

# The Synagogue Journal

## 1856-2006

May 5, 2006

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Shabbat Achaei Mot-K'doshim

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### Issue 18 Israel

#### In this issue ...

We celebrate *Yom Ha'atzmaut* and *Yom Ha'zikaron* (Israeli Independence Day and Memorial Day) with an overview of the congregation's historical initiatives to promote a Jewish homeland in Palestine and the State of Israel. *Brooklyn Eagle* articles report of early meetings of the Zionist movement in Brooklyn's Eastern district.

In 1912, several members of our congregation founded "Achua A – New York", a company with the mission to purchase land in Palestine, immigrate and establish a Jewish agricultural settlement. The journal features stories about two Brooklyn families who settled in Ra'anana more than eighty years apart. Fani Brown Brandenburg recounts her grandfather's stories about establishing the colony and synagogue, and of bringing a Sefer Torah that was donated by the Holy Congregation, Baith Israel Anshe Emes. Last week, past Kane Street trustee Lisa Smith located this scroll at Congregation Moriah just one block from her flat. Lisa and husband Alan Salzberg have blogs, documenting the family's adventures as new settlers in Israel.

Kane Street Synagogue continues to support Israel in a multitude of ways. The Israel Matters Committee keeps the community well informed with a lively cultural program. Rachel Epstein shares her story about the committee and its sponsorship of a *bayit cham* (hot lunch) program for children in a poor section of North Tel Aviv. The congregation supports Conservative Judaism in Israel through the Masorti Movement. Rabbi Jonathan Ginsburg's message of 1987 provides an interesting preface to the KBY website on the Kehillot B'Yahad organization, which Kane Street congregant Jeff Macklis directs.

This *Yom Ha'Aatzma'ut* the congregation will hold a brief, informal service and social hour in the evening to celebrate the miracle and the 58<sup>th</sup> Birthday of the modern State of Israel. At shabbat dinner after services, we'll enjoy collective story telling of "memories of that first trip to Israel."

Carol Levin, Editor  
[historicaljournal@kanestreet.org](mailto:historicaljournal@kanestreet.org)



## Scroll to articles and images, or click on underlined titles

### ***Brooklyn Eagle* on Zionism**

**"Convention of Zionists"** March 27, 1898, Page 10

**"Hebrew Notes"** June 10, 1900, Page 11 (see paragraph 4, "After a lapse of ...")

**"Hebrew Notes"** June 17, 1900, Page 28

### **Rabbi Goldfarb's Initiatives in support of a Jewish national homeland** (scroll to three articles)

**"To the President of the United States of America" – 1917**

The text of the petition to President Wilson is reprinted in this article.

**"Rabbis Write President"** Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 2, 1918

Article refers to Rabbi Goldfarb's letter of appreciation to President Wilson for the president's expressions of interest in Zionism and includes the names of Brooklyn Jewish leaders who signed the letter.

**"From Egypt to England"** Credit: *The Scroll*, April 1947

Message from Rabbi Goldfarb "May this Pesach bring to the entire human family the full enjoyment of the four freedoms for which we fought in the latest war against tyranny, and may there come a new redemption to the people of Israel in the Land of Israel, speedily, in our time.

### **BIAE Members Establish Colony Raanana, Palestine – 1922**

"FOUND THE SEFER TORAH!!!" writes Lisa Smith from Ra'anana after her quest to find the scroll that Congregation BIAE donated more than seventy years ago to Congregation Moriah. Fani Brown Brandenburg, a granddaughter of Ra'anana founder Max Brown reflects on her family's connections to the community in *The Synagogue Journal*.

