



# Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel

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Masorti Foundation Co-chairs

David H. Lissy  
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## NOAM Introduces New Singing Sensation, Shirat Machar



*Shirat Machar performing at the RA Convention in Jerusalem*

The values and ideals of Masorti Judaism have a new musical voice, thanks to about a dozen teen leaders chosen to represent the movement to Jewish communities throughout Israel and abroad as Shirat Machar, a project of NOAM, Masorti's national youth movement. The troupe, whose Hebrew name means "Tomorrow's Song," had its first major performance at opening night of the Rabbinical

Assembly convention in Jerusalem in February with a program combining music and lyrics written by the teens themselves with other well-known Jewish and Israeli numbers.

Having grown up in the Masorti movement, the group is passionate about spreading their love for Israel through song. In addition to Shirat Machar's impressive vocal talent and creativity is the group's enthusiasm for pluralism and Zionism. As senior members of NOAM who have worked as counselors for younger children in their local NOAM chapters, each also has extensive experience planning activities to engage and educate audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

Shirat Machar hopes to really take its show on the road, with at least one visit a year to the United States, possibly coinciding with Yom HaAtzmaut, Israeli Independence Day. Programs, which may be tailored to community needs and interests, can include a full-length evening concert, featuring Shirat Machar's original music along with familiar tunes; singing integrated with educational seminars on Israeli life and national holidays for children and/or families; musical enhancements to religious services; or Shabbatonim, adding an Israeli component to a weekend of tefilot, learning and social activities. By staying with host families in the US, members of Shirat Machar hope to meet peers to share common interests and establish lasting bonds that will bring Masorti Jews in Israel and Conservative communities here a little closer.

For further information about Shirat Machar and how to arrange a visit to your community, visit the group's website at <http://shiratmachar.noamist.org> or email [shiratmachar@masorti.org](mailto:shiratmachar@masorti.org) or [info@masorti.org](mailto:info@masorti.org). ♦

## L.A. Dinner Marks 'Bar Mitzvah,' Honoring Community Leaders

In a challenging fundraising year, the Los Angeles Jewish community once again proved its strong support for the Masorti movement, turning out for its 13th annual dinner, held at Sinai Temple on Sunday, December 7th. This year, six Los Angeles area Conservative congregations were dinner sponsors, with honorees from each congregation introduced by their respective rabbis. The six couples: Elke and Manny Aftergut (Adat Ari El, Rabbi Jonathan Jaffe Bernhard); Marlynn and Rabbi Elliot Dorff (Temple Beth Am, Rabbi Joel Rembaum); Martha and Michael Kahn (Temple Aliyah, Rabbi Stewart Vogel); Sally Weber and Malcolm Katz (Valley Beth Shalom, Rabbi Edward M. Feinstein); Ruthie and Michael Weintraub (Shomrei Torah Synagogue, Rabbi Richard Camras); and Terry and David Wohlberg (Sinai Temple, Rabbi David Wolpe) were chosen for their personal commitment to strengthening Masorti Judaism in Israel and involvement in local Jewish community.

A seventh couple, Elaine and David Gill, congregants at Valley Beth Shalom, received the Masorti Community Parnas Award, a coveted honor in recognition of their long-standing devotion (*cont'd. on page 5*)

## Youth Looks to Masorti

One way to gauge the increasing impact Masorti is having on Israeli life is to look at the increasing numbers of young people involved in its programs. For NOAM, Masorti's national youth movement, a good measure is the Shabbaton held in February in which almost 650 participated, an increase of about 50 percent over two years ago. For MAROM, the organization for college-age and young adults, the impact is reflected in a fourfold increase in membership in just two years.

Another measure of movement vitality is the number of bar and bat mitzvah celebrations at Masorti kehillot. In 2008, that number approached 500. While this was the first year movement leadership attempted an exact count, we know the total is well above what would have been reported as recently as even two or three years ago.

The majority of bnai mitzvah involved families not previously connected to a Masorti kehillah. When these families, and their many guests, experienced both the warmth and the spirituality of Masorti's religious services and community, they became the movement's greatest ambassadors, and this, no doubt, is part of the reason the name and work of the movement are becoming better known throughout Israel.

