

CLAL UPDATE - Spring 2006



CLAL

Spring 2006 ❖ 5766 אביב

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,

Healing, within the individual, between people, and amongst nations, is critical to our ability to move forward. Without it, we never really resolve our issues, reconcile our relationships, and make peace.

Since our beginning, CLAL has brought hope and renewal to so many—building bridges through our leadership and community development programs, creating pluralist approaches to problem solving, providing training for innovative thinking, and mining Jewish wisdom as a resource for contemporary living.

Responding to the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, CLAL faculty went to Southern Louisiana to help the communities there start to mend. Offering programs which provided the first steps toward spiritual healing, CLAL used Jewish tradition as a tool for recovery. Supporting people's bravery in maintaining daily life, CLAL helped them to cope with the trauma and recognize their own courage and resiliency.

Assisting patients and their families to confront serious illness, CLAL, in partnership with Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, is offering a new training for medical and rabbinic students. Based on the success of our earlier work, this innovative series responds to the difficult bio-ethical questions doctors and rabbis must face. Providing a holistic approach, it addresses the psychological, ethical and spiritual dimensions of treatment.

Forging new dialogue through our Building Spiritual Capital Initiative, CLAL, in sponsorship with the University of California at Irvine, the Cordoba Initiative, and the American Society of Muslim Advancement, is presenting a remarkable program bringing disparate groups to the table to discuss what fuels the passions in the Middle East conflict. Fostering greater understanding, the program creates fresh synergies, encouraging pluralism and openness.

These are just a few of the ways that CLAL is making a difference. Bringing Jewish wisdom to a variety of settings, CLAL creates possibilities for a Jewishly inspired, ethical and spiritual life. You are a central part of this effort. Your support has enabled us to reach out to new arenas, using Jewish tradition to pave the way. Thank you for joining with us in navigating the challenges, and in providing the tools and skills that fortify personal and community growth.

B'Shalom,

Fern K. Hurst
Chairman

Irwin Kula
President

Donna M. Rosenthal
Executive Vice Chairman

Brad Hirschfield
Vice President

HOPE, HEALING AND RENEWAL IN LOUISIANA

After the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Rabbi Irwin Kula, CLAL President, and Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, Ph. D., CLAL Director of Organizational Development, went to New Orleans and Baton Rouge to help the Jewish communities start to mend. The CLAL program, “Out of the Whirlwind: Jewish Possibilities for Acceptance, Hope and Renewal,” offered a series of workshops, meetings, community events and talks designed to inspire people to take the first steps towards healing. Using biblical texts to engender personal narratives, Rabbis Kula and Blanchard encouraged people to reflect on their experiences and see the heroism in everyday events. By creating the framework to connect people with their feelings, share their stories, build empathy, and confront the trauma, the program provided a new sense of possibility in the renewal of life.

In addition, Rabbi Kula was a frequent guest on WWL, the leading talk radio station in New Orleans, where he discussed healing after tragedy with a wide audience. Contacted by a listener to expound on the importance of storytelling in renewal and in choosing the tales we tell, he offered the following excerpted response, which addresses the power of narrative for both individuals and the country:

Ultimately “survivors” need to frame a narrative that invites people to go beyond feeling empathy for victims.... Psychologically, this is important for two reasons. The first is to mitigate compassion fatigue that sets in because a narrative that constantly reiterates a victim/savior plot negates the real heroism and power that the “victims” are demonstrating which inspires the renewal we all want. The second is that the victim/savior plot allows an insidious, unconscious fear of the helplessness and vulnerability that is a repressed aspect of all of our lives to become a source of distancing for the “saviors,” who know unconsciously that they, too, are vulnerable.

People will distance themselves from those they perceive as victims not out of malice or callousness, but because they do not have the psychological strength to cope with the feelings of vulnerability that dealing with victims raises. Rather than face those feelings and recognize that we are all both...victims and saviors in an interdependent dance, we disassociate from them...and from the painful situation.

The sooner we can tell a story that invites all Americans into an historic opportunity...to address not only the needs of New Orleanians, but the deeper needs and hopes that we have for a decent, just and equitable society...that invites us to participate not only in disaster relief, but in the renewal of one city as an example of...something needed in cities throughout America—the sooner we can galvanize commitment and energy. It simply is recognizing one of the deepest spiritual truths that people intuitively know—tragedy has within it the seeds of profound opportunity and it is...seizing...that opportunity that defines what is best about our humanness. This is a leadership task, and it is frighteningly missing today.

BUILDING SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

The Irvine Dialogue

Creating a unique partnership, CLAL, the University of California at Irvine, the Cordoba Initiative, and the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA) are joining together to present a breakthrough program for better understanding the passions that fuel the Middle East conflict. This campus-wide program, with a target audience of over 400 expected, “Why Israel? Why Palestine?” looks at the underlying cultural and psychological issues dividing Israelis and Palestinians. Rather than present policy prescriptions on what should be done, this new methodology offers a fresh approach by asking, “Why should we care so much?”

“Before diagnosing the problem, we need to better understand why something matters to someone else,” said Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, CLAL Vice President, and a program conceiver and panelist. “By creating an environment that encourages this inquiry, we can build a firmer base and greater commitment without undermining each other.”

Presenting six leading thinkers and speakers, three from the Arab/ Palestinian perspective and three from the Jewish/Israeli perspective, the program considers the cultural narratives articulated by both sides. Following the panel discussions, smaller community dialogues are taking place about what each of us can do to promote peace. Bringing new voices to the table, the event forges new synergies, nurturing greater respect and the potential for moving forward. A second conference is also being planned.

Bridging the Jewish-Muslim Divide

Working with the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the largest Muslim organization nationwide, CLAL is collaborating on several programs to bridge the gaps separating our communities. Rabbi Hirschfield and CLAL Senior Fellow Michael Gottsegen, Ph.D. are developing a series of events that will bring together imams and rabbis, as well as Jewish and Muslim lay leaders from across North America, for dialogue, reflection and study in order to empower them to work in partnership. Participating in ISNA’s Education Forum, they are exploring with Muslim attendees the creation of a textbook series for Jewish and Muslim youth on what each of the traditions should know about the other. Over Labor Day, they will work with ISNA to bring together Jewish and Muslim lay leaders at ISNA’s national convention in Chicago, which will feature Rabbi Hirschfield as a speaker. The event draws over 30,000 attendees.

CLAL at the United Nations

In April, Dr. Gottsegen was invited by the 2006 Economic and Social Council High-Level Segment to speak at a preparatory meeting to assess the current global situation on creating productive work and its impact on sustainable development. Offering support for a global full employment policy, Dr. Gottsegen addressed these issues from a Jewish perspective, emphasizing the link among full employment, human security and dignity. In attendance were delegates from U.N. member states, senior officials of the Secretariat, and other NGO representatives. At CLAL, Dr. Gottsegen directs several interfaith initiatives, including an ongoing effort on behalf of the Millennium Development Goals.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership and Community Development

Partnering with federations and other institutions across the country, CLAL faculty imbues leaders with the skills they need for shaping dynamic Jewish life. Working in almost 50 cities, CLAL brings its expertise to help prepare communities for the challenges ahead. Recent highlights include:

- New York, NY: At the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard joined with father Daniel Berrigan and other Christian and Muslim leaders for a compelling talk on religion as a force for violence and peace.
- Wooster, OH: Rabbi Brad Hirschfield was a Theologian-in-Residence at the College of Wooster. While there, he also gave a talk to the Clergy Academy, with over 100 members from the Akron area, on the impact of ritual on spiritual creativity.
- Dallas, TX: Rabbi Irwin Kula was the Scholar-in-Residence at Congregation Shearith Israel, where he discussed his forthcoming book, *Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life*, to be published by Hyperion Press in September 2006.
- Kansas City, KS: Working with the Jewish Federation, CLAL faculty are helping to prepare the next generation of Jewish leaders, building synergies across boundaries.
- Chicago, IL: Joining Rabbi Kula as featured speakers at AIPAC's Midwest conference were his father, Cantor Morton Kula, and his daughter Gabrielle. The program offered an intergenerational perspective on the dreams that connect us to the State of Israel.
- San Francisco, CA: Donna M. Rosenthal, CLAL's Executive Vice Chairman, was a guest speaker at the Women's Funding Network's National Conversation on "Women, Faith, & Philanthropy." The program, presented before an interfaith audience, looked at how the three themes could be joined to address the needs of women and children-at-risk.
- Phoenix, AZ: Rabbi David Kalb taught three sessions on religion and conflict at Temple Chai.
- Queens, NY: Rabbi Blanchard led participants in the "Unity and Diversity" initiative in a program emphasizing diversity as a key to enriching Jewish community life.
- Gulfport, MS: Rabbi Steve Greenberg served as a facilitator and program consultant for the Hillel Alternative Break, sponsored by the Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning.
- Long Island, NY: Joining with an imam and deacon, Rabbi Brad Hirschfield gave a talk on religion and conflict in the world today to more than 500 high school students.
- Greenwich, CT: Rabbi Kalb led a program on Jewish tradition and funding at the Jewish Federation.

The Impact of Pluralism Over Time

A few years ago, CLAL faculty created an exciting new model for community development—The Colorado Initiative. Working with the many streams of Jewish life in Boulder and Denver, faculty developed a series of programs to build unity and dialogue. Offering innovative classes and tools, The Colorado Initiative mended fences and offered new potential for fostering vital Jewish identity, experience and growth.