(scroll to image: Bon Voyage Party)

### **Kane Street Family Makes Aliyah to Ra'anana, Israel - 2005**

Lisa Smith and Alan Salzberg are documenting their experiences during their first year as new settlers in Ra'anana, a town founded by Kane Street members. Read about the family's adventures at [www.olahchadasha.blogspot.com](http://www.olahchadasha.blogspot.com) and [www.alansalzberg.blogspot.com](http://www.alansalzberg.blogspot.com) and view photos at [www.alanlisa.phanfare.com](http://www.alanlisa.phanfare.com) (password: corbin)

(scroll to image of family)

### **Warm Encounters in Israel**

Rachel Epstein writes about the Israel Matters committee and how the congregation came to sponsor a Tel Aviv Foundation bayit cham (hot-lunch) program at an after-school center in a poor section of North Tel Aviv.

(scroll to article)

### **Rabbi Jonathan Ginsburg on the Masorti Movement**

Credit: *The Scroll*, April 1987, Page 1

Rabbi Ginsburg appeals to the congregation to support the efforts of the Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel.

(scroll to message)

### **The Masorti Movement - 2006**

Kane Street congregant Jeff Macklis, Director of "Kehillot B'Yachad / Congregations Together" created an organization to make the Masorti (Conservative) Movement and the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (Reform) more accessible in Israel. Read more about KBY at <http://www.joinkby.com/11about/1main.htm>.

### **About the Journal ...**

"The Synagogue Journal" is a one-year online publication at [www.kanestreet.org/historical\\_journal.html](http://www.kanestreet.org/historical_journal.html), designed to highlight prominent individuals and events during the Kane Street Synagogue congregation's past 150 years.

We welcome submissions of reminiscences, letters and photographs to help shape the BIAE story. For a list of upcoming Journal themes or to read past issues, see "Archives" located under the Journal banner.

Special thanks to: Lisa Smith, Alan Salzberg, Fani Brown Brandenburg, Rachel Epstein, Jeff Macklis, Rabbi Samuel Weintraub, Vivien Shelanski, Dugans Martinez and Jack Levin; Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™, Brooklyn Public Library; [www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle](http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle)

## CONVENTION OF ZIONISTS An Interesting Gathering That Will Probably Meet in New York in May. Objects of the Convention.

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The first national American convention of Zionists will be held on May 10 and 11 and while it has not been officially decided upon as yet whether the convention will be held in Washington, New York, Philadelphia or Baltimore it is reasonably certain that Manhattan will be selected. The Educational Alliance has already tendered the use of its building, the East Broadway Institute, free of all expense for the time of the convention to the federation of Zionists of New York City and vicinity, which is the embryo organization of the to be National Federation. The former is constituted by twenty-four societies of New York, Brooklyn and Jersey City, as follows:

Young American Zionists, Chovevei Zion of New York (down town), Bnai Zion of New York, Bnai Zion of Brownsville, Brooklyn Sons of Zion, Ohabei Zion, Chovevei Zion of New York (up town), Up Town East Side Zion Society, Up Town West Side Zion Society, Dorshei Zion l'Sefath Ebber, Patriots of Palestine, Chovevei Zion of Brownsville, Ohelei Shem, Zion Social Club, Zinoa, Bnoth Zion, 1; Bnoth Zion, 2; Ziona, Matteh Levi, Kene-seth Zion, Dorshei Zion, Pirchei Zion, Sifra-th Zion, Daughters of Zion.

The following are the officers of the society: President, Professor Richard Gott-heit; vice presidents, Herman Rosenthal, the Rev. Dr. B. Drachman, Dr. I. J. Bluestone; treasurer, Dr. William Cowen; recording secretary, B. C. Ehreneich; corresponding secre-taries, I. D. Morrison, Abner Tannenbaum; financial secretary, Max Bukansky.

The call for the convention, which has for its purpose the permanent organization of a National American Federation of Zionists (as the international headquarters of Zionists at Vienna will not acknowledge any other but a national organization) is signed by the following men, who constitute the committee on convention: Herman Rosenthal, chairman; Stephen S. Wise, honorary secretary; M. Bukansky, S. Mosesson, Adam Rosenberg, Gerson Rosenzweig, Richard Gottheil, ex-officio. The honorary secretary of the committee is the Rev. Stephen S. Wise, 119 East Sixty-fifth street, New York.

