



Inside Brit Tzedek

BRIT TZEDEK V' SHALOM

JEWISH ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & PEACE

FROM GAZA TO NEGOTIATIONS: THE ROLE OF AMERICAN JEWS

Brit Tzedek v' Shalom's 3rd National Conference

New York City, February 19-21, 2005

Brit Tzedek v' Shalom,
The Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, is a national organization of American Jews deeply committed to Israel's well-being through the achievement of a negotiated settlement to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are guided by the mitzvah, or obligation, to pursue peace and justice that is rooted in both secular and religious Jewish traditions. We believe the vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians long for an enduring peace and that security for Israel can only be achieved through the establishment of an economically and politically viable Palestinian state, necessitating an end to Israel's occupation of land acquired during the 1967 war and an end to Palestinian terrorism.

With all the dramatic developments that have impacted the Israeli-Palestinian situation in the last few weeks, Brit Tzedek's 3rd National Conference, entitled "From Gaza to Negotiations: The Role of American Jews," comes at an opportune time.



Yossi Beilin & Yasser Abed Rabbo at the signing of the Geneva Accord.

"It's as if we were prescient to schedule our conference now. The conference will provide everyone with a unique forum to assess all the recent changes that bring us to this critical juncture in Middle East history," said Brit Tzedek President Marcia Freedman.

The conference will be keynoted by Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo, the Israeli and Palestinian architects of the Geneva Accord, which provides a

model for a two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Addressing the role of American Jews in promoting a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the opening plenary will be former Knesset member Colette Avital, who has been active in promoting the Geneva Accord; Stephen P. Cohen, founder and director of the Institute for Middle East Peace and Economic Development; and J. J. Goldberg, editor of the *Forward* newspaper. (See page 2 for bios on these speakers.)

Leading scholars and activists will present 36 varied workshops that will cover a range of topics including the security barrier, peace ideas ahead of the curve, and using the arts to advocate for peace, among many others. Workshop presenters will include many of the featured speakers, as well as Tony Klug, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Aaron Miller, Susannah Heschel, David Matz, Diane Balser, Gary Wexler, Marcia Freedman, Amjad Atallah, Alicia Ostriker, Ron Young, Cherie Brown, Yonatan Shapira, and Jessica Benjamin, and others. Four separate workshop sessions, with nine workshops will run concurrently.

The Conference, to be held at Temple Israel of the City of New York, 112 East 75th Street, New York City (between Park Ave. and Lexington Ave.), starts Saturday, February 19th at 8 p.m. and continues through Monday, February 21st at 3:30 p.m. The registration form is included in this newsletter and available at www.btvshalom.org. For lodging information, please visit our website or call our office.

Make your plans now to attend this important and timely conference!★

IN THIS ISSUE:

- National Conference, 1
- Refuser Pilot Shapira Tour, 1
- President's Letter, 2
- Open Letter, 2
- Conference Speakers, 2
- Chapter News, 3
- Executive Director Message, 3
- Questions Answered, 3
- Contribute, 4
- Register Now, 4

REFUSER PILOT SHAPIRA ON TOUR

Israeli Air Force pilot Yonatan Shapira, a former senior officer of the Israeli Defense Force's elite "Black Hawk" helicopter squadron who authored a "refusenik" Pilot's Letter in October 2003, will headline an 11-city Brit Tzedek tour this spring. The tour will be launched at Brit Tzedek's national conference in February and will take Shapira to Philadelphia, Washington D.C., San Francisco, Seattle, Olympia, Portland (OR), Madison, Indianapolis, St. Louis, and Chicago.

Shapira's Pilot's Letter was also signed by 26 other Israeli Air Force pilots. The letter reads: "We, for whom the Israel Defense Forces and the Air Force are an inalienable part of ourselves, refuse to continue to harm innocent civilians."★

Please visit www.btvshalom.org or call (312) 341-1205 for tour details.



Open Letter Presented to Senior White House Advisor

The Open Letter to the President signed by more than 8,000 American Jews was hand-delivered to a Senior White House official on November 30, 2004, capping off Brit Tzedek's three-month nationwide campaign in support of the Open Letter that led up to the U.S. elections.

