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OF GREATER METROWEST NJ

## WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY

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### Pursuing Social Justice

by Laura Dorf Queller, Vice President, Communications and Marketing

The commandment from Deuteronomy, “Justice, justice shall you pursue,” appeared on the flyer announcing the Women’s Philanthropy Civil Rights Journey. This four-day mission in March took 42 women from Greater MetroWest to Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma to explore Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in America. Along the way, women learned about the injustices that African Americans strove to overcome in the ‘50s and ‘60s, and were reminded that social justice struggles in the United States and around the world are far from over.

This *Women’s Philanthropy eNewsletter* examines the theme of social justice. I did a Google search for the current-day meaning of the term “social justice” and a variety of explanations appeared. Nearly every definition included words like *fairness* and *equality* and *access to opportunity* for all members of society, including the most vulnerable. This is a fundamental Jewish belief and lies at the core of Jewish Federation’s values.

The ongoing fight for social justice cuts across all religions, ethnicities, nationalities, sexes, and sexual orientations. That’s why the Civil Rights Journey concluded with a visit to the AIDS Memorial Quilt, which serves as a peaceful vehicle for combatting prejudice against the LGBTQ community and for affecting change. It is also why the National Women’s Philanthropy Heart to Heart Mission to Israel this year visited a tahini factory that employs Christian Arab women with disabilities, a group in need of services and a chance for a level playing field. And it is why the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest initiated and supports Project Atzmaut, which helps integrate Ethiopian Jewish families into Israeli society, ensuring that they have the tools necessary to thrive in their new homeland.

The Torah compels us to pursue justice. In Hebrew, this commandment takes the form of three simple words: *Tzedek tzedek tirdof* (Justice, justice shall you pursue). It is a daunting and never-ending task. But through Jewish Federation, we can strive to create a more just world together.

# Sharing Lessons About Social Justice

by Deborah Jacob



Deborah Jacob in Alabama, Women's Philanthropy Civil Rights Journey

I took part in the Women's Philanthropy Civil Rights Journey this past March. This unique mission allowed us to learn and experience what it was like to be involved in the movement back in the '60s. It was an intense and exciting four-day trip to Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma. It was emotional, thought provoking, and fascinating.

One of the themes that stood out for me was the impact that the children had on the Civil Rights Movement. Because of this, I felt that it was extremely important to share my experiences about what I learned. When invited to come speak to my daughter's third-grade class, I jumped at the opportunity.

My daughter attends a public school in Millburn/Short Hills. The children were working on a biography project and several of the students had read about Martin Luther King Jr. and

Rosa Parks. They were a great audience, attentive, curious, and opinionated!

I told the students about the places I visited, the significance of each place, and some of the trip highlights. I read them a story written by Joanne Blackmon Bland who, as a child, had been one of the marchers on the bridge in Selma. I described to the students what it was like to meet Joanne, get a tour around Selma (the town she lived in her entire life), and learn how she was part of a peaceful demonstration that turned violent.



Joanne Blackmon Bland with participants of the Civil Rights Journey

Joanne's is a story of struggle, loss, and triumph. She was a child when Martin Luther King Jr. marched from Selma to Montgomery. Her childhood is filled with stories of inequality, discrimination, segregation, and racism. I think the students identified with Joanne because of the personal nature of her story, and they were outraged by the injustice of her tale.

I talked about Rosa Parks and asked the students to imagine what it would be like to have been on her bus – to think about whether they would have moved seats if asked. I brought up the lunch counter protests and shared with them the experience of sitting at a simulated lunch counter at the Atlanta Center for Civil and Human Rights. I tried to highlight the inhumanity of the segregation laws. Several students were outraged. They were angry and they felt that they would not have been able to remain non-violent.

The students asked great questions and shared their feelings. I asked them to think about what they felt passionate about in their own lives and what they could do to make a difference. I reiterated that it was the children who made a difference at each point in the Civil Rights Movement, and how each of them could make an impact if they choose to do so.

## Striving for Social Justice in Our Community

by Jane Gomez

The Community Relations Committee (CRC) is the public policy and advocacy arm of Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest. The CRC works within the Greater MetroWest area to collaborate, educate, and communicate with members of the broader community on shared interests. In the past, the CRC has focused its energy on responding to issues and events such as the crisis in Darfur, Israel advocacy, human trafficking, and combating hunger and food insecurity. To this end, CRC committee members and professionals meet with elected officials and faith leaders to discuss and advance issues of mutual interest and to create stronger ties between the many diverse communities within New Jersey. Most recently, the CRC has considered how it might work to build alliances and forge relationships for the betterment of our local community.



Jacqueline K. Levine and President and CEO of the NAACP, Cornell William Brooks, at the Civil Rights Journey reunion event

Currently, Linda Scherzer, Director of the CRC, is creating a Task Force to address social justice issues in our community. She explained, “The pillars of CRC are social justice and relationship building.” And she continued by stating, “We [the Jewish people] need to remember our history and our struggle. If we stand in solidarity and be a voice for social justice in our communities, they will be the voice for us.”

The idea for this new Task Force was born out of the Women’s Philanthropy recent Civil Rights Journey that sent women on a mission to Atlanta, Georgia, and the Alabama cities of Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma. Over the course of this trip in March, women learned about the Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights struggle in America. This experience proved to be very inspirational. On her experiences, Lisa Friedman wrote, “My participation in the Civil Rights Mission inspired me to get more interested in the work of our Federation. The women who participated shared a common goal of wanting to learn more about the struggles during this important part of history and the work left for us to do today. I was inspired by their level of passion for helping others and this motivates me to learn more about other possibilities in our Federation community.”

Several weeks after returning from the Civil Rights Journey, many of the women who attended remained eager to build upon the lessons they had gleaned from their trip. In response, Linda Scherzer organized a reunion event with keynote speaker Cornell William Brooks, the president and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the nation’s oldest, largest, and most widely respected grassroots-based civil rights organization.



Jacqueline K. Levine and President and CEO of the NAACP, Cornell William Brooks

On his visit, Brooks told the women, “This is not an indifference moment,” and he prioritized the need to address policies that disproportionately affect minority populations in the community. Brooks outlined a call to action for the Task Force that included supporting voter rights, resisting biased voter registration policies, and supporting criminal justice reform.

The Task Force formed at this meeting is growing. It already has attracted 20 volunteers from the Women’s Philanthropy Civil Rights Journey reunion. If you are interested in joining this Task Force or want to learn more about becoming involved in the CRC, please reach out to Linda Scherzer at (973) 929-3087 or [LScherzer@jfedgmw.org](mailto:LScherzer@jfedgmw.org).

# Working Towards a Shared Society in Israel

by Phyllis Bernstein

Those who know me know about my efforts to create a shared society of Jews and Arabs in Israel. People have asked me why I am involved in this work. It's because the idea of "loving the stranger among us" is mentioned no fewer than 36 times throughout the Torah. These are my Jewish values.

The promise that Israel would be a "light unto the nations" is one of the state's fundamental principles. Through its Global Connections department, Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest is actively working to create a shared society in Israel. I am thrilled to highlight some of Federation's many efforts to achieve social justice within Israel's more challenging communities.

## Ethiopian Integration

Project Atzmaut (Project Independence) in Rishon LeZion was started and continues to be supported by our Federation, and has become a model for similar initiatives throughout Israel. This program integrates Ethiopian Jews into mainstream Israeli society, with a unique focus on helping the whole family assimilate into their new environment — providing assistance for adults to gain employment, education for children, and counseling to help support entire families.



Project Atzmaut, Ethiopian Jews participating in programming

The story of mass Ethiopian Aliyah to Israel is a moving and dramatic one – from Operation Moses, which aided the arrival of almost 8,000 Jews in 1984, to Operation Solomon in 1991, which rescued approximately 14,500 Ethiopian Jews by air. After 30 years, we are still working to ensure that their absorption and integration into the Israeli community is successful.

Our Federation's relationship with Rishon LeZion began years ago. In 1977, Prime Minister Menachem Begin began an urban renewal program throughout Israel's lower-income neighborhoods and cities. At the time, United Jewish Federation of MetroWest was paired with the struggling neighborhood of Ramat Eliyahu, one of the older areas of Rishon LeZion. The *Matnas* (community center) of the new neighborhood of Neve Eliyahu was established in 1978. I have visited this *Matnas* several times and heard much talk about how our Federation played

a major hand in bringing innovative, future-oriented, and successful projects to the community. Project Atzmaut is one of those initiatives.

Project Atzmaut is a completely Ethiopian-led program that has serviced hundreds of local families with vocational training, education, and family management aid. Its broad and insightful Homework at Home program, for instance, works with families to help them understand the importance of homework and after-school studying, a challenge within a population where many parents did not receive any type of formal education in their rural agricultural villages in Ethiopia. I'm proud that our Federation is an unequivocal part of the engine that drives these efforts, providing equal opportunities to those in need and giving thousands of Israelis a path to a brighter future.

