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March 16, 1986

ON KLAL ISRAEL

- ELIE WIESEL -

At one point in our study session this afternoon, I would like to invite you to join me and study together a story that is familiar to all of us: the one about Kamtza and Bar Kamtza illustrating the destructive mood that reigned in Jerusalem before its destruction.

For the moment, with your permission, I would first chart the course of these introductory remarks about understanding and tolerance with a plea for understanding and tolerance: I am neither rabbi nor son of a rabbi. I am only a student of rabbis. As such, I think I know some of the answers they have given to some questions. As for myself, do I know the questions? Obviously I do, otherwise I would not be here. Are they real? I think they are. Are we approaching an era of "Sinat hinam" as exemplified by Kamtza and Bar-Kamtza? Perhaps. There is hate, and often it is gratuitous.

As a people we have learned to withstand outside pressures, not internal ones. The first strengthen us, the latter weaken us. Frighten us. When I go out in the country and in the world, meeting Jews in many communities, I am seized by that fear. I wonder whether we are not too far apart. Why cannot we speak with one another? We dialogue with Catholics and Protestants, Muslims and Buddhists, Evangelists and Communists. Some Jewish leaders dialogue with Jaruzelski -- but somehow we do not dialogue with other Jews. I am afraid of the policy of estrangement that has been gaining ground in our midst. Fanaticism, wherever it is, inspires fear in me. And the Jewish people, of course, is not without its fanatics, but as a people we never advocated fanaticism. Pinhas, the example of the fanatic, is, after all, an exception. The zealots in Jerusalem were not seen or shown as role models. Unfortunately, they may serve to many people -- too many -- today. Meir Kahane? Not only Kahane. Every camp has its fanatics. Even the liberals have theirs: they are fanatically liberal.

I am afraid because I do not know what to suggest as a solution for the crisis in the making. We have the questions, but the answers are not ours. So what are we to do?

In times of crisis, are we to be more lenient or less? When faced with danger, must we close ranks and disregard internal strifes, or quite the opposite: withdraw into our respective shelters and fortify the walls around them? What I suggest we do today -- is to examine the ways our ancestors, our predecessors have dealt with these questions.

May I formulate, right at the outset, my personal feelings? I judge neither participant in this inter-religious conflict. I am, in a way, on everybody's side when that side is attacked by the others. I am ready to accept a Jew for whatever he or she is. Then, but only then, when the Jew has accepted her or his Jewishness and if the situation warrants it, it is up to me to invite him or her to gain more knowledge, more depth, more access to our hidden or visible treasures. For me, the key word is memory, in the best and the most tragic sense of the word: a Jew who links his or her memory to that of our people becomes my brother, not my step-brother. To me memory is an inclusion, not an exclusion. Because of memory, our ranks are thicker and the density of our experience, more exalting. My task is not to pass judgment -- I lack the authority for that; my task is to bear witness, in other words: to be present -- to be present to any Jew who wants or needs a Jewish presence to study, to work, to pray, or to dream. Yet I know: it is not that simple.

Division among Jews is not a new phenomenon. You know the story: in a shul, in Eastern Europe, worshipers began arguing whether to say or omit a certain Pivvut on Rosh Hashana. They argued with such passion that, Rahmana litzlan, the argument stopped being verbal. A year later, in order to avoid open conflict, they went to see a famous rabbi and asked for a p'sak-halakha. His answer was: "There is no halakha regarding that particular point, but there is a custom." "What is it?" they shouted, with impatience. "The custom is that people fight about it."

Jews fight about everything - whether it is l'shem shamayim or not, the mahloket, the quarrel "sofa l'hitkayem" -- Jewish quarrels never end.

However, today the situation seems more critical. Why? Because of statistics? We had none before. Now we do have polls and more polls, all computerized. Today we deal with figures -- and they are astounding, often frightening. If we were to believe some predictions, our people is in danger of losing its unity, thus its coherence, thus its sense of peoplehood. You hear the question everywhere you turn nowadays: "Are we going to be one people in the year 2000?" Should the process of polarization continue, what will the various fragments of Am Israel have in common?

The split in our ranks would be harmful even in normal circumstances, but it is more so when we live in abnormal times: marked by its promise but doomed by its violence, this century is not a normal one. Its pace is Biblical and so is its meaning. We are going somewhere and we do not know where; all we know is that we are running there fast, faster and faster. That is true of all nations, all people, all religions. Never has the planet been so united in its fear -- though not in its hope.

What we, Jews, now need most is awareness and study. In other words: we must discard superficiality. There is too much of it around. Granted, Jewish studies programs are flourishing. More yeshivot have opened their gates to more pupils. But Jewish life, as such, is not dynamic enough -- nor is it creative enough. Look at Jewish leadership in America today. It is not too bad. Some presidents even demonstrate a reasonable amount of courage and dignity in defending Jewish honor. But we would expect from Jewish leaders something more, something else; you would expect them to be great; you would expect from Jewish leaders vision, imagination. After all, they are leaders of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people is a different people. The Jewish people with its memories, with its past, with its mystery, it's all that we incarnate, it's all that we carry with us. When a Jew speaks, the world should hear. Leaders of such a people should express themselves differently. Maybe the problem is that our leaders don't know enough and, therefore, they don't realize that when a Jew speaks, he or she must feel the presence of 4,000 years of Jewish history. In other words, the feeling of Klal Yisrael.

A Jew must belong to Klal Yisrael. Not of today alone. Of the past as well. A Jew must feel linked to the sages and their teachers, the wanderers and their friends: he must feel their presence. They are part of him because his vision contains theirs.

To say I am Jewish means not only that I am a member of this or that organization, but that I am part of a community whose membership includes Moses and Joshua, Isaiah and Rabbi Akiba, the Besht and Rabbi Israel Salanter. That does not necessarily mean that I have studied all their teachings or that I abide by all their decisions; but it does mean that they are alive in my memory, that whatever I do either upholds or denies the hopes they had placed on me; it does mean that they and I are together associates within Klal Yisrael. Klal Yisrael means all of us.

But if things continue to develop unchecked -- what will happen to the sense that Jews have about being partners in Jewish history? Think in broader concepts -- what do we find? Within the Jewish people there are groups that do not adhere to the same laws, nor do they recite the same prayers; they do not celebrate holidays the same way, nor do they mourn their dead in the same manner -- what then do they have in common? What makes them into brothers and sisters, linked by the same destiny and attracted by the same goal?

Who is a Jew -- today? Who will be a Jew tomorrow? According to whose definition? Some say: it is enough for a Jew to claim kinship with the Jewish people to be Jewish. Others demand proof. Still others -- those who belong to the other side, the side of the enemy -- close the debate, stating flatly: it is not up to the Jew to decide.

Even Jean-Paul Sartre felt somehow the need to define the Jew -- and he was wrong. A Jew, he said, is someone whom other people see as Jewish. Later, shortly before he died, he admitted his mistake. He regretted it. He understood that his definition was derogatory. A Jew is not that passive; he is not an object but a subject of history.

Strange: The enemy always wanted to decide for us who we are; he wanted that privilege for himself. From Pharaoh to Nebuchadnezzar to Caesar to Torquemada to Hitler and to Stalin, they all insisted on defining the Jewishness of the Jew. But we never granted them that right. That right, that privilege belong to the Jew alone. So -- who is a Jew? But....why the question? I mean: Why the question now? Because of the upheavals in recent history? Had there been none before? Jews had been exiled to Babylon, to Rome, to Cappadocia, to Rhodes, to the "Islands of the sea", to faraway provinces along the Rhine or the Dniepr -- and yet, I wonder whether our ancestors were as preoccupied with the "Mihu yehudi" question, as we seem to be now. Is it that the Jewishness of the Jew was rooted more deeply, there, in larger numbers? Or that social integration or religious conversion were less possible then, whereas now they are acceptable options to some if not to many marginal Jews? Or is it because of Israel -- in other words, because of the Jewishness of our State which we feel we must protect, totally, not only materially but also spiritually, existentially, philosophically, morally, with all our being?

Are there other reasons? Perhaps nowadays it is too easy for a Jew to stop being Jewish -- and too easy to be Jewish. That goes for all branches of our community, the four branches who are represented here, and a fifth, the largest one, of Jews who are not religious at all. One can be totally immersed in Yahadut and endure no discrimination or punishment that were the lot of our ancestors or predecessors. College students are not compelled to attend classes on Shabbat, take exams on holidays or undergo starvation due to the lack of kosher food. On a different level, one feels Jewish simply by getting involved in Jewish activities -- any kind of activity. Political lobbying for Israel. Joining demonstrations for Soviet Jewry. Or sending annual contributions to the UJA, or to an educational institution in Israel. Is this why the question becomes important, perhaps even urgent, to find our bearings, and see who we are -- what we really are?

That the polarization is a result, a consequence of this situation, is clear. Let us not use the political vocabulary of right and left. Let us speak of ultra-Orthodox and ultra-liberal Jews. The first see themselves as the guardians of the true faith -- they view all of us as distant relatives, at best. One of them told me: "The Jewish people numbers a hundred thousand souls." Quote unquote. Even the Lubavitcher Rebbe, to them, is not Jewish. On the other hand, some ultra-liberals are as extreme in their liberalism. I have read an ad in a large newspaper, somewhere in the South, offering "conversion in 24 hours". If the two sides pull hard enough, with enough energy and conviction, the loss will be ours.

So how can we stop this quasi-Brechtian urge to attain a greater and deeper sense of distanciation? I do not know how -- but then, haven't I warned you of my inability to come up with proper answers? All I can do is to pull the alarm. For the sake of Yisrael. For the sake of Klal-Yisrael.

Klal means community; it also means totality. Likhlol: to bring together, to unite, to envelop all categories, all shades of opinion, all segments of a population. Of course, it also suggests: the general rule. The accepted principle. Which cover those who are not accepted.

In other words: Klal Yisrael almost by definition is meant to incorporate the majority and the minority, the traditionalists and the dissenters, the adherents of the strict interpretation of every law, and those who offer a different interpretation of the same law, or of others.

The question of Klal Yisrael is urgent. We must confront it. Do we have a Klal Yisrael today? And who decides what Klal Yisrael must do or not do, where to go or refrain from going? Who decides how far Klal Yisrael may run too far, and for what reason? Even the three mitzvot of "Yehareg v'al ya'avor", so important to us that we must give our life for them, rather than transgress them, even these three have been explained and/or applied differently by great teachers. What was considered idolatry by some, has been interpreted as wearing a mask by others. Thus whereas German and French Jewish communities chose kiddush haShem rather than convert, many Spanish Jews chose to live as hidden Jews -- as Marranos; and our history, I mean our religious history has not condemned them, quite the opposite: we glorify the kiddush haShem of Marranos, victims of the Inquisition -- yet we conveniently seem to forget that before their sacrifice by fire they had chosen open conversion in order not to leave Spain for exile.

Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Hanina chose kiddush haShem for study of Torah, although limud Torah is not one of the three mitzvot that command self-sacrifice. Were they right? Were they wrong? Who decided when -- and where -- and in what manner -- Jewish honor had to be defended? Rabbi Akiba taught in secrecy, Rabbi Hanina publicly -- who established, who followed the mainstream of Jewish tradition?

What do we have to do to be part of Klal Yisrael? What does it take to convince a Jew to have such desire? Suppose the Jew responds positively, enthusiastically; who decides whether he or she ought to be accepted in Klal Yisrael?

Or take the opposite possibility. If a Jew leaves Klal Yisrael, do we accept the Jew's decision? What is the greatest punishment that could be meted out to a Jew? Excommunication. He is excluded from the community. But who decides when such punishment is justified? Baruch de Spinoza, who was a great scholar, was excommunicated by a small Beit-Din in Amsterdam, and the Jewish

people everywhere respected that judgment. Would Spinoza be expelled today for saying what he said then? And what about Moses Mendelssohn, the great philosopher? I remember that I, by accident, picked up a book, the Biur, in shul -- I didn't even know what it was or who the author was. Reb Moshe Dessauer? His commentary on the Bible, seemed an Orthodox commentary on the Bible, yet an old chassid saw me; he gave me a slap in the face. For reading Mendelssohn. Today we study Mendelssohn. Would Mendelssohn be excommunicated today? Furthermore, suppose the verdict would have been excommunication; would the verdict be upheld by all of the Jewish communities everywhere, in the East and the West and the South and the North? In other words: who sets the limits? The individual Jew? The community perhaps? Let us phrase the question differently: we lost many communities in Diaspora -- were they lost because they chose to separate themselves from Klal Yisrael, or because Klal Yisrael rejected them? We know of some communities in Spain -- and in Persia -- who, collectively, chose conversion leading to assimilation. Did we try to bring them back? To keep in touch with some of them? How far must we go to save a Jewish soul -- or a community of Jewish souls? When do we say "Ad kan" -- this is the limit for tolerance? And who is to say it?

Jewish tragedy has, from the beginning, been identified with or caused by polarization. Mechirat Yosef. The sin of the m'raglim. The division, the split, the secession of the tribes from Malchut-Yehuda. Why has Yerav'am ben Nevat become the paradigmatic figure of evil? Only because "khata vehekhti"? There must have been others like him. Because he became king of a dissident kingdom? So what? Hasn't he been chosen and crowned by God's prophet? He was the symbol of evil because he symbolized Jewish division and polarization. Because of him Klal Yisrael lost its meaning.

The opposite of klal is prat. The particular versus the general. Does it mean that the two are incompatible, mutually exclusive? Must the prat give up its specificity and dissolve in the klal? That would suggest that the Jewish tradition negates diversity and pluralism. Isn't there more than one way to serve God? Doesn't more than one path lead to truth? Truth is one; the paths leading to it are many. What, in my view, is so exciting about the teachings of our fathers, is that the klal encourages the prat to maintain and enrich its individuality, its singularity, for then the klal, the community, the corpus of Israel would, in turn, be enriched by all the different, if not opposing, elements that compose it. Therein lies the captivating beauty of Jewish intellectual and spiritual history: the community and the individual, though occasionally opposing one another, help one another. The prat must protect the klal which, in turn, shields the prat.