Of course, these bnai mitzvah are in addition to the nearly 300 children who last year were part of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program For Children With Special Needs.

The Masorti movement takes special pride in nurturing these young people as they affirm their Jewish heritage. ❖

## A Message from Masorti Foundation Executive Director & CEO David Lissy



Adversity teaches us lessons. During the war in Gaza we saw how our Masorti communities responded. Unlike the typical Orthodox congregation which gathers almost exclusively for prayer, the hallmark of our kehillot is community outreach. You can read about some of these efforts elsewhere in this newsletter.

Nowhere was Masorti's special role more graphically evident than in Haifa. After the war ended, the city published a full page ad thanking about 50 organizations in Haifa that had provided assistance to residents in the south, including respite day trips to Haifa. Only one religious organization of any kind was on that list – Moriah, the Masorti kehillah.

As we all deal with economic adversity, we should keep in mind that the help we give to Masorti is making a difference. There is a clear return for the investment, and we should feel good about what we are helping to bring about. ❖

## Connecticut Rabbi Has Precious Carry-on Cargo on Flight to Israel: Sefer Torah for Use at Kotel HaMasorti



Rabbi Gary Atkins, center, with Rabbi Philip Lazowski, Beth Hillel's Rabbi Emeritus, 2nd from right, safely delivers Torah to, from l. to r., David Lissy; Rabbi Andy Sacks; and Yizhar Hess.

Rabbi Gary Atkins of Beth Hillel Synagogue in Bloomfield, CT left for the Rabbinical Assembly Convention in Israel in February toting more than his personal luggage. He was also escorting a sefer Torah donated by his congregation to the Masorti movement for use at the Kotel HaMasorti. "It is inspiring to think that our scroll will be used for hundreds of bnai mitzvah and other smachot in the years to come," he wrote before embarking on the journey. ❖

## Masorti Movement Responds to Emergency in South

In characteristic fashion reflecting Masorti's strong commitment to social action and community service, during the recent hostilities in Gaza and emergency in southern Israel, the movement reached out to Israel's military forces, as well as to residents within striking distance of Hamas rockets, with material and emotional support.

One initiative that typified this swift response was "From the Masorti Movement with Love," in which Masorti delegations distributed to soldiers and reservists on the frontlines hundreds of fleece neckwarmers, hugs, rugelach and cards with a prayer for their safety. (cont'd. on page 5)

## Emergency Solidarity Mission to Israel a Moving Experience



(Above) Mission participants and NOAM members gather with IDF troops on the Gaza border. (Right) Wounded soldier in Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon was happy to receive a Masorti fleece hat/neckwarmer, along with visitors and good wishes from mission participants, including Rabbi Leonard Gordon of Philadelphia, right. (Far Right) Miriam Segall of Minneapolis helped distribute Masorti fleece hats/neckwarmers to IDF soldiers.



As rockets fell on Israel, the Masorti Foundation was determined to demonstrate solidarity and support, not only for Masorti communities in the south but also for all residents of the widely-affected area. With just three day's notice, an Emergency Solidarity Mission was organized, drawing participants from Conservative congregations in Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania and Minnesota.

The mission spent three emotional days on the ground, much of it within range of rocket fire from Gaza. Mission participants visited hospitals to see wounded soldiers and their families. They heard firsthand from civilians what it was like to live on constant alert for the sound of a siren warning them to seek the safety of a shelter with only seconds to spare. Along the way, there were briefings from the IDF and from the mayors of Ashkelon and Sderot and deputy mayor of Beersheva. A highlight for many occurred when the group's bus drove to a formation of tanks and troops about to enter Gaza and mission participants gave out fleece neckwarmers with the Masorti logo, cookies and copies of a special Masorti prayer for the safety of the soldiers.

At the Masorti kehillot in Ashkelon, Beersheva and Omer, community leaders discussed both the physical and

psychological impact of the ordeal. This was perhaps best understood when Rabbi Hagit Sabag, mother of one-year-old twins, described how at all times she had to have a second adult with her in order to get her children to safety.