Recently, a leading community professional contacted CLAL about the lasting effect of its work. “Looking back, I am clear that The Colorado Initiative helped me to create a Federation presence in Boulder. Without CLAL, we wouldn’t have had the opportunity to bring the amazing teachers....It was programs like “What’s Jewish About Money”... that helped build momentum. Just in case you haven’t been thanked for your vision in the area of programming...I wanted to personally remind you of the impact of your work.”

PALLIATIVE CARE

Training Series for Medical and Rabbinic Students

Building on the success of CLAL’s training, in partnership with the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, a new six-part series on palliative care is being offered to rabbinic and medical students. Led by Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, Ph. D. and Cynthia Pan, M.D., the program is being provided through the generous renewed support of the Caring Commission of UJA-Federation of New York.

This term, a new unit was developed on Jewish approaches to bioethical questions which included such issues as the use of DNR orders, feeding tubes, ventilators, physician assisted suicide, as well as the different available denominational positions. Four trigger films were produced as training tools for discussion. Each film delves into a different real life scenario with which doctors and clergy must contend when treating patients for serious illness.

Andrea Schwartz, a medical student who is taking the training with her husband Charlie, a rabbinic student, said about the program, “The class has provided an incredible opportunity to focus...on treating a whole person....Exploring different Jewish approaches to dying, and learning about how clergy and physicians can work together to enhance patient care...have been an invaluable part of the process of becoming more comfortable discussing this sensitive and potentially emotional topic.”

***Bikur Cholim*: A New Film Encourages Visiting the Sick**

Recruited by the Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services, Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, well-known in the Jewish health and healing movement, is featured in a moving film about the importance of *Bikur Cholim*, visiting the sick. Joining him is the esteemed author Elie Wiesel, who was one of CLAL’s founders. The film addresses the deep values and transformative powers that visiting the sick can offer, both to the visitor and to the patient. It will be used by hospitals, synagogues, and a variety of other institutions to encourage volunteer participation.

CLAL GOES INTERNATIONAL

Australasian Students Visit for an In-depth Training in Pluralism

In December, a group of close to 20 students from the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) came to CLAL for an in-depth look at pluralism. The program, led by Rabbi Steve Greenberg, the Director of CLAL's Diversity Project, used texts from rabbinic literature to explore the nature of conflict and how to nurture constructive controversy. Providing frameworks for seeking "truth," the group looked at how to resolve disputes in a Jewish way.

"Rabbi Greenberg really challenged us to think about what 'diversity in thought' is all about and how we put it into practice," said Tamar Paluch, a participant in the program. "This is an issue which is particularly pertinent on campus, when trying to create a meaningful and accessible Judaism for people from all sorts of backgrounds."

The AUJS group came to the U.S. to meet with important Jewish organizations across the country. AUJS is the federal body for Jewish Student societies at universities and colleges in Australia and New Zealand, and caters to a broad spectrum of Jewish students as well as the wider community.

CLAL in Morocco

This June, a CLAL delegation will participate in the 12th Annual Fes Festival of World Sacred Music. The program will feature a unique colloquium, led by Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, on religion, violence and peace, and how our different faiths can be used to heal not only ourselves, but also the rest of humanity. *Freaks Like Me*, CLAL's film featuring Rabbi Hirschfield, who will discuss religion and globalization as a keynoter, will be shown at this exciting forum, which promotes music as a source for world harmony. The Fes Festival has gained such renown that it is included in the new book, *1000 Places to Visit Before You Die*. In addition to Fes, the group will also visit the beautiful cities of Meknes, Volubillis, Marrakech and Sefru.

Boundary-Breaking in Eastern Europe

This spring, Rabbi Steve Greenberg visited Budapest, Prague, Kiev, Moscow and St. Petersburg with filmmaker Sandi DuBowski to bring both his award-winning book, *Wrestling with God & Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), and the groundbreaking film, *Trembling Before God*, to Jewish communities there. Meeting with students, teachers, congregants, clergy and other professionals, they created vital discussions around faith, Judaism and homosexuality, challenging long held beliefs about Orthodoxy and Judaism. Replicating the model they used in South Africa, Rabbi Greenberg and Mr. DuBowski used the book and film to engage in public screenings, school dialogues, teachings, cultural events, synagogue programs, Shabbat dinners, and community building with a wide variety of organizations in places that have witnessed immense historic change. Exploring questions both in terms of the human element and the dynamic quality of the tradition with people of many faiths, they used Jewish wisdom to offer a fearless examination of religious identity and the universal struggle to belong.

