

Israel feature



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Happy Chanukah

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Students and graduates of Eretz Hemdah. WZPS photo courtesy of Eretz Hemdah.

Training rabbinical court judges

(Cont. from page B19.)

Operating in conjunction with the World Zionist Organization's Bureau for Spiritual Services in the Diaspora, Be-Mar'eh Ha-Bazaq answers questions of Jewish law (halacha) submitted by rabbis from Jewish communities around the world.

Eretz Hemdah's rabbis perused the Jewish sources and arrived at a solution. The couple divorced and remarried on condition, an act that will enable annulment of the marriage later on when the husband's condition deteriorates.

Founded some 12 years ago by the late Rabbi Shaul Israeli, a leading Torah personality who served on the rabbinical court of appeals of Israel, Eretz Hemdah aims to reach out to the public by providing a new generation of outstanding Torah scholars attuned to the needs of the Jewish people. They do this by combining Torah expertise with a strong Zionist background and a thorough grounding in secular studies.

This approach came in response to criticism leveled by the Israeli public at Israel's rabbinical court judges (dayanim), most of whom are ultra-Orthodox (haredim) and tend to live very insulated lives. Few have served in the army, attended university or even had significant contact with the country's non-haredi population. Many Israelis find them completely out of touch with their needs and concerns and unable to understand complex issues involving the need for secular knowledge.

"Today, a true Torah scholar not only has to know the Jewish sources, he also has to know psychology, sociology, science, medicine and technology," states Rabbi Yosef Carmel, who together with Rabbi Moshe Ehrenreich, serves as rabbinical dean of the Eretz Hemdah kollel (community). "We want scholars who will be able to understand the general public - who present Torah with love. Any rabbi can say 'no' when asked a halachic question. But to say yes, you need wide shoulders."

The seven-year, full-time program accepts only outstanding graduates of national religious yeshivas who have completed military service in

the Israel Defence Force. And while neither the chief rabbinite nor the laws of Israel require dayanim to have any secular background, Eretz Hemdah does.

"Most of our students not only have formal academic backgrounds, some even hold master's degrees. And our program provides them with enrichment courses and workshops on such general subjects as psychology, sociology, rhetoric, public speaking, and even non-Jewish law," Carmel explains.

These general studies are in no way at the expense of religious studies. Eretz Hemdah provides an in-depth, comprehensive program of Jewish studies, including Talmud, the codes of Jewish law, Bible and Jewish philosophy. Its graduates are awarded the highest level of rabbinical ordination, recognized by the Israeli government as equivalent to a Ph.D.

The excellence of the program is borne out by the grades graduates attain on the rabbinical court judges examinations. While the national passing average for these exams is 50%, Eretz Hemdah's average is between 80% to 95%. Of the last group of fifteen graduates to take the exams, thirteen passed and six were among the top scorers.

(Cont. on page B21. See "Training rabbinical court judges".)

Happy Chanukah

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Israel feature

Little Israel - Japanese style - in the Jerusalem hills

Following a major fire in 1996 which destroyed a great many trees in the Jerusalem corridor, the Jewish National Fund has been involved in ongoing self-reclamation efforts in the region...

By AVI GOREN

An association of Christian Japanese supporters of Israel recently established a breathtaking Japanese garden in Rabin Park at the entrance to Jerusalem; a carefully constructed mix of stones, earth and sand based on the tradition of the Land of the Rising Sun.

The garden is one of the self-reclamation projects being conducted by the Jewish National Fund following a major fire in 1996 which destroyed a great many trees in the region. These efforts have taken into account the area's physical features, and are based on surveys conducted after the fire which examined the ground, alluvial soil, archaeological sites and the forest landscape along the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway.

The Japanese garden, which runs through the



A member of Beit Shalom - an association of Christian Japanese supporters of Israel - visits the Japanese garden in the Jerusalem hills. WZPS photo courtesy of the JNF archives.

northern ridge above Sha'ar Hagai, from the monument commemorating the troops that forged the path to Jerusalem, to the Sha'ar Hagai interchange, was sponsored by the Jewish National Fund, with the assistance of Beit Shalom - an association of Christian Japanese supporters of Israel.

Beit Shalom was founded in 1938 by Father Osiki, after he experienced a divine revelation commanding him to pray for the

establishment of the State of Israel and the salvation of the Jewish people. Ever since the association's founding, its members have

Training rabbinical court judges

(Cont. from page B20.)

However, to date, not one Eretz Hemdah graduate has been appointed to the rabbinical courts of Israel. "Unfortunately, not always the best qualified are chosen to be rabbinical court judges. The appointments committee is not a professional committee but a political one. We never promised to excel in politics, only in scholarship," states Carmel. "The appointments committee tell us our graduates are too young - only 32 or so, while most of those appointed are about 50. We must have patience and the age issue will pass. In the meantime, our graduates are doing other important things - serving on financial courts, conversion courts, teaching in yeshivas around the country and serving as rabbis of various communities in Israel."

Eretz Hemdah also inculcates the spirit of community service in its students and students must also undertake community work. The choice of projects includes Torah programs for the general public, an advanced program for rabbis in France, the rabbinical seminary in Rome for the Italian Jewish community, courses for Diaspora rabbis in conjunction with the Rabbinical Council of America, and a program for training Russian immigrant religious leaders, as well as Be-Mar'eh Ha-Bazaq.

Be-Mar'eh Ha-Bazaq now fields more than one hundred questions a year. Some are from rabbis in far-flung Jewish communities such as Ecuador and Hong Kong, while others are from larger communities whose rabbis are seeking a "second opinion" on complex halachic issues. The questions cover such topics from relocating a Jewish cemetery under special circumstances to whether the Biblical injunction "to be fruitful and multiple" applies to those who are HIV-positive.

"The project has been so successful that Be-Mar'eh Ha-Bazaq has gone on-line and its responses are being translated into French. Eretz Hemdah has added "Ask the Rabbi" (www.erezhemdah.org), a similar service which enables the general Jewish public to ask and receive responses to questions about any Jewish subject, except kashrut, via the Internet. This service has already fielded more than 1,500 questions.

"In our answers - which are accompanied by substantiation - we try to incorporate sensitivity to our fellow human beings as well as the needs of the unique times in which we live," says Carmel. "This service is a wonderful opportunity to open a window to Judaism to those far away from it."

- WZPS.

actively supported Israel and the Jewish people.

The Japanese garden, which was planned and designed by Father Osiki and his followers, with assistance from the Jewish National Fund, incorporates traditional aesthetic principles of Japanese gardening that have been practiced since the 15th century. The garden contains a miniature model of the region spanning from Mt. Hermon through the winding streams of the Jordan River. Besides

the miniature map, there is a larger model running along the mountain range to the top of the mountain. The two models are made of stones, earth and sand and each component has spiritual and symbolic significance. Mount Hermon is depicted as a white rock at the top of the mountain, overlooking the uncultivated landscape of the Judean hills.

(Cont. on page B22. See "Japanese garden".)

Florists below wish friends & customers Happy Chanukah

Happy Chanukah

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