

I write to you this month to ask for your vote. Yes, really – your vote.

You may not know that there is an important election going on right now in the Jewish world, an election where each one of us has the right to vote. It is the World Zionist Organization (WZO) elections and I am on the ballot as a delegate, representing you and representing Conservative Judaism. Please – right now – go to votemercaz.org, register, note my name on Slate #2, then vote for our entire slate, for Conservative Judaism (Slate #2).

Now that I've asked for your vote, I owe you some background into why this matters.

Since the days of Theodore Herzl, Jews from around the world have been participating in the World Zionist Congress, shaping the direction of what is today our beloved State of Israel. Jews in the United States have the opportunity right now to have our voices heard in Israel through a democratic election of delegates to the next Zionist Congress – in Jerusalem, in October. Conservative Judaism in the United States – the values we hold dear - will be well-represented by MERCAZ, the official lobby for religious pluralism, protection of Israel's environment and a peaceful, 2-State solution to Israel's security challenges. Moreover, a strong MERCAZ voting block will ensure financial benefits of \$2 million annually to Conservative-affiliated institutions in Israel and around the world.

You've probably heard of UJA Federation and you likely know that some donations to UJA help care for overseas needs. The process is handled through the Zionist Congress and elections, via the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization. Through those organizations, funds are allocated to the various Jewish "streams" - especially the Masorti-Conservative Movement in Israel and elsewhere around the world.

As we heard so meaningfully from our visitor Rabbi Andy Sacks in December, the "playing field" for the allegiance of Israeli individuals and for government resources is far from level right now. Conservative/ Masorti Judaism has made great strides in recent years despite the lack of generous funding that regularly goes to Orthodox clergy and institutions. Many young people in Israel and the Diaspora feel alienated from Israel because they do not identify with the kinds of Judaism that ARE supported, and do not like being told that Conservative and Reform Judaism are not really Judaism and should not count when it comes to recognition and resources. A vote for in this election – via votemercaz.org - is a statement that we do count, and must be counted.

As Chancellor Eisen of the Jewish Theological Seminary reminded me, this is a vote for "the kind of Israel we want to see: open and pluralistic, loyal to the Zionist ideals

enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence, pursuing a negotiated two-state settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, and proactively concerned for the protection of Israel's environment.”

As a Vice President of Mercaz USA, these commitments in the Mercaz platform are precious to me, as I believe they are to you. I believe that Israel grows stronger the more its society heeds all the diverse voices that comprise it, and that Israel's support from Jews around the world requires that Jews in all their varieties feel part of Israel, take pride in its achievements, and know that the kind of Judaism that inspires us also inspires Israelis and contributes to the State.

This will not happen unless Masorti Judaism is well-represented in the rooms where funds are allocated—and that, in turn, depends on a large turnout by us. So, please, today, go to votemercaz.org to register, vote and support this positive vision of Israel – Slate #2. THANK YOU!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eytan Hammerman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eytan Hammerman, YOUR Rabbi and delegate to the World Zionist Congress