

## **Rabbi Lewis' Message for September 2007**

Political cartoonists have been having a field day with the worsening airport delays this summer. Their cartoons depict families pointing at their photo albums and exclaiming, "That's when we were delayed at O'Hare in Chicago! That's when we were delayed in Newark!"

And yet we travel on. We are willing to tolerate the inconveniences of traveling for all kinds of reasons. Traveling offers us a change of scenery, relaxation, and time with family and friends. Traveling also reminds me of how circumscribed our daily lives can get. I look forward to the people I meet along the way, often people I would not otherwise encounter. Meeting them broadens my own understanding of the world. Sometimes it is about the journey.

On one short trip this summer, I met three such people. The first was a manicurist in Los Angeles. She asked me whether you could be a Jew and also believe in Jesus. When I asked why she asked, she told me the story. Although she was wearing a cross around her neck, she had just discovered that she could trace her ancestry to Marranos in Spain. Her family had been "hidden Jews" who had tried to avoid the Inquisition by converting to Catholicism on the surface but practicing Jewish rituals in secret. She was thrilled at the news but unsure how it fit into her current belief system.

Then there was the woman I sat next to on the flight. She was traveling with four incredibly well-behaved small children with whom she spoke a mixture of Hebrew and English. It turned out that she was a caterer from the Tel Aviv area. Why was she able to travel in what would seem to be the height of the wedding catering season? It was during the three weeks before Tisha B'Av when traditional Jews don't get married. In Israel, that means no Jews get married since weddings are regulated by the state. Her family was taking advantage of the break, and in fact, was planning on spending the year in the States. We talked politics, religion and children. Her children all had wonderful Hebrew names which were completely unfamiliar to me since they are recently coined "modern" Hebrew names. I was reminded that it has been too long since I have been to Israel.

And then there was the young driver for the car service. He had come from - India, perhaps - to study computer engineering at Rutgers. After a year, his father had died suddenly and the money had run out. His family wants him to return to India but he still has hopes of continuing his education in this country. The problem is that he needs to work to earn money for school and a student visa won't allow you to work. I thought about the opportunities we take for granted in this country and how our immigrant ancestors made sure we would have those opportunities.

If you read Deuteronomy as we are this month, you see how we have been trained to think that the goal of our journey is to reach the Promised Land. While focusing on a goal is a good thing, there are times we have to remember that there is value to simply being on the journey. Our ancestors learned a great deal in their 40 years of wandering before reaching their destination. Those lessons helped them once they got there. As I write on Rosh Hodesh Elul, I am reminded that these summer journeys will soon come to an end. When we gather to welcome the new year together again in the Fall, I look forward to hearing about what you have learned on your journeys this summer. Sometimes it is about the journey.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis