

On the Frontline of Advancing Reform Judaism in Israel



↑ Dancing with the Torah
at Simchat Torah



BEIT DANIEL
The Center for Progressive
Judaism in Tel Aviv-Jaffa

MISHKENOT RUTH DANIEL
Congregation, Tourism
and Seminars Center and
Guesthouse in Jaffa

KEHILAT HALEV
Spiritual Kehila in the
Center of Tel Aviv

[www.beit-daniel.org.il /en](http://www.beit-daniel.org.il/en)
Winter 2017

← Families Feel the Warmth
of Hanukkah at Beit Daniel

A NOTE FROM TEL AVIV-JAFFA



Dear Friend,

Twenty five years have passed since we first opened the doors to Beit Daniel, and the values that we held close to us on our opening day are still on the forefront of our innovative and creative efforts to advance Jewish renewal in Israel. A quarter of a century ago, we believed that the important value of inclusivity would take us far. I can say with pride now, looking back, that we were right.

We continue to forge ahead to fully embody inclusivity: with the support of the Genesis Foundation and the Jewish Funders Network, we launched a new program to help Jewish families of patrilineal descent living in Israel to celebrate their son and daughter's B'nei Mitzvah with us. These families deserve to be integrated into mainstream Israeli society. The Talmudic sages taught us that "human dignity is so important that it overrules a negative commandment of the Torah." A Bar Mitzvah ceremony is not a commandment from the Torah, so it can readily be offered to those who seek an experience that will draw them closer to Judaism."

Some time ago I heard the actor Michael Douglas speak at an event in North America. He is the son of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, and is

himself married to a non-Jewish woman. He spoke warmly of the welcome he received at a Jewish community that opened its doors when his son wished to have a Bar Mitzvah ceremony. The ceremony, and the open-minded attitude of the rabbi and the community, has brought the family to the heart of the Jewish experience.

I was moved by Douglas's story. It should inspire us to follow in the footsteps of Joseph, when he declared "I seek my brothers." In today's world, this is not only a religious commandment, but also an imperative if we want the Jewish people to survive through the twenty-first century and beyond.

B'bracha,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Meir Azari" in a stylized, cursive script.

Rabbi Meir Azari
Senior Rabbi

EVENTS AT THE DANIEL CENTERS



Why is our Reform Conversion Program Unique?

How to provide a sensitive conversion program for individuals who aren't halachically Jewish but grew up in a Jewish household? While many congregations see this as a challenge, the Daniel Centers see it as an opportunity. Every year, over 100 individuals, many of whom are children of immigrants and are Jewish of patrilineal descent, join the Jewish faith through our inclusive program, A Welcoming Path. Some are fully Jewish but came from countries where they could not provide the appropriate documentation as to their halachic Jewishness!

According to **Rabbi Galia Sadan**, Associate Rabbi at Beit Daniel and director of our conversion school, "This program is like the final piece of a puzzle. All aspects of their Jewishness are in place for these individuals, except for the legal aspect that needs to be gently inserted.

We are proud to see these individuals become members of our community, celebrate their weddings, children's births and B'nei Mitzvah with us. Our conversion program is a path to a welcoming community. A Welcoming Path is supported by the Kathryn Ames Foundation and the Herbert Bearman Foundation.

NEW! Inclusive B'nei Mitzvah for Intermarried Families

The Daniel Centers synagogues are the first in Israel to openly and proudly provide inclusive B'nei Mitzvah to children raised in a Jewish household, but who do not have a Jewish mother. We are the recipient, along with a number of other well-known organizations, of the Genesis Grant to engage intermarried families in communal life, through the Jewish Funders Network, in honor of 2015 Genesis Prize Laureate Michael Douglas. Non-inclusive societal behavior within Israel isolates Israeli boys and girls from celebrating this important life cycle event. The Daniel Centers say "no" to this behavior, and instead, open our doors to families seeking to provide the same opportunities as their children's friends.

THINGS ARE HAPPENING...

13 or 31: A Bar Mitzvah at Any Age

This past December, we gathered to celebrate a Bar Mitzvah ceremony unlike any other, for Tikkun Olam (run jointly with BINA) participant Daniel, age 31. Daniel, who is from Brazil, only discovered his Jewish roots in high school and became part of our service-learning program this past September seeking to solidify his Jewish identity in a modern and pluralistic way. It was here that he realized that now is the time to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah; a dream of his since discovering his Jewish heritage.



