

# קול ארצה

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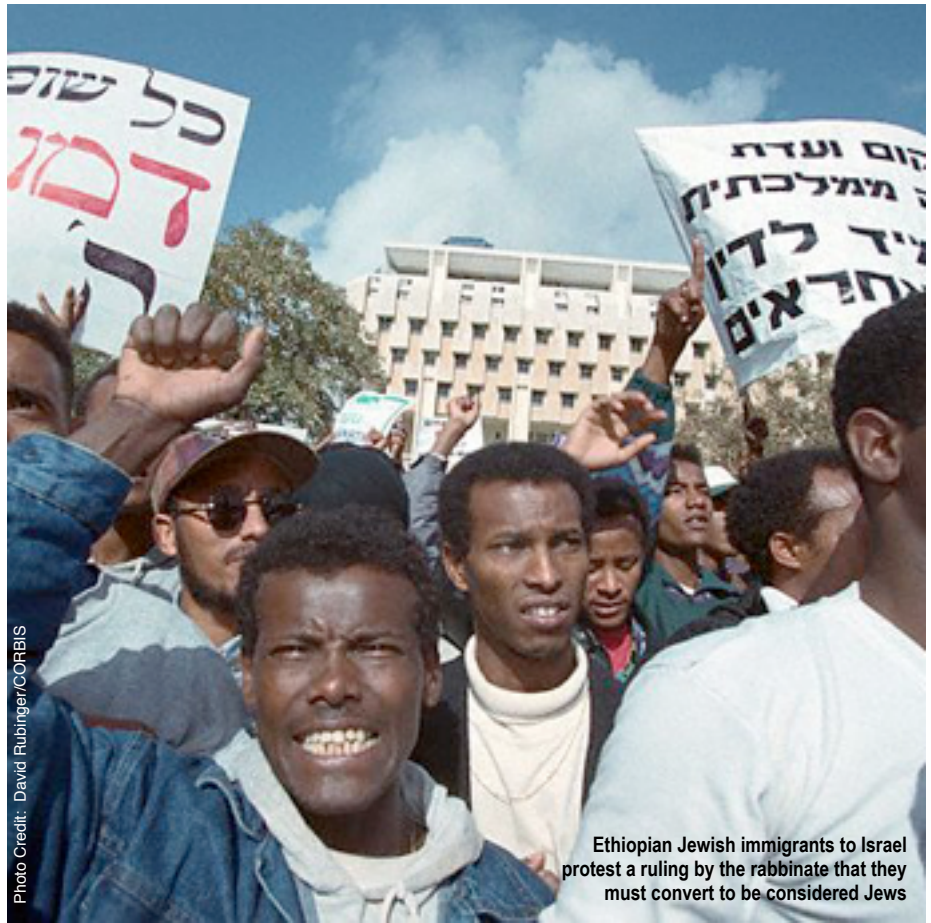


Photo Credit: David Rubinger/CORBIS

Ethiopian Jewish immigrants to Israel protest a ruling by the rabbinate that they must convert to be considered Jews

## Getting the "Other" Across the River: ARZA Canada delves deep into Israeli society

From our Israel study mission, to high-level workshops at the CCRJ Biennial, ARZA Canada continues to look at how we can stay involved in bettering the state of Israel.

The theme of ARZA Canada's study mission to Jerusalem in July 2006 was the "other," and this theme continued to resonate at the CCRJ Biennial in Toronto this past November, as ARZA Canada held workshops in on how Israel is a part of who we are as Reform Jews. Professor Paul Liptz of Tel Aviv University, ARZA Canada's scholar-in-residence, participated in the Biennial and also delivered a lecture at Temple Sinai (sponsored by ARZA Canada) following the conference, on the topic: *Dreaming of a Better Future: Israel in the Coming Decades*.

As one of our instructors on the study mission in Jerusalem put it, "Jews have an obligation to get the 'other' across the river, even when the agendas are different. For the sake of a peaceful life, there are things you have to

do." In the context of Israeli society, the "other" may be women, Arabs, the needy, and anyone who – for one reason or another – has been ignored, forgotten or dispossessed by society and/or the state. Paul Liptz added Mizrahi Jews to the category of the "other."

