

I remember reaching back, touching the wall, seeing signs in Hebrew, knowing most everyone in the pool and watching was Jewish, and feeling a tremendous sense of being at home. That was my Maccabiah moment 24 years ago at the 1993 games. It was because of that moment that I became a Rabbi, because of that moment that I returned again this summer to spend two of the most rewarding weeks of my life with Team USA and fellow Team Rabbi Tina Sobo, helping athletes find their moment, their connection to the Jewish people and to Israel.

What does a team Rabbi do? At Kikar Rabin, I spoke to a group about my own experiences being in Israel in November 1995 when Prime Minister Rabin (z"l) was assassinated, and I jumped from bus to bus-meeting athletes and answering questions. We helped the team celebrate Shabbat on Friday night and bring in the new week with havdallah on Saturday night. We conducted a short service at Yad VaShem mourning six million Jews murdered just a few generations ago, and later that day, in the foothills of Jerusalem, we celebrated the Magerman B'nai Mitzvah where nearly 200 athletes ascended to the Torah, some for the very first time, affirming their commitment to the Jewish tradition the Jewish people and God. As that service came to an end, everyone was restless for dinner but we paused for a moment and I shared with them the deepest Torah of my heart:

"There are too many forces telling us that our lives don't matter, that what we do can't make a difference. But the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:5) teaches that each one of us must day about ourself, "העולם נברא בשבילי. There is an essential human dignity that comes from God and you never even taken away. Each of us has a role to play and I pray that experience the games helps each of our athletes to find their place in Israel, amongst the Jewish people and in a broken world in need of healing and love."