

The Reform Movement in Action

This week (Sunday night and Monday) ushered in the month of *Shevat*, the 11th month of the Hebrew calendar. It also reminds us that in two and a half months, we'll be gathering together for our Passover *seders*. This week's Torah portion, *Bo* (Exodus 10:1- 13:16), contains an important ethic concerning the Passover:

Exodus 12:1 *The Eternal said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ² This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. ³ Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household. ⁴ But if the household is too small for a lamb, **let it share one with a neighbor** who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat.*

The first century Jewish historian, Josephus maintained that a minimum of ten was number required to partake in the *pascal* lamb sacrifice (The Jewish War, Book VI, page 499 of Loeb). And the Talmud it was taught by the rabbinic sages that the smallest group was thirty (*Pesachim* 64b).

The Torah's message is for us to make sure that we connect with our neighbors in order for all to partake in the celebration of the Passover. Note that the mitzvah is not just to reach out to those less fortunate and have them share in your Passover feast. Rather, the Torah is instructing us that if there are too few in our own household to consume the feast, that it is our blessing to include others. Indeed, in this case, those who have more than enough fulfill the mitzvah when others join with us.

All too often we think that the “credit” of the mitzvah is in the hands of the one who is giving. But the nature of Judaism as a family, a people whose 4,000 year history links us in bonds of responsibility, establishes that the gifts of our relationship to one another is blessedly reciprocal. This beautiful ethic is expressed in the Talmudic phrase “*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh, All Israel are responsible for each other*” (Shevuot 39a).

This past week, our Temple Sinai members had the honor to host two leaders of the Reform movement. On Sunday, Professor, Dr. Gary Zola, the Executive Director of the American Jewish Archives, shared fascinating stories about the development of Reform Judaism in America. And on Tuesday, Rabbi Josh Weinberg, Vice President of the Union for Reform Judaism and the Executive Director of Reform Judaism in Israel (ARZA), spoke about the growth and challenges of our movement and also addressed the latest peace proposals for Israel and the Palestinians.

That we could interact with two prestigious leaders speaks volumes about the importance with which our Temple Sinai voice matters to Reform Judaism both here and in Israel.

Rabbi Weinberg’s visit emphasized the importance of voting in the World Zionist Congress. Each of our votes for ARZA gives vital support to Reform Judaism in Israel. Each vote empowers our movement to build on the impressive growth of Reform Judaism in Israel. Already, over 8% of Israelis identify as Reform. Unfortunately, that is still not enough to break the hegemony of the Ultra-Orthodox who deny all other Rabbis (Reform, Conservative and Modern Orthodox) from fully participating in the life-cycles of our members. Your vote for ARZA will play a crucial role in

helping to keep Israel modern, democratic and pluralistic. For **Step-by-step Instructions on How to Vote** go to: <http://arza.org/election/>

Rabbi Zola reviewed the heroic efforts of Isaac Mayer Wise who founded the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now URJ, the Union for Reform Judaism), in order to build collective help to support the creation and maintenance of Hebrew Union College (HUC), the Reform movement's Rabbinic school. His insight was that HUC could not be sustained only through the gifts of substantial donors. Rather, the real health and viability of the Rabbinic school requires the participation of every congregation and, by extension, every member of those congregations. Now, 145 years after the founding of HUC, members of Temple Sinai and members of every Reform congregation can proudly assert that we are playing a vital role in supporting the largest branch of Judaism outside of Israel. Each of you should take credit for being a part of Reform Judaism's philosophy that is both fully modern and fully respectful of our Jewish spiritual and intellectual traditions; a Judaism that champions egalitarian participation, social action, and inclusion.

In keeping with this vision, Temple Sinai will honor our Social Action heroes this *Erev Shabbat* (Friday, 6pm).

Shabbat Shalom,

Rick

Rabbi Rick Rheins