



Make Your Voice Heard in Israeli Democracy—Vote in the WZC Elections

In November Rabbi Uri Regev visited our congregation and reminded us that as progressive Jews living in America we still have the opportunity to influence Israeli democracy. You'll likely recognize Rabbi Regev's name. We may know him best at Rodef Sholom for being the proud father-in-law of Rabbi Lara and grandfather of Noah, but he is also an internationally renowned leader and advocate for the liberal movements of Judaism in Israel and around the world. When Rabbi Uri Regev shares with us ways to impact religious pluralism and progressive values in Israel, we listen. One major opportunity we have to make our voices heard is to vote in the upcoming WZC elections. Between January 21 and March 11, 2020, the Reform Movement throughout the Bay Area and around the world is mobilizing to get out the vote for ARZA. We at Rodef Sholom will participate as a community in this effort. It is the only democratic opportunity we have to influence Israeli society as we continue our efforts towards equality, pluralism and tolerance.

In the Reform Jewish community across the country we have many questions and concerns about Israel's direction. Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the head of the Union of Reform Judaism, speaks often for our movement's concerns saying recently: "We have deep concern that the current government (in Israel) will deepen the discrimination against

the non-orthodox streams of Judaism, continue to undermine the democratic values and institutions of Israel, and discriminate against Arab citizens of Israel. We join our Israeli partners in the Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism in demanding that the government represent all of Israel's citizens." Rabbi Jacobs speaks these words with deep love for Israel.

The concerns Rabbi Jacobs mentions and others may prompt us to distance ourselves from Israel. And we empathize with this response. But at Rodef Sholom we call on our community to look for ways to continue to engage deeply with Israel as we continue to do with our own country in moments of pain or deep disagreement. We choose activism and involvement in the democratic process to make our values known.

So how does voting in the WZC elections help? The WZC, also known as the Parliament of the Jewish People, comprises 500 delegates and meets in Jerusalem every five years. It enables delegates to exert ideological influence on both Israeli society and the global Jewish agenda, as well as allocate financial and other resources to various organizations—including the Reform Movement—in Israel.

Currently the United States has 145 delegates, the largest single delegation outside Israel. Thanks to a robust turnout in the 2015 elections, 56 of the 145 delegates (39 percent) represent the Reform Movement. This representation allows us to

join forces with the Israeli political parties that reflect our values: helping to influence Israeli society in matters of conversion, marriage and divorce that doesn't involve the chief rabbinate, egalitarianism at the Western wall, LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality, and influencing the passing of anti-racist and anti-poverty laws. The representation has also enabled us to ensure that more than \$4 million a year is being directed to the Israeli Reform Movement. By comparison, the Israeli government annually provides nearly 4 billion NIS (\$1.1 billion) to Orthodox and Haredi institutions in Israel. A strong election turnout for ARZA among North America's Reform movement will ensure that financial resources will continue to flow to progressive Jewish institutions in Israel. It also will allow us to fill leadership positions in some of Israel's national institutions including the Jewish Agency for Israel, and Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael – Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF).

In this way we can work towards building a democratic society in Israel that truly reflects the Jewish values we hold dear: pluralism, equality, economic justice, human rights and peace.

Friday, January 24 | 6:15 Shabbat services followed by adult dinner. Israeli Democracy and the WZC Elections: Why Your Vote Counts. \$25, rsvp at www.rodefsholom.org/rsvp

To learn more, visit ARZA's website: www.arza.org