck was also aware of the failings of the institution and admitted it openly. In the same article, he mentions that "our seminary does not in a real sense produce the completely trained Rabbi" but added that it was constantly seeking to improve its curriculum.[71] The creation of the Year-in-Israel program was not just to fulfill the deep desire of the College's president, but an attempt to re-examine its own role in American and world Judaism and create a new rabbi who could lead into the twentieth century and beyond with a strong tie to the land, culture, language, and texts of the Jewish people.

In 1967, Levi Olan, then-incoming president of the CCAR, proposed that "the CCAR sponsor a study of rabbinical education to discover whether the HUC-JIR curriculum adequately prepared men to fill the role of the contemporary Rabbi."[72] Due to these changes in society, many rabbis were starting to feel a disconnect from their congregations. American Jewish identity was shifting away from the religious to the ethnic, which was out of step with what many rabbis thought HUC-JIR had prepared them for. This questioning from the CCAR and HUC-JIR's own faculty accelerated the process of internal review of the curriculum[73] and gave rise to two important reports about the role of the rabbi and rabbinical education. Both published in 1972, the reports highlighted the need for change in rabbinical education. One was titled *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism,* written by Theodore Lenn and produced under the

[71] Ibid.

[72] Karff, 234–235.

[73] President's Message to the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the CCAR, June 16-18, Houston Texas, *CCAR Yearbook* (1969): 7–8.

direction of the CCAR. The second report was *Reform Is a Verb*, issued by the UAHC written by Leonard Fein. These further stressed the issues that modern rabbis where facing.

The Year-in-Israel Program Takes Shape

A mandatory Year-in-Israel program for rabbinical students began to take shape in 1969. The first recorded call for it occurred on February 8, 1969, at a Board of Governors meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio. During the Board's discussion of where the Towanda program would be held, Richard Scheuer (1917–2008), chair of the administrative committee of the Jerusalem school, "stressed the importance of President Glueck's recommendation of transferring our Summer School to Jerusalem. He submitted for consideration the advisability of inaugurating the project this summer ."[74]

The initial proposal did not call for a full year in Israel. At this same meeting, however, Glueck suggested that students should spend one full year of study in Israel as part of their formal studies.[75] The question remained as to which year the students would be required to go. Some of the faculty, most notably Spicehandler, the director of the Jerusalem campus at that

[74] Board of Governors minutes February 8, 1969, Hebrew Union College 1967–1968 MS-20, Bg16-6, AJA.

[75] President's Report to the Board of Governors Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, New York, Feb. 8, 1968, 11-14, Board of Governors Minutes 1967-1968, MS-20, B16-G, AJA.

time, preferred that the third-year students go to Israel.[76] This had been the common practice at the College, and this theory held that third-year students would not only be more mature and committed to their studies, but they would have a better grasp of Hebrew and thus be able to progress much further than first-year students.[77] However, by June 1969, it had already become the dominant opinion that first-year students should be the class required to attend the Jerusalem campus. Reasons this choice were varied. First, some believed that a first year of intensive Hebrew study in a native Hebrew environment would allow students greater academic success with their text-heavy workload upon their return to the states.[78] Additionally, experience showed that fewer students would be married with children as they entered the College. Finally, since most first-year students would be coming directly from their undergraduate programs, it seemed less burdensome for a first-year student to move to Jerusalem than a well-established, settled, and possibly married third-year student.[79]

A deciding factor that pushed Glueck and others to require that first-year students should be the ones to go to Israel was a financial one. The College, due to its rapid expansion, had been facing a financial shortfall, and it was able to secure a scholarship from the Israeli government

---

[76] Letter from Ezra Spicehandler to Nelson Glueck, June 4, 1969, Richard Scheuer 1954-1972, Box K4-1, AJA.

[77] Ibid.

[78] President's Report to the Board of Governors Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio, June 5, 1969, pp. 13–15. Board of Governors Minutes, MS-20 1967–1968, B-16-G, AJA.

[79] Ibid., 7–11.

that made the Year-in-Israel program financially prudent.[80] Glueck suggested to the Board that the College would save significant money by closing the Towanda program, which had been running since the 1950s with varied levels of success, and consolidating the first-year program in Israel.[81] After much deliberation, the Board decided that the first year of rabbinical study be at Hebrew University in Israel.

At the Board of Governor's meeting on June 10, 1969, Glueck stated his plan to finalize the Year-in-Israel program:

> I prepared an outline a plan, which I desire to set before you this morning dealing with a revised form of a Rabbinic training, which our Jerusalem school plays a considerable role.… There's already been much discussion of it with our faculty and with the alumni overseers. I believe there's a unanimity of opinion among them with regard to the necessity of all of our Rabbinic candidates spending a complete preliminary year in Jerusalem at or under our Jerusalem school's guidance.[82]

At this same meeting Glueck went into details about the negotiations between the Israeli government and the College to help fund the Year-in-Israel students. Six days after receiving

---

[80] Ibid.

[81] President's Report to the Board of Governors Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio, June 5, 1969, 7-14. Board of Governors Minutes, 1967–1968 MS-20, B 16-G, AJA.

[82] Board of Governors minutes, June 10, 1969, Hebrew Union College 1967-1969, MS-20, Bg16-6, AJA.

approval to go ahead with the program, Glueck met with alumni and CCAR members and announced its creation. At the June 1969 CCAR conference, he gave a major speech wherein he stated:

> We are actually about to embark after years of intensive study, long experience and much experimentation upon what amounts to a revolutionary change in our entire Rabbinic training program.… It has long been my contention that our great school must be identified body and soul with the past and present and future of the people and the land of Israel, and I have moved resolutely in that direction during every year of the last two decades of my incumbency of my high office. This, we hold, conforms to the thrust of our history, to the genius of our destiny. In accordance with this philosophy, some six years ago our Yeshivah planted the stake of its endeavor in Jerusalem. And in accordance with this philosophy, with keeping abreast and moving ahead of the mysticism of our Jewish religious existence, I have just proposed to our Board of Governors—and I am positive that the proposal will be favorably acted upon this fall—I have proposed that beginning the year after next, every applicant for admission to the Rabbinic studies program of our yeshiva must spend a strictly controlled preparatory Year-in-Israel under our direction and guidance...Beginning, therefore, in the summer of 1970, this program will be innovated. It will take six years, including the initial preparatory Year-in-Israel, before the first class under the new regimen graduates with the titles of Rabbi and D.H.L. It will furthermore obviously be necessary for equitable arrangements to be made, enabling those now enrolled in our School, or

about to enter this fall, or who have previously completed the Rabbinic studies with us to retroactively obtain a doctor's degree.[83]

Even with financial support, the issue of where to house the upcoming Year-in-Israel students was still in question. Glueck anticipated a very large class of well over fifty first-year students. While the HUCBAS did have a few dorm rooms, they were not able to handle the large influx of students. Glueck used his connections with Hebrew University and backing from the Israeli government to secure dorm rooms for the upcoming class.[84] He also began a large letter-writing and fundraising campaign highlighting Israeli leaders' strong support for the program, which was met with enthusiasm.[85] Glueck was able to secure funding for the program from the CCAR itself.[86]

Conclusion

As previously discussed, Glueck's status was key to the creation of the Year-in-Israel program. Additionally, the College received not only financial help but political assistance from the State of Israel, first in building the Jerusalem campus and second in creating the Year-in-Israel

[83] *CCAR Yearbook* (1969): 249–250.

[84] Letter from Richard Scheuer to Nelson Glueck, Aug. 19, 1969, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, Jerusalem Campus, Richard Scheuer 1954-1972, Box K4-1, AJA.

[85] Letter to Ira Abramson from Kenneth D. Roseman March 12, 1970, ms0020.a1a.157.001, AJA.

[86] Interview with Richard Sarason, February 2020.

program. The motivation for assisting the College was multifaceted for the Israeli government. First, it was politically beneficial in that it created ties with American Jewry. Second, it matched the Zionist ideological responsibility to the Diaspora that the early leaders of the State of Israel ascribed to. The Reform movement was quickly becoming the largest and most politically powerful Jewish bloc in the United States. The hope was that having all Reform rabbis from 1970 onward study in Israel would not only create and cement a bond with the nascent Jewish state but also allow these rabbis to act as spokespeople for the new country. Rabbis with positive, firsthand experience could advance the relationship between Israelis and Americans. Glueck was mindful of this when building the school and this program:

> The building of this new facility at our school in Jerusalem is in harmony with the terms of the agreement between us and the government of Israel. The understanding was (a) that our Jerusalem school would draw our future Rabbis and our alumni closer to Israel; (b) it would serve to help bring closer the Jewry of America and Israel; (c) it would attract American archaeological expeditions to Israel; (d) and that it would serve in a general way to help bind together the objective cultural interests of America and Israel.[87]

The creation of a Year-in-Israel program had always been a primary goal for Glueck. It was his desire and his standing on the world and Jewish stage, combined with the push from the CCAR and UAHC to overhaul rabbinical training, that contributed to the decision to inaugurate the program. Glueck and those he guided had to leverage their political clout and connections in

[87] President's Report to the Board of Governors, Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 3, 1966, p. 18, Board of Governors minutes 1964-1967, MS-20, B16-5, AJA.