Every Zionist society, composed of from 25 to 100 members (25 being the minimum will be entitled to a representation of two delegates, with an added delegate for every additional hundred members, but no society shall be represented by more than five delegates.

The Zionists have a very quaint way of raising funds. Each member of a Zionist association contributes at least 50 cents annually to the local society, which transmits one shekel (an old Hebrew coin) to the international fund. International headquarters has decreed that one shekel in the case of the United States shall be equal to 25 cents of our currency. At the present time there are in the Custom House of New York several packages containing Zionist paper currency in denominations of one shekel each, which are expected to be passed through the appraiser's office this week and will then be offered for sale to the public. Each paper shekel entitles to one year's membership of the international organization, regardless of affiliation with any local Zionist body. The following are the objects of the proposed convention:

To unite American Zionists into one national organization on the basis of the Basle platform.

To establish a permanent bureau under the auspices of the proposed national organization.

To enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the American people in this movement.

To elect representatives to the Vienna Central Committee.

To elect delegates to the second congress, to be held August 29-30, 1898, at Basle.

To unify Zionist societies into city and state federations.

To arrange for co-operation with other Zionist societies.

The subjects proposed for discussion at the convention are:

Introductory addresses and reports of Zionist societies.

Propaganda work.

Hebrew and nationalistic literature.

The establishment of free schools for the study of the Hebrew as a living language.

The colonization of Palestine.

Agencies for the sale of Palestine products.

Pilgrimages to and explorations in the Holy Land.

After a lapse of nearly three quarters of a year, the Zionistic movement is again beginning to spread in the Eastern District. As before, the headquarters are located at No. 99 Manhattan avenue and frequent meetings are held, presided over by Dr. N. Samuels or others of the leaders of the local organization. While it is generally admitted that hitherto very few of the believers in the plan of the Zionists have been found willing to leave behind them the country that has become a second home to them, to exchange it for the sacred soil of Jerusalem and refound the old Judaic empire, it is more than likely that with the advent of a leader of the right kind, many Hebrews will be ready to tie their fate to his promises. If, as is being claimed, Dr. Theodore Herzl of Vienna really intends to visit this country for the purpose of making propaganda for the plan that in theory was called into life by him, the chances are that he will find a good many men and women willing to follow wherever he leads.

The recent mass meeting of the American Zionists at Cooper Union, which was attended by 125 delegates from thirty states, has acted like a tonic upon the Brooklyn advocates of the plan to start a wholesale emigration to Palestine and revive the Hebrew language as a living tongue. As was announced in the Eagle some time ago, regular meetings will be held at 99 Manhattan avenue, the headquarters of the Brooklyn Zionists, and it is expected to soon have a formidable army of Brooklyn Jews ready to join when the first procession starts for the Holy Land. Among the foremost leaders of the movement is the Rev. Dr. Stephen S. Wise, who, in order to be able to preach Zionism, has left a prosperous congregation in Manhattan in exchange for a poor pastorate in Oregon. Before leaving Dr. Wise called upon S. Popper of this borough and unfolded to him several plans. Mr. Popper will soon come before the Brooklyn Zionists and delivered the message intrusted to him, but at present refuses to divulge its details. He said, however, that there is nothing ephemeral about Dr. Wise's ideas, who, on the contrary, believes in putting the local movement on a sound business basis before making any attempt to realize the high hopes of the promoters of the plan.

