

Rabbi Lewis' message for Summer 2004

I don't know why I felt so paralyzed. When I was last in Rome some years back, I had seen that famed tableau molded on the inside of the Arch of Titus. The Jewish slaves are struggling under the weight of the menorah pillaged from the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70. You can almost see the beads of sweat on their bodies. I closed my eyes and for one moment, I felt like I was there, watching the Jewish people enslaved yet again, distraught at the destruction of their religious center. When I opened my eyes, it was as if I were seeing that scene for the very first time.

I wondered what these slaves had been thinking as their images were captured in stone for eternity. Did they think the Jewish people had come to an end with the loss of the Temple in Jerusalem? Did they have hope that the Temple would someday be rebuilt as it had been once before? Would they have imagined that there would still be Jews in the world two millennia later? Or were they just hoping to live to see the next dawn?

As I listened to our Confirmation students read Torah this morning, I couldn't help but think how that ancient suffering had been redeemed. We are the heirs to those who heard God's call in Mesopotamia, survived slavery in Egypt, accepted the Torah at Sinai, entered the Promised Land, built not one but two temples in Jerusalem, survived exile and return time and again. And here we still are, making our way into the future as if there is no question that there is a future. Our students bear the weight of that menorah not as a burden of slavery but as a symbol of pride in their heritage.

We all stood at Sinai again today, thankfully aware of the miracles that are with us every day. Each generation hears God's word and each generation passes their truth on to the next. Ashreinu mah tov helkeinu, how good is our portion, how beautiful our inheritance. May we continue to be blessed with the teachers and students of Torah .

Rabbi Ellen J. Lewis
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