



Inside Brit Tzedek

BRIT TZEDEK V'SHALOM

JEWISH ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & PEACE

ENTERING A NEW ERA OF PRO-ISRAEL PRO-PEACE ACTIVISM

Brit Tzedek and J Street Join Forces

The mission of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace is to educate and mobilize American Jews in support of a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The recent J Street conference in Washington, DC was an unprecedented gathering of the pro-Israel pro-peace community. It was also the perfect opportunity to announce a big, exciting change — on January 1, 2010, Brit Tzedek's chapters, activists, and Rabbinic Cabinet will become an integral part of J Street's recently launched national field program. Working together, we will be able to amplify your voice and the power of the grassroots.



Jeremy Ben-Ami and former Brit Tzedek Executive Director Diane Balser enjoying the J Street conference reception in honor of our 7 years of activism and activists.

Welcome from Jeremy Ben-Ami, Executive Director, J Street

On behalf of the whole J Street family, I want to make sure you know how thrilled we are to officially begin our partnership on January 1st.

It was an honor and a pleasure to share the success of J Street's first national conference with so many Brit Tzedek v'Shalom members in Washington last month. You should be especially proud of Brit Tzedek's excellent recruiting work — with your help, over 1,500 people attended. Thank you. What a perfect beginning to our new relationship!

With an integrated strategy — online messaging, lobbying, and grassroots activism — I am confident that we can show our elected representatives the depth of political support that exists for strong American leadership to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-state solution. In this way, we'll move forward together, stronger than ever.

With excitement,

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"As chair of our national Membership and Outreach committee, I've been privileged to watch us grow from the first 200 to nearly 50,000 who stand with us today — all on a shoestring budget and guided by the philosophy that every new supporter is critical. Thanks to all of you for swelling our ranks, making financial contributions, and your countless volunteer efforts."

– Donna Spiegelman, Boston, MA

"I went to Brit Tzedek's founding conference hoping to be part of a movement for a just Israeli-Palestinian peace instead of a solo activist and that hope has been fulfilled. As co-chair of the Rabbinic Cabinet — and with the fantastic support of John Friedman, Aliza Becker, Diane Balser and others — I've been able to gain political skills, offer my perspective, and help grow a network of rabbis who support each other in this work. What a privilege and a blessing!"

– Rabbi Julie Saxe Taller,
San Francisco, CA

"Our movement of knowledgeable, warm, and incredibly hardworking activists is a source of great strength. Brit Tzedek's birth and maturation have met my wildest hopes for connection to a network of comrades who 'have my back', and has enabled me & so many other activists for Israeli-Palestinian peace, regardless of experience, to learn exciting new skills. I remain ever grateful!"

– Rainer Waldman Adkins, Seattle, WA



Seven Years of Grassroots Power – A Brief Brit Tzedek History

As We Make Our Way to a New Land...

In late October, just two days before the historic J Street conference, Brit Tzedek announced that our chapters, activists and rabbis would soon join the J Street family. So it felt very *bashert*/fated that the conference took place the same week we read *Lech Lecha*, the Torah portion in which God calls on Abraham to leave his ancestral land for a place that God would show him.

We in Brit Tzedek are also leaving our “native land”, the organization we have lovingly built over the past seven years, one that has been a real home for so many of us. This transition is not easy, but any lingering doubts I had about our choice were quickly erased during those heady days at the Washington Grand Hyatt.

For 3 days, friends and strangers approached me to offer their congratulations on this historic moment in the life of Brit Tzedek and the pro-Israel pro-peace movement. Even more remarkable to me, however, was the number of people I encountered from so many previous parts of my life — a friend from summer camp in the mid-70s, a professor from college I hadn't seen in 30 years, the man who led the Jewish-Palestinian dialogue group in Jerusalem that brought me into deep connection with Palestinians living under occupation for the first time, and leaders of Jewish peace conferences I attended in the 80s and 90s.

Suddenly, I began to see J Street as something far more moving than the surface buzz — however much deserved — its rise had generated. At the J Street conference I found an expansive new home, one that welcomes all who have toiled for peace in different places and over many years and — like a mighty river formed by the streams feeding it along the way — weaves us together with each other, and those newly energized by this work.

Yes, we in Brit Tzedek are embarking on a bold journey — but I am sure it is one that will be filled with great promise, blessing, passion, and hope.



STEVE MASTERS
President, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom

In early 2002, a small group of pro-Israel American Jews — heartsick over the implications of the second intifada — came together to talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, more importantly, to do something. They were (or so they thought) few in number — but determined.

On April 27-29, 2002, the founding conference of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, was held in Washington DC. Former Member of Knesset Marcia Freedman became our first President and Aliza Becker our first paid staff person.