To illustrate this dual attitude, let us examine one more aspect of kiddush-haShem. Surely you remember the Halakha: should the enemy lay siege on a community and demand it to hand him over one of its citizens, the community is duty-bound to refuse, even if it means the death of all its members. However, if the enemy asks for a specific fugitive by name, then the situation is different: He is to be handed over. Why? Why should the community be ready to die for one person but not for another? The answer: If a fugitive from the enemy seeks shelter in his community, he was wrong in jeopardizing its security. In other words: Just as the community must protect the individual Jew, the individual Jew must work for the sake of the community. But even so, the Talmud does not look with favor upon a leader who is using his legal right and delivers a Jew to the enemy. The Jew may have sinned, but he remained Jewish.

What emerges from an exploration that we would make, that we should make, is an indication of three Jewish attitudes towards dissenters:

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1. Total and unlimited respect for the minority. After all, the Talmud is a dialogue, endless, extraordinary in its riches, but still a dialogue, and the Talmud as a document kept not only the views of the majority, but also the views of the minority, and the reason was simple: it was thought, meant to teach us to respect all views. No one had the right to question the sincerity of any participant in a debate. The disciples of Shammai and those of Hillel never questioned one another's right to express their views on any given subject. In spite of their disagreements, their children intermarried. They ate at each other's table, drank each other's wine. Efforts were being made on both sides to prevent an irrevocable split that would create the impression that the Jewish people was following two laws, two Torot. That was the greatest preoccupation of our sages -- not to have two laws; therefore, even Moses, before he died, he said, according to the Midrash. This Torah I gave you and I shall never give it to you again. No one will give again another Torah.
2. Compassion and rigor towards sinners. They are considered Jews, therefore worthy of redemption therefore needing repentance. After all, even ben Abuyah, the son of Abuyah, the renegade, the collaborator with Rome's oppressive police, although we was Akher, he was worthy and capable of Teshuvah of repentance.
3. Rigor without compassion. That applies not to the yahid but to a group. An extreme example: the "Ir hanidahat". If and when an entire dwelling-place chooses sin over virtue, crime over law, blasphemy over faith, and so forth, it is to be destroyed. Less extreme cases in point would be the different groups of heretics -- the Minim, the malshinim -- or, at a later stage, the Karaites, the Sabbateans, the Frankists.

What do we learn from all that? Just as we seem to be lenient with the Yakhid -- though a sinner b'mezid o b'shoge -- our attitude grows harsh when the opposition insists on turning its ideological deviation or interpretation into a system. To be more precise: As long as the system is not opposed by another system -- but by occasional pragmatic accommodations -- nothing serious will happen. The tension becomes rift only when the old system is confronted by a new or newer system.

Obviously, today we deal with a confrontation of systems, of movements, of so-called ideologies. And the question, therefore, is, Can they be bridged? If so, by whom and by what? One first step would be to address ourselves to our peers. Let Orthodox scholars speak to the Orthodox rabbis, the Conservative scholars to the Conservatives, the Reform to the Reform, the Reconstructionist to Reconstructionist, the secular to the secular -- and plead for "rapprochement" -- for using our immense taste for ingenuity to find or invent new solutions to old problems -- or the other way around. Ideological inflexibility is not appropriated by one segment alone. It has become the trademark of some elements in all segments. It has to be fought from within, not from without. Outside voices for moderation would have no impact. They must come from inside. If not, we may witness an upsurge of fundamentalism on the part of all religious segments. Who would benefit from it? Not Klal Yisrael. Klal Yisrael is based on and rooted in Ahavat Yisrael. And Ahavat Yisrael is conceivable only in terms of Klal Yisrael. No one has the right -- I have no right -- to say, I love only Jews in one city but not in the other, that I am committed only to one community in one land and not to the other community in the other land. To say I must help a Jew in Odessa and not a Jew in Chicago is wrong. I believe a Jew must be linked to all Jews. We are all mixed with one another, that we are all part of another. Whatever is happening to a Jewish community anywhere affects me. Better yet, I want to be affected by it.

Even more important -- or as important -- would be another step: mobilize all your forces and energies in the field of education. After all, there could be no conflict in that area. Let us emphasize the urgency of learning. Whatever his or her affiliation, let the Jew know the beauty of ancient texts, the humanity of their laws, the depth of their tales. Whether they observe the "Taryag" mitzvot now or later -- or never -- is for HaShem k'vyakhol, to decide. But the study of Jewish tradition, but the study of Jewish history, but the study of Judaism, but the acquisition of Jewish poetry and literature, and philosophy, that is our domain, not God's. Should we succeed in creating an atmosphere of fervor around Jewish studies in schools, in private homes, in centers -- a sense of Klal Yisrael would prevail in all our ranks, and nothing but good could come out of it. In practical terms, why couldn't we establish patterns, create frameworks for all students and teachers of all the four branches of our religious communities to study together?

Couldn't we, at least on the high level of scholarship, imagine an encounter between learned men of all four branches simply to discuss together the urgent questions that have arisen as a result of scientific progress, technological discoveries and social change? Ideally, it would be the extremists' task to come up with proposals or options that would allow more reinterpretation of some customs or laws and thus allow some Jews to remain within Klal Yisrael. Naturally, that would presuppose the idea that such decisions would be and must be made not by organizational referendum but by scholars whose only authority derives from their learning -- wouldn't that, as a minimum, enhance the prestige of Jewish learning?

I feel what we must do -- and probably that is what you must do -- is to instill a sense of Klal Yisrael in every Jew -- Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, or secular. Make them feel that he or she is part of Klal Yisrael. Now, who decides who is Klal Yisrael? Just as the enemy wanted to decide the identity of the parameter of the Yahid, of the individual, the enemy also wanted to decide Klal Yisrael. I remember, the feeling of Klal Yisrael that invaded me, occupied me, possessed me, during the war, when all of a sudden a Jew would arrive in those places and be surrounded by thousands and thousands and thousands of other Jews who had been brought there from all the corners of the Diaspora to ascend a strange altar. I hope you believe me. If ever I was afraid, if ever my fear were infinite, it was then because I had the feeling it was the end of Klal Yisrael. Klal Yisrael had been brought together for ultimate sacrifice. But there were other occasions. The second time I felt Klal Yisrael was in Moscow, when all of a sudden, on Simchat Torah, thousands and thousands of young people came to dance and to sing with the Torah, for the Torah. There too, who were those Jews in Russia? They knew nothing of Judaism. They were chosen as Jews by the enemy because they had in their passports written Evrei, so there too they came, together, and celebrate together their Jewishness. The third time was much better. The third time I felt Klal Yisrael in Jerusalem, when Jerusalem was liberated. Thousands and thousands of Jews, young and old, men and women, children, teachers, generals, were all there together. The difference? This time, it was by choice, our choice. We chose to be Jewish. We chose our Klal Yisrael. We chose to be part of Klal Yisrael. So I would say here, too, we must educate our children in that respect. It is we who decide what Klal Yisrael is. And Klal Yisrael is all of us.

In conclusion -- I still don't know how to solve the problems facing us with regard to Jewish unity, which is not the same as Jewish unanimity. We could never expect Jews to be unanimous, but we must demand for Jews to be united.

Is it halakhically possible to bridge strict observance to modern trends of compromise? Is it but desirable? Who would be bold enough to do it openly? Who would suggest plausible steps -- in which direction? I confess: I don't know.

What I do know is that the problem is very serious. Klal Yisrael is secure; the idea of Klal Yisrael is not. How could we change the mood of intolerance and suspicion in our midst? How could we encourage attitudes of mutual respect in all circles and spheres? I do not know. But I do know that a beginning has been made here today.

I don't think we can change the situation. I don't think it can be changed in a year, not even in ten years. It will take generations. But at least we are part of the beginning, and there is nothing more beautiful in Jewish life than to celebrate beginnings. In being here together we are following the most noble precept of our common tradition, which is one of overture and sharing.

Of course, there are times when "Yikov hadin et hahar"; there are times when the law must pierce the mountain, but the law is not meant to pierce human beings. The law may be used, and must be used, to bring people together, not to set them apart. Said God to Israel, according to the Midrash: do not hate one another, do not be envious of one another, lest the angels would say: "See? You should not have given them the Torah." How many times has the law been bent, adjusted, interpreted, though not revoked, because of "Tirha d'tzibura" -- simply to shield a Jewish family, a Jewish community caught in upheavals? Naturally, the question is: who may do the bending? Rabbi Nathan of Babylon offered us a tricky advice: Et la'asot ladoshem haferu toratecha: One may disrupt the law in order to serve God. But he did not identify the group or the person in whom such authority is invested. In general, few of us would make use of such authority: haferu toratecha? Who would be ready to go that far? But couldn't we go somewhere -- anywhere -- together?

Remember the Talmudic debate when a heavenly voice was heard telling both sides that "Eleh v'eleh divrei Elokim hayyim" -- that both sides reflect God's living words? As a child I asked my teachers: why doesn't the voice say that both arguments are wrong -- which would ultimately mean the same thing? And their answer was -- the "Bat kol" sought to teach both schools to respect one another: if both are right, respect is possible; if both are wrong, it is not.

I do not pretend to know whether in our debates nowadays "Eleh v'eleh divrei Elokim hayyim"; but I do know that the lesson remains valid: for the sake of Klal Yisrael we must respect each other's views, we must respect the sincerity that motivates such views, we must respect each other's beliefs, and we must respect each other's commitment to Klal Yisrael. A Jew who does not respect fellow human beings surely is going not only against the principles of Klal Yisrael but also against the principles of our tradition. His respect means humiliation; humiliation leads to violation of our memory.



RABBI GERSON D. COHEN
MARCH 16, 1986

The Jewish People has never been as unified since the days of the second temple as it is today. There is a myth to the opposite effect, but the truth is that we have never been a united people, if only as a result of the fact that there was no possibility of communication between far-flung communities. The unity that exists today is, I grant, organizational and defensive and is unquestionably centered around the fact of the state of Israel. The state of Israel has done more to unify the Jewish people in terms of purpose and activity than any other single phenomenon in its history. There was a considerable amount of guilt, pain, and anguish about the possibility that we were not sufficiently united to react with strength in the face of the Holocaust, even when it became impossible to doubt that such a program was in progress, but, even so, after the second world war we did not achieve unity until the state of Israel became the central and dominating phenomenon of Jewish life.

Indeed, we are living at the culmination of a historical movement that began in the middle of the nineteenth century (specifically in 1860) with the formation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, when Jews signified their readiness to take their political destiny into their own hands as far as it was possible to do. Now we have a state and a reborn language, and I wish to remark parenthetically that the latter is a strong component of our new found unity. On the other hand, I do not want us to overlook the fact that the largest Jewish community in Jewish history -- one that produces the greatest number of rabbis, scholars and communal leaders in contemporary Judaism -- exists today in the United States and is also a force for unity.

Despite all I have just said, however, this conference, dedicated to encouraging unity on levels other than the state of Israel, is, at one and the same time, too late and too premature. The sudden alarm at the potential demise of the Jewish family, stimulated in no small degree by Rabbi Alexander Schindler's proposal to accept patrilineal descent as a legitimate determinant of the Jewishness of a child and the decision of a good number of Reform rabbis to act upon it, as well as by the discontinuity in the behavior of many Reform rabbis with regard to the tradition in the matter of conversion, marriage and divorce, have aroused considerable fear for the future of the Jewish family. But the point is that our situation in terms of the breakdown of Jewish family law did not begin with Rabbi Schindler, or with the Reform rabbinate. The beginning of the decline in the compulsory power of Jewish Law began some two hundred years ago, when secularism began to be a major force in Jewish history. For the past 200 years, in both Western and Eastern Europe, we have been experiencing the progressive secularization of attitudes with regard to Jewish law

and practice in conversion, marriage, and divorce. In fact, the situation has become a matter for alarm now only because Orthodoxy is suddenly in a position to fight back. Still, the cry of alarm is 200 years too late. If we were to start examining the family history of every applicant for a Jewish marriage license today, we would establish a far greater source of contention than already exists.

Further, one must question whether those among the Orthodox who are crying so loudly about the progressive breakdown of the Jewish family and of the unity of the Jewish people, are sincere. For if they were, they would also concern themselves with the fact that there has been and continues to be considerable deviance with regard to Jewish family law in outlying communities that are not part of the mainstream.

In all fairness to the Orthodox, however, their concern is not new; they have been saying the same thing for years. But --again-- they are able to assert themselves now, first, because of their increased power in the state of Israel and second, because the laity has accorded them a degree of power outside the state that they never possessed before. There is another myth abroad that maintains that the more outlandish Jewish practice is and the less adapted it is to contemporary modern life, the more authentic it is. Although the myth is completely unhistorical, the fact of the matter is that many Jews believe it to be true.

When I said that this conference was being held "too late," I meant that it is too late to undo the results of two hundred years of progressive relaxation in some cases, of confusion in others, and of downright chicanery in yet others with regard to the laws of family purity. Although, I think, the present alarm grows out of the the increasing assertiveness of Reform and of the decision on the part of the Orthodox to confront it head on, the fact is that the disunity and the conflict about these matters was historically inevitable.

On the other hand, this conference on promoting Jewish unity is premature. We do not have the data that would enable us to provide the groundwork for new standards of behavior. We need the sociological data that will tell us about what actually exists out there. We need to know how many and who are those who are Jewish in name and how many and who are those who are Jewish in fact. Merely to reaffirm old norms is futile. Hence, the best that can come out of this meeting, to my mind -- and here I am advancing a very personal point of view -- is a joint commission committed to studying these factors. We also need a study of the factors involved in the establishment of norms and sanctions. A community cannot exist without sanctions: "You are a member. You are not.

You are entitled to certain rights. You are not." Only an agreement on standards will overcome the present chaos.

The commission I have in mind would necessarily include representatives of five different religious points of view: Orthodox (although it is moot whether such a designation includes Rabbi Norman Lamm or the late Rav Moshe Feinstein), Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Secular. I include the last named because not only is it a religiously relevant posture, but it is one that is pervasive within the contemporary Jewish community.

I think that much needs to be done and done quickly; we must begin our study immediately. The action I propose will take courage to carry out: Do not expect the approval of the Israeli rabbinic establishment; not only is it not to their political and financial advantage, but, I suppose, they sincerely believe that no one else is empowered to evaluate and or alter the tradition. For anything to happen, the Jewish lay leadership must want it to happen. There is a considerable amount of pressure that we can organize, particularly in the United States, if we are sincere about what this conference purports to advocate, that is, the overcoming of divisiveness and the establishment of unified standards.

Let me add that this is not the first time that Jews in the United States have been concerned with the necessity of transcending the divisions among us. In 1954, on the third floor of 425 Riverside drive, New York City, there was a meeting at which were present a number of Conservative and Orthodox leaders and they came to a decision to establish a united Bet Din. I mention this Bet Din because of recent proposals in Israel and elsewhere to establish such a joint court as one way of overcoming our present problems. It is essential to note, however that the Bet Din of 1954 was dissolved almost immediately after its establishment, since some members of the extreme Orthodox party refused to participate in the plan. How deeply this rejectionist attitude goes among those who hold it is illustrated by the fact that upon one occasion, one of the great Orthodox leaders of our time had eggs and tomatoes thrown at him because he had attended a meeting with Conservative and Reform Jewish leaders. The divisiveness we are experiencing today is hardly new.

We have the wealth to finance the kind of study I have in mind and we have scholars who are trained to confront these questions. We even have something more: Ours is the first period in which the religious leadership of the Jewish community is bound together by a truly cordial relationship. It meets together, talks together, and even works together -- All this, of course behind the scenes. What has brought about the fear of openly admitting the existence of such cooperation? It is the fear of being denounced by the more fanatical of the Orthodox leadership, A fear that is

intensified, I must repeat, by the mistaken communal conception of Orthodoxy as the only legitimate Jewish religious posture.

The first matter we are going to have to tackle is the power of the Orthodox in Israel to decide who is a Jew and who is not. In the distant past (and in the not so distant past with regard to some communities), when everyone knew everyone else, there were no problems with regard to family lineage. Today that is not the case, and we shall have to establish new criteria for legitimatizing Jewish identity. Therefore, we will need to find the courage to set in motion the kind of commission I have in mind and to agree to accept the result of its deliberations. There is no immutable obstacle in the way of our achieving the kind of unity and toleration that is so beautifully described in the mishna. The Mishna discusses the differences between Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai on certain aspects of the laws of marriage, specifically that of Levirate marriage. It says, "Even though this school forbids and the other permits, even though one disqualifies and the other recognizes, the school of Shammai never refrained from marrying the women of the School of Hillel, and vice versa. What is more, this is not only true with regard to the laws of marriage, but also with regard to the laws of ritual purity. Those things that one school declared pure, the other occasionally declared impure. They nevertheless used each other's vessels."

You have to want unity in sufficient measure to bring it about. Rabbi Tarfon says that it is possible for people who are mamzerim to have their lineage purified, and he prescribes a process that takes three generations to complete. What I want to indicate to you, however, is that we now live in a society where people are unwilling to wait for three generations, a society which insists upon the dignity and authority of the human beings who are alive today. And let us remember that we also live in a society in which one is not compelled to choose between being registered in the Jewish community or giving up his or her status as a Jew altogether.

I would, therefore, like to quote in full two principles that professor Wiesel has already referred to because they speak directly to our situation. Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Lakish say,

אין אדם חוצה להחליט על דברי תורה
119 really means, "At a time when people should have been fulfilling the will of the lord, they have been violating the Torah." But in the rabbinic idiom the verse came to mean, "when the time comes, when it is necessary to break a principle of the Torah for the sake of fulfilling the wider Torah, do it. The second principle reads, ... אין אדם חוצה להחליט על דברי תורה
It means, in effect, "It is better to uproot a principle of the Torah rather than have the entire Torah violated." Today we are facing the possibility of the violation of the whole of the Torah.

Consequently, I think that we must decide who is going to advise us on what to uproot. Jewish History is replete with traditions upon which to base the staking out of new roads in response to new and imperative demands. I hope someday to stimulate someone to write about the miracle of the East European Jewish university training developed in the Yeshiva of Volozhin. Volozhin upheld tradition and yet revolutionized Jewish life. It was in Volozhin and its off-shoots that the study of the Talmud was strengthened and, paradoxically, it was in Volozhin that the Hebrew language was resuscitated and that Zionism came to grow and flourish. We are here today because of Volozhin and its new and imaginative responses to the crisis of its day.

Can we unify the Jewish people in the face of contemporary divisions and disputes with regard to basic principles and in the face of a seemingly complete lack of mutual respect? I think we can. But we must commit ourselves to Judaism -- not just to the Jewish people. We have to decide what values and what discipline -- by that I mean, what sanctions -- we are willing to impose in the case of deviation, even if those who deviate are our own children, in order to achieve a true community of Beit Yisrael.

I believe there will be a Jewish people in the year 2000. But I believe that its future will depend upon the operation of two phenomena: First, the world must be willing to let us live to the year 2000. But second, and infinitely more pertinent now, we must want to survive and we must know why we want to do so. Our children are not going to stay within the Jewish community simply out of loyalty to their parents. They are not going to remain within the tradition unless they find reasons to do so. There have always been those who were not convinced of the value of Judaism. In the Maccabean period there were people who abandoned Judaism even after victory. There were those who abandoned Judaism in Eastern Europe, too, even when they were under no compulsion to do so. There are those in the United States who are doing so as well. There you have two very compelling reasons for us to be able to make Judaism not merely palatable, but necessary.

Rather than asking whether we will have a Jewish people in the year 2000, we should be asking whether we will have a confident and proud Jewish people in the year 2000. It will certainly take much more than an agreement on family law to achieve that. First, however, we do need such an agreement so that we can maintain the structure for our contemporary community and the continuity of our tradition.

Ira Silverman

CLAL

March 16, 1986

Princeton, New Jersey

TOWARD ONE JEWISH PEOPLE

I would like to open on a personal note, explaining as I prepare to depart as President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, that I, like Gerson Cohen, speak only for myself, as one Reconstructionist Jew; and that I am leaving my professional position, but not my commitment to the Reconstructionist idea--an idea which, in fact, also suffuses the 92nd Street Y.

What is the Reconstructionist idea? In the period of my service, I have emphasized three basic tenets:

- The need to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, to accommodate continuity and change, for the vitality of Judaism.
- The need to synthesize the best of the two cultures which we as American Jews inherit, and in which we live, the American and the Judaic.
- As a tempering force, and in its own right a good, the need to strive toward the worldwide unity of the Jewish people, klal yisrael.

With respect to that first tenet, the need to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, Reconstructionists believe that every generation has the right, indeed the responsibility, to interpret Jewish tradition in the light of its own knowledge, beliefs, psychological needs and social context. If Judaism is the belief and practices of the Jewish people, and we are the Jewish people of today, then we have the right to add to the layers of our tradition--not to supplant them, but to add to them--our own understandings.

Reconstructionists reject, for example, notions of supernaturalism and superior chosenness--but not the God of Israel, or our voluntary covenant, or a way of life guided by Jewish teaching.

Some say that is impossible, without ordered authority. I say it is not impossible, and not really optional if Judaism is to survive.

When installed in my position at the Reconstructionist College, I quoted from John Fowles, who wrote an insightful introduction to the remarkable novel The Book of Ebenezer Le Page. Fowles succinctly described the wrenching change of this century:

"We are still too close to it to realize what an astounding and unprecedented change, unprecedented both in its extent and its speed, has taken place in the psyche of Western mankind during these 80 years... It is only the very old now who can fully understand this: what it means to have known, in one lifespan, both a time when city streets were

full of horses, the car not yet invented, and a time when man stood on the moon; or even more incomprehensibly, both a time when even the most terrible weapons would kill a few hundred at most, and a time when their power risks entire cities--and their aftermath, whole countries. It is almost as if in those same 80 years we left the old planet and found a new; and we are all, however brashly contemporary, however much we take modern technology for granted, still victims of that profound cultural shock.... We have at least realized we made a very clumsy landing on our new planet, and also left a number of things behind on the old that we might have done better to bring with us."

It is tempting, I understand, in view of this instability, to take the tried and true route of Orthodoxy. But for many, that is not the answer; that is not possible or appropriate. Throughout our history, Judaism always grew, and remained vital through its growth. It was not a museum piece, like the fabulous Jewish museum of Prague, which is no more alive than the adjacent Jewish cemetery.

With respect to the second tenet, synthesizing the American and Jewish cultures, we can be--and indeed are--creating new models of Jewish life appropriate for the American setting. We ask ourselves: can't we better apply the principles of Judaism to our American civic lives? And can't we, conversely, better apply the principles we cherish in American life to Judaism? I think the potential application of our Jewish teachings to our civic lives in this society is obvious. It should be equally obvious that we can more effectively apply the Western values we cherish to our practice of Judaism.

I believe that an evolving Judaism can well benefit from a greater infusion of what we glorify, at least mythically, in America: democratic organizational processes, tolerance of diversity and dissent, equality of women and men, and so forth. Our tradition has not been particularly noted for these characteristics.

But then we have a problem. If we change our understanding of Judaism, and create a distinctively American version of Judaism, what about klal yisrael? At the popular level, we must understand the cost of generating yet additional ways of being Jewish: we risk the ready connectedness of Jews the world over. And more profoundly, we need be concerned about the very cohesiveness of our people--the definition of the tribe. To this point, Elie Wiesel spoke most eloquently; we must bear his teaching in mind.

I do not know what Rabbi Schindler will say--I suspect we are very close--but early Reform de-emphasized the tribal, and emphasized the credal. Reconstructionism emphasizes Peoplehood. We therefore believe that group self-definition is extremely important.

Which means that klal yisrael is important. We must overcome our ethnic barriers, such as those dividing Ashkenazi and Sephardi. We must overcome international barriers, especially those between Israeli and American Jewry. And, especially pertinent to our purpose today, we must overcome denominational differences.

But how do we achieve that? I believe only through good sense, not central authority. So that's what we're about: good sense--saechel. And I commend and thank Rabbi Greenberg for his good sense, and for bringing us together. Our coming together will require, as he has suggested, some compromise. I am prepared to compromise, but that will require the flexibility of others as well.

I am in fact troubled by as many signs of inflexibility as flexibility, even to the point of one of our colleagues not being willing to talk with me, and others, in person, in a public forum here today. Thus we must speak in series. Am I not Jewish? Am I treyf? That is the way it feels, although I am sure it is not meant personally.

I am heartened and moved by the words of Rabbi Haskel Lookstein on the call by a leading Orthodox rabbi for total non-cooperation with the rest of us. I will quote for a moment:

"Why is such a posture thought necessary? Are we really afraid that participating in joint ventures means giving endorsement to those with whom we disagree? Nobody has asked us for our endorsement, nor is anyone interested in it. Individual communities give legitimacy to their own religious leaders. We of the Orthodox movement have no monopoly on the granting or the withholding of legitimacy. No one has given us the right to judge the qualifications of others."

So one thing I demand is interpersonal respect, which I feel is lacking. I think that is a sine qua non for our continued joint exploration. Having said all that, I would add that I have great

empathy for those bold Orthodox men and women who even put their toes into our hot tub of debate; because I know they are constrained by their more rigid flanks--as I am too! God bless those who come this far.

Pushing on, I think it is important that we change the framework of understanding. Even here, some would have it that Orthodoxy is normative Judaism--and the rest of us have a deviant approach; or the rest of us are deviants. Well, in fact, like man and gorilla, we have common ancestries, and just took different evolutionary paths. Does that make one better than the other? Which is deviant? One could even assert that since the majority of us are non-Orthodox Jews--and since we understand Judaism to be the belief and practices of the Jewish people--that Orthodoxy is the odd man out and what we have, actually, as a friend of mine put it, is a tragic situation of Orthodoxy versus the Jews. Another friend has suggested that indeed there will be one Jewish people in the year 2000 and also a small sect of Orthodox whose separatism makes them the contemporary Essenes.

I prefer not to see it that way, but to accept pluralism within our unity of membership, klal yisrael. We Reconstructionists do not believe that we have a monopoly on the truth. In fact, we believe no one possesses that. Personally, I was taught to believe those who are seeking the truth, but to doubt those who have found it. I think that while we strive for unity, we must recognize that we have, for several centuries, had diverse strands within Judaism.

So what do we mean when we speak of unity?

Is it "unity" in regard to our conceptions of the intertwining of God, Torah and Israel? This we have not had for two centuries--secular Yiddishists, secular Zionists, Reform and Orthodox and Conservative and Reconstructionist and indeed, looking back to the debate over Spinoza, over Shabbetai Tzvi, over Karaism,--over Sadducees/Essenes/Zealots/Christians/Pharisees--perhaps we have never had it, or only rarely. I see no way to restore this, and no desire. God is Infinite--and He cannot accurately be reflected in any single human imagining.