Israel and the United States to make this program a reality. Those efforts were spurred on by the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War, which marked a sea change in the relationship between American and Israeli Jews and created a huge wave of enthusiasm for Glueck's program. The task now turned to laying the groundwork for this program to become reality.

Chapter 2: HUC-JIR's New Experiment

Having now discussed some of the historical and ideological motivations for the creation of the Year-in-Israel program, this paper will now attempt to reconstruct its first year from the perspective of the institution and its faculty. Material from the school's perspective is scant and incomplete. This chapter relies heavily on the records of Ezra Spicehandler (the director of the program that year) and a transcribed interview that he gave about the 1970–1971 academic year. Additionally, this chapter will rely on the 1990 rabbinic thesis by Ariel Stone.

The primary goals of the Year-in-Israel program were the acquisition of Hebrew skills and familiarization of key Jewish concepts and texts. It is to the College's merit that it was largely was successful in achieving those goals. When analyzing the Year-in-Israel experience from the school's perspective, a few themes begin to crystalize. First, the Jerusalem campus was not ready for either the massive expansion of the student body or the cultural shifts that American university students had undergone. Second, there was an internal tension and communication gap between the Jerusalem and stateside campuses. Third, relationships between faculty and students experienced tensions arising from both a cultural and a communication gap Finally, the unprecedented nature of the program meant that much of it was innovative and untested, which led to some challenges. Some contributing factors were (1) the program needed to mesh with the staffing that was present at the time; (2) HUC-JIR used as a paradigm its program of third-year students' taking classes at the Jerusalem school for credit along with an ulpan; and (3) the school borrowed parts of its Israel program from the successful facets of HUCBAS, its summer archeological program that it had been running for American scholars through the archeological school.

Laying the Groundwork

It is helpful to place the Year-in-Israel program within the larger Israeli social/historical context. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem began accepting foreign students as early as 1925, when the school was first established.[1]. Year-long study programs for foreign students began in the 1950s and 1960s under the direction of the World Zionist Organization.[2] After the creation of the State of Israel, there was an upward trend of foreign students studying in the country, but Hebrew University formally created the first program specifically for international students in 1956. The School for Overseas Students was formally inaugurated in 1971, and it later became the Rothberg International School.[3] Many of the HUC-JIR students who came to Israel before 1970–1971 participated in one way or the other with this Hebrew University program, which offered classes in Hebrew and English as well as ulpan.

There had also been a rapid growth in Israeli universities and youth programs. The 1960s saw the creation of University of Haifa as well as Ben Gurion University in Beer Sheva. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem saw exponential growth from the 1940s to the 1970s. The number of students rose from one thousand in 1947–1948 to five thousand in 1958–1959 and over fifteen thousand in 1969–1970. During this period, the academic staff increased from 200

[1] https://en.huji.ac.il/en/page/452, accessed February 5, 2021.

[2] Smadar Donitsa-Schmidt and Maggie Vadish, "North American Students in Israel: An Evaluation of a Study Abroad Experience," *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 11, no. 1 (2005): 33–56.

[3] Ibid.

to 1,430, many themselves graduates of the University.[4] In this same era, the Reform movement's youth group, the National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), began sending students to Israel in 1954.[5] In the 1960s, it became increasingly mainstream for one of the three major branches of American Judaism to offer either a short trip to Israel or a more immersive experience. In 1962, the Conservative movement launched its Israel summer program for high school students.[6] All of this was aided as well by decreased costs in international air travel.

The Jerusalem of 1970 was a vastly different city than it had been when the HUCBAS had opened. After 1967, areas of the city that once were off limits due to safety or walled off and controlled by Jordan were fully open. The environment was still very much electric and hopeful coming off the Six-Day War. Israelis were laying out plans to expand and modernize this small city, as well as improving sanitation and electric access. In the 1970s, Israel was still a very young, scrappy country that was not on the economic level that it currently enjoys. Many of Jerusalem's residents were poor and lacked modern services. But the sense of possibility and hope was pervasive among Jewish residents of Jerusalem. It was among all this change, upheaval, growth, and possibility that the Year-in-Israel program was established.

---

[4] "Higher Education in Israel: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem," https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hebrew-university-of-jerusalem#2, accessed February 5, 2021.

[5] https://nfty.org/about/history/, accessed February 5, 2021.

[6] Shaul Kelner, "The Impact of Israel Experience Programs on Israel's Symbolic Meaning," *Contemporary Jewry* 24, no. 1 (2003): 124–155.

The program was ambitious for its time; it was very much the product of not only Nelson Glueck's desires but the shifting relationship between the American Jewish community and the Jewish state. To implement this program required harmonization of many moving pieces. The College had to manage logistical challenges such as a changing curriculum, student housing, and the cost of the program. These challenges were made more complex by the realities of creating a program on the other side of the world, in a politically unstable region, in a country with a different language and culture, at a time when reliable international phone lines were few and far between—all the while coordinating with three stateside campus locations and their own respective ideas of what the Year-in-Israel program should look like.

As noted in the previous chapter, in some respects it seemed as though the program was a long time in the making; yet creating it from nothing required a great deal of alacrity. A few short months before Glueck's address at the CCAR conference in June 1969, in which he laid out the program and how it would shape the future of the rabbinate, it was not clear that the 1970–1971 academic year would be the first year of the program. HUC-JIR's Board of Governors formally approved the program's launch on June 4, 1970,[7] only after key pieces of funding and support from American and Israeli backers and agencies[8] were in place. While planning and deep conversations had been going on for some time internally as to what the goals and curriculum of

[7] Karff, 214 fn. 101.

[8] Income in tuition and fees from preparatory year students in Israel: $30,000; Jewish Agency $69,000; normal grants in aid for first year students, $71,000. Interschool correspondence, undated, MS-20, K7-31, folder 8, AJA.

a Year-in-Israel program might look like, the College had little time to assemble the program fully and concretely on the ground before it was to begin in August of that year.

Early documents show that the clear focus of that year would be Hebrew language skills. On January 20, 1970, just six months before the start of the program, Spicehandler wrote a memo outlining the academic goals:

> The Ulpan will meet 20 hours a week (4 hours daily 5 days). During the first semester it will concentrate on language, syntax, and practical grammar. In the second semester half of each daily program will be devoted to instruction in Bible and Rabbinic Hebrew.… Courses to be taught in English: We propose the following: "An introduction to the Bible." (2 hours weekly) to be taught by Dr. Brichto, and "History and Thought of Reform Judaism" taught by Drs. Brichto, Meyer and Spicehandler.… On alternate Thursdays, an evening lecture series on "Israel Today" will be arranged.[9]

Focusing on Hebrew language acquisition made sense since it was the main reason for the program to move to Israel. By March 20, 1970, just five months before the program began, course work and scheduling were still not finalized.[10] A major question that the College and its three stateside campus locations had to answer was how to fit this program into the larger curricular goals and plans of the school.

---

[9] Ezra Spicehandler to Alfred Gottschalk Re: First Year Program, January 20, 1970, ms0020.k6-2.001.001, AJA.

[10] S. Gitin, Director of Admissions to Entering students, March 20, 1970, ms0020.k6-2.001.001, AJA.

Practical and logistical questions also had to be addressed. Not all three stateside campuses had the same academic schedule. This led to questions about how to transfer credits gained in Israel. Communication about the program between all the campuses proved problematic. Additionally, there were ongoing internal discussions about the length of the program and what degrees the College would confer upon its rabbinical graduates. Glueck had stated previously that the program would confer a doctor's of Hebrew letters (DHL) and ordination after six years of study, but it was still an open question among the faculty and even Glueck himself whether the program would be five or six years long. A proposed curriculum about how the Year-in-Israel program would affect the school stated, "This curriculum could easily be adjusted should it become necessary to reduce the proposed six-year plan to a five-year program."[11]

From the outset, there was some pushback from HUC-JIR faculty in the United States, who felt that the curriculum in Israel would not be up to par.[12] The dean of the Cincinnati campus, Kenneth Roseman, voiced his concerns:

> I think we cannot allow ourselves this luxury with the first-year students. There must be pressure, pressure, pressure on them from the moment they arrive in Jerusalem. The faculty in the United States are considerably anxious concerning

[11] "A Proposal for the New Program of Studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Involving a Year of Residence in Israel," March 2, 1970, p. 7, MS-20, Box k6-2, Folder 1, AJA.

[12] Stone, "Ayn Zo Aggadah," 117.

