

# *Jewish* **Frontier**

Winter 2001

**American Labor Zionism Passes the Torch into the Next Century:**

**The LZA Los Angeles 2000-2001 Convention**



**Also Inside:**

**LABOR'S GREATEST DEFEAT  
SINCE 1977**

Susan Hattis Rolef

**YERIDA AND ITS  
DISCONTENTS**

Henry Feingold

**SINCE 1934 A LABOR ZIONIST JOURNAL**

# Jewish Frontier

SINCE 1934

A LABOR ZIONIST JOURNAL

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# Contents

LXVII, No. 2 and 3, (640)  
Winter 2001

LABOR ZIONIST IDEOLOGICAL 2  
STATEMENT

ISRAEL 4  
LABOR'S GREATEST DEFEAT *Susan Hattis Rolef*  
SINCE 1977

POEMS 8  
TO IRRIGATE THE DESERT *Yaakov Azriel*

IN OUR TIME 9  
YERIDA AND ITS DISCONTENTS *Henry Feingold*

LZA LOS ANGELES  
CONVENTION 11  
LZA 2000-2001 RESOLUTIONS

COMMENCING A NEW DECADE 12  
AND A NEW ERA

THE REPORT FROM THE 13  
OUTGOING PRESIDENT *Daniel Mann*

PRESIDENTIAL CHARGE TO THE 15  
CONVENTION *Jeffry Mallow*

LZA NATIONAL EXEC. 16  
COMMITTEE LIST 2000-2002

POEMS 17  
HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT  
MOSES, WHAT'S HIS NAME? *Yaakov Azriel*

IS IT POSSIBLE TO END THE 18  
PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT? *Zvi Ganin*

BOOKS 20  
A JEWISH LOOK AT TUESDAYS *Louis Kaplan*  
WITH MORRIE

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# Labor Zionist Ideological Statement

Adopted at the LZA National Convention, Los Angeles, April 2000

## Introduction

**L**abor Zionism has its origins in the early twentieth century. Its ideology is based on the 2000-year-old dream of Jewish national self-determination and the vision of a just and humane society. Labor Zionists were a driving force in the reestablishment of the Jewish homeland. Labor Zionists emphasize Israel as the center of Jewish life and are committed to promoting progressive Jewish issues, a peace-oriented Israel, social democracy, and economic justice throughout the world.

### LABOR ZIONISM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

**L**abor Zionists view Judaism as a civilization that embodies a multifaceted religion, diverse cultural traditions and languages, and the need for national self-determination. We believe that Jews must build on the foundations of our heritage, and promote its continuation. We are committed to the following:

- Fight for the rights of the Jewish people, wherever and whenever threatened
- Revitalize Jewish life in the United States through innovative formal and informal Jewish education
- Educate and support Jewish youth through our affiliated youth movement, Habonim Dror
- Create new leadership whose role is to promote progressive Jewish issues
- Support pluralism and egalitarianism in Jewish life
- Work toward a democratic distribution of power in our Jewish communities.

### LABOR ZIONISM AND ISRAEL

**A**s Labor Zionists, we believe that Israel and the Diaspora are linked in the development of the Jewish people. It is the responsibility of Zionists in the Diaspora to engage Israelis in an open dialogue. While often in close affinity with the goals of the Israel Labor Party, we remain an independent and constructively critical partner in their deliberations. Labor Zionists support key Israeli institutions such as cooperative settlements:

*kibbutzim* and *moshavim*; the national labor union, Histadrut; and Israel's universal health care system. We are committed to the following:

- Support full implementation of the Oslo peace process and the Labor-led government's initiatives for peace with the Palestinians and the Arab world and security for Israel and its neighbors
- Engage in a dialogue with the Israel Labor Party on issues such as religious pluralism, helping the disadvantaged, the rights of minorities in Israel, and the role of both the Israeli leadership and the younger generation of Israelis in bridging Israel/Diaspora relations
- Promote aliyah for those who choose to live in Israel
- Support the mutual recognition by the State of Israel and the Palestinian people of each other's self-determination.

### LABOR ZIONISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

**L**abor Zionists believe that the governments of the United States and Israel must provide their citizens with the fundamental legal, social, and economic rights that serve as the basis for all democratic and just societies. We are committed to fight for human rights, social and economic justice, equal education, civil liberties and religious freedom. We oppose all forms of persecution, including those based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation.

We are committed to the following:

- Support minimum wage and "living wage" campaigns
- Strengthen the labor movement as a vehicle for social and economic advancement
- Work to eliminate poverty in the United States, Israel, and other nations
- Support public education, vocational training, and job counseling in order to obtain equal opportunity in the workplace
- Fight for equal rights for all minorities
- Work towards guaranteed health care for all people
- Advocate initiatives that safeguard the environment, protect workers and consumers, encourage responsible methods of agriculture, and promote the humane treatment of animals
- Support the continued development of social democratic institutions throughout the world
- Work with like-minded organizations and individuals who strive to create a society that pursues justice, equal opportunity, and peace.

*The Labor Zionist Alliance's effectiveness as an agent for positive social change derives from our willingness and ability to adapt our vision, goals, and actions to meet new challenges.*

#### APPENDIX: OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The Labor Zionist Alliance is an affiliate of the World Labor Zionist Movement. We work with a variety of other institutions in the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. Zionism is based on the unity of the Jewish people, the centrality of the State of Israel, the renaissance of the Hebrew language, and the importance of aliyah (immigration) to Israel. As Labor Zionists, we are committed to emphasizing the centrality of Israel in Jewish life and to transmitting a shared set of socially progressive Jewish values from one generation to the next. We believe that the transmission of these values lies in our commitments to *Jewish peoplehood, a progressive and peace-oriented Zionism*, and the realization of *social democracy and economic justice* in Israel, the United States, and the world.

Founded in the early years of the twentieth century, Labor Zionism played a central role in the re-establishment of a Jewish society in our ancestral homeland. Labor Zionism rose to the

challenges of transforming the land and the Jews who came to build it: establishing social institutions to sustain the new society, and rescuing and ingathering the surviving remnant of the Shoah.

Labor Zionism made possible the establishment of the state, and provided the majority of its early leadership. It led the struggle for Israel's independence and organized the mass immigration of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Its sons and daughters were among the first rank of Israel's armies in each of its wars. Labor Zionism founded the economic institutions which have been the core of Israel's agriculture and industry. Labor Zionism's current political embodiment in the Israel Labor Party is primarily responsible for the road to long-term peace with Israel's Palestinian and Arab neighbors.

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, political Zionism achieved one major objective: Jewish national self-determination. In the last five decades, Jews in the Diaspora, working in close cooperation with Jews of Israel, have striven for and rejoiced in the success of Israel's economic and cultural achievements. Diaspora Jews have supported Israel's heroic rescues of Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry.

With Israel established as an instrumentality for the development of the Jewish people, Zionists continue to address the nature of that development. What does it mean to be a Jew and a Zionist today? Now that we have a Jewish state, what kind of state should it be? How should the Jewish people develop itself in both the Diaspora and in Israel? What shall be the relations between the two? These questions inspire heated debate among Zionists of various political affiliations, and among Jews in general.

Labor Zionism has continually expressed through its institutions and the writings of its adherents the centrality of democracy and the dignity of the human being. Labor Zionism has consistently respected the demands of Jewish tradition and its continuous redefinition, and reshaping of the Jewish condition in the modern world. In particular, Labor Zionism recognizes the legitimacy of pluralistic forms of Jewish religious and spiritual expression. Labor Zionism continues to recognize the inherent dignity in all forms of labor. As Labor Zionists, we are committed to a core set of principles and policies designed to reduce the inequalities in the economic systems of society. □



## The Greatest Labor Defeat Since 1977

*Susan Hattis Rolef*

Labor's defeat in the elections for Prime Minister that took place on February 6, 2001, was a foregone conclusion. All the indicators pointed to such a defeat, and the only open question was how large the margin of defeat would be. The final results, as published two days after the elections, were that Ariel Sharon received 62.38% of the valid votes to Ehud Barak's 37.62%, with the lowest rate of participation ever experienced in an Israeli election—only 62.2% of those entitled to vote actually went to the polls, compared with 78.7% in 1999.

