



Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel

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Masorti Foundation Co-chairs

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Bold Wedding Advertising Campaign Excites Israelis



Courtesy Adir and Sarit Melamed. Under the chuppah with Rabbi Tamar Elad-Appelbaum.

In a media blitz that directly challenges the official State Rabbinate control of weddings in Israel, the Masorti movement urged Israelis to “Play the Wedding Game.” The ads, which appeared on radio and Internet sites, directed prospective brides and grooms to a website that invited them to design their own “dream wedding.” After selecting a venue, special invited guest, menu and way to make a grand entrance, couples learn they can also choose to have a ceremony that is at once fully halakhic and egalitarian and respectful of personal preferences.

Couples are advised to have a civil ceremony performed outside of Israel to supplement the Masorti chuppah so that their marriages will be legally recognized by the State. They are informed that if they want to divorce, they will need a get. They are also encouraged to sign a pre-nuptial agreement which sets forth monthly financial penalties

for any party refusing to free the other in the event of a divorce. This pre-nuptial agreement would be subject to the authority of the civil courts.

“Our young people are being driven away from traditional marriage ceremonies by the difficulty of dealing with the Office of the Chief Rabbinate,” observed Masorti Executive Director Yizhar Hess, outlining the goals of the campaign. An estimated 20 percent or more of Israelis each year choose to live together as couples outside the framework of the Office of the Chief Rabbinate, either by not participating in any wedding ceremony or by limiting themselves to a civil ceremony in Cyprus or elsewhere.

Enormous early response to the campaign indicates that Masorti’s Wedding Initiative, under the direction of Rabbi Tamar Elad-Appelbaum, has indeed struck a chord. Within the first week, there were more than 30,000 unique hits to the website, and staff in the movement’s Jerusalem office answered nearly 200 phone calls from interested couples. In addition, there has been widespread media attention in Israel and the Anglo-Jewish press.

Delighted by the fact that word is getting out, Rabbi Elad-Appelbaum remarked, “It is critically important to make all Israelis aware that this religious alternative exists.” ❖

Yedid Nefesh in Modi'in Makes History as First Masorti Kehilla to Receive Government Funds for New Building

There was a great deal of excitement in May as Kehillat Yedid Nefesh in Modi'in celebrated the unveiling of its new building, the first Masorti kehilla erected with money from Israel's government. Since it was founded eight years ago, Yedid Nefesh had been holding services in congregants' homes and a local kindergarten.

Government approval for the building came during a very brief time several years ago when Orthodox parties could not block such moves by the Ministry of Housing and Construction. For the dedication of the new building, joining the kehilla's spiritual leader, Rabbi Paul Arberman, and Yedid Nefesh members was Bill Lipsey, president of Cong. Agudath Israel in Caldwell, NJ (CAI). CAI was instrumental in making it possible for Yedid Nefesh to reach this historic moment.

As is typical with government building subsidies, 90 percent of the cost of the nearly 2,000 square-foot pre-fabricated structure was covered, with the kehilla responsible for the remaining 10 percent. This came from private donations by kehilla members and a substantial (cont'd. on page 4)

Parents of Children with Special Needs Have Masorti Support System All Their Own

For the youngsters in Masorti's Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program for Children with Special Needs, there is a network of caring professionals who shepherd them through the process that culminates in the exciting moment of being called up to the Torah for an aliyah.

But for parents, juggling the demands of raising children with physical and developmental disabilities with other family responsibilities, it may seem daunting and overwhelming.

That's where Gila Cohen comes in. A licensed social worker, her job is to work with parents to answer their questions and concerns.

"I can sense the yearning parents have to connect with someone who is sensitive to their needs and appreciates their circumstances," said Cohen. "I feel so welcomed by these families who let me know how grateful they are to the Masorti movement for making it possible for their children to have this Jewish enrichment and *bnai mitzvah* experience."

First, Cohen will hold group meetings at participating special needs schools to explain the program and the ceremony and distribute information about the Masorti movement. During that session, parents will also have a chance to do a creative activity to express their personal hopes and dreams for their child, including feelings related to the *bar/bat mitzvah*.

Cohen subsequently will conduct individual (*cont'd. on page 5*)

Rabbi Joel Rembaum Tapped to Head Masorti Foundation's New Rabbinic Cabinet



One of the Conservative movement's most highly regarded rabbis, Joel Rembaum of Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles, has agreed to chair a newly formed Rabbinic Cabinet that will work in tandem with the board of the Masorti Foundation.

