



Mercanz News

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Message from the President

As I write this article we are in the election mode, in Israel, the US and here at home. World Zionist Organization (WZO) also plans to hold elections in 2010, to elect delegates to attend its Congress where decisions on important issues are made and monetary resources are allocated. Canada - through the Canadian Zionist Federation - is allocated 19 delegates and this number is split amongst the various organizations under its umbrella. A vote is held and the number of seats allocated to any particular organization is based on its membership and the number of members who vote. This is not unlike political parties here in Canada. When someone is running for the leader of a party his/her success is determined by the number of members his/her team can get to join and then assuring that they all vote.

The political team for Mercanz-Canada is our Board of Directors. It is our job to recruit every member of a Conservative synagogue into our ranks and to make sure every member votes. However we can't do this alone. WE NEED YOUR HELP. In order to be eligible to vote in the WZO elections you must be a member in 2009. Membership dues received from December 1, 2008 onward will be applied to 2009.

Membership is only \$9.00 per person or \$18.00 per couple annually. Please join the thousands of Conservative Jews who are making a commitment by:

- mailing the enclosed Response Form
- on line at our web site www.mercaz.ca
- dues statement check off for Mercanz-Canada, if available.

Remember to include your email address. This is essential to ensure that we can easily communicate with you as we approach the election.

Conservative / Masorti Institutions in Israel do not get the level of government funding Orthodox institutions do. The only opportunity for our

movement to receive major funding is through the WZO where our delegates, whose numbers are determined by the size of our membership, have a voice in the funding decision-making process. (Please refer to David Breakstone's article to appreciate all of the benefits Mercanz receives worldwide). Mercanz is the only Zionist group that supports and advocates for the Conservative/Masorti Movement.

In November I will be attending the WZO, Vaad Hapoel (General Council) and Jewish Agency Assembly in Israel as a Mercanz Olami delegate. I look forward to sharing the deliberations with you when I return (another reason for giving us your email address).

With your help and support we know that our Movement in Israel will continue to grow and flourish.

Chag Chanukah Sameach – Happy Chanukah.

Marion

Marion Mayman, President
Mercanz-Canada

If we are not for ourselves, who will be? JOIN MERCAZ-CANADA TODAY!

Remember when.... we became a tourist attraction

By: Ayelet Seed

This past summer I was a participant on USY Eastern Europe Israel Pilgrimage. Before going to Israel, we visited the Czech Republic, Lithuania and



Max Marmor & Ayelet Seed - ECRUSY Board Members
Poland, and saw what life was like for the Jews before and after the Holocaust. One of

the most moving experiences happened during our Shabbat in Krakow, Poland. That Friday was one of the worst days for us because we had spent the morning at Majdanek concentration camp. Friday night we were sitting in a cramped room in a hotel in Krakow davening Kabbalat Shabbat when in the middle of a 'niggun' we went outside and started singing down the streets towards the square outside the Old Synagoga Stara, where we continued davening Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma'ariv. We were met with stares from tourists, locals and other Jews, and had photos and videos taken of us. Saturday evening, for Maariv and Havdalah, we went back to the square and once again got the same reaction. Despite these responses I was so proud to be davening and singing there. I felt as if we had brought back some of the Jewish life that the Nazis had tried to destroy. We helped to revive a little bit of this once vibrant Jewish city.

I was so fortunate to have had this once-in-a-lifetime experience and it could not have happened without the assistance of Mercanz-Canada. It is something that will be a part of my life always.

My Home and Native Land

*I found a place where
I can breathe,
Where I can roam around free,
Happy and joyful.
I found a place where
I can sing,
Songs of the heart
And have everyone
I see join in.
I found a place where I can live,
With hope in my heart and fear far away,
Where my dreams can come true and my
imaginings be fact,
Where my people walked, long long time ago,
And now walk once more.
I found a place that I can call home,
That I will never forget,
A place that came to me in song,
And nestled in my heart,
A relentless tide pulling me back,
Calling me back to where I belong.
Israel.
My home and native land.*



By Eric Phillips-Sheldon

MERCAZ Matters

David Breakstone

Over the weekend of September 12-14, 2008, 57 members of Masorti/Conservative kehillot from eight countries throughout Europe convened in London to participate in a Leadership Development Seminar. Five years ago, such a gathering would have been impossible. Many of the congregations represented simply did not exist then, nor did the funds to bring them together. The worldwide organization of Mercaz –MERCAZ Olami – is the vehicle which made this remarkable growth and vital networking possible. The ability of MERCAZ to be of such assistance is entirely a function of our political clout within the World Zionist Organization (WZO).

