



A Publication of the Baltimore Board of Rabbis

# 5769 year end review newsletter

Volume 3 – Summer, 2009

## BBR Hosts Uganda's Chief Rabbi



Rabbi Gershom  
Sizomu

Last November, BBR members had the privilege of meeting Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, a freshly-minted Conservative rabbi who recently left the creaturely comforts of Los Angeles to return to his native land of Uganda where he serves as the rabbi of his Jewish community.

During his visit with BBR, he recounted the story of his tribe which began 100 years ago. At that time missionaries converted native African tribes to Christianity, and British colonialists commissioned a leader to oversee a swath of territory. That leader, newly converted to Christianity, was a warrior named Semei Kakungulu. Growing disenchanted with the British determination to limit his power, he broke away and converted again, this time to Judaism. He influenced his followers to do the same. By the 1970s, there were as many as 5,000-7,000 Jews in Uganda, until Idi Amin's reign of terror killed many and frightened others to abandon their faith.

Today, the Abayudaya tribe numbers about 1,000 souls who live among the rolling hills of Mbale, five hours from Kampala. They observe *kashrut* and *Shabbat* even as they face the hardships of droughts, food shortages, the absence of running water and electricity.

Rabbi Sizomu's talk focused on the spiritual life of his people and on his vision for the future. He plans to build a yeshiva that will train rabbinic leaders to serve not only Uganda but the entire African continent. ★

## Public Affairs Committee Tackles Timely Topics

The Public Affairs Committee discussed, debated, and crafted public statements on timely issues that referenced principles of Jewish tradition and Jewish sources. Specifically, BBR inserted four full-page ads in the *Baltimore Jewish Times* on topics including: 1) Election 2008 issues; 2) Voting Against Slots; 3) Repeal of Death Penalty; 4) Congratulatory message to President Obama. In addition, BBR inserted a full-page *Rosh Hashana* message and greeting.

BBR extends its thanks to the following colleagues whose service on BBR's Public Affairs Committee continues to raise public awareness about issues of Jewish import: **Rabbis Amy Scheinerman (Chair), Avram Israel Reisner, Bradd Boxman, Chaim Landau, Elan Adler, Yocheved Heiligman, Mark Loeb, Steve Schwartz, Liz Bolton, and Michael Meyerstein (ex officio).**

In addition, under the Committee's auspices, *Baltimore Jewish Times'* readers continue to be stimulated by BBR members who submitted columns on a monthly basis including **Rabbis Paul Sidlofsky, Jeffrey Orkin, Bradd Boxman, Steve Schwartz, Nina Cardin, Chaim Landau, Aaron Frank, Debi Wechsler, Mitchell Ackerson, Avram Reisner, Jon Konheim and Tsvi Schur. ★**

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# President's Column

by Rabbi Steve M. Fink



Rabbi Steven M. Fink

**Dear Friends,**

The Baltimore Board of Rabbis had a very active year in 5769. We created three Task Forces this past year dealing with the Adult Institute. Introduction to Judaism Course, and Membership Eligibility. The first, chaired by colleague **Floyd Herman**, made some very useful recommendations which will be reflected in this Fall's Institute. The second, chaired by **Geoff Basik**, will make its report to the Executive Committee this summer.

Its recommendations are expected to be implemented in time for the Spring, 2010 semester. The third, chaired by colleague **Joel Zaiman**, has delivered its report which awaits a decision by the Executive Committee. I want to personally thank all of those who contributed time and insights to this important.

We also had a terrific social at **Gila and Paul Ruskin's** home which provided some fine fun and relaxation. In response to pressing public issues, BBR issued position papers in the media on such matters as the death penalty, gambling, and the presidential

election. All of us especially appreciate Amy Scheinerman's tireless efforts on our behalf. We recently concluded our program year with yet another very successful Yom Iyyun.

