

ALEPH Annual Report 2004

2004 was a landmark year for ALEPH in many respects. Our Caravan initiative, launched in December of 2003, became a vital part of our outreach and visibility work. Our press coverage increased and we significantly strengthened our relationships with core trans-denominational and mainstream Jewish institutions. Our social justice work expanded significantly with the design of a dynamic and powerful interfaith Sacred Foods Project, based on the principles of Eco-Kashrut.

Our relationship with communities deepened considerably, with two successful financial sustainability trainings and consultation to many growing havurot. Our 18-month partnership with the Midwest Jewish Renewal Retreat Center Or Tzafon has provided the powerful foundation for 2 of this year's Caravans, along with the sustainability trainings. ALEPH's affiliated projects also expanded this year with the most welcome of addition of Ruach HaAretz.

ALEPH's success this year is your success! We look forward to working with you to infuse vitality and growth in the movement to renew Judaism for generations to come.

ALEPH Core Activities:

Community Highlights

ALEPH's first fiscal year with our new affiliation structure saw 32 ALEPH communities on board, representing 2250 households. New FY 2004-5 affiliations are still being discussed, but as of January 1, 5 additional communities have joined. We hope to expand our base to 60 communities by 2009.

The first conference call for community liaisons was held on January 26, providing consultation from Havurah Shir Chadash on how to hold a spectacular live/silent auction. Other conference calls will be scheduled as opportunities arise.

Two financial sustainability trainings held in partnership with Or Tzafon were conducted to glowing reports. One participant said: "*The sustainability training has made a huge difference for our congregation. We're on solid financial footing after several years of deficits. We've created a culture of giving and support in our membership that enables us to plan for the future with comfort and confidence.*"

As a result of this success, ALEPH will have a fundraising/financial sustainability "Rebbe Is In" track for community representatives attending the Kallah, and we are considering holding regional trainings after the summer if there is sufficient interest.

Bet Midrash

Reb Zalman Legacy Project: Reb Zalman's full-length book, "Credo of a Modern Kabbalist," was completed in 2004 along with the reformatting and reprinting of his daily English siddur and a recording of a CD of him davvening from this siddur. Significant progress on a reader in Psycho-Halachah has also been made. We hope to have "Renewal is not Heresy" ready for the Kallah in July.

ReSources Catalog: We added several cds and dvds to our product line including Reb Zalman reading the Psalms in English, and a dvd of him showing the davvenen styles of various rebbes. We've added the

live service recorded at Shir Tikvah in Detroit in response to ongoing requests for “live” Jewish renewal services. A weekday version of Siddur Kol Koreh will be ready for the Kallah. Projects of Reb Miles Krassen and Reb Leah Novick are beginning.

Teleconference courses: Four six-week sessions were scheduled for this fall and winter. Unfortunately, there was insufficient enrollment for the two classes scheduled in the fall. Classes by R. Daniel Siegel and R. Leah Novick are scheduled for this winter. Click on the “Distance Learning” button on the ALEPH home page to see the course offering for the rest of this year.

Caravan

The day-long ALEPH Caravan visited three cities this calendar year: Chicago's Makom Shalom, Boston's B'nai Or and Temple Beth Zion and Milwaukee's Congregation Sinai. Two were held in conjunction with the Midwest Retreat Center, Or Tzafon, as a joint effort to invigorate the local community, membership in ALEPH and attendance at Or Tzafon's semi-annual weekends. The Chicago and Milwaukee events were particularly successful, with Makom Shalom making strong gains in membership as a result and Milwaukee starting a fledgling Jewish renewal community in the wake of the Caravan's visit. Comments like the following were typical:

“We talk a lot about "radical amazement", but I must admit that I don't open myself to experience it nearly often enough. Yet as I walked in the sunshine this morning, I feel filled with an incredible sense of peace, wonder and gratitude. I know that I am not the only one who will experience this week differently thanks to your teachings. ALEPH, Or Tzafon, and Makom Shalom will survive and thrive because the world so desperately needs this teaching.”

“I wanted to take this moment to express my gratitude for the day of spirit, learning and community that I experienced at the Milwaukee ALEPH Caravan. From the praying and swaying to the blessings of each other, the Torah Yoga, the soul searching, all in a day, very powerful, definitely Chicken Soup for my Soul.”

