

AZM Biennial Assembly

Sunday, December 7, 2014

UJA-Federation of New York

The New American Zionism

BIENNIAL REPORT



633 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

AZM Biennial Program

11:30am Registration

12:00pm Business Session

Welcome
Constitutional Amendments
Nominations and Elections
Zionist Congress Elections
President's Report
Treasurer's Report
Executive Director's Report

Dr. Francine Stein
Dr. Stephen Wolnek
William D. Hess
Judge Abraham Gafni
Rabbi Vernon Kurtz
Judy Shereck
Karen Rubinstein

1:00pm Lunch

Greetings

Eric Goldstein
CEO, UJA-Federation of NY

2:00pm The New American Zionism

Keynote:
Moderator:
Panelists:

Professor Theodore Sasson
Gusti Yehoshua Braverman
Dr. Igor Branovan
Rabbi Natan Kapustin
Sara Zebowitz

3:30pm Round Table Discussions

4:00pm Summary and Conclusions

Dr. David Breakstone
Vice Chairman, WZO

AZM Officers 2012-2014

Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, President
Kenneth Bob, Chairman, National Board
Harvey Blitz, Vice President
David Newman, Vice President
Leonard Petlakh, Vice President
Judith Shereck, Treasurer
David Krantz, Secretary

AZM Cabinet 2012-2014

Dr. Igor Branovan
William D. Hess
Guy Hollingsworth
Marlene Post
Dr. Francine Stein
W. James Schiller
Dr. Stephen Wolnek
Steven J. Weinberg
Sandra Tankoos

**Report to the AZM Biennial Assembly
December 2012 - December 2014**

Respectfully Submitted

**Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, President
Karen J. Rubinstein, Executive Director**

Introduction

In December 2012, Rabbi Vernon Kurtz was elected President of the American Zionist Movement together with an outstanding team of officers. He named a leadership cabinet, who, for the past two years, have worked hard, investing their time, energy and passion into building AZM. They have not been the easiest years, with AZM suffering a 25% loss in budget. But these years were also marked by a substantial change in the WZO structure in North America and the establishment of an active WZO presence.

During the past two years, the American Zionist Movement has organized and sponsored a variety of programs from lectures to conferences, young leadership nights to Purim baskets, Hebrew events to marching in parades and more. This document is intended as an overview, rather than a complete report on AZM activities. Throughout this report it will become evident how AZM works both with and through its member organizations and the WZO. The reader will also see how AZM fulfills its multiple roles as a coordinating body, a liaison and partner to the WZO in Israel and an advocate for Zionism in the American Jewish community in order to develop a richer, fuller Zionism in the United States.

Celebrations and Conferences



*Astrith Baltsa presents **Hatikvah***

In Spring 2013, AZM welcomed renowned Israeli concert pianist and music scholar Astrith Baltsan, who delved into the surprisingly storied history of Hatikvah, Israel's national anthem. The program, in celebration of Israel's 65th year of Independence, was held at UJA-Federation in midtown Manhattan.

Using a multimedia presentation, Baltsan narrated Hatikvah's roots and its role in Israel today. At the end of the performance barely an eye was dry — whether it belonged to those who struggled to help establish the State or those who were born years later. The impact of the program was such that AZM has continued to promote the Baltsan program to communities around the USA.

In celebration of Israel's independence, AZM and WZO strengthened the Zionist Movement presence at the Celebrate Israel parade. For the past decade, AZM has organized a marching group at the parade. A huge event that has taken on the characteristics of a national celebration of Israel, the Celebrate Israel parade has its roots in the Zionist movement itself, which established the Salute to Israel Parade in 1964.

*AZM/WZO float at the 2014 **Celebrate Israel Parade***



So it is very fitting that two years ago AZM and WZO stepped up their presence with a colorful float and featured performances by the Tzofim Friendship Caravan, a summer delegation of Israeli teenagers who travel around North America and promote Israeli culture through music and dance. In 2014 the Tzofim performed on the AZM-WZO float dancing next to a colorful cutout of Theodor Herzl. Bright green flags featuring Herzl were also waved throughout the entire delegation to unify the organizations as one Zionist group.



Round-table discussions about Zionism

The full-day conference included presentations by well-known scholars and analysts, as well as the opportunity for discussion and exchange among the participants. Professor Gil Troy, author Yossi Klein Halevi and Ambassador Ido Aharoni were among the best known speakers in the program. Some 200 people joined in the discussions and left inspired by their probing conversations about Zionism today.

As part of its ongoing mission to strengthen American Jews' ties with Israel, AZM hosted conferences designed to create dialogue and drive action. "Zionism: From Ideology to Action, Israeli and North American Perspectives," was held in October 2013, addressing modern-day Zionist themes.



Shani Rozanes, Former Director Events and Public Programming for the Consulate of Israel in NY; Aryeh Green, Media Central; Kenneth Bob, AZM Chairman and President, Ameinu



*Sondra Sokal thanks speaker Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, author of **The Devil That Never Dies***

In December 2013, in close cooperation with the WZO Department for Countering Anti-Semitism, the Consulate General of Israel in New York and the WZO in North America, AZM organized "The Devil That Never Dies." The event explored Anti-Semitism today and how it manifests itself. Author Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Danon and US Special Envoy Ira Forman were among the speakers.



Yaakov HaGoel and Speaker Asaf Shamis at "The Devil That Never Dies" Conference



PURIM

To spread the joy of Purim, AZM collected donations to send *mishloach manot* (traditional Purim gift baskets) to Israeli children and soldiers who might otherwise not have received any. Thousands of baskets have been delivered over the past two years to soldiers and to children in Southern Israel.

In 2013, AZM donated *mishloach manot* to organizations in and around Ashkelon related to children as well as to lone soldiers and soldiers on the front line. AZM works with synagogues, Federations and a number of its own member organizations, such as AMIT

and Mercaz, to raise the funds. Likewise, a number of the benefitting Institutions are associated with Zionist organizations. In Israel, the coordinating efforts are accomplished through the offices of Herut.

In 2014, *mishloach manot* were given to children in nursery schools, absorption centers and AMIT schools. A special army intelligence unit also received *mishloach manot* and even visited pre-schoolers during rocket attacks to reassure them and to participate in Purim activities. The Purim Connection began more than 25 years ago in the Chicago Region of AZM and was adopted as a national project during the second Lebanon War. Its outreach and impact has multiplied many-fold since its first years.



Partnerships with Member Organizations and WZO

AZM proudly works with partner organizations to co-sponsor programs with compelling experts on Zionism and Israel. We want to particularly thank Dr. Simcha Leibovich, Tova Birnbaum, Diti Bechor and the rest of the WZO team in North America for their cooperation, assistance and partnership.



Educator and historian Muki Tsur discussed "Gazing from Mount Nebo" in May 2013 at an intergenerational event co-sponsored by AZM, WZO and Bina. Later that year, AZM and the WZO Department for Diaspora Activities presented a discussion about building bridges with Knesset Member Ruth Calderon, co-sponsored by the Jewish Theological Center and Bina. On Tisha B'Av, a panel about the Western Wall and how it has shaped Jewish and Israeli identity was co-sponsored with Congregation Bnai Jeshurun and the Manhattan JCC.

The Bnai Zion New York Speaker Series featured lectures by Gil Hoffman, chief political correspondent and analyst for the *Jerusalem Post*, and the Honorable Benny Kashriel, the mayor of the Israeli city Maaleh Adumim. Bnai Zion is always a partner that provides informative and interesting programs.



Hadassah's popular online monthly program, "Defining Zionism in the 21st Century," explores Zionism from a variety of backgrounds and contexts. The series, which is presented online, has featured a variety of thinkers and analysts, including Ambassador Yoram Ettinger; Rabbi Joshua Weinberg, president of ARZA; Rabbi Melissa Weintraub, director of JCPA Civility Initiative and co-founder of Encounter; Arnold M. Eisen, chancellor of JTS; Tova Birnbaum, director of the North America Region of the WZO, Department of Diaspora Activities; and Sarri Singer, founder and director of Strength to Strength. These presenters have led conversations on US-Israel relations, whether American Zionism is an oxymoron, how to train advocates for Israel effectively and whether Zionism is relevant for the next generation.

AZM has also co-sponsored several advocacy conferences organized by Mercaz in partnership with other arms of the Conservative Movement.

