



**Regarding the Sharansky Proposal
(excerpted from Rabbi Jack Luxemburg, ARZA Vice Chair)**

Key elements are:

A prayer area, the size of the current one and on the same level, to be created beyond the Mughrabi Bridge that leads up to the Temple Mount;

One entrance to one expanded Kotel Plaza from which a person can access either of the two prayer areas;

Both areas will be accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;

The Kotel Plaza will be under the governance of an **expanded Western Wall Foundation that will include representatives of Diaspora Jewry and a broader range of Israeli society** with the intention of restoring the “national and inclusive” character of the Plaza;

The egalitarian prayer area will have its own advisory body.

- The proposal is a victory for those who have worked so hard to bring about recognition of progressive, egalitarian Judaism in the Israeli public sphere. At a site recognized as central to the national and spiritual identity of the Jewish people and the Jewish state, Reform Judaism will be on regular display.
- Natan Sharansky wrote in a letter to the Jewish Agency Board of Governors that the Western Wall, all of which was referred to as “The Kotel,” was divided into two sections in 1968, not long after the Six Day War, and that the northern section was designated for prayer and the southern section, adjacent to the Mughrabi Bridge, was set aside for archeological exploration. “The excavations at the southern half of the Kotel have been completed,” wrote Sharansky. “It is time that we transform the Kotel into a site dedicated to prayer as well as a meaningful cultural and national symbol.”
- While the “devil is in the details”, there is every reason to look favorably on this proposal and the effort to bring it to fruition. The partnership between the non-Orthodox streams in the U.S. and in Israel, working together on this issue, bodes well for working together on other matters related to pluralism.

- It is important to broaden our own historical understanding of the Kotel as being more than the 90 meters along the Western Wall that is the current prayer area. Our struggle over the years has not been over those 90 meters but for the vision of an Israeli society that is progressive, egalitarian and inclusive in all aspects of national life, including the religious. What we can accomplish at the Kotel should not distract us from the other challenges to an egalitarian, democratic and pluralistic Israel which persist.
- As we celebrate the 65th anniversary of Israeli Independence, we may be witnessing a “tipping point” in Israeli society that favors significant change in favor of values we cherish as Reform Jews. It is important that we continue to express our support for these trends in the context of our continuing support for Israel and for our Reform Movement there. The more involved our Reform Movement is with Israel, the greater influence we can exert in this pivotal moment. Each individual, each congregation can make a meaningful contribution to these efforts.
- The proposal also gives our movement in Israel a literally “public platform” with unprecedented visibility from which to reach out to the great number of Israelis who are seeking a vibrant, meaningful way to express the spiritual dimension of their Jewish identities.