**"Since 1967, Jews have made aliyah from places Israel never imagined Jews would come from."**

This leads us to ask: how has Jewish identity changed since the creation of the state of Israel? Professor Liptz noted that since 1967, Jews have made aliyah from places Israel never imagined Jews would come from. In 1969, the first Ethiopian entered Hebrew University. Then in the 90s, the Russians aliyah began. Now the French are coming. Professor Liptz hypothesizes that within ten years, the British will start to move to Israel en masse. It is interesting to note that 90% of olim (immigrants) to Israel today come from non-democratic societies.

As if to underscore the surprisingly inclusive nature of the Israeli "other," Professor Liptz stated that "democracy begins in the family."

See "Newcomers are a challenge," page 4

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Rabbi Miri Gold: The "undisputed" spiritual leader of Kibbutz Gezer



are taxed for religious services but have no representation," she adds, echoing the heady slogan of the American Revolution.

**The kibbutz is unable to pay her salary... a victory would relieve Reform and Conservative congregations of financial burdens**

Though Gold is an ordained rabbi and the undisputed spiritual leader of her kibbutz, she is not recognized by the government as the "community rabbi." Her flock is a mix of kibbutzniks and their neighbours in the Gezer region, few of them Orthodox. The financially strapped kibbutz is unable to pay her salary, which is currently shouldered by her congregation and the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism. A legal victory would, she says, not only relieve Reform and Conservative congregations of financial burdens but give all Israelis "choice as to what rabbi is going to serve their community."

The Israel Religious Action Center, the legal arm of the Reform Movement in Israel, brought a petition on Gold's behalf to the Supreme Court in 2005, after failed attempts to appeal to the Religious Services Department of the Prime Minister's Office. Much to Gold's disappointment, the justices consented at a hearing in June to the government's demand for more time for the Knesset committee on religious reform to change the current law. The court set an end-of-the-year deadline and has frozen almost all rabbinical appointments in the meantime. "My assumption is that, in 2007, when there is no sweeping religious reform, we will be back in court," says Gold.

**"In 2007, when there is no sweeping religious reform, we will be back in court."**

The granddaughter of Belarusian immigrants, Gold grew up in a Conservative home in Detroit, Michigan. She fell in love with Israel during her college junior year abroad and, drawn by Zionism and socialism, eventually settled in 1977 on Kibbutz Gezer, which has been described in the Jewish press as the "major hippie hangout between Greece and Africa." At first, she worked in the communal kitchen. "I saw myself as a Yiddishe mama cooking for all those kibbutzniks," she says. When the kibbutz's rabbi left in the mid-

1980s, Gold quietly stepped in to fill the spiritual vacuum. "I am very shy in my soul, but I guess I kind of rose to the occasion," she says. "I started leading Kabbalat Shabbat. I gradually grew into a para-rabbinical role." But it was not until 1993, at her daughter's bat mitzvah, that she decided to leave the kitchen. Gold enrolled in Jerusalem's Hebrew Union College and was ordained in 1999. Today, she is a popular and active rabbi who runs a rehabilitation program for prisoners, and invites Klezmer musicians to provide the live soundtrack for her Simchat Torah services.

Most Israelis either attend Orthodox services or don't go to synagogue at all. Reform is the largest Jewish movement in North America, but it has only 6,000 dues-paying members in Israel. Israel is not alone in favoring one religion or denomination; Ireland, Great Britain, Italy and Greece do so as well. Rabbi Benny Lau, who leads the Ramban Synagogue in Jerusalem, believes that there is enough diversity within Orthodoxy to satisfy everyone. "I refuse to accept that dichotomy of Reform or nothing," he says. "There are answers to Jews' spiritual needs within normative Judaism."

**Gold does not ask the Orthodox to change their ways**

Gold is careful to note that her legal case seeks only government recognition of non-Orthodox movements and does not ask "the Orthodox to change their ways." "I think that some of the Orthodox rabbis feel a bit threatened, and maybe that's good," Gold says of the effect modest competition from Israel's Reform and Conservative movements has had. Israelis are increasingly open to having life cycle rites performed by non-Orthodox rabbis, and some Orthodox rabbis now break with tradition and allow women to speak after an official wedding ceremony.