I have tried to represent the BBR to the best of my abilities both within the Jewish community and the Baltimore community. Despite the fact that I have been an officer of the BBR for several years, I had no idea how much the president of this organization is in demand. Though this position takes a lot of time to do well, it is very exciting and interesting work. To say the least, the first year has gone very quickly. I hope I have represented the Board and each of you well.

Finally, I want to thank **Michael Meyerstein** for his continued good work on our behalf. Michael does more than his part to ensure that the Baltimore Board of Rabbis is healthy and well-functioning.

Best wishes to each of you and your families for a healthy and relaxing summer.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven M. Fink

## BBR Publishes *Facing Death and Mourning*

Last Fall, BBR's Public Affairs Committee published an important document that is getting wide distribution in the Baltimore area. Titled "*Facing Death and Mourning With the Comfort and Strength Of Jewish Tradition*", this sensitively written piece offers *aveylim* answers and guidance during difficult emotional moments in their lives.

BBR is indebted to **Rabbis Yocheved Heiligman, Joshua Neeley, Jeffrey Orkin, Amy Scheinerman, and Ruth Smith** who spent many months researching and writing the document.

Though they came to the project from different theological and philosophical perspectives, they cooperated beautifully in the spirit of *klal Yisrael*. In addition, BBR successfully recruited several corporate sponsors to help underwrite the reproduction, marketing, and distribution costs. The brochure was underwritten by a special grant from **Sol Levinson & Bros.** whose support for BBR's work is greatly appreciated. The Levinson grant allowed BBR to produce thousands of copies which BBR will sell to congregations, nursing homes, and other Boards of Rabbis in the coming months. ★

## BBR Launches Website

### [www.baltimoreboardofrabbis.org](http://www.baltimoreboardofrabbis.org)

After several years of discussion, BBR finally entered the 21st century last January with the unveiling of its own website. Created with the technical expertise and support of The Associated's Marketing Department, the website boasts listings of local Jewish communal resources, information about BBR's membership with links to each one's institutional affiliation, information about BBR's public affairs programs.

Particularly useful are the pages about BBR's Institute of Adult Jewish Studies and the Introduction to Judaism course. Visitors can download applications for the Intro course and register for the Adult Institute.

An added feature invites readers to "Ask The Rabbi" questions pertinent to Judaism. BBR members have volunteered to be "On-call" for two week blocks to reply to queries. Colleagues who have already signed up include **Rabbis Steven Fink, Debi Wechsler, Amy Scheinerman, Joshua Neely, Jonathan Panitz, Steve Schwartz, Jay Goldstein, Gila Ruskin, Jerry Seidler, Ron Shulman, Dana Saroken, Andrew Busch, and Michael Meyerstein.**

The website also features our colleagues' Favorite Jewish Books, Favorite Websites (by topic), and Favorite On-line Education Links, Favorite Recipes, Favorite Films, Favorite Secular Books, Favorite Tourist Places, and a host of other useful resources.

If you haven't been to the website, go to [wwwbaltboardofrabbis.org](http://wwwbaltboardofrabbis.org).

If you have comments, suggestions, or edits, feel free to write Michael. ★

## Introduction to Judaism Course Gets Face Lift in Spring 2010

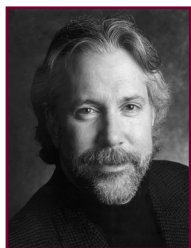
Thanks to a generous FYo8 Blaustein Foundation grant, Jewish Outreach Network (JON) and BBR surveyed the impact of the ever-popular BBR Introduction to Judaism course on the lives of past students and their families. On average 40-50 students enroll annually for the course. In the past decade, more than 500 students have 'graduated' the program, excluding spouses and significant others.

