



# GESHER

2010 Annual Report

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	3
Town Hall Meetings.....	4
IDF Officers Jewish Identity Training .....	5
Encounter Seminars and Jewish Identity Study Days.....	6
Civics – Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State.....	7
Beit Midrash for the Media. ....	8
LIBA – Jewish Core Study Groups in the Israel Workplace.....	9
Gesher Ynet Polls .....	9
MIRKAM: Weaving a Future Together for Mixed Secular-Religious Communities.....	10
Mass Media Initiatives.....	11
Gesher Multicultural Film Fund.....	11
From Mikranet to Ynet.....	12
Appendices:	
▫ 1 IDF Officer Training Program Participants 2010.....	13
▫ 4 Gesher Statement of Activity 2009 -2010.....	17

## Executive Summary

Gesher's programs provide an important bridge across Israel's widening divide. We are the catalyst for the creation of frameworks in which religious and secular Israelis come together. Gesher was the first to introduce Encounter Seminars to Israel forty years ago, and the long term effects of those seminars are surfacing. Many of the volunteer community leaders spearheading the Mixed Religious and Secular Communities Initiatives (MIRKAM) were participants in Gesher Encounter Seminars over 15 years ago! See more about this on page ten.

Throughout 2010, we held a number of candid, panel discussions at Beit Gesher in Jerusalem that were open to the public including a series that highlighted Ultra-Orthodox Education and the Workforce. Packed sessions brought together religious and secular, right-wing and left-wing Israelis to find common ground. They also attracted much media attention. Through these sessions we are reaching Israelis with our message of tolerance and the priority of Jewish unity.

Gesher's activities have always focused on experiential learning and critical thinking. Underpinning all our ideas is the passionate belief in education as a transformative experience. **Last year, 2,606 youngsters came together through Gesher's Encounter Seminars.**

Study Days challenge Israeli youth to explore their personal identity as Israelis and Jews. **6,638 pupils from schools throughout Israel participated in Study Days and Seminars in 2010.**

Through Gesher's Jewish Identity and Leadership Training Program for IDF Soldiers, officer cadets get to explore the interplay between their Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli identity and gain the tools to pass these values on to their future units when they become officers. **Last year 5,590 cadets finished their Office Training armed with Jewish knowledge and strengthened identity, and for the first time, 1,360 new officers participated in special Shabbat programming.**

Gesher has been a major player in crafting the IDF's Jewish and Zionist Identity program. As of 2010, Gesher is hosting the IDF's Jerusalem based five-day training program for its new recruits that stresses the centrality of Jerusalem and enhances young soldiers' connection to the land, values, heritage and people of Israel.

**200 high school civics teachers** further developed their education and professional skills by participating in Gesher's comprehensive Civics teaching program - Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State. We expect it to enhance **the educational experience of almost 7,000 high school students.**

Of course we have been focused on overcoming the challenges of the current economic downturn. **Gesher is proud that we have raised \$240,000 from our supporters in the United Kingdom in 2010. Private donations from our Israeli friends and supporters reached \$85,000.**

## Town Hall Meetings



**Haredi Housing Minister Ariel Attias with Channel 10 journalist Avishai Ben Haim at the "Segregated Country" Session at Gesher.**

In 2010 Gesher embarked on a new initiative. We opened up Beit Gesher for a series of "Town Hall" meetings that were free and open to the public. Our experience with large-scale informal educational and cultural initiatives has put us in a strong position to bring together on a panel opinion-moulders and decision-makers with diverse and competing interests in order to discuss top-of-the-agenda issues facing Israel.



This year we focused our "Town Hall" upon some of the Haredi policies that have so strained religious-secular relations. Sessions such as "The Ultra Orthodox and Employment," and "Bagatz vs Badatz" (Supreme vs Rabbinical Courts) filled the auditorium to capacity.

One well-attended session held under the banner "Segregated Country," dealt with the divide in Israeli society as expressed by segregated housing. Housing Minister Ariel Attias and a diverse panel of guest speakers discussed segregated religious and secular building projects and neighborhoods which are becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in Israel. These 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Hall

**Poster for Segregated Country**

meetings bring together religious and secular, right-wing and left-wing Israelis to find common ground and are attracting much media attention. Through these sessions we are reaching Israelis with our message of tolerance and the priority of Jewish unity.



**Ynet Journalist Efrat Shapira Rosenberg**

## IDF Officers Jewish Identity Training Program



Soldiers and commanders are faced with difficult challenges which often put their Jewish values and ethics to the test. Civilian casualties, intense international scrutiny, and media misrepresentation that have peaked in the aftermath of the flotilla affair, have eroded even the most dedicated soldier's determination.

For the past decade we have operated the IDF Officer Cadets Jewish Identity Training program which seeks to strengthen Jewish and Zionist identity of Israeli soldiers, clarify questions of values and heighten motivation for meaningful military service. The sessions are filled with intense workshops, seminars, presentations, role-playing activities, and tours of Jewish and Zionist sites.

In order to become a commissioned officer every one of the 6,000 Cadets whom the IDF trains annually must participate in this five-day program.

These young men and women comprise a diverse spectrum of Israeli society - religious and secular, immigrants and native-born Israelis. The participants have been selected and are being groomed for leadership positions in the IDF. Many go on to become influential in Israeli society. As military officers, they will serve as role models and guides for their troops; as future civilian leaders, they will shape Israeli society for generations to come. This unique relationship between Gesher and the IDF continues to strengthen.

**Over 46,000 young officers have participated in the Gesher-IDF Officers' Jewish Identity Training Program since its inception eight years ago. During 2010 Gesher trained 5,590 officers.**

This year we reached an impressive milestone; **for the first time Gesher was asked to provide programming for 1,360 officers in a new weekend session that explores the Israeli Shabbat experience.** The program uses Shabbat as a trigger for intimate conversation, a weekly time-out from the mundane.

In addition, from 2010, we are hosting the IDF's Jerusalem based five-day training program for its new recruits that stresses the centrality of Jerusalem and enhances young soldiers' connection to the land, values, heritage and people of Israel. This brings the total of soldiers served by Gesher's program to 10,208

Please see Appendix I for a summary of program participants

## Gesher Youth Activities



### **Encounter Seminars and Jewish Identity Study Days:**

Encounter seminars bring secular and religious high school students together. Students talk with each other, learn from one another and challenge long-held misconceptions in a neutral setting.

The program is designed to break down the barriers that exist between secular and religious youth, sowing the seeds for more effective communication and greater mutual understanding, and helping students define and express their Jewish-Israeli identity. The seminars focus on the critical issues of Jewish and Israeli identity, democracy, and pluralism in a Jewish state. Evaluations have shown that the program is highly effective in challenging long-held stereotypes and altering participants' perceptions about each other. These three day seminars bring together 11th-graders from secular and religious high schools to learn from each other, to break down the wall that divides them and to form a bond that unites them, in a neutral, informal setting.

**This year Gesher brought together 2,606 high-school students from different schools throughout Israel to spend time together in open and honest dialogue.**

### **Jewish Identity Seminars Study Days**

consisting of special full day programs taking the place of ordinary school classes, challenge Israeli secular youth to explore their personal identity as Israelis and Jews. Aimed at Israeli high school students, these programs focus on Jewish and Israeli self-identity, including topics of Judaism and Democracy, Social Justice, Zionism, and more. Activities took place both on and off school grounds.



## Civics - Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State

Civics lessons in Israeli schools provide a venue where the meaning of membership in the Israeli collective is negotiated and debated, and where students can engage with and appreciate the different aspects of Jewish and Israeli identity.



Our ambitious citizenship program instills Israeli high school students with an understanding of the importance of Judaism and Democracy in the State of Israel. The Ministry of Education, recognizing Gesher's expertise - particularly on the critical issues of democracy and pluralism in a Jewish state - has asked us to train 600 Civics teachers within three years.

**In the past two years, 350 newly qualified civics teachers have taken part in twelve in-service training courses throughout Israel.** Gesher's Civics initiative – Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State – is comprised of a provocative textbook (used in over fifty schools throughout Israel so far) and a state-of-the-art website that make Civics interesting, challenging and thought-provoking.



The Ministry is planning the Civics matriculation course to include more controversial and difficult topics that require the student to think critically. They have asked Gesher to provide in-service training that will enable Civics teachers to help impart these intellectual skills to their students.

