Masorti Provides Help and Respite During Operation **Protective Edge**

Unfortunately, our southern kehillot have become accustomed to maintaining activities during security alerts, but the intensity of Operation Protective Edge required them to increase their outreach and support activities to both their congregations and the general community.

In Ashkelon, Kehilla Netzach Yisrael, which has a number of protected spaces, provided an Active Shelter for young children from the first days of the Operation assisted by volunteers from all over the country.

In Be’er Sheva, Kehilla Eshel Avraham’s volunteers regularly contacted elderly and house bound members to offer assistance. Despite the missiles, services were held as scheduled and included an interfaith event on 17th Tamuz.

Omer’s Kehilla Magen Avraham continued to operate their planned day camp for 100 children, after receiving permission to do so from the Home Front Command and hosted a well-attended and joyful sing-a-long for the kehilla and town residents, providing a most welcome respite.

In Netivot, NOAM’s Canaan Garin stepped up to the plate and operated kindergartens and activity centers for one hundred local children.

In a nationwide Masorti effort, our kehillot from all over the country, collected candy, hygiene items, underwear, and socks for our Regga Cham Program (A Warm Moment). Many soldiers had already spent several weeks away from home, and these laundry bags filled with much needed items were most welcome.

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**NOAM Youth Movement Receives Official Recognition**

A year ago, we shared with you NOAM’s goal to recruit 600 new members in order to gain official recognition and funding from the Ministry of Education. We are proud to announce that we have achieved this goal. There is more to this recognition than just numbers. In addition to modest funding of about $4 per participant, this change in status helps Masorti gain legitimacy with city officials, opening doors for existing and new kehillot. Recognizing Masorti’s NOAM movement demonstrates that there are many faces of Judaism in Israel.

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Dear Friends,

A message from Shueli Fast, Masorti’s new chair in Israel

First, I would like to extend a huge thank you to Emily Levy-Schochet for her four wonderful years of leadership and service to the Masorti Movement. I am so grateful to have the opportunity to continue to work with her as the immediate past chair and to be the beneficiary of her amazing guidance. My name is Shueli, a unique name derived from Shulamit and Elisheva and one month ago, I was elected Chair of Masorti, the Conservative Movement in Israel.

Born and raised in Jerusalem, in what would now be referred to as a modern Orthodox family, I enlisted in the Israel Defense Force two months prior to the Yom Kippur War and continued to serve for 22 years, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. Following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, z”l, which traumatized my world, I decided to become a teacher – which would enable me to influence Israeli youth. I fulfilled my dream and today, I am a special education teacher for high school students on the autism spectrum. It is with great anticipation that I look forward to Masorti expanding its work with children and youth with disabilities.

As a strong believer in living a pluralistic, open-minded life, it was only natural that I gravitated towards my local Masorti congregation and became involved in the Movement. The rest, as they say, is history, but here I am on the cusp of my chairmanship, contemplating what lies ahead.

What I do know with absolute certainty is that this is a very special moment in Jewish history. Israeli society is at a tipping point and it is time for Masorti to help change the way people think Judaism should look like.

But, we will not be able to do it without the help of our North American partners. I hope that I may count on you to continue to help us gain legitimacy and equal funding from the Israeli government’s religion budget.

We must stand firm against the voices that claim that our needs, Rabbis and conversion practices are not equal to those provided by Orthodoxy. Israelis are seeking ways to engage with Judaism, and Masorti communities and our staff all over the country are at the ready to help them. I am a dreamer who makes my dreams a reality and I am quite sure that together we can make it happen.

I wish you a L’shana Tova, a happy and peaceful year for Klal Yisrael.

Shueli Fast, Masorti, Israel

A Mission of Love and Support

Between the hoped for ceasefires, and resumption of operations, between visits to the bereaved and injured, between our insistence on business as usual at Camp Ramah-NOAM, between calling on our communities in the south and emotional visits with their leaders –Rabbis and members of the Conservative Movement from all over North America paid Israel two lightening 72 hour visits. Highlights of these solidarity missions included meetings with the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Natan Sharansky, and MK Yuval Steinitz, Minister of Strategic Affairs.

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This year, preparation for Camp Ramah-NOAM was very different from all other years. Set up was scheduled to begin just a few days after what turned out to be “Operation Protective Edge”. It quickly became clear that we were not going to be able to hold the camp in our usual location - the Ben Shemen Forest. Not only is the camp one of the highlights of NOAM’s annual program, but it was particularly important to hold the camp this year as a means of moving the children from the south out of the range of Hamas’ rockets and offer them a positive, enjoyable, Jewishly-oriented experience. In cooperation with the Home Front Command and the Ministry of Education, an alternate site was found – the Jordan Park on the northern end of the Kinneret – and camp was quickly relocated and all the children rerouted.

Jewish camping provides a unique opportunity to acquire new skills. Each year, NOAM staff help campers entering 7th grade prepare for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah by learning to read Torah, prepare a D’var Torah, lay tefillin, and wrap themselves in a tallit.

This year, the process was made even more memorable by the creation of a “NOAM Tallit”, distributed to each 7th grader. Decorated in NOAM’s colors of orange and green, the Masorti logo in the corners, and the inscription “Their ways are ways of pleasantness, and all their paths are peace”, the tallitot will continually reconnect each participant with the special NOAM values and skills they acquired in camp. Tallitot were also distributed to those who participated in a “year of service” either as individuals or as a group.

More than 600 children, including additional children from the south who were our guests, participated in a fun-filled program with lots of special activities.

While travelling on the bus to Be’er Sheva, we experienced a “red alert” and had a very small taste of what Israelis living in the south experience on a daily basis. We also met with Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, and had a very emotional and inspiring encounter with Racheli Frankel, the mother of Naftali Frankel, z”l (one of the three young men kidnapped and murdered at the very start of this year’s hostilities).
This year’s tefilah (prayers) for Erev Tisha B’Av took place in the shadow of the war and the two terror attacks that occurred in Jerusalem earlier that very same day. Despite or maybe due to this complex situation, approximately 200 congregants and rabbis from Masorti kehilot nationwide attended the reading of Eicha (Lamentations), held at Azrat Yisrael (the recently expanded egalitarian area at Robinson’s Arch) at the Western Wall. Tisha B’Av services were also held at Masorti kehillot all over Israel.

On Tisha B’Av day, the Masorti Movement took an active leadership role organizing the Tikun La’Kehila Conference. This annual event, attended by more than 500 people, brings together a variety of Jewish renewal organizations. Masorti Rabbi Chaya Baker spoke on the opening panel discussion with an Haredi Rabbi and rebbetzin, which itself was an unusual occurrence. She inspired the audience with her thoughts on unifying the Jewish people once again by ratcheting down the rhetoric and educating our communities to respect for each others’ differences. Rabbi Baker’s Masorti kehillah, Ramot Zion is in French Hill, a Jerusalem neighborhood fighting to keep its pluralistic identity.