"This meeting represented an important preliminary exchange of ideas, during which we strongly urged the Administration to make a vigorous pursuit of a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a top priority," says Brit Tzedek Vice President Diane Balsler, who represented Brit Tzedek at the meeting, which also included representatives of some of the other organizations involved with the Open Letter campaign. "We conveyed the importance of the appointment of a high-level envoy to demonstrate the seriousness of the Administration's commitment to facilitating an end to this conflict," she added.

"The Open Letter was conceived as a Brit Tzedek project last spring," says Brit Tzedek President Marcia Freedman. "We seized upon the opportunity to collaborate with seven other American Jewish organizations in a campaign in support of the Open Letter and it was sponsored by a host committee of 72 prominent American Jews."

Brit Tzedek collected more than 85% of the signatures over the course of the collaborative campaign. This success was due in large part to a substantial Internet outreach campaign, complemented by good old-fashioned grassroots organizing by our chapters. Chapters held house parties, attended local Jewish community events, petitioned at street corners, gathered endorsements from prominent Jewish members of their communities, and organized public events to promote the Open Letter.

"The campaign in support of the Open Letter provided an important forum for American Jews to express their support for a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace through a bipartisan forum during an election season in which neither candidate was addressing the issue," said Steve Masters, Chair of Advocacy and Public Policy. "The letter conveys the sense that the unresolved and ever-worsening conflict is of central concern to our community and that concern will not subside or otherwise be silenced until it is fully addressed." ★

(The Open Letter text and complete list of Host Committee members can be found at www.openletter.btvshalom.org.)

FEATURED SPEAKERS AT 2005 CONFERENCE

Colette Avital has served as a Labor Party member of the Knesset since 1999, where she has been an important voice on Israeli-Palestinian peace and women's issues. She has been actively involved in the Geneva Accord, from the negotiations through the campaign promoting it. As a career diplomat, Avital rose through the ranks of Israel's foreign ministry to become its highest-ranking woman. She served as the Israeli Consul General in New York, where she became knowledgeable about the American Jewish community.

Yossi Beilin was a member of the Knesset for 11 years and held ministerial positions in three governments. Most recently, Beilin emerged as the leader of Israel's newest party, Yachad, whose primary aim is to unite and reinvigorate the Israeli peace camp. In 2001, together with Yasser Abed Rabbo, Beilin convened a team of Israelis and Palestinians that successfully negotiated a draft final status agreement known as the Geneva Accord, which specifies in detail what a tenable two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could look like.

Dr. Stephen P. Cohen is a leader in the practice and theory of unofficial diplomacy. Since 1975, he has pioneered behind-the-scenes efforts to bring Arabs and Israelis together. Dr. Cohen is currently National Scholar at the Israel Policy Forum, whose mission is to promote the Middle East peace process.

J.J. Goldberg is editor-in-chief of *The Forward*, a national weekly Jewish newspaper. An award-winning journalist, author, and lecturer, he has covered the politics and culture of the Middle East and the Jewish world for more than two decades. He is the author of several books, including the acclaimed 1996 study of American Jewish political clout, "Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment."

Yasser Abed Rabbo has dedicated his life to advancing the goals of both Palestinian liberation and Israeli-Palestinian peace. He has been a member of the PLO's Executive Committee since 1971 and served as head of its Department of Information and Culture until 1994, when he assumed the same position in the Palestinian National Authority. In 2001, Abed Rabbo resumed negotiations with Yossi Beilin that yielded the Geneva Accord. ★

Dear Friends of Brit Tzedek,

We begin 2005 in circumstances no one predicted—circumstances that have created a whole new reality in the Middle East. At the same time, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom enters 2005 with a network nearly 25,000 strong and with 30 chapters throughout the United States, many of them already making their influence felt locally.

The opportunity to bring about a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not been this promising for more than a decade.

The beginning of the post-Arafat era coincides with a period in which the realities of the Iraqi quagmire become clearer every day, prompting the U.S. to turn its attention to making some good news elsewhere in the Middle East. And on the Israeli front, Ariel Sharon, the architect of the settlement movement, has declared that at least some settlements must be evacuated in order to ensure Israel's security.

"...Brit Tzedek will not stop working until a negotiated two-state solution has been achieved."

