

CLAL UPDATE - Fall 2006



CLAL

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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,

This has been a very exciting time for CLAL. In fulfilling our mission to take Jewish wisdom public, CLAL has embarked on new avenues, taking the insights of Judaism to enthusiastic audiences nationwide. Addressing both the internal spiritual struggles and the wider societal divides, CLAL offers new tools for building a rich inner life, nurturing pluralism, and bridging the deep partitions within our religious communities that plague our country and world.

In September, CLAL President Rabbi Irwin Kula published his new book, *Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life* (Hyperion, Sept. 2006). Warmly received, *Yearnings* merges ancient Jewish wisdom with contemporary insight, offering practical perspectives on daily problems. From the most complicated – love, relationships, loss and death, to the deceptively simple – how to be creative and happy, *Yearnings* explains how our desire for answers is no different now than in Moses' time. Praised by noted author Harold Kushner as "...persuasive, rooted in tradition...filled with startling insights," *Yearnings* provides a way to celebrate the messiness of life as part of the human experience and as a necessary road map to living fully.

Looking to the larger societal issues, the use of religion as both a force for violence and for peace remains a critical issue in CLAL's efforts to "Build Spiritual Capital." How the different faith traditions can be mined to promote greater understanding is central to CLAL's goals. In response to the growing conflicts, Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, CLAL Vice President, conceived and is featured in a landmark television series for Bridges TV – American Muslim Television Network. *Building Bridges*, a new 18-part series with religious leaders from the Muslim and Christian faiths, addresses the tensions among the major traditions and the broader American culture. Launched on November 2 and airing nationally, the series is one of the network's highlights.

Yearnings and *Building Bridges* are just two of the ways that CLAL is reaching out, taking Jewish public through innovative approaches. Never static, CLAL creates possibilities, based on Jewish wisdom, for nurturing spiritual growth and civic participation. Your support is essential to these efforts. With your help, we are able to remain cutting-edge. Thank you for joining with us in helping to touch so many lives.

B'Shalom,

Fern K. Hurst
Chairman

Irwin Kula
President

Donna M. Rosenthal
Executive Vice Chairman

Brad Hirschfield
Vice President

YEARNINGS: EMBRACING THE SACRED MESSINESS OF LIFE

Life is messy and imperfect. We yearn for clear paths – comfortable solutions. Whether facing a mid-life crisis, raising our children, or trying to find meaning in the conflicts blanketing the evening news, we need to accept that sometimes we do not have the answers, and that there are no quick fixes to complex problems.

In his new book *Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life* (Hyperion, Sept. 2006), Rabbi Irwin Kula shows us how to cope with the complexities of life. Challenging the notion that messiness is to be avoided, he says that it is part of being human and fuels the journey for discovering life's lessons. Using texts and stories, he reveals how through this "dance with uncertainty" we find the sacred on our path to building a richer life.

Inspired by Jewish wisdom, *Yearnings* offers a new way to look at unfulfilled desires. Rather than feeling disappointed, he asks us to celebrate life's ambiguity. Life has no simple, easy roads. It is always an exquisite balance between joy and sadness, hope and anxiety. When we confuse our yearning for meaning with a desire for stability, meaning eludes us. *Yearnings* motivate us, and transform hunger into personal, positive energy.

Thoughtfully, Rabbi Kula looks at our timeless yearnings – for truth, meaning, love, happiness, transcendence, and the desire to create and find the way. He shows how doubt and disagreement are part of the journey, and are gifts that push us to ask harder questions which enable us to grow. In the end, he says we are so much more than the sum of our parts, and he invites us to embrace the uncertainty of life. Celebrating the complexities, he offers the creative tools to help us in this exciting exploration.

In late November, Public Television stations across the country will air a new pledge special, *The Hidden Wisdom of Our Yearnings*, with Irwin Kula. (Check local listings for the dates and times in your area.) The program, produced by JTN Productions, will reach hundreds of thousands of homes, and viewers who enjoy it are encouraged to show their support of this type of programming by becoming a new station member, or by renewing their membership. The show was taped in Chicago before an enthusiastic audience.

As part of Rabbi Kula's book tour, he will visit close to 40 cities nationwide. Highlights include: the Shambhala Mountain Center in Boulder, Colorado, where he took part in an inspiring forum on Compassionate Leadership with the Dalai Lama and Queen Noor; the Jewish Book Festival in Rochester, NY, where he joined Harold Kushner in a community event; and the American Business Associates of Long Island, NY, where he addressed local business leaders about our yearnings for success.

Rabbi Kula has received enormous media praise for *Yearnings*. Highlights of his coverage include: NBC-TV's *The Today Show* (repeat guest), the Hallmark Channel's "New Morning" show (repeat guest), KUSA-TV's *Colorado & Co.*, *The Lars Larson Show* (Westwood One radio), WBEZ (Chicago Public Radio), *Spirituality & Health* magazine, the *Baltimore Jewish Times*, and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. For more information on *Yearnings*, or to buy the book, go to www.yearnings.irwinkula.com.

BUILDING BRIDGES: Abrahamic Perspectives on the World Today

What is the relationship between religion and violence? Must your faith tradition be wrong in order for mine to be right? What is the role of God in a democratic society?

Building Bridges: Abrahamic Perspectives on the World Today, a first-ever interfaith series premiering on November 2, 2006 on Bridges Television (American Muslim TV Network), looks at these and other vital questions about the role of religion in America today. Conceived by Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, CLAL Vice President, this landmark multi-part series brings religious leaders together from the major faiths – Jewish, Christian and Muslim – to answer the tough questions dividing our country and world. From religion and terrorism to abortion, the series asks leaders to probe their own traditions for insights to create a new understanding and foundation for bridge building.

“Religion is killing more people than at any time since the Crusades,” said Rabbi Hirschfield. “The show is like a ‘McLaughlin Group with God,’ in which different opinion leads to exciting conversation, expanding the boundaries of our thinking while respecting the various commitments that each of us brings to the table.”

In addition to Rabbi Hirschfield, featured guests include Imam Abdullah Bey El Amin, Director of the Council of Islamic Organizations in Detroit, Michigan, and Father Francis X. Mazur, Pastor of St. Gerard’s in the Diocese of Buffalo, New York. Ahmed Soliman, Bridges Television’s newscaster, is the series moderator. Topics include:

- **Religion, Violence, and Peace.** Whether called commanded wars, or jihad, all three religions have invoked the will of God in the pursuit of violence. It is too simplistic to claim that such moves are only made by those who have “hijacked” their respective faiths. How do we understand the place of war in each of our traditions?
- **God in the American Public Square.** What are the implications of today’s debates about school prayer and other civic concerns? What is the right place for religion in our nation’s public institutions? How do we honor both the freedom of religion that is a hallmark of America, and the place of our particular religion in creating a better world?
- **Why Religion Matters.** What is the role of religion in a world that is witnessing more religious violence than at any time since the crusades? Is it time to simply give up, not on any one tradition in particular, but on religion in general? What is it about religion that contributes not only to the creation of group identity, but to the good of all mankind?

To launch the show, a special premiere screening was held with series’ participants at the Islamic House of Wisdom in Dearborn, MI, before a large audience. The series is one of the gems of the Bridges TV lineup. Started in 2001, Bridges TV was created in response to the anti-Muslim rhetoric in the media after 9/11. Developed for the American Muslim community, it offers a positive alternative, bringing diverse quality programming to its audiences. Today, the network reaches close to two million households nationwide.

CLAL ON THE RADIO

In late November, a new radio show was launched, *Hirschfield and Kula, Intelligent Talk Radio* on KXL radio in Portland, OR – one of the top 25 markets in the country. Original, compelling, thought provoking, the one hour show features Rabbis Hirschfield and Kula with prominent guests for lively discussion on the issues of the day. Bringing their own unique perspectives, grounded in Jewish wisdom, *Hirschfield and Kula* offers listeners an alternative to the usual left and right wing banter, finding hidden agendas, nuances and the partial truths buried deep in the divide.