Caravans are scheduled in the following cities for 2005:

- Ann Arbor Michigan: Pardes Hannah, April 6. Rabbis Chava Bahle, Elliot Ginsburg, Tirzah Firestone and Arnie Sleutelberg
- Houston, TX: JCC, April 13. Rabbis Mile Krassen, Marcia Prager and David Zaslou
- Oshawa, Ontario, Beth Zion. April 10. Rabbis Elliot Ginsburg and Daniel Siegel and Spiritual Direction student Paula Baruch.
- Albany, NY, Ohav Shalom, Date and teachers to be determined

Ethical Kashrut

Leaders in the Jewish renewal movement have been exploring the concept of Eco-Kashrut since Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi originated the idea about 25 years ago. This year ALEPH embarked on a remarkable Ethical Kashrut project that asks whether to be considered truly kosher, food and other material should be farmed and/or produced organically and sustainably and in a way that treats workers fairly and pays them a fair wage. The ALEPH project will explore this question and more in concert with

scientists, public policy advocates and representatives from other faith traditions. After significant research and dialogue, the project intends to implement an interfaith/interdisciplinary strategic plan for a unified and coherent religious response to the globalization of capital and of consumer markets.

Kesher

The ALEPH Kesher (connection) program engages, educates, and empowers young Jews as it connects them to organized Jewish life. Sparked in 1993 by the sole twenty-something attendee at our Kallah, Kesher grew to more than 55 twenty-and thirty-somethings at the 2003 Kallah. Current plans call for greater expansion and deepening of the program.

In July of 2004, the ALEPH Board appointed the first two Kesherites to the ALEPH Board: Bena Medjuck-Bruckner and Holly Taya Shere, and formed a subcommittee for Kesher Strategic Planning. Elements of the plan include the implementation of a year-round Leadership Program consisting of an annual retreat, a Tikkun Olam project and mentorships. The plan also calls for the expansion of the Kesher Virtual Community, to include monthly conference calls, building on the existing list-serve (now with 37 participants,) nurturing resource awareness, and encouraging networking between Kesherites and their ALEPH-affiliated home communities. In November the program received a \$3600 donation from a private donor, ensuring a pre-Kallah shabbaton for 15 Kesherites in 2005. In December 2004, Sara Blustein was named new Kesher Advocate, succeeding Bena who had served in that position since 2000.

Spring Retreat

ALEPH sponsored a week-long conference in an off-Kallah year for the first time in 2004. "Because Sinai was just the Beginning" was held at a beautiful site, attended by 20 devoted and energized students and was led by Rabbis Marcia Prager and Elliot Ginsburg and Cantor Richard Kaplan. They were joined on Shabbat by Rabbi Naomi Steinberg, Reb Zalman and Eve Ilson. By all counts it was a rousing success. Every participant clamored for another event as soon as possible. ALEPH now plans to hold intimate retreats in every off-Kallah year.

Visibility with the Jewish Press

ALEPH continued to send press releases every month to 80 Jewish periodicals in the US and Canada. Copies were sent to all members for whom we have email addresses, to the ALEPH Pnai Or list and to community liaisons. Because of our Caravans we were able to secure more coverage than in past years, with articles in papers in Boston, Milwaukee, Chicago and Ann Arbor. In national news, ALEPH was covered in an article in *Religion Link* as one of several voices discussing the future of American Jewry. We have a budding relationship with *Moment Magazine* who interviewed Rabbis Nadya and Victor Gross on Jewish education issues. We were also delighted when Reb Zalman was named one of the *Jewish Forward's* 50 Lead Players on a Global Stage in their November 1 issue.

Affiliated projects

CDEEP

C-DEEP: The Center for Devotional, Energy and Ecstatic Practice initiated its first group of students in Kol Zimra, an 18-month training program for Chant Leaders. Kol Zimra's first class has 36 extraordinary students from across the US, Canada and Mexico. The Kol Zimraniks are passionately dedicated to each other and to the work of healing ourselves and the world through the ever-expanding and deepening practice of chant. Each student has made a commitment to their own personal practice as well as to leading a group in their community so that what we learn at Kol Zimra can be shared and developed in the context of a living laboratory of prayer and devotion. C-DEEP Co-Directors Rabbi Shefa Gold and Rachmiel O'Regan have begun a waiting list for applicants who want to apply for the second round which will begin during the summer of 2006.