In a time of such dramatic transition, there is potential for much to go wrong, and it's possible that it may have by the time this newsletter reaches you. But we in Brit Tzedek will not stop working until a negotiated two-state solution has been achieved. As always, we will look for and find the opportunities amidst the challenges.

There are many positive signs, and the steps that need to be taken by each side are more than clear. So far, no one has balked. But no matter what, our job is to continue to work within the American Jewish community to organize the voice of the no-longer-silent majority who support a negotiated two-state settlement.

Our continued success depends on you—your volunteer hours, your good word, your introductions, your financial support, and your name.



**BRITSHALOM,
MARCIA FREEDMAN**
President, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom

MK Amram Mitzna Wows
1,600 in the Bay Area

During his three-day visit this fall with the San Francisco Bay Area chapter, Member of Knesset Amram Mitzna spoke to over 1,600 people at packed houses across the Bay Area. On the incredible turnout and festive atmosphere at one event, Mitzna commented, "I've never seen anything quite like this, but I must say, I like it!"

Renowned Civil Rights and Union Activist Marshall Ganz Hosts Brit Tzedek Organizing Workshop

In early December, chapters in the New England area were treated to an all-day workshop with renowned organizer Marshall Ganz. During the course of the

training, 30 Brit Tzedek activists from the Albany, Boston, Connecticut, Madison, and Western Massachusetts chapters learned about successful grassroots organizing techniques and discussed potential strategies for their chapters.

Kansas City Chapter First Public Event Makes Front Page News

Over two hundred people came out to hear *Rabbis for Human Rights* Rabbi Arik Ascherman talk about the human rights situation in the West Bank as part of the Kansas City chapter's first public event. The event drew significant media and public attention, and was featured on the front page of Kansas City's *The Jewish Chronicle*.

Boston Chapter Builds Bridges

After a very divisive fight in the city of Somerville, Massachusetts over the issue of divestment from Israel, the Boston Brit Tzedek chapter took immediate action to demonstrate what a proactive, unifying proposal to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could look like. The resolution, that was drafted by the chapter and then submitted by an alderman, called upon the city to urge the federal government to renew negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders which would lead to a two-state resolution. The chapter took a polarizing situation and built bridges to the broader Jewish community.

MESSAGE FROM ALIZA BECKER

Executive Director, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom



While many Israelis and American Jews struggle to believe that they will see a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in their lifetime, one Israeli—a former Knesset member and longtime peace activist—continues to find reasons for hope. Naomi Chazan, who spent this past fall on a national speaking tour for Brit Tzedek, focuses on the windows of opportunity in the present situation.

That doesn't mean she's not a realist. On the contrary, she is clear in noting the challenges and risks that both peoples face as they try to move toward a two-state solution. Her magnetic wit and upbeat message always inspire me, as they do everyone who hears her speak. Hundreds of people in various Brit Tzedek chapter cities had that opportunity this fall, and were glad they did.

Her message emphasizes her refusal to give in to despair and is a welcome rallying point for a people already known for their strong collective will. Like Naomi, we must refuse to drown in discouragement.

We are a people who have never ceased to believe in the seemingly impossible—whether it be the return of the messiah, the elimination of injustice, or the creation of Israel. We must somehow work through the difficult emotions that the Israeli-Palestinian situation brings up for us and confront and deal with our ambivalence about taking a position. If we decide to move forward together, we can put this conflict behind us.

Imagine.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Advocacy and Public Policy

Steve Masters, Chair of Advocacy and Public Policy

Diane Balser, Vice-President and Co-Chair of Advocacy and Public Policy

Q: *What do you see as the possibilities of working with the new Administration?*

A: It's too soon to know yet. We've taken an initial step by meeting with a senior White House official, and have possible entrée to others. The Administration says its goal is to have a Palestinian state within the next four years, but there are mixed signals from the White House about how seriously they will pursue it. Perhaps Blair's energetic pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian peace will help.

While the Administration is reformulating its Middle East policies, we need to continue to build our numbers and relationships so that we can effectively target the Administration with our message that it must seize this moment to restart peace negotiations.

Q: *What strengths does a grassroots movement such as Brit Tzedek v'Shalom have on impacting U.S. policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?*

A: Our power to influence elected officials comes from the nearly 25,000 American Jews in every state who have signed our petitions and supported Brit Tzedek with contributions. Our ability to grow the organization as rapidly as we have has impressed national political leaders. As our local chapters increasingly join in the political life of their local Jewish communities, we have also seen a dramatic increase in our influence on the local political scene.