While the existence of Conservative congregations in Melbourne, Johannesburg, Nice, Rio de Janeiro, Guadalajara, Budapest, Prague, Kiev, Paris, London and Delhi (to name but a few) is a major achievement due primarily to the dedication of their lay leaders, the support available from MERCAZ Olami has also been key. Funds generated by MERCAZ have enabled the Jerusalem office to send rabbis to congregations around the world, as well as to offer support to rabbinical students training to serve them. We have also provided seed money for numerous educational initiatives, purchased siddurim, trained shlichei tzibur, and sent Israeli shlichim (educational emissaries) to work with our communities, in particular with NOAM, our burgeoning youth movement and MAROM our young adult division. The efforts and successes of our next generation are not only assuring the future of Conservative Judaism, but also revitalizing the broader Jewish community in the process.

As a consequence of our influence within the WZO, we have also been able to secure appointments

to the Executive, Board of Governors, and standing committees of the Jewish Agency (JAFI), as well as assuring an annual allocation of nearly \$1.7million for the advancement of Masorti Judaism within Israel - without which we would be crippled.



Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, President of MERCAZ Olami with Mr. Zeev Bielski, Chairman of the Zionist Executive and The Jewish Agency for Israel.

MERCAZ, however, is not only about generating funding; it is also about impacting the agenda and influencing policy of world Jewry. One outstanding contribution in this regard is within Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael/KKL (the Jewish National Fund). As a result of our political representation within the WZO, we were entitled to nominate 10% of the KKL directorate who are utilizing their posts to make real and tangible contributions to eco-Zionism.

We are also impacting on Government and Jewish Agency policy regarding such matters as conversion, Who is a Jew, aliya by choice, and the development of an institutional infrastructure for the 1.5 million Jews in the FSU. Due to our alliance with Kadima within the WZO, we have ongoing contact with prominent members of Knesset and

our opinions and needs are regularly heard within the Prime Minister's office. This coalition is itself the direct result of the increased strength of MERCAZ following the last elections to the Zionist Congress in 2006. Kadima, a new party at the time, without any representation outside of Israel, sought us out as a strategic partner with a worldwide presence and an ideology comfortably complementing its own.

MERCAZ, in all of these ways, has succeeded in being the voice of Conservative Judaism in the one and only international arena where the entire political and religious spectrum of world Jewry convenes. However, how loudly we are able to speak, with what moral authority and to what effect, depends on YOU.

Dr. Breakstone is the International Vice President of MERCAZ and Masorti Olami and the representative of MERCAZ on the WZO and JAFI Executives.

IMPORTANT UPDATE: When the Jews of the Former Soviet Union celebrate Israel Independence Day next year with Jewish Agency funding, it is going to be because of MERCAZ - but they won't know that. Neither would you, if you didn't happen to be reading this update. As a result of the strength of MERCAZ at the last Congress, and his own sterling reputation, **Rabbi Vernon Kurtz**, our international president, was asked to fill the prestigious position of **Chair of the JAFI FSU Committee**. The important ongoing work he has been doing has greatly enhanced the stature of MERCAZ in the eyes of JAFI powerbrokers, and Rabbi Kurtz was recently able to use his position to avert a planned budgetary cut that would have left the Jews in the former Soviet Union without adequate funds for programs and activities that directly enhance their ties to Israel.



David Wallach, current President of Eastern Canadian Region USY.

Israel Matching Scholarship Winners

Mercaz-Canada is committed to encouraging young people to experience Israel through Conservative sponsored programmes. Mercaz-Canada provides matching scholarships of \$200 to the following young adults:

USY CLASSIC ISRAEL PILGRIMAGE

David Wallach Shaar Shalom Synagogue, Thornhill

USY EASTERN EUROPE/ISRAEL PILGRIMAGE

Maxwell Marmer Shaar Shalom Synagogue, Thornhill
Eric Phillips-Sheldon Shaar Shalom Synagogue, Thornhill
Ayelet Seed Adath Israel Synagogue, Toronto

CAMP RAMAH SEMINAR

Ethan Calof Agudath Israel Congregation, Ottawa

CONSERVATIVE YESHIVA

Daniel Chorny Or Shalom Synagogue, London

NATIV YEAR IN ISRAEL

Jonah Greenbaum-Shinder Agudath Israel Congregation, Ottawa
Leah Silverman Agudath Israel Congregation, Ottawa

Thank you to the Conservative congregations, across Canada, who matched or surpassed our scholarships. Only through increased membership in Mercaz-Canada, we will be able to increase our subsidy programme.



Nola Lazar, a Mercaz-Canada Board Member from Etz Chayim Congregation, Winnipeg & her family, enjoyed a beautiful Shabbat at Masorti kehillah, Moreshet Yisrael and the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem and also visited Masorti Kibbutz Hannaton. She commented that her children were happy to know that there is a place for Conservative/Masorti Judaism in Israel.