



Letter from Eli Bareket

Memizrach Shemesh
Executive Director

"It is a tradition in the world when a person is on trial, he wears black and grows a beard, because he does not

know how he will be judged, But Israel is not like this- instead, they wear white and cover themselves in white and they shave their beards and they eat and drink and are happy because God Almighty brings about miracles for them!" (Jerusalem Talmud, Rosh Hashana Chapter 1 Page 57b)

On Rosh Hashana we enjoy a festive meal, wear nice new clothes, eat delicious food and celebrate because we trust that God will bring us miracles and that he will forgive us for our transgressions on Yom Kippur. But there are some members of Israeli society who are not forgiven and who do not have a place at the Rosh Hashana table; these are prisoners who have committed crimes and are serving time in prison or at rehabilitative facilities for former inmates.

Rabbi Chaim Falagi, one of the great rabbis of Ismir, Turkey recognizes that prisoners should have a place in society. Rabbi Falagi instructs "leaders and those who are responsible within the community to make sure that the shofar is also heard by those inmates serving time in prison" (Moed l'Kol Chai 14:1). Those who are in jail also have an important role in the celebration of Rosh Hashana. Prisoners in Israel are part of the people of Israel and are included in these days of judgment that begin the Jewish year.

Over the years, Memizrach Shemesh has initiated Jewish study programs or *Batey Midrash* for prisoners as part of their rehabilitation. These prisoners learn about issues of giving and tzedakah in Judaism and they volunteer in senior centers as part of their learning and to give back to the community. Returning to society can be a challenge both for these former inmates and for society. Through volunteering, these former prisoners can take action to contribute to society, and in turn, they are empowered to succeed.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

UPDATES

The latest news and highlights from three of our programs.

P2

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

A glimpse at Student Leadership Facilitator, Odelia Karmi.

P3

RABBIS ON THE RADIO

Our Rabbinic leadership making waves on Israeli radio.

P4

SLICHOT

Memizrach Shemesh launches prisoner art exhibition.

P4

UPDATES



EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES

Drori Yehoshua's eyes light up when he speaks about the Expanding the Boundaries program at Memizrach Shemesh, where he serves as Rosh Beit Midrash. Memizrach Shemesh's Expanding the Boundaries Program aims to give tools to pluralistic Jewish educators so that they can encourage Israelis from all walks of life to participate in pluralistic Jewish communal learning programs. Throughout the year, group members study Jewish texts together while discussing issues of identity, ethnicity and Jewish communal life.

At one group meeting this year, a heated discussion developed after the educators saw Ruach Kadim, a film about Mizrahi identity in Israeli society. In the film, five Mizrahi activists discussed issues of identity, belonging and community in Israel. Group members were fascinated by the film and the diversity of identities represented. One woman said, "This is the first time I understood that there is such diversity amongst Mizrachim in Israel. We just saw 5 Mizrahi activists here in the film, but there are many more identities that I wasn't aware of. It really changes how you look at different groups in Israeli society and even how I look at people who come to study at my Beit Midrash!"

Drori felt the discussion was especially significant because "when these educators go through a process of opening their eyes to the diversity within Israeli society they are able to bring this back to their pluralistic study programs and invite people in."

As part of the Expanding the Boundaries Program, educators are currently working on special programs within their own Batey Midrash that are aimed at inviting in a more diverse community of learners. Stay tuned for updates on these exciting programs in our next newsletter...

VOLUNTEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The Volunteer Youth Leadership department at Memizrach Shemesh begins the year with seven groups of eager volunteers from the Israeli Scouts and Acharai youth movements. The volunteers will work in Kiryat Menachem, Gilo, Pisgat Ze'ev and Kiryat Yovel neighborhoods in Jerusalem and in Bat Yam and Netanya. Our new groups of volunteers will continue to learn about social issues relating to their volunteer work, such as poverty, inequality and social justice. There is much excitement in the air as facilitators prepare for their first meeting with the volunteers!

KEMACH - THE NEXT GENERATION

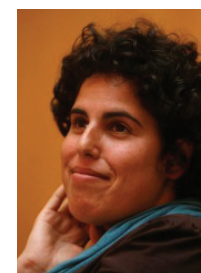
On September 29, 2009, Memizrach Shemesh will launch a new Kemach program aimed at training Kemach parent participants to facilitate Memizrach Shemesh community groups and learn how to organize within community settings. Program participants will learn about group facilitation techniques, Jewish text learning and community organizing during monthly meetings and through one-on-one supervision with their Kemach facilitator. The program will be directed by veteran Kemach facilitators, Pazit Adani and Igal David. This program is a significant milestone for Memizrach Shemesh, as it deepens the organization's commitment to grassroots community leadership development.

"The Community Beit Midrash training program is one of the most important programs at Memizrach Shemesh because it empowers those living in Israel's geographic and economic periphery to learn, develop and lead their communities into a better future" says Yardena Nachtomi, Memizrach Shemesh's Program Director. The Community Beit Midrash Training Program was made possible by a grant from Mr. Jonathan Lopatin through The New Israel Fund.

Staff Spotlight | Odelia Karmi

Student Leadership Faciliator

Sami Shamoon Academic College, Be'er Sheva



Odelia Karmi, a facilitator in the Department of Jewish Student Leadership at Memizrach Shemesh, is an activist, social worker and educator. She grew up in Shibolim, a moshav in the Negev and went to high school at the Boyer Boarding School in Jerusalem. In the army, Odelia served as a combat medic in the Arava and upon discharge returned to work at the Boyer Boarding school as a residential counselor for 7th and 8th graders. Working with young people in the boarding school was very meaningful for Karmi. She explained that "Going back to work at Boyer made me realize that I wanted to be a social worker."