The Study titled "*Engaging & Retaining Interfaith & Conversionary Families in Jewish Communal life*" surveyed past students, most of whom are interfaith couples and individuals contemplating conversion to Judaism. The information became the basis for curriculum development by BBR's Task Force on Introduction to Judaism, chaired by **Rabbi Geoff Basik**. Other colleagues serving on the Task Force included **Rabbis Yaakov Chaitovsky, David Greenspoon, and Paul Sidlofsky.**

Geoff promises that the revised Introduction to Judaism course curriculum will be released late this summer and will be ready for the classroom by January for the Spring, 2010 semester. The course will create a more meaningful and effective way to help students establish active connections to Judaism and the Jewish community. It will also create an easier, less intimidating, and more accessible entrée for students and their families into Jewish communal life.

Colleagues who taught the Intro course this past year and who helped guide students in their exploration of Judaism included **Rabbis Gus Buchdahl, Yaakov Chaitovsky, Aaron Frank, Elizabeth Bolton, Joshua Neely, Gila Ruskin, Michael Meyerstein, Sheila Russian, Phil Miller, Geoff Basik, and Jerry Seidler.** ★

## Yom Iyyun Hosts Rabbi Irwin Kula



For the fourth straight year, BBR and the Washington Board of Rabbis joined forces in hosting an outstanding *Yom Iyyun* whose theme was "Transmitting Jewish Wisdom and Practice in a Globalized, Post-postmodern World". This year's Scholar in Residence was **Rabbi Irwin Kula**, President of CLAL: The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership

Kula led three very dynamic and provocative sessions which were well received by conference attendees. *Yasher koach* to this year's Co-chairs **Rabbis Jon Konheim, Jonathan Panitz, and Greg Harris** on a job well-done in convening 60 colleagues for a day of textual study, discussion and camaraderie. Colleagues expressed great satisfaction with *Yom Iyyun* and the opportunity it gave them to engage in some intense learning with fellow colleagues. ★

## Monthly Programs Attract Strong Interest

The 2009-10 program year was an active one for BBR members. The High Holiday Seminar, the first in more than a decade, was well-attended. Chaired by colleague **Rabbi Debi Wechsler**, members shared sermonic sparks, noteworthy articles, quotable quotes and stories thematically tied to Yom Tov. Fortunately, the Jewish Times didn't report any rabbis using similar materials in their sermons!

In the context of the 2008 election year, colleagues heard a presentation on "Partisan Politics and the Pulpit". **Rabbi Bradd Boxman** introduced lobbyist **Mark Pelavin** of the Religious Action Center who touched on a few of hot election issues as well as the perennial church/state issues.

In the first of what may become an annual tradition, two colleagues **Rabbis Mark Loeb and Larry Ziffer** dialogued on the theme of "This Do I believe: *Asher Bachar Banu- Our Chosenness As G-d's People*". **Mark and Larry** shared personal reflections that were at once informative, insightful, and provocative.

Colleague **Steven Fink** presided at one of the programmatic highlights of the year when he hosted a private dinner with **Rabbi Gershon Sizomu**, Chief Rabbi of Uganda. Sizomu spoke of his global vision for the Jews of Uganda and Africa at large and especially the 1000 Jews of the Abuyadaya Village where he lives. Later that evening, more than 150 people attended a BBR-sponsored public program at which he spoke.

Our December meeting featured two speakers, including our own colleague **Rabbi Avram Reisner** together with **Dr. Richard Lederman**, Project Manager of *Hekhsher Tzedek*. Program Chair **Rabbi Steve Schwartz** moderated the discussion about the Conservative Movement's nationwide response to the Agriprocessors Kosher Meat Packing Company's egregious ethical and moral violation of *kashrut* and civil laws.

Colleague **Rabbi Gila and her husband Dr. Paul Ruskin** hosted a very successful Pre-Chanukah Social at their home. The camaraderie combined with great food and liquid 'nourishment' took the chill out of the December air.

