

## Orthodox Changemakers Delegation to New York & D.C. February 2012

### Shira Ben-Sasson Furstenberg



Shira Ben-Sasson Furstenberg serves as the Grant Officer for the New Israel Fund's Religious Pluralism Pool since January 2011. Previously, she served as the Religious Pluralism Project Coordinator at Shatil, NIF's Empowerment and Training Center for Social Change Organizations in Israel. Her work focuses on assisting three target populations: the general public (secular, Reform, Conservative, etc.), the liberal Orthodox public, and immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Born and raised in a liberal Orthodox family in Jerusalem, Shira was an officer in the IDF and received her BA and MA in cultural anthropology from the Hebrew University. She worked for five years in the Knesset Research and Information Center, focusing on education and culture. She is married and a mother of three.

**New Israel Fund (NIF)** is the leading organization committed to equality and democracy for all Israelis. NIF is a partnership of Israelis and supporters of Israel worldwide, dedicated to a vision of Israel as both the Jewish homeland and a shared society at peace with itself and its neighbors. NIF strengthens organizations and leaders that work to achieve equality for all citizens of the state; realize the civil and human rights of all, including Arab citizens of Israel; recognize and reinforce the essential pluralism of Israeli society; and empower groups on the economic margins of Israeli society.

### Yonatan Benarroch



Yonatan Benarroch is the former chair of Ne'emanai Torah vaAvodah (NTA), an organization devoted to strengthening openness and tolerance in Orthodoxy. As part of his work on behalf of NTA, he worked to promote independent religious services such as an independent international Beit Din – Jewish court of law – and an independent cemetery in Jerusalem. Yonatan is a lecturer on Jewish mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he received his BA, MA and PhD degrees. Last year he was a visiting scholar at the Tikvah program at Princeton University. A Fulbright scholar, he is currently doing his post-doc as a visiting researcher at Harvard Law School and the Harvard Center for Jewish studies, focusing on mythical and mystical aspects of Jewish law in Zoharic literature.

**Ne'emanai Torah Va'Avodah** seeks to return Religious Zionism to its roots, works to create a thinking religious culture that is open and self-critical, and encourages a courageous halachic (Jewish legal) discourse that deals with the challenges of contemporary times. The organization works to promote the values of tolerance, equality, and justice in religious society and to have a real influence on the Jewish-democratic character of Israeli society.

### Gadi Gvaryahu



Gadi Gvaryahu, an eighth generation Jerusalemite, is the founder and director of several liberal Orthodox organizations in Israel. He has been the force behind the creation of several educational institutions that combine committed Jewish learning and excellence in education, with pluralistic and democratic values. These schools include the Ruth Korman Pelech School in Kiryat Ekron and the Amit-

Amichai Yeshiva in Rehovot. Gadi established the Yitzhak Rabin synagogue in Rehovot, the only synagogue named after the assassinated Prime Minister. He is currently the director of two NGOs focused at combating racism and promoting tolerance in Israeli society, particularly within the Orthodox community: The 12 Heshvan Forum, and the Banish the Darkness Anti-Racism Coalition.

**The 12 Heshvan Forum**, named for the Hebrew date of Prime Minister Rabin's assassination, was founded to promote religious and social tolerance and teach respect for the institutions of the country, its symbols, and its leadership. Since its establishment, this cutting-edge organization has been a key player in addressing and fighting incitement from within Israel's religious community. 12 Heshvan led a Chanukah campaign this past December, protesting a series of "price tag" incidents against Palestinians, IDF officers, and Israeli peace activists. The campaign, called "Tag Me'ir" (Tag of Light) is a play on the Hebrew words for price tag, "tag mechir."

**Banu Choshech Legaresh** (Banish the Darkness) is a coalition of 16 Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and secular organizations who joined forces to fight racism and incitement in Jewish Israeli society, particularly as espoused by radical rabbis and other religious figures. The coalition aims to create a public space that fights racist processes, publications, and opinions, which are damaging to Israeli society and Judaism. BtD has created an educational guide against racism, continued legal and advocacy efforts against incitement in contemporary Jewish texts and by religious leaders, and have led counter-protests against conferences and rallies promoting intolerance in Jerusalem, Petach Tikva and elsewhere.

### **Batya Kahana-Dror**



Batya Kahana-Dror is Executive Director and Advocacy Coordinator at Mavoi Satum (Dead End). A lawyer by profession, Batya organized "Yachad", the Council for Interrelations between the Secular, Observant and Ultra-Orthodox and has edited books on the subject. She was a member of the editorial staff of Channel One and Two television stations. Before joining Mavoi Satum in 2004 Batya specialized in criminology for the Jerusalem District Attorney's office. Her areas of expertise include gender issues in law, religion and society, and she writes and speaks widely on the subject, including in a monthly column in Ynet (Yediot Achronot's online newspaper).

**Mavoi Satum** (Dead End) is a leading Israeli organization advocating for a permanent solution for *agunot* and *mesuravot get* (women denied a religious divorce). (The Orthodox rabbinate in Israel has sole authority over personal status issues, including marriage and divorce.) Mavoi Satum believes that divorce is a basic human right and that it is every woman's right to leave a bad marriage and live her life as she chooses. Mavoi Satum aids these women on an individual level, while promoting broad legal-religious reform.

### **Hanah Kehat**



Dr. Hanah Kehat is the founder and chairwoman of Kolech: Religious Women's Forum. Hanah lectures on education, Jewish Studies and gender and has established education programs at various institutions. She completed her doctorate in Jewish Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Hanah has published many scholarly and popular articles, as well as three books: *Mishnat Hanatziv*, *Feminism and Judaism: – From Collision to Regeneration*, and *Women's Torah Study: The Idea and Meaning*.

**Kolech: Religious Women's Forum** is the first Orthodox Jewish feminist organization in Israel. Kolech aims to increase public awareness and bring about change in Israeli religious society by: disseminating the values of gender equality and mutual respect between men and women; encouraging equal opportunities for women in the public arena; initiating equal opportunity legislation that benefits all Jewish women in Israel; advancing women's rights and women's leadership in religious and halachic (Jewish legal) spheres; encouraging greater equality for women in matters of personal status, such as marriage and divorce; and engaging in an uncompromising battle against all forms of gender violence. Recently, Kolech has been active in combating gender segregation in public spaces throughout Israel.

### **Drori Yehoshua**



Drori Yehoshua is the Rosh Beit Midrash at Memizrach Shemesh. Drori is an experienced educator and mentor, one of the founding members of the Hartman High School and of Memizrach Shemesh. Drori is married to Stacy and has four children.

Since 2000, **Memizrach Shemesh** has nurtured the language of Jewish social responsibility. The Center, inspired by Mizrahi and Sephardi Jewish experience, philosophy and commentaries, trains social activists and fosters leadership, who are committed to the Jewish values of solidarity and justice. From Kiryat Shemona in the north to Kibbutz Ketura in the south, 500 people annually attend the Center's ongoing activities. These join the hundreds of other people spreading the word: Jewish commitment means social responsibility. Memizrach Shemesh was established with the help of the Avi Chai Foundation and Alliance (Kol Yisrael Chaverim).