> the product of this year; if anything less than success is the outcome, there will be a faculty revolt.[13]

In addition to the academic skepticism, the U.S. faculty questioned the usefulness of the trips and extracurricular activities being proposed for the students.[14]

There were also questions and tensions concerning Hebrew, specifically the primacy of biblical versus modern Hebrew and their respective roles in the modern rabbinate. Spicehandler addressed these concerns directly in a letter to key faculty members:

> When I was in Cincinnati last April, I assured the faculty that we would cover at least as much classical Hebrew and grammar as was covered in the Hebrew 1 program. To this assurance I might add that the likelihood is that our achievement will be far beyond previous years insofar as active and passive command of Hebrew vocabulary and language structure are concerned. Biblical grammar will be taught in the class in Bible in an inductive method and will be quite thorough.[15]

Spicehandler's need to clarify the goals of the program—in a letter dated months after the Year-in-Israel program started—highlights that some of the stateside faculty did not fully understand the Year-in-Israel program, and it demonstrates that there were continuing communication issues between campuses.

---

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 120.

[15] Ezra Spicehandler to Kenneth D. Roseman, November 11, 1970, MS-20, Box K6-2, Folder 1, p. 2, AJA.

Documentation has not been found to determine whether the length of the program and the degrees earned upon graduation had been resolved by the time that the 1970–1971 Year-in-Israel class began. In fact, some testimony from participants and from Spicehandler suggests that it was still very much an open question even once the students began their studies in Israel. Spicehandler commented on this uncertainty, which he attributed to a lack of communication:

> Undoubtedly the fact that we are now in the transition (regarding the curriculum) in Cincinnati made us indefinite as to what the students are to expect, and the truth of the matter is they still do not know what to expect when they arrive in Cincinnati, or New York, or California. There is a problem of communication which could be improved. We do not get faculty decisions from Cincinnati. We get sporadic information. We get the information we ask for. The channeling of the information, not only from the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, in Cincinnati, but between all the four branches of the school is a problem that I think should be taken up by an inner-school committee.[16]

Challenges Continue

In addition to the breakdown in communication between stateside campuses, Spicehandler had to contend with issues arising from a much larger student body. The entering class of 1970–1971 was one of the largest that the school had ever admitted. At its beginning, the class numbered about seventy. Some students also traveled to Israel with their wives.[17] In addition, the College

[16] Ezra Spicehandler interview with Stanley Chyet, 1970, p. 24, SC-11842, AJA.

[17] Ibid.

had about thirty upperclassmen, mostly third-year students, who were studying at the College that year as well. Documentation is unclear as to the precise number of students in Israel, but on the basis of internal records, it seems fair to assume that the number was at least one hundred, and probably more.[18] This was a staggering increase in the Israel student body that, before this academic year, was traditionally made up of approximately ten to thirty third-year students and their wives, who also could take classes at the College if they wished. Spicehandler, who had been the director of the Israel program since 1966 and would run the program for the next fourteen years,[19] would have to contend with possibly three to four times more students. This raised practical questions about staffing as well as classroom space.[20]

In an interview with Stanley Chyet[21] at the conclusion of the inaugural year, Spicehandler talked about how the increase in students as well as the change in culture of the student body affected the HUC-JIR Jerusalem staff: "There is a tradition here at Hebrew Union College on the part of the employee staff that the students are interlopers. That this [program] was originally set out for three or four scholars and HUC students were to be discouraged." Faculty soon realized

---

[18] "We may well have approximately 100 Hebrew Union College…students in Jerusalem this coming academic year including about 70 first year men and perhaps as many as 30 upperclassmen." Glueck to Norman Grant, April 17,1970, ms0020.k6-2.001.001, AJA. (later letters by Glueck give a total of 110 students, though no complete list of students has yet been found).

[19] Stone, "Ayn Zo Aggadah," 85.

[20] Spicehandler to Nelson Glueck, November 20, 1969, MS-20 A1a-172/2, AJA.

they would need to adjust their expectations for this American class of students, as they were younger and had come from different educational backgrounds compared to the Israelis and students that attended the archeological school. The new students would need more support and encouragement than the faculty was used to providing.[22]

There was concern that some students would not understand enough about Judaism or what it meant to be a rabbi before they started their first year of study. The increase in the number of students also meant an increase in those who had little or no knowledge of Hebrew.[23] This would be compounded with the shock of being in another country that had a very different culture and was less economically developed than America. Other concerns were that students saw the program as a free trip to Israel and a way to get out of the draft, and some staff also thought that students would stay in Israel and not return to America.[24]

---

[22] Spicehandler interview with Stanley Chyet, 1971, p. 21, SC-11842, AJA.

[23] "There is a really traumatic effect upon most of our students entering our Hebrew Union College…Because of the fact that they are in their twenties and for the most part know not a word of Hebrew. The learning of Hebrew during their first year is greatly facilitated naturally in Israel." Nelson Glueck to Mr. Charles Petschek, November 3, 1969, MS-20, Aia-172/2 Year in Israel, AJA.

[24] "And there were, and this was before it started, there was this very strong feeling among some faculty and administrators that—well, first of all there was a fear that if you send them over, they'll never come back." Interview with Margie Meyer, June 2020.

On August 28, 1970, the vast majority of the Year-in-Israel class assembled in Great Barrington, New York, for an orientation to the College and the program in Israel. From New York the students departed to Israel on a chartered flight. According to Spicehandler,

> this orientation in some way set the program up for tensions and confusion between the faculty and the students. We made a mistake in having the orientation in the United states…. Because all sorts of statements were made about the experimentations in Jerusalem that had nothing to do with the reality of the program in Jerusalem.[25]

With this shaky start, the Year-in-Israel experiment had officially begun.

The School Year Begins

The program began on September 2–4 with class registration, opening day exercises, and tours of the Old City.[26] The faculty consisted of Spicehandler, David Greenberg, Herbert Brichto,[27]

[25] Ezra Spicehandler interview with Stanley Chyet, 1971, p. 24, SC-11842, AJA.

[26] Ezra Spicehandler, interim report to Nelson Glueck, October 26, 1970, Ms0663.022.022, AJA.

[27] Herbert Brichto 1925–1996 he earned his PhD at HUC-JIR's New York Campus. Before coming to Cincinnati in 1966, Brichto was an administrator and professor of Bible at Hebrew Union College's School of Bible and Archaeology in Jerusalem. He also was dean of the school's New York campus.

William Dever,[28] Michael A. Meyer,[29] Hannah Shenhar, and Michael Klein, as well as ulpan faculty and administrative support.[30] A few days later (September 6–13), Spicehandler and Klein took students to the north of the country to tour historical and religious sites.[31] Such tours around the country continued throughout the school year.

After the High Holy Day break, the school held dedication exercises on October 13 to mark the completion of the new residence halls.[32] This featured Israeli heads of state—most notably Prime Minister Golda Meir—politicians, supporters of the College, and board members.

[28] William Gwinn Dever (b. 1933) served as the director of the Harvard Semitic Museum–Hebrew Union College excavations at Gezer in 1966–1971, 1984 and 1990.

[29] Interview with Margie Meyer, June 8, 2020. Michael A. Meyer was born in Berlin, Germany and grew up in Los Angeles, where he received his B.A. (with highest honors) from UCLA. His doctorate is from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. From 1964 to 1967, he taught at the Los Angeles campus of HUC-JIR. Since 1967 he has been on the faculty of HUC, Cincinnati, where he is currently the Adolph S. Ochs Professor of Jewish History Emeritus.

[30] HUC-JIR Salaries 1970-71, Ms20 A1a-157/ Budget, AJA.

[31] Ezra Spicehandler, interim report to Nelson Glueck, October 26, 1970, Ms0663.022.022, AJA.

[32] Stone, “Ayn Zo Aggadah,” 102.

Both Glueck[33] and the prime minister delivered speeches about their support for Israel and the connection between Israel and the larger world Jewish community.[34]

Classes began in November with a finalized curriculum. Students were divided into eight groups based on Hebrew ability. Participants took twenty hours a week of ulpan and two hours a week of liturgical Hebrew. For the lower levels, an additional four hours of instruction was offered. For more advanced students, lessons were taught on sections from Deuteronomy, Rashi, and Midrash. In the second part of the year, ulpan was scaled down to ten hours a week, with the other ten focusing on Bible and rabbinical literature. Ulpan was under the direction of Yigal Yannai[35] and administered by Israeli ulpan teachers.[36] One of the first courses offered was on

[33] Nelson Glueck, address given at the dedication exercises October 12, 1970 at the Hebrew Union College Biblical and Archaeological school in Jerusalem, MS-20 A1a-172/1, AJA.

[34] Ibid. Golda stated that "The Hebrew Union College is to be congratulated for having instituted its Year in Israel program for its Rabbinical students. The program is an imaginative innovation to forge more strongly links between Israel and American Jewry. Together with our own youth, the students of the College will learn the great secret of our being one people wherever we may be."

[35] Yigal Yannai (1937–1995) was an Israeli linguist. He received his Ph.D. from Hebrew University and served as the Scientific Secretary of the Academy of the Hebrew Language in Jerusalem before coming to work at Hebrew Union College.

[36] Stone, "Ayn Zo Aggadah," 118.

modern Judaism.[37] An elective on Torah reading and hazzanut was also offered.[38] Many of the students had only a marginal understanding of Judaism or even Reform Judaism; it was therefore necessary to give them some orientation to Jewish history and Reform thought in a country where Reform Judaism was not normative and most Israelis either did not know about Reform Judaism or were biased toward Orthodoxy.

