

המרכז העולמי של בני ברית - ירושלים



B'nai B'rith World Center - Jerusalem

## B'nai B'rith World Center Jerusalem

### Center Stage: Spring 2020/5780

A periodic newsletter from the  
B'nai B'rith World Center – Jerusalem  
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## Israel's Premier Performer Yehoram Gaon Receives Special B'nai B'rith World Center Citation for Fostering Israel-Diaspora Relations Through the Arts

Singer, actor and Israel Prize laureate for Hebrew Song for 2004 Yehoram Gaon received the B'nai B'rith World Center's Special Citation for Fostering Israel-Diaspora Relations through the Arts at a conference held at Bar Ilan University on March 5 in honor of his late father, legendary historian of the Sephardi Jewish community in the Land of Israel, Moshe David Gaon.



*Left to Right: B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem Director Alan Schneider, Yehoram Gaon and Dr. Shimon Ohayon, Director, Dahan Center, Bar Ilan University*

Addressing the conference, B'nai B'rith World Center Director Alan Schneider said that the occasion was a fitting one since the B'nai B'rith Jerusalem Lodge – established in 1888 in Jerusalem – was the first institution in which Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews collaborated to advance the interests of the Jewish community in Ottoman-era Palestine. He added that the history of the Jerusalem Lodge and the Sephardi community in Eretz Israel were intertwined and that some of its most prominent sons were members of the Jerusalem Lodge and other early lodges.

Hebrew was set as the language of the lodge meetings because it was the only common language of its Ashkenazi and Sephardi members, and members of the Lodge went on dangerous, clandestine missions across the Levant, establishing B'nai B'rith lodges in Damascus, Alexandria, Beirut, Plovdiv, Izmir, Constantinople and elsewhere in order to awaken those communities to support the establishment of a Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel.

Schneider also noted that the elder Gaon's career included a four-year stint as the first teacher in Motsa – founded by the B'nai B'rith Jerusalem Lodge as the first Jewish settlement established in the modern era. He added that like the history of the Sephardi community in Eretz Israel which is not known by the general public in Israel – a fact decried by many speakers at the conference - so too are the major contributions by B'nai B'rith to the establishment of the “state in the waiting.”

The Special Citation - initially set to be presented last July at the 27th annual B'nai B'rith World Center Award for Journalism ceremony – was postponed due to Gaon's last-minute illness. Established in 2014, the citation has been presented in the past singer/songwriters Nurit Hersh, David D'Or, Idan Raichel and David Broza. Yehoram Gaon is an iconic Israeli singer, actor, producer, TV and radio host and public figure.

Throughout a career that has spanned six decades, Gaon has been responsible for countless hit songs, plays and movies that have become woven into the common culture of Israel and Diaspora Jewry. Gaon has taken profound interest in promoting Jewish historical themes and in engaging with Jewish audiences around the world. His civic career also shows a profound dedication to Sephardic and Ladino heritage.

B'nai B'rith World Center Chairman Haim Katz said that the citation is a fitting recognition to mark Gaon's 80th birthday.

## **B'nai B'rith Represented at World Holocaust Forum**

B'nai B'rith World Center Director Alan Schneider represented B'nai B'rith at the fifth World Holocaust Forum 2020: “Remembering the Holocaust; Fighting Antisemitism” that convened at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem on January 23. The unprecedented event brought together some 50 members of a foreign delegation, headed by kings, princes,

presidents and prime ministers. The gathering marked 75 years since the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp.

Featured presentations were made by Israel president Reuven Rivlin, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Russian President Vladimir Putin, US Vice President Mike Pence, Prince Charles of England, President Emmanuel Macron of France and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

President Rivlin said that the State of Israel is not a compensation for the Holocaust but that it is the home of the Jewish people to which it returned. PM Netanyahu vowed that the Jewish People would not suffer another Holocaust and drew comparisons between the condition of Jews during the Holocaust (“Auschwitz”) and today (“Jerusalem”): “from bones to independence, from independence to strength”, and called on all states to join the fight against Iran.

President Putin noted that “the memory of the War falls prey to short term political considerations; we all bear to preserve world peace; such a meeting would be an apt way to mark 75 years since the defeat of Nazi Germany and the creation of the UN.”

Vice President Pence called on the nations of the world to stand strong against the main state purveyor of anti-Semitism today – the Islamic Republic of Iran. “We must have the courage to recognize that today we have the responsibility and power to ensure that what we remember at this gathering can never happen again...We remember the triumph of freedom; a people restored to their rightful place among the nations.”



*Vice President Mike Pence at the podium*

President Macron said that the lesson of the Holocaust was that Europe must stay united to face adversity together; international law was trampled upon by the Nazis and today we must insist on the respect of law and human dignity. Using Hebrew terminology, Prince Charles said that we must never forget that every human being is created in the image of God and that each is an entire world. “The universal tragedy of the Holocaust would be compounded if we do not remember and recommit ourselves” he said.

President Steinmeier accepted the responsibility of Germany for the Holocaust saying, “I stand before you, 75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, laden with the heavy burden of guilt. At the same time, I feel gratitude for the outstretched hand of survivors and for the trust of the state of Israel and the flourishing Jewish community in Germany today. None of these can be taken for granted. Germany's responsibility does not expire.”

Schneider also participated in two other events on the sidelines of the Forum: the presentation of an honorary doctorate to the President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades and a reception for Georgian president Salome Zourabichvili.

## **B’nai B’rith Represented at JAFI Board and WZO Expanded Executive Meetings**

B’nai B’rith World Center director Alan Schneider represented B’nai B’rith at meetings of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization’s Expanded Executive in Tel Aviv on February 25-27.

The BOG passed a new Vision and Mission under which the Jewish Agency will strive for a “secure, diverse and thriving Jewish People, united by our heritage and by our commitment to Israel, the homeland of the Jewish People and all of its citizens” and will “provide the global framework for Aliya, ensure global Jewish safety, strengthen Jewish identity and connect Jews to Israel and one another, and convey the voice of the Jewish People to the State of Israel to help shape its society.”

Details of the revised program and budget that envisions concentrating the Agency’s activities on four main “Impact Areas” – Aliya, Ensuring Global Jewish safety, connecting Jews worldwide to one another and to Israel, advocacy and impact on Israeli society on behalf of world Jewish, while terminating the Agency’s activities in other areas, some of which it has been involved in since its founding 90 years ago - will be hashed out for approval at the Board’s next meeting in November.

The WZO Expanded Executive meeting focused on departmental committee reviews and preparations for the Zionist Congress that will take place on October 20-22, in Jerusalem.

## B'nai B'rith Fetes Holocaust-Era Chief Rabbi of Athens

The B'nai B'rith World Center presented its “Jewish Rescuers Citation” – a joint project with the Committee to Recognize the Heroism of Jewish Rescuers during the Holocaust – to the grandchildren of Rabbi Eliyahu Pinchas Barzilai, Holocaust-era chief rabbi of Athens. The citation was presented at the annual memorial ceremony for Rabbi Barzilai held at the Beit Shalom synagogue in Athens on February 23 with the participation of representatives of the Greek government, the Jewish community, the press, the B'nai B'rith Philon Lodge and the Israel-Hellenic Forum, founded in November by the World Center.

The event was organized this year in conjunction with the B'nai B'rith Philon Lodge. Speakers included H. Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, Rabbi of Athens, Philon Lodge President Victor Batis, Dr. Efstathios Lantis, Special Secretary for Religious and Cultural Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Alberto Tarabolos, President, Jewish Community of Athens, Mrs. Lilian Kapon, and Nissim Benmayor, grandson of Rabbi Barzilai.



*Left to Right: Alan Schneider, Millie Magid, Dan Mariaschin and Larry Magid*

In his speech, World Center director Alan Schneider noted that Rabbi Barzilai took courageous actions to foil the German intention to arrest, despoil, deport and murder the Jews of Athens, as they were engaged in doing to the Jews all over Greece. On September 21, 1943 - at great personal risk - Rabbi Barzilai succeeded in denying the Germans access to the Jewish community membership lists. He faced down and outwitted SS Captain Dieter Wisliceny who ordered him to produce a list of all Jews in the city including their addresses and assets.

Instead, Rabbi Barzilai burned the community's new membership rolls (the old ones had been destroyed in an ESPO attack on the Jewish community's office in July 1942). He also convened a meeting of all Jews at the synagogue, during which he urged them to abandon their homes immediately and secretly get as far away as possible; those who

did not attend the meeting received a telephone call from the Rabbi who encouraged them, using coded metaphor, to leave the city for the mountains.

Rather than compiling a new list as he had promised the German he would, the Rabbi went from the Gestapo headquarters directly to Archbishop Damaskinos (who was recognized posthumously as Righteous Among the Nations for his many courageous actions to rescue Jews) and to Prime Minister Ioannis Rallis to ask for their assistance. He also appealed to the Resistance and as a result of his intervention the National Liberation Front undertook to help those Jews who would flee to the mountains. His “kidnapping” was orchestrated on September 22, giving the signal to the Jewish of Athens to flee.

Through his actions and those of many courageous Christians, 66% of Jews living then in Athens, including thousands who had fled from Thessaloniki and other regions, survived, whereas some 80% of all Greek Jewry perished. Schneider ended his presentation expressing the belief that Rabbi Barzilai would have been proud of the progress made in Israel-Greek relations, including the establishment of the Israel-Hellenic Forum, and would have seen in it a continuation of his own legacy of friendship, mutual respect and identification with the Greek people, exemplified by joint efforts to rescue persecuted Jews.