The Voices Fellowship creates a safe space for learning, questioning and discussing issues relating to Judaism, Zionism, social justice and Israel. The fellowship is co-sponsored by WZO, Ameinu and Bina, and is led by the WZO Department for Diaspora Activities and its shlicha, Tova Birnbaum. The program has been offered for several semesters to select groups of Jewish advocates in their 20s and 30s.



Feminsrael – a 2013 celebration for the accomplishments of Israeli women, held at B'nai Jeshurun in New York and moderated by Tova Birnbaum.

AZM proudly supports the Feminsrael program, founded years ago by the WZO Hagshama Department. Every March, in honor of Women's History Month, Feminsrael hosts educational events and speakers that focus on Israeli women who have improved their communities and inspired others. The hope is that their stories will motivate others to act. In 2013, more than 200 men and women of different ages came together at B'nai Jeshuran in New York for a Feminsrael program jointly sponsored by AZM and the WZO's Department of Diaspora Activities.



In cooperation with WZO, the Consulate General of Israel in New York and Bnai Zion, members of the local Jewish community gathered together to say farewell to Shlomi Kofman, Deputy Consul General of Israel, and Gil Lainer, Consul for Public Affairs, in June 2014. Both dignitaries returned to Israel for the end of their diplomatic terms, having served the New York area with distinction.

AZM has partnered with the WZO in North America on many projects. At the initiative of Simcha Leibovich, Representative of the Executive of the World Zionist Organization, comedian Joel Chasnoff created the Zionist Theater, a one-man show that uses comedy to explore the different sides and meanings of Zionism. Close to completion for the Zionist Theater is "PenPals," a conversation that spans decades between two young Jewish friends, one of whom makes Aliyah with her parents. The issues and questions raise can resonate with many audiences. These shows are both available for booking and are an innovative way to discuss Zionism in an engaging and entertaining way.

AZM's Aliyah Committee is chaired by Marlene Post. When Mayor Eli Barda of Migdal HaEmek visited the United States, the Aliyah Committee brought the Mayor to New York to meet with representatives from a range of religious and ideological backgrounds to promote his city at a luncheon sponsored by AZM and WZO.



(L-R): Dr. Francine Stein, Sandy Tankoos, Karen Rubinstein, Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, W. James Schiller and Steven Weinberg. Photo taken at an AZM Cabinet meeting.

During the Gaza War in Summer 2014, AZM stood with WZO to advocate for Israel, demonstrating at intersections in Israel armed with Israeli flags and signs reading "Together We Win!" and encouraging Israel lovers all over the world to display them as well. AZM also worked with its member organizations to deploy programs and materials offered from various ideological perspectives.



Together We Win at Layla Lavan 2014



The judges at the first US Regional Adult Bible Contest held in New York on November 30, 2014. The judges are (L-R): Neria Pinchas, Israeli Ministry of Education; Dr. Ora Horn Prouser, Executive Vice-President and Academic Dean, Academy for Jewish Religion; Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, President, AZM; and Dr. Adriane Leveen, Senior Lecturer, Hebrew Union College. Rabbi Kurtz served as the Head Judge for this competition.

Just last weekend, on November 30, WZO, in cooperation with AZM, held the first adult Bible contest competition in the United States. This competition is a long-standing event held under the auspices of the Israel Ministry of Education. This was the first time the competition had regional contests outside of Israel. The New York winner and two-runners up will be privileged to travel to Israel and complete in the finals in Jerusalem. The event was well attended and the excitement in the room was palpable. In addition to the quiz show-like format to the competition, the audience was treated to a wonderful concert by Cantors Gadi Elon, Yosef Karavani, Israel Singer of New York and Israel Singer of New Jersey.

Inquiries and calls are already coming in from people who would like to participate next year.

Hebrew

Hebrew, the language of modern Israel, is an important part of Zionist identity and has seen an uptick in interest among Jews of all ages. It has become a major item on the Zionism agenda over the past several years and this has been reflected in AZM programming, and especially programming for young professionals.

ViZionYLD, the young leadership division of AZM, has made Hebrew a top priority at all its events. Similarly, affiliated young leadership groups throughout the country have also worked to strengthen their constituents' connection to Hebrew.



The Council for Hebrew Language and Culture was established in 2013 through a WZO initiative with the assistance of AZM. It aims to raise the profile of the Hebrew language and to create a movement and social network of Hebrew lovers throughout North America. Its annual conference addresses programming and activities to promote Hebrew throughout the country and have honored distinguished Hebrew scholars.




Café Ivrit: Pub Edition 8/20, 6:30PM

Join the American Zionist Movement and Masa Israel for an evening of informal Hebrew networking.

Practice your Hebrew-speaking skills over beers and *chumms* with other young professionals. All levels are welcome. Light refreshments will be served. *Yaffah, na?*

Tuesday, August 20th
6:30-8:00 PM
Hudson Station NYC
 440th 9th Ave (35th and 9th)

Tickets: \$5 (Register in advance to receive a free drink ticket)

עברית Café   

Café Ivrit is a new initiative that uses the Hebrew language to further connect young professionals to their Jewish identity & the State of Israel.

The series uses a holistic approach of immersion & experiential learning to engage & inspire.

For more information, contact hebrew@azm.org

Café Ivrit uses Hebrew immersion to further connect young professionals to their Jewish identity and the State of Israel. The Yoga Edition invited participants to take a yoga class with a Hebrew-speaking instructor. At the Pub Edition, in association with Masa Israel Journey, participants mingled at a bar in Hebrew, conversing and playing games guided by native speakers.

want to learn conversational Hebrew using hands-on methods. In Chicago, AZM initiated and co-sponsored a JCC class called Cocktail Lab, which taught participants to mix and taste Israeli-inspired cocktails while learning basic, relevant, Hebrew vocabulary. Mixology in Hebrew — a powerful libation!

Working with the Kingsbay Y in Brooklyn institutions and its creative and talented Gilad Khalifa, innovative Hebrew classes were offered for young professionals who

American Zionist Movement, Park Slope Library and Kings Bay Y at Windsor Terrace
 Invite you to


Café B'Ivrit
Tachles: Practical Hebrew Edition


JOIN US ON A FUN AND ENGAGING 8-WEEK JOURNEY!

- ◆ Learn conversational Hebrew in an engaging way
- ◆ Open to individuals in their 20's and 30's
- ◆ Content-rich curriculum and themed sessions
- ◆ Hands on activities
- ◆ Learn the vocabulary and cultural importance of the Israeli Breakfast, Krav maga, High-tech, Environmentalism and more!
- ◆ Refreshments will be served

Thursdays, 6:00 pm—7:45 pm,
Starting May 1st, 2014
FREE!

Park Slope Library,
 431 6th Avenue
 Brooklyn, NY 11215
 For more info contact Gilad
 at 718-407-6377 or
info@windsorterrace.org





ViZionYLD — Young Professionals

Every year, Tel Aviv holds Layla Lavan (White Night), an all-night festival highlighting the city's cultural life. To bring a piece of Israel to New York, ViZionYLD hosted its own version of the festival. The event featured numerous Israel-themed activities, including a *shuk*, Israeli snacks, a photo booth with Israel-themed props, henna artists, Israeli music and a Café Ivrit, where attendees spoke Hebrew with native speakers.

At the first annual Layla Lavan in July 2013, more than 200 young professionals attended AZM's event at Hudson Station in Manhattan. In 2014, close to 300 people celebrated Israel at the trendy club Libation as AZM co-sponsored the night with Isramerica. That night, because of the subdued mood due to the Gaza War, IDF Captain Amir Telem also spoke about his experience in the Air Force. Both evenings helped attendees appreciate Israel's dynamic culture and encouraged them to engage with fellow Israel lovers. AZM has also worked with Isramerica to sponsor other Israeli cultural evenings, including recent concerts with Israeli singers Rami Kleinstein and Zvika Pick.



Social Media

In today's world, social media is imperative to maintaining an organization's connection with its constituents and to engaging new ones. AZM interacts with constituents through Twitter and Facebook, with tweets and posts about Zionist events, dates in history and interesting stories about Israel. Following related organizations and supporters also ensures that AZM stays up to date about other communities.