The mission also had the sad experience of visiting with the family of Alex Mashvitzki z"l, killed in the early days of the fighting. The Mashvitzki family are members of the Masorti kehilla in Beersheva.

Back in Jerusalem, there were briefings at the Foreign Ministry and National Police Command Center. There was also a time for learning with Rabbis Chaya Rowen Baker and Tamar Elad Appelbaum.

"This trip exceeded any of our expectations," said David H. Lissy, CEO and executive director of the Masorti Foundation. "As we debriefed before boarding the plane home, we were all in or near tears. The Israelis are strong and united in their determination to achieve security. At the same time, because of the Jewish value placed on the sanctity of all human life, Israelis expressed concern about the impact of the war on residents of Gaza as well." ❖

## Rabbinic Profile: Jeffrey Cymet

Years before Jeffrey Cymet became a Masorti rabbi, he was seeking answers to one of Israel's most vexing problems. "Cultural Conflicts between Secular and Religious Jews in Israel" – written in Hebrew as his Junior Independent Work at Princeton University – reflected his already strong bond with Israel and foreshadowed what ultimately would be his driving passion: bringing Jews together under the banner of Masorti Judaism.

Cymet was drawn to the Masorti movement by a love of Jewish pluralism born of his self-described multi-denominational childhood. A native of Long Island, he attended a Conservative synagogue there for the first seven years of his life. Then, after two years living in Israel, the family relocated to Florida, where his parents maintained affiliations at both the local Reform and Orthodox congregations and enrolled him in what then was the Solomon Schechter-affiliated Lehrman Day School in Miami Beach. Committed Zionists, the family spent summers in Israel.

After earning his JD from Georgetown University Law Center, Cymet expected to move to Israel but decided first to get experience in international law. That meant a professional detour to a law firm in Seoul, South Korea before making aliyah in 1992 to work at a law firm in Tel Aviv. In 1994, he joined the Israel Defense Forces, earning the IDF's Outstanding Cadet Award during basic training. Following active duty, he used his legal background in public service, as legal advisor to the Minister of Justice; a board member of Bank Hadoar; and as general secretary of the Presidential Committee on Jubilee Year Pardons.

When one day, in 2003, he noticed that all the books on his bookshelves were related to Jewish themes instead of to legal subjects, he knew it was time to leave one career for another. With the support of his wife, Lorna, the two packed up their household for the move back to the United States and Jeff's entry to Rabbinical School at the Jewish Theological Seminary.



*Rabbi Jeff and Lorna Cymet with Yanai, 8, left, and Milly, 7.*

Today a family of four, the Cymets returned to Israel after Jeff's ordination last spring. He is now rabbi of Kehillat Adat Shalom-Emanuel, a thriving kehilla of 120 families from in and around Rehovot. In a letter about the congregation, Rabbi Cymet called the kehilla "an undiscovered gem," and "a showcase for the beautiful potential of Masorti Judaism in Israel."

Rabbi Cymet believes that by stressing the importance of being part of a Jewish community on a grass-roots congregational basis, Masorti has the potential

to remind unaffiliated Israelis of the core values and mission of living in a Jewish State.

Rabbi Cymet is already making that happen in Rehovot, with expanded educational programs for youth and adults. In addition, the kehilla seeks to meet the needs of a diverse population, hosting a Russian language Torah study group; an English-speaking Rosh Chodesh women's group; and yoga classes. For young people in the kehilla, there is a new class for post-bnai mitzvah and a vibrant chapter of NOAM, Masorti's national youth movement, whose current national student chairman is an Adat Shalom-Emanuel member.

Rabbi Cymet understands how much more there is to do. "I'd like to reach out more to youth, and we need a social action program that will serve the broader community." ♦

### Who's that in the Masorti kippah?



Rabbi Charles Simon, center left, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, was on hand for the National Prayer Service in Washington, DC where he shook hands with President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama. Rabbi Simon always wears his kippah with the Masorti logo as a way to show how strongly he supports the movement. ♦

## Masorti Movement Responds to Emergency in South *(cont'd. from page 2)*

After the ceasefire, Yediot Achronot, the largest circulation daily in Israel, published an article with accompanying photo of IDF soldiers relaxing on the ground. In it, the Masorti neckwarmers were clearly visible.