Earlier in the day, Schneider participated in a special tour of the Jewish Museum of Athens for members of the Israel-Hellenic Forum, organized by the B'nai B'rith Philon Lodge and led by museum curator, archaeologist Anastasia Loudarou. While in Athens, Schneider also met with MP Dr Dimitris Keridis, chairman of the Greece-Israel Friendship Committee in Greece's parliament and professor of International Relations at Panteion University, to discuss developments in the eastern Mediterranean and plans for the next meeting of the Israel-Hellenic Forum, planned for Athens.

## **B'nai B'rith Attends Annual CoP Israel Mission**

B'nai B'rith International was well represented at the annual Israel Mission conducted by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Organizations in Jerusalem on February 16-21. Highlights of the intensive program included speeches by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Reuven Rivlin, Knesset speaker Yuli Edelstein, Jewish Agency Chairman Issac Herzog, Diaspora Minister Tzipi Hotovely, Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion, Meretz Chairman MK Nitzan Horowitz, Opposition head Lt. Gen.

(Res.) MK Benjamin “Benny” Gantz, US Ambassador David Friedman, MFA Director General Yuval Rotem and US Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Elan Carr (in order of appearance). The group also visited the headquarters of Mobileye in Jerusalem’s Har Hotzvim Hi-Tech Park and the Western Wall Tunnels and travelled to Israel’s border with Lebanon where they visited an infiltration tunnel dug into Israel by the Hezbollah Lebanese Iranian proxy terrorist organization that was discovered and decommissioned by the IDF last year.

Other speakers included Hon. Marion Bucaro and Hon. Lasha Zhvania, the ambassadors of Guatemala and Georgia, respectively, to Israel, Lt. Col Jonathan Conricus, IDF International Spokesman, Brig. Gen. Shlomi Binder, Commander, 91st IDF Division and Maj. Gen. Tamir Heyman, Head of Military Intelligence. Other sessions of the mission program included expert panels on the seismic changes in the region and prospects for peace, on the changing landscape of higher education in Israel, on the threat of advanced missiles on Israel, on trends in Israel-Diaspora relations and on the challenges and responses to global antisemitism.



*Dan Mariaschin speaking at the Conference of Presidents annual mission in Israel*

B’nai B’rith was represented by CEO Daniel Mariaschin, CHRPP Chair Millie Magid and Larry Magid and World Center Director Alan Schneider. Also participating were honorary B’nai B’rith Presidents Seymour Reich and Richard Heideman and Phyllis Heideman.

## **International Conference in Kigali, Rwanda**

Marking 75 years since the end of the Holocaust and 25 years since the Rwanda massacre during which three quarters of the Tutsi tribe in Rwanda was murdered – B’nai B’rith held an international conference in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, entitled: "Incitement and Dehumanization as Precursors to Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity." The conference was held with the support of the new Israeli embassy in Rwanda and in cooperation with Aegis Trust that operates the Kigali Genocide Memorial.

The World Center initiated the conference and organized the program together with David Michaels, BBI Director for UN and Inter-communal and the Aegis Trust team. Six experts from Israel participated in the conference along with Rwandan government officials, academics and local activists. The conference was aimed at deepening the relationship between Israel and Rwanda in particular, and between Israel and Africa in general.



*At the international conference in Kigali*

Participants in the conference included Rwandan Chief Justice Dr. Faustin Ntezilyayo, Minister of Justice and General Prosecutor Johnston Busingye, President of the Genocide Survivors Association Prof. Jean Pierre Dusingizemungu, Israel Ambassador in Rwanda Ron Adam, US Ambassador in Rwanda Peter Vroman and Executive Secretary of the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide Dr Jean Damascène Bizimana.



The Israeli delegation included Mr. Itamar Marcus, Director of Palestinian Media Watch, Rabbi Seth Mendel, founder and President of "Kobi Foundation", Dr. Charles Small, founder and President of the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Senior Researcher at the Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, Dr. Naftali Halberstadt, Academic Director at Y.N.R Center and Dr. Ronnie Stauber, Academic Director of the Wiener Library for the Study of the Nazi Era and the Holocaust at Tel Aviv University.

French intellectual Bernard Henry-Levi, former Canadian Minister of Justice and General Attorney Prof. Irwin Cotler and former Chief Rabbi of Britain Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks delivered video lectures.

Following the conference, discussions ensued regarding future Israel-led humanitarian activities in Rwanda in cooperation with Aegis Trust.



## B'nai B'rith Advocates on Israel-Africa Ties

Following the international conference in Kigali, World Center Director Alan Schneider and BBI Director of United Nations and Intercommunal Affairs David Michaels traveled to Uganda, Zambia and Ethiopia to advocate for closer Israel-Africa relations.



