



MERCAZ CELEBRATES 40 YEARS!

A Reflection on Why MERCAZ Was Created

By Rabbi Matthew Simon, Past President MERCAZ USA

Forty years ago, Rabbi Stanley Rabinowitz, the senior rabbi of Adas Israel Congregation, Washington, DC, called a series of meetings to formally establish the Zionist movement of Conservative Judaism. One of his colleagues suggested the name **MERCAZ**, as a play on the Hebrew word meaning "in the Center," reflecting our Jewish orientation and our Israeli politics as well as the English abbreviation for the words "The Movement to Reaffirm Conservative Zionism."

The Reform Movement had established ARZENU as its Zionist organization a year earlier and there were a number of Orthodox related movements with ties to Israeli political parties. MERCAZ would enable us to claim our rightful seats at the table of the Zionist institutions.

Why were we late in officially joining the World Zionist Organization? Rabbi Rabinowitz and I asked each other this question at a number of personal meetings and conversations. The answer wasn't negative, but rather was part of the direction of Conservative Judaism. Israel was part of our daily work, our outlook, and a recipient of our financial support. Our members were active and held leadership roles in Hadassah, the ZOA, the Jewish National Fund and many other Zionist organizations. As a Movement, we organized support for our Israeli schools, projects and institutions. We did not see the need to be part of the Jewish Agency for Israel or the World Zionist Organization. If anything, it looked to be too much a part of a political system. Our commitment was to Israel in its fullest. But then, we were not at the table when decisions were made, nor present when funds were allocated.

I came to my suburban Washington pulpit, B'nai Israel Congregation in Rockville, MD, from Jerusalem, where I was director of the Office of the United Jewish Appeal and the American Section of the Jewish National Fund. Both important fundraising institutional supportive organizations sought our support, but we did not have our own structure to place our needs on the world Jewish agenda.

From this understanding, MERCAZ USA was born and MERCAZ in many other countries followed, joining together in MERCAZ Olami. As I look back on our accomplishments over the last 40 years, it is clear that we made the right decision. We now have a voice at the tables of the Jewish people, giving us input in non-governmental decisions and gaining support for our institutions and projects in Israel and worldwide. While there are many challenges still confronting us, we are in a better position to respond because of the existence of MERCAZ.

May our first 40 years be only a beginning of our work on behalf of our Movement in Eretz Yisrael. May we grow from strength to strength!



President's Message

Dr. Marilyn L Wind

MERCAZ USA is celebrating its 40th anniversary. Your membership is important to the Conservative/Masorti Movement in Israel and worldwide. It provides the support we need to function.

The fact that we exist as a membership organization tells the Jewish world (including the Government of Israel) that Conservative Jews in the US care about our brethren in Israel and are committed to Jewish religious pluralism.

The Conservative Movement was always committed to Zionism, but we did not have a voice at the table of the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency for Israel or *Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael* (the Jewish National Fund) until MERCAZ was founded. By 1979, we already had some *kehillot* in Israel, and a building that housed the year-long program for JTS Rabbinical students. Additionally, USY Pilgrimage and Ramah Seminar brought hundreds of our teens to Israel each summer and The United Synagogue Jerusalem center and youth hostel had already been established. But it was not until MERCAZ was established that we were able to speak as a Movement.

Over the last 40 years, our voice has gotten stronger. I remember going to the World Zionist Congress in the 90's and watching every resolution dealing with pluralism go down to defeat. Recently resolutions dealing with pluralism and other issues that we care about as Conservative Jews have passed overwhelmingly. MERCAZ has enabled this to happen. We should all be proud!

Clearly, more remains to be accomplished aside from gaining supportive resolutions. Having seats at these various tables enables us to fiscally support programs and projects of the Conservative/Masorti Movement in Israel and around the globe and to champion the causes of **progress and pluralism**.

In order to make this happen, we need your continued support! You can help by:

- **RENEW** your MERCAZ USA membership, or **JOIN** if you are not already a member, include your email address so we can easily stay in touch with you.
- **PLEDGE TO VOTE** in the upcoming election of delegates to the 2020 World Zionist Congress from January 21, 2020 – March 11, 2020.

Our Movement needs you to do both!

Marilyn