"We warmed both the heads and the hearts of Israel's fighting men and women," noted Yizhar Hess, CEO and executive director of the Masorti movement in Israel. "It was important they understood how much we supported them."

Some Masorti delegates also went to Soroka Hospital in Beersheva to visit wounded soldiers, while others spent time with residents of Saad and Kfar Aza, two kibbutzim near the Gaza border.

A big 'thank you' is also due volunteers from Masorti kehillot throughout Israel and from NOAM who jumped in to offer respite programs for residents in communities within the danger zone. Among their efforts:

- Kehillat Moriah in Haifa organized two busloads from Beersheva and Omer and another two from Netivot and Ofakim to spend a day in Haifa, with activities geared to youngsters. The trips were co-sponsored by Kehillot Magen Avraham in Omer and Eshel Avraham in Beersheva
- Kehillat Ve'ahavta in Zichron Yaakov organized an excursion for parents and children from Beersheva and Omer.
- Haminyan Hamishpachti Hamasorti in Kfar Vradim collected toys to be sent to communities where children were spending most of the day in shelters. The kehilla also arranged for families from the south to unwind at local bed & breakfasts for a night or two by negotiating discounted rates and raising the necessary funds
- A NOAM chapter in Rehovot prepared care packages containing food, warm clothing and bedding for soldiers and residents of Sderot
- NOAM garin members visited shelters to organize fun and educational activities for the children

To defray the costs of emergency programming, the Masorti Foundation in New York conducted an emergency appeal. While the immediate emergency is over, general support is still very much needed, and checks may be sent to the Foundation at 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 832, New York, NY 10115-1022. ❖

### Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel

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## L.A. Dinner Marks 'Bar Mitzvah,' Honoring Community...*(cont'd. from page 1)*

to promoting religious pluralism in Israel. This award was presented by Rabbi Harold Schulweis.

The Gills began their journey together as college students at the Brandeis Collegiate Institute, and they have each held numerous leadership positions in their synagogue and broader community. In remarks to the gathering, David Gill said, "Masorti is not about importing an American religious movement into Israel...It is about helping those many Israelis who desperately seek some sort of value system to help them in raising their families and enriching their lives. Because of religious politicization and polarization, there are many Israelis who reject or never hear religious teachings...Unfortunately many are unaware of the alternative."

Among the special guests at the dinner, co-chaired by Sandy Croll and Jo-Carole Oberstein, were Masorti Foundation co-chair Earl Greinetz; Yizhar Hess, executive director of the Masorti movement in Israel; and David Lissy, executive director of the Masorti Foundation. ❖



Honorees under a tallit celebrate with members of United Synagogue Youth, seated front.

## Men's Clubs Answer the Call:



Masorti Foundation Executive Director David Lissy, 2nd from left, accepts \$1,400 from Men's Club of Cong. Shomrei Torah in Wayne, New Jersey in response to the Foundation's Emergency Appeal issued during the recent hostilities in Gaza. Pictured with Lissy, from left, are Stuart Millstein, president of Shomrei

Torah's Men's Club; Harvey Hershkowitz, vice president of Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs Northern NJ Region and co-chair of Israel/Masorti Program Committee; and Eric Weis, NNJR president. The Men's Clubs of the Fair Lawn Jewish Center and Cong. Agudath Israel in Caldwell also supported this NNJR effort. Men's Clubs from other areas made contributions as well, including those from Park Avenue Synagogue in New York and the New York Metropolitan Region of FJMC. ❖

### When You Are Traveling to Israel...

Contact Israel Tour Connections LLC (ITC), the official tour operator of the Masorti Foundation, specializing in Masorti-oriented group and private tours. For complete information, log onto [www.masorti.org](http://www.masorti.org), and click on the ITC icon on the Home Page. Or, call ITC directly at 1-800-2 ISRAEL or email [www.israeltour.com](http://www.israeltour.com).

Now, more than ever, we need your financial support. Please help us secure Israel's spiritual future by sending your donation to:

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