Atara Eis ’99 Directing First U.S.-Based Yoatzot Halacha Program

The inaugural class of five U.S.-trained yoatzot halacha — women who provide guidance and information on issues of health, family purity and other halachic areas — graduated earlier this month in Manhattan. For Atara (Sendor) Eis ’99, the ceremonies were “a wonderful culmination to a labor of love.” Atara is director of the U.S. Yoatzot Halacha Fellows Program of Nishmat, the Center for Women’s Advanced Torah Studies in Jerusalem.

“I have spoken to hundreds of women, many of whom had never felt comfortable asking a question in this realm before, and many of whom had been erring in silence for years, which has taken a toll on their marriages and sometimes on their fertility,” she said. “Being a yoetzet halacha has allowed me to do this in a most delicate area of halacha, where it is most natural to turn to a fellow woman.”

Atara, who made aliya to Efrat last summer, was certified as a yoetzet halacha at Nishmat in 2007. The program she directs requires two academic years of part-time and three summers of full-time study. “Fellows take periodic written exams, study Nishmat’s unique supplementary curriculum of gynecology, fertility, sexuality, family dynamics, and psychology, and at the end travel to Israel to be orally tested by four widely accepted rabbis.”

“Our graduates are poised to make a deep impact upon Jewish life, by strengthening religious observance, finding halachic solutions to problems that can mar couples’ lives, assisting with fertility issues and helping bring Jewish babies into the world.”

After graduating, Atara and her family moved to the Philadelphia area, where she taught at Kohelet Yeshiva High School and served as a yoetzet halacha in her community and at various shuls in New York. The situation “was far from ideal because of the distance, but there were not enough yoatzot halacha to reach Manhattan, so I worked from two hours away,” Atara explained. She added that, in their travels, she and her colleagues heard yearnings in various communities for yoatzot halacha.

Atara said she responded by proposing that Nishmat develop a U.S.-based program. “The few of us who studied in Israel and came to the U.S. mainly had plans to return to Israel. If we really wanted to have enough yoatzot halacha to serve the community, we needed a U.S.-based program. That’s how the program was born, and that’s how I was asked to direct the program.”

Atara said Stephanie Samuels was the Maimonides teacher “who introduced us to the way in which the laws of family life can enrich a marriage, so she deserves credit for my career choice. Receiving an unbeatable education in Talmud and halacha paved the way for me to be able to study Talmud and halacha in midrasha and college, in Stern College’s Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies and Nishmat.”

“At Maimonides I also received an understanding of the beauty of our Mesorah and the sanctity of the halachic process, and the way in which healthy evolutionary changes within the Mesorah come slowly and only through consensus, and that the purpose of change is to preserve our core values,” she said. “The natural outcome of such an education for me was the desire to serve our community in a meaningful way, to be able to transmit our Mesorah and encourage people to live inspired lives.”

Nishmat’s approach toward women’s learning “dovetails perfectly with what my teachers at Maimonides taught me,” Atara emphasized, “as it has created a program which is widely accepted by mainstream Orthodox rabbis both in Israel and the United States, and which allows women to be an active and crucial voice within the halachic system.”
Graduate Says Teachers Launched Him Toward Building a Better World

**Barry Lowenkron ’69** reflects that, as a high school student from Dorchester, Maimonides “gave me the best combination. Social studies teacher Bertram Gerry instilled in me a love for history. And Rabbi Isaiah Wohlgemuth gave me *chesed*, and a real understanding of Judaism in the wider world.”

“I have carried what I got from those two with me my whole life,” said Barry, who for more than six years has helped improve countless lives throughout the world as vice president of international programs for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

You’ve probably heard of the foundation, which awards millions of dollars in grants each year “to build a more just, verdant and peaceful world.” The international program is one of four MacArthur divisions; in 2012 it sponsored more than $76 million in grants. MacArthur does not take funding from governments. “We work with organizations like Conservation International, Human Rights Watch, and others for the betterment of the human condition,” Barry explained.

Barry oversees five subdivisions: Human Rights and International Justice; Population and Reproductive Health; Conservation and Sustainable Development; International Peace and Security; and Migration. The foundation is based in Chicago. In addition, Barry is responsible for offices in India, Mexico, Nigeria and Russia.

His conversation — not surprisingly — is replete with accounts of how the foundation can make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities. “We could take parts of our budget and scatter them to hundreds of organizations,” Barry acknowledged. “But there has to be a strategy…Take the issue of maternal health in India and Nigeria. What are the interventions we can do to prevent maternal deaths? How do we get expectant mothers the help that they need? It’s my responsibility to help see that we recruit the best organizations on the ground, forge the most effective partnerships with others, and align our work with government efforts for maximum impact. During one of my trips to India I found myself sitting under a tree in a village in Rajasthan engaging in a lively discussion with 40 midwives. Our work has to link directly to what they are trying to do on the ground.”

