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For immediate release

WORLD RENOWNED ARTIST GARY ROSENTHAL CREATES UNIQUE 'MITZVAH' OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG JEWISH ADULTS

*Bar/Bat Mitzvahs Design Individual Torah Pointers,
Lend Support to Conservative/Masorti Movement Around The World*

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 21, 2005 – As part of their Bar and Bat mitzvah experiences, Jewish American teenagers are taking part in a special art project to establish educational programs in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and South America.

Last year, internationally known artist Gary Rosenthal (**Washington, D.C.**) approached the Conservative/Masorti Movement about developing an initiative for U.S. youngsters to design Yads (torah pointers) to use when they are called to the Torah as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Working with the World Council of Conservative/Masorti Judaism's Project L'Chayim, Rosenthal hopes that the art initiative will eternally link U.S. teenagers to re-emerging Jewish communities in cities such as Kiev, Ukraine; Wroclaw, Poland; Budapest, Hungary; and Moscow as well as potentially in Latin American Jewish communities, he said.

“In the tradition of the Jewish people, it is said to be a blessing or a mitzvah to make beautiful, functional art,” Rosenthal said. “Jewish youngsters are taught about the Torah and Jewish laws and rituals, but the importance of Judaic art can be overlooked. Through this program, we are ensuring an appreciation and responsibility among young Jewish adults and their communities and, at the same time, adding a Tzedakah Mitzvah to the Hiddur Mitzvah activity.”

As part of The Gary Rosenthal Collection's Hiddur Mitzvah Project, these young adults and their families come together at their local synagogues to construct a cut glass mosaic that is sent to Rosenthal's workshop in Kensington, Md, near the nation's capital, for finishing.

Rosenthal and the individual young artists sign each Yad as part of a pledge to teach Jewish communities around the world about Judaism and social responsibility. The goal is to have 1,000 youngsters design Yads, raising \$100,000 for educational programs in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and South America.

Debbie Friedman spearheaded the Hiddur Mitzvah Project at her synagogue, Beth Tikvah-B'nai Jeshurun (**Erdenheim, Penn.**), where youngsters and their parents have designed more than 50 Yads. Each Yad kit is \$100 with 100 percent of the proceeds being used for the overseas educational programs.

(more)

Gary Rosenthal Creates Unique Mitzvah Project

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“Jewish families typically go to a Judaica store to purchase a beautiful Yad as part of becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah,” said Friedman, whose daughters – Sarah, 12, who will be a Bat Mitzvah next month, and Rebecca, 14 – participated in the project.

“These personalized works of art were created by our family and my daughters will have them forever,” Friedman added. “It also holds a special meaning because this Hiddur Mitzvah Project allows them to step outside of themselves and understand that they are helping to preserve their heritage.”

Other Hiddur Mitzvah Project initiatives have taken place at Congregation B’nai Israel in Tom River, N.J.; Greenburgh Hebrew Center in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. and Temple Beth El in Birmingham, Ala.

“The Yad is a very significant part of a young man or young woman’s step into adulthood. It is more meaningful and special that the Yad is hand-crafted by the Bar or Bat mitzvah his or herself,” said Rabbi Alan Silverstein, Ph.D., president of World Council of Conservative/Masorti Synagogues whose Congregation Agudath Israel (**Caldwell, N.J.**) just started the Yad project.

“This process teaches people that every mitzvah touches the next generation. It is an ongoing cycle of goodwill that will ultimately fortify the Conservative/Masorti movement,” Silverstein said.

For more information about setting up a local Hiddur Mitzvah/World Council of Conservative/Masorti Judaism’s Project L’Chayim in your area, contact Rebecca Hammerman at (202) 686-2265 or via e-mail at rebecca@hammerhoff.com.

ABOUT THE GARY ROSENTHAL COLLECTION AND HIDDUR MITZVAH PROJECT

Gary Rosenthal has been sculpting in welded metals for almost 30 years. Together with a team of talented craftspeople, The Gary Rosenthal Collection creates one of the most popular and unique lines of Judaic art in the country. By combining copper, brass and steel with brilliant fused glass, the collection has a contemporary style rooted in tradition.

Work from the Gary Rosenthal Collection (www.collectgaryrosenthal.com) has been presented to Presidents from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush and can be found throughout the world in many fine galleries, private collections and museum shops including the American Craft Museum, the B’nai B’rith Museum, the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery, the Corning Museum of Glass and The Jewish Museum.

The Gary Rosenthal Collection is committed to helping others perform hiddur mitzvah (“beautification of the commandment”) and is pleased to offer the Hiddur Mitzvah Project as an entertaining and functional way to perform a service as well as teach the invaluable lessons of arts enrichment and community building. For more information about the Hiddur Mitzvah Project, visit www.hiddurmitzvah.org or call 1-800-962-1545.

For more information:

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