Rabbi Rembaum intends to encourage colleagues in the Rabbinical Assembly to disseminate information about Masorti, sponsor Masorti-related programs and plan synagogue missions to Israel that incorporate stops at Masorti *kehillot* and participation in some of the movement's national programs. Something else on Rabbi Rembaum's long-term agenda: a nationwide twinning program, matching Conservative congregations in the US with Masorti *kehillot*.

"We're not talking about simply fundraising, but rather, and equally importantly, the need to raise awareness of the exciting developments taking place in the movement in Israel and facilitating ways communities can witness these, when possible, first-hand," Rabbi Rembaum observed.

Rabbi Rembaum, looking ahead to a sabbatical, beginning July 2009, and retirement from the pulpit the following year, believes he is approaching the perfect stage in his career to jumpstart the Rabbinic Cabinet. In the meantime, in addition to his duties as senior rabbi of Beth Am, Rabbi Rembaum teaches in the Pressman Academy Day School. A Los Angeles native, he returned to the city following ordination in 1970 from the Jewish Theological Seminary and joined the faculty and administration of American Jewish University, then known as the University of Judaism. During a 15-year tenure, he was associate professor of Jewish history and dean of undergraduate studies. Rabbi Rembaum has also taught at U.C.L.A., where he earned bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees; at U.C.-Irvine; and for the Wexner Heritage Foundation.

A member of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, Rabbi Rembaum has served as well as president of the RA's Pacific Southwest Region. His 20-plus-years-long relationship with Camp Ramah in California began when he was a camper and continued with his work as a counselor and division head. He eventually "graduated" to professor-in-residence and member of the camp's board of directors.

Rabbi Rembaum and his wife, Fredi, have four children and six grandchildren.

Torah dedicated at Kotel HaMasorti:



On July 3rd-4th, Rabbi Dan Shevitz, left, and members of his congregation, Cong. Mishkon Tephilo in Venice, Calif., participated in a festive dedication of a *sefer Torah* they sent to Israel in September 2007. The scroll, now on long-term loan to the Masorti movement and in use at the Kotel HaMasorti, was officially welcomed by Rabbis Barry Schlesinger, right, Andy Sacks, director of the Rabbinical Assembly in Israel, and

Deby Grinberg of NOAM, the Masorti youth movement. Rabbi Shevitz presented the Israeli group with a new cover to dress the Torah.

Masorti Foundation Board Welcomes Two

The board of the Masorti Foundation continues to welcome vibrant new leadership with the addition of William L. Lipsey and Toni S. Bickart.



Bill Lipsey has long supported the Masorti movement through his synagogue, Cong. Agudath Israel (CAI) of Caldwell, NJ, where he is currently president. This past May, Bill and his family escorted a sefer Torah on loan from CAI to Israel, where it will be used by Kehillat Ve'ahavta in Zichron Yaakov. Bill also participated in an historic,

festive dedication of a new, government-funded building for Kehillat Yedid Nefesh, the Masorti kehilla in Modi'in. (See stories, pages 4 and 1.)

Bill's other communal affiliations have included service on the executive board of Masorti Olami; the boards of MetroWest New Jersey Federation and MetroWest New Jersey Jewish Family Services; and membership in the Wexner Heritage Foundation and Young Leadership Cabinet of United Jewish Appeal.

For the past dozen years, Bill has been a managing principal and president of Marketing and Client Service of Pzena Investment Management, an institutional investment management organization. A 1980 graduate in economics from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, he earned an MBA in finance in 1986 from the University of Chicago. Bill and his wife, Amy, have three children, Sarah, 22, (to be wed to Yuval Brokman); David, 20; and Joshua, 9.



Toni Bickart, another strong Masorti supporter, participated in a 2006 solidarity mission to Israel, which made stops at 10 kehillot, including those in the northern region targeted by Hezbollah during the second war in Lebanon. President for two years of her congregation, Adas Israel Cong. in Washington, D.C., Toni remains an active member, along with her husband, David.

An educator, writer and corporate executive, Toni is vice president of Teaching Strategies, Inc., an educational publisher specializing in early childhood. She works on special projects for the company where, until recently, she directed product development and production. During her more than 15 years there, she's also co-authored *Building the Primary Classroom*; *What Every Parent Needs to Know about 1st, 2nd & 3rd Grades*; *Preschool for Parents*; *Reading Right from the Start*; and *Math Right from the Start*, and been a contributing author of *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool*.

The Bickarts' daughter, Sarah Bickart, teaches kindergarten in the D.C. public schools; their son, Rabbi Noah Bickart, is currently studying for a PhD in Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Nadia Kahn, have a son, Meir Zeev. ❖

A Message from Masorti Foundation Co-Chair Gloria Bieler



This is a season of new beginnings for Masorti – on both sides of the ocean.

In the U.S., we have welcomed new board members, Toni Bickart and Bill Lipsey. Both Toni and Bill have witnessed firsthand the excitement Masorti has created in Israel, Toni, on a foundation mission in 2006, and Bill, on more than one occasion. In May, he represented his synagogue, Cong. Agudath Israel in Caldwell, NJ, at an historic building dedication in Modi'in. (See story, pg. 1.)

The movement in Israel has been the focus of much media attention for the Wedding Initiative campaign and the, perhaps predictable, strong negative response it triggered from the ultra-Orthodox party, Shas. Notably, enthusiasm for Masorti's traditional, pluralistic, egalitarian alternative to Orthodox wedding rites continues to build among Jewish Israeli couples who have responded enthusiastically to the campaign. (See story, pg. 1.)

At the same time, our Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program for Children with Special Needs has been in the Israeli media spotlight as parents whose youngsters would not otherwise have the

opportunity to be called up to the Torah have publicly expressed their profound gratitude to Masorti for this national initiative.

The biggest problem we face is that with the fall of the dollar, our support for programs in Israel has "fallen" by 25 percent. My hope for the New Year is a reinvigorated funding effort to enable our present success to be followed by an even fuller blossoming in the future.

Shana Tova Umetukah,
Gloria

Sifrei Torah on Loan to Movement Memorialize Shoah Survivors

Call it a posthumous victory. Holocaust survivors – from two different families in the United States – have inspired the permanent loan of two Torah scrolls to the Masorti movement, helping spread Jewish tradition and teaching for future generations in Israel.

That feeling of triumph was perhaps best expressed by Elliot Schnitzer of Chevy Chase, MD, who, with his wife, Evonne, used the celebration of their 60th birthdays as a reason to restore a 145-year-old scroll rescued from a monastery in Kelm, Lithuania. The Torah had been hidden there by a Jewish girl seeking to elude the Nazis by impersonating a nun. (The girl was eventually discovered and executed, but the Torah escaped detection.) Declared Schnitzer, “Our hope is that this Torah will be used by Masorti kehillot throughout Israel for many years to come. For my family, these events are an affirmation of ‘Am Yisrael Chai,’ ‘the people of Israel live.’”



Miriam Avraham and Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg with the Schnitzer scroll enroute to Mayanot.

The Schnitzer family donation was made in memory of Elliot’s father, Stephen, and in honor of his mother, Ethel, now 88 and living in Florida. The elder Schnitzers came to the U.S. in 1946 to



Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg, right, with Elliot and Evonne Schnitzer, who flank the Torah they had restored.

begin their lives anew. The entire Schnitzer clan gathered last Passover, when they celebrated the restoration and rededication of the Torah, before it made the journey to Israel in June.

Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg, now rabbi emeritus of Cong. Adas Israel in Washington, D.C. where the Schnitzers are members, traveled with a group of Adas Israel congregants to personally deliver the scroll to Kehillat Mayanot in Jerusalem.

In a traditional festive ceremony to welcome the Torah to its new home, Mayanot congregants, singing and dancing, escorted the scroll under a chuppah through the streets of their Talpiyot neighborhood, stopping traffic along the way. Miriam Avraham, Mayanot’s chairwoman, called the (cont’d. on page 5)

Yedid Nefesh in Modi’in Makes History as First Masorti... (cont’d. from page 1)

gift from CAI. The building has space for seating for up to about 200 worshippers and an attractive, modern ark. The interior, combining modern and traditional styles, was designed by a member of the kehilla.

Modi’in, located halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, is the fastest-growing city in Israel. It is generally thought of as a secular community.

Lipsey said he was impressed by the relatively young and mixed crowd of sabras and immigrants from English-speaking countries who attended the ceremony. The deputy mayor of

Modi’in came, as did Labor MK Ophir Paz-Pines, who has worshiped at Masorti synagogues in Israel for many years.