Is it unity of political action? This we did not have on any issue until 1933--in a negative sense--and until 1948--in a positive sense. Before then there was not unity on Statehood, not on Socialism, not on what side to support in World War I. There is now more unity of political action in regard to certain basics than in centuries, in support of the need for a Jewish state and of the security of Israel, in support of freedom for Soviet Jewry, but little unity (as little as ever before) over what those basics mean. Is Israel's security best achieved by ceasing to govern the West Bank and Gaza and their million Palestinians? Or by absorbing them? Disagreement. Is Soviet Jewry best assisted by supporting arms control? Or by opposing it? By insisting that Soviet emigrants go to Israel? Or not? Disagreement. It may be that wisdom appears only from disagreement and dialogue--not from uniformity.

Is it unity as to how we marry each other and whom we can marry? Unity in defining who makes up the Jewish people that wishes to see itself a unity? Here, some Jews have a problem and others do not. From the standpoint of Reconstructionism, all Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and secularist Jews are Jews. We have not said that when some other movement issues a get that is, to our eyes, male-dominant and unequal and therefore unjust, we will not recognize that get and therefore will not recognize a marriage made afterward and will proclaim children of such a marriage as mamzerim. We have not said that God does not hear the shofar-blowing of men who forbid women to blow the shofar. We imagine that God does hear such shofar blasts, and cries. But hears. From our standpoint, the Jewish people is still one, and nothing in our practice will undermine that.

The fact that we can live with some differences, some pluralism, makes my task--and our task if you agree with that--considerably easier.

We need not argue over, or compromise, various practices of liturgy, observance, or minhag. We can all of us do our thing--although, in good spirit, we can make progress in sharing and exchanging and adopting each other's ideas and approaches. I do wish to increase Jewish devotion to tradition.

I do call on all the Jewish people to observe Shabbat. That is, to desist from work, with new understandings of what that

can mean; to observe kashrut, similarly, with possible new understandings (for example, suggesting that smoking, or food produced by companies exploiting their laborers, be declared treyf); to observe family purity laws; to observe other mitzvot

Some of this is radical and unacceptable to some Reconstructionists and other liberals, but I urge these changes nonetheless. I compromise: Rabbi Lookstein wants us to work within the framework of halakhah, and I will go some distance toward that goal, but want the right to participate in evolving that way of life.

What that means, after all that give and take, is that we may be left with those fundamental membership questions--which in recent times have been provoked especially by differences over patrilineal descent, divorce procedures, and conversion.

With respect to patrilineal descent, I should make clear that the Reconstructionist commitment to defining as Jewish a child of a Jewish mother or father, in the event the child is raised Jewishly, is basic, that is, it fundamentally reflects our commitment to the equality of women and men. We come to positions such as this not on the basis of salability or convenience, but from principle. I will confess that I personally have been open to the idea, for the sake of klal yisrael (and in recognition of the fact that it was we liberals, Reconstructionist and Reform, who took the destabilizing initiative,) of advocating infant conversion, at least on an interim basis; but I now believe that our fundamental devotion to equality works in favor of retaining a commitment to

patrilineal descent. I therefore call on Orthodox and Conservative Jews to be flexible and accept that major change in the very self definition of our tribe.

With respect to conversion, I call on the Reform and Conservative movements to join with us in developing acceptable standards and practices to be used in conversion, thus acceding to Rabbi Lookstein's call for such compromise. I would add that clearly, while our liberal standards and practices can be altered, the pedigree and gender of the officiant cannot be the determinant of the conversion's kashrut. Related to that, one principle on which I cannot compromise is the right of the liberal seminaries to ordain rabbis, men and women, who are legitimate religious leaders of the Jewish people. It would be unthinkable of us to suggest to Jews that they submit to the authority of a rabbinate that excludes such people. But together, we can create new, but traditionally acceptable procedures for conversion--including infant conversion which may still, for awhile (our own liberal commitment notwithstanding), be useful in addressing the patrilineal issue.

With respect to divorce, I call on Reform to accept, and the Orthodox and Conservative movements to be flexible and adopt, the approach to gittin which the Reconstructionist movement has pioneered.

The inequality of the traditional system of Jewish divorce is patently unacceptable to our twentieth century egalitarian

sensibilities. So what is the solution--get rid of the get? No, the Reconstructionist approach has been to retain a system of gittin faithful to our tradition and to the notion of religious sanctification of such personal status matters--but to reconstruct it; that is, to make it reciprocal and egalitarian.

It is important to remember that liberal Judaism did not create assimilation, but in fact has tried to respond to it, for a century in which Orthodoxy seemed mostly incapable of doing so. One of the things now very troubling to the Orthodox is this issue of gittin. Reform rabbis and some other liberal rabbis will perform a second marriage for Jews when there has been no get, the children of such a remarriage becoming mamzerim. But the vast majority of Jews do not bother with a get because they bother not at all about religious matters and are entirely alienated from the tradition, not because a Reform rabbi has told them it is unnecessary.

Let us agree for the sake of klal yisrael that mamzerut is a problem. We do not really care about it but we recognize that others do and are interested in helping. How do we get more Jews to use the avenue of Jewish divorce (even as we try to discourage divorce)? Our way is not to be clamping down harder on those wicked rabbis who perform remarriages. It is rather by making Jewish divorce a more attractive and meaningful option. The actual ceremony of the divorce should be enhanced and updated. Elements of sexism, including especially the ability of husbands to blackmail their wives for a get, should be eliminated. Such

neo-traditionalist forms which satisfy the basic demand of halakhah while being in keeping with the spirit of our age must be devised. So let us all work together to combat our real enemy, Jewish indifference, by devising new, creative Jewish ceremonies; by learning and studying together, as Elie Wiesel and Susan Cohen so beautifully recommended.

It may be objected that some members of the rabbinate, may never recognize such new forms--just as now they do not recognize conversions by rabbis of movements other than their own, even if done according to halakhah. They may not. And what of it? If such people insist upon defining the Jewish people as split, some Jews as fake and some as real, there will be no satisfying them. There will always be some doubt, some independent-mindedness, that such people will choose not to tolerate. But perhaps it will turn out that only a small minority of rabbis in any movement would be so rigid as to turn their backs on such an effort. I myself think it would be worthwhile for us to find out.

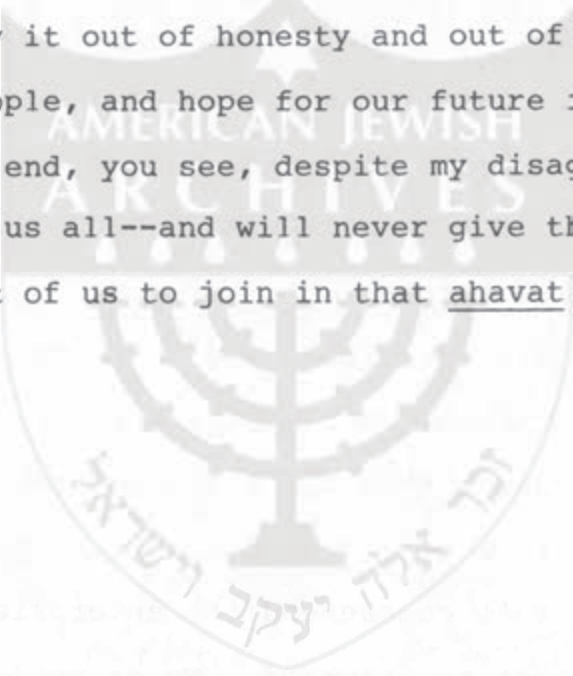
Such experimental models should, and I believe could, be our joint model. We can learn from tradition, and with full respect for it, adjust it to meet our own internalized ideal standards, not just current fads of the external world. I personally would be willing to agree to such common personal status procedures, if those procedures, as I have suggested, allowed women as witnesses, mohelim, rabbis and so forth; altered ketubot and gittin in egalitarian ways; and were to be determined by batei din which were comprised not solely of Orthodox Jews but of tribunals in

which our various approaches would be represented as a reflection of our demographic realities. In making that point, I would stress that this represents a compromise of one of my basic principles, a commitment to ultimate democratic values and procedures. We do not believe that Judaism is fundamentally a legal system to be governed by a rabbinical elite of judges. Such procedures undercut the very basis of what we consider to be the essence of a vibrant Judaism in our day: individuals educating themselves about their tradition and choosing freely to immerse themselves in Jewish enrichment. But if the rest of Jewry will join in creating joint standards for conversion and divorce, maybe we can go that far, although it will require a significant compromise in our philosophy of Jewish survival.

So why, some orthodox Jews ask, can't the liberals continue to violate the Sabbath as we please and eat what we please, but simply agree to cede to them the right to define who is a Jew? The question itself (a real one, not imaginary,) is troubling, insofar as it fails to comprehend the enterprise of liberal Judaism; but it must be answered. We cannot give up the right to participate in our collective self-definition because we are, and we represent, those Jews who do not want to be Jewish if Judaism does not incorporate our deeply held values such as the equality of women and men. We are not amei ha'aretz; we are scholars of Jewish tradition and history (in respect to which, I would add, some halakhic advocates are unschooled) and we know for a fact

that Jewish civilization has survived and prospered because Jews have dared to innovate and adapt. We know that if we cease to be bold now, the future will be bleak.

Some Jews today style themselves as a saving remnant. But they may in fact be reactionaries who will bring us all down. We believe the future is promising and we do not want to risk it because, for example, their rabbis do not want to let their children marry our children. This may sound harsh, but I feel compelled to say it out of honesty and out of love for our tradition and our people, and hope for our future in the year 2000 and beyond. In the end, you see, despite my disagreements with some, I actually love us all--and will never give that up. I will only ask all the rest of us to join in that ahavat yisrael.



Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

March 16, 1986

Princeton, New Jersey

Let me begin by thanking Rabbi [Irving] Greenberg for bringing us all together. He fears a schism in our midst, a rift so large that it will tear the Jewish people asunder. And he has resolved to do something about it. Indeed, he has bent all his energies to the task of averting the dangers he perceives. For this he has my respect and my affection, my ear and my active participation. I salute him and I avow that, if there is even the remotest danger of such a schism within Jewish life, we ought—all of us—to labor to prevent it.

But having said that, I must quickly add that I am not nearly as alarmed as Yitz Greenberg and some others appear to be. I hold a different judgment about the imminence of such a breach.

First of all, I would observe that our disputations, such as they are, are almost solely limited to the professional class—rabbi vs. rabbi—and have not truly inflamed the passions of our people. True, our various synagogue affiliations tend to separate us one from the other on the Sabbath and the weekdays—some will go to Orthodox shuls and some to Conservative synagogues and some to Reform congregations. And many, far too many, of our people go to no Jewish places of worship at all. This, my friends, is the great problem that all of us here, in all our denominations, must address—but that's for another day. Today we are gathered to discuss the differences among those who do believe in the synagogue, and I say to you that these differences are as naught compared with the gulf that divides Jews who observe the mitzvot in whatever fashion and those who ignore them in their entirety. Yes, there are differences, but my travels across this land tell me that they are more often a matter of happenstance than of ideological fervor, more frequently a question of how convenient a synagogue is or how friendly the rabbi than of any strong commitment to one branch of Judaism over another.

Perhaps this is a testament to the democratic currents within American Jewish life. Perhaps, on the other hand, it indicates a weakness in synagogue life, an arbitrariness to Jewish patterns of affiliation. However we interpret it, let us be humbled by the fact that our so-called schism is consciously that only at leadership levels, and only among some leaders. Truly, the greatest danger arising from our wranglings is, not that the Orthodox refuse to recognize Reform conversions or Conservative shofar blowing, but rather that the great mass of unaffiliated Jews will be so put off by what they see as *pilpul* that they will say "a plague on all your houses."

Second, I would remind us that feuding is hardly new to Jewish life. So much of the present day foreboding is predicated on the erroneous assumption that all was sweetness and light in the past, that, before these latest altercations between Orthodoxy and Reform, harmony prevailed, that there was then, in that golden and peaceful

past, a universal consensus uniting the Jewish world.

That is a gross misreading of Jewish history, of course. At no time did such an ideological consensus obtain. In virtually every era of our people's past, there were sharp ideological disputations setting Jews in opposition to one another, not just on political and social issues, but in the religious realm as well, especially in the latter. Yet the Jewish world did not fracture.

Remember the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees or the contentions between Saadya Gaon and Ben Meir when their respective followers celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Pesach on different dates. Or think of the refusal of the Sephardim to heed the Cherem of Rabbenu Gershom on polygamy. Or recall more recent times when the Chasidim opposed the Mitnagdim. Both opposed the Maskilim, who split into Zionists left and right, secular and religious, as well as Bundists. And in every age there were halachic authorities who rejected one another. Despite all of these conflicts and more, the center of the Jewish world held.

Let it be noted, moreover, that some of these conflicts were infinitely more fierce—and even violent—than are today's argumentations. The strife between the Mitnagdim and the Chasidim was the most brutal of all. These antagonists did not limit themselves to occasional rhetorical outbursts as we do today. They attacked one another physically, denounced their opponents to the authorities, and had them imprisoned.

Perhaps even more to the point, not a few times before our own time did the extremists of one camp refuse to give their children permission to marry the sons and daughters of the opposing camp. But cooler heads prevailed, and the Jewish world remained intact.

If such insistence on ethnic exclusivity and ideological purity did not work in the *past*, it will not work in *our* day. Our children will insist on making that decision themselves. If two Jews fall in love and wish to marry, they are going to marry. Who will stop them? They will scarcely be put off by the fear of not being halachically pure—nor will their parents. Most of them will thank their lucky stars that their children have chosen a Jew as a life mate. In the final analysis, the laity, the people, will shape the terms of communal interaction, and a sane and sensitive rabbinate will respond to its will, yea even an Orthodox rabbinate, which, I am confident, will find a halachic remedy as it always has. After all, the reluctance to exclude Jews from the family fellowship of Israel is a dominant motif which permeates the halachah along with its more restrictive strains.