"I have a place to think about the community work I do through different prisms: Jewish, social, and ethnic. This improves the work that I do. I know it is the same for my students."

In addition to her work facilitating two Memizrach Shemesh Student Leadership groups at the Sami Shamoon Academic College in Beer Sheva, Odelia works at a center aimed at helping those affected by the privatization of social services in Israel. Recently, with the help of the New Israel Fund, Karmi also organized female custodial workers at

Ben Gurion University and received the Yaffa London Ya'ari Scholarship for the important community organizing work that she did.

Odelia's extensive experience in community social work comes in handy in her job as group facilitator at Memizrach Shemesh. Throughout the year, she has facilitated Jewish text study on social justice issues such as inequality, racism and poverty. Odelia explained that the groups she facilitates are very diverse, "the groups are made up of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. When we learn about the social problems apparent in Israeli society, the students tell personal stories and this makes discussions all the more significant". Odelia was excited to work with group members on developing projects in their home communities. Some projects were aimed at strengthening the Kavkazi and Bukharian communities in Beer Sheva through community events for youth.

Odelia says that she found a new way to examine her multi-faceted identity at Memizrach Shemesh, "like the students in my group at Sami Shamoon, I have a place to think about the community work I do through different prisms: Jewish, social, and ethnic. This improves the work that I do. I know it is the same for my students."

OUT IN THE COMMUNITY



RABBIS ON THE RADIO...

THE RABBINIC LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL CHANGE PROGRAM (MERHAV)

The Rabbinic Leadership for Social Change (Merhav) Program at Memizrach Shemesh has been getting great publicity over Israel's radio waves. On Thursday evening February 2nd, the Rabbis of the Merhav group appeared with Rabbi Ari Avraham Smadga on his radio show "Halichot B'Moreshet" on Reshet Moreshet (98.4 in Jerusalem). Reshet Moreshet has tens of thousands of listeners and this was the first time the Merhav program had such widespread exposure in the Israeli media. The Rabbinic Leadership for Social Change Rabbis spoke about their experiences studying at Memizrach Shemesh and the significance of strengthening rabbinic leadership that is aware of Israel's social problems and challenges.

Rabbi Smadga, who serves as the Rabbi of the Ramat Shlomo neighborhood of Jerusalem invited the rabbis to join him on his radio show because he was interested in learning more about the program and getting the word out about the importance of rabbinic social leadership in Israel. Rabbi Zenou, Merhav coordinator was excited to be a part of the radio show and he was proud to see how eager the rabbis were to speak about their experiences at Memizrach Shemesh.

The rabbis also appeared separately on Rabbi Smadga's radio show throughout the spring. As part of a weekly segment of Rabbi Smadga's radio show, each rabbi gave a short Dvar Torah on a Social Justice issue, many of which were taken from sessions the Rabbis studied in depth at Memizrach Shemesh.



RABBI SMADGA speaks to Merhav Program Participants about Memizrach Shemesh on Reshet Moreshet 98.4 FM in Jerusalem.

SLICHOT AT MEMIZRACH SHEMESH

As part of a year long project to raise awareness about the plight of rehabilitated prisoners in Israel, Memizrach Shemesh launched an exhibition of artworks created by former prisoners who live in rehabilitative hostels and who take part in Memizrach Shemesh study sessions once a week throughout the year. For the past six years Memizrach Shemesh has facilitated groups of rehabilitated prisoners. Using Jewish texts and personal stories, group members learn about social issues in Israeli society through a Jewish lens. The exhibition "Slichot" was developed in collaboration with the Begin Center in Jerusalem, and consists of paintings and sculptures created by former prisoners.

The exhibition's opening on August 30th attracted many, with a panel discussion on issues of rehabilitation, legal rights for treatment and therapy within the prison system and musical performances by former prisoners. Elisheva Blum, who chaired the event,

spoke about the importance of forgiveness during the month of Elul and described the aim of the exhibition: "We want people to think about the deeper meaning of forgiveness. Why is it so difficult for us to forgive? How can we make an effort to forgive those who have paid their debt to society for the crimes they committed? How can we help them reintegrate and succeed?"

The exhibit will be on display for the month of Elul at the Begin Center in Jerusalem.



ARTWORK BY former prisoners that participated in Memizrach Shemesh programs lining the walls at the Begin Center.

WHO ARE WE?

Memizrach Shemesh, is a Beit Midrash (House of Study) and Center for Jewish Social Activism and Leadership in Israel. We cultivate leaders and train activists who are dedicated to the values of communal responsibility and social action rooted in all Jewish traditions especially those of the Sephardi and Mizrahi heritage. The Center was founded in 2000 by the Avi Chai Foundation and Alliance "Kol Yisrael Chaverim."



FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Memizrach Shemesh and our programs please contact:

Tamar Zaken, Development Coordinator

Tel. 972-2-624-2335

Cel. 972-50-900-9479

Fax. 972-2-624-8626

E-mail: tamarz@mizrach.org.il

99 Jaffa Road • Jerusalem, Israel • 94342

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**...THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISES WITH
HEALING IN ITS WINGS (MALACHI 3:20)**

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Our Tradition of Social Responsibility
Founded by Avi Chai and Kol Yisrael Chaverim

Tel. 972-2-624-2335 | Cel. 972-50-900-9479 | Fax. 972-2-624-8626 | E-mail: tamarz@mizrach.org.il

www.mizrach.org.il | 99 Jaffa Road • Jerusalem, Israel • 94342