“Radio requires an attention that no other medium offers,” says Rabbi Kula. “It reaches everywhere and just asks you to bring your interest. Anyone can participate, and it provides an opportunity to touch people wherever they are.” Rabbi Hirschfield continues, “What sets our show apart is that it is not just about talking, but about listening. So much of talk radio is about a one-sided conversation, with listeners leaving where they started. Our show is about stretching.”

Produced in New York, the show looks at local and national news with an eye to Portland. Covering the American spiritual, cultural and political landscape, *Hirschfield and Kula*, provides a pluralist perspective missing from the airwaves. Stirring and provocative, it is a first-ever radio show hosted by two rabbis and will take contemporary debates to a new place.

The series, soon to be available through the Web, provides listeners with the chance to call in and have their comments heard. Going beyond the “same old, same old,” this innovative show, airing at midnight, gives late night talk a new challenge and standard. Stay tuned for more information on *Hirschfield and Kula!*

CLAL IN MOROCCO

In June, CLAL brought a delegation of community leaders to the 12th Annual Fes Festival of World Sacred Music, a unique forum promoting music and spirituality for world harmony. The Festival attracts thousands of people to this ancient city known for ages as a home for a broad mix of Muslims, Christians and Jews. So renowned is its reputation that it is included in the book, *1000 Places to Visit Before You Die*.

A feature of the festival is its Colloquium, which is supported and moderated by The World Bank. Called “Giving Soul to Globalization,” this year’s topic was on building harmony. Moderated by Kathleen Marshall of the World Bank, the program attempts to build bridges among communities and explore a more holistic vision of development.

Rabbi Hirschfield, the only rabbi invited to participate in the program, spoke about “Global Forgiveness.” Joining him was Sheikh Abdulaziz Bukhari, head of the Uzbeke Community in Jerusalem, and Father Elias Kesrouani, Founder and President of the Dept. of Musicology at the University of Notre Dame Louaize in Lebanon. Movingly, Rabbi Hirschfield discussed the value of

apology, and explored how we all need to seek forgiveness from someone. Citing Jewish tradition, he showed how by combining the elements of forgiveness and vengeance, justice and mercy, the deep divides in our world and communities could heal.

While in Morocco, delegation members also visited the beautiful cities of Meknes, Volubillis, Marrakech and Sefru. In Marrakech, they met with leaders of the Jewish community, spent Shabbat with them, and learned how Jewish life is sustained as the population diminishes.

EATING MATTERS

In America today, teenagers' eating habits are putting them at risk for developing chronic medical conditions. How can we break this dangerous cycle of eating disorders and help them gain a healthy and constructive relationship with food?

Enter *Eating Matters*, a program inspired by Jewish wisdom, and designed to help young adults understand nutrition from a broad cultural context. Through the program students gain a more positive attitude toward the role of food by learning about other societies' eating habits, as well as the values connected to it in their own society. Created by students and faculty from Columbia University's Teachers College, and led by Project Coordinator Joshua Halberstam, Ph.D. for CLAL, it offers a fresh approach to learning about diet. By reaching high school and college students, teachers can have an impact on how they think about food and consumption.

Two conferences for select groups of teachers, nutritionists, religious leaders, and other professionals were held as part of the project. The groups discussed how we define people by their food, what we consume and why. Prof. Judith Goldstein, an anthropologist from Vassar College, looked at the politics of eating and the current landscape of food. Rabbi Joshua Gutoff of the Jewish Theological Seminary talked about how educators can draw on Jewish sources to teach about the role of food, and how the spiritual, ethical and communal relationships towards eating reflect Jewish values. Participating rabbis brought special texts about food which they presented for discussion. These teachings are being compiled as an educational resource for anyone interested in the intersection of Jewish learning and the meaning of how and what we eat.