In the realm of professional development, colleague Rabbi Ron Shulman chaired a panel program on "Pre-marital Counseling Best Practices". Panelists included our own **Rabbis Amy Scheinerman, Andy Busch, and Scott Nagel** who circulated some of the tools they use in premarital counseling. A follow-up program featuring clinicians, postponed due to inclement weather, will be held next Fall.

Towards the end of the year, **Rabbi Jerry Wieder**, Consultant to the UJC National Rabbinic Cabinet, spoke about the state of relations between Jewish Federations around the country and their local Boards of Rabbis. Jerry acknowledged that Baltimore's BBR is one of the few rabbinic bodies nationwide that enjoys a strong and open relationship with its Federation, i.e. The Associated. ★

## BBR Offers Members Fundraising Seminars

By special arrangement with our executive director, Michael Meyerstein, BBR offered its members three 3-hour workshops on different aspects of synagogue development. Some colleagues brought their volunteers and/or Board members to learn from Michael's expertise as a professional fundraising consultant to non-profit organizations.

The sessions focused on three topics: "Can A Rabbi TODAY Afford Not To Do Fundraising?"; "Does your synagogue have a stimulus and recovery plan?" and "How To Ask For Money and Succeed!" By the end of the third session, most registrants realized that synagogues can succeed at fundraising if they marshal the appropriate human and financial resources for the task. It requires a sense of deliberateness on the part of leadership. Michael reminded them of the time-honored principle "If you don't ask, you don't get". ★

## A Time For Hakarat hatov

BBR's programmatic and numeric growth in recent years is due in great measure to the efforts of many colleagues who work behind the scenes. BBR is most grateful to all of them for giving generously of their time in the service of BBR and the larger Jewish community.

*Todah rabbah* to those colleagues who chaired monthly programs this past year including **Rabbis Debi Wechsler, Bradd Boxman, Steven Fink, Steven Schwartz, Gila Ruskin, Ron Shulman and Elan Adler**.

*Todah rabbah* as well to those colleagues who conducted stimulating *Limud* study sessions at some of our monthly meetings including **Rabbis Jerry Seidler, Debi Wechsler, Jay Goldstein, and Susan Grossman**.

*Todah rabbah* to colleagues and their synagogues for hosting BBR's monthly meetings including **Rabbi Ron Shulman** (Chizuk Amuno Congregation), **Bradd Boxman** (Har Sinai Congregation), **Chaim Landau** (Ner Tamid Congregation), **Steve Fink** (Temple Oheb Shalom), **Steve Schwartz** (Beth El Congregation), **Andy Busch** (Baltimore Hebrew Congregation), **Jonathan Panitz** (Bolton Street Synagogue), and **Jay Goldstein** (Beth Israel Congregation).

Finally, a hearty *yasher koach* goes to the Executive Committee headed by *Rabbi Steven Fink*, BBR's President. In addition to Steve, the Committee includes *Rabbis Gila Ruskin, Amy Scheinerman, Chaim Landau, Debi Wechsler, and Steve Schwartz*. The Executive Committee deliberates on matters of policy, fiscal affairs and operations. Committee members also endure lots of e-mails from Michael in their INBOX! ★

## Adult Institute Adds 90-minute Courses To Fall 2009

Responding to a survey last Fall of Adult Institute registrants, BBR will introduce three ninety-minute courses to its Fall, 2009 Institute schedule, in addition to offering fourteen other courses that will meet weekly for 45 minutes each.

The Institute, now entering its 61st season, is a Baltimore tradition. The Institute is Baltimore's only venue where all of the community's Jews can learn together under one roof. Since its founding, tens of thousands of Jews have participated. Registration is expected to exceed 500 this Fall.

BBR's colleagues regard the Institute as an important form of outreach to which they commit much time and energy. This Fall, nineteen colleagues have agreed to teach in addition to four faculty members of the Baltimore Hebrew Institute of Towson University, formerly BHU. Indeed, since rescuing the money-losing Institute three years ago, BBR now realizes more than \$12,000+ annually in net revenue for its operating expenses.

