

Jewish Unity and Solidarity - 1997

Then said God, "The Torah... is peace: to whom can I give it?
To a people that loves peace." (Tank. B., Yitro, 37b.)

Issue

In a Jewish world divided by polarization and intolerance of each others' practices and views, there is a great need for worldwide Jewish unity, solidarity, mutual understanding and respect among all the Jewish movements.

Background

Even though all Jews share the same Torah, history and covenant with God, not all Jews have agreed on the interpretations of the Torah or laws or on the same customs and practices. In almost every generation there have been different groups, each trying to convince the others that its way and choices are the only answer to being an "authentic" Jew.

After World War II, Jews, no matter how they practiced their Judaism, united to form the State of Israel. It was the Israeli spirit of accepting Jewish diversity and rescuing and welcoming Jews from across the globe, from Arab nations, Germany, Russia or Ethiopia to name a few, that enabled Jews to immigrate as automatic citizens of Israel. It was this Israeli openness for Jews worldwide that permitted all Jews to unite for the sake of the Jewish people and the continuation of a successful Jewish nation.

In today's world Jews live in many countries. They speak different languages, have different customs and various ways of living Jewishly. Even in the same country, Jews practice their Judaism in very different ways.

This past spring the issue of "Who is a Jew" again came to the forefront. In March, 1997, six hundred Orthodox rabbis from the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada stated to the press that they do not recognize the Reform and Conservative movements as being Jewish. Then on April 1, 1997 the Knesset voted, on a first reading, to accept only those conversions that are performed in the Orthodox tradition. If this legislation passes subsequent readings, it will redefine who is considered an "authentic" Jew in the State of Israel. This could negate Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist conversions performed around the world, if those who have converted immigrate to Israel.

The Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements as well as secular Jews reacted negatively. In response, each stream or movement wrote and distributed public statements both in North America and Israel protesting the new conversion law for Israel. In some instances local Jewish communities, their rabbis and lay leadership insisted that their Jewish Federations issue statements opposing such a change in the way Israeli conversions would be accepted. Reform and Conservative movements worked vigorously to oppose this Israeli measure, saying that it would delegitimize the non-Orthodox denominations. At the end of June an interdenominational committee was established with the Israeli government to work toward a compromise.

The challenge of every generation of Jews is to create a sense of balance between solidarity and diversity. Today is no exception. The state of Israel must continue to be open to all Jews. Likewise, all Jews must continue to have tolerance, respect and understanding for all forms of Judaism while at the same time strengthening a sense of unity and solidarity.

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

Resolution

Believing that all Jews are one people united by covenant and history, recognizing that Jewish pluralism is a reality and realizing the importance of mutual understanding and respect among all Jews, Women of Reform Judaism urges all Sisterhoods to:

- 1) Work toward Jewish solidarity and unity, mutual understanding and respect and joint support of Israel, Jewish communities throughout the world and Jewish causes in our respective communities.
- 2) Encourage local Jewish Federations to recognize the importance of the four movements and to equalize funding for similar programs in each movement locally, as well as internationally, and especially in Israel.
- 3) Promote the importance of separation of politics from religion in North America and in Israel to permit all people to live and practice their faiths as they personally desire.
- 4) Develop community programs and/or forums that will lead to better understanding and respect of our Jewish differences.
- 5) Find constructive ways to build bridges and to work together with diverse Jewish groups, especially Jewish women's groups, on projects of mutual concern and interest, i.e. leadership development, growth of Jewish communities throughout the world, support of Israel, anti-Semitism and issues of political and social action that lead to tikkun olam, helping to heal the world.