

July 21, 2010

Knesset adjourned, the proposed conversion legislation did not come to the floor, and for the moment there is a respite in the ongoing struggle to define the Jewishness of Israel. Over the course of the next several months a process will emerge that involves the Government of Israel, American Jewish voices from the Federations, Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and hopefully modern Orthodox communities, Jewish voices from around the world and especially the voices of our Reform and Conservative movements in Israel.

One can never say thank you enough. Please email your thanks to Prime Minister Netanyahu by going to RAC.org. and to your nearest Israeli Consul General. The team effort of the Federations and the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements has been extraordinary. Please let your federation know that we appreciate their ongoing support in the effort to secure a religiously pluralistic Israel.

We hope that the first outcome is a viable solution for the 300,000 - 400,000 Olim from the former Soviet Union who are not considered Jewish to become Jews by choice. Our goal includes increasing the effort to insure that Israel is the Jewish State for all Jews with respect and state support for our Reform and Conservative movements.

Trying to finely parse the Jewish in the Jewish state is nothing new. With the British Mandate running down to the end the Jewish Agency, Chaired by David Ben Gurion prepared a Declaration of Independence. The careful crafting, the message, the joy, the expectations were not hard to commit to paper. Then came the question of God. Does God belong in a declaration of a sovereign state? Israel was established as a secular democracy with rights for all of its citizens, so what would it mean to acknowledge God when many citizens were atheists and some not Jewish.

The compromise was to use an expression of God that was not a traditionally specific name for God but rather an expression open to interpretation. Rock of Israel.

PLACING OUR TRUST IN THE "ROCK OF ISRAEL", WE AFFIX OUR SIGNATURES TO THIS PROCLAMATION

David Ben Gurion found a way to solve his problem. Perhaps there is something to the name. David times two was an extended conversation between Rabbi David Saperstein and MK David Rotem. It was an open exploration of the conversion bill he sponsored and our detailed concerns. Perhaps language can be found to solve many of our concerns. Only time will provide the answer.

The most fascinating exchange today was with a new member Knesset who is a seasoned journalist. "Israel is the most successful place in the world in terms of building a state. We have yet to be successful at building our society"

Max Fisher was one of our greatest Jewish community leaders in the 20th century. He chaired nearly every major American Jewish organization as well as the Jewish Agency for Israel. Max was a proud Reform Jew. Over the years during stressful periods discussing Who is a Jew, What is an acceptable conversion, he provided counsel; Patience and Perseverance.

Now is the time to persevere in our efforts, to thank those who need to be thanked, and to engage with those who disagree with us. Had the vote come to the floor today it would have been defeated. Together, we need to insure that strong support of the Prime Minister, Likud, Kadimah,

Labor, and Meretz remains in tact for the sake of all Jews.

We Are One people only if we work at it every day.

Danny