## **Arab Citizen Integration and the Social Venture Fund**

I serve as co-chair of economic development of the Social Venture Fund for Jewish-Arab Equality and Shared Society (SVF) and I love, love, love it! The SVF was launched in 2007 to strengthen and coordinate the Jewish community's efforts to address the unmet needs of Israel's Arab citizens. Our Federation has been involved for about seven years.

The SVF, now a part of the Jewish Funders Network, brings together 20 Federations, foundations, and individual philanthropists to make strategic financial investments in non-profit groups that focus on social change to promote equality and shared society in Israel. To date, the SVF has allocated more than \$8 million towards programs in the areas of education and economic development, with a particular focus on Arab women's empowerment and capacity building.

The SVF funds strategic initiatives in Israel that: (1) build mutual respect and understanding between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel; (2) increase opportunities for Israel's Arab citizens to share equally in the social, educational, and economic life of the country; and (3) promote structural and institutional reforms that support the vision of Israel as a shared society that benefits all of its citizens. Most important, the SVF is committed to a State of Israel based on the values of freedom, justice, and peace.

## **Bilingual Education at Hagar School in Be'er Sheva**

As women, we know how important education is for our children's future. A group of Jewish and Arab parents from Be'er Sheva, who share a vision of a just society where Jews and Arabs can live together in cooperation, trust, and understanding, founded the Hagar Association in 2006. The Hagar School is the newest integrated bilingual Jewish-Arab school in Israel and the only one in the Negev, providing daycare, pre-K, kindergarten, and elementary school through grade 6.

The Hagar School was started to create a bilingual, multicultural education program and includes an educational institute and a community outreach center. It was founded in cooperation with Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel, which has been implementing its model of bilingual education for the past nine years in six schools in different parts of Israel. The parents who founded this school decided to be the change they wanted to see in society. Hagar today has two teachers in every classroom, one Jewish and one Arab, co-teaching a mixed class of Jewish and Arab students. They teach in their respective languages with a progressive curriculum that exceeds the standards of Israel's Ministry of Education. In addition, community members get together to form bonds throughout the program.



Hagar School in Be'er-Sheva

I have visited this school and a few other Hand in Hand schools on various trips to Israel. This education model is terrific. People really do connect to one another and learn both Hebrew and Arabic. In my opinion it is the best elementary school option for Arab Bedouins in the South, who are among the poorest and least educated in Israel. The school expands on a yearly basis and aims to become a full K-12 school in the future. I am excited about its expansion and I hope more schools adopt this model. Currently only 1,500 children are in bilingual education, out of approximately 1.5 million students in Israeli schools. Hagar is not meant to be its own world, but an example for others.

## Arab Woman Entrepreneur Employs Disabled Arab Women

This February, the Women's Philanthropy National Heart to Heart Mission visited the Al Arz Tahini Factory, which is owned by Julia Zaher and employs several Christian Arab women with disabilities, a demographic that has a very low rate of workforce participation due to social stigma and lack of access to services, education, and employment. To develop services and models for advancing the rights of people with disabilities in the Arab community, the tahini factory received a grant through one of our partner agencies, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) Israel's Division for Disabilities and Rehabilitation. In 2011, backed by an executive board of prominent Arab business leaders, this special employment project became funded through The Masira (Journey) Fund, which works to improve the lives of adults with disabilities in Israel's Arab communities by establishing infrastructures that maintain and promote programs for the disabled.

GMW Mission chair Debby Brafman described the plant as beautiful, clean, welcoming, and warm. "The woman and her middle-aged children running the factory wanted us to see it," she

said. “We toured the factory, we ate lunch together, and we felt like one big family with no difference between Jew and Arab.” Debby described the visit as “the high point of her trip.”

T If you want to help support or become involved in these and other initiatives, please contact me at (908) 232-3785 or [phyllisb756@gmail.com](mailto:phyllisb756@gmail.com), or contact Sandy Green, Global Connections Director, at (973) 929-3070 or [SGreen@jfedgmw](mailto:SGreen@jfedgmw).



