



Shinshinim - Providing Us with a Real Connection to Israel

Shinshinim is a play on the Hebrew words, *Shnat Sheirut*, meaning “year of service”. *Shinshinim* are talented high school graduates from Israel, who delay their military service to serve who are placed in Jewish communities abroad, with the goal of educating people of all ages about Israel and its culture.

Shinshinim bring contemporary thought, authentic customs and the Israeli spirit to synagogues, schools and organizations, by providing informal programming to build Jewish identity and educate all age groups about Israeli life. They nurture a personal connection towards the goal of bringing the communities closer together.

When the *Shinshinim* return to Israel to begin their military service, they will carry a deeper understanding of the American Jewish community and the pluralistic nature of American Judaism.

For the community *Shinshinim* programming is a way to give Israel a face and to get to know it from another point of view; for the young *Shlichim* (emissaries) it is a life-changing experience.

MERCAZ Plays a Role

The program has been so successful that the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), the sponsor of the program, has increased the number of *Shinshinim* worldwide each year. In the US, Long Island was chosen by JAFI to be the area of growth for 2018-19. MERCAZ USA worked with the Sid Jacobson JCC (the onsite coordinator) and our *kehillot* and schools to increase participation in the program. This year on Long Island alone over a dozen communities are benefiting from the program. The reports from the congregations involved are amazing! The *Shinshinim* have brought energy and life to the groups they work with and create a deeper connection between the participants and Israel.

JAFI plans to expand the program to more communities next year. If you are interested, let us know.

MERCAZ is the Zionist arm of the Conservative Movement. Our Movement delegates sit at the table of JAFI, the World Zionist Organization and Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael as MERCAZ representatives based on the votes we receive in the election of delegates to the World Zionist Congress every 5 years.

Programs like this are funded by these agencies and our ability to assist congregations is the result of allocations for programs that connect us to Israel. Your membership in and support of MERCAZ helps make this possible.

A Student's View of the Shinshinim Program

BY EITAN GITLIN

Hello, my name is Eitan Gitlin. I am a Schechter student and am active in USY. I also serve as a *madrich* (counselor), at my temple, Congregation Tiferet Israel of Glen Cove. I have experienced the *Shinshinim* program for almost 5 years now.

My first experience with the *Shinshin* program came in my 8th grade class at Solomon Schechter. The two *Shinshinim* (plural of *Shinshin*) took my class outside and we played sharks and minnows in Hebrew. This activity taught me that kids in Israel play the same games that we play here in America. Throughout the year, we engaged in many activities that reminded us of this fact. But on the other hand, we also were taught history lessons from the



point of view of an Israeli kid. Even though they were not old enough to have lived through the events they were teaching, we could still see their excitement in teaching kids from another country about their own country. As we

matured and moved on through high school, the lesson became increasingly more sophisticated and we were able to relate ever more to the *Shinshinim*. Because they are young adults who recently graduated high school, making them just a few years older than we are, we can connect with them and

Continued on page 2



President's Message

Message from MERCAZ USA President, Dr. Marilyn L Wind

There has been a tremendous amount of discussion on multiple fronts including a Schechter Institutes/Jewish Theological

Seminary Forum and the latest General Assembly of the Jewish Federations of North America meeting on Israel-Diaspora Relations. There have been numerous articles written on this subject as well. Much has been said about how many Conservative/Masorti Jews, particularly our teens and young adults, are being alienated by Israel because of some of the Israeli government policies in general and those regarding Masorti/Conservative Jews in Israel. What I've learned from a variety of people who have spoken and written on this topic is a message I believe we, as MERCAZ USA, need to focus on. We need to state that we love Israel. We believe it is our Homeland. We repeat daily in our prayers that we love Israel and that it is an integral part of our Conservative/Masorti Judaism. We can recognize that Israel has flaws, but we love it nonetheless and that is the reason we are compelled to engage with Israel and advocate for a more just society. We can get angry and frustrated about how difficult it is to get the Abayudaya, a Ugandan community of Masorti Jews, to be recognized by the Israeli Government as Jews. While it was difficult to do so we were finally able to get the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) to recognize the Abayudaya community as Jews. We can also rejoice in the role

our Movement played in getting approval for the first Birthright trip of Abayudaya. The answer is that we need to speak out against injustice, not disengage.