Be that as it may, time and again through our long and stormy past, we have seen the chasm stretch in peaceful contemplation and

violent conflict over the most elusive definition of Jewishness: religion? people? nation? national minority? religious civilization? Without ever agreeing on one answer, we have nonetheless defined ourselves as One.

Moreover, we share a living history which is partner to the Torah in defining our Jewish identity. In our day, for instance, all but the most extreme forces of the right and left—such as the Satmar Chasidim or the fading relics of the American Council for Judaism—have adjusted their perspectives on Jewish life to admit to the influence of history. And thus the struggle to secure the safety of Israel, or in behalf of Soviet Jewry, or against anti-Semitism or an international terrorism whose primary target is the Jews continues to unite us—Conservative and Orthodox and Reform Jews. Yes, even the very people who are most fierce in voicing their disagreements on the theological level stand shoulder to shoulder—as brothers and sisters should—when it comes to these and kindred issues (e.g., when the presidents and executives of rabbinic associations meet regularly, Louis Bernstein of the Mizrachi and I usually are on the same side at meetings of the Zionist Executive; at the White House and in the State Department, Moshe Sherer of the Agudah refers to me as rabbi though he may not do so in his shul).

The fact remains that the evolving historical identity of the Jewish people will continue to grow, for Jewish history, like the Torah, belongs to no one single person or movement but to all Jews—to all who share the destiny of this people Israel.

All this is not to minimize our differences, to discount those divergences of view which obtain between Orthodoxy and non-Orthodoxy in our day. These differences are real enough. They involve such pivotal issues as the religious divorce and conversion and patrilineal descent. They cannot easily be resolved. Indeed, they are not likely to be resolved. But, if they cannot be resolved, we will simply have to live with them. And we *can* live with them as we have in the past, provided we accord each other mutual respect and refrain from questioning the integrity and intentions of those whose views we do not share.

I speak here, in the first instance, self-critically; mark that. In my volleys with Orthodoxy I have, in the heat of response to what I saw as attack, more than once indulged in the anger of the outcast, using words and invoking images and bitter analogies which I now regret. I confess too that there were times when I did not take into account the halachic difficulties that certain Reform innovations present to Orthodox Jews. I have responded in kind to the intransigence and zeal of Orthodoxy's most extreme spokespersons, using their scorn as an excuse for not truly striving to lessen the pain of others.

This is not to say that I retreat from any of the steps taken by Reform Judaism this past decade—only that these steps may have seemed less precipitous and threatening had we achieved a higher level of dialogue in advance of public pronouncement.

But the Orthodox, on their part, must realize how very deeply their intolerance wounds us, how we feel, for instance, when a leading halachic authority rules that a Reform Jew's aliyah is not an aliyah and his blessing is not a blessing because we don't believe in God and hence God does not hear the prayers of a Reform Jew. Does that not have a chilling resonance? I plead with my Orthodox colleagues to understand how hurt we are when the graveside of a revered Reform rabbi who made aliyah some years ago, after a distinguished career in Chicago, is violated—as it was in Israel only a few weeks ago when Orthodox extremists built a stone wall around his final resting place to segregate him from the other Jews who are buried there. Aye, and they must understand how deeply pained we are when another "*posek*," still another decisor of halachah, ordained, as he did earlier this year, that, if a Jew must escape impending disaster and he can find refuge in a church or a Conservative or Reform synagogue, the church is to be preferred.

Lema'an Hashem, is it fair to ask us to remain silent in the face of all this and much more? Can we really be expected to interpret these things as anything other than an effort to delegitimize us, to read us all out of the Jewish fold? Oh, I know that Orthodoxy sings the praises of *ahavat Yisrael* as a foremost virtue, and yet these excesses, let it be recognized, convey just the opposite message. And so does the eloquent silence from the overwhelming majority of Orthodox leaders.

And what shall we say about the persistent efforts to amend the Law of Return—spearheaded as they are by Chabad, by the Lubavitcher movement, and endorsed, at least publicly, by all of mainline Orthodoxy? How are we to read that? We are told that such an amendment will affect only a scant few, since only non-Orthodox converts are intended to be excluded and how many of them choose to go on aliyah? Well, to begin with, the number of such converts and their children is scarcely insignificant. They number in the hundreds of thousands by now in America alone, and their children exceed the half-million mark by far.

True enough, few of these Jews-by-choice plan to go on aliyah—today. But was Israel created only for such a time as this? Israel was established as a haven of refuge for all who are potentially victimized because of their Jewishness. The attempt to narrow its definition, therefore, is unacceptable; indeed, it is morally reprehensible. Safe harbor for Jews, the unreserved embrace of Klal Yisrael for its persecuted children—that is what the Law of Return

represents. It is a life preserver in a world that asks not, "What kind of a Jew are you?" before drowning us in hatred, intolerance, and oppression. To tamper with the Law of Return is to tamper with Jewish life and flesh and bone and heart and soul.

Let me note in this connection that, while I have on occasion been guilty of hyperbole in defending Reform against the onslaughts of the politicized Orthodox establishment, I have never been guilty of attacking either Orthodox Jews or Orthodox Judaism per se. Indeed, I deem Orthodoxy essential to Jewish life. I was raised by parents who taught me to respect Orthodoxy and those who practice it.

But that Orthodoxy which I was taught to revere, as a young man, manifested a good deal of modesty. It did not lay claim to an all-exclusive authenticity. It did not presume to know with a certainty what the Holy One, blessed be He, demanded and whom He deemed acceptable in His eyes. It did not wear armor in the name of righteousness or wield the sword to trim the beards of other Jews.

Religious triumphalism must be banished from our table. Simply put, though not simply achieved. I know what is required is the emergence and amplification of more Orthodox voices such as those of Yitz Greenberg and Emanuel Rackman and Eliezer Berkovitz. The genius of these men is in building bridges, not citadels of intolerance. We need to see them strengthen their hand, vie more actively for influence, reach out especially to the Orthodox laity who I believe would welcome the refreshing breeze of dialogue among Jews.

Let us then earnestly dialogue, building as many channels of discourse as are humanly possible. Concretely, I propose the following:

- ... exchange of pulpits, wherever feasible.
- ... positive reportage and attitudes in our publications.
- ... a review of our Jewish educational materials in order to make certain that the views of those who differ from us are presented without bias.
- ... exchanges on a lay level, especially for our youth, through joint meetings, retreats, and summer camp experiences. Our youth, alas, is already a victim of our differences.
- ... joint studies involving the faculty members of our various seminaries. We might be able to evolve a transdenominational approach to such vexing, divisive issues as intermarriage and conversion. But, even if we don't, even if we start with less controversial subjects, such a process of joint study will be unifying.
- ... we ought to jointly establish a regular, no less than quarterly, forum or some kind of instrumentality to air differences and ex-

plore possible compromises—not binding on any one, but at least with the imprimatur of various schools of thought. Such a forum could also help define issues of common cause and strengthen our sense of alliance.

Such a multifaceted dialogue is possible if all of us appropriate the resources necessary for it—above all, if we accord each other respect and if the "what" and not the "who" becomes the object of our quest—by which I mean, for example, that we will endeavor to determine *what* the requirements for conversion should be, not *who* is doing the converting. Indeed, many Reform rabbis insist on extensive preparatory study and many require that the minutiae of halachah regarding conversion—including *milah* and *tevilah*—are observed. Yet these conversions are disqualified by the Orthodox, not because of what is done, but because the officiants are not Orthodox.

In his excellent article in last December's issue of *Moment*, that giant of the spirit, Harold Schulweis, points to the historic, passionate dialogue between the Houses of Hillel and Shammai as the prime example of respectful Jewish conflict.

Between the two schools, "so Harold reminds us," a spirit of trust and respect prevailed. Each informed the other when practices contrary to the rulings of the other school were being enacted. . . . And if. . . the House of Hillel was entitled to have the halachah fixed in agreement with its rulings, that was. . . due to the kindness and modesty of the House of Hillel. For the House of Hillel studied the arguments of its opponents and even mentioned the words of Shammai before its own.

It is in this spirit that I would like now to discuss most briefly two issues which are the cause of much misunderstanding between Orthodox and Reform: (1) Intermarriage-conversion and (2) patrilineal descent.

On the first issue there is the wide impression, indeed it is a charge frequently leveled against Reform, that we are somehow encouraging of intermarriage and that we embrace anyone and everyone as a Jew without restraint or requirement. This is simply not the truth. It is an unwarranted accusation.

Reform is unalterably opposed to intermarriage, even as are the Orthodox and Conservative religious communities. We oppose such marriages on human grounds because they are more likely to founder and end in divorce, as the statistics indeed attest. But, above all, we oppose intermarriage on Jewish religious grounds because there is the ever present danger of the attenuation of our identity and a decline in our numeric strength. And so we resist intermarriage

with every resource at our command. The resources and programs of the Reform movement are devoted to building Jewish identity and literacy in the hope of forestalling intermarriage.

But the reality is that our best efforts do not suffice, nor do those of the other branches of Judaism. We live in an open society and intermarriage is the sting which comes to us with the honey of our freedom. More than ever before, our young people meet and go to school, work, and live alongside non-Jews. Ultimately, many determine to choose them as life partners, not to escape from being Jews, but simply because they have fallen in love.

When they do, what should our policy be? It is here that Reform diverges from the pattern of the past, for we have determined not to sit shivah over our children. Though persisting in our rejection of intermarriage, we refuse to reject the intermarried. On the contrary, we have resolved to love them all the more. We do everything we humanly can to draw them closer to us. We try to involve them in Jewish life and in the life of our community, in the hope of bringing the non-Jewish partner to Judaism or at least to make certain that the children issuing from these marriages, our children's children, and their children in turn—*ledor vador*—will, in fact, be reared as Jews and share the destiny of this people Israel. We believe this is the wiser course. We believe that this course in no way violates the Jewish tradition and that it is more in harmony with its more compassionate strain as it is exemplified in the chasidic story of the father who came to his rebbe with the plaint that his son was a wastrel. "What should I do," he asked in his despair. The rebbe enjoined, "Love him all the more!"

Now to the matter of patrilineal descent. I am sure that most of you are familiar with what is involved here, but, just in case you are not, let me offer a brief explanation: As you know, for the past fifteen hundred years or so, Jewish identity was determined by the maternal line alone. Halachah, religious law as interpreted by traditional Jews for centuries, ruled that the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father is *automatically* Jewish, whereas the child of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father is *not* regarded as a Jew and must first undergo conversion. If the mother is Jewish, the child is Jewish, no matter what. But, if only the father is Jewish, his children must be formally converted to Judaism in order to be regarded as Jews. The recent Reform decision on patrilineal descent eliminates the distinction between men and women, between fathers and mothers. It holds that, insofar as genealogy is a factor in determining Jewishness, the maternal and the paternal lines should be given equal weight.

But the Reform resolution on Jewish identity does not limit itself to genealogy, and in this sense Reform is more stringent than is

Orthodoxy. Tradition confers Jewishness automatically if the mother is Jewish. Reform Judaism does not. It sets some added requirements. Reform insists that, while the child of either a Jewish father or a Jewish mother may be considered Jewish, Jewishness must be further confirmed by "acts of identification with the Jewish people" and "the performance of mitzvot."

Let me read the operative section of that resolution since it is usually quoted, or rather misquoted, only in part:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that the child of either Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent. This presumption of the Jewish status of the offspring of any mixed marriage is to be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people. The performance of these mitzvot serves to commit those who participate in them, both parent and child, to Jewish life.

...mitzvot leading toward a positive and exclusive Jewish identity will include entry into the Covenant (Berit Milah), the acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, and Kabbalat Torah (Confirmation). For those beyond childhood claiming Jewish identity, other public acts or declarations may be added or substituted after consultation with their rabbi.

As you can see, we truly are "machmirim," more stringent than Orthodoxy in the respect that genealogy alone does not suffice for us in establishing Jewish identity, not even if the mother is Jewish. Something more is needed. Jewishness cannot be transmitted merely through the genes. It must be expressed in some concrete way through an involvement in Jewish life and the willingness to share the fate of the Jewish people.

In this manner, incidentally, Reform eliminates some peculiar anomalies to which the more traditional approach gives rise. Let me give you a dramatic case in point: Traditional Judaism denies the Jewishness of Ben-Gurion's grandson because the mother was converted to Judaism by a Reform rabbi whilst it accords Jewishness to the grandson of Khrushchev because the mother was Jewish. Reform Judaism's more stringent approach overcomes such perplexities. We insist that genealogy alone is not enough, even as we broaden the genealogical definition to encompass fathers as well as mothers.

Now this broadened definition does not represent so complete a break with tradition as it might appear. In fact, in the early days of our history as a people, Judaism followed the paternal rather than the maternal line. The matrilineal principle did not always hold

sway. Quite the contrary, there was a time in Jewish life when the patrilineal principle was dominant, when children were considered Jewish primarily because their fathers were Jewish, even though their mothers were not.

Look at the Torah and see: The genealogical tables of the Bible are overwhelmingly patrilineal; it was the *male* line that determined descent and status. In matters of inheritance the patrilineal line alone was followed. Perhaps even more to the point, throughout the Tanach, the Jewishness of the children of non-Jewish mothers is never questioned. Solomon married many foreign wives, and the child of one of them, Rehoboam, succeeded him to the throne. Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest; yet her children were considered Jews, following the line of their father. Joseph married Asenath, the daughter of a priest of On. She certainly was not a Jewess; yet her children were reckoned as Jews because their father Joseph was a Jew. Indeed, even unto this day every male child of Israel is blessed with the blessing that he be like unto Ephraim and Manasseh, and this even though their mother's father was a priest who worshiped the sun in the heathen shrine at Heliopolis near Cairo.