The two sectors in which the lowest voting rates were registered were that of the Arabs—less than 20% of whom came out to vote (this was primarily in protest over the 13 Israeli Arabs killed in the course of the violent demonstrations of October 2000), and that of the *haredim* (ultra-religious) amongst whom the rate of voting is usually the highest in the country, but who were not enthusiastic about either Sharon or Barak, both of whom would like to see more *haredim* enlist for military service. Barak was hurt by the low rate of the Arab vote, and benefited from the relatively low rate of the *haredi* vote. However, Barak was also weakened by the fact that almost all the traditional Center-Right voters and many of the Russian voters, who voted for him in 1999, “returned home” to the Likud. He was further weakened by the fact that many traditional left-wing voters stayed home.

Two related questions come to mind regarding what took place. The first is whether it was Barak's policies (especially in the peace-making sphere, but also in the social and religious spheres) or his personality and conduct that contributed most to his downfall. The second is why this election was necessary in the first place. Regarding Barak's peace policy, opinion polls indicate that while there is a clear majority in the Israeli public (over 60%) that

favors the continuation of the peace process, a majority felt that Barak had gone too far in his willingness to make concessions, both *vis-a-vis* Syria and *vis-a-vis* the Palestinians - especially regarding the partition of Jerusalem and control over the Temple Mount. A majority also disapproved of negotiations being resumed with the Palestinians before the violence had subsided. In the social sphere many, even inside the Labor Party, felt that too little had been initiated and done, while on the religious-secular issue, Barak appeared to be zig-zagging between his wish to comply with the wishes of those in the secular population who seek an end to “religious coercion” and who support his idea of a “civil reform”, and his desire to hold Shas inside the coalition, or at least on the fence, in order to give the peace process a chance.

To Barak himself the priorities appear to have been clear - the peace process came in first place. But the problem was that despite the fact that he was willing to go much further than any of his predecessors, both on the Syrian and the Palestinian fronts, his negotiating partners adopted an “all or nothing” approach, which meant that beyond taking the IDF unilaterally out of Lebanon (i.e., without any sort of agreement with either the Lebanese or Syrian governments) he had nothing to show for his efforts, except constant Hizballah provocations on the Northern border, a renewed *intifada* in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and a new wave of terrorist attacks inside Israel proper. Would he have opted for a different set of priorities had he been convinced that his peace making efforts would end in dismal failure? We do not know.

We can assume, however, that had Barak been more successful in his peace making efforts—i.e. had Bashir Asad and Arafat been more forthcoming—the Israeli public would have accepted his policy, despite the painful concessions. However, he opted for the peace process, and because of this

refused to seriously consider establishing a national unity government with the Likud, even though Likud's leader Sharon was more than eager to enter such a government. Barak believed that such a government would kill whatever hope there was for a peace agreement with both Syria and the Palestinians. Had he decided to opt for a national unity government under his own leadership, he could have seen his four-year term of office through. But he preferred his peace policy to a safe seat—or perhaps it was arrogance that led him to believe, for a little while longer, that he could have both.

One might argue, that the problem was not so much with Barak's policies and priorities, but the with his personality, and especially his apparent contempt for his fellow politicians, and his confidence that he could appeal directly to the people in a calm, and confident tone of speech, and win over a majority. Because of this pattern of conduct, Barak ended up in the election campaign with hardly anyone fighting for him except his own campaign team, the leadership of Meretz and troops of enthusiastic youths—many of them under voting age.

Not only did Barak find himself - to a large extent through his own fault - quite lonely in the campaign (not unlike Netanyahu in the 1999 elections), but he had Labor veteran Shimon Peres behind his back, trying to get himself elected as an alternative candidate for the Left with the help of Meretz and others, and several younger members of the Labor Party—such as Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg—sitting on the fence like vultures, waiting for what they believed (rightly) to be his inevitable defeat. Had Barak manifested a different style of leadership during his year and a half in office, he certainly would not have found himself so alone on February 6. Furthermore, had he manifested a different style of leadership, and had he been less inclined to gamble with high stakes, he might not have found himself in the beginning of December—when he announced his resignation—without a majority in the Knesset, with most of his original coalition partners gone, and without the prospect of a budget for 2001. In other words,

the early election was mostly of his own doing—a gamble that failed dismally.

Barak was apparently aware of his approaching defeat early on in the campaign. This did not, however, lead him to change either his policy or style. He was and remains convinced that he is the right leader for Israel, and his policies are the right policies—only that apparently the People of Israel are not yet ready for him and them. “I shall be back”, he stated right after his defeat and his announcement that he would step down from the Labor Party leadership and give up his Knesset seat as soon as a new government is formed by Sharon.

It all sounds very familiar. Barak's conduct in February 2001 is so reminiscent of that of Binyamin Netanyahu in May 1999, that one is inclined to see them as identical twins, though the policies they espouse are diametrically opposed. One would almost be inclined to say that it is the direct election of the Prime Minister that inevitably brings leaders such as Netanyahu and Barak into power, and then unceremoniously throws them out. But now it is the 73 year old Sharon who has been elected, and, for better or worse, he is a totally different kettle of fish.

To a large extent Sharon has become Prime Minister by default - because right after Netanyahu's defeat in 1999, no one was too eager to pick up the pieces of the Likud and deal with the party's empty coffer. At the time, everyone in the Likud assumed that Barak would remain Prime Minister for four years, and that there was therefore plenty of time for a serious leadership contest in the future. Not even Sharon himself believed that he had a real chance of becoming Prime Minister, and his goal - until Barak's decision to resign - was to join a national unity government under Barak.

Now that he has been elected Prime Minister, Sharon's first priority is still a national unity government, which he prefers to a narrow, Right-religious one. He has even offered Barak the post of Defense Minister in such a government. One does not know whether this offer is or is not tempting to Barak, who has announced several times since the

elections that he has said his word for now. Commentators are wondering, however, whether he might not zig-zag again and accept the offer.

So what now? The Labor Party, which is in even greater disarray than it was after the 1977 defeat, when it lost power for the first time since the establishment of the State, and returned to the Knesset with 33 seats. Of the 26 seats won in 1999 by One Israel, two belong to David Levy's Geshet, which is on its way home to the Likud, and following Barak's resignation, his replacement is also a Geshet man.

The Labor parliamentary group in the Knesset also lost in the past year two senior Laborites—Beilin and Mattan Vinai—as Ministers in Barak's government resigned their Knesset seats to enable the two next persons on the Labor list to enter the House, in a sort of voluntary implementation of the non-existent "Norwegian Law" (the Norwegian Law refers to an article in the Norwegian constitution which calls upon Ministers to resign their parliamentary seats). Since the election, another two senior Laborites—the chairman of the Finance Committee Elie Goldschmidt, and veteran MK and former Minister Uzi Baram—have announced their resignation from the Knesset, and departure from political life. Goldschmidt did so because he said he felt sick at heart about the lack of support for Barak shown by his fellow party members during the election campaign, and Baram because after finally deciding not to contest the Labor Party leadership, he felt he had had enough after 24 years in the Knesset. The only Laborite who doesn't seem to have had enough after 42(!) years in the Knesset, is the untiring 77 year old Shimon Peres, who never won a single election, but firmly believes that had he been allowed to run against Sharon on February 6, he would have won.

