

The Daniel Centers for Progressive Judaism



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Beit Daniel | Mishkenot Ruth Daniel | Kehilat Halev

Beit Daniel

The Center for Progressive Judaism in Tel Aviv-Jaffa

Mishkenot Ruth Daniel

Education and Culture Center and Guesthouse, Jaffa

Kehilat Halev

Spiritual Kehila in the Center of Tel Aviv



Shofar blowing at the Yarkon River



Celebrate your Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Beit Daniel



Tel Aviv-Jaffa Mayor Ron Huldai visits the Senior Citizens Group at Beit Daniel

www.beit-daniel.org.il

Fall-Winter 2013



From the Rabbi's Desk



Dear Friends,

In the winter, whether here in Israel or overseas, we all look for the same thing - warmth, love and light. This newsletter is all about these three things and is aimed at people who care about and love Israel, whose deeds affect the lives of others and how light is brought to so many people.

When Rabbi Moshe Zemer dreamed about building a Reform congregation in Tel Aviv in the 1970's, he never imagined how much we would influence secular Israeli society. He would be amazed that hundreds of children attend our preschools, dozens of schools are involved in our Bar and Bat Mitzvah in the City program, thousands of people from around the world, Jews and non-Jews, stay at our guest house, Mishkenot Ruth Daniel and enjoy our walking tours, our synagogues have set record numbers of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and wedding celebrations and that our conversion center welcomes hundreds of Jews by choice.

We continually hear about the "startup" nation and about the long list of Noble Prize winners who were educated in Israel. We consider that the Daniel Centers are an equally striking startup that is having an enormous impact on Israel and the Diaspora. It's a place for young modern Israelis to feel at home without the coercion of the Orthodox establishment and to keep and strengthen their Jewish identity. We provide a home for our senior citizens who come to our centers for weekly talks and discussions. We provide the Tel Aviv community and Jews from all over the world a place of warmth, love and light not only in the winter, but all year long.

With this spirit of light and warmth in the holiday season, we hope that you continue to support our important work for Israel and the progressive Jewish community around the world.

Happy holiday season!

Meir Azari

Senior Rabbi

The Daniel Centers for Progressive Judaism



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Community & Culture

ZuLazu (for each other) - Early Childhood & Family Center

During the past year, we realized that there were not enough young families with small children walking through our doors. In North America, young families stay connected to Temple life because they seek a Jewish education for their children, starting at a very early age. In Israel, there is still a lack of progressive Jewish programming that allows young families to take part in programs that focus on liberal Jewish values. This void is especially obvious in Tel Aviv. We opened the door to **ZuLazu** at Beit Daniel in 2012, under the direction of new Director of Education, Maya Dubinsky. This summer we officially launched the **ZuLazu** Early Childhood & Family Center and the **ZuLazu** Congregation. Now, when a family becomes a member of Beit Daniel, they have access to all the services and activities offered by **ZuLazu**.

ZuLazu's programming includes children's exercise, music classes, baby yoga, lactation consulting, basic infant care, Mother's Rosh Chodesh celebrations, Tot Shabbat and religious study. We are also offering a Beit Midrash which focuses on what Jewish texts tell us about parenting. In addition, we initiated a parents' Tikkun Olam project to help new families to adapt to daily life at home with an infant, including providing evening meals to new parents. Under this program one hundred families have joined the Beit Daniel community and we expect to expand our program and outreach.



ZuLazu

A Welcoming Path

Thanks to an Israeli Supreme Court ruling several years ago, Israelis converted by the Reform or Conservative movements – not just Orthodox – can be registered as Jewish in the Interior Ministry of Israel. Beit Daniel is now home to Israel's largest non-Orthodox conversion school, boasting over 100 converts annually. Our regular conversion program runs over the course of a year and covers theology and values, Jewish life cycle, prayer and prayer book, history of Israel, Jewish home and Jewish and Israeli holidays and memorials. In 2010, in recognition of the quality of our work, the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Israel agreed to provide a grant to support our conversion work.

Nonetheless, today in Israel, tens of thousands of Russian immigrants, many of them living in segregated Russian communities, are not considered Jewish by the State. They feel a great discrepancy between how they and the State of Israel perceive their identity. Ironically, many potential converts were persecuted because, in their country of origin, they were considered Jews. Most of them have lived in Israel all their lives, have been educated in our public schools, speak the language, served in the army and are immersed in our society and religion. But those of patrilineal descent (with a father who is Jewish), as well as others, are not considered Jewish according to Orthodox halacha. They are eager to learn about Judaism within a progressive environment which allows for open discussion and for flexibility about how they practice their Judaism.