In rabbinic literature, evidence of the patrilineal tradition continues to be manifest. It invokes the God of our *fathers* in prayer. It rules that we be summoned to the Torah by our *father's* name. It reminds us that we live by *zechut avot*, by the merit of our *fathers* alone. And, when a non-Jew is converted to Judaism according to the halachah, he or she is designated as a son or daughter of Abraham, *avinu*, our *father*.

Most significant of all, both the Torah and rabbinic law hold the male line absolutely dominant in matters affecting the priesthood. Whether one is a *kohen* or a *levi* depends on the *father's* priestly claim, not the mother's. If the father is good enough to bequeath the priestly status, why isn't he good enough to bequeath Jewishness? Reform concluded that he was—and hence its newer, and at the same time much older, definition of Jewishness.

There were, of course, contemporary reasons, sociological reasons that also prompted the Reform rabbinate to act as it did, and all of them have to do with intermarriage. The first is rooted in the fact that most intermarriages take place between Jewish men and non-Jewish women. In the case of divorce, the father's right to determine Jewishness of his offspring must be protected.

Second, we cannot ignore the sensitivity of children issuing from such marriages, who, barring a declaration on our part that they are fully Jewish, were bound to believe that they are not really Jewish. And remember, once again, that Jewish sociologists estimate that

there are no less than 300,000 mixed marriages in the United States with twice as many children, and the number of both is growing in geometric progression.

How do you think these children feel, though they were circumcized and reared Jewishly with the consent and cooperation of both parents, when they hear that only the child of a Jewish mother is Jewish. When they grow up, some of them find the strength to speak of their silent pain. Thus, several years ago, I received the following letter from a young woman named Adrienne Gorman, the daughter of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother:

When I read your speech, I realized how deeply the subject of Jewish identity has wounded me . . . and how successfully I had covered the wound through the years. I was raised to be aware that some part of me was Jewish and that with that birthright came the responsibility to remember the six million victims of the holocaust—to remember them, not as a detached humanitarian who, on principle, abhors extermination, but on a far more fundamental level, where the soul of the witness resides.

I can't recall when I first came to understand that my sort of allegiance was to be considered nothing more than a sympathizer's or when I tried to answer for myself the question of what choice I would make if Hitler came again, this time using the halachic definition of a Jew in rounding up his candidates for the ovens and the camps. But at some point over the years I did decide that, where my father's faith—or more precisely, his heritage—was an issue, I would without reservation take my stand as a Jew.

Thus, I effectively bestowed on myself all of the deficits of being a member of an oppressed group with none of the benefits of that community. Jews consider me a non-Jew, non-Jews consider me a Jew . . . and, with a despair tinged with as much humor as I could muster, I began to think of myself as nothing at all.

How could we fail to respond to such a person? Why should we demand that she undergo a formal conversion? Why should we not say to the Adriennes of this world:

By God, you are a Jew. You are the daughter of a Jewish parent. You have resolved to share our fate. You are therefore flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. You are in all truth what you consider yourself to be—a Jew.

I, for one, am glad that the Reform rabbinate has taken its step. The denial of such a declaration has caused far too many people far too much suffering. And so I am happy that we have finally offered them recognition.

I do not expect what I have said to persuade anyone. I merely want to explain our motivations and demonstrate the earnestness of our concerns. Reform does not make changes in order to offend other Jews. Nor do we make changes in order to make ourselves more palatable to others and to enlarge our numbers. Our changes, including the patrilineal resolution, are born of necessity and conviction. They are entirely worthy of our essential character and history as a Jewish religious movement.

Only one more commentary in this connection: It may seem "chutzpadik" but I do not mean this in any pejorative sense. I do devoutly wish that the *poskim* of our times, the Orthodox decisors of the Law, were just a little bit more daring in halachic creativity, more responsive to the human needs of men and women—Jews living in a changing world. Maybe then, Reform would not have to be quite so daring and innovative in its decisions. The two movements would be infinitely more congruent.

But, above all, do I wish that ever more Orthodox rabbis and lay leaders would be prepared to admit what is manifestly true—that the Torah is capable of more than one interpretation and that, of its many faces, the most authentic is the one that reflects, not only the wisdom of the Torah, but its heart.

Let me end as I began with the assertion of our essential unity which has persisted and will continue to persist, please God, despite our divergences. We allowed for such diversity even in times when we were endangered and embattled. Shall we not do so today when we are so very much more secure? We have become a people who need not hunker down into conformity for survival's sake. We can afford to proliferate and to evolve. Indeed, we must—if we are to survive and to grow in creative continuity. Let us therefore regard those words which denote us in our many-splendored diversity—words like Orthodox, Reform, secular, and whatnot—let us regard those qualifying words for what they really are: adjectives and not nouns. The noun is Jew. *Vos mir zaynen zaynen mir—ober Yiden zaynen mir*. Whatever we may be, we may be, but, this above all, we are, we are Jews.

If nothing else, the memory of the *shoah* should impel us to do so. It is a memory that weighs heavy upon us. It constitutes a lasting, impelling mandate for unity. Let us never forget that those who sought to destroy us made no distinctions between us. They killed us all, whatever our "qualifying adjective," yea, even those who were accepted as Jews by non-Orthodox rabbis or whose fathers were Jewish though their mothers were not. Even as we were brothers and sisters in death, so must we ever remain brothers and sisters in life.

UNITY AND INTEGRITY

I come here this evening with a troubled heart to speak as an Orthodox Jew about a concern that unites all of us, namely, those issues that disunite all of us from each other.

The predictions of an unbridgeable and cataclysmic rupture within the Jewish community leave all of us deeply distressed.

They serve to agitate all of us who love and care for and worry about our Jewish people and its future. The twin issues of Jewish identity -- the question of conversion -- and of Jewish marital legitimacy -- of proper gittin (divorce) and, in their absence, subsequent adultery and the blemish of mamzerut (bastardy) -- should give us no rest. The non-marriageability of a significant portion of the Jewish people with the rest of am Yisrael is too horrendous to contemplate -- and yet we are forced to do just that, lest our fragile unity, such as it is, be shattered beyond repair.

At the same time, we have to retain a healthy skepticism about such projections. Samuel Goldwyn used to say, "Never make forecasts, especially about the future." Prophecy is a risky business, especially if it is based upon statistics.

Moreover, while it is good to be alerted, it is not healthy to be panicked. Such excessive alarm sometimes leads to medicines which are worse than the disease. Disaster is not inevitable. Even if we are told that it is, then, as Justice

Louis Brandeis once said about inevitability, "I am opposed to it."

Hence, we have to try our very best, within the limits of our integrity, to promote unity and to oppose the seemingly inevitable disaster that looms before us.

Now, let me repeat that phrase that I just used -- "within the limits of our integrity." I am here, amongst fellow Jews, to do what I can as an advocate of enhanced Jewish unity. But, no honorable person can afford to dispense with his integrity.

The issues are too critical to permit us to gather in a Jewish equivalent of the old "interfaith" meetings in which warmth substituted for light, and good fellowship for genuine understanding. It is too late for that kind of good-will posturing. It is a given that we must relate to each other in friendship and fraternity. Now we must also be honest and truthful with each other. And, as the great R. Saadia Gaon pointed out a thousand years ago in the Introduction to his Emunot Ve'Deiot, in analyzing the causes of skepticism and disbelief, the truth is bitter and distressing and it is more convenient to ignore it. But without it we are wasting our time; more -- without it we are lost. So, if what I have to say proves disappointing and unpopular to some or maybe to all, it is because I am trying to be honest in keeping to the truth as I see it, even while attempting to be as accomodating as I can. I accept it as axiomatic that all other participants are doing the same.

It is in this spirit of searching for unity within the

limits of integrity that I address myself first to the issue of pluralism.

I once thought I knew that the word meant. I have a passing acquaintance with pluralism as a metaphysical concept, in contrast to monism. I believe I understand what cultural and political pluralism are. I've written in favor of pluralism within the halakhic context. But I confess to being confused by all the current talk of "religious pluralism" within the Jewish community. It has been used in a variety of ways, both with regard to Israel and the Diaspora, so that I am at a loss to really understand it. Moreover, my perplexity is deepened by the elevation of "pluralism" to the rank of a sacred principle. It has become a symbol, and whenever an idea is transformed into a symbol, it becomes so enmeshed in emotions and so entangled in mass psychology that it is exceedingly difficult to treat it analytically and critically. Sacred cows, like golden calves, inevitably lead one astray.

Let me then say what kinds of pluralism I can and cannot accept.

If pluralism is just the newest name for what is a discredited ethical or religious relativism, I will have none of it. Relativism is the proposition that because there are many kinds of "things" or points of view, and all have an equal right to be heard and advocated in a democratic society, they are therefore necessarily equally valid. When pluralism is understood as relativism, it slides off into nihilism.

My conception of pluralism in the Jewish religious community can best be summed up by reference to a famous dictum in the Jewish tradition -- that there are shiv'im panim la-Torah, there are seventy faces or facets to Torah. No one is more valuable or significant or legitimate than the other sixty-nine. Judaism is not monolithic. However -- there are only seventy (the number, of course, is arbitrary) and not an infinite number of such faces or facets. A pluralism which accepts everything as co-legitimate is not pluralism, but the kind of relativism that leads, as I said, to spiritual nihilism. If everything is kosher, nothing is kosher. If "Torah" has an infinite number of panim, then, as we would say in Yiddish, "es hat bi'khlal nisht kein panim," it has no face at all, no value, no significance.

I too know the Talmud's comment on the disputes between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai, that elu v'elu divrei Elokim hayyim, "both of these and these are the words of the living G-d." Unfortunately, this profound statement has been abused and turned into a slogan by ignoring the fact that the controversialists were at one in their commitment to the Halakhah and its divine origin, and disagreed only on its interpretation with regard to very specific matters. The dictum implies a pluralism within the halakhic context -- only. It can no more be stretched to cover all "interpretations of Judaism" than "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" can subsume as legitimate all competing astronomical theories -- including the one that the

moon is made of green cheese.

Before going any further, let me address myself to another and similar issue which has the capacity to befuddle rather than clarify. This deals with the terms "recognition" and "delegitimation." The first term, "recognition," has become a red herring in the Orthodox camp, and the second, "delegitimation," is the newest member in the semantic rogue's gallery of the other groups. Let us begin with the first item.

There has been a great deal of talk over the past several years about Orthodox rabbis granting or withholding "recognition" from non-Orthodox rabbis, and the latter, in turn, angrily demanding to know who authorized the former to grant or withhold recognition. So heated has the debate become, so inflamed the personal and political passions, that cool and disinterested analysis has become virtually impossible. But we are not going to make any headway unless we stop simmering for a while, separate our collective egos from the issues, and try to listen to each other and then argue calmly and dispassionately.

Now, my first suggestion is to understand that no Orthodox Jew, if he is true to his faith, refuses to recognize fellow Jews as Jews just because they are non-observant. It is unfortunate that such a denial is at all necessary, but one must give the lie to a canard that has been gaining wide currency, even in an editorial in a recent issue of an "official" Jewish weekly. A Jew is a Jew even if he sins, as the Talmud teaches, and whether or not he thinks he is sinning. He who denies this teaching is

not Orthodox.

My second suggestion, to non-Orthodox rabbis, is to stop worrying so much about whether Orthodox rabbis "recognize" you or not. If you sincerely believe in what you teach and do, you need not be nervous about others approving of you. Your level of anxiety is needlessly high.

However, should non-Orthodox rabbis want to know, out of curiosity, whether I as a Centrist Orthodox Jew "recognize" their credentials, I would be glad to oblige them. I do so not because it is important that you be recognized by me, but because it is helpful that we each know where the other stands if we are to make progress on the truly critical issues of the day.

Now, one premise and three categories:

My premise is that Orthodox Judaism is, by its very nature, tied to a transcendent vision, to a Being who is beyond us; and that vision includes the revelation of Torah and of Halakhah -- a way of life, formulated in terms of legal norms and discourse, which we accept as authoritative. It is the word of God, transmitted from Sinai down through the ages, and it is the backbone of the Jewish tradition. This Halakhah is given over to man to apply to his daily life, but he is not authorized to dispose of it according to his personal taste or whim. The Halakhah, like any formal legal system, has rules that govern its change, amendment, and application; all the more so because its claim is to divine rather than human origin. The central point is

this: the Halakhah is heteronomous, it obligates us, it is above us; we are bound by it and must live within its perimeters even if doing so proves personally, politically, and even spiritually uncomfortable. It is, after all, the Word of God. Where the Halakhah has spoken, therefore, we cannot negotiate, trade, or barter.

Now, three categories we ought to consider in the "recognition" or "legitimation/delegitimation" issue, are:

- a. Functional validity
- b. Spiritual dignity
- c. Jewish legitimacy

Because Orthodox rabbis consider those movements not bound by the traditional Halakhah as heretical, many refuse to accord non-Orthodox rabbis any credibility as leaders of Jewish religious communities.

Now, I consider this an egregious error. Facts cannot be wished away by theories, no matter how cherished. And the facts are that Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist communities are not only more numerous in their official memberships than the Orthodox community, but they are also vital, powerful, and dynamic; they are committed to Jewish survival, each according to its own lights; they are an invaluable part of Kelal Yisrael; and they consider their rabbis as their leaders. From a functional point of view, therefore, non-Orthodox rabbis are valid leaders of Jewish religious communities, and it is both fatuous and self-defeating not to acknowledge this openly and

draw the necessary consequences, e.g., of establishing friendly and harmonious and respectful relationships, and working together, all of us, towards the Jewish communal and global goals that we share and which unite us inextricably and indissolubly.

