

NEW JERSEY JEWISH NEWS

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Learning to Grieve

A legendary teacher's thoughts on Tisha B'Av. Page 6



Back in the Game

Bush tries to jumpstart the peace process. Page 19



Hope Amid Horrors

Local film student captures humanity against Shoa backdrop. Page 25

Conservative shul largest to be led by woman rabbi

by Jill Huber
NJJN Bureau Chief/Monmouth

A Monmouth County synagogue has become the world's largest Conservative congregation to be served by a woman rabbi.



Rabbi Toni Shy

Rabbi Toni Shy will become religious leader of Marlboro Jewish Center/Congregation Ohev Shalom in Marlboro on Aug. 1.

The Rabbinical Assembly, the international association of Conservative rabbis, confirmed that Shy's new congregation is the largest to be led by a woman rabbi. It has a membership

See **RABBI** page 17

For spiritual leaders, time to recharge

by Johanna Ginsberg
NJJN Staff Writer

Silence was on the menu for breakfast and lunch at a rabbinic retreat drawing three local participants.

Mornings at the July 15-20 retreat include silent breakfast, followed by two hours of "mindfulness" meditation and one hour of yoga. Lunch is also silent. The quiet time is designed to enable

See **RECHARGE** page 16

Bring them home



Above: A crowd of all ages, from many parts of the country, gathered across from the UN to call for the release of soldiers kidnapped from Israeli soil last year. Below: Elie Wiesel at the July 16 Free the Soldiers Rally at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza in Manhattan. Photos by Elaine Durbach



Refusing to forget, rally-goers again demand release of captive Israelis

by Elaine Durbach
NJJN Bureau Chief/Central

Karnit Goldwasser worries that some people may be tired of campaigning on behalf of her husband and the other captured Israeli soldiers.

But Goldwasser has one more request — that people write to the ambassadors of

Lebanon, Syria, and Iran to ask their help getting from the captors of the three men at least "a sign of life."

That small request electrified a large rally held Monday, July 16, at the United Nations' Dag Hammarskjold Plaza. A crowd police estimated at 1,500 people joined Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel and other national Jewish and political leaders in calling for

the release of the three Israeli soldiers kidnapped a year ago and another five Israelis missing in action.

Hizbullah militants abducted Ehud Goldwasser, 31, and Eldad Regev, 26, on July 12, 2006, precipitating last summer's 34-day war in Lebanon. Their abduction came just weeks after Hamas

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Through My Father's Eyes...

by Mark Samuel Ross

This year Tisha B'Av, which of course means the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, begins on next Monday evening, July 23. Our tradition holds that on this day both the First and Second Temples were destroyed, and other evils happened to our people. But did you know that in memory of our lost Temple, we not only read the Megillas Eichah but we also leave a square undone when painting our house, put on ashes when getting married, and, of course, crush the glass under the chuppah?



Mark Samuel Ross

And here is a little riddle about Tisha B'Av – see if you know the answer:

"Israel could have changed the evil decree if only they'd stopped and listened to me. I wrote Megillas Eichah as prophecy, but alas its words all came to be." Who am I? The answer, of course, is the prophet Jeremiah.

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RECHARGE

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self-discovery.

"Silence works to create space where people are allowed to deepen their privacy and discover insights about the world and the nature of God," said Rabbi Nancy Flam, founding director of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality and codirector of its programs.

The summer retreat, held at the Trinity Conference Center in West Cornwall, Conn., is the start of an 18-month program aimed at renewing religious leaders' spirituality — a facet of their leader-



Rabbi Faith Joy Dantowitz of Millburn is one of three local participants in the IJS' Rabbinic Leadership Program's newest cohort, which began with a retreat July 15-20.

ship often overlooked in the press of synagogue management, sermon-writing, and other pastoral and community duties.

"Rabbis are so busy trying to help congregants with their spiritual growth, they do not have sufficient support or guidance for their own spiritual development," said Flam.

To address this issue, Flam and five other rabbis, led by Rabbi Rachel Cowan, created IJS and established the Rabbinic Leadership Program. It began as an initiative of Metivta in Los Angeles, funded by a seed grant from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, where Cowan served as director of Jewish Life Programs from 1990 to 2003. But it soon outgrew Metivta and became its own organization. "The goal was to restore the spiritual dimension to Judaism that, post-Holocaust, was drained out of Jewish life," said Cowan, who left Cummings in 2003 to become director of IJS, which is now supported by over 15 foundations.

The 18-month program is devoted to inner searching through meditation, text study, yoga, prayer, and spiritual guidance. Four local rabbis have already been through the program, which has just begun its fourth cohort. IJS has steadily grown and expanded its offerings to cantors, educators, and lay people.