Inherent in his mission is a glass-half-full attitude, something that also came in handy during his years in government. “The biggest problem I face in the foundation is a sense of what can one organization do in the face of so many global challenges; in government it’s how to contend with crowded agendas and on the world stage with indifference, if not outright cynicism. The half-full attitude is especially important in the area of human rights. We have to be optimists and get what we can and then build from there.”

Barry’s career at MacArthur is built on a strong base of public service. His more than 30 years of experience in government included assignments on the White House National Security Council Staff and 10 years at the Department of State, including serving under Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. He was confirmed by the Senate in 2005 as Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

At State, “I worked very hard to assist human rights defenders globally, to help individuals often fighting alone or in small numbers just to keep the human rights light on…Governments not happy about the press for fundamental freedoms since the end of the Cold War are pushing back and we need to protect civil society.” He carried other principles experienced at that level of government to his work with the foundation, including “Change can start with one individual” and “All it takes is a spark, an idea, and a determination never to let go.”

“I used to remind my staff at the State Department that after a long hard day we get to go home to loved ones, to shelter, to food — to fundamental security. There are people around the globe who don’t have any of that. So, get your rest and get back tomorrow refreshed and ready.”

Barry is an alumnus of Northeastern University and earned his graduate...
The Ultimate Goal Is Grass-Roots Economic Justice for 1993 Alumnus

Jeremy Thompson ’93 is a researcher, analyst and organizer who is spending a career working on behalf of people seeking economic justice. He has helped advocate for state transportation finance reform, organized on behalf of laborers near the bottom of the pay scale, and worked to give Boston residents access to construction careers.

He acknowledged that “you lose more than you win. But it’s as much about winning as about organizing. If you lose, but organize hundreds of people around an important issue, that gets them ready for the next fight.”

Jeremy said he considered journalism as a career in 1993 while serving as a Maimonides Project Shalom sports-writing intern with The Jewish Advocate. During his undergraduate years at Emerson College, “I decided I wanted to get on a public policy track.”

His first job was as a data analyst and client consultant with Associates for International Research, which researches consumer prices around the world so multinational corporations can pay their expatriate employees accurate cost-of-living adjustments. This work sent him to places like Kazakhstan and Papua New Guinea. He went on to earn a master's degree in urban planning and policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago, returning to Boston in 2007.

“For the past several years my main focus has been on community and labor,” Jeremy said. That included work as a senior researcher for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1199, representing hundreds of thousands of health care workers on the East Coast.

“As part of that work, I was research and policy coordinator for MassUniting, a coalition of union locals, community groups and faith-based organizations that essentially sought to organize people around issues of economic justice.” These included foreclosures, public transit fare hikes and service cuts, Medicaid cuts and “justice from the banks.” Tactics included not only organizing and policy proposals but also “being thrown out of State Street Bank’s annual shareholders meetings and protesting in the streets every week.”

“Through that I developed relations with a number of community groups, mainly focused on low income people of color,” Jeremy continued. “The issues were different but the class profile was roughly the same.”

Last year he launched the Economic Justice Research Hub, which conducts strategic research, data analysis and policy development for labor and community organizations.

“Recently I co-authored a paper that has gotten more attention than anything I’ve done,” Jeremy reported. “It looks at the disproportionate reliance of fast-food workers on public aid programs.” Working over a five-month period with academics in California and Illinois, Jeremy gathered and analyzed data.

“These massive companies pay their employees barely above minimum wage,” he said, and “the way they survive is by turning to the taxpayer. More than half nationally receive some form of public assistance (the figure in Massachusetts is 46 percent). “These are what we consider to be employer subsidies.”

Jeremy is now back with SEIU, organizing adjunct professors at various area campuses. “The next fight is to negotiate contracts that move us toward benefits.” Universities that pay top teachers six-figure salaries and their part-time instructors near-poverty wages are being inconsistent, he said. “It comes down to a question of values.”

Also over the past year Jeremy has been working with a coalition of labor unions, city councilors, bureaucrats and other organizations to reinvigorate the Boston Residents Jobs Policy. Originally intended to ensure that public and private construction projects in Boston employed city residents, people of color and women, he said targets haven’t been met or enforced in recent years.

Jeremy lives in Jamaica Plain with his wife and their two children. He is a visiting scholar at the Labor Resource Center at the University of Massachusetts-Boston.

“It’s a pretty grim reality that I face every day,” he said. “But it has been great to be able to move into a career where now I’m doing something to make a difference. I’ve always been kind of frustrated about the world; I remember sitting in Saval Auditorium reading the Boston Phoenix when they covered issues that didn’t get covered elsewhere, and saying, ‘I wish there was something I could do’.”

