



## Looking East: What Do We See?

EXCERPTS FROM THE MERCAZ USA PRESENTATION AT THE JULY 2017 FJMC CONVENTION

by Richard S Moline, MERCAZ USA Board Member

Director of Israel Education, Community Foundation for Jewish Education/JUF

Genesis 12: 1- 2: The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing."

Ramban (Nachmanides) asks, why this order? Why is Avram told to leave in this order? Chronologically, it should be the other way around. In order to leave artzekha, your country, you first need to leave moladatkha, your hometown. And before you leave your hometown, you would need to leave beit avikah, your parents' home. Perhaps the author of this story was using this seminal moment in the life of one person and ultimately of the entire Jewish people, as an opportunity to understand that for an individual, we cannot separate understanding from emotion. Avram needed to look at this somewhat forced relationship to the land in worldly terms, even though it was coming from a Godly realm.

In today's Jewish world, the confluence between intellect and emotion is most present on the subject of Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel. The connections so many of us have to this small piece of real estate are intensely personal and intensely emotional.

Arguably, there is no stronger or complicated an emotion than love. So how do we convey the notion of Ahavat Yisrael love for Israel, Ahavat Eretz Yisrael – love for the land of Israel? Ahavat Medinat Yisrael – a love for the State of Israel? And ultimately how do we model Ahavat Am Yisrael – how do we model love for the Jewish people?

To some, Israel is a country with a lot of warts and a lot of flaws. No doubt many of us cringe at the statements of certain politicians on the right and on the left; are appalled when leaders are indicted and sentenced to prison. The gap between those who are well off and those living below the poverty line seems to grow every day. And, call it what you wish, but the occupation/administration is a black cloud hanging over our heads.

And yet...like you, I love Israel.

I feel pride and comfort when the sign on the bus normally reserved for the route number wishes us a chag samayach or tells us which day of the Omer we should be counting. There is something incredibly special about saying Shabbat Shalom to every merchant – secular or religious – on Thursday night and Friday.

We have our own sovereign state, our own currency, our own army, our own common language. And to prove our success as defined by Ben Gurion, we even have our own criminals and our own prostitutes.

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## President's Message

Message from MERCAZ USA President, Dr. Marilynn L Wind

As President of MERCAZ USA, I am often asked to explain the role of MERCAZ and how we differ from our partner M's – Masorti Olami and Masorti Foundation. MERCAZ USA is the Zionist arm of the Conservative/Masorti Movement in the United States. We are a membership organization and not a fundraising organization. We are the largest affiliate of MERCAZ Olami which is the Zionist umbrella of the Conservative Movement worldwide.

Why does the Conservative/Masorti Movement need an official Zionist organization, after all, love of Israel has always been an integral part of Conservative Judaism? It is through MERCAZ, the Zionist organization of the Conservative Movement, that we let the Jewish world know that we are committed Zionists, and claim our rightful places at the tables where priorities for the Jewish people are set. MERCAZ's existence helps our institutions obtain recognition and a share of funding, from the agencies that provide for such assistance – the World Zionist Organization

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(WZO); the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael (KKL, the name of the Jewish National Fund in Israel). It is as MERCAZ delegates that leaders of the various arms of the Movement, including USCJ and the RA, are part of the discussions on promoting religious pluralism and respect in the democratic Jewish homeland.

In the US, MERCAZ USA is your representative to the American Zionist Movement (AZM). In addition to bringing the multitude of American Zionists together to foster a love of Israel as the Homeland of the Jewish people, the AZM runs the elections for the delegates to the World Zionist Congress which is held approximately every five years. MERCAZ's membership in AZM enables us to participate in all of the above.

**So how does this help you, our members?** The WZO, JAFI and KKL all have a large number of talented staff who produce educational materials that are available to you and your kehillot, to enable you to learn more about Zionism and Israel. We will be sharing these materials with you on an ongoing basis. We ran a pilot training for rabbis on Long Island on how to use the materials and are planning to run other training around the country. Our website is in the process of being updated so it is on a different platform that

will allow us to use it in a more interactive fashion. Funding from the above National Institutions also benefits many of the organizations in the Conservative/Masorti Movement.

**So who are the other M's?** Masorti is the name used outside of the U.S. and Canada for Conservative Judaism. The **Masorti Foundation** is the US fundraising arm of **Masorti Israel**, the organization encompassing all the Conservative kehillot (congregations) in Israel. **Masorti Olami** is the umbrella for all the Conservative/Masorti kehillot throughout the world. These organizations benefit from MERCAZ's participation in the Zionist entities. Other organizations that benefit include the Schechter Institute and the Conservative Yeshiva in Israel.

