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innovative and expansive visions.

Strong Roots

That's not to say Hillel of Metro Detroit has lost its way.



Hannah Fine

At the lounge dedication, sophomore Hannah Fine, a Detroit resident, talked passionately about how nimbly HMD assists freshmen in meeting other Jewish students and finding a

Jewish niche on campus, through Hillel or otherwise. Programs like "Jewish in the D" and "D360" give students a sense of the vigor of the Motor City — and its vast potential.

Said the biochemistry major: "Kresge Court at the Detroit Institute of Arts has been affectionately dubbed the Living Room of the city. And if Kresge Court is the Living Room, then Hillel has got to be the Family Room. I don't know anywhere else where you can walk in and everyone knows your name, asks you how you are doing; where you can sit down, talk, watch the Tigers; and eat a kosher Passover lunch."

Like Hannah says, "Supporting Hillel means support for the Jewish journey of Jewish students on each of the six campuses of HMD, which is really a big deal."

Hillel of Metro Detroit has plenty to be proud of. Seizing its challenges and highlighting its strengths — while mining the nuggets of its storied history — will help position it for continued excellence. □

On the Ground In Kathmandu:

A personal account.

Only days after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake shook the South Asian nation of Nepal on April 25 — killing nearly 8,000 people (a number that is likely to rise) and injuring more than 17,000 — I flew there with my father, Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky, vice chairman of the educational arm of Chabad-Lubavitch.

It was our plan to meet with Chabad of Nepal's co-directors, Rabbi Chezky and Chani Lifshitz, as part of a strategic visit to the Far East.

Never did we imagine that we'd meet in the middle of a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions, and that the Lifshitzes and a team of about 50 volunteers, many of them Israelis just finishing several years of military duty, would be at the center of a far-reaching rescue-and-relief effort.

I've been to Nepal before, but I quickly realized that this visit would be very different.

When we landed at the airport, it was full of special shipments and Hercules planes bringing aid from various countries. Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport is the only international airport in the country and, with just one runway, it seemed to be quite a challenge to accommodate all of the added traffic.

Driving through the city to our destination, we witnessed immense damage. Words fail to describe the utter destruction that had befallen Nepal. The streets were lined with broken buildings, crumbled homes, personal possessions strewn everywhere — the shells of crushed lives. And we were told that it wasn't even the worst of it; some villages were totally destroyed.

People seemed to be wandering about as if in a daze, trying to make sense of a world that had been turned utterly upside-down in a single day.

Upon arrival at the Chabad center, we were greeted by the Lifshitzes, and immediately sat down to discuss how to continue and expand their rescue work.

With hundreds of thousands of people touring the country annually — many of them young Israeli backpackers who recently completed their army service — the Chabad center has become a de facto embassy for Jewish visitors. But in the wake of the massive earthquake, supplies were rapidly dwindling as so

many people turned to the Lifshitzes for shelter, water, daily meals and medical care.

Throughout our time together, I was amazed by their unwavering and intense focus — the focus of those who have handled crises before.

Although we needed to take multiple breaks to allow them to field urgent phone calls and messages — many of them pertaining to life-and-death situations — each time we continued exactly where we left off, honing in on the nuts and bolts of planning a long-term humanitarian campaign.

One major asset for locating the stranded has been satellite phones. After a sudden blizzard last October killed four Israelis and trapped some 250 others in the mountains and surrounding areas, the Lifshitzes began keeping a supply of such phones, giving them to backpackers who stop in beforehand at the Chabad center. They have served as a key tool in finding people stuck in the middle of hikes and climbs, or in this instance, remote places.

Later in the day, we accompanied a group of volunteers from the Chabad center on a visit to one of the poorest areas of the city. There, we joined them in distributing water, rice and fruit, which serve to both nourish and hydrate. Some have constructed rickety cloth tents for themselves. Others sleep under the open sky. It was heartbreaking to see the situation of these people, many of them young children, not knowing when their next drink of water will arrive.

I was completely stunned with how the locals I met — many of whom had lost loved ones, their homes and more than that, any resemblance of normalcy — were handling the situation. They were calm, collected and extremely grateful for everything we did to assist.

We concluded our 10-hour stay with a visit to the Israeli field hospital that was flown in from Israel with 260 military medical personnel. It brings a great



The author, Rabbi Mendy Kotlarsky (center), his father, Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky (right), vice chairman of the educational arm of Chabad-Lubavitch, and Rabbi Chezky Lifshitz (left), co-director of Chabad of Nepal, are in discussion with a member of the medical team at the Israeli field hospital that was flown in from Israel.

deal of pride to see what the Israel Defense Forces have done in such a short amount of time, though for those familiar with the IDF, their tremendous capabilities are not surprising. During our time at the field hospital, we also arranged for the hard-working soldiers to use Chabad's facilities, particularly in preparation for Shabbat.

On the way back to the airport, as I glimpsed the shuttered stores and newly homeless citizens from the dusty taxi-cab window, I was reminded of the first time I left home to learn at the International School for Chabad Leadership in Detroit. Each Friday, as part of a program instituted by the Lubavitcher Rebbe — Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory — we would visit the homes of Jewish elderly immigrants, many of Russian origin, in an effort to create personal bonds with often isolated members of the community.

It is this very same ideal — reaching out to others in less fortunate circumstances, the collective responsibility for every Jew and every human being — that has inspired and continues to motivate me to do the work I do. And it never ceases to touch a chord within.

With news of another powerful earthquake shaking Nepal and with monsoon season fast approaching, I think of the Nepali people and aid workers, whose faces are etched in my mind — impressions I will share with others in the hope that it creates more awareness of those who are less fortunate and encourages people to engage in more acts of kindness, may it be for a stranger one encounters on their way home or a victim of a natural disaster half a world away, each individual and each good deed is infinitely significant. □

Rabbi Mendy Kotlarsky is director of strategic initiatives at Chabad-Lubavitch Headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y.



Rabbi Mendy Kotlarsky

Dry Bones CHEESEY HOLIDAY

AMERICAN CHEESE, BLUE CHEESE, BEL PAESE, BRIE, CHEDDAR, COEUR DE CHEVRE, CREAM CHEESE, CANEMBERT, COTTAGE CHEESE, DANISH BLUE, EDAM, EMMENTAL, FARMER CHEESE, FETA, MOZZARELLA, GOUDA, GRUYERE, LIMBURGER, MUENSTER, PANELA, PARMIGIANO, POT CHEESE,

RICOTTA, PROVOLONE, ROQUEFORT, STILTON, SWISS,

HAVE A HAPPY SHAVUOT

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