"They are trying to be more accommodating," Gold says. She is optimistic that her case will become a landmark victory for religious freedom that will bolster the spiritual life of Israel as a whole. "I think that all different ways of celebrating and observing enrich Judaism," Gold says. "The last thing I am interested in is people sitting on the sidelines because nothing talks to them."

Originally printed Moment Magazine, December 2006

## Taxation without representation

As Miri Gold sees it, her fight is not about a paycheck but religious freedom in Israel. Ever since David Ben-Gurion granted the Orthodox Rabbinate a legal monopoly over Jewish religious life in exchange for their support of a Jewish state, only Orthodox rabbis have qualified for government salaries. Gold, an energetic Reform rabbi in a bright blue kippah, says she too deserves a paycheck and has taken her battle all the way to the Israeli Supreme Court. "If Israel wants to be a Jewish state, it must be democratic," she says. "People should have freedom of religion as stated in Israel's Declaration of Independence."

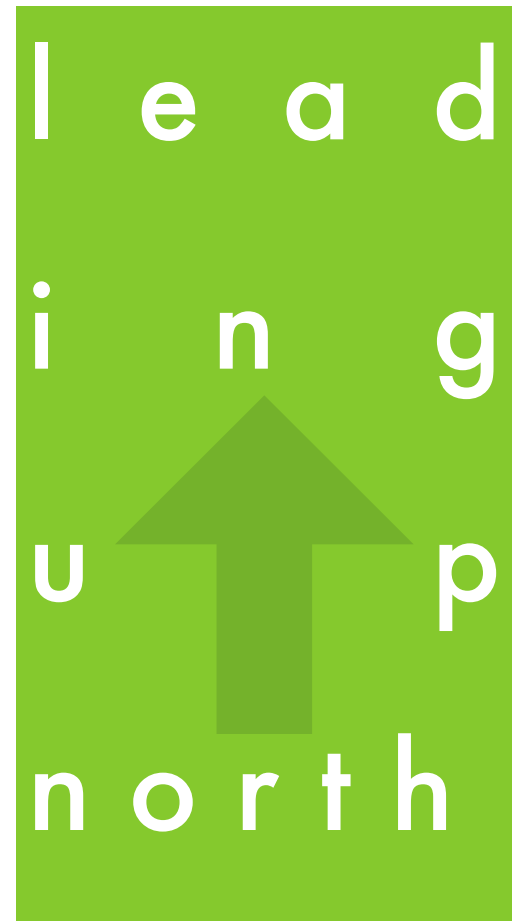
**"The present situation is unjust... We are taxed for religious services but have no representation."**

The legal battle, which has made Gold the face of the Reform Movement's struggle for legitimacy in Israel, boils down to a simple question: Who is a rabbi? The Chief Rabbinate of Israel refuses to grant a teudat kasher (a rabbinical certificate) to anyone who is not Orthodox. Without such certification, there is no government appointment, and without government appointment, there is no government salary. "The present situation is unjust," says Gold, 56, who leads the 180-person Birkat Shalom Congregation on Kibbutz Gezer, between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. "We

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Participants Adam Salberg of Fordham University in New York City and Jesse Paikin of Toronto's York University work to rehabilitate a bomb shelter beneath the *shuk* (market) in the Jewish-Muslim city of Akko in northern Israel



In response to the conflict that has traumatized Israel's north, the Schusterman Family Foundation, in conjunction with Hillel and the Israel on Campus Coalition, instituted *Leading Up North*. This ten-day winter break trip placed 550 young Jewish leaders as volunteers in cities, towns, and national parks to repair damage and to provide emotional support to the residents of the North.

KESHER, the Reform Movement's on-campus organization, in conjunction with ARZA, sent seven students on the winter mission. In addition to their humanitarian work, they served as delegates of Reform Zionism, educating other members of the group about Progressive Zionist ideals.

Jesse Paikin, a participant on the trip, shares his experience.

Upon returning from Israel and being asked how my trip was, my initial response was "great!" I firmly believe that no journey to Israel should be anything less than great. But almost as soon as I had uttered that word, I realized that it didn't suffice. I immediately had to qualify it. My trip was also depressing. And more than that, it was humbling. This was my fifth trip to Israel, and it was the most eye-opening of all. I wasn't a tourist. I wasn't a pilgrim. I wasn't a visitor. Truth be told, I'm not sure there's a word to describe what I was on this trip, aside from "Zionist". Nonetheless, it was most certainly an eye-opening trip. My eyes were opened to a part of Israel that is rarely seen, let alone spoken of, by non-Israelis.