Peres is one of the main proponents of the Labor Party joining Sharon's government, and he has already announced that he is interested in the post of Foreign Minister. At the time of writing, no decision has been taken in the Labor Party as to whether to accept Sharon's offer. The Party, still under the leadership of Barak, who has stated that he shall resign only after Sharon forms his new government, is holding talks with the Likud. In addition to Shimon Peres, amongst those who seem

eager for Labor to join Sharon's government is Haim Ramon, who sees himself as a potential successor to Barak, but is not yet ready for the contest. Ramon served Barak loyally in his cabinet for the first year or so, but after that went media-silent until the day after the election. His main problem within the Labor Party is that he is viewed by many as the person responsible for the collapse of the Histadrut and Kupat Holim, even though he was little more than the little boy who pointed out that the emperor had no clothes.

At the time of writing on Binyamin (Fuad) Ben-Eliezer has announced that he will run for the Party leadership, claiming that he can bring back to Labor many of its lost sons. However, though a hard worker, Ben-Eliezer has no charisma and little following in the party. Another potential contender for the leadership is Foreign Minister Prof. Shlomo Ben-Ami, who objects to Labor joining the Sharon Government. However, Ben-Ami might be too closely identified with Barak's willingness to make far-reaching concessions to the Palestinians, and the Party will probably seek to move away from such an extreme position. Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg - another contender - seems to be sitting on the fence on the issue of the National Unity Government, though it will be easier for him to prepare for the contest if Labor is in Opposition. If Labor goes into Opposition, he will probably resign from his post as Speaker—either voluntarily or as a result of the Likud amending the law so as to force him out of the post.

It is believed that if the leadership contest took place in the Labor Party today, Burg would win. He has been working hard over the last year and a half to build a following in the Party, and has gained popularity. However, though he is proud of his record both as Chairman of the Jewish Agency and Speaker of the Knesset, both amongst Jewish Agency and Knesset employees there is less enthusiasm, and it is claimed that though Burg is a smooth talker, he is shallow and superficial, and totally immersed in his own ego. Most of those calling for the leadership contest to be put off for at least half a year, are trying to weaken Burg.

Dr. Yossi Beilin, who back in 1997 came second to Barak in the Party leadership contest of that year (he got 28.51% of the vote to Barak's 50.33%), is the main opponent of going with the

Likud, and has already made it known that if Labor decides to join the Sharon Government, he shall leave the Party and form a new social democratic, social liberal or democratic party together with Meretz, some members of the Center party and other political groups and personalities.

At the time of writing (February 12) it is difficult to guess whether or not Labor will join Sharon's Government. In many respects the situation is similar to that in the aftermath of the 1988 elections. Then too the Likud, led by Yitzhak Shamir, had a majority in the Knesset, but even though Shamir could have formed a narrow government, he preferred another National Unity Government with Labor. Sharon today is in the same situation, but unlike Shamir he feels that his best chance of surviving for more than just a few months will be if he can form a broad coalition. To achieve this he is willing to give Labor two of the three main Ministries: Defense, Finance and Foreign Affairs. His main concern is the possible return of Netanyahu, who has made it clear that he plans to return. In fact, had Netanyahu decided to run in the February 6 elections, nothing would have stopped him. But he decided that without elections to the Knesset as well, he did not want to run.

In 1988 it was Peres who opted for joining Shamir's Government, and it is he again who is pushing for joining the Sharon Government. Beyond the personal interests of the various contenders for the Labor Party leadership, who are viewing the prospect of a National Unity Government largely in terms of whether it will or will not increase their chances to be elected, there is a much more serious dilemma at hand. The question that Labor must confront, on the national level, is whether it is nationally responsible to leave the Government, at such a critical time, in the hands of the Right-wingers and the religious parties. A critical question, from the Labor point of view, is whether Sharon and the Likud will be willing to move forward in the peace process—perhaps not in order to achieve a permanent settlement, and certainly not on the basis of the Clinton proposals, but nevertheless to move forward. This issue appears to be the main stumbling block at the moment on the road to a broad coalition.

However, viewed from a partisan point of view, it is questionable whether any serious work to rehabilitate the Party will be possible, if it joins

Sharon's Government now. This was also the main argument for staying out of Shamir's Government in 1988, and it is a fact that Labor's road back to power in 1992 was paved only after Labor left the Shamir Government in March 1990, and Yitzhak Rabin managed to replace Peres as Party leader in February 1992, when the Party was in Opposition.

And what about the State of Israel? Israel will survive, even though one might expect a rough period ahead with regard to Palestinian violence; possible violence along the Northern border; shaky international status; and future economic turbulence (as a result of the socio-political crisis of the last six months). Israel will survive—it might even thrive in certain spheres, though it is unlikely that Barak's "civil reform" (i.e. the secularization of Israel) will materialize in the foreseeable future. In his old age, Sharon appears to have mellowed out a bit. His wife's recent death, gout, hearing difficulties and a few other ailments, have certainly all had an effect on him. He is even speaking of appointing a Muslim Arab to his Government. Whether or not he will deliver, is to be seen. □

## **Labour Zionist Alliance** *Of Canada*

**Mourns**  
**The loss of its President**

**JOSEF KRYSTAL**

Harry Froimovitch (Vice-Chairman, Montreal)  
Lou Kirshenbaum (Vice-Chairman, Toronto)



## POEMS

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### To Irrigate The Desert

*Yakov Azriel*

“Isaac brought her to the tent of his mother Sarah; he betrothed Rebecca and she became his wife; and he loved her.” (Genesis 24:67)

Beneath meters of baked desert-sand and scorched rock,  
Reservoirs  
Of untapped waters, cool, almost ice,  
Wait for the well to be dug.  
With patience,  
I'll locate the site, dig the well,  
And subterranean waters  
Rise.

So too is my mouth a desert  
Speechless, soundless.  
Yet underneath layers of silent skin and tissue,  
Reservoirs  
Of untapped feelings and countless unheard songs  
Wait.  
With patience,  
I'll utter the unexpressed words, release hidden melodies,  
And submerged emotions  
Emerge.

Thus my love for you:  
Buried deep within,  
Waiting to be excavated and exposed,  
The songs of my love for you  
Well up, flow out  
To irrigate  
The two deserts of our lives.

We cherish the memory  
of our Beloved Mother,  
Grandmother, and Great Grandmother

**Elsie Schaefer**

*Passed away 1/9/01*

Jerry Flo  
Larry Deb Alan Ira

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## Yerida and Its Discontents

Henry L. Feingold

**T**he sound of Hebrew or English, spoken with that never-to-be-lost throaty Israeli accent, can be heard everywhere in my neighborhood. I hear its distinctive sound as I wheel my shopping cart down the aisle of the supermarket and at a concert. But rather than feel satisfaction, I now have a vague apprehension—as though something dreadful is happening. It is triggered by a thought that involves the interconnectedness of two seemingly unrelated phenomenon; the “dirty little secret” of American Jewish history which concerns demography and the latest round of Palestinian violence.

American Jewry’s rapid attainment of middle class status, what sociologists call “embourgeoisement,” was accompanied by a normal decrease in the size of families. As America’s earliest and most efficient contraceptors, Jews attained zero population growth early (2.1 children per family) and have since maintained an even lower birthrate. Today, American Jewry not only fails to replace itself, but its proportion of the general population has declined. In 1935 Jews composed about 3.7% of the general population. Today it is probably less than 2.5%. At the same time, other factors such as aging and out-marriages contribute to a potential demographic crisis in the not too distant future.

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**That American Jewry’s demographic deficit may today, and perhaps even more tomorrow, be filled by Yordim who “descend” from Israel is a matter of some sadness for committed Zionists.**

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**A**merican Jewry’s problem of growth and replacement is not new. After the steep rise of the Jewish population curve caused by the massive influx of east European Jews in the late 19th century, it is now reverting to its former precarious condition. The Sephardic Jews who dominated during the colonial and early national period were on their way to disappearing when the timely arrival of a quarter of a million Jews from central Europe after 1820 assured the survival of organized Jewish life. They, in turn, would likely have melded into the host society had it not been for the arrival of the 2.4 million East European Jews. They arrived in sufficient number to create the impression that the demographic problem had finally been solved. But that, again, was only temporarily true.