Thousands of copies of the speech of Dr. Henry Ilowizi of Philadelphia are being distributed in the Hebrew districts of Brooklyn and other places. Among others it contains the following sentences: "In the name of humanity and justice we are striving for the new Zion for our oppressed nation. In the Book of Books is written the right of Israel to the land of their fathers. To-day the Boer is shedding his blood for a land which he took from the savages. Ireland is struggling for home rule, despite long years of discouragement, and yet, we Jews, who have so much to strive for, oppressed as we are in many countries, we are silent. Where is our manhood, our conscience, our heart, our courage, that we endure without attempting to help ourselves? Here in this land of freedom we are happy, but it is our duty to remember our oppressed brethren in Russia. There is now a movement to prevent the Russian Jewish immigrants from landing in this country. What can we do for them, driven out of Russia and denied here? Their only hope is in the Jewish Zion. I hope that all who are here present will go home convinced that the Zionist movement is not Utopian; that sooner or later the Jew will hold Zion to be his own forever and ever."

## **Rabbi Israel Goldfarb's Initiatives in support of a Jewish National Homeland**

### **The Congregation sent the following petition:**

"To the President of the United States of America"

We, the Undersigned Citizens and Residents of the United States of America, respectfully request you to place before the Peace Conference the aspirations and historic claims of the Jewish people with regard to Palestine, to the end that in accordance with the British Government's declaration of November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1917, endorsed by the Allied Governments, there shall be established such political, administrative, and economic conditions in Palestine as will assure, under the trusteeship of Great Britain, acting on behalf of such League of Nations as may be formed, the development of Palestine into a Jewish Commonwealth, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

### **"Rabbis Write President"**

Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 10/2/1918

"A letter of appreciation for President Wilson's recent expressions of interest in the aims and achievement of Zionism, and his approval of the declaration of Mr. Balfour, on behalf of the British Government, favoring a National Home for Jews in Palestine, was sent to Washington last week by Rabbi Israel Goldarb on behalf of a number of Hebrew congregations in Brooklyn.

The letter was signed by the following: Reve. Der. Herbert Levinthal, William R. Roth, Rabbi Wolf Gold, Rabbi Jacob Dolgeas, Rabbi Morris Silverman, Vice President Maer Pearl, Rabbi Moses J. Port, President Samuel H. Pearlman, President Isadore Taub, President Bernard Lebowitz, President Philip Benowitz, President Solomon Alpert, President Sigmund Berkowitz, Rabbis J. Finklestein and Moses Chaim Rabinowitz."

### **"Passover – Symbol of the Jewish Struggle for Freedom From Egypt to England"**

Credit: *The Scroll* monthly bulletin, April 1947, page 1

"Thirty-three centuries have rolled over us since we first lit the torch of freedom on the banks of the Nile. The battle which our fathers began against our Egyptian oppressors has been raging ever since, in every age and in every land. The struggle for emancipation is still going on. Tyranny is a hydra-headed monster. When you crush it in one place, it rears its ugly head in another place. When you defeat it in one form, it rises up again in another form. It constantly changes its forms, its name, its color and its methods, but its purpose is always the same: - to enslave its victims, to destroy civilization, and to choke within the human breast every hope and every dream of a better, happier and nobler world.

Tyranny thrives on hate and on confusion in the world. It feeds on human misery and on ignorance. Its voice is deceitful. It speaks in honey-sweet words but its tongue is dipped in poison. It wears the garb of a Saint but engages in the acts of Satan.

It is against this enemy of freedom that our fathers in Egypt declared a war unto death. The battle is not yet won. It is even now still being waged on many fronts in many parts of the world.

In the Holy Land where our embattled and weary brethren have hoped to find at last a place of refuge and a home of freedom and peace, tyranny has prepared for them barbed-wire cages and received them with tear-gas bombs and with cruel assaults. England has replaced Egypt as Israel's oppressor and Bevin has become heir to the tyranny of Pharaoh. To the agonized voice of Jewish Martyrdom English Imperialism has consistently remained deaf and hard-hearted.