Last year we began a new program, **A Welcoming Path** - an intensive three month conversion program for those who already consider themselves as practicing but non-halachic Jews. This program allows those, who for all their lives, identify themselves as Jews, to be seen as Jews by their government. It is led by Rabbi Galia Sadan and Grisha Kotler. Thanks to grants from the **Kathryn Ames Foundation** and the **Shirley and William Fleischer Family Foundation**, we are offering this program four times a year and expect to convert an additional 100 individuals each year. Our goal is to continue to expand the mission of inclusion within the progressive environment that the Daniel Centers offers and to increase public awareness of the validity of Reform conversions.

Tikkun Olam in Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Values through Action

This fall, the Daniel Centers welcomed the new class of Tikkun Olam in Tel Aviv-Jaffa (our joint volunteer program with BINA), with twenty-four participants from abroad as well as six Israelis. Participants in this acclaimed Masa Program volunteer and live in south Tel Aviv or Jaffa for either five or ten months. A new Internship track has been added to the Social Action and Coexistence tracks. Interns work with one organization rather than volunteering to assist a variety of populations in need. The participants of Tikkun Olam have explored their new city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. They traveled during the Sukkot break, and will take day and overnight trips around Israel to learn more about Israel's long history and diverse populations. The Daniel Centers welcome Carrie Collister as our first Tikkun Olam intern. She will help us to reach out to Diaspora visitors as well as connect to and serve visiting individuals and groups.



A personal note from Carrie Collister

“As a convert myself, I know that there are many different paths to living a Jewish life. Since my conversion five years ago, I have been a support for others taking on the challenge. I am currently living in south Tel Aviv with Tikkun Olam in Tel Aviv-Jaffa and am interning with the Daniel Centers until next summer. After visiting Israel for the first time, two years ago with Birthright, I knew I needed to come back. My desire to make a difference in the world, as well as learn more about the life of a Jewish educator and synagogue leader, has led me back to Israel and, specifically to the Daniel Centers. Although my personal conversion experience took place in North America, I see the need for all those with a desire to fulfill their Jewish calling here in Israel as well. It can be demeaning to be overlooked as a Jew when that is indeed how you identify yourself. I see the amazing potential of the Daniel Centers' Welcoming Path conversion program and am excited to be a part of the growth of this program at the Daniel Centers.”

Portraying Jaffa

This fall we began the **Portraying Jaffa** program, which brings together 14 Arab and Jewish 10th graders who will create a play from script to stage. This is both a leadership and cultural program. These Arab and Jewish adolescents will build their own bridges based on the realities of coexistence that they live in their daily lives.

This program will be co-directed by Jewish and Arab professionals from the Arab-Hebrew Theater, which prides itself on the belief that multiculturalism is not just an idea but a fact within their walls. A key mission of the theater is to open the window to the world of the arts and theatre to the residents of Jaffa, who do not have easy access to traditional Israeli theatre. The two co-directors, one Arab and one Jewish, are professional theatre directors and writers with experience with this type of community work. Students will complete the entire process of a play, from initial writing, to planning, set design, makeup and costumes, back stage management, ticket sales and ultimately play production. When the process is complete, debuting in spring 2014, these young people will have truly become a team and will have learned from one another and expanded their knowledge of the arts. Our center in Jaffa, Mishkenot Ruth Daniel, will host a majority of the weekly planning sessions and early rehearsals throughout the year.

This project is funded by an Israeli family, congregants of Beit Daniel, who wanted to support the Jaffa community. We thank them for partnering with us on this remarkable venture.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Increasingly, Diaspora families come to Israel to celebrate the Bar/Bat Mitzvah of their children. While many go to Jerusalem, the center of Israel's cultural life is in the greater Tel Aviv area. The Daniel Centers welcome your son or daughter and your entire family to have a unique and spiritual Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience in Tel Aviv. Our distinctive, egalitarian, progressive spirit will make the experience one of a kind. In addition, we offer housing at Mishkenot Ruth Daniel and unique tours in Jaffa and the southern tip of Tel Aviv. Our office is happy to speak with you about this opportunity and to tell you about the experiences of others. Contact office@beit-daniel.org.il for further information!