*Alan Schneider and David Michaels at the conference in Kigali*

They met with Ugandan Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda, Zambian Foreign Minister Joseph Malanji and Minister for Presidential Affairs Freedom Chomba Sikazwe, and with Ethiopian Foreign Ministry officials including Birhanu Gibiril, Acting Director-General for Middle East Affairs and Endaweke Tesfaye, Acting Director-General for Public Diplomacy Affairs.

Issues raised included ensuring equality for Israel in multilateral organizations such as the U.N. and the African Union – which just concluded its annual high-level summit that provided a public platform for Palestinian, but not Israeli, leaders. They also met with Abune Mathias, Patriarch and Catholicos of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, with prominent Christian Zionists and members of the parliamentary pro-Israel caucus in Zambia, and with key journalists, local rabbis and ranking American and Israeli diplomats. Schneider and Michaels also held discussions with senior Rwandan officials.



Speakers and organizers of the conference with Rwandan Minister of Justice Johnston Busingye (center)



*Left to Right: Alan Schneider, Patriarch Abune Mathias, Abune Aregawi, Director of International Relations for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and David Michaels*

## Biennial Jewish-Greek Leadership Mission



*Mission participants with Reuven Azar*

The fourth biennial Jewish-Greek Leadership Mission to Israel, Cyprus and Greece, led jointly by B'nai B'rith International, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the American Hellenic Institute and the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, took place in January. The 22-member delegation included heads of the four diaspora organizations, among them B'nai B'rith International President Charles Kaufman and CEO Daniel Mariaschin.

The Israel leg of the mission, that launched the trip on January 11-13, was organized by the World Center. The delegation continued to Cyprus and Greece for a series of meetings with government and military officials. The delegation met with Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Reuven Azar, deputy head of National Security Council and Political Adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, among others. They also toured the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem and visited a special army forces base in Greece. The purpose of the missions is to deepen relations between the Jewish and Greek diasporas in the US

and advocate for even stronger cooperation between Israel, Cyprus, Greece and the US for promoting stability and peace in the volatile Eastern Mediterranean.

## **International Holocaust Remembrance Day Commemoration at the Balai Quezon in Israel**



*Left to Right: Alan Schneider, Robert Rockaway, Amb. Imperial, Max Weissler, Amb. of Australia to Israel Chris Cannan and Amb. of Sri Lanka to Israel Waruna Wilpatha*

The B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem teamed up with the Philippine Embassy to hold an event on January 27 - International Holocaust Remembrance Day - entitled "Safe Haven: Jewish Refugees in the Philippines". The event spotlighted the "Open Door" policy pursued by Holocaust-era Philippines president Manuel Quezon and was held at the Balai Quezon – Quezon House – at the Philippines embassy in Tel Aviv.

At the event – attended by members of the Southeast Asian diplomatic corps in Israel, among others - B'nai B'rith World Center director Alan Schneider said: "The 'Open Door'

policy was pursued by President Quezon out of a deep sense of outrage at the violence and dispossession visited upon German Jews from the moment the Nazis came to power – until it was stopped by the outbreak of WWII. He did so with determination and in the face of voices in the U.S. administration and in his own government that objected to the large-scale immigration Quezon envisioned. For this we honor him today.”

One of the Jews who found refuge in the Philippines and who now lives in Israel, Max Weissler, attended the event.

Ambassador Neal Imperial delivered opening remarks: “Each person that managed to reach Manila was a life saved, a life allowed to reach its full potential, a life continued through the next generations. Quezon offered a new home and hope to 1,300 refugees, who went on to marry and have children and grandchildren. That is the true weight and worth of Quezon, US High Commissioner to the Philippines Paul McNutt’s and the Jewish network in Manila’s legacy.”

The ambassador quoted Quezon’s speech before the Jewish refugees at the inauguration of Marikina Hall, the Jewish shelter he had built on 7.5 acres of land he personally donated: “It is my hope, and indeed my expectation, that the people of the Philippines will have in the future every reason to be glad that when the time of need came, their country was willing to extend a hand of welcome.”

The event featured a panel discussion with Imperial and Professor Robert Rockaway of Tel Aviv University, as well as screenings of excerpts from two films about the refugee policy, “The Last Manilaners” and “Quezon’s Game.”

At the initiative of the World Center, B’nai B’rith International and the Philippine Permanent Mission to the United Nations, in cooperation with the U.S.-Philippines Society, held a joint Holocaust commemoration event at the UN focused on the “Open Door” policy, in tandem with the event at Balai Quezon.

## **Media Coverage**

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- <https://kib.co.il/הנצחת-זכר-יום-השואה-הבינלאומי-בבית-קוי/>
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- <http://www.jewishtraveler.co.il/philippine-holocaust-day-2020/>
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