Passover comes to us every year at this time with a new message of promise that freedom's battle, long and hard though it may be, will not be lost. Like the dew drops of Spring, which bring renewed life and hope, of peace and happiness. With abiding faith in the ultimate triumph of freedom's cause the Jew calls out at the Seer Service: "This year we are still slaves. May we in the year to come be completely emancipated."

May this Pessach bring to the entire human family the full enjoyment of the four freedoms for which we fought in the latest war against tyranny, and may there come a new redemption to the people of Israel in the Land of Israel, speedily, in our time."



## **BIAE Members Establish Colony Raanana, Palestine – 1922**

Congregation Baith Israel Anshei Emes members were strong supporters of a Jewish national homeland in the Holy Land. This brief story is about Max Brown, one of three men from BIAE who founded Colony Raanana and established Congregation Moriah, the first synagogue to be built in the agricultural communities. Max's interest in Palestine began years before his emigration in 1934.

Max and his wife Fannie Brown were beloved members of the congregation. Max served as the synagogue's Gabai, trustee and in the paid position of secretary. The children attended the Sunday school and Talmud Torah, and sang in the choir. Fannie served on the sisterhood's board of directors. The family resided on Columbia Street. Max had a wholesale general merchandise business at 48-50 Carroll Street, which for a time manufactured shawls and Kimonos. Fannie had a flourishing dressmaking business. In 1926, the couple sailed from New York to Palestine on the Brendisi Line via Alexandria where Fannie purchased fabrics.

Fani Brown Brandenburg, the Brown's granddaughter, writes, "Ra'anana's story began in 1912 with the founding of Achuza A - New York, a company that was involved in the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, the purpose of which was to purchase land in Palestine, to immigrate to the country, and to establish an agricultural settlement. World War I put an end to the plan temporarily. Only in 1922, did they manage to finally build the settlement.

"On April 2, 1922, two wagons left Tel Aviv with four members of the Achuza group, three workers, and two armed guards. At the end of the five-hour journey, they reached their destination, unloaded the wagon, and decided that they would erect the first tent on that spot.

In its early days, it was called Raanania, a name suggested by its founders in the U.S. The settlement's Arab neighbors called it Americaya because most of the existing residents spoke English and came from New York City. Finally, the first settlers selected a Hebrew version of the name, and it was called Ra'anana, meaning fresh."

Max Brown was an integral member of that first community in Ra'anana. He purchased land, and built stores and homes. He purchased orange trees in Valencia, Spain and planted a grove. (One tree still exists from the original grove.) A founding member of Congregation Moriah, he donated the land for its first synagogue and acquired a Sefer Torah.

Congregation Moriah's scroll came from Brooklyn. BAIE trustee minutes of August 13, 1934 state, "Our President Mr. Harold Turk appointed Max Brown as a special messenger to deliver a Sofer [sic] Torah donated by our Congregation to Congregation Moriah in Palestine where Mr. Brown is going to settle permanently. The following inscription was engraved upon handles of the Sofer Torah. 'This Sofer Torah was donated by the Holy Congregation, Baith Israel Anshei Emes, Brooklyn, N.Y. North America to the Holy Congregation Moriah, in the Colony of Raanana in the Holyland, Palestine.'" The minutes describe the party given for Max that included the presentation of a valise and good wishes of "Bon Voyage and a happy journey."

Rabbi Goldfarb wrote to Max from Highmont, New York, "Being unable to be present at this important meeting I am taking this means of joining with you in honoring our esteemed member and friend in extending to him my blessings and good wishes. We exceedingly regret to see Mr. Brown leaving our community and synagogue where he gained for himself the affections and the respect of all. He will surely be missed in our congregation. For more than 25 years Mr. Brown gave of himself unsparingly to the service of Jews and Judaism. Together with his sainted wife the late Fannie Brown and their children he was always found in the forefront of our congregation activities, participating in every com[mittee]...enterprise, working unselfishly without seeking public acclaim or applause bearing in mind the good of the community. But do not envy him for his determination and firm resolve to go to that wonderful land which is the cradle of our history and which has in recent years revived as the new land of opportunity for oppressed Jews where new Jewish life is being shaped and where a new chapter of our glorious history is being written. Permit me therefore to join you dear members and friends of BIAE in wishing our colleague and friend Max Brown as well as his daughters, Helen and Evelyn a bon voyage and successful career in the land of Israel. May prosperity and good fortune follow them on their journey and May the land of promise be to them the land of fulfillment.

Max and Fannie Brown's descendants reside in Ra'anana today and are frequently visited by their American relatives. In 1996, Rachel Brandenburg celebrated her Bat Mitzvah on a weekday at the Congregation Moriah synagogue with a dramatic reading of her great-grandfather's correspondence. There is a plaque in the synagogue, recognizing BIAE's contribution to Congregation Moriah. The community recognized Michael Salit, the BIAE president in 1906, a United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism founder and an Achuza A – New York leader by naming Rehov Salit in his honor.

Past Kane Street Synagogue trustee Lisa Smith family settled in Ra'anana in August 2005. Coincidentally, she and her family live a block from Congregation Moriah. When I emailed Lisa to look into the whereabouts of the scroll, she replied with a RE line, "FOUND THE SEFER TORAH!!!" Lisa reported, "It is old and needs to be checked and possibly repaired, but it's here! In addition to the inscription from the BIAE board minutes, there is another inscription which says that it was donated in memory of a woman who passed away the previous year, 1933." [The scroll is dedicated in memory of Fannie Golde Brown.]

Carl Hoffman from *The Jerusalem Post* reported on March 30, 2006 about an extensive collection of public archives on Ra'anana's early settlement that is housed in the Bar Tov elementary school on Rehov Eliezer Yaffe. Hoffman writes that it is, "filled with fascinating objects from the days when a handful of pioneers from New York stood by their wagons and contemplated an almost endless vista of barren sand dunes rippling off toward the empty horizon." The collection includes "official papers, personal letters – many in English – and photographs from the city's beginnings to the present day." There are a number of documents on education in the first years and farming implements from the early settlement. An educational program guides young visitors in "packing crates of oranges to help them get a real feeling of what life was like here in Ra'anana at the beginning."

It is interesting to learn that Max Brown's orange grove still makes news.

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Editor's note: This article by Carol Levin was written with the invaluable assistance of Fani Brown Brandenburg and Lisa Smith. The quest to understand BIAE's historic connections to Colony Ra'anana, Palestine led to the discovery of the Sefer Torah that the congregation donated in 1934. Plans are to translate Fannie's Palestine journal from the Yiddish, read Max's correspondence as a settler and visit the public archives storage room. The full story on the Brooklyn/Ra'anana connection is yet to be written.



# THE SCROLL

KANE STREET SYNAGOGUE, Brooklyn, N.Y.

March/April 1987

Adar II-Nisan 5747

**\*\* RABBI'S MESSAGE \*\***

Dear Friends,

I have recently assumed co-chairmanship of a committee in the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative Rabbinic organization) called "Rabbis for the Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel." This committee is charged with helping give the work of our Movement in Israel (called Masorti - "traditional") a higher priority among the Rabbis and lay members of our Movement throughout the world.

During the last few years the Foundation-sponsored Masorti Movement has made enormous strides. Today there are over forty synagogues, compared to fewer than ten a decade ago; a youth program involving over a thousand young people as compared to less than two hundred; seven Masorti-type public schools instead of one; nine Ramah day camps as against none. A kibbutz has been founded in the lower Galilee, in addition to a Rabbinical school and a high school in Jerusalem. All of this has come despite the lack of support from the Israeli government or the Jewish Agency, and with a modest subvention from the North American Conservative Jewish Community.