NEW TOOLS, ANCIENT WISDOM

Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life

This new book by Rabbi Irwin Kula, to be published by Hyperion Press in September 2006, uses Jewish wisdom to help people live deeply and joyfully. Rather than teach people how to be Jewish, it assumes that Jewish wisdom is one of the many wisdom traditions in the American marketplace of ideas that can enrich anyone's life. Reflecting upon the yearnings that we all share—for truth, meaning, creativity, self-understanding, happiness, love, and transcendence—the book uses Jewish wisdom to illuminate these deep desires and invites people to embrace their longings, proposing that we neither reduce our dreams because of the disappointments, nor delude ourselves that we ever will fully satisfy all of our yearnings. It suggests that at least one of the keys to a vital and wise life is to live in the gap between our yearnings and their ultimate fulfillment, enjoying the satisfactions along the way while propelling ourselves to new levels. Stay tuned for more information on how to purchase this exciting new resource.

“Simple Wisdom with Irwin Kula”

Hailed by American Public Television as one of its most recommended shows, this national 13-part series featuring Rabbi Kula looks at the central issues of our lives—work, money, family, community, identity, and others. Shown around the country in more than 30 markets over the past few years, “Simple Wisdom” recently aired in three new markets—Detroit, MI; Chico/Redding, CA; and Albuquerque/Santa Fe, NM. Bringing Jewish wisdom to a wide audience, the series explores the tensions we live with and offers a few practical exercises for daily living.

CLAL on Film

Freaks Like Me, the acclaimed documentary on religion and violence featuring Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, will soon be available to the American market. Bought by Ironweed film distributors, it will be released through their subscription based film club. And at a New York benefit for the Telluride Mountain Film Festival in Colorado, a trailer of *The Believers*, a film that CLAL is co-producing featuring Rabbi Hirschfield, was previewed, generating huge excitement and enthusiasm.

CLAL ONLINE

A new feature now available on CLAL's website (www.clal.org) is the CLAL Weblog. Part of our online magazine, *eCLAL: An Online Journal of Religion, Public Life and Culture*, the eCLAL Blog is a place where you can respond to our focus question of the week, comment on articles appearing in *eCLAL*, engage with CLAL faculty on issues of the day, and participate in a fast-paced conversation about what really matters. To comment on an article in the eCLAL Blog, go to the eCLAL Blog homepage, scroll down to the article to which you want to respond, click on the “comments” link just below the article, and add your remarks. Other readers will respond to you in turn, and soon the eCLAL Blog will be buzzing with the kind of conversation that can pull us all together as members of a vibrant community.

CLAL Update * 7 * Spring 2006

CLAL IN THE NEWS

From the war on the holidays to the Super Bowl to the dispute over the cartoon of Mohammad, CLAL continues to appear in a number of leading stories nationwide, providing new insights on what drives the debates. Recent media highlights include:

- In response to the commercialization of the holidays, and the convergence of Christmas and Chanukah, CLAL appeared in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Westchester Journal News*, the *Florida Sun-Sentinel*, and *Beliefnet*, and presented commentary on NPR's "Morning Edition." CLAL also fielded calls from "The O'Reilly Factor" on Fox News.
- Describing the Super Bowl as the biggest civic religious event, Rabbi Hirschfield was interviewed by the *Kansas City Star*, the *Buffalo News*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Air America* and *KIRO-AM Seattle*.
- Commenting on the dispute over the printing of the cartoon of Mohammad, Rabbis Kula and Hirschfield did interviews with the Voice of America, Coast Public Radio (with a request from NPR), *NY Newsday*, and *New York Jewish Week*.
- Rabbi Hirschfield appeared on Court TV to discuss a case involving a couple who allowed their child to starve to death.
- Rabbi Kula was a guest on Illinois Radio Network's "Eye on Illinois," where he discussed religion in politics.
- The *L.A. Times* interviewed Rabbi Hirschfield on Jews becoming Buddhists.
- Rabbi Hirschfield appeared on Westwood One's "The Lars Larson Show" to discuss the impact of Ariel Sharon's health.
- The *Christian Science Monitor* interviewed Rabbi Kula on the film, "Munich."
- The Religion News Service interviewed Rabbi Steve Greenberg on Orthodoxy and homosexuality, and Rabbi Hirschfield on Judaism and gambling.
- Rabbi Hirschfield was interviewed by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on a new resource—a history of Israel in comics.
- Rabbi Hirschfield wrote an op ed on Chanukah and the wisdom of the *dreidel*, which appeared in *New York Jewish Week*, the *Atlanta Jewish Times*, and the *Texas Jewish Post*.
- Citing a German ad campaign misappropriating images from the Holocaust, Rabbi Hirschfield wrote an op ed which was published in the *Forward*.
- Rabbi Steve Greenberg wrote an op ed on Purim as a time for "Unmasking," which was published in the *New York Jewish Week*.