Quickly Brit Tzedek grew to thousands and tens of thousands. By the time that President Obama took office, declaring his dedication to many of the same policies we had been advocating since 2002, our numbers had reached nearly 50,000.

In our 7-plus years, we've found that many American Jews were quietly looking for a new way to be pro-Israel, and many more were open to reconsidering their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Brit Tzedek provided a voice and a home for all of them.

- ★ In 2003, over 13,000 of us called on the U.S. administration to help bring the West Bank settlers back home to Israel.
- ★ In 2004, we sent Diane Balser, Marcia Freedman and Steve Masters to represent us at the signing of the Geneva Accords in Oslo.
- ★ We've organized rabbis across the denominational spectrum, and our 1000-member rabbinic network has framed the search for peace in a spiritual and Torah-based context. In 2007, just over 500 rabbis and cantors publicly supported the Annapolis peace conference; just a year later, over 1000 signed a letter to President-elect Obama urging him to make Israeli-Palestinian peace a priority.
- ★ We've held hundreds of meetings with members of Congress in Washington DC and in their home districts, calling on them to pursue policies supportive of a just peace.
- ★ We've gathered in social halls and on university campuses, hosted Israeli and Palestinian peace advocates across the country, shown documentaries in our living rooms, and set up tables at Jewish music festivals and pro-Israel celebrations.
- ★ We've brought together hundreds of grassroots activists for our national conferences and training institutes held in Boston, Washington DC, Chicago, San Francisco, and New York.
- ★ Our activists have appeared on the radio, written for their local newspapers, and been quoted in the national media. We have become a source of information to our family and friends.

In short, we've helped to change the “Israel conversation” in the American Jewish community, and in doing so have changed American politics.

As we prepare to bring our history and experience under the J Street umbrella, let us celebrate the work we have done: the American Jewish community would not be where it is today were it not for our efforts.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS, *continued*

“As a Conservative movement pulpit rabbi, I have found great comfort and strength in the Rabbinic Cabinet. For too long, the American Jewish community spoke in a monotone on the Middle East, but Brit Tzedek and our Rabbinic Cabinet allow a stronger, multi-layered, stereo sound to be heard in the name of love, security and peace for Israel. I am proud to be a part of this holy community.”

– Rabbi Joshua Grater-Levine, Pasadena, CA

“Brit Tzedek has been a personal alternative to despair and anger in the struggle for two states. Perhaps most of all I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate on behalf of Brit Tzedek within the San Francisco Bay Area, and to forge relationships with individuals and groups that work tirelessly to realize justice, respect and compassion.”

– Molly Freeman, Berkeley, CA

“In 7 years, we've built up our credibility, numbers, reputation, and pro-peace power. We've brought hundreds of pro-peace activists to the halls of Congress. Some greeted us enthusiastically, some not so much. But, they heard us — and they're hearing us more and more. We've come a long way. Mazel Tov gang!”

– Ben Murane, Brooklyn, NY

Time Passes When You're Having Fun

By Aliza Becker, Executive Director, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom



I can't believe it's been 7 years!

I think back to April, 2002. About 175 of us — new and long-time activists of all ages — were gathered in a hotel in metro DC. The second Intifada was raging. The news was filled with desperation and rage on both sides even as the peace process and the Oslo years were a not so distant memory.

In our lives outside the founding conference, we had — as individuals — questioned the Israeli response to the Intifada, and the Bush administration's wholehearted backing of that response. In our own Jewish communities, however, there was little room for discussion. We were told that the only way to be pro-Israel was a silent acquiescence to the status quo.

Little by little we pried open the conversation. We brought a small — but crucial — change to the typical pro-Israel mantra. We said "there is more than one way to be pro-Israel" and meant it. We believed that loving conversation about how to best resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a conversation worth having.

We went to Congress with our concerns and found a handful of courageous Congress members (and their staff) who showed us the ropes. Working with our allies, including Americans for Peace Now and Israel Policy Forum, we significantly increased Congressional support for U.S. leadership in brokering a peace agreement.

We took the long view when it came to the Bush administration's stonewalling of peace efforts until its last year. We patiently built our grassroots base up to 40 chapters and made serious inroads into the Jewish community, including over 1,000 rabbis. We trained people with different shades of opinion to speak in one voice in their communities and in the halls of Congress — and we prepared for the day when a strong Jewish pro-peace voice could play a decisive role in shifting U.S. policy.

Fast forward 6 years. J Street makes a big splash, reaching a broad swath of the Jewish community ready to embrace a new President with a new vision.

Founded during the excitement of the 2008 elections, J Street brings state of the art political and communications savvy to our movement. At first, our collaboration with them was occasional, then almost daily. This summer, we began discussion of a formal partnership.

