

CLAL UPDATE - Fall 2005



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CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership

- ❖ Stimulates volunteer, professional and rabbinic leadership to build responsive Jewish communities across North America.
- ❖ Helps individuals to imagine new Jewish possibilities.
- ❖ Promotes inclusive Jewish communities in which all voices are heard.
- ❖ Convenes interdisciplinary seminars that explore the Jewish and American futures.
- ❖ Enhances Jewish participation in civic and spiritual life in North America.

Dear Friends,

For more than 30 years, CLAL has built a solid reputation for bringing Jewish wisdom to contemporary Jewish life. As a respected advocate for religious pluralism, CLAL has been acclaimed for translating many of the tradition's insights into American idioms, attracting people to Jewish life while always embracing the dignity of difference. Today, CLAL is recognized as an important leader in intrafaith and interfaith dialogue. Sought out by members both inside and outside the Jewish world, CLAL participation is seen as key for revitalizing communities, crossing boundaries, and reimagining the future.

In this issue, we will focus on CLAL's bridge-building work with the interreligious community. Using Jewish wisdom as a model and a method that both honor the particularity of each tradition while celebrating the connection to the wider world, CLAL brings its leadership to a variety of settings, helping to create new relationships. More than just a Jewish presence, CLAL brings a Jewish voice to the table at a time when suspicion of the "other" is at a critical juncture. Drawing from Jewish insights, CLAL helps steer the dialogue to greater understanding, mutual respect, and a new kind of listening that engages all parties.

From CLAL's founding, interfaith relations have always been an important aspect of our work. In his most recent book *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The Encounter between Judaism and Christianity*, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, President Emeritus of CLAL, challenges people of faith to overcome their hostilities and work together to create a better world. CLAL continues to break new ground in this effort, whether by meeting with Pope Benedict XVI in Rome with a group of clergy, or by joining religious leaders at a milestone address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan on the future of Islam and Judaism.

These initiatives provide the stepping-stones for encouraging pluralism in all communities. In addition to our other programs, they "take Jewish public," and enable us to touch more people than at any other time in CLAL's history. You are a vital partner in this. Together we can make a difference in our communities and in our world. Thank you for your commitment to this work.

B'Shalom,

Fern K. Hurst
Chairman

Irwin Kula
President

Donna M. Rosenthal
Executive Vice Chairman

Brad Hirschfield
Vice President

BUILDING SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

CLAL Bridges Muslim-Jewish Divide

Increasingly, CLAL is sought out as an important institution for global bridge-building. Recognized for its expertise in religious pluralism and its creativity in making an ancient tradition relevant, CLAL is seen as a central address for promoting unity while respecting religious integrity.

In September, Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, CLAL Vice President, participated in two historic programs with Muslim heads of state. “The power of the programs reflected what CLAL has been teaching for more than 30 years,” said Rabbi Hirschfield, “that tolerance alone is not enough to build strong foundations between communities; it requires genuine pluralism which celebrates both what is shared and what is particular to each community.”

The first meeting, held in Washington, D.C, was with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, who discussed the future of Islam and Judaism with a representative group of about 60 American rabbis. In a moving presentation entitled “Islam and Judaism: Beyond Tolerance,” King Abdullah addressed how Jews and Muslims are tied together and their shared roots. Warning about the common threat of religious extremism, he emphasized that we must move beyond mere tolerance to true acceptance, and expressed hope for the two faith traditions to work together towards peace, justice and reconciliation.

The second program, sponsored by the American Jewish Congress—Council for World Jewry, emphasized the theme of enlightened moderation. A first-ever event, it featured Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, who spoke before a group of American Jewish and Pakistani leaders about ways of strengthening relations and issues regarding ties with Israel. Sitting on the dais with the Pakistani leader were members of the American Jewish community and Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations.

In his address, President Musharraf talked about the need to distinguish between terrorism and extremism. He said that terrorism must be fought with military force, but that extremism is countered by getting to the root causes.

“President Musharraf borrowed the best insights from the left and the right to set a new agenda for the Middle East,” said Rabbi Hirschfield. “Like CLAL, he looked for the partial truths to find a new beginning. This approach reflects CLAL’s methods for over 30 years, finding the partial truths in those communities with which we disagree, and creating new possibilities.”

CLAL Joins Delegation to Meet Pope

In the early summer, Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, Ph.D., CLAL’s Director of Organizational Development, joined a small team of religious leaders for a meeting with Pope Benedict XVI in Rome to promote Jewish-Catholic relations and begin an ongoing

dialogue. While in Rome, he participated in a conference on Catholic-Jewish relations with over 100 leading international religious figures including Albert Guigui, Chief Rabbi of Brussels; Jossi Steiner, Chief Rabbi of Slovakia; Joseph Ehrenkranz from the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding at Sacred Heart University; and Cardinal Casper, President of the Papal's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. The program was sponsored by the world renowned Focolari, a movement begun in 1943 to promote unity and universal brotherhood, and boasting over five million members.

In late September, working with the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding, Rabbi Blanchard returned to Europe with a small group of clergy to help familiarize newly appointed Bishops with the special meaning that the Holocaust holds for Jews and the Church's position on its relation to non-Christian religions. The Church's position grew out of the recognition of its own role in creating the climate that made the Holocaust possible. The group visited Auschwitz and returned to Rome for a conference on Jewish-Catholic dialogue. In Rome, Rabbi Blanchard was interviewed by EWTN-TV, the Global Catholic Network, seen by millions of viewers in America and around the world.

"As a leader in religious pluralism, CLAL has much to offer at the international table," said Rabbi Blanchard. "Through these kinds of dialogues, we can begin to look at our suspicions of each other and build a stronger interreligious foundation."

Religion, Violence and Peace

In the globalizing world, will religions be able to co-exist by showing mutual respect and understanding, or will they be used to fuel hatred and conflict? In June, interfaith leaders from across the globe gathered at the Kremlin in Moscow for a symposium on how religious faiths are being exploited to support political conflicts and violence, and to look at ways to promote peace and counter terrorism. It was organized by the Intercultural Dialogue Platform, a Muslim organization based in Istanbul that convenes interreligious dialogue to foster greater harmony, and its Eurasian branch (DA) based in Moscow.

Providing the Jewish perspective on interfaith co-existence was Rabbi Hirschfield, the only North American rabbi invited and one of the few American participants. He spoke about the role and responsibility of a group's members to act as responsible interpreters of their respective traditions, and the Jewish understanding of how justice and peace are related. The goal of the program is to bring intellectuals and religious leaders worldwide together to alleviate suspicions, establish new networks, and begin conversations on religion as an instrument of global peace.

U.S. State Department Invites CLAL to Meet with Islamic Delegation

Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, along with a small group of Jewish religious leaders, recently met with an Islamic delegation of seven academic and religious leaders from the West Bank and Gaza. The event, hosted by the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program, was held in New York. The objective of the evening was

to foster better relations between Palestinian and Jewish religious leaders and to develop more positive views of each other. Participants included Sheikh Yousef Abu Snineh, chief Imam of the Masjid Al Aksa in Jerusalem, the third holiest mosque in Islam, and Rabbi Tzvi Hersch Weinrab, executive vice president of the Orthodox Jewish Congregations. The evening was part of the U.S. State Department's project "U.S. Foreign Policy for Islamic Leaders," which is geared to inform the delegation about the substance and formulation of U.S. foreign policy.

Religious Communities Fight Global Poverty

Leaders from more than 35 national religious organizations gathered in New York in an effort to mobilize religious Americans on behalf of the Millennium Development Goals. The program, co-sponsored by CLAL and directed by CLAL Senior Fellow Michael Gottsegen, Ph.D., was organized under the auspices of the Consultation on Interfaith Education, of which CLAL is a founding member.

Adopted in September 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) express the unanimous commitment of U.N. member states to cut global poverty in half by 2015. At the New York meeting, representatives of the various organizations discussed the religious and moral imperative for fighting poverty. Keynote speaker Rabbi Irving Greenberg, CLAL President Emeritus, discussed the Jewish tradition's grounding for making a better world. Participants considered the underlying principle supporting their involvement and common to all their faiths: that the neighbor whom we are urged to love is not limited to our kin, but includes the stranger—both the near and far one.

Moved by this mandate, the diverse religious communities committed to integrating support for the MDGs into their public policy agendas. Action plans, networks, and task forces were created to help religious leaders mobilize their own communities. This extensive interfaith effort is a good example of how America's religious traditions can look past their differences and play an important public role in committing to a shared moral vision.

Aspen Film Program: The Life and Death of God in the 21st Century

Challenging our ideas about religion, CLAL presented a two-part film series at the Aspen Institute's Paepcke Auditorium in August. The first, a screening of *Time for a New God* followed by a discussion led by Rabbi Kula, explores how God and the sacred fit in a world where traditional explanations are increasingly harder to apply. The second, *Freaks Like Me*, followed by a talk led by Rabbi Hirschfield, explores religion, faith, and violence. Filmed at the 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, it looks at how our different faiths can be used to heal and nurture peace.

