

## Rabbi Gibson's letter from Jerusalem, July 2, 2008

Dear Temple Sinai Family,

It is Wednesday evening, July 2 and I am sitting in the library at the Shalom Hartman Institute to write you a message from Jerusalem. I am now in my second year as a Fellow in the Rabbinic Leadership Institute which provides rabbis the opportunity to study intensively with some of the best professors and thinkers in the entire Jewish world.

I am studying with 27 other rabbis from all of the major movements of North American Judaism: Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist and Renewal. There is a wonderful respect we share for each other which is not always replicated back home. Our studies are demanding - the days start with intensive learning at 8:30 each morning and sessions run beyond 9:30 at night (it's 9:45 right now). There are 95 other rabbis studying in a shorter version of my program, at least 50 lay leaders here from all over North America (including our own Barbara Shuman!) and dozens of other learners, from Army officers to high school students. The air is rich with ideas and enthusiasm.

Today, as I came out of a provocative 2 hour lecture on the book of Joshua in the Bible, I learned that a terrorist had commandeered a bulldozer and used it to kill and maim civilians near the Central Bus Station.

It was very sad and the rest of city is taking all proper precautions, of course. But this was far less devastating than a bomb. This was a criminal act by a terrorist who had the chance to take over a bulldozer. That is different than a terrorist cell penetrating the defenses of Israel to wreak havoc on a large scale. Yet I know that for some, any untoward event is evidence that Israel is unstable.

I do not believe this at all. Israelis acted swiftly to stop the attack and with compassion to all who suffered from it, just like we would expect. It's not just that life goes on, rather that everyone here has a sense of how precious life is and that it is our duty not to drown in panic or pity. I am proud to be in a country that cares for its own with such tenderness without turning into a police state for the sake of security.

Last week, New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristoff commented that Israelis are often involved in the best and the worst of things. The best, because it is a vibrant society committed to progress in every conceivable area, from scientific advances, to medical breakthroughs, to social well being. The worst, because there is an intractable dispute between Israelis and Palestinians over a what is really a very small piece of land and security is an issue.

Our task as committed Jews is to live in both realities. We do not stick our heads in the sand. And we refuse to stop dreaming. Whether we live in America or in Israel, we choose to live and actively take part in great challenges of life in this world. I believe that we do this because of our spiritual heritage, because of our challenging history and also because of our unquenchable optimism.

One teacher, Rabbi Avi Weiss, spoke of the call to what he calls "spiritual activism" in order to live up to the demands of our faith. At home at Temple Sinai, in our own community, nationally and here in Israel we Jews embrace life with its blessings and challenges.

I am proud to be an American Jew. I am delighted to be in Israel. I am moved that the best values of both cultures are part of my spirit, part of my very being, part of my neshama, my soul.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy, Happy Fourth of July!

L'Shalom,  
Rabbi Jamie Gibson