There are greater reasons for hope today than there have been in a decade, despite ongoing problems. We have a president committed to peace and an organized pro-peace grassroots constituency that will keep him to his word. I hope that with our integration into J Street we can soon complete the work we have so auspiciously begun.

P.S. Brit Tzedek wouldn't be where it is without the hard work and long hours of many volunteers and staffers. I want to thank the following staff (past and present) for all they've done: Adam Esrig, Alex Armour, Diane Cantor, Ariel Chasnoff, Bria Dolnick, Deepa Domansky, Bruce Ente, Leila Forouzan, Eduardo Gabrielloff, Jessica Gorelick, Jeff Kulp, Rob Levy, Carinne Luck, Bruno Mikanowski, Jason Pollens, Jessica Rosenblum, Nora Scheff, Melissa Sbrinovich, — and especially former Executive Director Diane Balser.

A Look At the New J Street National Grassroots & Field Program

By Laurie Moskowitz, Senior Advisor, J Street Education Fund

J Street is thrilled to launch its new National Field Program this January as part of our strategy to strengthen the pro-Israel, pro-peace message at the local level.

This national program is designed to build on the hard-won success of Brit Tzedek activists and expand our grassroots capacity — by integrating J Street and Brit Tzedek supporters for common local efforts and coordinating with the rest of the J Street family (particularly JNet and J Street U).

As we move towards January 1 and the ultimate integration of the two organizations, we — Carinne Luck and I — will be seeking guidance from Brit Tzedek leaders on your best practices as well as your recommendations on how local organizing might be most successful in the newly configured structure.

Next spring, we will hire regional organizers responsible for the training and support of our activists with the end goal of developing effective ways to demonstrate the widespread support that exists for a two-state resolution within the Jewish community.

One of our new focuses will be identifying the specific roles and responsibilities needed to be successful. What different functions are needed at the grassroots (e.g., media, outreach, advocacy)? How can we expand our leadership and find a way for every potential volunteer to put their skills to use?

In the first six months, we hope to call on this newly engaged activist core for a national field program kick-off event, a campaign that builds our ranks and our capacity, and a re-energized advocacy effort. More details on all of these programs will be available soon.

Please feel free to get in touch with us about the transition and the emerging national field strategy.

A note on the J Street field staff: Laurie Moskowitz has developed and managed hundreds of field programs for candidates, issue-based organizations, state political parties, and ballot initiatives, including the National Coordinated Campaign for the 2000 Democratic presidential election. She will be joined by Carinne Luck, who has significant experience organizing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with both Brit Tzedek v'Shalom and J Street, as well as on a number of other social justice and peace related issues.
Contact: field@jstreet.org

"The Brit Tzedek Rabbinic Cabinet has been, for me, a place where we can come together to wrestle over the challenges facing us as rabbis committed to Israel and to peace. It is a forum for sharing and creating resources, and a venue for taking action when action is called for. I look forward to continuing to wrestle and discuss and take action together, along with J Street, in the months to come."

— Rabbi Toba Spitzer, West Newton, MA

"Being a part of the leadership of Brit Tzedek has been a huge honor. Not only did we do some incredible work — the Rabbinic Cabinet, advocacy days and training institutes, educational programs and tours — but we are an amazing group of Jews who built a home in which we care deeply about each other and Israeli-Palestinian peace."

— Cherie Brown, Washington DC

"American rabbis and cantors have deeper and more nuanced positions on Israel-Palestine today than 7 years ago when the very word Palestine was considered treif (not kosher). Our organizing has made it far more difficult for rabbis and cantors to speak about peace without ceding the necessity for two states, an end to the occupation, and a robust American role in realizing this dream."

— Rabbi John S. Friedman, Durham, NC
Chair, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom Rabbinic Cabinet

"Brit Tzedek successfully broke the silence in the American Jewish community on the subject of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, made a space for dissent and nuanced public discourse, and created a grassroots base for the American Jewish peace movement. That's a lot in so short a time, and I'm proud of it."

— Marcia Freedman, Founding President, Berkeley, CA

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Change is hard...

and often a little sad, even when that change leads to good things. The cause of a just two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is immeasurably served by the integration of Brit Tzedek and J Street — but for many of us, Brit Tzedek was the first place our hearts felt fully at home. This was the first place where supporting Israel and longing for peace came together, and where we found fellow travelers. We — staff, board members, chapter and Rabbinic Cabinet activists — are grateful to each one of you for our years together and what we've built. Thank you.

And in some ways our work has just begun.

Brit Tzedek has proven the power of constant, consistent grassroots organizing. Our integration into J Street will mean a more strategic and effective operation. The new J Street national field operation will need organizers nationwide to reach out to an ever-increasing number of American Jews and clergy. Brit Tzedek donors are the core support for this new operation. Please help us continue to organize and win in communities across the country and in the halls of Congress.

Make a donation now to help us win.

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