

From the Rabbi's Desk

January 2020

Friends,

Sherry Barnes, David Stein and I just returned from the Biennial of the Union for Reform Judaism. Over five thousand Reform Jews gathered in Chicago for the conference. It was five days of sharing experiences and knowledge with our colleagues in large and small congregation across North America, Europe and Israel. Seminars and presentations covered topics including engagement, social justice, liturgy, theology, text studies, education, synagogue management and leadership, Reform Zionism and music. Most important, our leadership gave us a vision for the future. As I have told you many times in the past three years, our movement is not shrinking and is certainly not dying. However, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, URJ President, advised us that our future depends upon us rolling up the sides of our tent and pulling on the ropes to make our tent ever bigger. We must be making more room for more diversity. The future of Reform Judaism depends upon our congregations being ever more welcoming, even more inclusive, and reaching out even farther. The younger generations of Jews today will not be engaged in the same ways that we were. We should not be asking of our children, why can't you just be like us? Rather, we should be supporting them in reforming the liberal Judaism we love into the Reform Judaism that inspires them. As you've heard many times, 'Reform' is present tense and active. It is always happening. That has always been our strength.

Speaking of strength. WE NEED YOUR VOTE! The World Zionist Congress (WZC) elections are coming up. Voting will be open between January 21 and March 11 (the day after MLK Day until Purim). The Reform movement did extremely well in the last elections in 2015. This accomplished a great deal for us in Israel. It ensured \$20 million dollars over five years went to support our movement. With this critical support, liberal Judaism has grown incredibly in Israel. Over the past five years the number of Reform communities has grown from 23 to 52. There are well over 100 Israeli Reform rabbis ordained from HUC-JIR in Jerusalem. Reform Jews sit at the table for important decision making at the Jewish Agency and KKL-JNF. Because of our presence and strength, our Reform leaders are able to insist on pluralism in Israel. That means justice and fairness with regards to marriage, conversion and burial regulations, funding for religious institutions, and appointments to important national offices. Because of our presence and strength, we are also building important bridges between Reform leaders and other stakeholders including the ultra-Orthodox parties. This is not about forcing our will on others, it is about guaranteeing our seat at the table when important agreements are negotiated and major issues are debated. An Israel that reflects our values of democracy and pluralism depends upon our vote.

Because we did so well in the 2015 elections, there are many organizations that are creating and working strategies to squeeze the Reform movement out of the 2020 WZC. Thus, we must not only equal our voting in the last election, we must surpass it. David Stein is our WZC Election Captain. David and I will be communicating with you many times between now and Purim. We will be explaining what the WZC and affiliated organizations are, what they do, and why it matters to us. We will also be explaining how to vote and helping everyone to do it. Consider this a warm up for next November. You should have only one New Year's resolution - to vote in the WZC elections...and then the US elections.

Lastly, the next URJ Biennial will be in Washington, DC, December 8-11, 2021. We have a strong movement behind us. If we engage with it, it will help us achieve our mission of building a vibrant community through Reform Judaism. Put the next biennial on your calendar. If you can't go yourself, perhaps you can help send some of our leadership team.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Marc