

April 2018

Dear Friends,

Every student of the Jewish People's 3800 year long history comes to realize that although, for us, the questions are eternal, the answers to those questions have varied according to when in our history the questions were posed. What was a fundamental belief or standard practice in the biblical period, for example, may well have been transvalued by the Sages in the Rabbinic period, or dismissed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Identifying this truth, Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, taught that 'Judaism is the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish People.'

This truism was turned on its head by the two intrepid and patient guides who shepherded our synagogue group of seventy through Israel in December. As you can imagine, our questions were numerous and wide-ranging. Consider the following sampling: How did Israelis react to President Trump's proclamation that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel? When will we arrive at the hotel? How do we know if we have crossed the Green Line into the West Bank? Is there a vegetarian option for lunch? Do Israelis still believe in the possibility of a two-state solution? How far is the next rest stop? But no matter what the question, and no matter which guide, the answer always began with "It's complicated."

Indeed, 'complicated' could be used to describe the attitude of many American Jews with regard to the modern State of Israel. This was not always so. Having grown up in a socialist Zionist home, Israel was for me the fulfillment of a dream, in particular, of Theodor Herzl's dream of a safe and secure homeland for the Jewish People. From the ashes of the Holocaust came the realization of an independent Jewish state after 1900 years, which gave territorial backing to the words "Never Again!" The nascent state became a point of unconditional pride for my parents and for the American Jews of my generation.

That pride reached its zenith with Israel's victory in the Six Day War. But as the years passed with the waning of a political solution between Palestinians and Israelis, and the growing divide between religious Zionists and religiously progressive Diaspora Jews, attitudes regarding the present (lower case 's') state of Israel has become, well, complicated for some. We at RSNS are fortunate to be one of the few synagogue communities where we can still talk about such complications. Friday night services are a frequent venue for these conversations, but we have additional opportunities, too. Our Shabbat afternoon seminar on Zionism began with a study of mid-nineteenth century Zionist ideologues. Ten years later, we have just completed a study of the Oslo Accords and of the Shamgar Commission's report on Yitzhak Rabin assassination. We have also brought Israel directly to our children. For the past several years, Israeli high school graduates who take a gap year before military service have taught in our school through a program sponsored by the Jewish Agency and run by the Jacobson JCC. Rabbi Jodie spent a week in Israel in February as part of a new program to teach educators how to integrate Israel more fully into our curriculum. In addition to bringing Israel to RSNS, we have brought RSNS to Israel. Our trip in December was one of many that we have sponsored in the course of the past two-and-a-half decades, with still another trip in the planning.

There is nothing better than a personal encounter with the State and its people to make Israel all the more real. Our last trip raised many questions and left us with the understanding that no matter what the particular issue, that it's as complicated for Israelis as it is for diaspora Jews. To be sure, the discourse among Israelis is no less lively than ours. What isn't at all complicated is the miracle that Israel is, and the celebration of its still unrealized potential as the State enters into its seventieth year.

We will rejoice in the best of Israel on the nineteenth of April here at the synagogue with "Café Israel," a cultural evening of music, dance and food. Plan to join the fun from 6:30 to 8:00.

With a grateful heart, I am, warmly,

*Lee*