In response to a growing number of expressions of racism in late 2010, Gesher provided a special seminar for civics teachers with a panel of guest speakers including the Head of civics studies at the Ministry of Education, as well as leading national religious Rabbi. Rabbi Haim Druckman.

**The 200 teachers trained this past academic year will reach approximately 7,000 tenth and eleventh-grade Israelis.**



## Beit Midrash for the Media

Gesher's Beit Midrash for the Media has been successfully running for three years. This unique Beit Midrash provides a pluralistic Jewish study framework that gives Israel's leading print, broadcast and digital journalists the tools and resources to increase their own Jewish literacy. Israel's leading journalists take the time out from their busy schedule to attend the program.

By creating the Beit Midrash for the Media, Gesher is providing learning opportunities for leading journalists so that they can be as knowledgeable about concepts in Judaism as they are in the spheres of economics, politics or literature. Daily, these individuals make countless decisions about which facts to emphasize, which to ignore and which way to shape a story. They are currently missing the “Jewish lexicon” to do this fairly. The stories these media figures present reach millions of people daily and the way in which they present them has a huge influence on Israeli society, and on the world at large.



**In 2010, 18 of Israel's leading journalists took part in the Beit Midrash - 5 from the Russian language media in Israel.** These included returning participants from Ha'aretz, Ynet and RTVI TV (Russian language), and this year reporters from Israel's major news organizations including the Ma'ariv newspaper and TV Channels 2 and 10.

Led by Israel's top educators from across the spectrum, the Beit Midrash enables journalists and writers, many who have had little or no exposure to Jewish knowledge in the past, to tap into classical Jewish sources to enrich their worldview.



The Beit Midrash experience can radically affect the way a particular story is presented, making it more balanced and less riddled with the stereotyping so often seen in the media.

Although originally scheduled for ten sessions, due to participants' demand we extended the Beit Midrash to another five full sessions and a special event open to the public on the subject of Judaism and the media.

This event gave the Beit Midrash a "public" face and attracted a wide audience. The participation of two articulate Russian-speaking journalists on the media panel brought a Russian-speaking Israeli voice to the public discourse – one that is rarely heard.

Five of the participating journalists have made a commitment to help the Gesher cause and they have taken an active role in various activities as keynote speakers for our facilitators' trainings, mixed communities' convention and civics teachers' workshops and as panel members in Gesher's Town Hall sessions. One journalist is even taking a well deserved year off from broadcasting her program to 7 million viewers to develop her own idea of a Beit Midrash for Russian-speaking Israelis.

## LIBA – Jewish Core Study Groups in the Israeli Workplace

The workplace is perhaps the ultimate opportunity for encounter between the secular and religious communities in Israel. Geshher, together with the Israel Association of Community Centres (IACC), has created a Jewish Core Study program to train a group of managers from a variety of backgrounds and professions to operate Jewish study groups in their own workplace as part of the work day. **Over 40 men and women now have the tools to set up Jewish study groups where they work.** These include some of Israel's leading companies and corporations including: Teva Pharmaceuticals, Hadassah Medical Center, Amdocs and others.

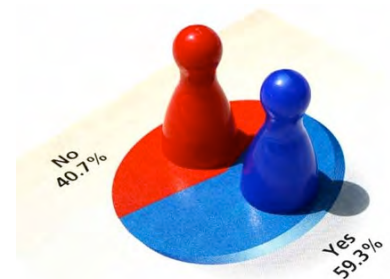


The supportive environment that Geshher provides, teaches people how to stimulate discussion and create learning experiences for their co-workers. The programs website [www.liba.org.il](http://www.liba.org.il) contains a large online video and text library, as well as an active facilitators' forum for the participants. Based on this initial success, we are seeking to set up the LIBA program in four other locations throughout Israel.

