

Rabbi Lewis' message for February 2006

Every day, I scour the newspapers for word of Ariel Sharon's condition. Nothing has changed, they say. And yet everything has changed. Israel again finds herself in a precarious political situation. Sharon's new party Kadima still seems to be popular as an alternative to Labor and Likud but all remains to be seen until after the elections are held.

It often seems to us in the Diaspora that Israelis must spend all their time worrying about Hamatzav, the political situation. The truth is that Israelis may worry but they also get up in the morning and go to work, just like we do. They still work to make Israel the kind of country they want to live in. They go to concerts and malls. They read books. They watch television. Many also are looking to find a satisfying spiritual life outside the bounds of traditional Judaism.

Reform and Conservative rabbis in Israel have found enormous spiritual interest among Israelis who don't like the traditional choice of "secular" versus "religious." Because the Orthodox administer the officially sanctioned government religion, however, the state funds that are distributed to the Orthodox are often not shared with the liberal denominations.

Unlike the powerlessness we often experience when it comes to helping Israel, this time there is something we can do. Go to www.VoteReformJudaism.com on the web and vote in the World Zionist Organization elections. It will cost you \$7 to register and vote for ARZA, the Reform Zionist organization. Your vote will allow for greater Israeli funding of liberal Judaism in Israel.

On February 12, we will celebrate the Israeli holiday of the trees, Tu Bishvat. We will encourage our students in the school to buy trees from the Jewish National Fund. We will celebrate by having a Tu Bishvat Seder where we taste the different fruits of the land of Israel. This builds a wonderful connection with Israel but it doesn't make Israel a better place for liberal Jews. For Israel's sake, vote in the WZO election and come join us for Tu Bishvat.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis
February 2006