Both programs, with more than 200 people in attendance each day, were followed by very dynamic and thoughtful question and answer sessions. The events played to a diverse audience from the Aspen community. Filmed by Grassroots TV, the popular two-part series aired a number of times on local television.

Bringing Jewish Wisdom to New Places

In September, Rabbi Kula spoke at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center School (MET) in Providence, Rhode Island. The school's director and co-founder is Dennis Littky, an award-winning educator, who co-founded the Big Picture Company, a non-profit education reform organization. The innovative inner city high school serves the most vulnerable and at-risk students.

In his talk to the faculty and administration, Rabbi Kula explored the relationship between human beings as images of God and the unique process of education pioneered at the MET school. Drawing from Jewish values and wisdom, he helped participants reflect on their life transforming work and ground it in a larger spiritual framework. They were encouraged to explore how their own spiritual values and world views drive and affect their social change efforts. They discussed the responsibility entailed in building a covenantal community in which for the first time in any professional setting they, as teachers, and their students are being treated as images of God—as unique individuals of infinite value.

“CLAL helps provide a framework or language, derived from Jewish wisdom, that enhances a way of living vitally in the world,” said Rabbi Kula. “We helped them see their job as educators in a more profound light and they helped me see the application of Jewish ideas to global issues.”

Palliative Care

Both rabbis and doctors hold positions that can influence the decisions of patients and their families facing serious illness. They also hold the role of healer and can help sick patients find meaning and growth at a difficult time.

Through the generous renewed support of the Caring Commission of UJA-Federation of New York, CLAL, in partnership with the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, will provide a six session training program for 12 rabbinic and 12 medical students in palliative care. Students are now being recruited for the spring series. In addition, building on their work together over the past year, CLAL and Mt. Sinai will enhance and complete the course curriculum, which they have developed for future dissemination to rabbinic seminaries and medical schools across the country. The training and curriculum guide will cover many of the emotional, ethical, spiritual and religious aspects of end-of-life care, offering a holistic approach to meet the needs of patients and their families.

Medical students from last year's program said that they found the training fundamentally changed their attitude about how they were going to practice medicine. Rabbinic students said that it opened doors for them to take a more active role with physicians about the demanding issues of end of life care.

Talking Movies: A CLAL Perspective

In September, Rabbi Jen Krause, CLAL's Associate Vice President, was a guest speaker at a compelling film series hosted by WNBC-TV's film critic Jeffrey Lyons and film

executive Roberta Burrows. The series, “Talking Movies,” brings together actors, directors, screenwriters and producers with interested students, professionals, and film lovers for a behind the scenes look at new foreign and independent films before they are released to the public. It is held at the Directors Guild of America Theatre in New York City.

Launching the series was *Ushpizin*, an Israeli film dealing with Jewish mysticism and miracles. It explores what happens to an Orthodox couple when two unexpected guests show up for Sukkot. Commenting on the movie, Rabbi Krause said that its themes—Is change possible? Can people start anew? The power of faith—are universal. The film takes Jewish wisdom and brings it to bear on broad human issues.

“Exploring film as a text, we are able to reach new audiences with Jewish insights,” said Rabbi Krause. “For many younger audiences, the new media is their source. But the questions that are raised—they are timeless.”

Tools from the Rabbinic Tradition

Rabbi Steve Greenberg, CLAL Senior Teaching Fellow, was a scholar-in-residence recently for a three-day conference with 200 Episcopal ministers. He was asked to help ministers access the tools of rabbinic *midrash* (storytelling) to enrich their thinking about scripture and to enhance their resources for sermon writing. During the program, the group encountered many *midrashim* from Genesis that expanded, reworked and sometimes transformed the biblical text. They were enthralled by the interpretive methodology and stated that they actively want to recover the literature as a resource for themselves and their communities.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Leadership and Community Development

Fortifying communities, nurturing skilled, creative leadership, developing new resources to give professionals and families fresh ways of celebrating Jewish life at work and home—these are goals of CLAL’s leadership and community programs. Acclaimed throughout the country for their innovation and effectiveness, CLAL’s teaching and training provide the tools for the next steps in American Jewish life.

In the last months, CLAL faculty has traveled around the country teaching in many communities. In New York, Rabbi Jen Krause worked with the prestigious 92nd Street Y for an evening of learning and reflection marking *Selichot*; in Boston, Rabbi Kula participated in a symposium on religion and public television, sponsored by WGBH; in Scotch Plains, NJ, Rabbi Hirschfield was a keynote speaker for a mini General Assembly with the Jewish Federation of Central Jersey; in Maitland, FL, Rabbi David Kalb provided leadership training with the Jewish Federation of Greater Orlando; and in St. Louis Park, MN, Rabbi Kula was scholar-in-residence with Beth El Synagogue. These are just a few of the many programs CLAL faculty provided, helping to build more Jewishly vibrant and inclusive communities.

Unity and Diversity

Recognizing the success of CLAL's "Unity and Diversity" initiative, the UJA-Federation of New York's Commission on the Jewish People renewed its support for an additional year. The program will focus on developing the Queens dialogue group, which consists of members of all denominations. Breaking down stereotypes and barriers, the discussion provides the participants with skills and insights to gain a better understanding of the variety of approaches to Jewish life, enhancing cooperation and thereby creating a more unified and effective Jewish community. In addition, working with members from last year's Riverdale and Manhattan groups, the "Unity and Diversity" program will produce a guide for interdenominational dialogue to help leadership build bridges among Jewish communities. Once completed, the guide will be distributed to rabbinic, professional, and volunteer leadership across North America.

Internship Program

Acclaimed for its cutting-edge approaches, the CLAL Internship Program offers talented rabbinic and post-doctoral students the chance to further their training to become leaders in building open, pluralist communities. This year's program, under the direction of Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, has participants representing all the denominations and seminaries in the New York City area. The group meets weekly using a variety of methods including the interdenominational study of Jewish and secular texts, the development of personal narratives, and learning journeys around New York, to explore their own particular Jewish philosophies and theologies, and to creatively imagine the future of Jewish life. Topics addressed include contemporary Jewish identity formation, the cultures of American Jewish life, the spiritual and religious landscape of America, and the implications for rabbinic authority, community building and Jewish practice of living in a pluralist and open society.

CLAL Calendar Celebrates Jewish Life through Inspired Reflections and Art

Commemorating CLAL's 30 year past, its new *Sacred Days* calendar 5766-5767 (2005-2006) features the beauty of Jewish wisdom through word and image. Offering essays, insights, and stories by people who've been touched by CLAL, it presents a wide range of topics from personal torah to CLAL's teachings. Woven amongst the texts is the stunning artwork of Moico Yaker, a well-known Jewish artist of Lima, Peru, whose pieces celebrate the richness and diversity of Jewish identity and tradition, while reflecting on the complexity and sacredness of the spiritual journey. To order, send a check to CLAL Sacred Days Calendar (see enclosed order form). The price, including postage and handling, is \$15.

CLAL IN THE NEWS

Coverage

In the past months, CLAL faculty did a variety of interviews for major print and broadcast media. Issues ranged from the disengagement from Gaza to God and Hurricane Katrina to religion and popular culture.

Highlights include:

- Discussing the disengagement from Gaza on national radio, Rabbi Kula appeared on “The Jim Bohannon Show,” and Rabbi Hirschfield, on “The Lars Larson Show” (Westwood One). Beliefnet also interviewed Rabbi Hirschfield on the topic.
- Voice of America’s “Talk of America” interviewed Rabbi Hirschfield on the 80th anniversary of the Scopes trial. Rabbi Kula was interviewed on Central Coast Public Radio’s “Talk of the Bay” on the topic.
- Rabbi Krause was a guest on Air America’s “Mike Newcomb Show” (radio), where she discussed religion and TV programming.
- Rabbi Hirschfield was a guest on Central Coast Public Radio’s “Talk of the Bay” to discuss the impact of 9/11.
- The *Dallas Morning News* interviewed Rabbi Kula on Hurricane Katrina and the power of prayer.
- *New York Newsday* interviewed Rabbi Kula on racial profiling and, in a separate article, on faith in the face of disaster.
- *The Aspen Times* reported on CLAL’s two-day Aspen programs in August, highlighting *Time for A New God* and *Freaks Like Me*.
- Rabbi Hirschfield was quoted in the *Florida Times Union* on the Jewish view of an afterlife, and, in a separate article, on evolution.
- Rabbi Jen Krause was featured in *The Columbus Dispatch* on Jewish tradition and the treatment of workers for Labor Day.
- The *Wilmington Journal* interviewed Rabbi Hirschfield on religion and violence.
- Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard was noted in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and the *Portland Press Herald* as a member of a Jewish-Catholic delegation visiting Poland and Rome.
- Rabbi Hirschfield wrote an op ed for the High Holidays on the danger of divisiveness, which was published in New York’s *The Jewish Week*.
- The *Forward* published a piece on CLAL’s new *Sacred Days* calendar.
- The *New Jersey Jewish News* interviewed Rabbi Hirschfield on a vision for the Jewish future.