## Geshher Ynet Polls



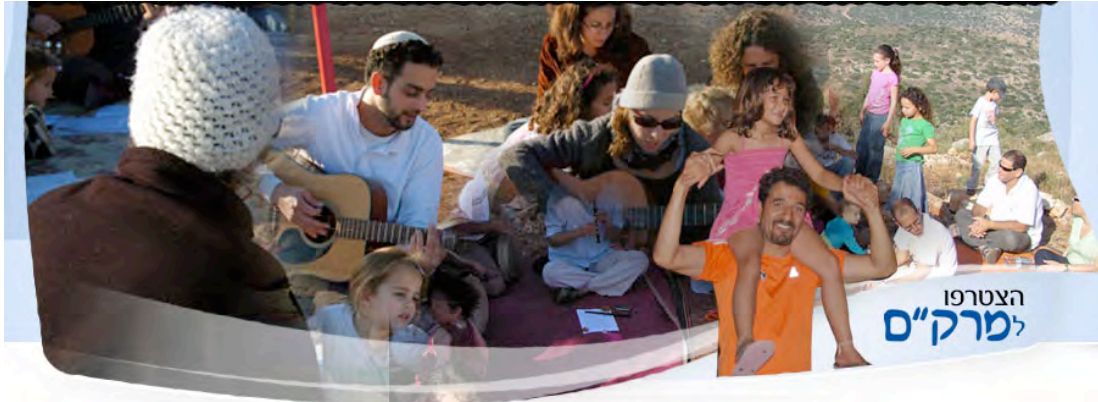
Ynet, Israel's largest and most popular news and content website, runs a Geshher-Ynet poll on hot button issues in Israel. These polls, conducted on a representative sample of 500 Israelis, are widely quoted in Israel and are often picked up by international media. Many polls are featured on the front page. Topical and sometimes controversial issues are covered. Some polls tie in to the Town Hall sessions that Geshher holds at Beit Geshher, arousing much anticipation and stimulating a huge number of talkbacks as well.



One such poll, taken prior to Geshher's Town Hall Meetings on Religious-Secular relations, found that two-thirds of secular Jews have never visited an ultra-Orthodox home, one-third have no religious acquaintance or friend, and secular employers were reluctant to hire ex-yeshiva students.

These polls provide a very current snapshot of where the average Israeli is on issues of society and identity. **One recent poll revealed that 65% support and 35% are against closing commercial centers on Shabbat.** Another Ynet-Geshher poll revealed some 22% of Israelis will fast on Tisha B'Av; another 52% will honor the day by not going out with friends.

## MIRKAM: Weaving a Future Together for Mixed Secular-Religious Communities



Finding a way for Jews who are so different to live together and maintain a sense of common purpose is a challenge with real meaning for our day-to-day life as Israeli Jews. Today, in urban Israel, where people may not even know their neighbours, the sense of belonging to a community is largely gone, especially for secular Israelis.

Gesher is supporting twenty new Mirkam communities that are revitalizing community life. These urban and rural communities are devoted to building a bridge between the different types of Jews living in Israel today and to create close-knit communities. These communities may be the pathfinders for a new way of life, which suits our very complicated and uniquely Israeli society.

The long term effects of Gesher's Encounter Seminars are surfacing! **Several of the volunteer community leaders from the mixed community of Mazkeret Batya were participants in Gesher Encounter Seminars over 15 years ago!**

The program has joined together 20 communities of secular and religious Israelis throughout Israel to create a network of mixed communities that share the challenges of everyday life and learn from each other's experience. Gesher is providing these communities with programs and resources to develop the tools that will create a new vision of full communal life in Israel.

Last year, through the Amitim/Fellows program, Gesher provided the tools of "everyday life management" to a select group of 15 community volunteers and activists. Topics ranged from "how to operate joint schools and community Shabbat events" to "how to celebrate life-cycle milestones together." This program was also a chance for the committed individuals who have chosen to live together to share with each other their concerns, experiences and suggestions for navigating this brave new world.



Gesher also organized the first sold-out National Conference in the summer attended by secular and religious Israelis from 15 mixed communities.

## Mass Media Initiatives

### Gesher Multicultural Film Fund:

Television and film are among the most popular and most important communication media worldwide. As a way to advance our goals to the widest range of Israel's population Gesher has chosen this medium for some of our newest projects. The Gesher Multicultural Film Fund (GMFF) encourages the production of films and television programs that reflect the diversity of Israeli culture and correct the stereotypical images of minority segments of society. The fund provides grants and editorial guidance to veteran film-makers, and scholarships and training for promising young scriptwriters, producers, and directors emerging from minority segments of the population.



Though less than a decade in existence the 150 GMFF supported films, television series and documentaries have helped break down stereotypes and have raised issues of Jewish identity while achieving considerable national and international success as well.

