

## **Rabbi Lewis' Message for September, 2011**

It sounds like a joke but it's not. The Arab Spring shows revolution in the streets and Israeli Summer features – a Cottage Cheese Rebellion? At the end of June, an Israeli business publication ran articles in which they compared the cost of food in Israel to the cost of food abroad. An 8.8 ounce tub of cottage cheese (Israelis think in grams, not ounces) costs 8 shekels, or \$2.32. That price has risen 39% since 2008.

A 25-year-old Israeli from B'nei Brak became so angry that – via Facebook - he called for a boycott of cottage cheese. It didn't take long before 100,000 Israeli consumers joined the boycott. There was a noticeable decline in the sale of cottage cheese, long considered a staple of the Israeli diet, and then the hoped-for price cut.

Initially, people did not see the Cottage Cheese Rebellion as the beginning of major civil unrest, but that perception has changed over the last couple of months. A report on the internet says that the rebellion "...is spreading to other goods and services, especially housing, and it has given voice to a feeling of economic helplessness." As always when it comes to Israel, things are more complicated than they might first seem. A country founded on ideals of social equality suddenly finds there is a large gap between the very rich and the rest of the country. Israelis - who spend years in army service including time in the active reserves – want to be sure that they are getting what they are fighting for. And so we have seen tent cities set up in the middle of Tel Aviv as a protest against the high cost of housing. What began with cottage cheese has captured the country's imagination.

This rebellion reminds me again of how hard it is to understand Israel from across the ocean, from "chutz la'aretz" as Israelis say, from outside of Israel. When I lived in Israel as a student in the pre-email 1970s, I would get letters from home expressing worry about my safety. I was always puzzled because I felt so safe living in Israel. I could walk anywhere I wanted, day or night, not something I could say about many places closer to home. My family in the States could only rely on what was reported in the newspaper and it was inevitably a distortion of how I experienced life in Israel.

I understand how you might be afraid to travel to Israel when your knowledge comes from the American media. You just can't know what it is like in Israel until you experience it yourself.

We have a wonderful opportunity to share that experience together this coming December. We plan to celebrate our two shabbatot together at two different Reform congregations, one in Tel Aviv and one with home hospitality in Modi'in. I am

grateful to Rhonda Jordan and Iris Hirsch for organizing our participation. Please go to the link below to see the details of the tour and to register.

<http://tinyurl.com/4ynkzfc>

As Rabbi Hillel so famously said, “If not now, when?”

May this new year include setting foot on Israeli soil and tasting Israeli cottage cheese together.

Shana tova.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis