

# Linda Lingle:

BY BETH PANITZ

**This Hawaii governor leads with Jewish values.**

**F**or Linda Lingle, governor of sunny Hawaii, the heat is always on. She races from a meeting with her closest advisers, to a press conference, and then back to her office to sign a bill into law. In this frantic schedule, there's one weekly meeting that the governor especially cherishes—every Wednesday morning she meets with her rabbi. Together, they study Torah, giving the governor a moment to reflect on the lessons learned from Biblical leaders such as Avraham, Moshe, and Miriam that she can apply to her work as governor.

The study sessions are one way that Governor Lingle observes Judaism while leading America's 50th state. When she moved into the governor's residence in January 2003, she proudly attached a mezuzah to the doorpost at the entrance, and each Pesach, she hosts a community Seder.

When we spoke with Gov. Lingle, she re“LEI”ed what it is like to serve as a chief executive in a flowery, tropical paradise.

**BABA:** Aloha, Gov. Lingle. Why did you run for governor of Hawaii?

**GOV. LINGLE:** I thought it was a good way to help people. When the community has a problem, being a leader puts me in a position to help solve it. When I came into office, our state had a serious economic crisis, and there had been lots of public corruption. I wanted to restore the people's trust in the government. We've gone a long way toward doing that.

**BABA:** What traits make a good leader?

**GOV. LINGLE:** Realizing that you can't please everyone is among the most important traits for a leader. You have to make what you believe is the best decision for the greatest number of



# Head of State

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JEWISHFUL THINKING

When we spoke with Gov. Lingle, we asked her if there were any Jewish texts that offer her insights into her job as leader of America's 50th state. She told us that she had studied that very morning about a special architectural quality of the Holy Temple that described her leadership style. While most buildings are constructed to bring light inside, she explained, King Solomon built the Holy Temple to project light outward. Therefore, the windows were narrow inside and wide outside, enabling the Temple's spiritual light to illuminate the world. So too, she said, a good leader must shine outward to the people.

people, and then move forward without getting overly concerned that some people won't like your decision.

**BABA:** Can you give us an example?



Gov. Lingle meets with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (above); and with soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces (below).

**GOV. LINGLE:** Sure. I can't spend all of the money that the legislature requests in the budget, because they want more money than we have. I'm the one who must tell people they can't have something, and people don't like to hear that. But it's my responsibility to maintain financial health for the state.

**BABA:** How have Jewish values influenced your views of leadership?

**GOV. LINGLE:** Jewish values provide a strong foundation for my life and my job. I appreciate that Judaism requires that the community and the individual take responsibility for helping the poor. In fact, this responsibility has influenced my administration's plans to work with the private and non-profit sectors to build affordable rental housing for Hawaii's 5,000 homeless citizens. We've come dangerously close to accepting the homeless as a problem we just can't solve. We must face this, even though it will be one of the toughest issues for our community.

**BABA:** Why do you make time in your hectic schedule to study each week with a rabbi?

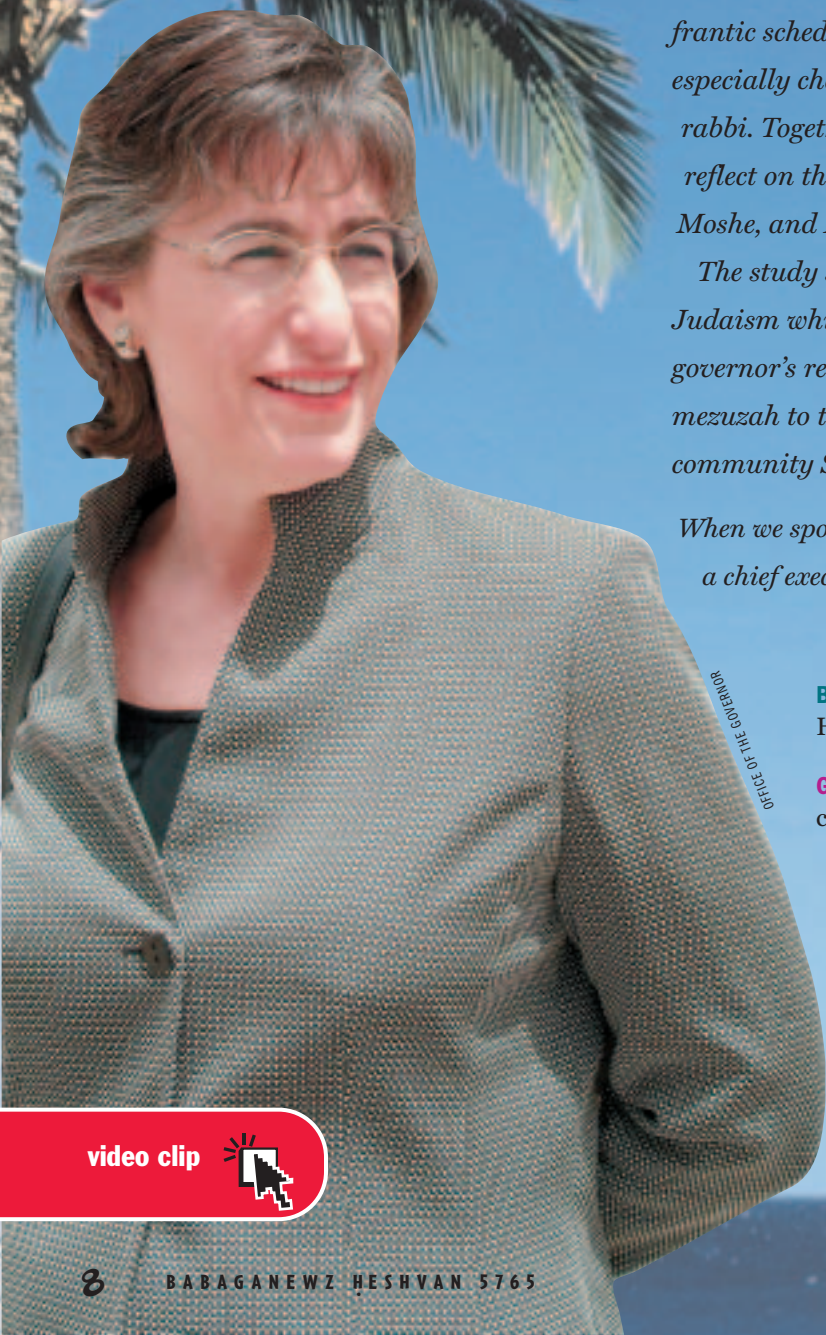
**GOV. LINGLE:** Torah study with the rabbi reminds me that although we live in a highly technological,

modern world, ancient Jewish values, such as the obligation to be compassionate to others, can still guide human behavior.

**BABA:** You recently traveled to Israel for the first time with an official delegation from Hawaii. As a Jew, what was the most meaningful part of the trip?

**GOV. LINGLE:** It was a trip of a lifetime. One of the most meaningful parts was our visit to Masada. After Rome destroyed the Second Temple in 70 C.E., a group of Jews fled Jerusalem to the fortress of Masada, which is situated on top of an enormous, isolated rock. There, they courageously held out for three years. I wasn't familiar with that history of our people and the difficult decisions they were forced to make.

**BABA:** Mahalo (thank you), Gov. Lingle. May you continue to go from strength to strength. 🌟



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