Other AZM Activities



(L-R) W. James Schiller, Sondra Sokal, Rabbi Yosef Blau, Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, Mel Salberg, Leonard Petlakh in front of the Knesset

When the Conference of Presidents quickly organized a Solidarity Mission to Israel in the summer of 2014, many of AZM's leaders were there. Three AZM past presidents have also served as Chairman of the Conference of Presidents, and current AZM President Rabbi Vernon Kurtz is chairman of the Conference's Membership Committee. Many AZM leaders serve on the JAFI Board of Governor's committees, several chair or co-chair major JAFI committees and Rabbi Kurtz serves as well on the Executive of the Jewish Agency. A number of Zionist organizational leadership are also key people in their local Federations and in other community institutions. Past AZM President William Hess has taken an increasingly active role in the Claims Conference (Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany). AZM also had a presence at the Conference on Israel Education organized and co-sponsored by the WZO, ICenter and the Government of Israel as part of the Government's Global initiative.

Café Israel — Broadening the Conversation

At the January 2013 round-table discussion about Israel led by Shahar Azani, Consul for Media Affairs at the Consulate General of Israel in New York, attendees shared their concerns about how to deal with Israel's portrayal in the media and how to fight against those who are ignorant or negative about it. Azani stressed the importance of being positive in interactions and suggested sharing less-publicized information about Israel in order to paint a more comprehensive picture of the country.

Helyn B. Reich Memorial Scholarship

Twice a year, through the Helyn B. Reich Memorial Scholarship Fund, AZM provides both undergraduate and post-university students with scholarships for time spent in Israel on approved programs. The scholarship was named after Helyn B. Reich, wife of the first president of the restructured AZM, Seymour D. Reich. Over the past two years, 18 winners have received almost \$20,000 through this scholarship. Since its establishment in 1997, many of the awardees have gone on to make Aliyah, and many of those who have returned to the US are making contributions to American Jewish life on campuses and in their local communities.

Fiscal Sponsorships and Cooperative Efforts

AZM has assisted several young Jewish start-up organizations by serving as fiscal sponsor and by mentoring the young leaders of these groups. The first of these was **PresenTense**, which has gone on to be a highly successful project encouraging Jewish entrepreneurship. AZM has continued to work for several years with two additional projects, described below, and is assisting the Swedish Zionist Federation in its efforts to advocate for Zionism against the growing anti-Israelism taking hold in Sweden.

Perspectives Israel is a grassroots initiative affiliated with AZM. Its two-day study tours, available for rabbinical students, young Jewish educators and lay leaders, aim to give nuanced perspectives and to start new conversations about the conflict in Israel. Creating a nonjudgmental setting, Perspectives develops its programs in consultation with a team of experts in Israeli politics and informal education, and seeks to give participants the opportunity to contextualize the many conflicting narratives they may have heard.

Boston's **BIG (Boston Israel Group)** connects Israeli and American Jewish young professionals, with support from a Young Adult Community Grant from Combined Jewish Philanthropies. It offers diverse programs, including an olive oil tasting for Chanukah, fall foliage hikes, a brewery tour, volunteering and lectures about Israel.



Towards the Future

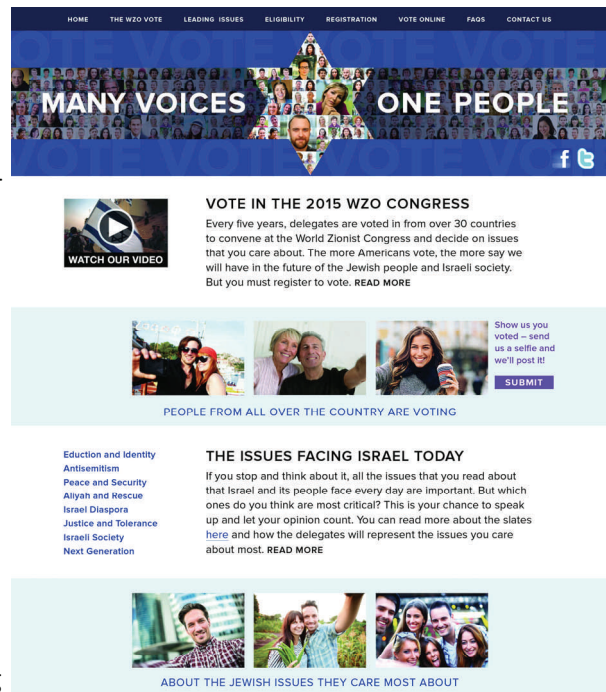
In January 2014, AZM began to plan for elections to the 37th World Zionist Congress. The process began to see its first fruits in October, when early registration began. The election and Congress preparations will be a major activity of 2015. Leadership is hopeful that we will see an increase in registrations over the previous election, which occurred 10 years ago. It appears that there may be two new slates running in these elections, which will translate into new members for AZM to help build a broader and bigger Zionist movement in the United States.