Most of our trip was spent painting and cleaning bomb shelters in cities in the north - in Nahariya, Akko, Shelomi, and Kiryat Shemona, to name a few. While the dingy condition of the shelters themselves was revealing, it was our discussions with the citizens of these cities that was truly eye-opening. We heard of how the old and the poor were neglected by the state - left to fend for themselves while those of means retreated to safety in the south. We learned of how people were forced to run back and forth between their homes and the bomb shelters every time a siren sounded - sometimes fifteen times a day. This is not something that the elderly couple we met who lived on the fourth floor of their building could do with ease. And we learned of the struggle that the Arab communities faced - shelled by their Arab "brethren" from across the border, and all-but forgotten by their own government in Israel.

If this story sounds eerily similar to the stories told by those who have visited the southern United States following Hurricane Katrina, it is for good reason. That parallel wasn't lost on many of the citizens we met, and they continually referred to it. But with one notable exception: Israel's response after the war was anything but neglectful. While Israel made many mistakes this past summer, she got one thing right: the response after the war. To be sure, there was almost no intelligible sign of a conflict in the cities. Villages had been cleaned up, houses had been repaired, trees have started to be replanted, and many of the bomb shelters have in fact been locked. I heard a story told of one American visitor who, upon arriving in September, complained that there were no bombs to clean up.

Many of us noted that the trip itself appeared to be hastily thrown together, and was at times painstakingly poor in organization. But of course, that was to be expected with such a mission, planned as a quick emergency response. This criticism is overwhelmingly outweighed by the incredible amount of thanks that was bestowed upon us by the citizens of the north, and by the immense didactic value of our time spent in Israel's north. At its core, the trip was the supreme expression of Zionism: we got messy in the political, cultural, and physical dirt of Israel, and tried our hardest to make something beneficial out of it. In this light, we were bearers of the Zionist slogan *livnot ul'hibanot*, to build and be built. We arrived in Israel to build, and in return, we were built up ourselves. We were Zionists.

## Conversion, Civil Marriage & Same-sex Marriage

Rabbi and Attorney Gilad Kariv, Associate Director of the Israel Religious Action Centre, considers the implications of Israeli Chief Rabbi Amar's proposed conversion bill and two recent Supreme Court decisions.

**Chief Rabbi Amar's Proposed Bill**  
Chief Rabbi Amar's proposal, fraudulently and deceptively presented as a compromise, is both groundless and contemptible. This law would take us back twenty years, by not recognizing Reform conversion in Israel or abroad.

The ultra-Orthodox parties failed to pass a law regulating "Who is a Jew" by changing the Law of Return in the early 1980's, and failed again in their attempt to change the law regulating the Rabbinic Courts. They are attempting once again to make the same changes, this time under a different guise.

### Civil Marriage Abroad

The Court has removed the questions surrounding the legal status of civil marriage abroad, strengthened the status of the legal right to family life, and determined that these marriages are not intrinsically invalid and that their dissolution requires a legal divorce.

The fact that the divorce proceeding remains in the hands of the Rabbinic Courts is distressing; however the ruling reinforces our struggle for full recognition of the right to family life and civil marriage in Israel.

### Recognition of Same-sex Marriage

The Court ordered the State to change the registration of two Israelis of the same sex who were married in Ontario, Canada and register them as a married couple.

## Newcomers are a Challenge

*continued from page 1*

This is reminiscent of the Court's ruling in 2002 regarding Reform conversions. At the time, the Court ruled that the petitioner be registered as a Jew without making a final determination as to the validity of the conversion.

Despite the Supreme Court's efforts, and the fact that legally this is not a precedent-

setting ruling, the ruling nevertheless, has a wide-ranging impact on public perceptions.

