

Traditions

Supporting
Conservative
Judaism in
Israel

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62 YEARS LATER

Dear Chaverim,

This past October I travelled to Israel on a special Masorti Mission to take the pulse of Am Yisrael and the Masorti/Conservative Movement. While the Movement, although cash strapped was alive and well, Israeli society was not. Most Israelis I spoke to were angry or disillusioned. With few exceptions, they did not talk about the usual existential issues of safety, security, the peace process and the nuclear threat. Rather, they talked about what was happening to their country internally. Many railed specifically against the haredim and how this relatively small sector of Israeli society had an oppressive stranglehold on the majority. Others, and in particular the young people, focused on the pain of being part of an Israel where, for them, something was missing. Probing further I found that Israelis in large number, were questioning their Jewishness, perhaps for the first time.

For Israel's first 62 years it was all about nation building in the most concrete of terms, the absorption of Jews, borders, tilling the soil, fighting defensive wars, creating a country that could defend itself and prosper. Who had the luxury or the time to question just what a Jewish, Democratic state in the middle of a hostile environment actually meant? But now 62 years later, Israel's youth and some of Israel's leaders are doing just that. They are questioning Israel's Jewish identity and are not at all happy with the answers they are getting.

In 2004, the WZO Congress adopted a manifesto called the Jerusalem Project.

In the main it called for the strengthening of Israel as a Jewish, Zionist, and democratic state. The "Jewish" part is further defined as ". . . an exemplary society with a unique moral and spiritual character . . . rooted in the vision of the prophets, striving for peace and contributing to the betterment of the world."

My friends, It is the "Jewish" part that Israelis are missing.

Consider the inequality of \$450,000,000 provided to Orthodoxy by the Israeli Government to less than \$100,000 to Masorti and Reform combined. Consider an educational system that is completely secular (except for our TALI Programme) and is otherwise failing because of unattractive teacher salaries. Consider the refusal of the State to recognize our Masorti rabbis as legally entitled to officiate at Jewish lifecycle events, and consider the haredi orchestrated suppression of women's rights. Is this the kind of Israel that embodies 'Jewishness' as we in North America understand it? What is the spiritual character of a nation when 85% of Israeli society is called "Jewish Goyim" by the ultra-Orthodox? How is "spirituality" rooted in the vision of our prophets when religious leaders can incite a follower to assassinate Israel's Prime Minister?

I could go on.

I talked to many about Masorti. They were surprised and interested to learn that we have 60 kehillot around the country, that we provide Israelis with an opportunity to explore their Jewishness in an open, non-coercive manner, whether by study, participating in life cycle events, davening in minyanim, Youth Programmes, enriched Jewish education (TALI), and kindergarten and pre-kindergarten classes. They asked me why there was not such a thing in their neighbourhood.

Jewishness cannot be imbedded in the character of Israel without the knowledge of our traditions. It will

not be imbedded without those traditions being taught through a religious approach that speaks to the majority of Israelis. That approach is embodied in our Masorti Movement.

The Conservative Movement world-wide, in concert with Masorti and others, discovered when the "Who is a Jew?" question was potentially being redefined by MK Rotem's bill a few months ago, that it could influence the Israeli government by raising its collective voice. On my mission, it became obvious to me, given the airtime we were given by MKs, municipal mayors, and Natan Sharansky now heading the Jewish Agency, that Israel will listen to Masorti's voice if we empower it. The Movement now has the people, the infrastructure and recognition by Israel's leaders. If we are able to reach out to Israelis in greater numbers, the politicians will have no choice but to listen even more.

Masorti can provide the missing spiritual element Israelis are searching for, but it dearly lacks the funds.

Israel's Jewishness is in our hands.

As we celebrate Hanukah, the holiday commemorating our religious freedom from a different oppression, please be generous and give Masorti a gift of freedom by your generous donation.

Wishing you a happy Hanukah.

Ron Hoffman, President
Canadian Foundation for Masorti Judaism



Masorti Mission participants, October 2010



CFMJ Raises Funds For New Rabbi

TODAH RABAH to our generous donors from the Canadian Foundation for Masorti Judaism who answered the call from Ron Hoffman, President, and donated significant funds, specifically for a rabbi for Adat Shalom-Emanuel, in Rehovot.

After an intense and lengthy search, the kehillah has hired Rabbi Judit Rubin, originally from Hungary, who made Aliya at 19 years of age.

After finishing her rabbinical studies three years ago, at the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem, she travelled, together with her husband, to the United States to be a shlichah in Maryland. Her duties will not only include being the spiritual leader for the kehillah, but she will also help to build future cooperative relationships with municipal leaders and school principals in the community. Having a rabbi is essential in order to spread the message of the Masorti Movement and all it stands for.

Kibbutz Hannaton Age of Mitzvah Chesed Fund

The divide between the religious and secular in Israel is felt from a very young age. "Secular" children in Israel have few rich, Jewish educational opportunities. For the most part, they grow up disconnected from their Jewish heritage and tradition. Though they speak Hebrew and live in Israel, they are foreigners to the synagogue, the siddur, and practices of the Jewish religion. The Age of Mizvah Program, run by the Masorti Kibbutz Hannaton, prepares 7th grade Israeli school children for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. A major goal of this program is to promote a more vibrant, pluralistic and sustainable approach to Judaism within the Israeli school system. The Age of Mitzvah Chesed Fund will provide access for children who cannot afford this program.



Age of Mitzvah: art as a way to learn about the synagogue.



L-R: Adina, Carol, Richard, Jonah & Evan Lebrach

Jonah Librach's Bar Mitzvah at the Masorti Kotel

By Richard Librach

Last August, our family celebrated our oldest son's Bar Mitzvah at the Masorti Kotel, within the area of Robinson's Arch. From the moment we began our photograph taking, we knew we were in for a special morning. Awaiting our family and guests' arrival and throughout the ceremony which Jonah performed so wonderfully, my wife and I stood in awe of the surroundings, trying in earnest to take it all in - to live in the moment. Wrapping tefillin, singing, sharing laughter and tears of happiness and thankfulness, the experience has given us everlasting memories. As we gathered with our group to leave the area, my wife and I were so pleased and appreciative of the choice we made to celebrate at the Masorti Kotel, thankful for the experience we were able to provide to our close friends and family, where we could all celebrate together.

Images from Masorti Mission



Masorti kindergarten at Omer



Ron Hoffman with Rabbi Mauricio Balter of Omer Masorti Kehillah



Rabbi Yoav Andy, of Kibbutz Hannaton, accepting donation of restored Torah from Larry Ritter (ITC Tours)



Ron Hoffman and Terri Davis of Netzach Israel, Ashkelon



Kehillat Netzach Israel, Ashkelon Day Camp for children 5-12

Masorti Kehilot



NOAM Youth Leaders on their Shnat Sherut (year of service), working with Ethiopian Jews in the Absorption Centre at Canada House, Be'er Sheva.

MERCAZ-CANADA & CANADIAN FOUNDATION FOR MASORTI JUDAISM

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