

MASORTI MATTERS

Shalom Friends,

Ron Hoffman, President of Canadian Foundation for Masorti Judaism, asked that I share with you a commentary on the Haftarah on Parshat Vayigash, taken from Ezekiel. The author is Rabbi Abe Friedman of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago, written for "The Unraveller," a series published by the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs. Rabbi Friedman urges Conservative Jews everywhere to "be part of the solution" to promote religious pluralism in the State of Israel through support of the Masorti movement, a message still relevant as we begin 2012.

Please enjoy his incisive commentary, and take his message to heart. You may make your donation online at <http://www.canadahelps.org/CharityProfilePage.aspx?CharityID=s39186>, or send your contribution to the Masorti Foundation at the address below.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Jennifer Gorman, Executive Director, Canadian Foundation for Masorti Judaism

All the House of Israel

By Rabbi Abe Friedman

Ezekiel is a strange dude. As one of my professors in Rabbinical School once pointed out, you're dealing with a guy who started his career by eating a book (see Ezekiel 2:8-3:3); after that, it's basically anything goes.

No surprise, then, that this week's Haftarah opens with more obscure instructions:

The word of the Lord came to me: And you, O mortal, take a stick and write on it, "Of Judah and the Israelites associated with him"; and take another stick and write on it, "Of Joseph – the stick of Ephraim – and all the House of Israel associated with him." Bring them close to each other, so that they become one stick, joined together in your hand (Ezekiel 37:15-17).

The Lord goes on to explain to Ezekiel the meaning of the sticks – each represents half of the Israelite kingdom, which God will reunite in the coming redemption – and to promise Ezekiel that when the Lord God brings the people back to the land of Israel they will never divide their own people again.

Although Ezekiel's message was written thousands of years ago, it could not come at a more opportune time. Increasingly, we hear stories of religious discrimination in Israel – most recently, women who have been barred from participating in family funerals even when that was not their family's custom. We are right to be angry about those rabbis who abuse their political power and use religion as a weapon against other Jews.

Israel, and Judaism itself, have suffered because that country does not have a formal separation of Religion and State as we have in America. One need only consider the stark disparity between Orthodox synagogues in Israel, whose rabbis' salaries are paid by the government from tax revenues, and Conservative and Reform rabbis who must work two, three, and sometimes four jobs to make ends meet – because their synagogues receive no government support.

But if we merely condemn those who use religion to sow division, we have done nothing to improve the situation.

Ezekiel's vision of two sticks challenges us to step up and be a part of the solution as well. For God tells Ezekiel, *Bring them close to each other, so that they become one stick, joined together in your hand* – each of us must take action to heal the breach, to bring about the unification of the Jewish people.

Ultimately, Israelis must deal with the problem of Religion, State, and pluralism. For us, as American Jews and members of Conservative synagogues, the best way to do that is to support the work of Masorti (Conservative) Judaism in Israel – rabbis, teachers, and lay leaders who believe in the future of religious pluralism in Israel and in the possibility that all Jews can join together in strengthening our people and our religious homeland.

So as the end of the calendar year approaches, consider a donation to the Masorti Foundation, which will go to support Masorti congregations in Israel. When you plan your next trip to Israel, make sure Masorti communities are on your itinerary, especially when you're deciding where to go for Shabbat.

In supporting Masorti Judaism in Israel, we lend support to a vision of Judaism that makes room for all Jews – regardless of their approach to observance – within the community of Israel.



Canadian Foundation for Masorti Judaism ~ Supporting Conservative Judaism In Israel
MERCAZ-Canada ~ Your Voice in Israel

For more information about Masorti/Conservative Judaism in Israel
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