

# At The Crossroads

One-man program offers ideas about common Jewish questions.

**Maayan Jaffe**  
Staff Reporter

**S**hlomo Horwitz is the director of finance for a Columbia software company. Though analytical and detail-oriented, Mr. Horwitz lets his creativity shine through during each 45-minute Jewish Crossroads session.

Transformed into the Jewish historical figure of Rabbi Akiva, an Israel Defense Forces paratrooper or even a Messianic Jew, Mr. Horwitz spends his free time onstage "to build Torah awareness."

He founded the Jewish Crossroads organization in 1992 for teens at his synagogue, Shomrei Emunah. It was so successful that Mr. Horwitz, a Greenspring resident, began marketing to other venues. He has put on presentations at synagogues ranging from Beth Tfiloh and Har Sinai, as well as across the country, in Florida, Colorado, California, Washington and New York.

Mr. Horwitz carries along a Hollywood director's slate and slaps it down before going into character. He does not wear elaborate costumes. Yet, "if everything works well, they forget [who I really am]," he said.

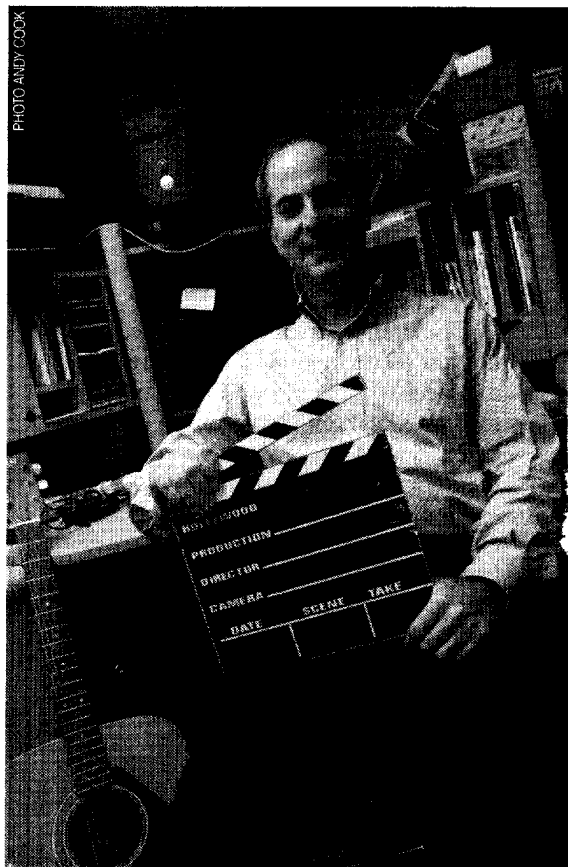
Mr. Horwitz's programs range in topic from Jewish history to Israel and Torah values. In one program, "Jihad!" he becomes a Palestinian campus activist talking about growing up in Beit Sahour near Hebron. Enumerating why he has devoted his life to the Palestinian cause, the

character denies the Holocaust and glorifies suicide bombings.

"I say things so nasty and provocative, they start yelling at me," he said of his audiences, which can range in age between teenagers and senior citizens and are of any denomination. One time, he said he was even physically threatened.

When his Palestinian act is over, Mr. Horwitz slaps his director's slate down again and transforms into 12th-century Jewish thinker Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, sharing the scholar's take on whose land Israel is. Then, there is discussion.

"By the time the audience leaves, they have understood what the conflict is to some degree, and they are better informed on both sides," said Mr. Horwitz.



With Jewish Crossroads, Shlomo Horwitz says he hopes to inspire Jews about their history and heritage.

The presentations, a listing of which can be found on his Web site ([jewishcrossroads.org](http://jewishcrossroads.org)), are not off-the-cuff. Mr. Horwitz spends hours researching each character, consulting original texts, stories and experts.

"I'll try to give a montage of a person's character, the way they viewed the world and the legacy they left," he said.

Mr. Horwitz is not a trained actor. Most of his techniques were learned from books. But he said he thinks drama is a great way to spread Jewish thinking.

"I watched a lot of television and movies when I was a kid and I was always captivated by how the screen can transport you to a different land, different place, different time zone," Mr. Horwitz said. "I realized as I got older that that can be harnessed as a tool to give Jews the tools they need to confront the modern world."

Grappling with Jewish questions is something Mr. Horwitz did from a young age. He said when he was in high school, many philosophical questions surfaced within him. And though he was in an Orthodox day school, he felt they were not being answered. So he went to study in Israel, and as rabbis and teachers guided him and "I got answers to my questions, I wanted to share them with other people."

Larry Ziffer, executive vice president of the Center for Jewish Education, became familiar with Mr. Horwitz's work years ago when his youngest children participated in presentations. He described Jewish Crossroads as engaging, creative and interactive, albeit unconventional.

"There are these cute things that he does, which are a little out of the ordinary, that create this different kind of learning atmosphere," said Mr. Ziffer. "He challenges the kids to identify with the characters."

On the Jewish Crossroads Web site, others who have used Mr. Horwitz's services share similar sentiments.

"My mission is simply to strengthen Jewish life and values," said Mr. Horwitz. "I want to inspire people and help them see what Torah has to say." □