Q: *How would you characterize our work with other American Jewish peace organizations in promoting the Open Letter?*

A: We played a leadership role in uniting other groups (Americans for Peace Now, Habonim Dror, Hashomir Hatzair, Meretz USA, Labor Israel, Labor Zionist Alliance, Parent's Circle) with common goals in support of the Open Letter. One thing was clear: Brit Tzedek is unique as the only organization capable of rapidly and effectively mobilizing large numbers of American Jews in support of our common agenda.

Q: *What has been the impact of Brit Tzedek's Call to Bring the Settlers Home?*

A: There's no better way to show that an idea has concrete support than by showing it has thousands of signatures behind it. Brit Tzedek launched our Call to Bring the Settlers Home from Israel (bringthemhome.btvshalom.org) when we were just a year old and the only U.S. grassroots effort on this issue. The Call garnered nearly 11,000 signers, helped us develop a positive profile with the American Jewish community, and generated significant coverage in the Jewish press. Shortly after we delivered our signatures to President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon, the Israeli government announced it would offer financial compensation to settlers in Gaza and in four West Bank settlements who relocate within the Green Line.★

CONTRIBUTE

Your tax-deductible membership contribution to Brit Tzedek v'Shalom will strengthen the voice of the American Jewish community in its call for a negotiated, two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Help us continue to do our work in communities across the United States.

Make a donation now.

Make a secure donation online at www.btvshalom.org or send a check, payable to "Brit Tzedek," and mail to:

Brit Tzedek v'Shalom
11 East Adams Street
Suite 707
Chicago, Illinois 60603

Register Now!

Brit Tzedek v'Shalom's 3rd National Conference "From Gaza to Negotiations: The Role of American Jews"

February 19–21, 2005
New York, NY

Keynotes: Geneva Accord architects, Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo

Join: Amjad Atallah ★ MK Colette Avital ★ Jessica Benjamin ★ Cherie Brown ★ Stephen P. Cohen ★ Marcia Freedman ★ Rabbi John Friedman ★ J.J. Goldberg ★ Susannah Heschel ★ Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz ★ Tony Klug ★ David Matz ★ Aaron Miller ★ Alicia Ostriker ★ Letty Cottin Pogrebin ★ Yonatan Shapira ★

Registration form enclosed or to register online, go to www.btvshalom.org

Questions: Call (312) 341-1205 or email info@btvshalom.org.

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Brit Tzedek v'Shalom

JEWISH ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & PEACE

REGISTRATION FORM

Brit Tzedek v'Shalom 3rd National Conference From Gaza to Negotiations: the Role of American Jews February 19-21, 2005

The conference will be held at Temple Israel of the City of New York, 112 East 75th Street, NY, NY

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP CODE

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EMAIL *(please print clearly)*

General Registration * Subtract \$25 for registrations postmarked or received by 2/11/05

- \$125* **Member** Full Conference
 \$150* **Non-Member** Full Conference (includes one year of membership)
 \$50 **Student** Full Conference (includes one year of membership)

Single-Day Registration **Subtract \$15 for day registrations postmarked or received by 2/11/05

- \$75** **Member** Sunday only \$65** **Member** Monday only
 \$85** **Non-Member** Sunday only \$75** **Non-Member** Monday only
 \$30 **Student** daily rate

Evening Plenaries *Payable at the door only.*

Saturday night \$10, Sunday night \$15

Full conference registration fee includes all public sessions only. For information on **work study** and/or **low-income subsidies**, write jessica@btvshalom.org or call Jessica at (312) 341-1205.

Accommodations

We have reserved a block of rooms close to the conference site at the Melrose Hotel through 1/29/05. Call 1-800-Melrose or (212) 838-5700 for reservations and ask for the "Jewish Alliance" rates. Go to www.btvshalom.org/conference/2005/#lodging for more details.

Payment

I wish to make an additional contribution of \$_____ to help subsidize student and low-income registrations.

- My check for** \$_____ is enclosed, payable to Brit Tzedek v'Shalom.
 Charge my: Master Card Visa **Amount** \$_____

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