"We really are what we eat, and what we eat is a function of personal taste, cultural norms, and ethnic traditions," said Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, a conference speaker. "How those three come together to nourish both our bodies and our spirits is what *Eating Matters* is all about."

CLAL wishes to thank the McDonald's Corporation and all those involved in the resolution of the "*Block v. McDonald's Corporation*" and related litigation for helping to facilitate this work.

REMEMBERING FOR LIFE: A New Synagogue Resource

“Memory is about choice. We can remember in ways that provoke pain or that challenge us to take from the past lessons that will help us to live more fully and create a better world today,” says Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, who conceived and edited an inspiring new book, *Remembering for Life*, for rabbis and synagogues. Compiled from stories gathered from the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation’s collection of over 52,000 interviews, it allows people who have experienced life at its worst to teach us about life at its best.

This moving volume is organized as a beautiful addition to the weekly Torah readings and holiday celebrations. The stories, matched to the themes of the week’s *parsha*, teach about life from men and women from across the globe – survivors, liberators, hidden children, and resistance fighters – who share a unique capacity to teach us about life and the importance of memory in ways that point as much to the future as to the past.

This exceptional book, inspired by the vision of Sherman Jacobson and made possible through the generous support of a large group of caring donors, offers rabbis a new way to bring the memory of the Holocaust to a younger generation – one that will not be able to rely on the direct experience of the survivors to help understand what happened during the nightmare. Each short passage provides the opportunity to understand the lessons of the *Shoah* as lessons of life, not death. Read alone or as part of the weekly service, this special resource presents a new way to honor memory, providing a unique reflection on each week’s teaching. But whether interpreted alone or with the community, *Remembering for Life* will make each week’s Torah portion come alive, creating new memory and wisdom.

The book is available at \$18.00 to rabbis, educators and synagogues.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Over the past three years, with the support of UJA-Federation of New York, Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, Ph.D., CLAL’s Director of Organizational Development, and Cynthia Pan, M.D., palliative care specialist on the faculty of the Mount Sinai Medical School, have engaged medical and rabbinic students in a ground-breaking palliative care training program using a new specially tailored curriculum, *Embracing Life and Facing Death*, which they designed to be used in conjunction with the acclaimed CLAL book, *Embracing Life and Facing Death: A Jewish Guide to Palliative Care*. Following the program, students were asked to evaluate each component, resulting in high marks uniformly. The curriculum, with accompanying trigger tapes and a teacher’s guide, is now being disseminated to rabbinical schools and medical schools across the U.S. for their use.

In addition, Rabbi Blanchard is featured along with Professor Elie Wiesel in the new documentary, *Turn to Me*, a film by Academy Award nominee Murray Nossell, which has just been released by the Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services. This moving documentary is about *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick.

CLAL continues to offer specially tailored community-wide palliative care programs to interested organizations. *Embracing Life and Facing Death: A Jewish Guide to Palliative Care* is available through the CLAL website, www.clal.org, and online at Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com.

CLAL IN THE NEWS

In addition to the media coverage listed for *Yearnings*, many other interviews and placements on the book appeared. Highlights include:

- *O Magazine* (Oct. 2006 issue), “What Adam and Eve Didn’t Tell You” by Irwin Kula
- Reviews in: *Publisher’s Weekly*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Seattle Times*, *Fort Wayne Star Sentinel*, *Wichita Eagle*, Lexington (KY) *Herald Leader*, *Sh’ma*, *Jewish Journal of Greater Phoenix*, *Jewish Journal of Los Angeles*, and the *Forward* (NY)
- *Florida Sun-Sentinel*
- *The Jean Chatzky Show*, on “Oprah & Friends,” XM Radio, National
- *The Joey Reynolds Show*, WOR-AM, National
- *The Louie B. Free Show*, WASN-AM, Cleveland
- *Caplis and Silverman*, KHOW 630 AM, Denver
- *Too Jewish*, with Rabbi Sam Cohon & Friends KXAM 1310 AM, Phoenix
- *Be the Star you Are with Cynthia Brian*, World Talk Radio

Media interest was also strong on the launch of “Building Bridges,” the new TV series on Bridges Television Network. Interviews with Rabbi Hirschfield included:

- *Fox 2 News Morning*, WJBK, Channel 2, Detroit, MI.
- *The Lars Larson Show*, Westwood One
- *The Mike Newcomb Show*, Air America Phoenix
- *The Mitch Albom Show*, WJR-AM (Detroit, MI)
- *The Drive*, WJBC-AM (Bloomington, IL)
- *Detroit Free Press*
- *Buffalo News*
- *Detroit Jewish News*
- *New York Jewish Week*

CLAL also appeared in a variety of news stories. Topics included the George Allen and Mel Gibson scandals, and the shootings at the Amish school. Highlights are:

- *USA Today* – op ed by Irwin Kula on introspection, Mel Gibson, and Yom Kippur.
- The *Los Angeles Times* – both Rabbis Kula and Hirschfield were quoted on Mel Gibson’s apology.
- The *Washington Post* – Rabbi Kula was quoted about George Allen’s Jewish ancestry.
- Rabbi Hirschfield was recognized as one of the nation’s leading *Preachers and Teachers* by Beliefnet, the Web’s most popular religion site.
- *USA Today* – Rabbi Kula was quoted about forgiveness and how we move on.
- Op-ed by Brad Hirschfield for the High Holidays – appeared in *Jewish Week*, the *Ohio Jewish Chronicle*, and the *Atlanta Jewish Times*, among others.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP

CLAL faculty consults, teaches, and works with federations and other institutions across the U. S., imparting skills and techniques to new and established leaders to help them build dynamic Jewish community life. Recent highlights include:

Aspen, CO: Rabbi Brad Hirschfield led United Jewish Communities' 2006 Jewish Leadership Forum. He and Rabbi Irwin Kula also conducted the "CLAL in Aspen" program.

East Hampton, NY: Three CLAL scholars each served as scholar-in-residence for the Jewish Center of the Hamptons. Among the topics discussed were "Exonerating Zimri: When Breaking the Law is God's Will" and "When God Goes to War."

Greenwich, CT: A series of "Lunch and Learn" programs was led by Rabbi David S. Kalb at the Greenwich Jewish Federation.

Jacksonville, FL: Rabbis Brad Hirschfield and Tsvi Blanchard spoke to future executives of the Jewish Federation and of other local organizations at the opening of their Leadership Enrichment Series.

Las Vegas, NV: Collaborating with the Las Vegas Jewish Federation, Rabbis Hirschfield and Blanchard led leadership programs and worked with educators as part of the Federation's ongoing Las Vegas Initiative.

Reistertown, MD: At the Pearlstone Retreat and Conference Center, honoring the founder and CLAL Board member Richard Pearlstone, Rabbi Hirschfield spoke about "The Power of Retreats," and the importance of rejuvenation.

Seattle, WA: Speaking at the Jewish Federation of Seattle's Community Dinner, the first communitywide gathering post the tragic shootings in July, Rabbi Kula addressed our yearnings to heal and move forward before an audience of more than 1,300 people.

Boulder, CO: The Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado featured Rabbi Kula at a book event for his *Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life*, and at their Lion of Judah and Pomegranate Luncheon.

Palm Beach, FL: Temple Emanu-El of Palm Beach is sponsoring a five weekend Scholar-in-Residence series of Shabbatons with CLAL faculty and CLAL rabbinic alumni entitled *Being Jewish in the 21st Century*.

New York, NY: Rabbi Blanchard spoke at the Jewish Home and Hospital Lifecare System's Palliative Care Conference at Columbia University.

Washington, D.C.: Rabbi Steve Greenberg was featured in a panel discussion at the Jewish Community Center's Stuart S. Kurlander Program for Gay and Lesbian Outreach and Engagement Inaugural Weekend with Congressman Barney Frank.