As an Orthodox Jew, I not only have no trouble in acknowledging the functional validity of non-Orthodox rabbinic leadership, but also in granting that non-Orthodox rabbis and laymen may possess spiritual dignity. If they are sincere, if they believe in God, if they endeavor to carry out the consequences of their faith in a consistent manner -- then they are religious people. In this sense, they are no different from Orthodox Jews who may attain such spiritual dignity -- or may not, if their faith is not genuinely felt and if they do not struggle to have their conduct conform with their principles. Phonies abound in all camps, and should be respected by no one, no matter what their labels. And sincerely devout people exist everywhere, and deserve the admiration of all.

But neither functional validity nor spiritual dignity are identical with Jewish legitimacy. "Validity" derives from the Latin validus, strong. It is a factual, descriptive term. "Legitimacy" derives from the Latin lex, law. It is a normative and evaluative term.

Validity describes the fact of one's religious existence. Dignity refers to the quality of one's religious posture, not its content. It is the latter which, to my eyes, determines what we

are terming Jewish legitimacy. Here I have no choice but to judge such legitimacy by my own understanding of what constitutes Judaism and what does not. And the criterion of such legitimacy is the Jewish lex -- the Halakhah: not a specific interpretation of an individual halakhah; not a general tendency to be strict or lenient; but the fundamental acceptance of Halakhah's divine origin, of Torah min ha-shamayim. And if we become bogged down in definitions of these terms, then let us extricate ourselves from the theological morass by saying: acceptance of Halakhah as transcendentally obligatory, as the holy and normative "way" for Jews, as decisive law and not just something to "consult" in the process of developing policy.

Hence, I consider myself a brother to all Jews, in love and respect, and together with them I seek the unity of all our people. But, I cannot, in the name of such unity, assent to a legitimization of what every fiber of my being tells me is in violation of the most sacred precepts of the Torah.

At bottom, any vision of the truth excludes certain competing visions. And so does the Torah commitment. Under no circumstances can an Orthodox Jew, for instance, consider as Jewishly authentic a view of Judaism which excludes faith in God -- such as "Humanistic Judaism"; or one which condones marriage of Jew with non-Jew; or one which rejects the halakhic structure of Sabbath observance or the laws of divorce or the institution of kashruth. To ask that Orthodox Jews accept such interpretations as Jewishly legitimate in the name of pluralism,

is to ask that we stop being Orthodox. If that is what pluralism and "mutual legitimation" mean, the price is too high.

A distinguished Conservative/Reconstructionist rabbi, writing in a Jewish periodical (Harold Schulweis, "Jewish Apartheid," in Moment, December 1985), recently stated the following:

In the name of the unity and continuity of my people, I acknowledge the right and privilege of Jews of diverse schools of thought to build their own institutions of learning, to support the rabbis they elect to follow, to entrust their children to these rabbis for instruction.

These are words of which I heartily approve. I too acknowledge such right and privilege, and have no argument with that statement in praise of unity. But the rest of the paragraph is one with which, unfortunately, I simply cannot go along. It reads as follows:

For the sake of Zion, I may criticize their methods of conversion or their interpretations of the law, but I am pledged to recognize their authority, to accept their marriages, their divorces, their conversions...

No, I am afraid that I cannot remain a Halakhic Jew and make such a blanket statement. Nor, indeed, can I see how a Conservative Jew can make such a statement. Neither can some Reform rabbis. Are traditionalist Reform rabbis ready to accept the authority of fellow Reform rabbis when and if they marry Jews and unconverted Gentiles? Are Conservative rabbis ready to accept the authority of, and legitimate, a Reform remarriage when there was no divorce other than a civil document? Are they ready to accept

those Reform conversions, which I take to be a majority, in which there was no circumcision, no immersion in a mikvah, no kabbalat ha-mitzvot? If Conservative rabbis are not ready to accept such acts, Orthodox rabbis certainly should not be asked to do so.

Coherent and coordinated action to securing a decent Jewish future for our children and grandchildren, therefore, requires of us that we do away with slogans and buzz-words and reject vain hopes for the kind of "mutual legitimation" that cannot happen without doing violence to integrity.

In a positive vein, it calls upon us to accord to each other what I have called "functional validity" and, where deserved, "spiritual dignity."

Orthodox Jews have not always been as forthcoming in this respect as one might have hoped. We have not always been models of tolerance and openness. For too long we have substituted invective for argument, and have often evoked an equal and opposite reaction. Indeed, in recent months the counter-invective has been very opposite and even more than equal. But Orthodox Jews will have to learn to be more civil in their rhetoric, more respectful in their approach, more conscious of their responsibility towards the mitzvah of "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and of Koheleth's admonition that divrei hakhamim be'nahat nishma'im, "words spoken softly by wise men are heeded more readily than the foolish shouting by an official"

(Eccl. 9:17). And Conservative and Reform Jewish leaders too must learn the same lesson and not adopt the stridency that they have learned from Orthodox extremists. The Neturei Karta style is unbecoming and divisive, no matter who adopts it. Neither abusive rhetoric nor blackmail nor financial pressure is the proper way to conduct Jewish religious discourse.

Moreover, Orthodox Jewish leadership should not have to be dragged kicking and screaming to meeting with their non-Orthodox confreres in order to develop common policy where possible, or mutual understanding where not. In addition to whatever formal communal structures now exist, there is a need for all major religious leadership to consult personally and unofficially, so that we know what we are about without the need to vote, lobby, or issue public statements.

A further point: In facing the future together we must reduce the Kulturkampf taking place in Israel and rearing its head here, by adopting a hands-off policy with regard to all issues that do not constitute an immediate danger to the wholeness of Kelal Yisrael as defined by the ability of any one segment of Jewry to accept as Jewish or as marriageable members of any other segment. Hence, I may, as I do, disapprove of non-Orthodox sanction of women rabbis or general permissiveness on a hundred other issues. And Conservative and Reform Jews may look askance at what they regard as Orthodox sexism or our rigidity on this or that matter. But even while being critical of each other, we must not interfere or allow such differences to break

us apart. Let us argue with each other -- but not fight. Let us be critical -- but never obstructive. Each side needs to give the other "space" to "do its own thing." As former Secretary of Health Education and Welfare, John W. Gardner, used to say: We must love critically and criticize lovingly.

Now, factually, this situation prevails to a large extent. Except for certain pockets of population, there is de facto communication in most areas. There may not be enough interdenominational relationship, but neither is there sufficient intrad denominational communication.

Yeshiva University is, in many ways, a microcosm of the Jewish world. Who better than Rabbi Soloveitchik represents the meeting of Jewish learning and Western culture at their highest levels? Our students spend half a day plumbing the depths of the Talmud, no less intensively than any other good yeshivah, and in the afternoon they study the sciences and humanities and business no differently from any quality university. In my own work, I relate daily to the most committed Orthodox who consider me as a Centrist much too much to the left, and with the most Reform of the Reform for whom I am much too much to the right. Yeshiva University is a galaxy that contains several kollelim along with a medical school and law school and their supporting Boards. Yes, there are problems, but they are solvable. There are challenges, but challenges are made to be met and overcome. We are in effect a marvelous bridge, indeed a network of bridges,

connecting many worlds -- Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and secular, Orthodox and non-Orthodox -- in the academic, ideological, and communal spheres.

So, the general situation obtaining in the Jewish community is sometimes taut and tense, but it is not terrible. I do not see the need for radical solutions or apocalyptic fervor. But I do see the need for more concerted efforts than have been made heretofore.

The two areas that do warrant major concern are those which affect the future oneness of our people -- the question of conversion or "who is a Jew," and that of get, the Jewish divorce, without which remarriage is considered arayot, adulterous, and the progeny as mamzerim, illegitimate and hence unmarriageable except to proselytes or other mamzerim.

The conversion/identity issue is the lesser of the two evils because it is reversible. If Orthodox and Conservative Jews, say, cannot recognize a non-halakhic conversion by a Reform rabbi, at least the person involved can later undergo a halakhic conversion. It may be a blow to one's sense of identity and to the Reform rabbi's authority, but it is reversible. The second, mamzerut, is far more grave. It is, as our Tradition puts it, a bekhiyah le'dorot, a tragedy for generations. The remedies are few and difficult.

Let me address the first of these matters. The issue in Israel has become transformed into a symbol and hence is seemingly impervious to a political solution. At another

conference this past year I proposed an amendment to the Law of Return which, I believe, can solve the problem. But this is not the place to discuss Israeli issues.

I am far more concerned by the problem in the Diaspora. In Israel, despite the brouhaha over the "Who is a Jew" legislation, perhaps a half dozen or a dozen questionable conversions per year are in issue. In America, the number is probably more in the order of a hundred thousand. And it is here that the Reform patrilineal resolution of just three years ago is so critical and grave.

It is hard to be dispassionate about the issue, but out of respect to the Reform group we must do so. Such enormously consequential steps are not undertaken by responsible people without powerful need and motivation. Yet, even without considering the effects on the rest of world Jewry, I believe it was not thought through properly, as I shall presently explain, and the Reform groups would be well advised to take another look at it and come up with a more acceptable solution.

Truth to tell, from a halakhic point of view, this proposal makes almost no difference. Most Reform conversions, I believe, do not require tevillah (immersion in a mikvah), circumcision or symbolic circumcision, and a minimum form of kabbalat ha'mitzvot. Hence, whether children of Jewish fathers and Gentile mothers are declared Jewish en masse by a CCAR resolution, or converted individually, the Halakhah does not recognize such people as Jews.

Furthermore, a distinguished Reform rabbi (David Polish) has stated that, "This resolution is a de jure formulation of what has long been a de facto practice in Reform congregations." Thus, both from the point of view of Halakhah and that of Reform practice, the resolution does not change reality to any great extent.

Its importance lies mostly in the area of psychology and symbol. It is painfully reminiscent of an ancient schism which became a turning point in the history of Western civilization. I refer to the attitude of the Tannaim, the Fathers of the Talmud, to Christianity. As long as Christians were Jews who went astray after one they regarded as the Messiah, but otherwise kept their yichus (genealogy) inviolable, they were regarded as minnim -- heretics, apostates, but still Jews. It was when Christianity decided to abandon the halakhic standards for determining Jewish status and declared that effectively one could join the religion by self-declaration, that they were regarded by the Tannaim as a separate religion.

A learned professor at N.Y.U. has recently studied the issue and come to the following conclusion:

Had the rabbis relaxed these {halakhic} standards... Christians would quickly have become the majority within the expanded community of "Israel." Judaism as we know it would have ceased to exist... Christianity would have been the sole heir to the traditions of Biblical antiquity, and observance of the commandments of the Torah would have disappeared within just a few centuries. In short, it was the Halakhah and its definition of Jewish identity which saved the Jewish people and its heritage from extinction as a result of the newly emerging Christian ideology.

The ultimate parting of the ways for Judaism and Christianity took place when the adherence to Christianity no longer conformed to the halakhic definitions of a Jew... The rabbis ceased to regard the Christians as a group of Jews with heretical views and Christianity as a Jewish sect. Rather, the rabbis began to regard the Christians as members of a separate community... -- (Lawrence H. Schiffman, Who Was A Jew? {KTAV: 1985})

The patrilineal resolution has thus touched a raw nerve in Jewish historical memory.

Furthermore, an often overlooked element in this resolution is one which requires of all half Jews, whether the mother or the father is the Jewish parent, that their Jewish status be confirmed "through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people." Thus, the child of a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father will not be presumed to be Jewish by Reform standards if that child shows no signs of such "public formal acts," but will be Jewish according to the Halakhah. Paradoxically, Orthodoxy -- which has been falsely accused of "reading Jews out" -- will accept the Jewishness of such a child, whereas Reform will indeed be reading him/her out of the Jewish people.

Clearly, this matter must be rethought by the Reform group for its own sake.

With regard to the second issue -- gittin and manzerut -- the problem is more resistant to resolution and far more catastrophic in its consequences.

The only solution I can see -- and it is only a partial

solution -- is reviving the stalled efforts of the 1950's at establishing a national Beth Din. The two leading personalities at that time were Rabbi Saul Lieberman, of blessed memory, and "the Rav," Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (le'havdil bein hayyim le'hayyim). I ask myself: if two such giants failed, how shall we succeed?

The first answer is that we have no choice. Immanuel Kant once said, du kanst weil du must -- "you can because you must." The sheer numbers of potential mamzerim and quasi-Jews is so far greater today than it was 30 years ago, that we do not have the right to desist from a major successful effort -- no matter how much we will be criticized by extremist elements in all camps. We can because we must.

Second, their efforts came to grief because, I believe, they tried for too much, and because they tied their plan too tightly to institutions and organizations. Thus, the insistence on organizational discipline caused the plan to fail when the Rabbinical Assembly felt it could not deliver on getting all its members to agree to the authority of the Beth Din.

What we must now do, I submit, is try to half a loaf -- tafasta mu'at tafasta -- in the belief that partial cures are better than none. We must reach out for nehamah purta, at least for some consolation, some relief.

I do not believe that, despite the aggravated situation that prevails today, it is possible for the various groups to obtain the kind of consensus that can result in universal agreement and

discipline.

What is possible, I suggest, is a more voluntaristic National Beth Din (N.B.D.) which all groups will recognize as authorized to deal with personal status. The N.B.D will, in turn, set up branches throughout the country. All rabbinic and synagogue organizations will not only accept its rulings but will support it and actively urge all their constituents to have recourse to it.

Those rabbis of all groups who subscribe to it will refer all cases to it or its deputized batei din. Hence, such cases will enjoy universal or near-universal acceptance, both here and in Israel. Those who do not subscribe to it will deprive their "clients" -- prospective converts or marriage partners with halakhic problems -- of such wide approbation.