### Jerusalem Brew



This year the Film Fund supported two acclaimed, award-winning series on Israel television: the much anticipated second season of "Avoda Aravit" ("Arab Labour") and "Jerusalem Brew" now in its third season which is one of the top-rated television shows in Israeli history.

Our experience with the development of "Arab Labour" – the first sitcom featuring mainly Arab characters speaking in Arabic on prime time TV in Israel and Jerusalem Brew - which gave a far more nuanced view of Orthodox Jews than had previously been seen on Israeli TV screens - has now led us to look for creative ways to include even more marginal voices in the Israeli media landscape.

In development over this past year are two new drama series: "Addis", the first Israel drama series featuring an Ethiopian-Israeli family, and a drama series that takes place among the "ex-pat" Israeli community in far-away Kathmandu.

## From Mikranet to Ynet.

Gesher's mass media initiatives began twenty-five years ago with its award-winning Chanukah animated special, "Lights," which continues to broadcast annually during the winter holiday season and is an all-time favourite among children and adults as well. It features the voice of Jewish actor Leonard Nimoy, "Dr. Spock" of Star Trek fame, and of other famous Jewish actors. Gesher was also one of the first Jewish organizations to realize the learning potential of the digital media, developing Mikranet - a rich online resource for the teaching of Bible in Israeli schools.



**Mikranet Bible Teaching Portal**

In development this year is a ground-breaking animated Parshat Hashavua (Bible-portion of the week) which will be featured on the front page of Y-Net, Israel's top news portal, as well as receive top billing on Mikranet. **The Y-Net collaboration is a direct result of the editor's participation in the Beit Midrash for Media.** In the animations, two novice angels are charged with re-examining the Bible for present day applications. On-line viewers will get a look at their attempts to grapple with the weekly Torah portion every weekend.



**Two of the Stars of Gesher's new Weekly Portion of the Bible Cartoon**

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 IDF Officer Training Program Participants - 2010

Field Unit	Number of Officer Cadets 2010	Date
Paratroopers, Golani Givati, Nahal Engineering Corps, Anti-aircraft, Armoured Corps, Anti-artillery, Navy, Border Guard	270	Jan 18+20
Paratroopers, Golani Givati, Nahal Engineering Corps, Anti-aircraft, Armoured Corps, Anti-artillery, Navy, Border Guard	270	Feb 8 +10
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Adjutancy Corps, Military Police, Education, General Service Corps, Ordnance corps, Logistics	270	March 8+10
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Adjutancy Corps, Military Police, Education, General Service Corps, Ordnance corps, Logistics	370	March 15+17
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Adjutancy Corps, Ordnance Corps	360	March 22+24
Paratroopers, Golani Givati, Nahal , Shimshon, Engineering Corps, Anti-Aircraft, Armoured Corps, Anti-Artillery, Navy	270	May 24+26
Paratroopers, Golani Givati, Nahal , Shimshon, Engineering Corps, Anti-Aircraft, Armoured Corps, Anti-Artillery, Navy	270	June 7+9
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Adjutancy Corps, Military Police, Education, General Service Corps, Ordnance Corps, Logistics	370	June 14+16
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Adjutancy Corps, Ordnance Corps	400	June 28+30
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Adjutancy Corps, Ordnance Corps Military Police	370	July 5+7
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Military Police, Education, Air Force, Ordnance Corps	370	Aug 30+ Sep 1
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Military Police, Education, Air Force, Ordnance Corps	370	Sep 13+15
Paratroopers, Golani Givati, Nahal , Shimshon, Engineering Corps, Anti-Aircraft, Armoured Corps, Anti-Artillery, Navy	270	Oct 4+6
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Military Police, Education, Air Force, Ordnance Corps	360	Oct 11+13
Paratroopers, Golani Givati, Nahal , Shimshon, Engineering Corps, Anti-Aircraft, Armoured Corps, Anti-Artillery, Navy	270	Oct 18+20
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Adjutancy Corps, Military Police, Education, General Service Corps, Ordnance Corps, Logistics	370	Dec 13+15
Intelligence Corps, Logistics Communications, Medical Corps, Adjutancy Corps, Military Police, Education, General Service Corps, Ordnance Corps, Logistics	360	Dec 27+29
	5,590	Total 2010