As an informal part of the program, Spicehandler and other faculty conducted weekday and Shabbat services that were all in Hebrew, including the sermon. They were not widely attended. As Spicehandler noted, "the vast majority of students have not been synagogue attenders prior to their arrival."[39] Spicehandler would often provide a summary of the sermon in English as well. Services were meant to increase the amount of Hebrew that students and others were exposed to, as well as provide an opportunity for Israelis to experience a progressive approach to Jewish worship.

The Year-in-Israel Program from the School's Perspective

It did not take long for tensions to arise between the faculty and the students. When viewed within the larger context of the program's very nature, these tensions are understandable. It was then, as it is now, unusual for a professional/graduate program to require a student to

[37] Ibid., 119.

[38] Ezra Spicehandler, interim report to Nelson Glueck, October 26, 1970, Ms0663.022.022, AJA.

[39] Spicehandler interview with Stanley Chyet, p. 12, SC-11842, AJA.

move to and live in another country for an entire academic year.[40] The program was not only an introduction to the Hebrew language (for many students had a limited background) but a larger introduction to Israel, the College, and their new roles as rabbinical students. These competing and congruent goals could often clash, leading to stress among students and faculty about the program's goals and priorities. Added to this was the fact that the College—at least the director of the Jerusalem program, among others—felt that the students came to the program with a limited understanding of Reform Judaism and theology. The school was not blind to possible stress points in this area. Spicehandler commented on this:

> Now we always anticipated the problems of the social adjustment of the students to the Israeli environment and the problem of the general ideologies of the Reform Movement. I mean by that we knew that American Students living in Israel would encounter certain disappointments as a result of their contact with the Israeli community, that their Reform Jewish commitment where it existed, and I must say for many students, the commitment was pretty weak, would be challenged by the objective Israeli situation as well as the people they meet.[41]

In addition, the reality was that the Jerusalem school was not ready to adapt to this new generation of student and felt somewhat blindsided by the quick social change that had occurred in the student body. The incoming students were very influenced by the events at Kent State and the student revolts. They did not trust the administration and were emboldened to question policy decisions on campus. This created a tension between students and faculty, which faculty

[40] Ibid., 24–25.

[41] Ibid., 1.

attempted to resolve by working with a student-elected committee that represented the student perspective. Students objected to the requirements of a term paper, but their largest objections came in response to the cumulative exam at the end of the year.[42] As Spicehandler recalled:

> The students in 1971, in fact the youth of 1971, are a very different group. They make tremendous demands. They want to be treated like adults and then they want to be treated as children. And it is as difficult for the older faculty members to understand the student as it is difficult for the students to understand the older faculty member. On the one hand the student will tell you, "I am an adult, and you can't talk to me this way," and on the other hand would come in and pour out his heart like a ten-year-old child to you and ask for your advice and direction....
>
> There are damn old rules. There used to be rules. There was a professor, there was a student, and the professor was right. The student was making the request and the demand and if he didn't get it, he might have resented it, but he knew the line of authority. I think the contemporary student no longer knows that nor does the professor, and this is the source of a great deal of uneasiness and criticism on both sides.[43]

By the halfway point of that year, confusion and tension among the students and school were reaching a critical point. Stanley Chyet, who visited the Jerusalem campus that year, noted this:

---

[42] Ibid.

[43] Spicehandler interview with Stanley Chyet, p. 22, SC-11842, AJA.

> From the very beginning of my arrival here in January I sensed on the part of many of the students, a feeling again it's impossible to know how general this feeling was—its impossible to know how general any feeling was, but I did sense sometimes … a feeling on part of the students, not the students but students that the administration was not open to them, that the administration tended to be unfriendly to them that they didn't feel the people on the administration and on the faculty also liked them.[44]

Another significant event affecting faculty and students alike was the death of Nelson Glueck from cancer on February 12, 1971. Glueck did not know that he was ill until almost the end of 1970. In fact, he had built an apartment on the Jerusalem campus where he planned to retire. The Board of Governors chose the dean of the Los Angeles campus, Alfred Gottschalk, to become the school's next president.[45]

Meeting its Goals?

From the program's inception, its primary goals were to overcome rabbinical students' difficulties in learning Hebrew and to expose them to the reality of the Jewish state. To this end, the school was largely successful. In fact, it would be difficult for students not to advance their Hebrew skills while living in a country where it is the spoken language, combined with the curriculum that required many hours of intensive study.

---

[44] Chyet interview with Spicehandler, 1970, SC-11842, AJA.

[45] Meyer, *A Centennial History*, 243.

To its credit, the school had to figure out a program that largely had no road map. This was only exacerbated by the complexity of having three different regional stateside campuses and a large, complex, and multilayered bureaucracy. From the perspective of the College, the strongest proof that the program succeeded, even with its challenges, is that it continued after the death of Glueck and the ongoing financial challenges. In reviewing the program at the end of the year, Spicehandler stated: "It is, of course, premature to come to a final conclusion about the program but I believe that is already clear that it has, this far, proved to be very successful. It promised to achieve its purpose of making our students more learned Reform Rabbi and better Reform Jews."[46] This was confirmed by an assessment the College did on the class of 1975, which concluded that "[v]irtually, all of the respondents, despite the problems of the program praise the Israel experience as one of the high points of their lives. They- readily acknowledge that they learned a great deal, and that the program is an enormous success."[47]

Creating the program and requiring that Reform rabbinical students spend a year in Israel helped to inform generations of rabbis about life in the Jewish state and the living Hebrew language. Implementing this program helped to radically shift the already-moving pendulum of American Jewry's opinion of and interaction with Israel. These shifts were reflected both in the new and subsequent changes to the prayer books as well as in increased Hebrew usage and the steady reclaiming of more traditional practices in Reform Judaism. HUC-JIR's rabbinical

[46] Spicehandler, Report on the Year in Israel program for entering Rabbinical students, November 4, 1971, Alexander Guttmann papers, MS-663, box 22 folder 22, AJA.

[47] Profile of Faculty Questionnaire on Israel program, Alexander Guttmann papers, MS-663, box 22, folder 22, AJA. February 24, 1976.

program was part of a larger trend of American Jewish institutions deeply engaging with Israel.[48] Even with all the challenges it faced that first year (and even more so now as the program enters its fiftieth year), its impact on the American rabbinate has been profound.

[48] JTS decided to require its rabbinical students to attend a year in Israel during the middle of 1970. Jack Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel," *American Jewish Yearbook* (2008): 12. Yeshiva University the leading Modern Orthodox Institution did not require its students to spend a year in Israel. However, it was very common for its participants to spend a year in Israeli yeshivot before they began their rabbinical studies at YU. Lawrence Grossman, "The Rise and Fall of Torah U'Madda," *Modern Judaism* 41, 1 (Feb. 2021): 71–91.

Chapter 3: HUC-JIR Students in Israel, 1970–1971

Having thus far looked at the institutional side of the Year-in-Israel inaugural program, this chapter examines the 1970–1971 year from the perspective of the students and offers the reader the "feel" of that experience from those who lived it. This section is largely based on student testimony and interviews conducted by the author. Unfortunately, not all students from this class were able to be interviewed, so this section highlights the general experience of that year rather than an exact representation from all who participated.

A questionnaire was sent out to forty-two of the seventy participants whose emails were able to be obtained. Twenty-one rabbis responded with an interview or by completing the questionnaire. The author conducted seventeen interviews by Video technology or phone. Both the questionnaire and the interviews focused on the rabbis' backgrounds before they attended HUC-JIR; their motivations to become a rabbi; connections to and opinions of Israel, Zionism, and Hebrew; and how the program influenced their lives personally and professionally.

In analyzing the data, a few themes come to light. There was a range of Hebrew proficiency among the students; however, many came to the program with little to moderate knowledge of Hebrew, Israel, or Jewish philosophy. In addition, the year was experimental and the students were not always clear about the goals outside of Hebrew learning. As we saw in the last chapter, mixed messages about the academic program led some to feel deeply confused if not angry, which led to tensions between faculty and students. These were compounded by the political and social climate of the period. Even with these tensions, there were some bright areas. The students recalled the trips Michael Klein led as a highlight of the experience. The program was largely successful in improving most of the participants' modern Hebrew skills, and most

participants remember the ulpan positively. The program, for many, left a strong impression about Israel, Zionism, and Jewish peoplehood that impacted their rabbinates, and it created lifelong friendships that influenced their personal and professional lives.

Background of Participants and Motivations for Entering Rabbinical School

The students of the first Year-in-Israel class came from myriad backgrounds and political ideologies and had varied expectations about the year that lay ahead. Most of the participants did not know each other, and a fair number had never been to Israel before.[1] The College's aggressive fundraising for the program meant that many, if not the majority, of the first-year participants were paying little to nothing for the year.[2]

It is difficult to tell the story of the beginning of the Year-in-Israel program from the perspective of the students without discussing the Vietnam War and the student protest movement against it.[3] Many of the Year-in-Israel participants had been actively involved in protests at their undergraduate schools, where there was a flurry of antiwar activity, including at

[1] Paul Golomb, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[2] "Nelson Glueck alav ha-shalom who died while we were there, and you know the president's apartment at 13 King David was built as Glueck's retirement apartment. (Laugh) He had raised the funds so that all of us had a free ride the first year and because he wanted everyone to come, to be able to come." Neal Borovitz interview, July 16, 2020.

