

Last week I had the privilege of participating in my first meeting of the Rabbinical Assembly Executive Council. As a new member of the Executive Council, this was my first meeting, so I didn't quite know what to expect. But I was in for quite an inspiring and uplifting 5 hour meeting!

We met in a large conference room at the Seminary in NY, 17 elected council members, who are the governing body of the 1600- member Rabbinical Assembly, plus officers and the professional staff of the RA. Just gathering and sharing with rabbinical colleagues was a strengthening experience for me- living in a somewhat rabbinically isolated area, I rarely have the opportunity to be with my peers. But it was the agenda, and the reports and actions of the Council that I found most edifying.

We heard from a number of South American Rabbis about the great growth of the Masorti/Conservative Movement in South America, notably, in Argentina, in Peru, Colombia, Chile and Brazil. We heard about the demand and great expansion in Conservative synagogues, youth groups and summer camps, as well as the growth of the Seminario Rabbinico Latino Americano, (whose name I need not translate). Although surveys report that in North America, the Conservative Movement is graying, apparently the opposite is true south of the equator.

We discussed at length the Rabbinical Assembly's Social Justice and Public Policy initiatives. We are encouraging legislation in Washington and practices around the country, regarding a fair and humane immigration policy, and "Greening the Environment" issues.

We heard about Hechsher Tzedek, the work of Conservative Rabbis in urging kosher food production plants to establish fair working conditions, environmentally friendly processes, and for plants working with animals, concern for animal welfare.

We heard about preliminary work being done to formalize and standardize *giyur*/ conversion processes and centralize Conservative conversion registry. This is particularly important for *gerim*/converts, or their children, who move to Israel – a centralized Conversion registry will aid in their acceptance by the State of Israel for marriage or citizenship.

There were a few other matters discussed – two members of the RA were expelled from the organization for various unseemly conduct, and there was a discussion about "defrocking" versus "mere" expulsion from the Rabbinical Assembly.

There was some discussion of three synagogues in Toronto who seceded from the United Synagogue, and whether the response to their succession should be from United Synagogue alone, or were we other arms of the Conservative Movement, all in this together.

There was a report about plans for the February '09 Rabbinical Assembly convention in Jerusalem, which will be focusing on environmental and social justice issues in Israel.

The meeting was uplifting and exciting, and thoughtful and inspiring – I am honored and delighted to serve on the RA Executive Council for my term for the next three years, and I look forward to sharing with our congregation some of the highlights and advances that we discuss as our Jewish lives become deeper and more richly entwined with the social fabric of the world in which we live.

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