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# The Reform Movement Israel Update



April 11, 2013 | 1 Iyyar 5773

## Reform Movement Update: A Way Forward at the *Kotel*?

### News for Your Congregation From:

- Union for Reform Judaism
- Central Conference of American Rabbis
- Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
- Association of Reform Zionists of America
- Women of Reform Judaism
- ARZA Canada
- World Union for Progressive Judaism

By working together and with a vision, events concerning equal access to the *Kotel* (the Western Wall in Jerusalem) are moving rapidly, positively, forward. This short update reports on this week's developments and offers some concrete "action steps" for our congregations.

**IN SHORT --** In meetings with Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky we have been very encouraged by his broad proposal to resolve the long standing tension regarding the freedom of non-Orthodox Jews to pray at the Kotel. While his proposals are not all we had hoped for, they represent a dramatic step towards a State of Israel that respects and

protects the rights of non-Orthodox Jews. There are many crucial details to be worked out but in general we are hopeful that the process is moving towards a solution that would affirm the unity of the Jewish people and the many authentic ways to practice Judaism.

### News of the Week and Our Reaction:

- This week Sharansky presented a plan, "One Wall for one Jewish People," that proposes significant steps forward in the ongoing struggle for pluralism and equality at the *Kotel*. While his plan is by no means a perfect solution for all, or any parties, it represents an agreeable compromise. Jewish tradition teaches to both stand by your principles and to compromise, and it is in that spirit that **we commend Sharansky for his leadership, vision and continued effort to broker a compromise.**
- Israeli President Shimon Peres called Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, the ultra-Orthodox rabbi of the Western Wall, urging Rabbi Rabinowitz to act in moderation in his handling of the Wall and attempts by women to pray there. **We applaud President Peres for his political leadership to help calm the situation and his public support for Jewish pluralism.** Rabbi Rabinowitz has said he will not oppose Sharansky's plan and would accept the plan "in the name of unity" (NY Times, 4-10-13). **We welcome this statement and pledge to continue to be open to the same level of cooperation demonstrated by Rabbi Rabinowitz.**
- Five women were detained this week (on Rosh Chodesh Iyyar), and all were released under an unprecedented ruling by the **Honorable Sharon Larry-Bavly** saying, "*After ... examining the evidence ... I find that there is no basis for the arrest of the Respondents. The disturbance of the peace that has occurred at the Western Wall, to the extent that it took place, was not a disturbance of the peace on the part of the Respondents.*" **We welcome this ruling, and urge the police not to appeal it. The ruling calls into question the legitimacy of the 1993 Religious Act that made any religious act that was offensive to others a felony. It is time to dismantle this archaic tool and return to the words of the Declaration of Independence, which promised to "guarantee freedom of religion [... and] will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions."**
- There are many details yet to be worked out and any of them could derail this compromise:

- Interim plan: We insist that there be an immediate shift in police policy toward women's prayer at the *Kotel*, protecting their right to gather at the Wall until the implementation of a long-range plan.
- Dome of the Rock: The "bridge" to the Temple Mount cuts through the proposed expansion of the current prayer space. In the spirit of protecting all the Holy Sites of Jerusalem, we call for a plan to protect access to the Temple Mount without dividing the space in the proposed expanded Western Wall plaza.
- Control of the plaza: We are calling for new oversight of the Western Wall and adjoining plaza under the control of the Israeli government, no longer under the control of the Orthodox authority.

### Action Steps

The Sharansky compromise is promising, but in order to ensure its implementation we need the support and action of all of our congregations. The Reform Movement represents the largest Movement in the Diaspora and our members' voices need to be heard on this issue. We must continue to focus on support for "one Wall for one people."

- **LISTEN** - to a special conference call for Reform Movement leadership with Anat Hoffman, Director of the Israel Religious Action Center, and Gilad Kariv, Director of the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism:
  - Phone number for U.S.: **+1 (201) 590-2255**
  - Phone number for Canada: **+1 (416) 800-8947**
  - Phone number for Israel: **+972 (0) 37219621**
  - Conference Room: **3518108#**
- **READ** - This short message from Anat Hoffman from the bimah this Shabbat: *If you care about Israel there comes a moment when you must roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty. You can't wring your hands and roll up your sleeves at the same time. Women of the Wall's historic battle gives all of us an opportunity to come together but to promote our shared values. It is not only our right to join in, it's our obligation.*
- **LEARN** - We recommend the following resources:
  - [Background information about the Sharansky proposal from ARZA Vice Chair Rabbi Jack Luxemburg >>](#)
  - [Blog post by CCAR President Rabbi Rick Block >>](#)
- **PRAY** - This Shabbat, ARZA will lead congregations around the country in the celebration of the second annual Reform Israel Shabbat. We hope that this will become an annual event in every congregation. Download these resources for use in your congregation or community:
  - [Erev Shabbat Readings](#)
  - [Candlelighting Ceremony](#)
  - [Recommended Torah portions, personal stories, songs & recipes](#)
- **CELEBRATE** - This coming Monday (4/15/13) Kehillat Yozma, in Modi'in, Israel will provide a live broadcast of their Havdalah ceremony to conclude Israel's Memorial Day (Yom HaZikaron) and begin Yom HaAtzmaut, led by Rabbi Kinneret Shiryon and Rabbi Nir Barkin of Kehillat Yozma in Hebrew and English, prayers and songs with the Yozma choir and children, and remarks (with English translation) by Shlomo Dror of the IDF National Military Museum.

**[View the broadcast on Monday, April 15, 11:30 AM - 1 PM ET](#)**