

Phillip Brodsky

Professor, fellow students,

Everyone in Israel has a cell phone. Why is this? Because Israelis are big on technology? No, it is because they need to be able to get in touch with each other. Think about it, right after September 11th what happened? The networks were busy, it was hard to get a call in, remember. This is everyday life in Israel. There's a suicide bomber, and then the networks are busy. A bus is blown up, and the networks are busy. An attack and every mother and father call their children. It is no coincidence that when you go to any restaurant in the country, cell phones ring relentlessly.

Passover, the recounting of the Hebrew's exodus from Egypt, was just celebrated by Jewish people all over the world. Jews remember the oppression of slavery, the miracle of the Red Sea, and the long nights in the desert. When the Seder, or traditional dinner, is ending all Jews in one voice around the world sing the same line from the prayer book, "Next year in Jerusalem."

I spent the summer of 2000 in Israel. For two months I experienced ancient, medieval and modern Israel. I traveled all over, from the great city of Tel Aviv, to ancient Jerusalem, to the beaches of Eilat, and to the place I left my heart - the Golan Heights. I was never afraid. Back then bombings were not as frequent as they are today. In fact, at the time, I wished that I might never leave the country to come home.

It's a funny thing, when I got home the first Jew ever was appointed to run as vice president, and the new intifada, period of violent acts, started. It really hurt me to see what felt like progress at home and a possible period of Jewish understanding in

America, contrasted with daily acts of violence occurring in a place where I had stood, ate and danced.

There was a metal fence in front of my favorite place to go on a weekend night, a dance club called Pacha. Everyone lined up along the fence, about three people thick, waiting to get in or just waiting around if you weren't old enough to get in. This is where a bomb went off. I had shivers the entire day when I read that story in the paper. I was actually there, I had stood there and wiggled my way through the people to get inside.

Since I have been home the past four years, I have come to college and joined a Jewish fraternity, one just starting to get off the ground. I embraced my fraternity and through it I have learned more than I have in most of my classes. I have learned how to deal and act around people. I have learned how people like to be treated and how to work with different kinds of people.

Most importantly though I am helping Jewish males connect with something that without the fraternity may have been lost: Jewish ideals. Honesty, mutual helpfulness, faith, perseverance, humility. I feel that by giving Jewish men a connection with their religion, one that is not religious, but social and values oriented, I am finding a way to regain the piece of my heart that I left in Israel.

Next year in Jerusalem we say.

What do those in Jerusalem say at the end of the Seder?

They pray for peace.

So many Israelis I have talked to realize that peace will only come with more sacrifice. They want peace now and are willing to give up pieces of a country which is

only the size of New Jersey. The people are willing to create another Arab state, inside of a country surrounded by Arab nations ten times its size.

My message is not a political one. I have not said a bad word about either side. I have met Palestinians who have lost their loved ones as well, and with Palestinian Israelis who want nothing more than peace.

It makes me sad that blowing one's self up is considered martyrdom.

It makes me sad that so many in my own country do not see the whole story. That bulldozing homes was a last resort effort to stop the smuggling of weapons and outlaws in and out of the country.

It makes me sad that even here, at a University that values diversity and the marketplace of ideas that anti-Semitism is still present.

With 200 fellow students at the end of the first Passover Seder at Hillel, the Jewish life center on campus, and with 50 the second night in my fraternity house, I said, "Next year in Jerusalem."

Next year in Jerusalem may I celebrate Passover with my friends and family.

Next year in Jerusalem may there be no bombings.

Next year in Jerusalem may there be peace.

Next year in Jerusalem may my father finally get to see the country he has faced for so many years while he prays.

Next year in Jerusalem may things like the "right of return" and refugee camps be revealed for the political tools that they really are.

Next year in Jerusalem may the Israeli army not have to stand guard.

Next year may we learn a little more about each other.

Next year may the marketplace of ideas rule out the untruths and the hatred here in our own country.

Next year may Americans enjoy their great country of freedoms.

I have been preparing myself to return to Israel since I got home four years ago. Although I have lost touch with many of my friends that I made while I was there, I will never lose touch with the country that grabbed hold of my heart and soul. I take Hebrew here so that when I go to Israel I can give back, by teaching English to young people.

I have my cause, and my dreams. This is what I work for and how I find value in what I choose to do.

Next year may I put it all into action.

Next year may I return to regain that part of my heart which I left.

Next year in Israel may families be able to turn off their cell phones to enjoy an evening of quiet together in celebration of the past.

Next year in Jerusalem, and next year all around the world.