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A private moment with God

Ben-Eliezer visits the Western Wall, singer Yehoram Gaon talks about the paparazzi, and Metzger entertains tots at a Seder

GRAPEVINE

By GREER FAY CASHMAN

■ POLISH AMBASSADOR **Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska** hosted a reception last week for Spark Pro, an Israel-based organization that works with the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the British Council, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jezreel Valley Academic College and several other entities in an ambitious exchange program between young Poles and young Israelis aged 21-35 to change their perceptions of each other, to learn to know each other and each other's cultures and to form friendships. The program is the brainchild of **Boaz Yardeni**, the son of Holocaust survivors, who believes that while we should not forget the painful chapters in Polish-Jewish/Israeli history, it is time to write a new positive chapter.

It is amazing how ignorant people from both countries are about each other. Some 25,000 Israeli youth go to Poland each year to visit the death camps, he said, and their whole perception of Poland is that of a graveyard. They see very little of the new, modern Poland. Similarly, said **Timothy Rabinek**, one of the Polish young people who participated in the program, Polish people's image of Israel is shaped by what they see on their television screens – mainly war and guns. Poles are surprised to discover a very different Israel, said Rabinek, who fell so much in love with the country that he's now living here.

Tal Grayevsky of Migdal Ha'emek, who also participated in the program, is the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors and grew up with a negative image of Poland. She was happy to have been on the program, "because this enables you to see the positive side."

Ten Israelis and 10 Poles spend an intensive week together in each other's countries. They live in a guest house, eat together, go out for coffee or a beer together, go to concerts, art shows, lectures and the beach, and learn about each other's countries and each other as human beings. Many of the participants will hold key positions in the future, says Yardeni, and this will bode well for both Poland and Israel. Spark Pro conducts "before" and "after" surveys to see how the views of participants have changed – and the results are astounding.