

# Hineini

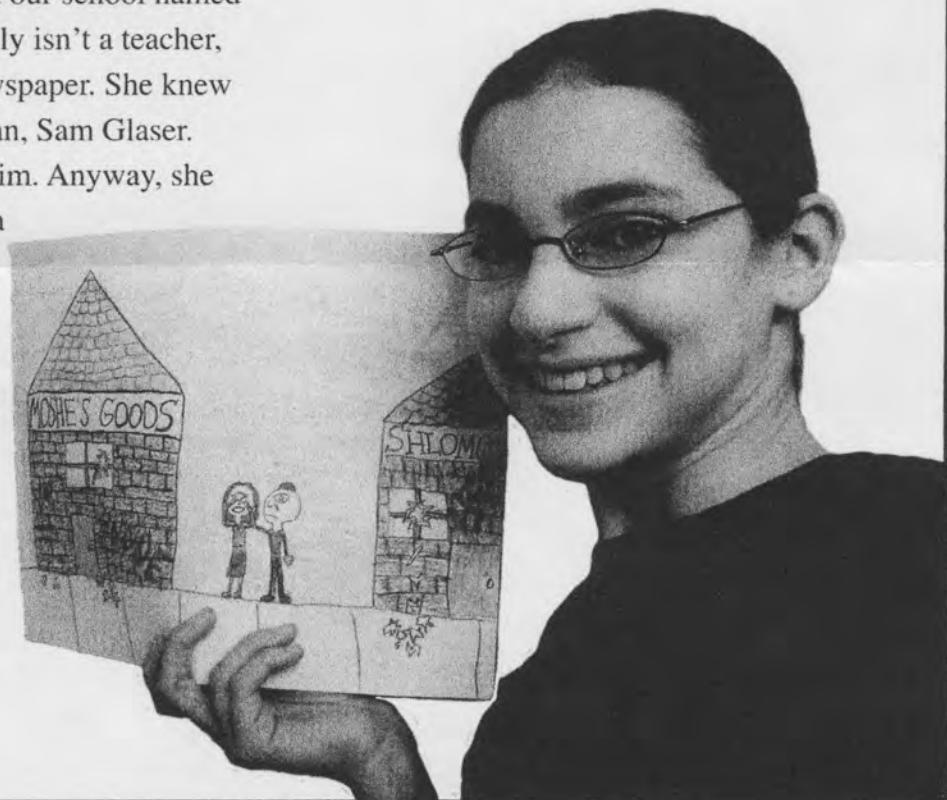
By Talia Lakritz, age 12 from WI

Every year at my school, Hillel Academy, the eighth grade class gets the opportunity of a lifetime and goes to Israel for two weeks, visiting holy sights, camel riding, ziplining, and more. Naturally, everyone in the school anticipates the event. But it doesn't come cheap. It costs an average \$2,300 per child, and they also have to pay for the chaperone, which is usually one of the teachers. The class has to raise the money, with some help from the parents and staff. Sure, they get grants and things like that but sometimes it's just not enough...

There is a woman at our school named Mrs. Weimer. She technically isn't a teacher, but she runs our school newspaper. She knew a Jewish singer and musician, Sam Glaser. Maybe you have heard of him. Anyway, she came up with a great idea: a concert performed by Sam Glaser to raise money for the Israel trip! Sam generously volunteered to do the concert at no charge.

Everyone in the school pitched in to make the concert even more special. The kindergarten

to second grade sang along with Sam for one song. The middle school boys played drums and guitar to other songs. And last, but not least, the third to sixth grade (I was in sixth grade at the time) illustrated a line of a song called 'Hineini' (I am here) that would then be projected on a big screen as Sam sang the line. We each received a line from Mrs. Wiemer to draw a picture of. I was randomly given the line 'I wasn't there on the eve of KIRSTLNACHT.' KIRSTLNACHT, or Night of Broken Glass, was at the beginning of the Holocaust.



Germans shattered windows and painted swastikas on Jewish stores and homes. It was a very gloomy and sorrowful night.

I immediately got to work, making sure every detail was perfect. There were two storefronts, Moshe's Goods and Shlomo's. I thought those names sounded right together. There was a young couple crying. And swastikas on each store. Not to brag or anything, but it was probably the best picture I've ever drawn. I was proud of my work.

The night of the concert, I was very excited. But they saved the presentation for last! I focused on the concert, which was outstanding, and soon enough, it was time for the big moment! As the screen came down, I expected to see a title page or something, but to my surprise, I saw...my picture! I was shocked and confused. What was my picture doing up there?!

Sam explained, "When I saw this drawing, I was shocked, and started weeping. The names on the storefronts are Moshe and Shlomo. Those are the names of my two great uncles, who survived the horrors of Auschwitz (a camp). They just recently passed away. Whoever did this must have had the Divine Presence above them."

I sank slowly in my seat. My friends were all telling me, "Talia, that's awesome!"

"That's so cool!" "Talia?"

I was too shocked to answer them. I was struck with a feeling for Hashem that I've never felt before. That He truly is watching

over us, and cares for every single one of us, as if you are the only person on Earth. I had never truly understood that until that day. I went to meet Sam after the concert. "You

really freaked me out!" He told me. "How did you know?"

"I don't know myself!" I answered truthfully.

The concert was a huge success. The eighth grade class had the time of a lifetime, a trip they will truly remember forever. I anticipate my trip of a lifetime, G-d willing, next year.

Hashem sent me a message that day. "Hineini," "I am here." ❀

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