These newcomers are a challenge for Israeli society and Israeli identity. The traditional Zionist identity which stabilized the state for the first twenty years of its existence does not adequately meet the need for a more "inclusive identity in the present age. How does the situation impact on Reform Jews in North America? It has sparked the need for Progressive Zionists to step up to fulfill an important role. We must foster open-minded discussions about how the idealistic worldview of the early chalutzim and kibbutznikim is transforming into the Israel of today, a society dominated by middle class citizens of non European descent. And we must translate discussion into action, by ensuring that the "others" in Israel are not forgotten.

## Bad News, Good News

By Rabbi Dow Marmur,  
ARZA Canada Rabbinic Council member

Trying to follow events in and around Israel is very difficult and confusing. It's almost impossible to figure out whom to believe. Here are three interconnected examples.

1. **On the one hand**, much is being said about the looming danger of a nuclear Iran and the distinct possibility that Israel may be compelled to take military action to prevent a nuke falling on Israel. The analyses are troubling and the predictions grim. The very existence of Israel seems to be at stake. And the world doesn't seem to mind.

### Even the Ayatollah is said to be interested in greater cooperation with the UN...

**On the other hand**, there are persistent reports of a sizeable opposition in Iran to the hawkish demeanour of its president. Even the ayatollah, considered the highest authority in the land and the real boss, is said to be interested in greater cooperation with the United Nations in order to avoid a confrontation over the nuclear program.

2. **On the one hand**, there are persistent reports about the intransigent Hamas government of the Palestinian Authority - inspired and financed by Iran, Syria and others - that precludes all hope of negotiation and compromise. By way of example, please bear in mind the statement made to the Globe and Mail correspondent by the Authority's foreign minister that Canada should resettle Israel's Jews within its own borders. His aim is one Islamic state for the entire the region.

**On the other hand**, there are persistent reports about Syrian overtures, apparently not only in words but also in deeds. The encounter between Abu Mazen and the leader of Hamas in exile that took place in Damascus recently is part of the process. It may lead to a unity government in the Palestinian Authority, which in turn may result in some kind of understanding with Israel. Experts also point to other confidence building

**The Jews and Arabs  
"will continue to stick  
together to the very  
sad status quo."**

3. **On the one hand**, there is evidence of unrest among Arabs in Israel. A researcher in Haifa University, Dr Dan Schueftan, has just published a report that states, *inter alia*: "The Arabs don't plan to integrate themselves into the Jewish state. The Jews won't commit national suicide. Both will continue to stick together to the very sad status quo." To accommodate the demands of the Arabs would spell the end of Israel.

**On the other hand**, in the wake of the second Lebanon war a poll indicated that 73% of Israeli Arabs would rather live in Israel than in any other country in the world. (The figure for Jews was 88.5 %.) Many Arabs occupy prominent positions in the Jewish state. Recently the Jewish Agency initiated a project in the North of Israel, where most Arabs live, calculated to bring them and Jewish Israelis closer to each other.

Which of the versions we read usually depends on the political orientation of authors and readers. (1) People on the right (Netanyahu and company) are more likely to stress the threat from Iran. (2) People on the left (Beilim and company) are more likely to insist that Israel openly negotiate with Syria. (3) Those that harbour anti-Arab views (Lieberman and company) are more likely to tell us that Israel cannot afford to live with its Arab minority and should "persuade" them to move to the West Bank.

In comparison, what to do with the President while he's awaiting formal charges for rape, abuse of power, lying, etc. seems to be easier to resolve.

Jerusalem, 23.1.07

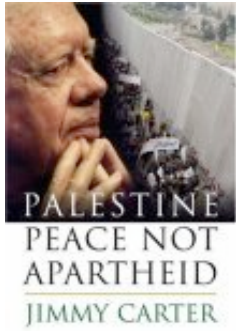


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# Carter's Book: Peanuts, not Politics

By Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin



There is that moment in [parashat Vayishlach] in which Jacob learns that the Canaanite prince, Shechem, has raped and defiled his daughter Dinah. But Jacob does not respond. He sits on the news for a little while. V'hechrish Yaakov - "And Jacob was silent." Since my Hebrew name is Yaakov, I confess that I have nurtured a silence within myself ever since I first arrived in Atlanta. I have long been silent about my misgivings regarding the post-presidential utterances of Jimmy Carter. I deemed it ungracious to say anything. For there is much in Jimmy Carter that I have admired. There is a generosity of spirit within him. This congregation has been

a partner in his vision through our participation in Habitat for Humanity. The Carter Center had been an institution of dialogue and honest brokering in the name of statesmanship; it has been one of the jewels in Atlanta's crown... So why get into it? Our sainted teachers have taught us: Affection without criticism is not genuine affection. I have uttered my words of affection for President Carter; now comes the time for criticism.