We ask you to do the following:

- **Renew your membership in or Join MERCAZ USA** and provide us with your e-mail address so we can keep you updated. We promise we won't inundate you with e-mail.
- **Share this newsletter** with friends and family and encourage them to join MERCAZ USA.
- **Donate to the Masorti Foundation, the Schechter Institute and Masorti Olami** to support Conservative/Masorti Judaism in Israel and throughout the world.

## Sarrae's Corner

*Message from MERCAZ USA Executive Director,  
Sarrae G Crane*



I write this shortly after participating as part of the MERCAZ USA delegation to the October meetings of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and the Va'ad HaPoel (the Actions Committee) of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) in Jerusalem. Attending these meetings provided Marilyn Wind and

me the opportunity to meet with the leadership of our Movement programs and projects in Israel as well as our colleagues from around the world. In November I attended and participated in the American Zionist Movement's 2 day Washington conference marking the centennial of the Balfour Declaration, where I represented the Conservative/Masorti on the panel discussion "Zionism Across the Religious Spectrum." MERCAZ USA was well represented at this event!

As part of the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the vote on partition, I participated with other members of the Conference of Presidents in meetings with ambassadors to the UN from the countries that voted in favor.

In January, Marilyn Wind and I will return to Israel for the MERCAZ Olami retreat – a multi-day agenda conference bringing together the leadership of MERCAZ affiliates throughout the world. We will work together to coordinate our agendas for the next few years.

At home, MERCAZ has begun work on a new strategic plan that will enable MERCAZ to better interact with our constituency. This process will include designing a new website to better serve us all.

We have introduced a new format for our newsletter (which will now appear in print twice a year – December and June). It now includes:

- A feature article for thought and discussion;
- Messages from the MERCAZ USA President and Executive Director letting you know what is happening;
- A sampling of successful ventures by our partner agencies – Masorti Olami and Masorti Israel so that you will learn about some of the wonderful things the Masorti Movement is doing around the world and especially in Israel with the help of MERCAZ.

We are interested in hearing from you, our members. We invite you to please share your thoughts with us. ([info@mercazusa.org](mailto:info@mercazusa.org)).



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We also have our own set of profoundly deep and troubling challenges.

I view Israel the same way I view my family. I love them unconditionally. They make me happy and proud. Yet sometimes, we disagree. We may even fight. But I love them unconditionally, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

With that in mind, I want to start by suggesting three simple thoughts to guide us when we think about the complexity of our relationship to Israel.

- Israel wants peace. The Jewish people want peace. The Psalms tell us to seek peace and pursue it. Every single section of our prayer book ends with a prayer for peace (*Oseh Shalom, Sim Shalom, Shalom Rav*). Whenever there's a transition, it's all about peace.
- Israel is a democracy. While we may not agree with everything that happens there, nobody is killed for being gay or lesbian (Tel Aviv has been named the most gay-friendly city in the world). There is a free press. Nobody will have their hand cut off for writing an editorial critical of the government. There is free speech. Doesn't seem like such a big deal, but look at the rest of the neighborhood.
- Israel has a right to exist and a right to defend itself. Period full stop.

In *Parashat Ma'asei*, we learned about the long journey of the Israelites as they marched toward Canaan, with many stops. But at the end of this travelogue, we read the following:

*And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land to you to possess.* (Numbers 33:52)

What made these journeys meaningful, perhaps even tolerable, is that there was an end game. There was a purpose. There was hope and there was promise.

So now, as we may feel like Yehuda HaLevi, that we are in the west while our hearts are in the east, we need to think about our current journey.

Where are we going on our communal journey with the State of Israel and Israel education? I use the word education advisedly. It's admittedly difficult, even impossible, to have a conversation about Israel without things getting political, but there needs to be a marked difference between education and advocacy.

Advocacy, or *hasbarah*, is a failed strategy. Its focus has been defensive and its effect has been minimal. With education, sadly, we've failed to move much beyond falafel, so when our kids step onto their college campus, and increasingly on the high school campus, they look at us and say, "you didn't tell us any of this stuff." Or worse yet – "you lied to us" or "you betrayed us."

So where do we start?

Let's look in a mirror. The overwhelming majority of our pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah kids who are enrolled in any kind of Jewish educational program are in afternoon or supplemental religious school

programs. The average synagogue religious school meets 96 hours per year -- less than 4 hours per week during the school year. It's about as much time as it takes to watch a ballgame.