GMW participants on the Women's Philanthropy National Heart to Heart mission at the Al Arz Tahini Factory



Danielle Bier (far right), a GMW H2H participant, learning about grants that help employ workers at Al Arz

# Words Worth Repeating

by Jamie Ramsfelder

Jamie Ramsfelder of Morristown had been increasingly disturbed by the treatment of minorities in our country, especially because of the rhetoric and behavior during the 2016 political campaign. She did not feel she was well educated about the Civil Rights Movement or the struggles encountered before, during, and since. When she heard about the Women's Philanthropy 2017 Civil Rights Journey, she jumped at the opportunity to participate. As Jamie noted, "Baruch Spinoza said, 'If you want the present to be different, you must study the past.'"

Jamie is a soon-to-be alumna of the Wexner Heritage Program, a Federation-supported two-year Jewish Learning and Leadership Development Program committed to preparing future generations of Jewish leaders. The Wexner staff was interested in learning more about the mission and Jamie was happy to share her experiences with others who might not have the opportunity to take such a journey.

Jamie's reflections appeared in the Wexner Foundation blog in April 2017, during Passover. Her thoughts about the sights she visited and the people she encountered, and how they relate to our Jewish heritage are Words Worth Repeating

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## "Musings on Freedom: History Repeats Itself"

Posted on the Wexner Foundation blog on April 13, 2017 by Jamie Ramsfelder

Pesach is a story of the long journey from degradation to dignity and is a theme that continues to repeat itself throughout history. This year at my seder, and during this week when we tell the story and journey from then to now and from bondage to freedom, I am mindful that the journey is far from over.

I recently went on a Women's Philanthropy Civil Rights Journey to Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma. The trip was advertised as a journey not only about the Civil Rights Movement, but also as an opportunity to learn about Jewish participation in it. I had seen the



Women's Philanthropy Civil Rights Journey participants

pictures and heard the stories of Rabbis Joachim Prinz, Eugene Borowitz, and Abraham Joshua Heschel; of their support for the Movement; their marching side by side with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and their arrests. Not to take anything away from their efforts — indeed, they were true leaders exemplifying Jewish values in not just their words, but also their actions — photos don't tell the whole story. Reality is a bit more complicated.

Yes, Jews marched, registered people to vote, and were Freedom Riders, and, yes, some experienced repercussions, from beatings and arrests to the ultimate price, death at the hands of the Klan. It is estimated that 60 percent of the white people who took a stand for Civil Rights were Jewish — an admirable number. Notwithstanding, however sympathetic to the cause, a very tiny percentage of Jews actually participated, and only a handful of them were Southern. Most Jewish protesters could return to their homes, families, and businesses in the North with little consequence. If you were a Southern Jew, it was a different story.

In general, Southern Jews had a fine relationship with the black community. Both communities were considered by mainstream Southerners as inferior. With this commonality came understanding. More at risk than their Northern brethren and fearing violent reprisals to family and business, Southern Jews tried to stay neutral. In the words of Elie Wiesel z"l, "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

Indeed, Jewish values dictate that we take sides and that to "side with the oppressed — whether Jewish or not — is to be like God." (Rabbi Shai Held, PhD., *More Than Managing, The Relentless Pursuit of Effective Jewish Leadership*, p. 87) The words "never again" are a popular refrain, but never again for whom? If only for Jews, "never again" are hollow words. If based in Jewish values, they must mean never oppression nor human indignity for any person.

On my trip, I heard eyewitness accounts of heart-wrenching experiences spattered with moments of light. I felt horrified and inspired at the same time. Reverend Gwendolyn Webb, a Baptist minister with a soft smile and vibrant spirit, spoke of her experiences as a high school student protester in the movement. She described living with the daily indignities and how she wanted a better future than her parents' past. Our group joined her in making a human chain, arms intertwined, hands held tight. Reverend Webb explained how the chain helped them act as one and created a safety net if one fell. They acted in unison to swiftly pick her up.

Joanne Blackmon Bland described how she, as an eleven year old, had already been arrested 13 times since the age of eight for simple infractions such as possessing Civil Rights meeting flyers. After trying to peacefully cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, she was chased down by the police and witnessed her family and friends' brutal beatings on Bloody Sunday. And there was 83-year-old Bishop Calvin Woods who led my group through Freedom Walk in Birmingham. I listened to his descriptions of protesters, children included, being attacked by the police with dogs and fire hoses. But then Bishop Woods led us in an uplifting song and I learned how the power of music — spirituals, folk, and gospel songs — bound the protesters together, lifted their spirits, and gave them the strength to carry on.

I saw the faces of the four girls who were murdered by a KKK bomb at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. I thought of my own children and I cried. At the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, I was enthralled with and angered by the presentation of the stages of black life in America that culminates in the current stage where racial disparities in our criminal justice system are racism's legacy and a continuation of our history of racial injustice.

