

Renew Your Links With Israel

Steve Denenberg - Exec Director UPJ

Surely it is not a coincidence that we read last week's Parasha Terumah ('Donation') just at the time when the United Israel annual Appeal commenced. This is the time in the year when we have the opportunity to renew and strengthen our links with Israel in a tangible way. The work of the United Israel Appeal is vital in ensuring that Jews from around the world are able to make a new life in Israel and to receive the help they require to make the transition to a new language and culture as smooth as possible. **Fortunately, for us Progressive Jews, we are able to support these efforts while providing direct support for the Progressive movement in Israel, as it too welcomes and absorbs refugees and migrants, as well as addressing key social and civil issues.** When establishing the Jewish State, none of the leaders believed that a time would come when Egged buses were segregated and women forced to sit in the rear third of the bus. Few imagined that ceremonies to welcome new migrants and graduating soldiers would be banned from the area of the Wailing Wall because the possibility of a woman singing there was "immodest"; most would have thought it unimaginable that photographs of women candidates for the Knesset would not be displayed publicly for reasons of modesty; and the vast majority would have laughed at the idea of Jewish "modesty patrols" telling residents of non-religious neighbourhoods how they should dress and behave. However, all of these and many other examples of religious intolerance are a reality in Israel – today. As most people know, Israel is a largely secular and tolerant society and yet the current electoral system – which allows the inclusion of "religious parties" - gives comparatively small groups, such as ultra-orthodox sects the power to have legislation passed that is against the wishes of the majority of the population. They have also succeeded in preventing freedom of religion, a central tenet of the Declaration of Independence, from being implemented for Jews, and others. You will therefore realise the vital importance of the funds that we send to the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) via the UIA Progressive Trust as our support for migrant absorption frees funds to enable the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) to be at the forefront of the battle to ensure that Israel is the democratic, pluralistic and inclusive society that was the dream of its founders and is still the goal of the vast majority of Jews around the world, including the overwhelming majority of Israelis. The IMPJ's legal arm, the Israel Religious Action Centre, is one of the major forces of social advocacy in Israel and its staff work tirelessly to challenge basic inequalities, including the situation where every orthodox rabbi and congregation is funded by the State and yet the Progressive and Conservative movements receive neither recognition nor funding. The IMPJ is working for justice, both in the Knesset and through the legal and judicial system, on behalf of all who pray for a democratic and inclusive State of Israel. We strongly encourage you to pledge your support to Israel through the UIA and also by visiting whenever you can; and by being informed and speaking up when others criticise. Over the coming days and weeks renew your links with Israel and help ensure a strong and healthy Jewish State. For more information please call Ian Samuel on 9563-6336