



Date

Inside Address

Dear ABC Temple Member,

Before you leave for summer vacation, I want to share some insights and information with you about the role The Schechter Institutes play in helping Israel and the Jewish people.

Jews everywhere recently celebrated Israel's 60th birthday, reaffirming the reality of a Jewish homeland, a Jewish state created for Jews yet founded on democracy and the ideal of pluralism -- a place for "all inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex" -- as stated in its declaration of independence. In 1948, there were only 806,000 residents. That number has grown to over 7 million today of which 75% are Jews. Of those 5.5 million Jews, 69% consider themselves fully secular, 10% religious, and 21% Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox.

You might think, as I did, that being a Jew, living in Israel surrounded by our history and culture, would create a strong connection to Judaism. In truth, this is not the case, as evidenced by the majority of Jews who declared themselves non-religious in the Central Bureau of Statistics study in 2006, I referenced above. Fueling their resentment and increasing their distance from Judaism is the minority ultra-Orthodox control of the government, including influence on issues around work, marriage, conversion, and sadly, education.

Schools funded by the government come in three varieties"-- state-secular, state-Orthodox, and ultra-Orthodox. This situation has polarized the Jewish population, and worse, denies the foundation of our religious traditions, history, and culture to the majority of Jews living in Israel. Adding to the challenge and unrest is the ethnic and cultural diversity created by continued immigration from Eastern Europe, Iraq, Morocco and Ethiopia, along with the Arab population. The complex economic, political, and social turmoil divides Israel and in the end, derails the path to a lasting peace. A cohesive society is stronger in the face of an external enemy.

Though we live in the Diaspora, we can help address one serious need so that "Am Yisrael chai", the People Israel live. Through the Schechter Institutes, Jews of any affiliation or nationality can choose to enrich their lives with Jewish studies provided within the structure of secular schools. On May 15th, the *Jerusalem Post* reported:

"According to the Education Ministry, the number of ordinary secular schools offering extra hours of elective Jewish studies has doubled over the last two years, while the number of students choosing to take these classes has soared by 92 percent These figures reflect a growing trend of secular interest in Israel's Jewish heritage ... The [Schechter] TALI school system ... has also boomed, growing 30 percent in the last three years alone ..."

In fact, the Schechter Institutes provide much more than just TALI schools. With 4 major programs, Schechter reaches Jews across the globe. Midreshet Yerushalyim provides Jewish education to 1,200 Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel. And In the Ukraine, over 1,000 children and their parents are attending TALI schools and Camp Ramah. Imagine -- a Jewish camp in the former Soviet Union!

The Schechter Institute also trains Conservative rabbis in its seminary, with 18 Israeli and 2 European students there now. Another 38 rabbinical students from abroad are studying at the Seminary's one-year overseas program. Schechter is training rabbis to hold pulpits throughout Israel or wherever there is a need.

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In addition, rabbinical students are training in the pioneering chaplaincy program, an unqualified success among students and health care professionals.

Currently, over 550 dedicated educators are earning a masters degree in Jewish Studies to fill the void for Jewish studies throughout Israel. Last fall, the Institute began a program in Sephardic Studies, one of 14 tracks offered.

The progress has been remarkable, and I am proud to be a part of the efforts here in Los Angeles to support this extraordinary institution in Israel, meeting the vast and varied need for Jewish education. I sincerely hope you too, will add your support.

Wherever your travels take you, have a wonderful and safe summer.

With warm regards,

Mike
Los Angeles Area Coordinator
The Schechter Institutes

PS – If you are traveling to Jerusalem, you are personally invited to meet with Eitan Cooper, the Development Director at the Schechter Institutes, for a tour of the campus. Eitan would be happy to tell you about the extraordinary programs Schechter offers. Give me a call at (310) XXX-1234 or drop me an e-mail at schechterla@gmail.com to arrange a meeting. We are particularly excited to finally be breaking ground this summer on the new Neve Zedek campus in Tel Aviv thanks to generous gifts from Lou Miller, Bruce Whizin, Jake Farber, the Lainer families, and other members of our Los Angeles community.