Next Fall's Institute will be hosted by Baltimore Hebrew Congregation and chaired by veteran Institute participant Ms. Ada Bloom. Thanks to BBR's access to professional resources in the Associated's Marketing Department, the Committee has already completed work on the new course catalogue.

***Todah rabbah*** to the following colleagues who gave generously of their time this past Fall to teach a course: **Rabbis Bradd Boxman, Elan Adler, Steven M. Fink, Yocheved Heiligman, Chaim Landau, Mark G. Loeb, Jeffrey Orkin, Jonathan Panitz, Avram Israel Reisner, Gila Ruskin, Elissa Sachs-Kohen, Amy Scheinerman, Steve Schwartz, Ron Shulman, Paul Sidlofsky, Nina Beth Cardin, Joshua Neely, Avram Reisner, Ruth Smith, Alan Yuter, Elizabeth Bolton.**

BBR is also indebted to **Sol Levinson & Bros.** for their continuing generous corporate support of \$5,000 as the title sponsor of this past year's Adult Institute. ★

## BBR Partners With Jewish Prisoner Services

Last September colleague **Michael Meyerstein** attended a Jewish wedding in a rural part of Connecticut. At the reception, he was seated with fellow Baltimorean, **Jon Singer**, a casual acquaintance from the past. Jon has volunteered with Jewish Prisoner Services for nearly a quarter of a century. By the end of the meal, Jon convinced Michael to engage BBR's membership in this important JCS program. Volunteers periodically visit Jewish prisoners incarcerated around the state to help them observe holidays and teach them about their heritage. Recruitment and orientation efforts followed in the ensuing months. BBR salutes those colleagues who are participating, including **Rabbis Steven Fink, Elan Adler, Jeffrey Orkin, Mark Loeb, Floyd Herman, Geoff Basik, Don Berlin, Ross Singer, Dana Saroken and Josh Snyder.** ★

## BBR's Associated Campaign Tops \$55K

In a very difficult economic environment BBR's 2009 Campaign on behalf of The Associated topped \$55,000. This year the Campaign was ably co-chaired by 7 colleagues including **Floyd Herman** (retirees division), **Ron Shulman and Debi Wechsler** (Conservative colleagues), **Bradd Boxman and Elissa Sachs-Kohen** (Reform colleagues), **Chaim Landau and Larry Ziffer** (Orthodox colleagues) They deserve a lot of credit for successfully securing 100% support from BBR's members. Nearly 40% of BBR's colleagues contributed \$1,000 and above to this year's Campaign.

BBR's members' generous support reflects an understanding of the Associated's importance to the vitality of Baltimore's Jewish communal life. Every Jewish communal institution, indeed every Jew, benefits from the enormous array of services available especially today. ★

## BBR Thanks THE ASSOCIATED And JCS

BBR continues to work collaboratively with the Associated, its agencies and others in the larger Baltimore community, and especially Jewish Community Services (JCS). BBR is especially grateful to Barbara Gradet, JCS' Executive Director and her professional staff for the generous in-kind services they provide in the form of clerical and IT support.

BBR greatly appreciates the annual operating funds grant it receives from The Associated and especially the in-kind services provided by the Marketing Department. ★



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### Mission Statement

The Baltimore Board of Rabbis (BBR) is a powerful moral and religious voice providing spiritual leadership for the Baltimore Jewish community. It is a forum for rabbis to confer about and to promote various aspects of communal issues, to facilitate cooperative programs among congregations and other organizations and agencies, and to serve as a Jewish educational and information resource for the Greater Baltimore community. As an association for rabbis of all streams of Judaism, the Baltimore Board of Rabbis provides opportunities for rabbis to gather for collegial support. The Baltimore Board of Rabbis provides professional development resources for rabbis in their diverse settings.

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Baltimore Board of Rabbis is a program of The ASSOCIATED.