Jeremy Thompson ’93 and his wife Liliana Ibara picking apples with Milo and Iris.
A Roundup of Alumni Achievements, and Charitable Causes…

Rabbi Daniel (Tzvi Moshe) Schultz ’94 recently completed his first sefer, Mashal Tov, a collection of parables on the weekly parashah. “When I first started out in my chinuch career, I had the opportunity to observe classes at Yeshiva Tifereth Moshe, in Queens,” Daniel said. “I met a terrific rebbe named Rabbi Shaya Greenberger, who composed unique meshalim. The stories were funny, the nimshalim were deep ideas, and the students all loved them. When I started teaching my own class, I repeated his meshalim, and my students loved them, too.” Five years ago, he said, he decided to share them with a general audience, “and now the sefer is completed. This is a great sefer to share with your children at the Shabbos table, to keep them engaged, and to help generate great discussions. I’d love to hear your feedback (tzvimoshe@hotmail.com).” The book, published by Feldheim, is available at http://www.feldheim.com/mashal-tov.html.

Several alumni were on hand on Oct. 6 as Rabbi Asher Lopatin ’82 was installed as president of Yeshiva Chovevei Torah in Riverdale, NY. The guests included classmates Deborah (Levisohn) Stanhill and Yonina Siegel, as well as Dr. Stephen Bayme ’67, Bill Feld ’84, Rabbi Max Davis ’99, Rabbi David Green ’00, Yael (Kletter) Keller ’02 and Avishai Gebler ’04. In his remarks, Rabbi Lopatin, who was Maimonides School’s first Rhodes Scholar, thanked his classmate Rabbi Fred Hyman for originally suggesting that he pursue the rabbinate as a career.

Alex Klibaner ’91 has been named one of the first 18 Chai in the Hub honorees, sponsored by Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston. Alex, father of fifth-grader Ellie and first-grader Jessica Klibaner-Schiff, will be among those recognized at a CJP event for donors ages 22-45 on Nov. 16 at the Hyatt Regency Boston. Alex, chair and charter member of the Maimonides Alumni Steering Committee, is also an officer of the Jewish Community Relations Council and chairs its Public Policy Committee. He serves as an assistant attorney general in the Insurance and Financial Services Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office.

Ethan Merlin ’98, a middle school math teacher at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC, wrote an article entitled “Teaching Structure in Algebra” in the November issue of Mathematics Teacher magazine. Ethan was a leader of the math team in high school, recording several perfect scores in league competition.

Fiona Guedalia ’08 has started a small photography business focusing on small scale events and personal head shots. Fiona, who graduated from Stern College for Women in January, said she mainly enjoys her art photography. She has built a photography website (www.fionagphotography.com) that showcases her work.

At Stern Fiona’s photos often were featured in school exhibits and the literary magazines. She is also working at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee as a board relations assistant.

Building a Better World
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degree from the Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies. That is where he taught as an adjunct for 25 years and where his fellow Maimonides graduate, former State Department colleague and good friend Elliot Cohen ’73 is a professor and heads the strategic studies program.

In 1989 he and Eliot ran into each other at the Pentagon where Barry had gone to a meeting representing his boss, Gen. Powell, and Eliot had gone representing his boss, Undersecretary Paul Wolfowitz. “One of my happy memories from my Washington days was walking down the hall from my office in the Human Rights bureau to pop into Eliot’s office.” A long journey from Philbrick Road!
All Hearts in Boston as Alumni Relish a Baseball Championship

(Clockwise, from top, left): Binyamin ‘00 and Rachel Berkovits hosted a gathering in Riverdale for classmates and others to watch the first game of the World Series: (rear, from left) Noah Liben ‘00, Shai, Rachel and Binyamin; (front, from left) Avi Pultman ‘00 (and baby daughter Jessica), Sol ‘00 and Rachel Redlich, Amy and Dovid Green ‘00 and Chanan Berkovits ‘03. Enjoying the Red Sox success from her seat in Busch Stadium during Game 4 of the World Series is Elizabeth (EB Solomont) Levy ‘97, who resides in St. Louis. Beaming during the post-game celebration after Game 6 on Yawkey Way in Boston are (from left) Elisha Blechner ‘96 of Scarsdale, and his brothers-in-law and father-in-law, Adam Dalezman ‘02 of Manhattan, Allen Dalezman of Newton (a member of the Maimonides Board of Trustees) and Michael Dalezman of Skokie. Inside Fenway Park during Game 6, Mark Levenson ‘74 of West Orange, NJ poses with retired Red Sox catcher Jerry Moses, who was seated in the row behind him.