[3] Neal Borovitz interview, July 16, 2020.

times violence on campus. From this environment of political unrest and activism, many of the first Year-in-Israel program participants emerged.

One of the few ways to avoid the draft was through enrollment in a religious seminary. The College attempted to weed out applicants who were only interested in the rabbinate because they did not want to go to Vietnam. However, more applicants were able to slip through than the school may have been comfortable admitting. As Joshua Goldstein stated, "Our class was bolstered in its numbers by the motivation to seek a draft deferment. At that time, we were an eclectic group."[4] Although over seventy students began the program, not all of them were ordained.[5] The number of students seeking to avoid the draft was noticeable enough that the staff later were named them "Ho Chi Min boys."[6]

The College was obligated to provide chaplains for the military. HUC-JIR rabbinic alumni had a long history of chaplaincy service during World War II and the Korean War. Rabbinical alumni who met the military requirements were required to serve as chaplains for two years after their ordination.[7] The chaplaincy program began to lose popularity within HUC-JIR and the CCAR during the Vietnam War and the period leading up to the inaugural Year-in-Israel program. [8] Some of the Year-in-Israel students who had been active in antiwar activities on their

[4] Letter from Josh Goldstein to the author, May 19, 2020.

[5] Ben Lefkowitz interview, July 16, 2020.

[6] Ibid.

[7] The school had a lottery system to assign who would have to serve as a chaplain. Brown and Kutler, *Nelson Glueck*, 196.

[8] Ibid., 197.

undergraduate campuses before coming to HUC-JIR took this revolutionary spirit with them to Jerusalem.[9] The political tensions were only heightened by the Kent State massacre on May 4, 1970, when the Ohio National Guard opened fire on a crowd of Vietnam War protesters, killing four Kent State University students and injuring nine others. This led to a large number of students organizing and protesting the war, causing many campuses to shut down.[10] The aftermath of this event was very fresh in the minds of some in the incoming class. Neal Borovitz recalled:

> Ezra [Spicehandler] really didn't know how to be, he had no concept of what American college students were like coming out of the protest years against the war etc. You know our class was 1970 and we didn't have or most of us didn't have graduation ceremonies because of Kent State.
>
> Yair: Were you involved in any of those protests on campus?
>
> Borovitz: Yeah, I was involved in Vietnam protests and racial justice action in Vanderbilt.[11]

In this context, students began to protest the war and the draft on HUC-JIR's campus, with some students organizing against the war and others threatening to return their draft cards.[12]

---

[9] Neal Borovitz, Interview with Yair Walton, July 16, 2020.

[10] https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/kent-state-shooting (accessed February 17, 2021).

[11] Neal Borovitz Interview, July 16, 2020.

[12] In the spring of 1968 students on the various campuses participated in the Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam. A climatic moment came, in December when a student at the

While some in that class were motivated by a desire to avoid the draft, many were genuinely driven to serve the world and the Jewish community. Martin Beifield points to this desire as his own motivation:

> My 1968 answer to that question was I wanted to fix the world. OK and I thought becoming a rabbi was going to be either a vehicle for or an opportunity for achieving that. I mean that's the simple answer. I thought things were pretty awful and that we had to fix the world and I could do it this way.[13]

The 1970 class was just one year away from the famous Woodstock festival that marked the high point of the hippy and counterculture movement in the United States. This generation sought to upend norms of religion and society. It was this energy and outlook that many of the soon-to-be first-year HUC-JIR students took with them to Israel.

The increased involvement with Israel in the United States after the Six-Day War was another motivating factor for many of the participants to become rabbis.[14] Before 1967, a large percentage of the students had a personal connection with a rabbi or a congregation growing up,[15] and some of their families were heavily involved with synagogues. Additionally, many had

---

Cincinnati school stood up in the chapel and proclaimed that he was sending his selective service card back to the local draft board and would face the consequences. Brown and Kutler, *Nelson Glueck*, 197.

[13] Martin Beifield Interview, June 24, 2020.

[14] Josh Goldstein interview, July 9, 2020.

[15] Alan Alpert interview, July 13, 2020 and Eric Wisnia interview, July 14, 2020.

some prior connection to the Reform movement either through camps or youth groups.[16] Although the vast majority of the students came from a Reform background, the College attracted some from the Conservative or even Orthodox movements.[17]

The student body had a wide spectrum of exposure to Israel before the 1970–1971 academic year. Some participants had done part of their undergraduate study in Israel at Hebrew University or in Tel Aviv,[18] and others had grown up with a Zionist background.[19] On the other end of the spectrum were students for whom Israel was completely outside their prior experience.[20] Beifield, for example, said that for him, Israel was "a place on the map. I had no relatives in Israel, I had no connection to Israel, so it was like Mars to me."[21] Others were very excited to go to Israel for a year of study.[22] Lawrence Englander responded, "It was my first visit to Israel, and I was looking forward to it."[23]

---

[16] Michael Perlmutter, July 20, 2020 and Martin Beifield interview, June 24, 2020.

[17] Neal Borovitz interview, July 16, 2020 and Jay Rosenbaum interview, July 15, 2020.

[18] Ben Lefkowitz interview, July 14, 2020.

[19] Joel Schwartzman interview July 14, 2020. "I attended a Zionist Yeshiva in Borough Park," Jay Rosenbaum interview, July 15, 2020.

[20] "My flight to Israel was actually the first time I ever flew in an airplane." Henry Karp, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[21] Martin Beifield interview, June 24, 2020.

[22] Laurance Edwards, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[23] Lawrence Englander, response to questionnaire, 2020.

Many incoming students had a limited exposure to and understanding of modern or classical Hebrew. Jonathan Stein said that he had memorized his bar mitzvah Torah portion. Upon his application to HUC-JIR, he knew only the most basic Hebrew.[24] His experience was typical for many who were interviewed and matches the College's understanding of the Hebrew level of many of its incoming freshmen.

Student Life in Israel

It is important to note that not all student learning during this year occurred within the classroom or under the supervision of faculty. Much of the learning, according to interviews and testimonies, occurred organically during the day-to-day lived experience of being an American Jew in Israel. Many of the students arrived in Israel on a chartered flight from New York. A bus picked the students up and they were escorted to a Hebrew University dorm that was within close walking distance to the HUC-JIR campus on King David street. The dorms had central heating, washing machines, and a TV lounge, which was unusual at the time, as well as a shared kitchen for students to cook their own food.[25] Not all students loved the dorm accommodations: "Sometimes we ate at the dorm, but the dorm was disgusting. We didn't want to spend a lot of time in that kitchen—at least I didn't want to."[26] While most of the students came to the program unmarried, a small number moved to Jerusalem with their wives and were not placed in the

[24] Jonathan Stein interview, July 12, 2020.

[25] Richard Sarason interview, March 20, 2020.

[26] Martin Beifield interview, June 24, 2020.

dorms.[27] Israeli life was much sparser than many Americans had been used to. Finding familiar foods was also a challenge in 1970s Jerusalem. Hamburgers were hard to find, as was ice cream that was palatable.[28]

The Hebrew University dorm had many Orthodox students, many of whom were dorm mates of the new HUC-JIR students.[29] As a policy, HUC-JIR students were encouraged to live with Israelis, and for many this was not only the first time they interacted with Israelis but was also the first close interaction with Orthodox Jews.[30] Not all interactions with the Israeli Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox communities were positive. Joel Schwartzman recalled one particularly negative incident:

> Went to Mea Shearim [ultra-Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem] to buy books, so here I am going back to 16th century Poland and I'm in this bookstore and I'm buying these books I'm not sure I have a yarmulke on my head I probably do because I'm in Meah Shearim and this Orthy says to me what are you doing with these books? I didn't know what the hell to answer him. I really didn't know what to say. I think I was stupid enough to tell him I was going to HUC. He all but spat on me and I turned to him and I said something to the effect of it is forbidden to

[27] Email from Laurence Edwards, February 12, 2021.

[28] Ibid.

[29] "Unmarried students were (mis)placed into a Hebrew Univ dorm for Dati students." Martin Beifield interview, June 24, 2020.

