

CD-1078 Transcription

Lecture on Israel and Jewish-Christian dialogue.

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In 1974, he co-edited with Dr. Paul Opsahl, *Speaking of God Today in the Age of Auschwitz and Technology*, and is co-editor of the upcoming book, *Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation*. Rabbi Tanenbaum is a founder and co-secretary of the Joint Vatican International Jewish Consultative Committee. He was only rabbi to attend Vatican Council II, and his guidance was sought in the Vatican's Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, which repudiated any form of anti-Semitism in church teachings. He has pioneered numerous international religious colloquia, including the historic conference on Religion, Land, Peoplehood and Nationalism at Hebrew University. He was co-president of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, and has helped to mobilize [01:00] support for relief efforts in Biafra, Uganda, Ireland, and for Vietnamese refugees. Two weeks ago, he received his tenth honorary doctorate from Sacred Heart University in Connecticut, which cited him as the human rights rabbi of America. I give you Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum.

Marc Tanenbaum:

I want to begin by sharing with you an experience I had this weekend, which as I think back on it, was in some ways a providential preparation for this rather extraordinary meeting of [02:00] our dear friends of the Texas Baptist Convention, and the Jewish Community in Dallas, and the American Jewish Committee.

I was invited to serve this weekend as "scholar-in-residence" at an institution called Brandeis Institute. I had never been there before. It is an institute that has been founded in the Simi Valley in south of the San Bernardino Mountains, in an incredible, even spectacular setting. On last Saturday afternoon, really toward evening, atop a mountain, [03:00] that is the closest thing I have seen in America, in appearance to Mount Sinai, beside a house that is called The House of the Book, there were 700 Jewish men, women and children, many young people, college students, high school students, dancing together with their arms wrapped around one another, dancing the *Hora*, and singing songs, and Hebrew songs. It was almost as if Cecil B. Demille had arranged the act. The sun was setting in a backdrop. [04:00] These gorgeous colors of the rainbow. It was an ecstatic experience. I began to feel as if I was at my first Jewish revival meeting. About the only thing that was missing was thunder and lightning, and I had a feeling that if we waited

long enough, we probably would have had that too. In any case, after that experience of that weekend, where our people had come together to pray together in a kind of love and caring and compassion, a kind of dropping away of uptightness and starchiness which I had never seen before, and after spending the Sabbath afternoon studying the ethics of the synagogue fathers and [05:00] trying to draw applications from that for their lives and professions, and business, and social life, I was then invited to stand up in this beautiful hall atop that mountain to address this group of about 700 people, on President Carter, the Evangelical Renaissance, and its meaning for America. And about the only thing that I could think of as I stood before the audience after being introduced as generously as I was by our chairman this evening, was that, "I come before you this evening as a born-again Hebrew."

And I must tell you that, after spending these days together with so many friends of the Southern Baptist Convention, [06:00] and feeling such genuine feelings of appreciation, for friends like James Dunn and Phil Strickland, and gratitude to my colleagues who helped make this possible together with them, Milton Tobian, Miles Zitmore, my good friend, and my associates, James Rudin and Judy Banki, I think if nothing else has happened during these two and a half days, other than to have the

privilege of being exposed to one of the great Christians, not only of this nation, but of the this generation, it would have been sufficient to say, [07:00] *Dayenu*, it was enough to hear Frank Littell.

I say that because, as some of the colleagues here will testify, this is just about my twenty-fifth year of service in efforts to build relationships between Christians and Jews of all denominations, Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants, evangelical Christians, Greek orthodox, black Christians. And I would be less than candid if I were not to tell you that while there are moments of great spiritual uplift, great sense of community and solidarity, especially with people with whom we share so much in common in terms of the biblical inheritance, [08:00] there are also a great many moments which are frustrating, at times even depressing: the 1967 War, 1973 War, October First Statement, Soviet-American relations on the Middle East. And there are times where one feels like Sisyphus trying to push the rock up the mountain. And 25 years is a long time for pushing rocks up the mountain. But what redeems one from a sense of, either despair, or cynicism, even skepticism, are redemptive moments such as that we've experienced tonight in the presence of Dr. Franklin Littell. [09:00] There are many ways to talk about the meaning of Israel in Jewish-Christian

