

APRIL 2009 - NISAN 5769

WELCOME to the **MERCAZ-Canada** e-Newsletter.

**MERCAZ-Canada** is the Zionist membership organization of the Conservative Movement, the voice of Conservative Jewry within the World Zionist Organization (WZO), the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and the Canadian Zionist Federation (CZF). We work to support religious pluralism in Israel and strengthen the connection between Israel and the Diaspora.



## **MERCAZ-Canada, MERCAZ-USA, WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM ESSAY CONTEST**

It has become customary for **MERCAZ-Canada**, **MERCAZ USA** and **Women's League for Conservative Judaism** to conduct, in coordination with the biennial Women's League Convention, an essay contest for high school students on Israel and Zionism. The winners are provided with scholarships to subsidize the cost of Conservative Movement sponsored trips to Israel. This year, in honour of Israel's 60th anniversary, the theme for these essays was "Israel at 60: Achievements and Challenges". Among the nearly two dozen North American teenagers who took part in this competition were six Canadians. When the judging was completed two Canadian girls and three American boys were prizewinners.



*Danielle Klein*

The second place winner was **Danielle Klein**, an 11th grader at Sir Robert Borden High School from Agudath Israel Congregation in Ottawa. She has received a \$500 scholarship.

There was a tie for third place. The Canadian winner was **Sara Levine**, a 10th grade student at Tanenbaum CHAT Wallenberg Campus from Congregation Beth David B'nai Israel Beth Am of Toronto. She received a \$300 scholarship.



*Sara Levine*

Letters of appreciation were sent to each of the Canadian young people who submitted essays. There were many excellent entries, which made choosing the winners very difficult. We are extremely proud of the intelligence and maturity shown in all the essays. Yasher koach to all those who took the time and effort to enter the contest. We wish them continued success in all their future

endeavours.

Note that **MERCAZ-Canada** annually offers a \$200 scholarship to young people attending Conservative sponsored trips to Israel - e.g. USY Pilgrimage, NATIV, Ramah Seminar, Conservative Yeshiva, etc. Our MERCAZ-Canada scholarship must be matched or surpassed by their Conservative synagogue.



## WZO & JAFI meeting in Israel November 2008

l-r: Rabbi Vernon Kurtz (President MERCAZ Olami), Rabbi Tzvi Graetz, (Director MERCAZ & Masorti Olami) Marion Mayman (President, MERCAZ-Canada) Norman Stern (President CZF), Marilyn Cohen (Ex.Dir. MERCAZ-Canada and Canadian Foundation For Masorti Judaism), Yizhar Hess (Ex.Dir. & CEO Masorti Movement in Israel)

## Conversion

As you can imagine, conversion is a very important issue for the Masorti/Conservative Movement within Israel. **Rabbi Vernon Kurtz**, President of MERCAZ Olami, speaking at the annual meeting of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem in November, called the continuing conflict regarding conversion in Israel "[a] crisis [that] is a violation of the teaching of G-d" and helped push through the Assembly two resolutions aiming to break the ultra-Orthodox stranglehold over the conversion process. To read more, go to: <http://www.mercazusa.org/newsltr/winter08-09/agency-on-conversion.html>

## Nefesh B'Nefesh

One of the mandates of MERCAZ-Canada is to promote aliyah. **Ari Schuchman**, Assistant Director of Overseas Programs for Nefesh B'Nefesh, came to Toronto on March 2nd and 3rd to meet with community leaders to continue building relationships with partner agencies, synagogues and community institutions. He wanted very much to meet with Conservative synagogue leadership and therefore we invited the Toronto MERCAZ-Canada Board members to a meeting on Monday evening March 2nd.

One of the topics discussed was the work [Nefesh B'Nefesh](#) is doing with the Jerusalem based Aliyah Forum of the Conservative/Masorti Movement. The meeting also provided an opportunity to learn about how [Nefesh B'Nefesh](#) can work more closely with the Toronto congregations. In 2008 Nefesh B'Nefesh became official partners with the Jewish Agency re Aliyah.

Statistics - Out of 3500 new Olim last year - 1000 were singles/young couples (52% grew up Conservative) 250-500 were retirees (30% Conservative) 2000 were families moving all over Israel (15% Conservative)

## Masorti/Conservative Movement in Israel

**Yizhar Hess**, Executive Director & CEO of the [Masorti Movement in Israel](#), visited Toronto in April to give us an update about Masorti and religious pluralism in Israel and suggest ways we can help the Movement flourish. He brought us up to date on how the Masorti Movement has grown, how its kehillot (congregations) are bringing

thousands of Israelis back to their religious roots, how the Masorti Movement helps children with Special Needs celebrate their Bar or Bat Mitzvah, etc.

All Toronto MERCAZ-Canada Board members were invited to meet with Yizhar on Tuesday April 23rd at Beth David B'Nai Israel Beth Am Synagogue.

## Benefits from MERCAZ's participation in WZO & JAFI

MERCAZ plays an important part in ensuring JAFI funding for the Masorti/Conservative Movement in Israel. A strong MERCAZ presence, backed up by a large membership body, can ensure that Masorti/Conservative Judaism in Israel receives its rightly deserved funding, helping more & more people connect to Judaism.

The JAFI-funded "Shlichim for Pluralism" Program helps ensure the posts of over 20 pulpit rabbis throughout Israel (by paying half their salaries), as well as other programming for our kehillot. This program enables us to run many outreach and hesed projects, helping connect Israelis to their Jewish heritage. Shlichim for Pluralism is also dedicated to developing our existing kehillot and helping create new ones. In 2008, the number of Masorti kehillot increased by 10% to a total of 53.

JAFI also provides much needed funds for the NOAM Youth Movement which has seen an almost 50% increase in participation at many of its activities over the last two years. JAFI continues to support MAROM, our University & Young Adults organization which now operates in 11 centres around the country.

## Membership

As we approach the WZO Congress being held in June 2010, it is very important that we elect a full roster of delegates. To accomplish this, membership numbers are critical. We thank you for your membership and continued support and ask that you **forward this newsletter** to family and friends who are not already members. They may join by clicking onto the **MERCAZ-Canada** web site at [www.mercaz.ca](http://www.mercaz.ca).

**MORE MERCAZ MEMBERS = MORE VOTES IN WZO ELECTIONS = MORE FUNDING FOR MASORTI/CONSERVATIVE PROGRAMS IN ISRAEL.**

### Join now!

Fill out this [online form](#)

If you are not already a member of MERCAZ-CANADA through your voluntary check-off on your synagogue's dues statement, you need to join. We've made it easy. You can [join ONLINE by using this form](#). Membership is just \$18 per couple or \$9 for a single member over 18 years of age.

### We need YOUR membership (only \$9/person or \$18/couple) to...

- Advance religious pluralism in Israel
- Offer matching scholarships to young people attending Conservative sponsored trips in Israel
- Expand allocations for the Conservative/Masorti Movement
- Support short and long-term Movement study programs in Israel
- Disseminate Zionist educational materials and programs.
- Promote Conservative Masorti Judaism throughout the world

### Need more information?

Call MERCAZ-CANADA at 416-667-1717 or 1-866-357-3384 e-mail: [info@mercaz.ca](mailto:info@mercaz.ca)

## MERCAZ-Canada

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