[30] "I knew some Conservative Jews. But I certainly didn't know one Orthodox Jew. They were as alien to me as martians." Martin Beifield interview, June 24, 2020.

shame somebody in public and it was like putting up an electronic shield he backed away from me immediately.[31]

During school breaks many students traveled around the country or worked on kibbutzim. Some students also volunteered at the Bet Shemen Youth Village to tutor Israeli high school students.[32] Students become frequent visitors to a local restaurant (Gali) that was owned by Egyptian Jews. The owners would let the students practice their Hebrew on them as they cooked schnitzel and other foods.[33] Some students became so close to the owners that they were invited to the grandson's brit.[34]

Another part of the experience was regular attendance at services on Shabbat and weekdays, usually led by Spicehandler with a student choir and a cantor. At the start of the year, students did not participate in services; as the year progressed, they developed a minor role. The whole service, including the sermon, was in Hebrew. Afterward, the sermon would be explained in English. This was a shock for students who grew up with English being the main language of prayer, and the service itself was more traditional than many in the United States.[35]

As the year progressed and students were exposed to other rituals and customs, some began to experiment with different forms of observance, including wearing kippot and putting on tefillin. Laurence Edwards recalled that "Dr. Spicehandler was upset that some of us started

[31] Joel Schwartzman interview, July 14, 2020.

[32] Lawrence Englander, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[33] Joel Schwartzman interview, July 14, 2020.

[34] Lawrence Englander, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[35] Margie Meyer interview, June 8, 2020.

putting on tefillin that year. I think he saw it as regression toward the Orthodoxy he had left behind; for us, it was part of experimenting with our Jewish practice and expanding our Jewish identity."[36] As there were few liberal synagogues in the Jerusalem, students would sometimes attend Orthodox synagogues for Shabbat. For some students, it was their first time encountering kashrut and traditional Jewish practice. Beifield said: "What did I know about kashrut? I knew nothing, I knew I couldn't have cheese on my turkey sandwich although you probably couldn't have gotten turkey in Israel in those days. You couldn't get a hamburger."[37]

For many, a key part of their experience was their interactions and trips throughout the country and the Sinai with Michael Klein. Klein came to HUC-JIR Jerusalem initially as an archeological student with the HUCBAS. He would succeed Spicehandler as the dean in 1981 and would keep that position until 1998.[38] During the first Year-in-Israel program, he was the primary guide and educator for the student trips. Klein also taught classes on Talmud and rabbinics.[39] Many of the students would agree with Beifield's statement:

> Michael Klein … was excellent and he was a gifted tour guide, he took us all over the country. All over the country we took these multiday trips to the Galilee, multiday trip to the Negev, to the Sinai, we'd have these walking trips all over

[36] Laurence Edwards email to Yair Walton, February 12, 2021.

[37] Martin Beifield interview, June 24, 2020.

[38] http://huc.edu/news/2000/11/01/huc-jir-mourns-passing-dr-michael-l-klein (accessed February 19, 2021).

[39] Ben Lefkowitz interview, July 14, 2020.

> Jerusalem all throughout the year. That was the best part of the whole year. He was fantastic.[40]

Many of the participants expressed that Klein was their connection to Israel and helped to make Israel "real" for them. In their testimonies, they remembered him fondly:

> One of the wonderful things about that year was that I think we all grew attached to Israel; I think we all grew attached to Israel I would have to tell you primarily, at least for me personally, because of Michael Klein. He taught us how to appreciate what Israel could mean, what Israel meant to a lot of people, he exposed us to the life—you know, to Israel horizontally as well as vertically and he was a mensch, he was accessible to us.… He made it more than a Hebrew program.[41]

Challenges

The Year-in-Israel program was an experiment not only for the students and faculty of the College, but also for American Reform Judaism, which, in the past, had had a lukewarm feeling toward the Jewish state. Criticisms and areas of improvement were naturally to be expected. Based on the data, a few critiques emerge, particularly about the academic requirements and the leadership of the Jerusalem campus. Students felt the program was disorganized, and thus the expectations from the institution were unclear. There was also a general feeling that Spicehandler was overwhelmed by the new program and was perhaps ill-suited for the position of dean.

---

[40] Martin Beifield interview, June 24, 2020.

[41] Ben Lefkowitz interview, July 14, 2020.

Finally, the student culture was not in line with the institutional culture, which led to a clash between the College and the students over the final exam.

The theme of disorganization runs through many of the interviews and responses. As noted in the prior chapter, students did not receive much information about the program before their initial meeting in New York. As such, they did not have a good idea of what to expect in Jerusalem. Often, the information given to students would change from one day to the next, even regarding the degree they would earn upon completion of the program or the number of years it would take to reach said degree. Some students received conflicting information as to whether the program was five or six years long.[42] This would cause confusion when students returned to the United States. The participants knew beforehand that they would be learning about Hebrew and Israel, but many felt unclear on other goals.[43] While many felt positive toward the Hebrew

[42] Eric Wisnia, "we were told that it would be a six-year PhD program." Interview with Yair Walton, July 14, 2020. Yair Walton: "Did you know what type of program you were in? Did they tell you how long it was going to be, and what degree you were getting?" Jeff Elson: "There were times when it seemed as if it was a six-year program; there were times when it seemed like it was going to be a five-year program. Everything was unresolved." Jeff Elson interview, July 17, 2020.

[43] "The experience and you know being be'aretz was unmatched, but as far as the content of the academic program, it was sloppy, disorganized. It was a mess very often." Ibid.

program, classes outside of ulpan felt more disjointed.[44] Michael Greenwald relayed this in his response:

> It was fairly clear that the school had not actually agreed upon what the nature of the Year-in-Israel Program was to consist of. Initially, it was to be the 5-hour/day, 5-day/week ulpan, but after about a month, someone somewhere (Jerusalem? Cincinnati? New York?) decides that we need to have additional course work. So after about a month, we were told that we had to take two additional courses—any courses—but we had to take two. The course menu seems to have been established based on what faculty happened to be around. The courses (I took a course on Reform Judaism with Mike Meyer and an archaeology course with Bill Dever) were well constructed, but there was no curricular cohesion among them.[45]

Richard Sarason, who was a student and a teacher during the 1971–1972 academic year, noted this lack of organization. Sarason pointed out that in the first years of the program, the College just used the faculty and staff it had available at the time for the academic non-ulpan portion of the program. Steve Garten affirmed this when he said that some of his lasting

[44] "We were all given an evaluation exam at the outset and split into eight classes, depending on degree of proficiency. I was right in the middle, which was a fascinating place to be. But the non-ulpan courses—they were the ones having problems; they were the ones that needed revision because it seemed that the goals of the year had never been clearly defined. You know, they wanted us to have Hebrew; they wanted us to have some exposure to Israel." Ibid.

[45] Michael Greenwald, response to questionnaire, 2020.

reminiscences of the program were the friendships, the lack of organization, and HUC-JIR's inability to understand that 1970 Jerusalem was not Towanda in another city.[46]

As noted previously, the College was strapped for cash. This led to the students' hearing conflicting rumors about increased tuition.[47] Then, toward the end of the year, an issue developed around health insurance premiums. Students on the Los Angeles campus had to pay much higher rates than students in Cincinnati. This led to more confusion and stress, as students worried about their financial situation after Jerusalem. There was a continued theme of uncertainty about the program in Israel and what the rabbinical program would look like upon their return.[48]

This disjointedness showed up in other areas of the program as well. Some students' confusion over the length of the program and the degree earned continued into the second year. Eric Wisnia explained that his whole class was given an unexpected master's degree during their second year in Cincinnati in 1972 as a way to settle the ongoing issue of what degree the students should receive.[49] Yet a similar degree was not discussed with students from the New York or Los Angeles campuses.

---

[46] Steve Garten response to questionnaire, 2020.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Eric Wisnia: "when it came time when we were starting to plan to go back, you know, they said, 'Well, what's the rest of the program going to be like?' And they'd tell them 'We don't know. You'll find out when you get home." Interview, July 14, 2020.

[49] Ibid.

Regarding the leadership of the Jerusalem campus, in particular with Spicehandler as dean, a number of the respondents felt that he was overwhelmed and out of his element. Most participants liked Spicehandler personally but saw how overwhelmed and short staffed he was in this new role as a director of such a large program:[50]

> Ezra was in over his head. Nevertheless, I think that we all kind of felt benevolent and sorry for him. He never wanted this program; Nelson thrust it upon him and then had the "bad graces" to die just as we got there!
>
> Ezra had been running a nice, quiet little Biblical and Arch. School for older students, forever. He was totally "plugged in" to the Israeli establishment and used his "connections" to smooth a lot of our way. Now, suddenly and without his asking for it, he got handed 70 wild and crazy college graduates entering Rabbinic school. We, and Ezra, had no idea what to expect.[51]

By his own admission, Spicehandler was not a natural administrator. He noted that he found it difficult to transition from being primarily a teacher to being an administrator:

> Let me put it this way after having the four years prior experience, of a rather intimate relationship with the student without those kind of administrative walls

[50] "The program, itself, was disorganized and poorly directed. Ezra Spicehandler was a brilliant and a lovely man but not a skilled administrator. He was way out of his depth." Martin P. Beifield Jr. interview, July 2020.

