

At the Kotel, at last | Cover Story



Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

I'm one of those fortunate people who gets to be in Israel for 10 days each year. I meet with the Ziegler rabbinical students studying there during their third year of our program, teach at various *yeshivot*, interview prospective students and meet with Masorti (Conservative) leaders and rabbis. I get to visit family and friends and stroll the streets of Jerusalem.

Walking Jerusalem is something my great grandparents could only dream about, but for me it is an annual privilege. And I meander widely. But the one spot I never visit is the Kotel. That Wall leaves me sad and angry — an imposed monopoly of Orthodox domination and political capitulation to religious coercion. I can't stand at the Kotel without feeling invisible, disdained, cheapened. My presence would betray my colleagues and students, the female rabbis whose talent and wisdom have already so enriched contemporary Jewish life.

The decision by the Israeli government to create an honorable space for egalitarian worship makes it possible to return to this sacred space, allows the space — once again — to unite the Jewish people across our diversity, rather than smothering Jewish vitality with state-sponsored uniformity.

There are still issues in Israel's struggling democracy that demand our attention — broader issues of religious pluralism for all streams of Judaism, the status of *mizrachi* and Ethiopian Jews, equal social services and opportunity for Israel's Arabs, affordable housing, ending the occupation in a way that gives Israelis and Palestinians real security and political self-determination — to name a few.

But this gesture of inclusion at the Kotel is more than just a nod. It is a visible acknowledgment that we are all recognized components of the Jewish people, that our ways of loving God and Torah can stand in the sun and add to the light.

This is good.

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