

Rarely do the Jewish and Western calendars line up as perfectly as they did last month as when the Fifth of Iyar (the official Hebrew date for Yom HaAtzmaut), May 14th (Israel's Day of Independence as per the Western calendar) and the MERCAZ USA General Council all filled the same weekend! But here they were, all these important dates, with the Fifth of Iyar on Friday, May 13th, then May 14th on Shabbat and then the MERCAZ general membership meeting and the election of new officers on Sunday, May 15th.

Congratulations to Dr. Marilyn Lishnoff Wind of Bethesda, MD, who was elected MERCAZ USA's new president, succeeding Janet Tobin who served as the organization's head since December, 2010.

Dr. Wind, a scientist by training who worked at the Consumer Product Safety Commission for more than 30 years, is a veteran lay leader with both the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and Women's League for Conservative



Outgoing MERCAZ president Janet Tobin (left) and incoming president Dr. Marilyn Lishnoff Wind (right)

Judaism and most recently served as a MERCAZ Vice President and Co-Chair of the MERCAZ/Conservative Movement Election Committee.

Others elected to officer positions at the May 15th event, which was held at Congregation Kol Shalom in Rockville, MD, included Rabbi Daniel Dorsch, Rabbi Eytan Hammerman, Martin Werber and Rita Wertlieb (Vice Presidents), Gary Rosenthal (Secretary) and Eric Weis (Treasurer). In addition, the entire MERCAZ Board of Directors was elected to a new 30-month term of office which runs to late 2018/early 2019.

Rabbi Dov Lipman, the former American-born Member of Knesset from the Yesh Atid Party and current Director of Public Diplomacy for the World Zionist Organization, served as the keynote speaker at the preliminary session and signed copies of his latest book, An American MK.

Others participating in the biennial general membership event were Rabbi Matthew Simon, a former president of MERCAZ USA and MERCAZ Olami, who gave the Dvar Torah, Rabbi Alan Silverstein, the newly elected president of MERCAZ Olami, who gave greetings, and Rabbi Jonathan Z. Maltzman of Congregation Kol Shalom, who installed Dr. Wind as MERCAZ president.

MAZAL TOV

... *to Rabbi Alan Silverstein*, who was elected the new President of MERCAZ Olami, upon the untimely passing earlier this year of Dr. Stephen Wolnek. Rabbi Silverstein has served in a number of leadership positions within the Conservative Movement including as president of the Rabbinical Assembly, Masorti Olami and the Masorti Foundation and was a vice-president of MERCAZ USA.

... to Dr. David Golinkin, who was named President Emeritus of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies upon reaching the term limit as stipulated by Israel's Council for Higher Education. Succeeding Prof. Golinkin as the new Schechter Institute president is Doron Bar, an Associate Professor of Land of Israel Studies.

... to Daniel Minden (Unionville, ON Canada), Brittany Sacks (Calabasas, CA), Raphael Gendler (Minneapolis, MN), Shulamit Weinstein (Bala Cynwyd, PA) and Tamar Wohlberg (Ambler, PA) whose essays were selected as the best in the biennial MERCAZ USA/MERCAZ Canada/Women's League teen essay contest which completed earlier this year. This year's topic was "A Critical Defense of Zionism."



President's Letter

The following are excerpts from Dr. Marilyn Wind's inaugural speech. The complete speech can be found on the MERCAZ website.

Thank you to the Nominating Committee for having nominating me to be president of MERCAZ USA. Let me tell you a little about

myself and how and why I am a Conservative Zionist. When I was in Junior High School, my best friend's mother decided to start a Junior Hadassah group. My friend and I got involved and soon I was president of that group and was serving on the Junior Hadassah regional and national boards. Thus, my Zionism started, but it was an idealized concept, as I hadn't yet been able to visit Israel.

Fast forward a number of years to 1987, and I was able finally to take my first trip to Israel with Women's League for Conservative Judaism. As much as I am a committed Conservative Jew, I am also a strong feminist. On my second trip two years later, we met the Women of the Wall and davened Shacharit with them at the Kotel. Imagine my astonishment when I was told I could not wear my tallit and when there was screaming and yelling by the men trying to drown out our voices. That was my first taste of an Israel that was very different from my idealized version.

I came home from that trip knowing that I was not comfortable in an Israel that didn't allow me to practice my Judaism in the manner to which I was accustomed, that did not accept Conservative/Masorti rabbis to perform conversions, weddings or burials. It was then I decided to get involved in MERCAZ USA.

Getting involved showed me more problems, but it also showed me what determined individuals can do. At the first World Zionist



Congress I attended, every single resolution that dealt with pluralism was defeated. Progress in Israel is slow but I am happy to report that with the increased representation of Conservative/Masorti Jews at the last two Zionist Congresses, pluralism resolutions have now passed overwhelmingly.

It is because of our Movement's actions that there has been a section of the Kotel where egalitarian minyanim have been held for more than 15 years, and now the Israeli government has agreed to expand that area for egalitarian and full women's only minyanim. While there is opposition to the plan, we will continue our fight until we have achieved our goals.

It is because of our Masorti congregations throughout Israel that Israelis are now being offered a Judaism that is a non-coercive joyous Judaism. Are there problems because these congregations don't get supported by the State in the same way that Orthodox congregations do? Yes! But inroads are being made there as well.

It is because of the Schechter Institute, founded by the Conservative/Masorti Movement, that since 1987, there has been a separate stream within the secular public schools, the TALI Schools, which provide a pluralistic Jewish studies program to tens of thousands of schoolchildren at more than 10% of all secular public schools in Israel.

These are just a few examples of what we have been able to do through the political lobbying of our Conservative Movement led by MERCAZ USA. I am a Zionist and love Israel but I am a feminist and a Conservative/Masorti Jew. And I view MERCAZ as the vehicle to continue to criticize and push Israel when she is not living up to her potential. We have a lot of work to do and I am counting on all of you to join me in this effort.

Join MERCAZ Today.

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