OHaLaH

OHaLaH, the Association of Rabbis for Jewish Renewal's accomplishments for 2004 include accepting student members for the first time, providing a job listings page for members on our website, and collaborating with the ALEPH Rabbinic Program to support the creation of a Rabbinic Pastor Association (RPA) for rabbinic pastors and pastor students. The RPA will hold its first meeting, facilitated by its newly formed Steering Committee, during YOCA 7. In addition to providing the program for the annual YOCA conference, which many participants felt was the best gathering to date, OHALAH will provide a daily program during ALEPH's Kallah in July 2005 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Check out our website www.ohalah.org for interesting articles by our members, links to members' websites, information on how to join as well as a list of OHALAH members who are looking for jobs, leadership and teaching opportunities. OHALAH's President Pam Frydman Baugh points out that in addition to website postings, our members may participate in the OHaLaH email discussion list, now in its third year.

Rabbinic Program

In 2003-04 the ALEPH Rabbinic Program ordained 8 rabbis and 2 rabbinic pastors, bringing the program to a 7year total of 42 rabbis, 1 hazzan and 4 rabbinic pastors. Those ordained serve as chaplains, in congregations, as university professors, and in Jewish communal organizations. They are ritualists, artists of prayer, authors, educators, activists and spiritual directors.

Enrollment remains steady at about 40, including current students and the class we will admit to replace the 10 recent graduates.

The program launched the development of a comprehensive curriculum Jewish spiritual counseling. Designed to augment the existing spiritual development/practice components of our program, it creates a vehicle for students to specialize in mentoring those seeking to grow their souls and practical lives in closer alignment with the Divine. Spearheaded by Academic VAAD member, Rabbi Dr. Shohama Weiner, the curriculum will be developed in consultation with other renewal rabbis involved in spiritual direction. The program is currently envisioned as a groundbreaking elective certificate program, open to students in our rabbinic, cantorial and rabbinic pastor program.

Ruach Ha Aretz

Ruach Ha'Aretz: Spirit of the Earth has been offering transformative week-long retreats in the Western States in the 'off-Kallah years' for 8 years. This past summer, we brought our renewal experience and teachers to Hope, British Columbia, 2 hours from Vancouver. While this retreat was smaller than previous years, it was as magical as always. Classes and workshops around our theme, "Exploring Sacred Relationships", were taught by ALEPH favorites. Since the retreat, Ruach became a project of ALEPH. As a result of this metamorphosis, Rabbi Leah Novick, founder and past-President, retains the name "Spirit of the Earth" for her ecumenical and outreach work. We pray that she receives the support she merits to complete her pioneering work on the Divine Feminine. "Ruach Ha'Aretz" and its co-directors, Rabbis Nadya and Victor Gross, will expand our work to include the continuing development of Jewish Spiritual Education by providing programs, material and support to educators and schools.

Sage-ing

The ALEPH Sage-ing Project offered a successful workshop at Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York last July. In October, co-Directors Bahira Sugerman and Rabbi Shaya Isenberg were invited by the Spiritual Eldering Institute to present a keynote program to a conference of nearly 100 Certified Seminar Leaders (most of whom we had trained) at Sunrise Ranch outside of Boulder. We gave a three-hour workshop on "Sage-ing in Our Relationships". This relationship work will be an important part of the Aleph Sage-ing work.

In July of 2005 we will again be teaching a course on yerushah, creating our legacy and experimenting with four world "spiritual wills" at the ALEPH Kallah. We hope to begin our two year leadership training in Sage-ing work at Elat Chayyim in 2006. Our goal is to create a "Teaching Collective around Aging Issues" in the Jewish community.

The Shalom Center

The Shalom Center is joining with other Jews, Muslims and Christians to seek deeper spiritual kinship as a basis for working together for peace, justice, and healing of the earth in its Abrahamic Traditions Campaign. Twelve people met for an initial four-day retreat, and will meet again in the winter of 2005. The Center is also raising funds for a full-page New York Times Ad, "The Tent of Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah," which brings together interfaith signers in proposals for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian and Iraqi-American wars.

Through its *Beyond Oil Campaign*, The Shalom Center is joining with others to take positive steps for an energy policy and practice that goes beyond oil-addiction and connects the dots between the energy crisis, environmental destruction, and wars waged for oil.

In Philadelphia The Center is involved in an interfaith peace network organizing to stop the violence of war and of the poverty caused by warmongering economies. Center Director Rabbi Arthur Waskow encourages all to visit its website for more information on the above: www.shalomctr.org