The growth of the Masorti Movement has been hampered by limited resources. Tragically, this has happened at a time when the needs for the Conservative Movement, combining an authentic Jewish approach with a serious regard for the modern world, has never been more sorely felt. Religious extremism in Israel knows no bounds, and the polarization between the Orthodox minority (15-20%) and the non-Orthodox majority (80-85%) has become seriously exacerbated. The very soul of Israel is at stake. Will the social fabric be torn apart as the extreme elements push towards uncompromising theocracy governed by political fanatics? Or will it remain true to the vision of its founders: a pluralistic democratic society with which all Jews can identify and which they regard as theirs?



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The Foundation for Conservative Judaism is committed to the latter vision, but we must act immediately and decisively. We, who helped create and sustain Israel these past 38 years, must not turn our backs now. We have invested too much, and the people of Israel have sacrificed too much, for our dream of what Israel means to be betrayed.

The time has come for the Foundation to increase its efforts and provide an alternative to the growing polarity. Classmates of mine from the Seminary serve pulpits in Beersheva, Haifa and Ashkelon. Although the Israeli religious establishment prevents them from officiating at marriages and funerals, they are deluged with requests from the Israeli public starved for the spiritual food we can offer. The financial goal of the Foundation this year is one million dollars. Six hundred thousand has been raised, the Rabbis will raise from among ourselves at least fifty thousand more. Can the 1000 Conservative Synagogues in North America raise the balance? Will we do our share?

We will not see immediate benefits. We are planting seeds - starting new camps, youth groups, synagogues; building buildings, subsidizing sabras studying for Conservative ordination, hiring staff. But the efforts we undertake now will enrich Israeli society in endless ways.

On Shabbat Chol haMoed Pesach, April 18, I, along with hundreds of my colleagues across North America, will discuss the work of the Masorti Movement in greater detail, and ask then for your support. If you wish to help but cannot be present on that day, or wish to help in advance of that day, you may do so by sending a check to:

Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel  
3080 Broadway  
New York, New York 10027

May God firmly establish our efforts as we go from strength to strength.

A Happy and Kosher Pesach

Rabbi Jonathan H. Ginsburg

## **WARM ENCOUNTERS IN ISRAEL**

By Rachel Epstein

*Rachel's main activities at the synagogue since she and husband Melvin joined in the early '70s have been The Scroll and the Israel Committee. Their son Jonathan is now a member on his own and their daughter Emily and her daughters come for the High Holidays. Kane Street feels like family to Rachel since Rabbis Sam and Simcha Weintraub and Sara Porath, whose father married the Epsteins, are from her home town in Maryland.*

This is a short, story of an encounter in Israel. It's mainly personal but it would not have taken place without my connection to Kane Street. At a Fourth of July party in 2001, congregation member Laura Barbanel suggested that the synagogue find a way to become more personally connected with Israel, a way beyond and different from giving money.

This seems like a long time ago. The second intifada was raging then. Today, despite yesterday's bomb attack on a market in Tel Aviv (I am writing on April 18, 2006), what has come to be known as Intifada II is considered history. (Relatively isolated terrorist attacks by Arabs are just business as usual for Jews living in Israel in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.) The end is not because any pact spelled out peace terms but because Israel's separation barrier has managed to stop most of the suicide bombers from entering Israel.

In 2001 those of us with a strong interest in Israel felt united in our devotion and anguish but cut off emotionally from Jews who were more casual about, or even hostile to, Israel as they cancelled trips or avoided Israel for personal safety or political reasons. We felt both beleaguered and frustrated.

Out of these concerns, and spurred on by Laura's suggestion, the Israel Matters committee was born. It has been masterfully chaired since its inception five years ago by Sara Porath, with the inspired support of Rabbi Sam Weintraub, who reported at our first Sunday evening Salon that we were the only Israel-focused synagogue committee he knew of that was able to actually put on programs and had not disbanded because of political dissension about Israel, a fact I found extremely sad. We had dissension but it didn't kill us. It did, however, change the make-up of the committee! That's what I mean by "masterful" chairing and "inspired" support.

