

## **Rabbi Lewis' message for September 2005**

Lest you be in doubt, the world is watching. On any given morning at 10 a.m., the T V at the local nail salon is tuned to those denizens of morning talk shows, either “Ellen” or “Tony Danza.” Today was different. The T V was set on MSNBC so the clientele could watch the Israeli disengagement from Gaza. The world is indeed watching.

The show has been riveting, engaging, if you will. It has been both horrifying and uplifting, painful and oddly reassuring. I found myself thinking that I have never felt so proud as I did watching the restraint of the unarmed Israeli army as they approached their fellow-citizens. And I felt the same way about most of the settlers who were most certainly entitled to passive protest under the laws of the only democratic state in the Middle East. Late today, there was a report that acid had been thrown on the soldiers in Kfar Darom. The residents claim it was “only” diesel fuel. Whatever it was, and whether that was the act of the illegal infiltrators or residents of the settlement, it was unconscionable. The army shared the tears of the settlers. It is not over yet, although we hope the worst is over. Until it is done, we will hold our collective breath. We know this feeling, those of us who love Israel, for we have done this before.

I am one who believes that this had to be done, but I, of course, don't live there. I always feel myself hesitant to speak about Israel's politics because I know that I don't have to live with the consequences the way Israelis do. Then I read a statement by a colleague, a Reform Rabbi who is the Executive Director of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, who has made his life in Israel. I thought, he can say what I can't. Here is Rabbi Ronald Kronish in his own words:

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY-FOR BBC RADIO -  
AUG. 17.05 - RABBI DR. RON KRONISH**

Good morning.

Today is a difficult day in the history of Israel. We are sacrificing some land — some parts of the land of Israel, which is holy to the Jewish People—for the sake of peace, or at least a movement in the direction of peace.

Is this worth the price? My answer is YES.

But the problem is more complex than this. We — the citizens of Israel, the Jewish majority and the non-Jewish Arab minority-have voted for disengagement. This is the policy of the democratically elected government of Israel. Yet, we do this with much

anxiety and many questions: will the Palestinians see this as an act of peace or as an act of surrender; i.e. an act of war? Will Gaza turn into a “terror state,” as some of our politicians on the right suggest? Will this lead to peace agreements - between the two peoples-rather than unilateral measures? Or will this lead to more terror and more violence on the part of the Palestinians as a way to achieve political ends?

As a religious Jew, I am committed to the importance of living in the land of Israel. This is why I chose to “go up” (to make aliyah) to live in this land, with my family, over 26 years ago. This land has been special-holy-for our people since the beginning of our history. It is a sacred land. And the state of Israel is the “beginning of the flowering of our redemption,” i.e., it is a vital political framework for the achievement of our national aspirations as a Jewish people.

But land is not more important than life. Nor is land more important than peace. Rather, peace — and the attempts to reach peace with all of our neighbors — is our most important value.

In our Midrash, our literature of tales and traditions, we find this statement about the importance of peace:

If there is no peace, there is nothing at all, for Scripture goes on to say in the Psalms, ‘And I will give Peace in the Land’ which indicates that peace equals all else. Indeed, we say (in the morning prayers), ‘When He made peace, He created everything.’

The search for peace is not simple. It will not end with this disengagement from Gaza and a few settlements in Northern Samaria. But this is a good beginning, an important step along the bumpy road to peace.

This is a good beginning as the world watches. All we can do is watch, wait and pray that the forces for peace prevail, and that we will all enter the year 5766 with renewed hope, motivation and inspiration.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis

September 2005