

Opinion

A trip that united

By David Berman

Hillel at Binghamton and Muslim Student Association collaborated on the "Visit a Mosque/Visit a Temple" event on March 9, sponsored by the Avi Schaefer Fund. Twelve Hillel students and 12 students from Muslim Student Association spent the afternoon together, visiting Masjid Al-Nur in Johnson City and meeting with Imam Anas Shaikh, then visiting Beth David Synagogue in Binghamton and meeting with Rabbi Zev Silber. Two students, Munira Pulodi, of Muslim Student Association, and Andrew Davidov, of Hillel, shared their reflections on the event.

By Munira Pulodi

Muslim Student Association, in collaboration with Hillel, organized a wonderful event that Muslim and Jewish students attended on March 9. The trip included a visit to the mosque in Johnson City and the Jewish Orthodox synagogue. It was a fantastic idea to bring two religions together and share our commonalities. I never thought that Judaism and Islam have so much in common. Moreover, I was able to make friends and ask them questions on Judaism, as well as share my experience as a Muslim.

We went to the mosque first, where Imam Anas Shaikh, the Islamic leader, showed us the inside of the building. As his brother explained, the simplicity of the design inside

the building was created intentionally as to allow Muslims to have a closer connection to Allah. Students were eager to have their questions answered. Shaikh and his brother were highly informative about Islam. It was surprising for many to see the Islamic leader as an active member of the community and a full-time student on campus. Hearing his story made me realize that if one truly loves something, he or she will find time for it. Shaikh had many responsibilities, such as conducting marriages and prayers, teaching classes, attending meetings and providing counseling, and yet he seemed passionate about helping others to better understand their religion and themselves.

After our trip to mosque, we went to the temple where Rabbi Zev Silber, the Jewish Orthodox leader, welcomed us. He, as well, was very informative. I learned plenty of information on the role of women and men in Judaism, religious ceremonies, the sacred book of the Torah and the structural design of the synagogue. As Silber compared and contrasted both religions, students were prepared to ask questions and clarify some facts. The overall visit was wonderful, and we even ran out of time to finish our discussion.

Observing so many students interested in learning about Islam and Judaism made me think that we should have more educational

programs on campus that will allow students to learn about different religions. It is great to be knowledgeable about our own religion, but we should also strive to be aware of other religions. This learning process can generate many great discussion questions as well as bring people together. We all strive to develop healthy relationships with one another, and they come with our acceptance of personal beliefs and values of other human beings.

By Andrew Davidov

Walking into the mosque of the Islamic Organization of the Southern Tier, I expected intricate stained glass windows of religious prophets, a podium with special seating for the imam and an arc with scriptures of the Koran. What I really saw was a room with walls only painted beige, carpet with diagonal lines on them to hint at participants of prayer where they should face and a clock allowing the congregation to know the time for prayer. The focus on the spirituality aspect of prayer and its connection to God forbids any earthly objects in the room of prayer.

Being raised in a conservative Jewish home in central New Jersey, I was never exposed to a mosque before. It was not the physical structure of the mosque that made

me think the most, but the pride in which the representatives of the Muslim Student Association and the imam of the mosque took in their home of communal prayer and social gatherings. The imam and his brother, also an active Executive Board member of Muslim Student Association, were born and raised in Binghamton and attended the mosque since they were children. Now, they are becoming young leaders of the community. It was inspiring to hear how loyal and dedicated they are to their community.

Their sense of pride and positive communal gathering is not so far off from my own feelings toward my Jewish community, back home and in Binghamton University. Whether a student is active in Hillel, Maimonides, Chabad or all three, there is a strong Jewish presence on campus. The amount of opportunity offered by these three organizations is unique and huge in itself. It is an honor to be active in these organizations and to be able to teach my Jewish values and learn from other communities around Binghamton. I hope events with Muslim Student Association and other cultural, ethnic and religious groups continue for students campus wide to continue an understanding of peace and equality for all.



Hillel at Binghamton and Muslim Student Association members visited the mosque Masjid Al-Nur in Johnson City during a joint educational program.



Hillel at Binghamton and Muslim Student Association members on an educational visit posed outside of Beth David Synagogue in Binghamton.

Letters

Hillel Academy a gem of a school

To the Community:

We are writing to let you know about our gem of a school. Hillel Academy has served Binghamton for more than 50 years, providing the best in secular and Judaic education. We are proud to continue our tradition of excellence, while constantly working to improve our school.