It is important to note that the reason JAFI recognized the Abayudaya community was because the Conservative Movement had a seat at the table. MERCAZ, the Zionist arm of the Conservative Movement, is the agency that represents the Conservative Movement in the National Institutions (the World Zionist Organization, JAFI and Keren Kavyemit L'Yisrael (KKL)). Further, there are Conservative/Masorti institutions working on the ground in Israel and around the world making changes that result in furthering our concept of pluralism and a just society. In order to make sure we continue to have a seat at the table it is necessary for you to join MERCAZ USA to have your voice heard, to vote for MERCAZ USA when the World Zionist Congress elections take place in early 2020 and support the Schechter Institutes, the Rabbinical Assembly in Israel, the Conservative Yeshiva, Masorti in Israel, Marom, and Masorti Olami. These organizations have programs and do work that directly supports our goals.

Our new website is up. We have links to the Conservative/Masorti organizations I have mentioned above and you can learn more about them by following links. Our membership year runs from July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019. I urge all of you, if you have not yet joined or renewed your membership, to do so now either by going to www.mercazusa.org, mailing the attached coupon, or if you belong to a check-off congregation renew your membership or become a member through your congregation. Share this newsletter with those who are not yet members and urge them to join. We need your support!

Shinshinim ... continued from page 1

have meaningful conversations. The best thing about this program is that they are still teenagers, not official teachers or adults, which means we think of them as friends who live in Israel, to whom we can easily relate and with whom we can meet when we go there.

I have also experienced the *Shinshin* program at my temple. The area I live in doesn't have many Jews. The kids in my temple don't get much contact with other Jews and even less with the State of Israel. Most of what they have learned can be summarized as follows: Israel is dangerous, threatened by terrorists and if you visit you might be killed. But our *Shinshin* presents a very different view of Israel. The kids here get to learn that Israel isn't war-torn and that Israelis do not wake up every day thinking everyone is out to get them. They learn what high school is like in another country and they develop friendships with the *Shinshin*, who read-

ily answer questions about their life and about Israel. The younger kids also have fun with our *Shinshin*, while learning about the geography and the history of Israel.

This year, my family and I are hosting a *Shinshin*, *Ofir* Pearl, a normal kid from Binyamina, a town in Northern Israel. He has become part of our family. We engage in conversations about Israel, about high school and about the army. My sister is a sophomore at Albany University, and it is weird not having her at home; but it's great having a "sibling" in the house who will play soccer or a game of fifa, or just sit down and watch a movie.

The *Shinshin* program has influenced me greatly and has provided me with Israeli friends, with whom I remain in contact and hope to visit when I travel to Israel.

MERCAZ is proud of the work of our partner agencies and the support we provide them through MERCAZ's participation in the WZO, JAFI and KKL

News from Masorti Olami: Kivun Chile - Connecting Young Adults to Israel

Kivun Chile offers young adults in the Masorti community a wide range of in-depth and insightful programming to enable them to better understand and connect with Israel, Zionism, the history of the cause, and the modern issues facing the Jewish state. Each session is led by a leader of the Jewish community in Chile with extensive firsthand knowledge of Israel. Each of the encounters is followed by a conversation and discussion where the young people in attendance are able to air their concerns and ask difficult questions about Israel that they may not feel comfortable bringing up in other community settings.

The topics covered so far this year include:

- **Creation of the State of Israel**, rights over the land, how it was created, what is it based on by former Israel journalist Andres Meyer.
- **A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict** including the perspectives of the UN, agreements and wars by Eduardo Guerra. This included discussions on Israel's borders, the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the situation with Iran.
- **The News out of Israel**, including: Israeli democracy, Israeli politics, diversity, integration, migrations, start up, technology and development with Jonathan Nowogrodski. This session also included a discussion on the Nation State Law, the settlements and a historical review of Israel's withdrawal of troops and evacuations from territories.
- **BDS: What is it?** What effect does it have? How to face it using social networks and Hasbara by Jorge Zeballos, Executive Director of B'nai Brith.
- **The Role of Women and Egalitarianism in Judaism in Chile.**
- **The Masorti movement**, highlighting how our approach to *Halacha* varies from that of the Orthodox and Reform.



