

[The Hillel Experience:](#) Hillel's Bar Mitzvah in the FSU

The Jerusalem Post is proud to present The Hillel Experience; a blog which provides a platform for Hillel members to share their experiences on campus.

It was recently my pleasure to celebrate the 13th anniversary of Hillel in the former Soviet Union (FSU) – their bar mitzvah year – with students, volunteer leaders and Hillel professionals in Moscow. Throughout my trip, I got a sense of overwhelming excitement and enthusiasm about our work in the FSU, and not just about our past accomplishments but about the great opportunities that lay before us as we reach out to engage more and more young people in many different ways.

This journey was nothing short of miraculous for me. It seems like only yesterday that I was a Jewish student activist, as young as these students, rallying my campus on behalf of “Soviet Jewry,” which seems such a quaint phrase today. Geopolitics may have brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union, but our efforts helped to provide Soviet Jews with the materials to foster their underground educational work, and our voices provided them with the confidence that someone in the West was advocating on their behalf. The liberation of Soviet Jews and today’s thriving community of Jews from the FSU reinforce my belief that the initiatives we undertake in Hillel today will reach fruition in the years to come.

Back in the bad old days of the Soviet Jewry movement, one publication served as a link between Israel and the Diaspora: The Jerusalem Post. It was smuggled into Russia, read in diplomatic quarters in Jerusalem, and shared on campuses across North America. In the era before the Internet – even before cable television – the Jerusalem Post fed our need for comprehensive information about life among the global Jewish people. Written in English, the Jerusalem Post was a boon to those of us who had not yet mastered Hebrew, wherever we lived. The Jerusalem Post was an information lifeline for activists and for the entire Jewish people.

The Jerusalem Post remains a crucial source of information today. I am thrilled, therefore, that the editors have invited Hillel to have its own blog on The Jerusalem Post site. My colleagues and I hope that this will serve as a meeting point of campus and community; open to all those with a deep interest in Jewish life on campus. Just as the Jerusalem Post speaks to Israel and the Jewish Diaspora, so too does Hillel. Just as the Jerusalem Post crosses all lines of ideology and affiliation, so too does Hillel. We are pleased that the Jerusalem Post recognizes the significant influence and impact campuses and college students have on the Jewish future. We look forward to this new forum for dialogue.

Just as the Jerusalem Post contributed to successes in the past, I hope that this new blog will contribute to the achievement of our new challenge: inspiring every Jewish student to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life.

I now invite you - Hillel students and professionals - to share your thoughts!

B'Shalom,

Wayne L. Firestone