High Holy Days

This year's High Holy Day celebrations saw over 1000 worshippers welcome 5774 at the Daniel Centers. The children were captivated by the sound of the shofar at a moving family service on Rosh Hashanah. On Yom Kippur we joined together with our local community and visitors from abroad, including the President of the American Red Cross, Gail J. McGovern. We hosted Ron Huldai, the mayor of Tel Aviv, as he wished our senior citizens a Happy New Year. Each night during Sukkot, we celebrated in our Sukkah, which was beautifully decorated with origami. At Mishkenot Ruth Daniel, at the conclusion of Shemini Atzeret, we held the Second Hakafof in the form of a drum circle. Young and old gathered to beat farewell to the High Holy Day season and hello to the fall.



Second Hakafof at Mishkenot Ruth



Bar Mitzvah at Beit Daniel

Things are Happening...



Staff Spotlight:

Maya Dubinsky, Education Director & head of ZuLazu Early Childhood & Family Center

Maya, our resident redhead, has been teaching at the Daniel Centers for eight years and was recently appointed Director of Education, responsible for coordinating the Daniel Centers' Jewish education work in elementary and pre-schools. She founded and now heads our new family congregation for parents and toddlers, ZuLazu (see our ZuLazu article to learn more).

Maya served in the IDF as an education officer responsible for the education core's film unit which created educational films for army units. She was a counselor at the URJ Jewish camp, the Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, working with children in grades 3 to 12. Since then

she has visited the US several times, including as a leader of a youth delegation from Beit Daniel hosted by Temple Israel in Memphis, Tennessee.

Maya earned a Bachelor's degree from Tel Aviv University, double majoring in pedagogic counseling and Jewish Studies. She holds a Teacher's certificate and is a certified lactation consultant. According to Maya "It is so important to connect even our smallest children to their Jewish identity for that spark will, with continued tending, become a light to the world. Through my work at ZuLazu, I try to ignite this spark in our littlest members and ensure parents are able to help that light grow."

When not busy at the Daniels Center, Maya enjoys her family including husband Yonatan and daughter Tamar.



Maya Dubinsky and ZuLazu activity

LGBT Inclusion

Last June, in conjunction with Gay Pride week, the Daniel Centers hosted a weekend of LGBT inclusive events, which included family Shabbat services, a discussion panel, children's activities, and a Havdalah service. Because of our values of inclusion, acceptance and equality, many LGBT families reach out to us for their religious needs, including conversion of their adopted children. We look forward to more families joining us in the future.



Because my house shall be a house of prayer – for EVERYONE!

Friends & Members

Bread - Daily and Divine

Mishkenot Ruth offers several unique tours in Jaffa including 'Bread - Daily and Divine'. This tour takes visitors through both old and new Jaffa using bread as the lens to examine the unique history of the area in addition to how bread was and is used in the main Abrahamic religions. Keren, the tour guide, takes visitors on a trek back in time, stopping at the largest mosque in Jaffa, resurrected after Napoleon burned much of the city to the ground, up the port to Saint Peter's Church and finally to the first synagogue in Jaffa, founded in 1740. Along the route she weaves the story much like one might remember their savta/bubi/grandmother weaving challah for Shabbat.

On a recent tour, given in English, a visitor from America commented "I very much enjoyed learning about how three different faiths, which have deep connections, still share something as simple and organic as bread. Coming from a country with great religious pluralism, it is helpful to remember the basic things that connect us all. Our guide was fantastic; she even took time to answer all our additional questions. Plus the bread tasting at the end made my feet a little less tired!"

We hope the next time you are in Tel Aviv-Jaffa you consider this or one of the other numerous options for tours through the Mishkenot Ruth Tour Center. For more information or to set up your own tour please contact Yael, Director of Center programs and tours, at yaelhb@beit-daniel.org.il.



Bread Tour

Donate to Friends of the Daniel Centers

While over 75% of its budget is self financed, the Daniel Centers need additional funds to meet its ambitious goals of religious pluralism, multiculturalism and service. You can donate on line to Friends of the Daniel Centers, by going to www.beit-daniel.org.il. Your donations will be processed through the secure website of the Network for Good. Alternatively you can send a check directly to Friends of the Daniel Centers, 4108 Leland Street, Chevy Chase, MD 20815. Your donation is tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law. If you are interested in establishing a longer term relationship with the Daniel Centers, contact Yonatan Sacker, External Relations Director, at yonis@beit-daniel.org.il.



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