There is no easy way to say it. Jimmy Carter's new book, *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid* is a dangerous book. It is a memoir of Carter's involvement with the Middle East peace process. I add my own yasher koach to our friend Professor Ken Stein of Emory,

***Carter's "Palestine: Peace not Apartheid" is a dangerous book... replete with factual errors, copied materials not cited, superficialities, glaring omissions and simply invented segments. The book is absolutely wrong.***

who has publicly resigned and disavowed his connections with the Carter Center - an institution with which he had been associated since its very founding - and he did so because the former president's book is [and I quote Ken Stein now] "replete with factual errors, copied materials not cited, superficialities, glaring omissions and simply invented segments." Ken Stein is absolutely right. The book is absolutely wrong. Lacking sufficient aggravation in recent days, I decided to count the book's errors of fact and of interpretation. Let's just say that by page 25, I had already lost count.

Read the full article at [www.arza.org/Carter\\_response/salkinarticle.htm](http://www.arza.org/Carter_response/salkinarticle.htm)  
Read Professor Kenneth Stein's interview with NPR at [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)

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For more information, or to register for the study trip, fill out the form below and return it to ARZA Canada

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ARZA Canada is the Zionist arm of the Canadian Reform Movement, serving over 6,000 members. We are an affiliate of the Union for Reform Judaism and a member of ARZENU and the Canadian Zionist Federation. Our mandate is to connect with Reform communities throughout Canada, foster connections with and strengthen our ties to the Reform Movement in Israel, and work to realize the vision of Reform Zionism.

At ARZA Canada, we're committed to building relationships between Reform Jews in Canada and in Israel, and with committed Reform Zionists around the world. To this end, we engage in a wide range of programmes and initiatives designed to strengthen our ties with the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism and deepen our connection with Canada's broader Jewish community.

Learn more at our website, [www.arzacanada.org](http://www.arzacanada.org)

**ARZA Canada board sets priorities and goals at retreat**

On January 14, the ARZA Canada board met for a day long retreat to and develop a programmatic agenda and brainstorm areas of focus. The retreat was highly productive, and from it emerged various action items and projects that will come to fruition in the near future. Following is a partial list of ARZA Canada's priorities for 2007:

**CONNECTING TO ISRAEL**

Twinning  
 Canadian & Israeli Reform congregations, fostering travel programmes to Israel, supporting our Reform shlichim

**COMMUNICATIONS**

Developing better methods of communicating and partnering with congregations across Canada

**YOUTH & EDUCATION**

Increasing opportunities for Canadian Reform youth to travel to Israel, developing Israel education curricula for our schools



**Israel and Canada:  
 Two Branches, One Family Tree**

**Tu BiSh'vat ט"ו בשׁוֹט**

ARZA Canada presents this special Tu Bi Sh'vat curriculum for early childhood classrooms. Adapted from an original project by ARZA (US) and the Union for Reform Judaism's department of Lifelong Jewish Learning, the FREE download includes an easy-to-implement three-lesson curriculum with songs, stories, poems, and classroom enrichment ideas, including contact information for and photographs from Israeli pre-schools, as well as movies and sound files of appropriate Hebrew songs and *brachot*.

Tu BiSh'vat is the perfect holiday to help us focus on being God's partners in taking care of the world and the environment. It is also a time to focus on Israel, as it is the time when trees are planted and begin to bud in *Eretz Yisrael*. Jews around the world celebrate the *chag* through our actions. We plant trees in Israel and we eat foods that are distinctively grown in Israel.

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*kol arza* welcomes your submissions!  
 If you would like to submit an article, please contact Jesse Paikin at [jpaikin@urj.org](mailto:jpaikin@urj.org)

You can read the entire list of ARZA Canada's priorities for 2007 and learn more about the work of the board of directors at our website. Visit [www.arzacanada.org/2007](http://www.arzacanada.org/2007)

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