“It’s nice that Masorti Judaism is speaking to young Israelis and not just transplanted Americans,” said Lipsey, who unveiled a plaque at the ceremony thanking CAI members for their gift.

A CAI delegation will visit Yedid Nefesh and other Masorti kehillot in February.

“Our community feels blessed to be able to partner in mitzvah projects with Masorti communities in Israel and to build increasingly deep bonds of friendship when we visit one another,”



Naomi Dar, kehilla chair, Bill Lipsey, center, and Rabbi Paul Arberman in front of the new ark in Modi’in.

said CAI’s Rabbi Alan Silverstein, vice chair of the Masorti Foundation, who has made nurturing ties between his congregation and Israel a hallmark of his rabbinate. ❖

3rd Annual Jack Roth Memorial Run Raises Funds for Masorti



Janice, left, and Maren Roth at the race



Bexley, Ohio native Jack Roth believed in not letting life's hurdles get in his way.

"Jack was an activist, in his own quiet way," said his wife, Janice. With the couple's daughter, Maren, she organized the third annual Jack Roth 5K Rock & Run in memory of Jack, who served on the board of the Masorti Foundation.

The event, which this year raised \$40,000 for Masorti's Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program for Children with Special Needs and Netaim, a summer camp program for this population, took place in Bexley on Sunday, June 8th, attended, as usual, by Jack's family and many friends from the town where he grew up. (A portion of the proceeds from the run was also donated to the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital in Columbus for lung cancer research. Although a non-smoker, Jack died of lung cancer in 2004 at the age of 57.) ❖

Sifrei Torah on Loan to Movement... (cont'd. from page 4)

Torah's arrival a classic Jewish tale: "From the ashes, to Israel and renewed Jewish life, it's a symbol of continuity."

Another scroll, commissioned for Cong. Agudath Israel in Caldwell, NJ by Shauna, Harrison and James Wreschner in memory of their grandparents, Holocaust survivors Rachel and Chaim Weiser, meant that Agudath Israel was able to part with one of its existing Torahs. The latter is currently on loan to Kehillat Ve'ahavta in Zichron Yaakov, escorted to Israel in May by CAI President Bill Lipsey, traveling with his wife, Amy, and their children.

The Torah made its debut on the Ve'ahavta bimah on Friday, July 4th, Rosh Hodesh, for the kehilla's first adult b'not mitzvah celebration. Next February, a CAI mission to Israel will participate in the formal rededication of the sefer Torah. That mission will include Leona Wreschner, the Weiser's daughter, with her husband, Herbert. "We are very excited about making our first trip to Israel," said Wreschner, recalling of her parents, "They were always very youthful, full of life and thankful for everything they had," despite the hardships caused by their wartime experience.

David Lissy, executive director and CEO of the Masorti Foundation, commented, "It is amazing how much joy the gift or loan of a sefer Torah can mean. We warmly encourage more congregations in the United States to make such a commitment." ❖

Parents of Children with Special Needs Have Masorti Support System...

(cont'd. from page 2)

home visits where families feel more comfortable confiding their concerns. Some, for instance, will wonder whether Masorti's open, pluralistic approach will conflict with their own religious beliefs and practice, while others ask about how to join a Masorti kehilla. It's not uncommon for Cohen to learn about the physical, economic and emotional challenges parents have raising their youngsters. Still more will express trepidation or confusion about whether their child will be capable of completing the program.

One way Cohen helps parents confront their own fears is to have them compose a "Traveler's Prayer" for their child, putting into words a symbolic beginning and end of his or her journey toward independence and Jewish adulthood.

The final meeting of the year will be another group gathering to discuss logistics of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony and celebration, including invitations, refreshments and photography. Before adjourning, Cohen will lead parents in communal prayer, guiding them to make personal connections to the liturgy.

Cohen observed that prior to her joining the program, "we would often see parents wandering around at the ceremony, unsure of their role. After I went through the process with a group over the course of a year, I was so gratified to find a high level of parental involvement, and watching them, I could tell they were having a unique spiritual experience they will remember for years to come." ❖



Emma Spett, foreground, was among the 50 8th-graders from Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County (NJ) participating in a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony at a special education school in Nahariya in May. The visiting students had raised \$2,300 for Masorti's Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program for Children with Special Needs.

Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel

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