Photo: Noam Shitrit

After expressing his desire for this rite of passage, his fellow Tikkun Olam participants jumped at the opportunity to help. They coordinated the logistics with us at Beit Daniel, handled the food preparation, created a special video that was played prior to his ceremony, and in secret, raised money to fly out his mother and girlfriend from Brazil for this special day. There was not a dry eye in the room when Daniel's mother and girlfriend embraced him after months of separation.

Led by **Rabbi Meir Azari**, **Rabbi Mira Raz** and **Cantor Freddy Faur**, Daniel was surrounded by his family and friends as he read from the Torah. It was a humbling moment and a true reminder of the beauty, love and generosity that exists in this world.



Kehilat HaLev's Elul Retreat to Nazareth

In September, Kehilat HaLev, led by **Rabbi Efrat Rotem**, spent a weekend in Nazareth for their annual pre-High Holy Days Elul retreat. The month of Elul, characterized by a period of introspection, inspired the theme for the retreat: Through compassion, how can we glean inspiration from other religions as part of our preparations for the next year? Participants explored local mosques and churches, led Kabbalat Shabbat services, and viewed the city through the lens of their Nazarene tour guide. Community members had the opportunity to reflect on the past year and prepare themselves for the year to come, through embracing the concept of compassion for the other.

Kehilat HaLev welcomes visiting guests and groups from around the world for musical Kabbalat Shabbat services, a catered dinner with Rabbi Rotem, and a unique opportunity to speak with the community about relevant issues Israeli society faces today. Schedule your group's visit today by contacting Rabbi Rotem at efratrotem@gmail.com.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Rare Glimpses of Jaffa Before the Turn of the Century: Connecting the Past to our Future

Last summer, thousands of visitors from around the world came to Mishkenot Ruth Daniel in Jaffa and stood alongside local residents to view rare pictures of Jaffa taken at the turn of the century. These pictures were exhibited in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of historic Jamal Pasha Boulevard (what is today Jerusalem Boulevard). Today, this main



thoroughfare is also the address of Mishkenot Ruth Daniel; our community center and guest house. The original glass negatives and slides, taken from the Eric and Edith Matson collection in the US Archives, provide eye-opening glimpses into everyday life as well as dramatic events in Jaffa 100 years ago.

MASA Tikkun Olam in Tel Aviv Jaffa Program

We are seeking college graduates with a passion for social justice and promoting an understanding between Arabs and Jews. Participants chose between a five or ten month track and volunteer or intern at local organizations, while living and learning alongside participants from Israel and around the world. Participants study Hebrew, learn about the complex realities in Israel from a broad range of perspectives, explore questions of social justice in the Jewish tradition, and discover the land and people of Israel through fascinating discussions and tours. Tikkun Olam in Tel Aviv-Jaffa is run by BINA and the Daniel Centers for Progressive Judaism. Visit our website online to register and learn about the different tracks:

www.tikkunolamisrael.org



FRIENDS & MEMBERS

Welcoming Dr. Lee Perlman, Chairperson of the Daniel Centers



We welcome **Dr. Lee Perlman, PhD**, as the Chairperson of the Board of the Daniel Centers for Progressive Judaism.

Lee has held senior positions at The America-Israel Cultural Foundation, The Jewish Federations of North America and The Abraham Fund Initiatives and currently at **The Israel Center for Educational Innovation**. He is a research fellow at the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University, which in 2017 will be publishing his book on Israeli Theatre, "But Abu Ibrahim, We're Family!". He co-founded Beit Daniel's "Keshet Cham" supportive community program and has served as the Chairman of the Judging Panel of the Daniel Centers' "Embracing Our Differences" exhibit.

Lee grew up in Manhattan and has lived in Israel since 1982, living first in Kibbutz Harel, and since 1989 in Tel Aviv. His wife Edna, an active member of Beit Daniel, is a lecturer in the Faculty of Arts at The Kibbutzim College of Education and a visual researcher at Haifa and Brandeis Universities. They have three children: Udi, 26, Inbal, 23 and Ely, 17.

Lee said, "I have a passion for building community, and a deep belief in the Centers' ability to continue to create a more just and pluralistic Israeli society."

Support the Friends of the Daniel Centers

While over 75% of our budget is self-financed, the Daniel Centers need additional funds to meet our ambitious goals of religious pluralism, multiculturalism and service. You can donate online to Friends of the Daniel Centers, by going to our website. Your donations will be processed through the secure website of Network for Good. Or 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, please contact us at edit@beit-daniel.org.il

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