

From Rabbi Nancy Wechsler: Living the Dream



Living the Dream: the 100th graduate of HUC-JIR's Israeli Rabbinical Program

Steeped in the season of gratitude, we think about the success of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion with its four campuses, Los Angeles, Cincinnati, New York and Jerusalem. Since 1875, JUC-JIR has ordained over 3,300 rabbis worldwide. At this time, we reach an important milestone – more than 100 Reform rabbis have been ordained in the State of Israel!

Israeli Reform Rabbis advance a progressive vision of Israeli Judaism. According to Rabbi Aaron Panken, President of the college, the Israeli Reform Rabbinate strengthens the Jewish and democratic nature of the state; demands equal rights for all Israelis regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, national origin, religion or denominational affiliation and promotes a vision of Israel's peaceful and secure coexistence besides its neighbors. In contrast to the state-sponsored Orthodox rabbinate, these graduates from HUC-JIR create meaningful egalitarian alternatives for conversion, marriage, burial, learning and prayer.



In parashat Vayeitzei, we witness Jacob imagining what his world will become. He flees Beersheba and arrives in Haran. There he takes a stone and places it under his head for a pillow and falls deeply asleep. Jacob dreams of a ladder with angels going up and down upon it. The Holy One stands at the top and gives him words of comfort and security that he will never be alone and that his human message will be spread to the west, the east, the north and the south.

Waking from sleep, Jacob says, “Truly G-d is in this place and I did not know it. This is no other than the house of G-d and this is the gate of Heaven.” (Genesis 28:16-17)

The great Reform Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver spoke some 70 years ago about the State of Israel using prophetic words hinting at the milestone we are now celebrating. We can imagine Rabbi Silver’s happiness in the evolution of progressive Judaism in Israel.

Rabbi Silver said, “The Land of Israel will be small ... but the people of Israel will make it great. Not in opulence, but in eminence, will their destiny be fulfilled, and the elixir of their pride will be distilled not out of dominion or far flung borders, but out of the faithful and skillful building of a good society.”

Just as Jacob dreamed of a ladder with angels and a Voice of Holiness predicting new life, we look forward before too long to the ordination of the 200th Israeli Reform Rabbi and we commit ourselves to a State of Israel filled with righteousness, fairness, democracy, creativity and pluralism; a safe and secure home for all her citizens.

Shalom,

Rabbi Nancy Wechsler