As referenced in the opening paragraphs and reflected in the many activities of AZM, the WZO's decision to create a more significant presence in North America has greatly impacted AZM. We are still learning and shaping what these structural changes mean. The next year, leading up to the Congress, and the year following, will be critical in paving new paths for the Zionist organizations in the United States, and for their umbrella organization – AZM.

We wish to take this time to again thank our partners and colleagues, who served as a striving force behind many of these activities and were always an important source of help and inspiration.

We particularly would like to thank Dr. Simcha Leibovich, Diti Bechor and the WZO team for their collegiality and motivational force. Tova Birnbaum's energy, creativity and openness were an continual source of help and inspiration. The support of the members of the Executive in Israel who worked with AZM must get special mention: Yaakov HaGoel, Gusti Yehoshua Braverman and Haim Cohen and the team at the Department for Diaspora Activities. A special thanks goes to our long-time colleague and partner Dr. David Breakstone, who has always considered the local perspective when planning his activities in the US. And last but not least, a thanks and congratulations to Avraham Duvdevani, who has led the WZO in new directions and started on a path toward a stronger, more vibrant and more visible WZO in North America.

Finally, our special thanks to all of the AZM officers and Cabinet members who devoted so much of their time and energy to build AZM and to strengthen and enrich Zionism in America.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the WZO 2015 Congress website. At the top is a navigation bar with links: HOME, THE WZO VOTE, LEADING ISSUES, ELIGIBILITY, REGISTRATION, VOTE ONLINE, FAQS, and CONTACT US. Below the navigation bar is a large banner with the text "MANY VOICES ONE PEOPLE" and a collage of many small portraits of people. To the right of the banner is a "WATCH OUR VIDEO" button. Below the banner is a section titled "VOTE IN THE 2015 WZO CONGRESS" with a paragraph of text and a "READ MORE" link. Below this is a section titled "PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY ARE VOTING" with three small photos of people and a "SUBMIT" button. To the left of this section is a list of issues: Education and Identity, Antisemitism, Peace and Security, Aliyah and Rescue, Israel Diaspora, Justice and Tolerance, Israeli Society, and Next Generation. Below this is a section titled "THE ISSUES FACING ISRAEL TODAY" with a paragraph of text and a "READ MORE" link. At the bottom is a section titled "ABOUT THE JEWISH ISSUES THEY CARE MOST ABOUT" with three small photos of people.

HOME THE WZO VOTE LEADING ISSUES ELIGIBILITY REGISTRATION VOTE ONLINE FAQS CONTACT US

MANY VOICES ONE PEOPLE

WATCH OUR VIDEO

VOTE IN THE 2015 WZO CONGRESS

Every five years, delegates are voted in from over 30 countries to convene at the World Zionist Congress and decide on issues that you care about. The more Americans vote, the more say we will have in the future of the Jewish people and Israeli society. But you must register to vote. [READ MORE](#)

PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY ARE VOTING

Education and Identity
Antisemitism
Peace and Security
Aliyah and Rescue
Israel Diaspora
Justice and Tolerance
Israeli Society
Next Generation

THE ISSUES FACING ISRAEL TODAY

If you stop and think about it, all the issues that you read about that Israel and its people face every day are important. But which ones do you think are most critical? This is your chance to speak up and let your opinion count. You can read more about the slates [here](#) and how the delegates will represent the issues you care about most. [READ MORE](#)

ABOUT THE JEWISH ISSUES THEY CARE MOST ABOUT



American Zionist Movement, 633 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