News from Masorti Israel: Hasidic Celebration Masorti Style in Ein Karem

Rabbi Yerach Meiersdorf and Nava Meiersdorf-Berenshtin, who were recently married, both come from religious Israeli families, and discovered Masorti Judaism as adults. Yerach, who was ordained as a Masorti rabbi, serves as the rabbi of Noam, the Masorti youth movement, and Nava is a rabbinical student at The Schechter Institutes. For them leaving the Orthodox world strengthened their religious life. Together, they established a Masorti *kehilah* in Ein Karem, Jerusalem.

They were excited to host a Hasidic Rosh Hashanah – 19 Kislev celebration. 19 Kislev, known as the Hasidic Rosh Hashanah, is the date that Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad Hasidism, was freed from his imprisonment in czarist Russia. Although many places around the world celebrate 19 Kislev, this was the only one where women sat next to men and the only place where the “*tish*” was led by women, including Rabbi Dr. Reb Mimi Feigelson, *Mashpiah Ruchanit* (spiritual mentor) of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles. It was spiritual, beautiful and egalitarian!

Visit their website to check out the full story and videos for a taste of Masorti Israel at <https://masorti.org/celebrating-hasidic-rosh-hasha-na-with-a-masorti-community/>

Support Masorti Foundation www.masorti.org

Sarrae's Corner

Message from MERCAZ USA Executive Director, Sarrae G Crane



MERCAZ USA is now focusing attention on conversations that deepen our understanding of Israel and strengthen our Zionist commitment. Our mission is to engage Conservative/Masorti Jews with Zionism/Israel and the Jewish people world over while reaffirming our commitment to pluralism in Jewish religious life, and promoting its acceptance in the State of Israel. We recognize that while we hold diverse views concerning both American and Israeli politics, nonetheless, we believe that we can come together with our shared vision and love of Israel and the Jewish people.

More practically, we will keep you abreast of developments related to our Movement in Israel and around the globe, tapping our sister Conservative/Masorti organizations. By doing so, we hope that this will provide greater understanding and appreciation for Israel beyond the headlines.

Towards this end we are launching a new MERCAZ USA website (www.mercazusa.org) with resources on understanding Israel beyond the headlines. It will be fully functional by the end of 2018. It will include links to our partner agencies within the Conservative/Masorti Movement, as well as the Zionist world and the greater Jewish community, representing the full breadth of agencies with whom MERCAZ interacts.

We are proud of our involvement with the *Shinshinim* program—see the feature article—and hope this success will lead to more of our congregations in North America participating in the program in the coming year.

In addition, MERCAZ USA is now working with Masorti on Campus. Currently, Masorti on Campus cooperates and works with MERCAZ USA, Marom and Masorti Olami, regarding programs in Israel for North American college students including study programs in conjunction with The Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem. It is also in the process of creating a campus fellow program in conjunction with Marom, becoming Marom North America. We will keep you informed as this relationship develops.

The World Zionist Organization has announced that the next World Zionist Congress will be held in Jerusalem in October 2020. The American Zionist Movement has created the Area Election Committee to determine the rules, procedures and dates for the election of US delegates. Our Movement has established a Management Group to organize our campaign. We are pleased to announce that MERCAZ USA president, Marilyn L Wind is the co-chair. You will be hearing much about this over the next year. We are anticipating that the elections will be held in the winter of 2020. We are counting on all of you to support our efforts to strengthen and grow our delegation for the benefit of Conservative/Masorti Jews in Israel and worldwide.

Your support has enabled MERCAZ to work with the World Zionist Organization to bring resources to our communities and projects. There is still much to be done and your continued involvement will make us stronger.

Hope you had a joyous Chanukah and wishing you a happy secular new year.



Join MERCAZ Today.

Please complete this form and return to:

MERCAZ USA 520 Eighth Avenue, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10018
or enroll online at www.mercazusa.org/membership.html



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