The 37 Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist rabbis selected for the newest cohort from a pool of over 70 applicants included Rabbis Rebecca Sirbu, director of both the Center for

Jewish Life and the MetroWest Jewish Health and Healing Center; Faith Joy Dantowitz of Millburn, formerly associate rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in Short Hills; and Elliott Tepperman of Bnai Keshet in Montclair.

The Rabbinic Leadership Program is among a growing number of projects aimed at giving rabbis time out to reboot. Minnesota-based Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal, for example, offers a program for rabbis to reconnect with their original visions of the rabbinate. The Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary offers a week-long rabbinic retreat for continuing education as does the Reform Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. And the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem runs an annual Rabbinic Torah Study Seminar for North American rabbis.

All answer a growing and documented need among rabbis for post-seminary education and renewal. Tuition for the 18-month IJS program is \$1,200 per year plus \$1,350 in room and board for retreats. Alumni pay room and board for retreats and a minimal tuition (around \$100). The program is heavily subsidized, with costs per rabbi estimated at \$5,000.

One of the rabbinic alumni of the IJS program, Rabbi Matthew Gewirtz of B'nai Jeshurun, could not even begin to measure the effects of his participation.

"It was trajectory-changing for my rabbinate," he said.

Unlike at other rabbinic conferences, shop talk, whether about budgets or politics, is not on the agenda. "This is about your own journey," said Gewirtz. "What is your sacred path? What is your spirituality? How can you dig deep down? It changes the way you look at life because of the inner work you do."

Afternoons are spent studying traditional hasidic texts, viewed

inner life," said Flam.

Cowan said that while study of Hasidism has disappeared except among the hasidim themselves, their perspective is more in tune with a postmodern sense of God. "It's a more experiential theology — how to open yourself to feeling and connecting with God. How to relate to God and how your life is affected by the relationship. People do not find faith in the old ideas of a God intervening in history or being responsible for illness or cure. Everyone knows the God they don't believe in. That God doesn't exist any more. We have a different understanding now."

Three additional retreats are held every six months throughout the program (winter retreats are held in California). Between retreats, participants are expected to continue weekly study of hasidic texts using the *hevruta* method, that is, studying with a partner. They are also asked to

'We're looking for cultural and institutional change in the Jewish community such that the spiritual life would come more to the center for those seeking it.'

select a contemplative practice to continue.

After the formal program concludes, alumni are invited to partake of various options to continue their spiritual work, ranging from alumni retreats, study resources, and one-on-one monthly meetings to a *hevraya*, or circle of friends, in which alumni

On one foot

Who: Institute for Jewish Spirituality

What: 18-month Rabbinic Leadership Program

Why: Helping rabbis deepen their spirituality through meditation, text study, yoga, prayer, and guidance

Testimonial: "It changes the way you look at life because of the inner work you do."

from a contemporary perspective.

"There's a tremendous potential for creative use of the tradition of *Hasidut* [hasidic practices] among contemporary Jews," said Flam. She speaks particularly of the works of early hasidic figures like the Ba'al Shem Tov (1700-1760) and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1810). The literature "reflects years of investigation by the masters of how the inner life works. We're about the

contribute to a resource bank their own programs inspired by the IJS program.

Looking for change

IJS' goal is to move spirituality to the top of the Jewish communal agenda. "We're looking for cultural and institutional change in the Jewish community such that the spiritual life would come more to the center for those seeking it,"



Rabbi Matthew Gewirtz, one of four local alumni of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality's Rabbinic Leadership Program, said his participation was "trajectory-changing for my rabbinate."

said Flam.

Applicants must demonstrate self-awareness, recognition of a need for the program, and a position of influence in the Jewish community.

"The focus on spiritual development has two purposes: first, for the leaders' own growth, insight, and development and second, that this knowledge and empowerment gets translated to the rabbi's place of work — to bring the tools to the congregations that are so thirsty and desirous for their own growth," said Flam. "It's an individual and a communal agenda. The second cannot happen without the first."

Just prior to departing, Dantowitz, regional director of admissions and recruitment at HUC in New York, was looking forward to taking time out. "As a human being, a rabbi, a spouse, and a parent of four children, it's hard trying to find ways to stay focused and work on spirituality," she said. "It will be a treat to connect more deeply and find people who want to focus on the same things I do. I hope it will infuse my rabbinate and my Judaism with a greater sense of purpose and spirituality."

Although no Orthodox rabbis have participated, IJS has received inquiries from a few, and according to Flam, there are plans to evaluate the IJS programs and make necessary changes to accommodate Orthodox rabbis in the next cohort.

Sirbu, who leads mediation services occasionally at Congregation Beth El in South Orange, hopes the retreat will enrich her teaching. But what appealed to her most, she said, is "the focus on my inner life. The message is that you have to work on your inner life to be a good leader."

Rabbis Stuart Weinberg Gershon of Temple Sinai in Summit and E. Noah Shapiro of Congregation Shomrei Emunah in Montclair have also participated in the program. ■

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