

February 2020 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

Perhaps you've heard the old joke in which a young student comes to the master and asks, "Please, can you teach me all of Jewish history?" To which the master responds, "That's easy. They tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat!" It's a joke, of course, but within every good joke – including this one – lies at least a kernel of truth.

If I had to choose the three most consequential dates in all of Jewish history, I imagine they would be 586 BCE (the fall of the First Temple in Jerusalem), 70 CE (the fall of the Second Temple in Jerusalem), and 1948 CE (the founding of the modern State of Israel. As a Jew who shies away from defining myself as a victim, it may seem odd that I would choose two of the most devastating and violent dates to be among the three, but I pick 586 BCE because it was only when we were forced to live without the First Temple of Solomon, which was the sacrificial center of our people, that the Jewish religion actually came to be. Before that, we were still practicing the religion of Israel, a religious practice that centered on the sacrificial cult. Once animal sacrifice was no longer possible (because the Temple was the only place authorized to conduct sacrifices), we were forced to create new paths towards the sacred. The end result was the introduction of a service based on spoken prayer, i.e., the sacrificial offering to God in words rather than animals and grains.

Similarly, I pick 70 CE because it was only when we lost our sacrificial center for the second and final time that the ancient priesthood became obsolete (it was the priests who oversaw the sacrificial system). As a result, "Rabbinic Judaism," a tradition based on Talmudic wisdom and innovation (which is the basic form of Judaism that we practice today), was born.

Of course, 70 CE is critical for another reason, too, because once dispersed into the Diaspora, our people were now filled with a hope so deep-seated that it would remain a driving spiritual force for the next two millennia, until May of 1948 when at long last, our "two-thousand-year-hope, to be a free nation in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem," finally came to be realized. To be clear, though, this national hope never would have – or could have – been realized had it not been for an extraordinary gathering of 208 participants and 26 news correspondents some 50 years prior in the city of Basel, Switzerland. Over the course of the last three days of August 1897, Jews from across Europe (roughly ½ from Western Europe, ¼ from Russia, ¼ from the rest of Eastern Europe – and four from the United States) gathered together in Basel, Switzerland, for the First Zionist Congress, organized and chaired by Theodor Herzl. While it is true that the majority of world Jewry at the time was lukewarm (at best) to idea of Political Zionism, Herzl and his fellow members of the Congress refused to be dissuaded. They had a vision, and they were set on achieving it. So confident was Herzl, that he wrote just three days later: *"At Basel I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years*

perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it.” Indeed, with half a century of continued efforts, this is exactly what came to fruition in 1948.

1897 was the First Zionist Congress. Over the next 123 years, until today, there have continued to be periodic gatherings of Jewish representatives from around the world to discuss Zionist issues. At first these meetings happened annually and then biannually (with a break during WW II). With the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Zionist Congress (which eventually came to be called the World Zionist Congress) began meeting in Jerusalem every four-to-five years, and has followed this pattern ever since. The 38th World Zionist Congress will gather with 500 elected delegates from around the world in October of this year. Among the myriad items on their agenda, perhaps the most consequential will be a process of voting over how to disperse hundreds of millions of dollars to various organizations within Israel. Voting for delegates to the World Zionist Congress is open to all Jews, 18-years-old and older. On-line voting has already begun, and will close on March 11.

I cannot stress enough just how important it is to the development of Jewish pluralism and human rights for all (including women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, minority populations rights, etc.) that we make sure there is a strong Reform voice participating in the allocations process. For that to happen, we will need as many Jewish adults as possible to vote for the Reform slate. There are a number of slates, and obviously you are free to vote for whichever you choose, but I will be clear that **I myself cast my own vote last week for the Reform Movement’s slate.**

To vote, just go to arza.org/election/ and follow the instructions. You will need access to your e-mail throughout, as you will have to enter a PIN twice (one PIN for registering and a different PIN for voting). Unfortunately, it does cost \$7.50 to vote (\$5.00 for voters 25 and younger). Please know that this is not the Reform Movement’s doing, but an administrative decision made by the World Zionist Congress to cover the cost of the election.

To give you further background on why this is such an important opportunity, I am including information compiled and disseminated by ARZA (Association of Reform Zionists of America). I encourage you to read it and vote. And, as always, if you’d like to speak with me about why I find this to be so important, please do reach out.

Rabbi Dubin

Copyright © 2020 Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey