

Rabbi Leonard Rosenthal
Tifereth Israel Synagogue
Rosh Hashana First Day - 5772

ISRAEL THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES

A lot of rabbis waited until last Friday to write their High Holy Day Israel sermons this year. Last Friday was the day upon which Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas petitioned the United Nations to admit the State of Palestine as a member nation. I did not wait. I had already decided a couple of months ago that I was not going to speak about Israeli politics this year.

It's not that I am afraid to. A sermon about Israeli politics is fairly easy to write, and is almost always a surefire crowd pleaser, at for the least the crowd that agrees with you.

During my studies this summer at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, the rabbis who participated spent a lot of time talking about the other crowd, the one composed of those who don't agree with us. We talked not only about Jews who are anti-Israel, but more worrisome, about those who are disconnected from or apathetic toward Israel.

The question they pose is: why should we care about Israel? What

makes our relationship with Israel different than our relationship with any other country in the world in which we do not reside? How do we make sense out of the constant tumult and craziness that surrounds Israel? What are we to think about the constant criticism levied against her? What does Israel have to do with our lives as Jews here, in the United States?

For many years Jewish community leaders have suggested that the best way to increase identification not only with Israel, but with Judaism and the Jewish community as well, is to make sure as many Jews as possible visit Israel to experience Israel for themselves. The statistics indicate that these trips have a positive effect, but I wondered how these trips affected the individual Jews who went.

A couple of minutes ago I said that I was not going to talk about Israeli politics this year. The truth of the matter is that I am not going to talk about Israel at all this year. Instead, I have invited three members of our congregation to share with us their summer experiences in Israel. I asked them to write not a travelogue, but to tell us how visiting Israel changed their thoughts about Israel and their lives as Jews.

We will first be hearing from Daniel Johnson and Christina DeJesus.

Daniel and Christina are young adults who visited Israel for the first time in their lives on *Taglit*, or Birthright Israel. In the words of its organizers, “Taglit-Birthright Israel provides a gift of first time, peer group, educational trips to Israel for Jewish young adults ages 18 to 26 from around the world.” To date, well over 250,000 young adults from all over the world have seen Israel through Birthright Israel.

(<http://www.jewishla.org/blog/entry/taglit-birthright-israel-by-the-numbers>)

Following them, David Ogul, a member of our congregation and a journalist, will share his experience at the Conservative Yeshiva this summer. The Yeshiva, located in Jerusalem, provides adults of all ages an opportunity to study traditional Jewish texts in an open and egalitarian learning environment. The Yeshiva offers a year long program, as well as the summer program on which David participated.