Before the restricting immigration laws of 1921 and 1924, American Jewry was enriched (perhaps dependent would be a more accurate word) by the cultural and biological surfeit of East European Jewry. It retained that artificial glow of demographic health and cultural dynamism during the twenties. But in the case of the development of an indigenous American Jewish culture, with the possible exception of Mordecai Kaplan’s Reconstructionism, all our religious and political movements have a “made in Europe” label attached to them.

Not until after World War II was

there a realization that Hitler's "final solution" may also have delivered a lethal blow to American Jewry. There is a Holocaust gap in our population curve and the East European Jewish world that might have filled it lies in ashes. This might explain why, in the seventies, American Jewish organizations and the Jewish agency got into such a bitter conflict about "Neshira," the right of Soviet Jews to "drop out" of their obligation to settle in Israel in favor of settling in the U.S. American Jewry needed aliyah too.

That American Jewry's demographic deficit may today, and perhaps even more tomorrow, be filled by yordim who "descend" from Israel is a matter of some sadness for committed Zionists. It is significant that America rather than Israel, the Jewish homeland, is chosen as Zion. If Israeli life becomes more insecure as the current low-level conflict continues indefinitely, then there will certainly be more Hebrew heard in our communities. Though rarely addressed openly, it is a factor that warrants consideration in negotiating an arrangement with the Palestinians (I do not speak of a formal peace).

There are signs that Israel may face a conflict where the primary goal of the Palestinian combatants is the disruption of civil society by hitting hard at the civilian population. The Algerian conflict (1953-1962) or the recent trouble in East Timor serve as examples of the horrendous suffering such a war can inflict.

However, we are not concerned here with general emigration. It has existed since the founding of the Jewish State in 1948. It was, perhaps, too much to expect that a people that had wandered for millennia would suddenly settle in a hot little land and stay put. Indeed, Israelis are among the most intrepid tourists in the world. I am concerned about the loss of Israel's operational elite; its scientists, technocrats, businessmen and sundry professionals that make it a going concern. If civil conflict becomes Israel's normal condition then the possibility of this population's hemorrhaging is as predictable as is the consequences of their departure.

Politically, all citizens are created equal but that does not mean that the value different citizens have within society is equal. Some citizens are more valuable than others and the loss of scientists,

technocrats, entrepreneurs, and even culture carriers would be more keenly felt. It has taken years to develop the world-class scientific community and universities that Israel boasts today. Israel's upward economic trajectory is, in some measure, linked to this operational elite, but such people can best be retained in a society that can support the very institutions that carry their work forward. A protracted and bloody low-level war will create the conditions for a diminished or totally lost strata of this population.

Israel's scientists and technocrats are certainly loyal and patriotic citizens, but they are also people who need a certain amount of security and comfort to realize their goals. Regardless of whether those goals involve discovering a vaccine or starting a new business, these individuals are rarely concerned with keeping this or that sacred space in Jewish hands. Their priorities lie in the pursuit of self-realization and the full use of their talents. Those same talents are what make them targets for recruitment by high-tech firms in the U. S. and Europe. Some Israeli "techies" and businessmen already live with a foot in both worlds.

A perpetually beleaguered Israel that needs to impose heavy tax and military service obligation on its citizenry cannot compete with host cultures in Europe and America that offer security and a high standard of living with few encumbrances. The loss or, more likely, the diminishment of this special group goes beyond a "brain drain." It speaks to Israel's viability as a modern society.

It is a truth about which we are reluctant to speak. There is, after all, a "chutzpah" involved in warning, from the fleshpots of Manhattan's west side, of the dangers involved in the possible emigration of an important segment of Israel's population. But that doesn't make it less true. It is a factor in the current peace negotiations that is rarely talked about but may be crucial in the long run.

I mention my apprehension about this particular yerida not as a rationale for concluding a peace at any price. It should not become a chip in bargaining about the Palestinian state. But it should be in the minds of all who are concerned about Israel's continued viability. Yerida is not much talked about because it conjures up disturbing visions of the failure of Zionism. It suggests that the

*(Continued on page 23)*

**Labor Zionist Alliance  
Los Angeles, April 1-3, 2000  
Convention Resolutions**

**1. Middle East Peace Process**

The LZA strongly supports Israel's commitment to the ongoing negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. We commend the Israeli government's attempts to negotiate a peace settlement with the Syrian regime. We applaud the Clinton Administration's commitment to a meaningful Mideast peace process and its willingness to expend its valuable political capital in facilitating Mideast diplomacy. LZA identifies with all Jewish organizations that support the peace process.

**2. Living Wage**

The LZA recommits itself to its tradition of support of socio-economic justice. To this end, we encourage and support efforts to develop living-wage initiatives appropriate to the needs of local communities. We advocate government programs designed to enable workers to achieve economic well-being with dignity.

**3. Participation in Jewish Communal Life**

We encourage our members to become actively involved in major decision making processes at all levels of Jewish communal life.

**4. Austria**

We are distressed by the inclusion of the far-right neo-Nazi Freedom party of Joerg Haider in the Austrian government in spite of his recent resignation as head of the party. We further urge the Austrian government to engage in a full examination of its role and responsibility with regard to the Holocaust.

**5. Jewish Security in Argentina**

We commend the Argentinean government's courage in confronting corrupt and anti-Semitic forces within the Argentinean National Police that may have been complicit in the 1992 and 1994 bombings in Buenos Aires. Furthermore, we applaud the Clinton Administration for its commitment to monitor the trial of the Buenos

Aires police officers accused of committing these crimes, to make sure that Argentina's judicial process is above reproach.

**6. National Energy Policy**

We reaffirm our support for federal policies and programs to reduce U.S. consumption of oil and coal. At a time of both rising energy costs and a decreasing public concern with energy efficiency, the LZA calls on the Administration to further the creation of clean and sustainable energy sources that will diminish U.S. reliance on imported oil while reducing such environmental hazards as greenhouse gas emissions, smog-forming compounds, and precursors to acid rain.

**7. Long-Term Health Care for Holocaust Survivors**

We applaud the Insurance Commissioner of the State of Florida and the South Florida Survivors Coalition for initiating the funding of long-term home health care for Holocaust survivors. The Florida program will be funded with money from "heirless" insurance proceeds from the International Commission for Holocaust Era Insurance Claims. LZA commits itself to participating in similar efforts throughout the United States.

**8. Meaningful Gun Control Legislation**

The Labor Zionist Alliance supports municipal, state, and federal legislation which include 72-hour background checks for all gun purchases, imposes severe penalties on those selling guns to juveniles, and requires the sale of effective childproof safety locks for all handguns.

**9. Death Penalty Moratorium**

LZA commits its membership to calling upon local, state, and federal officials to impose an immediate moratorium on death penalties pending study to determine the fairness of its imposition.

*(Continued on page 23)*



## Commencing a New Decade and A New Era— The 2000 LZA Convention

**S**omewhat like academic graduations, organizational conventions could correctly be called “commencements,” for these events both conclude one period and launch another. The 32<sup>nd</sup> National Convention of the Labor Zionist Alliance, which took place in Los Angeles this past April, was not only a culmination of a decade of rebuilding but also the commencement of a new era of reinvigorated leadership—a turning point in the almost century-long history of the movement in this country.

The following dimensions made this convention special:

1. The extraordinary hospitality of our host organization in Los Angeles, headed by Ethel and Martin Taft, Bea and Bernard Weisberg, and Louis Senensieb, which generated an audience of several hundred members and friends at the opening session and hosted two dinners attended by our local constituency together with the delegates from across the country.
2. The participation of six official representatives from our youth movement—Habonim Dror—as full voting delegates, session chairs, and committee members. This too was a culmination of a referendum among the college-age and young-adult ma’apilim to constitute themselves as a national branch of LZA—something unmatched and unique in American Jewish life. In addition, the outgoing head of Habonim Dror North America, Jared Matas—now going on aliyah to a new urban kibbutz in Jerusalem—addressed the convention.
3. The adoption of a new ideological statement for the new decade and the new era in Jewish life. This was yet another culmination—of an effort led by Jeffrey Mallow, now the new national president of LZA, that took ten drafts and the deliberations of various regional and national meetings during a two-year period. The text appears in this issue of the Jewish Frontier. Among its noteworthy elements is the inclusion of a new Judaic section along with those on Labor and on Zionism.
4. A rich panel of speakers and panelists drawn from both Israel and the United States, coordinated by Convention Chair Samuel Norich, now the Administrative Vice President of LZA, and Executive Director Stephane Acel. Those addressing the convention included, from Israel: Deputy Minister of Defense Ephraim Sneh, World Labor Zionist Movement Chair Aharon Yadlin, and World Chair of the Jewish National Fund Yehiel Leket; and several academic and communal leaders from both Los Angeles and other American communities, discussing various sections of the new ideological statement. (Some of these presentations will be published in upcoming issues of the Jewish Frontier.)
5. A challenging program of public-affair and organizational activity for the new term, projected by Jeffrey Mallow. (His statement as well as convention resolutions appear in this issue.)

*(Continued on page 23)*

# Century to Century, Generation to Generation— Report of the Outgoing President to the 2000 LZA Convention

*Daniel Mann*

**T**he official title of this session is “The Past Decade and the New One,” which provides a more realistic perspective than the context of old and new centuries and is surely preferable to the excessive emphasis in this year of Y2K on the millennium, which is after all a Christological concept. Yet at this turning point in my personal and LZA’s organizational life, as I complete my service as national president, allow me a reference to the century just completed, for in a sense that is where I came in.

In my “inaugural address” in 1994 I stated the following:

It is my contention that Labor Zionism is the most significant Jewish idea of the 20th century. Think back to the first decade of this century: the Kishinev pogrom, the migration of a million East European Jews to the United States, and the Second Aliyah to Eretz Israel—the Labor Zionist pioneering movement that laid the basis for the Jewish State. Then go fast forward to this final decade of the 20th century, in which the Labor Zionist leaders of that state are building on its strength and integrity to achieve peace with the Arab nations, and in which American Jewry is striving to assure its own continuity through Israel experience programs, an educational instrumentality pioneered by our own youth movement almost a half-century ago.

Labor Zionism expresses some of the most fundamental values of Jewish civilization: binyan ha-eretz, the upbuilding of the Jewish homeland, and tikkun olam, the repair of the world, and it accords high priority to service, education, and community. It is therefore not surprising that a program based on those values has resonated over the years within American Jewry.

**T**hus the *idea* of Labor Zionism was secure, but the challenge we faced in the 1990s was to make the Labor Zionist Alliance the channel for implementing that idea, and that was *not* guaranteed.

At the beginning of the decade the LZA was seriously split along several political lines, but Henry Feingold, Ben Cohen, and many others assumed central responsibility and righted the ship, as it were. Then, in 1994, recognizing the need to move the vessel forward, the National Executive Committee undertook some strategic planning for enhanced programming, membership growth, and increased funds, which I was asked to coordinate. During the same period I had played a similar role in the parallel effort to publish *Builders and Dreamers* and to lay the groundwork for what is now the Habonim Dror Foundation, so “for my sins” I was elected president of LZA.

To this latest volunteer responsibility in my communal life I brought not only the intense loyalty and deep dedication to our movement that is true of so many of us, but also a degree of pragmatic, down-to-earth, grassroots realism—even some skepticism—derived from my Midwest origins and upbringing—attitudes useful for living in New York and Washington, as I have now done for well over 40 years. Indeed, it was in the Midwest that I began to articulate my approach to the situation of the LZA: In Chicago, where I made the observation, only half-jestingly, that “our first project would be to drag the organization, kicking and screaming, into the...1970’s,” when we were doing so many of the basic activities that needed to be renewed in the 1990s; and in Detroit, where I declared my attitude to be one of “constructive impatience mixed with cautious optimism.” Now the time has come to review what all of us together have achieved in the intervening six years and what remains to be done.

**T**oday, we are again vocal and pro-active in a long list of national and local umbrella organization—all the more important in light of the difficulties the Zionist and, in fact, most Jewish membership organizations have encountered vis-a-vis the recently established United Jewish Communities, the national framework of the federations. We are called by and quoted in major Jewish media. And not only are we active in our world movement and in the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency (together with our sister organization, Na'amat USA), but we enjoy an equally active working relationship with our counterpart, the Israel Labor Party, thanks to the initiative of Deputy Minister of Defense Ephraim Sneh, who addressed this convention, and the blessings of Prime Minister Barak.

All of these connections are important but none surpass in significance the enhanced ties we have developed with our youth movement, Habonim Dror, culminating in their decision, following an extended referendum, to have their members 18 and over constitute a national chapter of LZA and thus to be represented with a full voting delegation at this convention. It should also be noted that several of the new LZA branches established in recent years around the country and comprising primarily “boomer-age” members bear the name of the Habonim Dror camp in their respective areas, which many of them once attended and where they now send their children.

We have renewed a mutual partnership within LZA between the national organization and the city committees and branches, which has been reflected in significant increases of grants to the national organization, the growth of our sustaining-membership program, and the establishment of several designated funds within the national budget. Last year our largest component, the New York City Committee led by Jechil Dobekirer, set an example in creative fundraising efforts for the national organization. At the same time we took our national events to the country: two National Executive Committee meetings and an important public-affairs

conference in Washington, our last convention in Detroit, and now this one—a first in our history—in Los Angeles. And we continue to communicate with own constituency as well as with the community at large through the venerated channels of the Jewish Frontier and the Yiddisher Kemfer and through new instruments such as our website and the ideological statement being adopted at this convention.

**A**ll of this together constitutes a gratifying record on which we can build in this new decade, but nothing is as crucial to our further progress as is the emergence of a new national leadership of activists in their 40s and 50s that is now assuming central responsibility for this organization. We face many old and new challenges in all facets of our work—membership recruitment and retention, fundraising, programs, representation and advocacy, our publications, the next World Zionist Congress elections, and many others—but we are now assured of both continuity and creativity in the coming years.

In this report I've repeatedly used the word “we.” This is *not* intended to be a “royal we,” for we have truly made progress together. Everyone among our outgoing and incoming officers and NEC members, and so many others, contributed to the considerable success we have had. Nevertheless, because I was privileged to serve as your president, I have many personal memories of moments, events, and experiences: being in the company of the movement at the 1995 Midwest Seminar, when we heard the shattering news of the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin; seeing the fruits of his and Barak's labors a few months ago when the Presidents Conference mission met with King Abdullah in Amman; visiting not only our city committees but other branches in key communities across the country and enjoying the personal hospitality of good friends in so many places; the opportunity to engage with top leaders of our movement in Israel; a range of gratifying contacts with the remarkable leadership of our remarkable youth movement; and the extraordinary opportunity of

*(Continued on page 24)*

# Presidential Charge to the Convention

*Jeffrey Mallow*

*Jeffrey Mallow, the current president of LZA, thought it best to introduce the movement's agenda for the forthcoming term. His convention charge follows below:*

**W**e are not now, nor have we ever been, a one-issue organization. We have always had a broader vision, as articulated in our recent Statement of Ideology (see pp. 2-3). Briefly, it encompasses:

## LABOR ZIONISM AND ISRAEL

As Labor Zionists, we believe that Israel and the Diaspora are linked in the development of the Jewish people. It is the responsibility of Zionists in the Diaspora to engage Israelis in an open dialogue. Labor Zionists support key Israeli institutions such as cooperative settlements: *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*, the national labor union: Histadrut, and Israel's universal health care system.

## LABOR ZIONISM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

As Labor Zionists, we view Judaism as a civilization that embodies a multifaceted religion, diverse cultural traditions and languages, and the need for national self-determination. We believe that Jews must build on the foundations of our heritage, and promote its continuation.

## LABOR ZIONISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

As Labor Zionists, we believe that the governments of the United States and Israel must provide their citizens with the fundamental legal, social, and economic rights that serve as the basis for all democratic and just societies. We are committed to fight for human rights, social and economic justice, equal education, civil liberties and religious freedom.

How do we enact our vision in each of these three areas? Our agenda for the next two years emphasizes one focus of action for each:

- **For Labor Zionism and Israel: supporting Israel in its quest for peace.**  
To work with our partners in the Israel Labor Party and in the government, to make this last battle truly the last battle.
- **For Labor Zionism and the Jewish People: struggling for a real pluralism, and a liberal interpretation of "Who is a Jew."**  
To forge alliances with our counterparts in the religious movements, to make the slogan "We are One" a reality.
- **For Labor Zionism and Social Democracy: what we call 'the global sweatshop'.**  
To struggle together with other groups against global exploitation of workers, to globalize the labor movement as a vehicle for social and economic advancement.



**LABOR ZIONIST ALLIANCE**  
**Officers and Members of the National Executive Committee 2000-2002**  
(as of Winter 2001)

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Vice Pres. Administrative	Samuel Norich
Vice Pres. Membership	Steven J. Weinberg
Vice Pres. Program and Cultural Affairs	Judy Silberg Loebel
Vice Pres. Midwest	Norman Naimark
Vice Pres. Northeast	Irving Wishnia
Vice Pres. Southeast	Milton Rosen
Vice Pres. West	Louis Senensieb
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Kenneth Bob  
Ralph Bondar  
Jesse Bronitzky  
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Lonnie Golden  
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Daniel Mann

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Los Angeles	Ethel Taft
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**COOPTIONS**

Josh Cohen  
Elyse Frymer  
Eileen Maddis  
Michael Zurakov

## Have You Heard About Moses, What's His Name?

*Yakov Azriel*

“Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the farthest end of the wilderness...” (Exodus 3: 1)

Hello darling, long time no see,  
Sit down, have something to drink.  
Have you heard the news?  
What do you mean, about whom?  
Let me be the first,  
They've found old Moses.  
What, don't you remember,  
That Jew who grew up in the Palace,  
Who could have risen to a position in the Court, but –  
You can't have forgotten the scandal!  
An Egyptian nobleman chooses  
To be one of the Jews,  
To turn his back on us, and for what?  
Simply revolting.

Now where do you think he's been hiding all these years?  
Hiding from justice  
And hiding his fears.  
In Midian, in Sinai,  
Dreadful, God-forsaken places.  
Excuse me, what did you ask, how old he is?  
Well, he must be 79 years old now.  
An old man, a nothing,  
A missing glove,  
A broken stove.

Could have been,  
Might have been,  
Has become  
A has-been.

How odd to choose the Jews.

Enough.  
Tell me, where's the menu for lunch?

# Is it Possible to Bring an End to the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict?

Zvi Ganin

*Some problems are never solved—they just get older.*  
Chaim Weizmann

Prime Minister Barak is reported to have said, “I will sign an agreement [with Arafat] only if, thereby, an end to the conflict will be announced.” (Yediot Achronot, July 24, 2000) This policy has proven to be diplomatically unrealistic as well as educationally, morally and politically risky. It is manifestly impossible to bring an end to the hundred-year-old conflict in the foreseeable future. Alternatively, a better diplomatic approach would be: “I will sign an agreement only if, thereby, all mutual claims will be ended.”

Diplomatic tactics aside, however, the fundamental question is: Why can't the Palestinian-Israeli conflict be resolved now? My pessimism, as reflected in the wording of the question, derives from recognition of the exceedingly complex nature of the issues. The conflict is essentially religious with cultural, national and political overtones. It is a conflict that is therefore intractable. In this regard, it is similar to such contemporary conflicts as that in the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Spain, Belgium and Cyprus.

As far back as 1891, Ahad Ha'am, the astute Zionist essayist and critic, warned of the dangerous ramifications for the future of the Zionist encounter with the Arabs of Palestine, then still under Ottoman rule. ('Al Parashat Drahim, p.24). Another perceptive observer, the pro-Zionist British Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, who was chief political officer in the Middle East for General Allenby, wrote this prophetic observation in his diary in 1919: “The [Paris] Peace Conference laid two eggs: Jewish and Arab nationalism. These are destined to become two obnoxious hens . . . Jewish

and Arab sovereignties must [eventually] collide.” (Middle East Diary, pp. 27-28, Hebrew).

The Palestinian Arab leaders, as those of the neighboring Arab states, all descendants of the Muslim conquerors of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century CE, have never recognized the four-thousand-year-old religio-national Jewish affinity for Eretz Yisrael. This rejection of the premise of the Zionist enterprise was made explicit in innumerable conversations during the British Mandate period as well as after the creation of the State of Israel. In September 1947, by way of example, two Zionist diplomats, David Horowitz and Abba Eban, met with the secretary-general of the Arab League, Azzam Pasha, in London as part of the final Zionist attempt to reach an Arab-Jewish agreement along the lines of the UNSCOP Report that had recommended the partition of Palestine into two states—one, Arab and the other Jewish. Dismissing Zionist offers of compromise and a Jewish guarantee “against any encroachment by the Jews upon the boundaries of other states,” Azzam Pasha stated bluntly that the Arabs...

...were not afraid of [Jewish] expansion. They resented the very Jewish presence as an alien organism which had arrived without their consent and which refused to be assimilated into their way of life.

Consequently, Azzam Pasha declared that the Arabs would fight with all their might to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state.

Responding to Horowitz's and Eban's question regarding Arab action if, nevertheless, a Jewish state were created, Azzam explained that politics...

...was not a matter for sentimental agreements; it was the result of contending forces. The question is whether you can bring more force for the creation of a Jewish State than we can muster to prevent it. If you want your state, however, you must come and get it. It is useless asking me for the Negev on the grounds that it is empty. You can only get your Negev by taking it. (Political Documents of the Jewish Agency, Vol.2, pp 696-672)

In August, 1949, A similar encounter took place between 'Abd al-Mun'im Mustafa (head of the Egyptian delegation to the Lausanne Conference) and Eliahu Sasson (The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs' foremost Arabist). During his seven-hour talk with Sasson, Mustafa was equally frank in elucidating on Egypt's enmity toward Israel:

Egypt does not want a common border with Israel. Egypt would have been happy if Israel had not come into existence, and it did everything possible to forestall this. Egypt is convinced that an Israeli state, alien to the Arabs in all respects, in the midst of an Arab ocean, will of necessity be a permanent cause of conflicts, complications and instability in the Middle East.

The Egyptian diplomat pointed out that he had warned American diplomats that in order to regain the confidence of the Arab world, the U.S. "had to keep Israel from becoming large, strong, and densely populated. Egypt would not feel safe with three or four million well-educated, energetic and dedicated Jews on her border." (Documents on the foreign policy of Israel, Vol. 4, pp. 380-82).

Ever since Israel's War of Independence, however, and in particular after the Six-Day War, various Arab rulers realized the futility of attempting to destroy the Jewish state. Yet, it is still doubtful whether Yasser Arafat has accepted Israel as a *fait accompli*. Moreover

most of the Muslim and secular elites in the Arab states, as well as many of the Palestinian and Israeli Arabs still seem to harbor a virulent hatred of Jews and Israel. The Israeli response to this lamentable state of affairs should not have been the undertaking of an aggressive, ultra-nationalist-religious settlement policy (such in Hebron, at the tomb of Joseph in Shechem, and elsewhere). As a result of this action, we have been pushing moderate Arabs into a cul-de-sac. A more rational policy would have been to adopt strategic considerations only.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as with many other ethnic-religious conflicts, is not going to be solved by the magic touch of the Beilin-Abu Mazen Document, or any other single agreement. Nevertheless, The Oslo Accord might have laid a basis for a fragile co-existence—a *modus vivendi* not so unlike American-Canadian relations. Even so, we should not have been deluded into believing in a "new Middle East," or in the emergence of a utopian peace. To prevent further delusions, it is vital to realize that there is still no solution at this time to the problem of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; there is no immediate remedy for the lack of a water needed to sustain the 15 million people of the former British Mandate (6 million in Israel, 3 million in the territories, and 6 million in Jordan); and there is no solution for mounting mutual demographic pressures.

*Editor's Note: The following section was written after the start of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in November, 2000.*

This section has been written immediately after the horrendous lynching of two innocent Israeli reservist drivers who lost their way in the outskirts of Ramallah, and the simultaneous televised sermons of Muslim preachers in Gaza and elsewhere urging their audience "to kill every Jew, everywhere." The atrocity, occurring against the background of the incessant slaughter perpetrated by Muslim fundamentalists in Algeria, and the bombing of the Twin Towers in New York City,

*(Continued on page 24)*



## A Jewish Look at Tuesdays With Morrie

*Louis Kaplan*

W ithin the last year, I visited a man twice in his home and upon his introduction of the topic, had long conversations with him each time about life and death. A cancer victim, he had been told by his doctors that he would probably live only a few more months. They were correct. In our first conversation he mentioned that he had read book by Mitch Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie, three times. He had been very moved by it—and so have hundreds of thousands of other people. For more than two years, that book was number one in The New York Times Book Review's list of hardback best sellers, and it is still among the top three. Many of you have probably read it. When my wife and I received the book as a present, I decided to read Tuesdays with Morrie and see why so many people have been impressed by its message.

The situation and setting of the book are certainly very touching. Morris Schwartz, a sociologist, had been Mitch Albom's favorite professor at Brandeis University, from which Albom had graduated in 1979. One night in March 1995, while flipping television channels, Albom heard someone ask, "Who is Morrie Schwartz?" The voice was that of Ted Koppel on his Nightline program, conducting an interview with Schwartz. That was when Albom discovered that his former teacher was suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Lou Gehrig's disease, and that Schwartz was confined to his house in West Newton (near Boston), Massachusetts.

Mitch Albom decided to reestablish contact with the man whom he hadn't seen or talked with for sixteen years. Thereafter, Albom, who lived in Detroit, visited Morrie Schwartz regularly on Tuesdays. The relationship deepened. With Schwartz's

permission, Albom taped their conversations. Albom was primarily interested in hearing what his beloved, intelligent, and dying professor had to say about how to live. The result of those recordings is the book, Tuesdays With Morrie.

Since many Jews have read and have possibly been influenced by Morris Schwartz's advice on living, I want to point out some parallels between what he says and Jewish teachings. Finally, I will mention a few of my personal departures from Morrie Shwartz's outlook on life.

The subtitle for Tuesdays with Morrie is "An Old Man, A Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson". To Schwartz, "life's greatest lesson" is love. He told Albom: "The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love and to let it come in...Love each other or die [emotionally, spiritually, in your humanity]."

Immanuel of Rome, who was alive 700 years ago, wrote, "Love is the pivot of the Torah." Indeed, three of the Torah's most famous lines deal with love:

*"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart (i.e. intellect), with all your soul and all your might";*

*"And you shall love your fellow [or 'neighbor'] as yourself";*

*"And you shall love the stranger."*

Regarding this third love command, Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz observes in his commentary on the Torah, "This demand to love the alien is without parallel in the legislation of any ancient people." As for the

love between a man and a woman, an entire book of the Hebrew Bible is devoted to that: *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs).

For the Jew, love entails deeds as well as feelings. We are to show our love of God by leading a good, morally upright life. We are to love our fellow human beings, including strangers, by: wishing them well and rejoicing in their successes; respecting their right to go their own peaceful way; relating courteously and honestly to them; and by assisting them, if possible, to live healthier, safer, more comfortable and productive lives. From what I read of Morris Schwartz in Tuesdays with Morrie, I think that is how he loved.

A second suggestion by the deathly ill Morris Schwartz was. "Devote yourself to your community around you."

In the sixth century before the Common Era, the prophet Jeremiah advised the Jews from Judea (today's Israel), who had been taken captive by the country's conqueror to their land of Babylonia, "Seek the welfare of the city to which I [God] have exiled you."

Throughout their history, Jews, when permitted to do so, have participated with non-Jews in working for the welfare of the community, state, and nation in which we lived. Morrie Schwartz and our Jewish tradition agree on the imperative of tending to the *tzawrchei tzibur* (community's needs) and helping with *tikum olam* (repairing the world) through such ways as honest labor at one's job, good behavior, charitable donations, and volunteer efforts.

A third bit of living wisdom is found in the following exchange between Morrie Schwartz and Mitch Albom:

He nodded toward the window with the sunshine streaming in. "You see that? You can go out there, outside, anytime. You can run up and down the block and go crazy. I can't do that. I can't go out. I can't run. I can't be out there without fear of getting sick. But you know what? I appreciate that window more than you do."

Appreciate it?

"Yes, I look out that window every day. I notice the change in the trees, how strong the wind is blowing. It's as if I can see time actually passing through that window pane. Because I know my time is almost done, I am drawn to nature like I'm seeing it for the first time."

Our biblical ancestors saw nature's wonders as evidence of God's creative power: "The heavens declare the glory of God and his handiwork the sky proclaims," declared the Psalmist. I am moved by the sensitivity of the Hebrew Bible's authors to the marvels and beauty of the natural world. Consider these examples: "like palm groves that stretch out"; "a cloud as small as a man's hand"; "like the rushing of many waters"; "The high mountains are for wild goats, crags a refuge for rock-badgers"; "the ostrich's wings beat joyously"; "The locust has no king, yet every one of them goes forth in formation"; "Like a lily among thorns"; and "the vines in blossom give off fragrance."

Centuries ago, the rabbis devised blessings to be said on such occasions as seeing lofty mountains, spotting the year's first springtime blossoms, and observing a lovely animal. The recitation of the *Hamotzee* blessing before a meal is meant to rekindle our spark of awe at the existence of food and to make us consciously grateful for it.

Morrie Schwartz is very much the Jew in bidding us to truly see and appreciate nature.

Now, for several disagreements...

Morrie Schwartz said to Mitch Albom, "People are only mean when they're threatened..." But is that the only reason? Aren't some individuals bad-tempered or vicious at times because they are ill, want to exert power, show off, or to get revenge for a real or imaginary hurt, to steal, or due to another reason?

Near the end of the book we read, "'It's natural to die,' he said again. 'The fact that we make such a big hullabaloo over it is all because

we don't see ourselves as part of nature. We think because we're human we're something above nature."

I think human beings understand that we are part of nature. Nevertheless, most of us don't welcome our inevitable death because we have enjoyed being alive so much. We want to continue living—in health. Moreover, many persons don't believe in or are very doubtful about a conscious existence somewhere after they have died on planet Earth. Therefore, although "it's natural to die," it's also understandable that an overwhelming number of people make "a big hullabaloo over it."

There is a sad truth that Morrie Schwartz admits: until he became seriously ill he didn't think much about death. As Albom quotes the professor, "Everyone knows they're going to die," he said again, "but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently." So Morrie suggested, "Do what the Buddhists do. Every day have a little bird on your shoulder that asks, 'Is today the day? Am I ready? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person I want to be?'"

A Jew doesn't need the Buddhist's little bird. The *Modeh Anee* (I Thankfully Acknowledge) sentence to be said upon awakening expresses gratitude for another day of life and implies that one should make the most of it. Urging responsible living, the sage Hillel declared, "And if not now, when?" for no human being can be certain of another second of life. It is unwholesome to dwell overmuch on one's inevitable death, but neither is it wise to avoid acknowledging reality.

Albom provides us with some information on Schwartz's thinking about God: "He was born Jewish, but became an agnostic [i.e., a person who asserts that it is impossible to know if there is a God] when he was a teenager, partly because of all that happened to him as a teenager."

Except for a repulsive visit to the fur factory where his father worked, Albom doesn't let us know what occurred in Morrie's teenage years that turned him into an agnostic. Frankly, I'm surprised that whatever those teenage difficulties were, a smart person like Morrie Schwartz would blame God for them. But did

he at least give God credit for whatever happiness he enjoyed as a teenager?

Did Schwartz never come across non-supernatural conceptions of God? Surely such an educated man must have been familiar with the American philosopher John Dewey's idea of God: "the values to which one is supremely devoted..."

Similarly, since the professor lived in a Boston suburb, perhaps he heard or read what Roland Gittelsohn, a very prominent Reform rabbi in Boston, understood God to be: The word can also refer to the moral or ethical goal toward which each of us should constantly strive . . . God is the sum-total of all our ideals, magnified to perfection.

Did Schwartz ever seek a non-supernatural conception-of God that could undergird his life, or did he rest content in not looking?

Despite his agnosticism, when close to the end of his life, Morrie said of God: "I'm bargaining with Him up there now. I'm asking Him, 'Do I get to be one of the angels?'" Albom adds, "It was the first time Morrie admitted talking to God." Even an agnostic or atheist can't be faulted, in a time of crisis, for hoping there really is a creator, powerful, listening God who can restore one's health or at least let one die peacefully, and who can enable that individual to live on elsewhere.

Albom also discloses that Morrie "still felt at home, culturally, in Judaism." This is a reminder that a Jewish agnostic or atheist is still a Jew and can be enriched by Jewish books, ethics, values, Zionism Hebrew and Yiddish, customs, art, music, and, yes, even by ritual observances seen as religious language that expresses Jewish or common human experiences, ideas, and aspirations.

Morrie Schwartz was a cultural Jew. But it is very hard to form a solid Jewish identity in a child or teenager, to have that youngster feel privileged in being Jewish and want to live a Jewish life, if all one transmits is cultural Jewishness. It can be done, but it is especially difficult in the United States where religion plays a significant role in so many

*(Continued on page 24)*

## Yerida

*(Continued from page 10)*

dream of building a modern democratic Jewish state has become, if not impossible, far more challenging than anyone imagined.

What makes this trade off one of anguish for those Jews who have cast their lot with America but whose spirit has been shaped by the love of Israel is the realization that what would enrich and assure the biological future of American Jewry could come at the expense of impoverishing Israel. That is what can be distilled from a historic juncture in Jewish history where yerida and the new phase of the Intifada intersect. It is a disturbing prospect. □

## Resolutions

*(Continued from page 11)*

### **10. Public Education, Charter Schools, and Vouchers**

The Labor Zionist Alliance reiterates its wholehearted support for public education, recognizing public schools as the pre-eminent social institution to direct children for full participation in the life of our nation. Furthermore, the LZA is unswerving in its opposition to so-called school vouchers, which we see as excuses for funneling public monies into discriminatory sectarian and parochial schools.

### **11. The Environment**

LZA commits itself to participating with the general Jewish community in environmental educational, and action efforts both here and in Israel. We urge the Israeli government to re-evaluate its proposed plans for the construction of a potentially environmentally-disruptive trans-Israel highway.

### **12. Jewish National Fund**

The convention endorses the proposal approved by the Administrative Committee to renew LZA activity in behalf of the Jewish National Fund.

Our goal is to plant at least 1000 trees in the coming two years, and we instruct the incoming administration to conclude negotiations with the JNF on the location and theme of this forest, for presentation to the first NEC meeting of the new term in September.

### **13. Los Angeles LZA**

We thank Los Angeles LZA for hosting a most productive, gracious, dignified, and successful convention.

### **14. Ethiopian Jewry**

LZA calls upon the government of Israel to dispatch promptly a significant team of personnel to process the aliyah applications of the remnants of Ethiopian Jewry still there; to apply as appropriate criteria for eligibility for aliyah of the Falash Mura of Ethiopia that applicants be "seed of Israel," descendents of Jewish ancestors, and currently actively following Judaism; and to bring to Israel those applicants found eligible for aliyah without further delay. □

## Commencing A New Decade

*(Continued from page 12)*

While all of the above elements contributed to the success of the convention, perhaps the most important achievement was the election of a new national leadership, drawn from all generations as indeed should be the case, but built around a core of individuals in their 40's and 50's. A movement that can pass the gavel—and the torch—to a new cadre of younger leadership is a movement that will surely be able to further strengthen its relationship with its counterparts in Israel, with its youth movement in America, and with the community at large across the country. (The full list of the new officers and National Executive Committee also appears in this issue, as does the report to the convention of outgoing President Daniel Mann.)

We look forward to a new decade and a new era of LZA growth and activism that commenced with the Los Angeles Convention. □



## Century to Century

*(Continued from page 14)*

working with our two outstanding executives, first Emma Raymont and now Stephane Acel, who represent the best that Habonim Dror has produced and who both grew with and grew the jobs they undertook on our behalf.

So let me close where I began six years ago, but with updated wording. In that 1994 “inaugural address” I closed with another look at the century:

We are the heirs of an historic tradition and the trustees of a great idea. It is therefore both our obligation and our privilege to act in accordance with that vision and to carry it forward from this century to the next and in all the years to come.

Now that we are in that new century, let it be said that Labor Zionism continues to be a major force in Israel and in our communities worldwide as well as in our personal lives. We have not only the privilege but the obligation to continue to act in accordance with that vision, and we have not only the obligation but the privilege to bring our message to thousands of potential new members of all generations. I look forward to working with all of you to fulfill those *mitzvot*—still motivated by constructive impatience but with less caution and much more optimism. □

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## An End to The Conflict

*(Continued from page 19)*

demonstrates Professor Bernard Lewis' thesis that we have been witnessing a clash of civilizations: the struggle of Muslim fundamentalists against two enemies, secularism and modernity. “The war against secularism is conscious and explicit,” he has written, “and there is by now a whole literature denouncing secularism as an evil neo-pagan force in the modern world and attributing it variously to the Jews, the West, and the United States.” (Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic*, September 1990).

In summary, it is vital to understand that in the foreseeable future, the Muslim fundamentalists and the influential Muslim preachers will not accept the legitimacy of a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael. On the other hand, so far, and despite their efforts, no fundamentalist movement has succeeded in gaining control of any Arab state. We must make every effort, therefore, to prevent the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from continuing as a religious one. Most importantly, we should understand the necessity of living with insoluble problems. There is no chance for an instant peace—it will be enough to attain a tolerant co-existence. □

## Tuesdays with Morrie

*(Continued from page 22)*

persons' lives.

Morris Schwartz, a Jew—a cultural Jew, made arrangements for a Jewish funeral and received one. His friend, Rabbi Al Axelrod of Brandeis University, conducted it.

I have my disagreements with Morris Schwartz. But there is still much good advice in Tuesdays With Morrie which, echoing Jewish teachings, can help us to reorder our priorities and achieve a more meaningful life. □



***The remarkable eyewitness account  
of the emergence of Israel by a founder of Habonim,  
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Dear Friend:

Saadia Gelb is one of those magnificent madmen who helped make Israel among the most exciting countries on earth. Recognized as one of the founding fathers of Habonim, the groundbreaking Labor Zionist youth group, as well as a leader in the Kibbutz Movement, Saadia has been a key figure in developing the State of Israel. Now, he shares his extraordinary adventures in his long-anticipated memoir, **THE CHASE IS THE GAME: THE JOURNEYS OF AN AMERICAN-ISRAELI PIONEER.**

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