

Yozma's Lights Burn Brightly As Economic Storm Gathers

A message from the Chairman
Jay Shofet

The Festival of Lights arrives this year just in time to drive away, for a week or so, the darkening storm clouds of an economic tsunami. At least that's what the leadership of Yozma is planning for, in the most prudent and responsible way we can. And what choice do we really have? Every economic and common-sense indicator points to our need to work harder to raise funds on one hand, and work aggressively to reduce expenses on the other. There are no magic solutions, only the diligence and creativity of our top-notch professional staff -- led by our director Yossi Aud -- and our volunteer leadership.

The truth is, Israeli civil society is entering a Darwinian phase of survival of the fittest. Not all of the NGO's active for social change in Israel will weather this storm. But when prosperity finally does return to our land, those survivors, like Yozma, will be leaner, more savvy, better at making an impact with limited resources.

Fundraising is tougher for everyone this season, but that only means we must work harder and smarter, and we are. Our energetic fundraising committee is mapping and implementing strategy to segment our donor base and increase targeted appeals. Our two rabbis will each travel abroad once more than originally planned this year, and our fundraising back-office, under the professional guidance of Karin Sigal, is ever more efficient and creative, targeting sources of funds in Israel and foundations in Israel and abroad.

Our local sources of income are suffering too: the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism will be reducing crucial support this year as it finds itself dealing with significant budget cutbacks. Further, though we pride ourselves on the fact that over 80% of our operating budget is earned income from our educational services, this too is subject to economic pressures: many parents are withdrawing children from our afterschool enrichment program as income at home gets tighter, and more parents are requesting tuition discounts due to economic hardships. We may well face declining enrollment next year as parents seek less expensive (and lower quality!) solutions to pre-school education.

In terms of reducing expenses, for months already we have been implementing systematic budget cuts and monitoring our budget implementation with exactitude. With expenses scaled back to a bare minimum -- and one step ahead of making painful cuts in staff and vital services -- we are now planning to reduce our office space by as much as 75% to save on rent and municipal taxes. This will be a hardship for our staff and operations, but not an insurmountable one for a resilient and dynamic organization like ours.

The bottom line? Yozma is learning to do more with less. Our spiritual, educational and cultural activities are burning brightly with no sign of running out of oil. Stop by and see for yourselves next time you are in Israel. If Judah the Maccabee's ghost is still haunting these hills, the ol' hammer is happy to see that here in his old neighborhood, we are continuing to strike the decisive blow for freedom of religious expression.