relationships. The conventional way to seek to interpret that subject, both to Jews as well as to Christians, is to do the kind of systematic treatment in which one talks about the biblical promises, the covenant that God made with Abraham, "And to thee, unto thy seed, will I give this land," to cite the fact that in biblical literature, there are at least 2000 references to Jerusalem alone as the Holy City [10:00] in the Hebrew canon, or the fact that Jerusalem and the Holy Land have been perceived in Rabbinic tradition as centering on the *Even ha'Shetiyah*, the foundation stone in Jerusalem, which was seen as the *axis mundi*, the center of the cosmos, of orientation in the world. And one could go on to describe how those fundamental biblical themes and rabbinic themes have expressed themselves in the life, the actual existence, the historic experience of the Jewish people, across every century since the time of the Covenant, and certainly since the time when King David created [11:00] a unified city of Jerusalem, which became the center of both the national and the religious focus of Jewish hopes and aspirations, and so glorious was Jerusalem, that it became the center out of which Jews have prayed for centuries for the coming of a Messiah.

I've written a text in which I have sought to document out of both religious and historic sources that continuity of the

Jewish ties, religious, spiritual, human across every century, and I'd be more than happy to make that available to you. I offer that as a testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee several years ago when I was asked to give a testimony on the meaning of Jerusalem and Israel, and Judaism onto [12:00] the Jewish people. But after Franklin Littell's remarks, I have decided that I would prefer to discuss the subject in an altogether different frame of reference which may have more immediacy, certainly for me, I would hope for others as well. And I'd like to penetrate into the meaning of these watershed events that Dr. Littell has talked about this evening, by sharing with you several personal experiences [13:00] which have really consumed my attention and have touched me in ways that few experiences in recent history have affected me in terms of an understanding in a very personal way of what Israel means to me, and what I hope would become increasingly, in the understanding between Jews and Christians at this present moment.

This past August, on August 11th, I was invited, together with several colleagues of the American Jewish Committee to come to Germany at the invitation of the West German government, Lufthansa Airlines, and the Bavarian Tourist [14:00] Ministry, to preview the revised script for the Oberammergau Passion Play.

I won't go into any detail about that experience of the Oberammergau play, except to say that when we landed on August the 11th, which was a Thursday, we were received with great warmth and friendship by the West German government officials, by the Lufthansa President of North America, by the Director General of the Bavarian Tourist Ministry, [great?] *Gemütlichkeit*. I have probably drank more beer in Munich than I have consumed in my entire lifetime. Some of it is still affecting my performance [15:00] this evening, I'm afraid.

On the morning after we had landed in Munich, one of the West German government officials came to me and asked, (inaudible) have a day free on Friday, we were to go to Oberammergau on Sunday. "What would you like to do?" And I responded at once and said, "I would like to go to Dachau." *Ach so*. So, one of my associates joined me, and on that Friday, we went to Dachau. I had never been to Dachau before. [16:00] You could almost pass by Dachau without ever knowing what it meant. You see, it has become manicured. It is surrounded by poplar trees. The grass is trimmed. There are beautiful flower beds of roses. There are two barracks that are left, some 28 barracks were destroyed. We were accompanied by a young German woman who was a tourist director, and as we walked through Dachau, the only appropriate response was one that seized all of us at once, of complete silence. Take