[51] Email from Eric Wisnia, February 12, 2021.

between them (words missing in the interview) I subconsciously resented the new role.[52]

Spicehandler's difficulties with the large increase in class size and his role within this experimental year was a recurring theme in many interviews. Richard Sarason, who was a participant in the program's first year, recalled a fellow student who was looking for tutoring in Hebrew. Spicehandler looked at a list of student names and chose one as a possible tutor, only to be told that he had chosen the student sitting before him asking for guidance. That Spicehandler did not know who all the students were is only one clear indication that he was overwhelmed and unhappy running the program.[53]

The disorganization and confusion that characterized much of the inaugural year eventually coalesced around an unpopular final cumulative examination. It is unclear if the students knew about this exam from the start of the program, but its unpopularity showed up in many of the interviews and responses to this project. The test required a grade of at least 70 percent to continue the program stateside.[54] The pressure was significant, as failure could mean dismissal or having to repeat a year. In recalling the controversial exam, Jeff Elson said, "It wasn't clear. As a matter of fact, Spicehandler had said he would be happy to drop the exams, but we were made to understand that the Cincinnati faculty raised a ruckus demanding that those

[52] Ibid.

[53] Richard Sarason interview, March 20, 2020.

[54] Stone, 121.

exams take place, and of course they did. So, you can imagine what those students going to Cincinnati were thinking."[55]

The students of the 1970–1971 class had gone through a cultural shift that made them want to be activists in their own education rather than just accepting their professor's word at face value. Interviewees explained that their perception was that the faculty did not listen when they tried to give input and feedback.

> It was clear they didn't know what they were doing. OK, I figure from the day one that they were inventing it as they were going along. They got us there, they didn't know how to land this plane, and I suspect aside from everyone's disorientation … we might have welcomed the opportunity to participate in how to land the plane. Or to give reasoned feedback, you know [but] none of us were trained to give reasoned feedback in 1970, we were trained to give unreasonable feedback because we were trained that the authorities really didn't want our feedback and that was true at HUC. They didn't really want our feedback.[56]

Not all of the students contributed to the tension between teachers and the students. Alan Alpert explained that many students were coming out of the turbulence of the American college system who were primed "to buck authority and were anti-establishment, but he was not among them."[57] But the sense of tension recurred many times during the participant interviews.

---

[55] Jeff Elson interview, July 17, 2020.

[56] Martin Beifield interview, June 24,2002

[57] Alan Alpert interview, July 13, 2020.

By the middle of the year the deans of the stateside campuses came to visit. The students met with President Gottschalk and "he got an earful. He was very, very unhappy about what he heard.… I don't think he was ready for some of the comments, that's for sure. But he said he doesn't like much of what he heard, but he's glad he heard it."[58]

Positive Outcomes

Despite the frustrations experienced by the students, it would be incorrect to say they had an overall negative experience in Israel. Rather, many of the participants interviewed spoke favorably of their time there, recalled positive experiences, and reported that several aspects of the program helped mold them into the rabbis they would later become. Many saw the opportunity to go to Israel for a year favorably.[59] Participants who were asked about their progress in Hebrew that year gave varied responses. Some stated they felt prepared to continue their learning once they returned to the United States.[60] Others reported not having learned as much Hebrew as they would have wanted.[61] Still others stated they learned an amazing amount of Hebrew that year.[62] Responses indicate that the students who came into the program with some Hebrew background, either from their upbringing or undergraduate studies, were able to

[58] Jeff Elson interview, July 17, 2020,

[59] Paul Golomb, Steve Garten, Laurence Edwards, Responses to Questionnaire 2020.

[60] Josh Goldstein, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[61] Steve Garten, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[62] Laurance Edwards, response to questionnaire, 2020.

advance further and feel more confident when they returned stateside. Those who went on to study on the New York campus could continue their progress, as that campus offered classes taught in Hebrew.[63] This was not the case for Alpert, who continued his studies on the Cincinnati campus, which did not offer modern Hebrew classes.[64] For some, the experience with modern Hebrew was life-changing: "Hebrew became part of my life," said Wisnia.[65] Another participant stated that "it was a breakthrough in terms of language and getting to know Israel."[66] Some stateside campuses were challenged by having to teach students with better Hebrew proficiency than previous classes. It also presented a challenge to the faculty's authority, according to Michael Greenwald:

> My sense was that the Cincinnati faculty, at least, had always been able to use Hebrew as a mechanism for keeping students in a very subordinate role.… The faculty did not know quite what to do with a student body that understood Hebrew, however rudimentarily, as Hebrew instead of trying to learn it as a code for English.[67]

Beyond improving their Hebrew, participants reported achieving other positive outcomes. Many noted how the experience gave them a larger picture of the Jewish people and a sense of Jewish peoplehood—something that was either lacking or underdeveloped before the Year-in-Israel

---

[63] Ibid.

[64] Alan Alpert interview, July 13,2020

[65] Eric Wisnia Interview, July 14, 2020.

[66] Laurance Edwards, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[67] Michael Greenwald, response to questionnaire, 2020.

program. For some, this was their first opportunity to interact with Jews outside of the American Reform movement, and it gave them a deeper understanding of what it meant to be part of a world Jewish community. Many would agree with Garter, who said that "it [the program] gave me an enriched appreciation for non-Reform perspectives on Jewish theology and ritual. It deepened my sense of peoplehood."[68] Wisnia stated that after this, he "was no longer an American, I was a Jew who lives in America."[69]

In terms of Zionism, many respondents said that the experience of living and studying in post-1967 Israel shaped them personally and professionally and solidified their commitment to the Jewish state. "Although my family was Zionist before I went, I came back with a much deeper love of Israel and Zionism. This has been a core of my rabbinate," wrote Englander.[70] Echoing this, Paul Golomb said, "It was a comprehensive introduction to Israel. Possibly the most lasting component of the year for me was that it engendered a genuine and lifelong identification with Zionism."[71] Many of the participants returned to Israel after that year either on personal trips or organized trips for their synagogue or organization.[72]

One of the more telling responses about the new connection to Israel came from Henry Karp:

---

[68] Steve Garten, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[69] Eric Wisnia interview, July 14, 2020.

[70] Lawrence Englander, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[71] Paul Golomb, response to questionnaire, 2020.

[72] Eric Wisnia interview, July 14, 2020.

The more I shared with others about my Israel "adventures," the more I realized how much I looked forward to returning. One evening, as I was starting to prepare for my return to Israel, I referred to the trip as "going home." That put my mother in tears. Though I felt horrible about hurting my mother in that way, it was the moment at which I confronted just how much I did love my time in Israel and my commitment to Israel. I returned to the Jerusalem campus with a completely transformed attitude about my Israel experience.[73]

[73] Henry Jay Karp, response to questionnaire, 2020. "As a direct result of that experience, my connection to Israel became one of the central aspects of my Jewish identity. I left the program with the belief that one's Jewish identity will always remain incomplete without spending time in Israel. Jews need to visit Israel in order to fully understand what it means to be a Jew. As Jews, we need to "touch" the history of our people and our faith. We need to come to appreciate the central role that Israel plays in the continued survival of our people.

Conclusion

The year 2020 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the HUC-JIR Year-in-Israel program. Like any new initiative, its beginnings presented both challenges and rewards to all involved. This thesis is an attempt to provide a historical inquiry into the reasons and forces and personalities that gave rise to the mandatory Year-in-Israel program. It seeks not only to tell the story of the creation of the program from the perspective of the institution but also of the students. And finally, it aims to itemize the program's successes as well as its trials, with the overall goal of demonstrating how this innovative experience influenced the lives of the rabbis who participated in it.

Summary of Chapters

This work discusses how the presidency of Nelson Glueck was a pivotal factor in the creation of the school's Year-in-Israel program. After the establishment of the HUC-JIR Jerusalem campus, more and more students began to voluntarily spend a supplementary year of study in Jerusalem. This caused some professors to question the best use of a new Jerusalem campus. For many years prior to creating the Year-in-Israel program, the College had been struggling to provide rabbinical students with better Hebrew competency, which they would need in their chosen profession. In this regard, the school first partnered with universities to create a dual degree program. This was later scrapped for a summer intensive program first located at Towanda, Pennsylvania, and subsequently on the Cincinnati campus. A study-in-Israel program was always on Glueck's mind, and with the creation of the Jerusalem campus, the post-Six-Day War

excitement, and the change of attitudes in the American Jewish community about Israel, he was able to finally make this idea a reality.

In some respects, this program was also a reaction to the larger feeling within the CCAR and the UAHC that rabbinical education at HUC-JIR needed to change and modernize to address the shifting needs of the American Jewish community. This led the school to reassess its curriculum, and this initiative contributed to the creation of the Year-in-Israel program. Glueck and others were able to rally American and Israeli support to make this program a reality.

Ezra Spicehandler was a well-known and highly respected figure within the school and Israeli society. He became the director of the Jerusalem campus, where he oversaw various scholars visiting the school along with a handful of HUC-JIR students. The 1970–1971 Year-in-Israel class presented Spicehandler and the Jerusalem staff with significant logistical and cultural challenges. The class was about three times larger than any the campus had managed before as well as much younger, with most of the students having just completed their undergraduate programs. The students left their undergraduate campuses amid a high level of unrest over the Vietnam War, protests of racial injustice, and antiestablishment sentiment, and many brought that spirit of activism with them to Israel. Spicehandler and others had to put together a program while balancing ideological and communication problems between the three stateside campuses and the resources available to them in Israel. Although Spicehandler's position was stressful, he nevertheless made Hebrew acquisition a priority through weekly sermons and worship services conducted almost entirely in Hebrew.