Most of the work of the committee has been to bring speakers to the Sunday evening Salons. We heard speakers representing, among others, "From Israel With Love," Memri, Geshet, World Jewish Congress, and "The Jerusalem Post" in our attempt to put together a well-rounded picture of different aspects of today's Israel. This past year Hedda Kafka and others presented the third annual Israel film festival.

However, we also wanted to do something to help the Israelis materially as we became alarmed by stories of the plummeting tourism trade, increases in poverty, especially among children, and hunger, made especially meaningful by an impassioned plea by Mordechai Friedman.

We took the suggestion of committee member Rita Cohn, whose cousin is the Tel Aviv Foundation's director, and quickly made the decision to fund a Foundation hot lunch—bayit cham—program at an after-school center for first graders in a poor section (I think it is the Hatikvah section) of North Tel Aviv.

By the fall of 2002 we had raised \$10,000 from synagogue members, which we were told would fund the program. (As I later learned, that only partially funds the program.) That November when I was in Israel to attend the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, I visited "our" school. The entry is through a park with beautiful, enormous trees. Between the park and the school is a raised garage-like structure—a bomb shelter. In fact, no matter what the setting in those days, reminders of danger came into play. Before the school visit, the Foundation Director (and Rita Cohn's cousin) took me to a chic café for lunch. She put her cell phone on the table with an apology: I have two children serving in the army.

At the center, the children, ages 3-6, who come after a morning at school, had not yet arrived. I was given a tour which showed bright rooms and cabinets in primary colors filled with new clothes that the parents are free to take home for their children. In the far room the little chairs were set up in a circle. This is where the children talk most days about what has been happening in their lives. A kind of "show and tell." But in this version, the telling is often about "Daddy hitting Mommy," or "Mommy crying," or similar scenes of violence and desperation.

Soon after the children arrived they were served a hot meal consisting of the ubiquitous-in-Israel turkey schnitzel, couscous, carrots, and chickpeas. Bread is not on the menu because the children eat so much bread at home. The children waited until the teacher gave the signal to begin eating. (I can't remember if there was a motzi.) They ate with excellent manners and spoke pleasantly to each other. This is clearly a meal about more than nourishment. I remember one little boy methodically circling his plate with what he called "hummous," i.e. chickpeas. These children are mostly

from the “stans” in Russia, the central Asian republics of the FSU. They could be mistaken for the children at our granddaughter’s pre-school in Washington, D.C. But I knew from the tour that their lives are different.

I got more evidence a few minutes into the meal when a distraught looking mother rushed into the center with her six-year-old daughter. She had kept the daughter out of school because she was sick but was now bringing her in because there was no food in the house. The teachers sent her home with food for the whole family.

The center and the Tel Aviv Foundation are extremely appreciative of what we are doing and have put the Kane Street Synagogue name on a plaque outside the door. We have now raised another \$10,000, after skipping a year, and I hope we will continue to fund this worthwhile project and that synagogue members who actually do seem to travel to Israel fairly frequently will take advantage of the opportunity to visit this lovely little place.

Again getting back to the personal, the day of this visit was exciting for me in a second way because I was taken to see Hemda, an exceptional, and exceptionally beautiful, science high school for gifted students from all over Tel Aviv, teaching biology, chemistry, physics and computer science. This school, which has a close relationship with the Weizmann Institute, is also run by the Tel Aviv Foundation and is a wonderful way to make sure that Israel, which had been losing ground in science education, fully develops its best natural resource: the brains of its people. To walk in here in an afternoon and see fully engaged, beautiful young people performing experiments, and playing science and math games for fun is truly an inspiration. I am grateful to Kane Street for, in a roundabout way, giving me the opportunity to know both of these special places.

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Editor’s note: To donate to the hot-lunch program, please make checks payable to Kane Street Synagogue and include “bayit cham” in the memo line.