Our exceptional faculty teaches to each student's learning style. We offer mixed classrooms and our students thrive in our dynamic learning environment. As a small, private school, we customize each student's learning experiences, allowing for maximum growth and development. We pride ourselves on training our stu-

dents to be lifetime learners, instead of test-takers.

We offer foreign language instruction in Spanish and Hebrew, music, science, social studies and Jewish learning, all beginning in kindergarten.

Information is available online on our website, <http://HillelAcademyBroomeCounty.org>, and through Facebook and YouTube under "Hillel Academy Binghamton."

Even better, call our office at 722-9274 to set up a visit of our school. The office is open from 8:30 am-3:30 pm.

Sincerely,

Julie Piaker, administrator

Coreen Sines, education coordinator

A Jewish approach to the "differently abled"

By Sid Schwarz

(JTA) – Increasing numbers of Jewish institutions are starting to pay attention to the disabled in our midst.

As with so many categories of Jewish teaching, the traditional Jewish approach to disability is a mixed bag. Several categories of the disabled, like the *cheraysh* (deaf-mute) and the *shoteh* (mentally deficient and/or insane) are neither obligated by the body of *mitzvot* (Jewish commandments) nor qualified to serve as witnesses in legal proceedings, essentially being placed in the same category as minors. The blind are obligated by the *mitzvot*, but are not allowed to offer testimony in a trial.

In other places in our tradition, a disability or a disease is seen as a punishment from God for bad behavior. Leprosy is the punishment for tale-bearing. Similarly, in the Talmud

(Taanit 21a) a story is told of Nahum Ish Gam Zu, who had no hands, no feet and was blind in both eyes. These disabilities were not birth defects, but were rather divine punishment inflicted on Nahum at his own request because he felt guilty for not being quick enough to feed a beggar who ended up dying.

A third way that the Jewish tradition discusses disability is essentially used as a theological trump card. It is a way of saying that God's agency in the world is far more significant than human agency. Thus despite the fact the Moses is said to be "slow of speech," possibly a person with a speech impediment, he nonetheless offers the most important words in the biblical story. The rabbinic commentators use this to make the point that Moses is simply an agent for God, serving as God's spokesman in the earthly realm.

See "Approach" on page 7



Dr. Arieh Ullmann, President
Sima Auerbach, Executive Director

www.jfgeb.org

The Reporter Editorial Board

Robert Neuberger, chairman
Aaron Alweis, Rebecca Goldstein Kahn,
Ben Kasper, Bruce Lercher, Richard Lewis,
Dora Polachek, Paula Rubin

HOW TO REACH US

Mail – The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Rd. Vestal, NY 13850

E-mail – TReporter@aol.com • Fax – 607-724-2311

Phone – 607-724-2360 or 800-779-7896

Extension#/Department – 1. Advertising 2. Business Office
3. Art Department 4. Circulation 6. Editorial/News



OPINIONS

The views expressed in editorials and opinion pieces are those of each author and not necessarily the views of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton.

LETTERS

The Reporter welcomes letters on subjects of interest to the Jewish community. All letters must be signed and include a phone number; names may be withheld upon request.

ADS

The Reporter does not necessarily endorse any advertised products and services. In addition, the paper is not responsible for the *kashruth* of any advertiser's product or establishment.

DEADLINE

Regular weekly deadline is noon, Wednesday, for the following week's newspaper.

Executive Editor Rabbi Rachel Esserman
Layout Editor Diana Sochor
Assistant Editor Michael Nassberg
Advertising Bonnie Rozen
Production Coordinator Jenn DePersis
Graphic Artist Alaina Cardarelli
Bookkeeper Gregory Senger

Proofreaders

Barbara Bank, Eleanor Dursee, Fran Ferentinos,
Leah Ferentinos, Rebecca Goldstein Kahn, Merri Pell-Preus,
Heidi Thirer, Ellen Van Iderstine

"The Reporter" (USPS 096-280) is published weekly for \$36 per year by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, 500 Clubhouse Road, Vestal, NY 13850-3734. Periodicals Postage Paid at Vestal, NY and at additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Road, Vestal, NY 13850-3734 or reach us by e-mail at TREPORTER@AOL.COM.

www.thereportergroup.org