

Rabbi Lewis' Message for March, 2011

When you walk in to our Jewish Center, the first thing you do is hang up your coat. When you walk into the synagogue in Tokyo, the first thing you do is take off your shoes and exchange them for slippers. It is what you do in Japan when you enter a private home. It is even what you do in many restaurants. Then you climb the stairs to the classrooms and sanctuary. The building itself is only a year old, built on the site of the original 1952 building. It has its own mikveh, its own kosher (only meat) kitchen and its own Japanese chef!

When you walk in to our sanctuary, you see the rabbinic quotation over the Ark, "Know before Whom you stand." In Tokyo, the words from Psalms read, "From the rising of the sun until its setting." The play on words is evident in the Hebrew, calling on Japan as the land of the rising sun. And yet so much feels the same. The liturgy is chanted to familiar tunes from an American prayerbook. The congregation is a mix of native Japanese, Israelis and American ex-patriates, along with random tourists. It is a little larger than ours, about 120 families, but has the same feeling of warmth and welcoming. The rabbi is Antonio de Gesu, friendly and engaging, Italian born and ordained at [JTS](#) in New York.

I always tell our kids that the purpose of learning the prayers in the prayerbook has nothing to do with b'nai mitzvah. It has everything to do with skills that will help them feel comfortable when they enter other sanctuaries in other places. Other places might include synagogues in the US but in this increasingly small world, it also includes synagogues in other countries. It is a wonderful thing to be awed by the land of Shinto, sushi and skyscraper and still be able to walk into a synagogue and feel that you are home.

You were with me as I prayed (shoeless) in Tokyo, as I know I am with you as you worship in Washington.

Rabbi Lewis