off your shoes, for you walk [17:00] on holy ground. We walked through Dachau in that palpable silence, and then we came by the crematoria, and the shower room, and it really was too much to take, and it became an unbearable experience. The shower room was white-washed, cleaned. The shower pieces on the ceiling. The Jews and others -- and I want to come to that in a moment -- were told that they were being brought into the shower room in order to be de-liced. [18:00] And, however one can explain that, and it is unfathomable, they believed their German captors. Dachau was the first concentration camp; apparently there was not too much experience with those kinds of instructions. And so trusting their captors, they walked into the shower room, and all of them undressed. And then the showers were turned on. But instead of water, it was Zyklon B gas. And the Germans had a special predilection for taking very religious, very devout Orthodox Jews, wearing their long beards and their kaftans, and forcing them to undress, [19:00] because in their strict code of piety and personal gentility, to undress before another person was the ultimate humiliation. And of the thousands, they were forced to undress completely in the presence of their wives, and others, and children. I've carried away one image which I can't eradicate from my mind. After they were destroyed, asphyxiated in the shower room, those who were left behind were forced to bring the bodies into the crematorium next door, and there is a

large wooden paddle. And the bodies were shoved in with that paddle. [20:00] And every time I walk past a pizza parlor, I feel a tremble. It was as if human beings were reduced to pizza pies.

Some months ago, after one of the conferences which Dr. Littell had sponsored on the Nazi Holocaust, and the *Kirchenkampf*, I had occasion to spend an evening with Elie Wiesel, who as all of you know was one of the survivors of the Holocaust, and whose entire life has been devoted to assuring that it does not become simply a memory of a past event [21:00] with no meaning for contemporary society. Elie Wiesel told me a rather incredible story. He said, "You know, after the war was over, a group of Jewish partisans who had fought in the underground, Poland, some of the other Slavic countries, had gathered together in a forest after they were liberated by the American army. And they were discussing what their future purpose would be, having survived by the providence of God whom they sure had hid His face from them."

And as Eli told me the story, he said [22:00] some of the partisans were so consumed with rage over what had happened to their people, by the sense of abandonment, that they were now determined to use the skills that they had learned in the

underground -- they had become masters of the use of hand grenades, and explosives, and machine guns -- they felt now justified in destroying any would come into, literally wiping out Poland, Germany, wherever they went. They felt absolutely vindicated in the sense that they had to do something for the brothers and sisters who had been [23:00] destroyed as if they were vermin. And it was a raging debate. And Elie Wiesel said that it became a massive theological discussion on the meaning and the value of human life. And a number of the partisans said that, no, we will not yield to that despair, and nihilism, and anarchism, because that, in fact, would give Hitler the posthumous victory that he seeks of our people. We would descend to the level of our victimizers.

And instead, this group of partisans determined, as painful, and as almost inhuman as the task became, to turn their energies to saving life. Because they had gone [24:00] through an experience in which human life had become absolutely worthless. They did a calculus together that in those shower rooms where they packed 100, 125 people, a vial of Zyklon B gas cost 25 cents. Which meant that 100 lives were worth less than 25 cents. And so they turned their energies to try to snatch, as embers out of a fire, the Jews, the men, the women, the children, to bring them through the underground across the borders, into Palestine. To

them, it was an affirmation, that [25:00] in spite of the insanity and the absurdity and the madness that they had gone through, that ultimately human life must have meaning.

I want to tell you another story. Six months ago, a man walked into my office, a black man, so tall, shining face, very large, bright eyes, flashing out of his head. He came to me and said, "Forgive me for breaking in on your schedule. My name is Godfrey Binaisa." I asked him to sit down. [26:00] And he tells me this story: "I was the former Attorney General of Uganda." And as it turned out, he was the Attorney General under President Obote, the second-most powerful man in Uganda. "Idi Amin, when he came to power, kept Obote on, thought he would keep him on for several months, because Obote had contacts all over the country. Obote is the son of an Anglican pastor." Uganda, as many of you know, is 85% Christian. Half of them are Anglicans, the other half are Roman Catholics. There are a number of Presbyterians, and some Baptists and others. "Idi Amin one day brought together some 12 missionaries, Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and [27:00] was preparing to liquidate them." And Godfrey Binaisa, as he had told this story, sitting on my sofa in my office, came to Idi Amin and said, "Mr. President, if you as much as lift a finger against these missionaries, I will organized a coup d'etat against you. And I can do it." And Amin pulled out a gun, put it

at his head, and said, "Mr. Binaisa, you and your family have 24 hours to leave this country, or I will send you, your wife, and your children, your seven children, out of this country in boxes."

And Binaisa left with his wife and children immediately, got across the border, brought their way into Kenya, then went to London. His wife [28:00] and seven children were left behind; they were on social welfare relief in England. He came to the United States to try to establish himself here, and also to establish contact with other Ugandan refugees in his country.

When Binaisa began telling this story, he said, "Rabbi, I'll tell you why I come to you. Now I have some practical problems," he was living in an apartment in a building that was owned by a Jewish real estate man. He had no money; he had not been able to pay full month's rent; he was about to be evicted. And he asked if he would intervene, and that was the easiest thing to do. He said, "I came to you, because I know very few other people in this country. But I know one thing, that what is happening [29:00] to my people in Uganda is in many ways not unlike what has happened to the Jewish people in the 1930s. The entire world knows that our people are being liquidated, massacred by the thousands." At that time, he was estimating a minimum massacre

of 150,000 to 200,000 Ugandan Christians, and he said the massacre goes on daily. Every day, thousands, bodies found in the rivers, the lakes, beheaded, decapitated.

He said, "And the incredible thing, with all the newspaper stories and the television, and all of the accounts, the silence is the silence of a tomb. And as great as is the tragedy of what is happening to our people," [30:00] all the more traumatic, as we were exchanging that insight into what was happening into the world, all the more traumatic was the knowledge that human beings were being abandoned, in massive numbers before a world which seemed to be preoccupied with pursuing all kinds of other concerns, self-indulgence and pleasures. It's almost the caricature of the Freudian principle of a pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of even the knowledge of pain.

After we discussed a number of matters in terms of how we might be of some assistance to Ugandan refugees in this country, and what may be done politically to help them try to get a hearing in our government in the United Nations and elsewhere, Binasisa said the following: "You know, [31:00] I don't think your people know this. I'm sure that most American Christians don't know this. But the Bible is the best ambassador of Israel and of the Jewish throughout the whole of Africa. You hear all of this

terrible stuff that goes on at the United Nations, which," he said, "is horrendous. The knowledge that Idi Amin can come to the United Nations with the blood of my people on his hands and be given a standing ovation before 159 nations of the earth as if he were some kind of conquering hero, is one of the great obscenities of our time. But what you need to know is that between all that propoganda, and beneath all the manipulation of the United Nations and the Zionism racism resolutions, there is a deep and abiding love and respect for Israel and the Jewish people among millions of African Christians, who understand [32:00] Israel in a way that perhaps few other people do."

Binaisa told me that there is such a sense of identity with the Bible, because he said the biblical story, as he called it, "The Old Testament story, that is our story, supremely. We are a people of tribes trying to forge ourselves into a nation, a unified nation. We are a nomadic, agricultural, pastoral people, trying to forge together a nation that is going to create for itself that which the biblical tradition spoke about in the Jubilee year: to create a society that would be based on the liberation of human beings, as the liberation theme of the Jubilee year in the Bible articulates in great detail. We are seeking economic liberation [33:00] to break the cycle of poverty which the jubilee year was established to do, so that there would never be indentured property in the land of

Palestine, the Promised Land, to bring about ecological liberation, to allow the land to lie fallow, so it could restore itself, a reverence for nature. A reverence for creation. A mystique for the land." He said, "Your people have that uniquely, in Israel. We understand that intuitively and profoundly. And finally, as the Jubilee year was established to create a spiritual democracy, during that year in which the land lay fallow, the whole people of Israel studied the word of the Lord were educated in scripture, to raise up illiterate people so that they would become a kingdom of priests in a Holy Nation. That's our task as well," Binai said. [34:00]

What does Israel mean, to a Jew today, deeply formed by a biblical consciousness, a covenant with a people that is everlasting, a covenant with a land which is equally in parallel, in its binding hold on our consciousness? For one thing, Israel has come to mean to the Jewish people, after the dehumanization of Auschwitz, a recognition that in the kind of age in which we live today, we can no longer afford to be impotent in terms of the instruments for mastering our own destiny and our own fate. [35:00] Never to be vulnerable again, so that people can say, and young children will say, "Why did they go like sheep unto the slaughter?" Now my friends, it's been estimated by Professor J.L. Talmon, that as a result of the

Roman persecutions in the first century and the second century, and the dispersion out of the land into the exile of 2000 years, and becoming exposed to the madness and the hatred and the prejudices and the anti-Semitism across 2000 years of the exile, we lost so many people, generation after generation, that we, the saving remnant, 14 million Jews living in the world today, [36:00] must somehow come to cope with the fact that had Jews been able to master their own fate and their own destiny, and not be allowed to become vulnerable to every whim of madness and insanity and absurdity in the world, had Jews been living on their own land, in control of their fate and destiny and able to defend themselves against those who sought to bring about their liquidation, there would have been living today in the world a minimum of 150 million Jewish people. That's what the hatred, and the impotence, the powerlessness has cost us.

But it means something else, and I want to close by telling you [37:00] one other story. Rather poignantly, shortly after Binaiisa had left my office, actually the following week, two women came into my office. I had met one of them earlier, in Washington at a conference. They were reasonably well-known. They had now become internationally-known. Their names are Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams. They are known as the Peace People of Ireland. Two women, one of whom had seen the children

[38:00] of her sister, infants, shot in the streets of Belfast, as a result of aimless terrorism, that day after day takes its toll in human lives. They decided that they'd had enough of killing, and enough of the massacres, and enough of the hatred, and enough of the terrorism, and they decided themselves that they would begin to testify by their lives that they wanted to make a difference in the way in which Catholics and Protestants would live with one another in Northern Ireland. And they began to march, as you know. And then hundreds, and then thousands, and then suddenly bishops and cardinals and archbishops began to bless their efforts and march with them.

But that's not the real point [39:00] of the story. Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams came to the office with a Professor [Siobhan?], who was their intellectual adviser, a professor of political science. They said, for one thing, they have learned to watch the Jewish experience very carefully, especially what was happening in Israel. And they are now persuaded, as they told me, that because the world became inured, really indifferent, couldn't care less, because it was not happening to them. [To Mal Lut?], [40:00] to the fact that people would seek to justify their ideology, the PLO, by destroying innocent children in school on an afternoon hike, just random destruction. And because Lod Airports were able to take place,

and hijackings, and kidnappings, because the world stood by silently and allowed it to happen to the Jews, it became a Jewish thing, an Israeli problem, not theirs. There's a statement in the Talmud which says, "*Shtika K'hodaah Domya*," "Silence is equal to assent." And if the international community was able to remain silent as it has, year after year after year, obsessed with resolutions for Israel, at one session devoting 60% [41:00] of their time scapegoating Israel, they had no time for resolutions on Uganda, there's not a single resolution on Uganda. There is not hardly a word about the fact that 40,000 Christians and Muslims have been massacred in Lebanon, and that the PLO literally has destroyed the Christian presence in Lebanon, which was to the Christians in the Arab world, what Israel is to the Jewish world, especially to the Jews in the Middle East. And nothing was said about Burundi, and nothing was said about Sudan, where nearly a million black Christians were massacred. And at this moment, a quarter of a million people languishing as refugees in Cyprus, and Greek Orthodox, and Iakovos comes pleading the Jews, Archbishop Iakovos, "Help us, to get a hearing for our refugees; the only refugees that appear to be in the world are the Palestinian refugees. God bless them, something needs to be done for them, but what about our people?"

[42:00]

And then Mairead Corrigan turned and said, "Look, we have religious problems in Ireland, but it is not a religious war. Our fundamental problem is an economic problem. We have thousands upon thousands of people living out in the farms who cannot earn a living in the farms. It's as if the period of the potato famines were about to renew themselves. The land is bleak. No significant agricultural development, single crops, and we desperately need help.

We talked about the *moshavim* movement in Israel, and the *kibbutz* movement. The Israelis who came into a land that was desert and swamp, malaria-infested swamps, deeply motivated many [43:00] of them, especially the traditional Jews building the *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* in Israel, wanting to build jubilee year, jubilee year communities, created a mixed economy in the *moshavim* movement, where people owned their own homes, their own houses, but share in common land, share in common technical assistance, share in common the purchase of equipment, share in common the marketing and the selling of their products, and it's a raging going concern. And in that mixed economy, they have their own identity, and yet collaborate for the common welfare. Mairead Corrigan said to me, "I want to know more about the *moshavim* movement."

And so this black pastor, Dr. [Bryan George] working [44:00] for the Ford Foundation asked us if we would help him look into the *moshavim kibbutz* movement. We have taken to Israel, where he spent seven weeks studying the *moshavim* movement and the *kibbutz* movement, and it was a mind-blowing experience for him. And he brought back from Israel to Alabama at Tuskegee University, three Israeli families, agricultural specialists, land development people, who working out of Tuskegee have helped now to create a *moshav*, a black cooperative movement, in which there is now a diversity of crops, and now for the first time in the life of now thousands of blacks in the South, they are beginning to earn a living from the land. And not only are they not leaving the land, some of their young [45:00] people who have left to go to universities in the north and elsewhere, are beginning to come back to direct the cooperative movement, because there is a future for them, and they're beginning to realize that they're able to help their people to live on their own land, to create their own life, to create their own community, and not break up their families.

That experience, we've now begun to arrange for the Peace People in Ireland who have now established contact with Israel, which is exploring sending specialists in agricultural development and technical assistance. This nation which has not had a year of

peace, which has not been free from threats of being driven into the ocean, which has not had a night in which they did [46:00] not have to worry about PLO terrorists, sending their infant children into the ground every night in the *kibbutzim*. And yet something of the prophetic idealism, and remarkably I found that among the land reform people in the *moshav* movement and *kibbutz* movement, many of them are believing, devout, young Orthodox Jews who really feel that they are living out the prophetic message of being "*Or LaGoyim*," "a light unto the nations."

For a very long period of time, and I say this great sensitivity, with all my love and devotion to the Judaism in which I was raised, and in which the Jewish people in this country and elsewhere throughout the diaspora have been raised and nurtured, that Judaism which has preserved us more than we have preserved it. But [47:00] living in the ghettos of Europe, being exposed to the whim and the caprice of the host society in which they live, Judaism in many ways became a "hot-house creation." It never was able to really test its values and its ideals in the real world, in society, in history, in building a nation that would be stamped with the character of the biblical-Hebraic tradition, and to allow the prophetic impulse to manifest itself in its optimum possibilities. That has happened in our lifetime, despite Auschwitz. And when one begins to see

Jewish young people quietly without fanfare going out as they did at one time, and to the [48:00] -- every continent of the Earth seeking to help, to be present, to relieve pain and suffering, to share knowledge, to build justice and compassion, one begins to understand the biblical vision of Zion shall be built in righteousness. There is a great consciousness of that reality as a result of the rebirth of Israel.

I want to close, my friends, with a statement and an appeal. The Jewish community has gone through some quite anguishing days in recent months [49:00] that have been almost -- disturbing in their impact, a kind of swinging of a pendulum. And during the period of time in which the October First Statement on Soviet-American Relations, led not only to anxiety but to fear, one began to recognize that that declaration was bringing in through the front door the Soviet Union not simply as the [co-covenanters?] of a Geneva Conference, but as persons who were being invited to implement, guarantee the peace. Sadat had staked his career on getting the Soviet Union out the back door, and we brought the Soviet Union in through the front door. And the kind of loose, codeword about "Palestinian homeland," God knows [50:00] the Jewish people, of all the people of the earth would want Palestinian refugees to have justice, and finally some peace and comfort from the indignities that had been heaped upon them

mainly by their own brethren who had been hard-hearted and callous to their plight. But not a PLO state.

And so I want to -- for myself, and I'm sure for many of my colleagues, express the word of deepest gratitude and appreciation, especially to millions of Southern Baptists and evangelical Christians, who understood deeply, intuitively, out of their biblical professions of faith of what was at stake when they volunteered, spontaneously, [51:00] no manipulation. The first I heard of it was when we received a telephone call from Dr. Bernard -- from Dr. Arnold Olson of, the former president of the National Association of Evangelicals to place a full-page ad in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, "Evangelicals concerned for Israel," signed by 15 of the leading evangelicals in this country, for Dr. Billy Graham to declare before our October 28th meeting in Atlanta, spontaneously, the vast majority as he has experienced it, as he's traveled around the country, the vast majority of the 50 million evangelical Christians in America support the right of Israel to exist, to be safe and secure, to stand against terrorism and calling upon the Palestinian people to bring forth leadership that is committed to peace and coexistence with Israel. I have traveled to 15 cities over the past [52:00] three weeks. I've met literally with thousands of Christian leaders, many of them evangelical

Christians. And those advertisements and those statements I've heard expressed to me face-to-face with the kind of warmth and caring and solidarity that will remain a lasting memory, and which I will cherish, and the spirit that Frank Littell talked about, being present to one another when one is hurting.

I want to close with one story which some of you may have heard. My colleagues certainly have heard it several times, but I think it's appropriate for this moment. There is an account of a Hassidic rabbi who was sitting in history study [53:00] studying the word of the law. And as he was studying one of the texts, it struck him that there was something highly suggestive in the fact that when Jews pray every day, the morning prayers, the afternoon prayers, the evening prayers, or the Sabbath prayers or holy day prayers, that one of the high moments of the prayer, the following blessing is recited: "*Barukh atah Hashem eloheinu melekh ha-Olam, Elohei Avraham, Elohei Yitzhak, v'Elohei Yaakov.*" "Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, [54:00] the God of Jacob."

And the rabbis asked, why was it necessary, in our tradition in which so much value is placed on the economy of the word, when no word in the Torah or even in the prayer book is expected to

an excessive word, why was it necessary for us to pray to the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob? Would it not have been sufficient simply to say, "*Elohei Avraham, Yitzhak, v'Yaakov*," the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

And the rabbinic insight was as follows: "The power of the prayer, of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, [55:00] and Jacob, the power of their personality and their presence in the world was so extraordinary that if they were to come together in the afterlife, and were to pray together at once simultaneously, the effect of their prayer and their presence together would be cataclysm. It would in fact," the rabbi say, "-- have forced the Messiah to come before his time. And therefore, they prayed separately, but together."

I feel that way about what is happening in this room, and what is happening in every room where Christians and Jews and Muslims [56:00] and other people of good will are coming together to overcome the hostilities and the misunderstandings, the stereotypes of the past, and to create a new basis of relationship. In an age in which we have been taught by Alfred North Whitehead that history has its own momentum, "The brute force of history," Whitehead wrote, "One sometimes has the feeling that one is so overwhelmed that the individual person

can make no difference." It is a common affirmation in both of our traditions that the human personality, created in the sacred image of God, with the power of the sanctity of every human being, [57:00] when joined together in common prayer, in solidarity, in love and in mutual respect, and in mutual caring, in being present to one another, especially in moments of pain and suffering, we can hardly begin to estimate the power of that prayer and the power of that presence in the world to bring on in God's good time the Messianic Age for the whole of God's people. Thanks very much.

(applause)

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