We teach Hebrew language, and prayer, and music, and history, and more. So where and how does Israel fit? "Israel is not a unit!" It's part of our DNA. It's part of who we are as a Jews, but what does this mean? Are we a religion? Are we a culture? Are we a nation? Are we a people? Israel is where we pull this all together. When we decide to talk about Israel only in terms of the latest crisis with the Kotel and concentrate only on the challenges and not the joys, it's no wonder we find a disconnect.

What role does terminology play in our public discourse?

How do we refer to Israel and the West Bank? What do we convey when we use the terms "Judea and Samaria" or "occupied territories" or "settlements?" What shall we call that wall – a "separation fence" or a "security barrier?"

What maps do we use when we teach about Israel? Should we show a map with a green line? With red lines? With Areas A, B, and C of the Palestinian territories delineated? And the greatest challenge – what should our strategy be as participants in a progressive, religious Jewish lifestyle?

First, we need to get more kids to Israel. Birthright is too late.

Next, we need to support Mercaz. Mercaz is the voice of the Conservative movement in the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency and is the vehicle through which the diverse arms of our movement can approach the government, whether it's through FJMC, USCJ, the RA, or others. And most important, I know that Sarrae Crane and Marilyn Wind have re-envisioned Mercaz as the address for Israel education and awareness.

Let's mobilize starting here, and starting now.

I love engaging in conversation with cab drivers in Israel and have many wonderful stories. When I was in Israel during the Second Lebanon War, I found myself engaged in a very loud political conversation with a Sephardi driver when I noticed signs in restaurants throughout Jerusalem advertising "Free Meals to People from the North." If you recall, people who lived up north were fleeing to the south to avoid the scud missile attacks.

I said something to the driver about these signs, at which point, his voice dropped and he said to me "*ha'am hazeh yodeiah aikh l'habeq*" – this country knows how to hug.

This statement is as simple as it is profound.

Yes, the relationship is complex. Yes, we don't always get them and they don't always get us.

Israel is the vision and venture of the Jewish people. And yes, we are all part of the same family.

*The full text is available at the [Mercazusa.org](http://Mercazusa.org) website.*

## MERCAZ is proud of the work of our partner agencies and the support we provide them through MERCAZ's participation in the WZO, JAFI and KKL

### Rabbinic Ordination in Germany



Mazal tov to Rabbi Nitzan Stein Kokin, the first rabbi ordained by the Zacharias Frankel College – the European Rabbinical Seminary, and the first Conservative/Masorti rabbi ordained in Germany since before WWII. (photo by Tobias Barniske)

### News from Masorti Israel: Adat Shalom-Emanuel, Rehovot

Adat Shalom-Emanuel, Rehovot, founded in 1970, has experienced a growth in participation of late. In addition residents from 2 other Rehovot neighborhoods have asked the kehillah for help – one for establishing a new egalitarian synagogue to serve their needs and the other to assist them in organizing Yom Kippur services. Although the mayor of Rehovot is not supportive of these efforts, over 80 local residents signed a request for land in Rehovot-Hamada to build a new synagogue and nearly 100 people, who would not otherwise have been in shul, attended Yom Kippur services in the Sderot Chen neighborhood.

The interest of the residents of these 2 neighborhoods proves the vitality of Masorti in Rehovot and its relevance to a growing number of people in the city.

Support Masorti Foundation [www.masorti.org](http://www.masorti.org)



Pictured here is Mario Stofenmacher, the spiritual leader of Bet-El Madrid and his family writing a letter in the Torah with the Sofer Stam (scribe) Rabbi Gustavo Surazski from Israel. (photo from Masorti Olami)

### News from Masorti Olami: Comunidad Masorti Bet-El, Madrid, Spain

The Masorti community in Madrid—Bet El—was the venue for a triple Simcha at the beginning of November. Bet El hosted the fall meeting of Masorti Europe, with delegates from Masorti communities in England, Valencia and Alicante, Spain, Paris, Nice and other communities in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, and the Czech Republic, with panels on Zionism, Masorti principles and techniques for addressing community issues.

Highlighting the weekend was the community's celebration of the 25th year of Bet El and the completion of a new Sefer Torah under the guidance of a Masorti sofer, Rabbi Gustavo Surzaski. **This was the first Sefer Torah written in Spain in over 500 years!**

Comunidad Masortí Bet-El was founded in 1991. Today some 120 families from Madrid and the surrounding area participate in activities.

Support MASORTI OLAMI! [www.masortiolami.org](http://www.masortiolami.org)



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