On the heels of my trip, after Purim and with Pesach quickly approaching, I could not help but think about Amalek: "In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us." Throughout history there have been people who play the role of Amalek, prospering off of prevailing biases, curtailing the liberty and security of other people, creating "the other," and using words to promulgate fear and divisiveness. Inevitably, those words turn into small actions growing in intensity and size until the unthinkable becomes reality. It happened in Egypt, in Europe and, yes, in the United States. As Baruch Spinoza said, "If you want the present to be different from the past, study the past." But humans are slow to learn, with short memories and attention spans. When we encounter injustice, it is so easy to assemble a series of reasons to justify our silence or indifference. Have we not yet learned that indifference to suffering is the epitome of evil? It is time we see everyone as ANOTHER. Another human being, another life, another soul. If not, our destruction may not be physical nor come at the hands of Amelek. Our defeat will be of our own making. It will be our moral defeat, the death of our soul for not standing up to the present-day threats to humanity.



Four young girls killed in the bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church



Reverend Gwendolyn Webb demonstrating the human chain

During Pesach, I am thinking about our story. Four hundred years we were slaves in Egypt. And though our physical bondage ended, sadly the fight for human dignity has continued. This is similarly true for the black community in the United States. The slave trade began in the 17th century. Four hundred years later, in the 21st century, after the Emancipation Proclamation, the Thirteenth Amendment, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, though the physical chains no longer exist, the battle for human dignity goes on.

## President's Message

by Rebecca A. Gold



I am inspired daily by the women I know through Women's Philanthropy – young and old, near and far. Jackie Levine, now in her 90s, is one very special woman from within our Greater MetroWest Women's Philanthropy family who was on the front lines of the Civil Rights movement and has worked tirelessly for nearly 70 years to fight for social justice on behalf of Jews, women, African Americans, and others. In 1963, Jackie joined her rabbi, Civil Rights activist Joachim Prinz, on the March on Washington, where he addressed the crowd immediately before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. In 1965, she marched with Dr. King from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. In 2017, it was Jackie who inspired many of us to go on the Women's Philanthropy Civil Rights Journey to Atlanta and Alabama, where we could imagine what she experienced firsthand.

While Jackie was not well enough to join us on the Civil Rights Journey, we were thrilled that her daughter, Ellen Levine Cramer, co-chaired the Mission in her honor. Ellen was in kindergarten when she accompanied her mother to picket Woolworth's lunch counters for not serving African Americans, and she impressed upon us Jackie's bravery and determination, and the Jewish ideals that drove her mother to take action throughout her life.

The Civil Rights Journey was a highlight in my 15 years of volunteering with Women's Philanthropy. I was struck, once again, by how thoughtful, just, and smart our women are. The 41 other women I traveled with embodied what first drew me to Women's Philanthropy back in 2002. I experienced these same shared values when we had a festive dinner with the women of Montgomery's Jewish Federation. It amazes me that we can go anywhere in North America and Israel and feel so connected to one another!

In this eNewsletter, several of our most articulate "sisters" describe what the Civil Rights Journey meant for them and how justice is a central reason why they are engaged in the community work we do together. I always consider the fact that the word tzedakah literally means "righteousness" and not just "charity" as a moral obligation for Jews.

Throughout our trip I wondered, “What would I have done?” Would I have put myself in harm’s way to stand up for Civil Rights, advocating for the African-American community and for every individual who was suffering injustice? Today, from where we live in the relative safety of our corner of New Jersey, we can stand up for others’ rights and for communities in need easily. We can send aid to Jews at risk without ever having to be in the trenches with them – with little threat of physical harm to ourselves or to our families. We also have invaluable resources right in MetroWest to help our local community. Why then is it so difficult to reach more Jews here and enlist their support? Why do so many in our midst turn the other way? Speaking up and speaking out is a great start, and being ambassadors for our community here and worldwide through our Jewish Federation is certainly an excellent way to unite and be most impactful.

You women are *my* inspiration and I look forward to another incredible year of *tzedakah* and philanthropy with all of you. I am certain we will continue to inspire one another to do the right thing and to share what is so precious to us – safety, freedom from oppression, and the ability to make our world one of equality and justice. Here’s to many more journeys together!

Enjoy your summer and thank you, thank you, thank you!

*Kulanu B’yachad* – All of Us Together,

Rebecca A. Gold