The students came to the program with diverse backgrounds and motivations. A fair number were there to avoid the draft and/or had participated in antiwar and antiracist activism on their campuses stateside. Many questioned authority, and there was tension between students and

staff around many issues. Students saw the program—outside of Hebrew learning—as disjointed, disorganized, and lacking communication. The year was filled with an array of controversies and conflicts, which were exacerbated by confusion over whether students would receive a master's degree or a doctorate at the end of their program of study. The overall uncertainty led students to protest the final exam.

Despite students' dissatisfaction with parts of the academic program, they fondly recall the friends and connections that they made as well as the trips throughout the country led by Michael Klein. They reported that their year in Israel had strengthened their commitment to the Jewish state, and they agreed with the school's assessment that their Hebrew had improved greatly during that year. Finally, the College concluded that the Year-in-Israel program was an a success.

Findings

One of the goals of the Year-in-Israel program was to improve students' Hebrew, which most participants said was successful. But for many the program had a secondary effect—it created a deep connection to the Jewish state and Zionism that infused much of their rabbinates and personal lives. Many of those who participated in the program's inaugural year subsequently led trips with their organizations or synagogues back to Israel over the course of their careers. In retrospect, the alumni of this innovative program viewed their year of study in Israel as one of the best years of their lives.

On a larger scale, the creation of a Year-in-Israel program contributed to the reclamation of traditional rituals in American Reform Judaism. For some participants, it was their first time interacting with Orthodoxy and traditional Jewish practice. The Jerusalem campus's liturgical

changes pushed more and more rabbis and, ultimately, the Reform movement itself to use more Hebrew in ritual and prayers. The Israel experience also helped more Reform rabbis adopt their own personal approach to observing kashrut, Shabbat, and more traditional prayer.

The Year-in-Israel program was part of a larger trend among American rabbinical seminaries and the American Jewish community to engage deeply with the Jewish state in the aftermath of the Six-Day War. Now at fifty-plus years, the Year-in-Israel program is undergoing a new shift brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. But it would be hard to visualize an American Judaism that has not had thousands of its rabbis living and studying in Israel for a year.

Areas for Further Research

There is still much work to be done on this topic. The author did not have access to faculty notes from this period and did not have time to explore fully the thousands of pages of letters, Glueck's personal diary, transcribed Board of Governors minutes, and other primary sources. A further review of these materials would yield a harvest of useful data for those interested in the history of HUC-JIR, rabbinic education, and the evolution of American Jewry after 1967.

How to engage with Israel and how to encourage Jews to embrace their Jewish heritage are perennial questions that occupy the minds of many Jewish educators. Although this work was limited by the time and scope of the project itself, there is a wealth of information—faculty correspondence and the minutes of faculty meetings that contain debates over how the Year-in-Israel program should be constructed—awaiting future scholars who are interested in the development of rabbinical curricula in America. Additionally, scholars who are interested in the political and institutional shift of the American Jewish community post-1967 would find much to learn in the archival material that was sourced for this project. Finally, this author hopes that the

interviews conducted for this project will be of use to future researchers studying Jewish and rabbinical education in the 1970s.

The study of past innovations within Reform Judaism and their impact on the religious and cultural practices within the movement are of great importance, as it illuminates the ripple effect of history on current events. Furthermore, the study of the history of Reform Judaism allows leaders within the movement to learn from such undertakings and use these lessons to direct change and progress in a direction that is of value to Jews around the world. It is now up to future scholars to take on further research into the abovementioned texts to effectively implement growth and development in Reform Judaism—in the United States, in Israel, and in the world at large.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Martin Beifield Response to questionnaire undated 2020

Laurence Edwards Response to questionnaire undated 2020

Laurence Edwards email to Yair Walton, February 12, 2021

Lawrence Englander Response to questionnaire undated 2020.

Steve Garten Response to questionnaire undated 2020

Josh Goldstein Response to questionnaire undated 2020

Paul Golomb Response to questionnaire undated 2020

Michael Greenwald Response to questionnaire undated 2020

Henry Jay Karp Response to questionnaire undated 2020

Martin Beifield Interview with Yair Walton June 24, 2020.

Neal Borovitz, Interview with Yair Walton July 16, 2020.

Jeff Elson Interview with Yair Walton, July 17, 2020.

Josh Goldstein, Interview with Yair Walton July 9, 2020.

Ben Lefkowitz interview, with Yair Walton July 14, 2020.

Margie Meyer Interview with Yair Walton, June 8, 2020.

Michael Perlmutter Interview with Yair Walton July 20, 2020.

Jay Rosenbaum, Interview with Yair Walton July 15, 2020.

Dr. Richard Sarason, Interview with Yair Walton March 20, 2020.

Joel Schwartzman, Interview with Yair Walton July 14, 2020.

Jonathan Stein, Interview with Yair Walton, July 12, 2020.

Eric Wisnia, Interview with Yair Walton July 14, 2020.

Spicehandler Ezra Interview with Stanley Chyet, 1970, SC-11842, AJA.

MS-20, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Records, 1936–2016, AJA.

MS-663, Alexander Guttman papers, 1908-1988, AJA.

HUC-JIR Nearprint Admissions and Student Affairs, 1960–1970, AJA.

Secondary Sources

"100 Rabbis. Educators and Cantors Graduate from H.U.C. J.I.R.," Jewish Telegraphic Agency (June 7, 1960), https://www.jta.org/1960/06/07/archive/100-Rabbis-educators-and-cantors-graduate-from-h-u-c-j-i-r.

"A Brief History of the Hebrew University." https://en.huji.ac.il/en/page/452, accessed February 5, 2021.

"Glueck, Nelson," Wikiwand, accessed October 21, 2020, https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Nelson_Glueck.

"Higher Education in Israel: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem," https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hebrew-university-of-jerusalem#2, accessed February 5, 2021.

"HUC-JIR mourns the passing of Dr. Michael L. Klein." http://huc.edu/news/2000/11/01/huc-jir-mourns-passing-dr-michael-l-klein.

"Kent State Shooting." https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/kent-state-shooting

"Our History." https://nfty.org/about/history/

"Reform Jews to Establish School of Oriental Research in Israel." JTA, August 4, 1954. https://www.jta.org/1954/08/04/archive/reform-jews-to-establish-school-of-oriental-research-in-israel.

"Reform Rabbis Will Study Means of Making Synagogue More Relevant to Us Jewry." https://www.jta.org/1969/06/23/archive/reform-rabbis-will-study-means-of-making-synagogue-more-relevant-to-us-jewry

"U.S. Jewish Communities Report on Their Speedy Response to Israel's Crisis." *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, June 12, 1967, www.jta.org/1967/06/12/archive/u-s-jewish-communities-report-on-their-speedy-response-to-israels-crisis?_ga=2.167087934.1828095127.1602031529-1184258955.1601340841.

Brown, Jonathan, and Laurence Brian Kutler. *Nelson Glueck: Biblical Archaeologist and President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2006.

Dever, G. William. *My Nine Lives: Sixty Years in Israeli and Biblical Archaeology*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020.

Donitsa-Schmidt, Smadar and Maggie Vadish. "North American Students in Israel: An Evaluation of a Study Abroad Experience." *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 11, no. 1 (2005): 33–56.

Fein, Leonard J. *Reform Is a Verb: Notes on Reform and Reforming Jews*. New York: UAHC, 1972.

Glueck, Nelson. "President's Message to the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the CCAR." *CCAR Yearbook* (1969): 7–8.

Grossman, Lawrence. "The Rise and Fall of Torah U'Madda." *Modern Judaism* 41, 1 (Feb. 2021): 71–91.

Karff, Samuel, ed. *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1975.

Katz, Emily. *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture, 1948–1967*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2015.

Kelner, Shaul. "The Impact of Israel Experience Programs on Israel's Symbolic Meaning," Contemporary Jewry 24, no. 1 (2003): 124–155.

Meyer, Michael A. *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: A Centennial History 1875–1975.* Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992.

Sherrard, Brooke. "American Biblical Archaeologists and Zionism: The Politics of Historical Ethnography," doctoral dissertation, The Florida State University, 2011. https://fsu.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fsu:183526/datastream/PDF/view.

Stevens, Elliot. “The Prayer Books, They Are A’Changin’.” *Reform Judaism*. 2006. https://www.ccarpress.org/content.asp?tid=471.

Stone, Ariel. “’Ayn zo Aggada’: A History of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem 1954–1990. Rabbinical thesis, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, 1990.

Syme, Daniel. “Growth of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in the U.S. and Abroad.” Rabbinical thesis, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, 1972.

Wertheimer, Jack. “American Jews and Israel: A 60-Year Retrospective.” The American Jewish Yearbook (2008): Pg 108