I also endorse a suggestion by Dr. David Berger, a colleague on Yeshiva University's Faculty, that all groups undertake an ad campaign, distasteful as it may seem, encouraging gittin where a marriage is being dissolved, and perhaps making all gittin gratis.

All groups, however, will have to undertake to inform those people who do not apply to the N.B.D. that their status and that of their progeny may be in jeopardy in the eyes of a or the major segment of organized religious Jewry. This is the honorable thing to do anyway; anything less is a violation of the moral and halakhic norm of lifnei iver lo titen mikhshol, not ensnaring

one who is unaware of the consequences of his actions.

The critical problem of who will serve on such a N.B.D. or local batei din is not insoluble. The three dayyanim that form the quorum of a court should be chosen on the basis of scholarship and personal halakhic observance, not institutional affiliation. Rabbis who are expert and personally observant, no matter what groups they formally belong to, may be authorized to serve. In addition, a broader-based committee may serve with the beth din, including the referring rabbi or his deputy, provided it is understood that the halakhic act is enforced by the beth din alone.

Now, it is true that such dayyanim will be found mostly in the Orthodox community. But three things should be borne in mind:

a) They will be serving as individuals, not as representatives of organized Orthodoxy.

b) They may well include non-Orthodox affiliated experts. The late Rabbi Boaz Cohen comes to mind. His gittin were accepted by the Rav and the RCA. I too accepted them without question. Surely, some observant members of a non-Orthodox Talmud faculty, trained in these areas of halakhic law, can be found.

c) There is no special pleading here: By no means would all Orthodox rabbis be automatically qualified to serve on the beth din. Indeed, most would not be qualified.

I tell you here and now that I have never written a get or officiated at a divorce proceeding nor will I ever do so. The

reason is not taste; it is competence. My training has not been in this area, and therefore I consider myself totally incompetent to do these things. There are no more than a dozen or two dozen individuals in this country whose gittin I would accept as valid.

Were this idea to be accepted, I would seek to expand the kollel le'horaah at The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University, the graduate rabbinic program which trains experts in the civil and domestic branches of Halakhah, and I would augment it with special courses to sensitize the young scholars to deal with a large and heterogeneous constituency. There are significant details that have yet to be elucidated. But if the idea is found attractive, we can work out the specifics. Again, I caution that this is only a partial solution and by no means a panacea.

It will not be easy to set up such a N.B.D. Many of my Orthodox colleagues will not go along because of the implied "recognition" of non-Orthodox rabbis. (I have dealt with part of this problem earlier.) But they shall have to acknowledge the need to alleviate untold personal suffering by accepting the purely halakhic standards and not being distracted by organizational/denominational considerations, important as they may regard them. The late Senator Dirksen used to say, "I am a man of unbending and fixed principles, and the first unbending and fixed principle is to be flexible." The "Orthodox-Conservative-Reform" rubric is after all, not a halakhic category. And Conservative and Reform rabbis will have to

surrender some of their professional and communal autonomy for the same sacred cause -- the wholeness of Kelal Yisrael and the integrity of the lives of countless thousands of Jews living and unborn.

Ki yishalkha binkha mahar -- some day our children will surely ask us: Why did you ignore our mahar, why did you not take into account our "tomorrow," our future? That is a terrible question -- especially if one doesn't have an adequate answer.

There are two other requests I would make of the non-Orthodox groups. One, that the Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis explain explicitly to the people they are marrying that they do so according to their understanding of marriage law, and that that is their interpretation of the operative phrase ke'dat Mosheh ve'Yisrael, and that, by clear implication, it is not done so as to accord with Orthodox law, i.e., Halakhah. By these means, those Orthodox Jews who follow the ruling of Ra'bi Moshe Feinstein will then be able to accept the progeny of the remarriage of people so married without fear of mamzerut.

Second, again in order to spare grief for future generations, and therefore as an act of moral probity, Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis should insist, when remarrying one who was married at an Orthodox ceremony, (or, for that matter, a Conservative ceremony) that he/she obtain a valid get first. Consistency requires that a status assumed under a specific legal system be abolished by the norms of that same system before a new

status is achieved under a different system.

I have spoken at length -- perhaps too long -- about issues ha-omdim be'rumo shel olam that are of the highest significance in our world.

If my ideas for an accomodation find the minimum resonance to allow for further development, then the proper forum -- a private one, shielded from publicity and posturing -- must be found soon in order to stop the unravelling of the fabric of Jewish unity that is so frighteningly real. If there is enough ground to warrant further work on this or other ideas in this vein, it would be best to call a halt, insofar as it is within our power to do so, to the cycle of mutual recriminations and, as well, to any "new directions" or actions by rabbinic bodies that can only aggravate the situation and add oil to the flames. Now is not the time for further "innovations" that will bedevil our efforts and strengthen those who are less concerned with Jewish unity.

The Talmud tells us that just as we lay the tefillin so, as it were, does the Almighty. And whereas in our tefillin we bear a scroll which reads, Shema Yisrael -- "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, The Lord is Ehad - One," so do His tefillin bear the words, "mi ke'amkha Yisrael goy ehad ba-aretz, "Who is like unto Your people, one nation in the world."

Neither unity has yet been sufficiently achieved or acknowledged. Just as we conclude our prayers (in the Alenu) with the verse from Zechariah, "And the Lord will be King over

all the world, ba-yom ha-hu -- on that day yihyeh ha-Shem ehad u-shemo ehad, the Lord will be One and His Name will be One," so, I suspect, does God Himself offer the prayer, "May Your people Israel again be one people; ba'yom ha-hu, may the day come soon when Israel will be goy ehad, one unified people in the world."

It is a prayer worth hearing -- and answering with all our might and main.



CHARLES SILBERMAN
CRITICAL ISSUES CONFERENCE
MARCH 16-17 1986

My opening talk is a story that I heard first from my friend Egon Mayer. A Jew dies and, before being given the verdict as to where he will travel, he is told that he can be granted one wish. Delighted with the opportunity, he says that his wish is to see his rosh yeshiva again; he is instantly transported to a lavishly landscaped backyard where the Rav is sitting under an umbrella table next to a swimming pool, learning, Gemorah, while undulating all around him is an absolutely magnificent blonde woman in a bikini. After they have caught up with all the news, the former student says, "Rabbi, it's wonderful to see you, but I'm surprised at the surroundings; I had never realized that this was your idea of heaven." And the Rav responds, "You don't understand, my son. This isn't my idea of heaven; it's her idea of hell."

The point of the story is that perception is not a simple or objective relationship between the object and the viewer; in large measure, we see what we are prepared to see. Thus, objectivity is impossible; but fairness is attainable. It is fairness that I have sought, therefore - not objectivity. One measure of my success in achieving that goal may be that I will manage to offend everyone. Be that as it may, I have tried to be fair in the remarks that I prepared in advance of this meeting and spent most of last night revising. I have lived within each of the four movements at various stages of my life. I have been an Orthodox Jew, a Conservative Jew, a Reform Jew, and now, in the wisdom of old age, a Reconstructionist; I think I have an understanding of and a respect for each of the four denominations.

I have been asked to speak about some aspects of American Jewish life that seem relevant to the subject of this conference. I've tried to confine myself to those aspects about which I have (or think I have) some expertise.

It's no secret that I take an optimistic view of the current state of Judaism and Jewishness in the United States. (Just as an aside, I would remind those who disagree with my optimism, that, although Joshua and Caleb were a small minority among the twelve spies, it was their optimistic view that prevailed, and not the pessimistic view of the majority). I am not going to abandon that optimism today: each of the four denominations -- each of the four movements -- has cause for pride in its accomplishments.

None of the four, however, has grounds for complacency. What I want to do in the time I have today is to focus on some of the

weaknesses of each of the movements, as well as on their strengths, because I think that if we recognize our own weaknesses, we may be more open to the lessons we can learn from the other denominations. So let me begin with my own movement.

Certainly, we Reconstructionists have cause for pride. So much that was once new, even revolutionary, is now part and parcel of American Jewish life that it is easy to forget what a visionary Mordecai Kaplan was. It was Kaplan, after all, who first talked about the centrality of Jewish peoplehood; it was Kaplan who invented the concept of the Jewish community center, need for the synagogue center; even the Young Israel movement was in large part a Kaplan invention. Certainly, no one has dealt so seriously -- or, at least, so explicitly -- with the institutional, as well as intellectual, changes that are needed to live in two civilizations.

But the reality has been that, until the last ten years, the Reconstructionist movement was stultified. It was stultified, I think, by two factors. The first was an accident of history: Kaplan's emotional and intellectual commitment to the Jewish Theological Seminary and his resultant reluctance to establish a separate movement meant that Reconstructionism was a spectator, so to speak, during the great postwar expansion of American Jewish life, i.e., the suburbanization of Jewish life during the late 40's, 50's, and 60's, with the extraordinary synagogue building boom that resulted. This, in turn, meant that the enormous intellectual impact that Kaplan had had on the Conservative rabbinate was dissipated as Conservative rabbis went into the field and were pulled along by the institutional pressures of the Conservative movement.

In my judgment, Reconstructionism was stultified even more by a kind of intellectual arrogance that many of us assumed, however unconsciously: an assumption that if we did not necessarily have a monopoly on religious truth, we did have a monopoly on intellectual honesty. Reconstructionism was hampered, too, by an obsolete view of modernity and an irrational emphasis on nationality. The last 50 years have not dealt kindly with rationalism; the last 50 years have also disproven Kaplan's belief that civilization is on an upward climb from simpler to more complex -- that the new is necessarily superior to the old. Because the movement, in its inception, was the product of people who were rebelling against Orthodoxy, we tended, all too often, to derogate Orthodoxy in general and Orthodox Jews, in particular. At the same time, curiously enough, we created a new Orthodoxy of our own -- a tendency to substitute Torah "miKaplan" for Torah "miSinai".

That error is now being overcome. I think there is growing recognition that Kaplan's greatest insight was sociological and historical, rather than theological. I refer to what Kaplan called his "Copernican revolution": His view that Judaism was the product of the Jewish people -- that Judaism exists to serve the Jewish people, in contrast to the traditional view that the Jewish people exists to serve Judaism, i.e., to carry out God's will. I offer this formulation not as a theological doctrine -- obviously and by definition it is unacceptable to Orthodox Jews -- but as a sociological reality. To put it as simply and clearly as possible, it is impossible to understand the post-World War II development of American Jewish life apart from this formulation of Kaplan. Whether one accepts Kaplan's "Copernican revolution" or rejects it, that is to say, it is the way most American Jews live their lives.

I think there is a growing recognition within our movement, too, that Kaplan's genius lay more in the nature of the questions he asked than in the answers he provided. I think that along with our Reform brethren, there is a growing appreciation of the richness of our tradition and an increasing recognition that an earlier generation misunderstood the choices. Specifically, the alternatives are not to accept the tradition literally or to reject it; on the contrary, one may retain the tradition and understand it metaphorically rather than literally. Understanding the role of myth and metaphor makes it possible to retain far more of the traditional formulations of the sidur, for example, and far more of the traditional rituals. I think a profound error of Reconstructionism, contained in the Reconstructionist prayerbooks, was the conception that there were only two choices: to accept literally or to reject. I don't think those are the real choices.

We also share a serious dilemma with Reform Judaism: how to reconcile our notions of autonomy with our notions of authority. If, as Reconstructionists like to say, tradition has a vote but not a veto, how large is the vote -- and when is that vote decisive? I think we have failed to face honestly and directly the difficult nature of that question. We have failed to accept the truth of the formulation that Rabbi Lamm suggested last night: that if everything is kosher, nothing is kosher. To say this is not to suggest that Reconstructionists can or should accept Rabbi Lamm's view of the role of authority in general or halacha in particular; it is to argue that there must be some authority -- that everything cannot be subject to individual choice. To put it differently, to understand Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jews does not -- cannot -- mean that everything is subject to change; at any given moment, some aspects of tradition are fixed -- witness our reluctance to tamper with the Torah itself. It seems to me that we have not faced this dilemma -- how to reconcile autonomy and authority -- with sufficient honesty or clarity. Nor have we faced another dilemma: how to reconcile our commitment to Jewish peoplehood with our

commitment to personal conscience or intellectual consistency. There are obvious conflicts; we have not always acknowledged them, and we have not given enough thought to how to resolve them.

Let me turn to Reform Judaism, which has enormous cause for pride. For one thing, it no longer is dependent on the other movements, as it once was; its leaders no longer come from Conservative or Orthodox or Reconstructionist ranks. On the contrary, the Reform movement is now generating its own rabbis, its own lay leaders, its own scholars and teachers; it has become self-perpetuating.

Secondly, Reform is becoming the largest denomination within American Jewish life. I say "becoming" because the data are confusing if you are not familiar with demographic surveys. If you ask Jews today how they define themselves, the Conservative movement is still the choice of the largest group. But if you look at these self-definitions by age or generation, one sees an extraordinary increase in the proportion of Jews who define themselves as Reform, and a concurrent decline in the proportion who define themselves as Conservative.

Even so, the Reform movement faces serious dilemmas and challenges. A significant proportion of those who identify themselves as Reform Jews do so in purely nominal fashion: they do not belong to a synagogue, and they do not observe even the most minimal rituals or mitzvot in their personal lives. The Reform movement, I think, is paying a heavy price for the generations in which it permitted itself to be defined as the denomination of those who observe nothing, as in the vulgar lay formulation, "I don't observe anything; I'm Reformed."

The paradox of the movement is that both the lay and the rabbinic Reform leadership are moving toward a far greater appreciation of and commitment to ritual and tradition, greater use of Hebrew, and more congregational singing, while much of the rank and file are moving in the opposite direction, unaffiliated, unobservant. There is a second paradox as well: many lay people would like to move toward a greater commitment to tradition but they lack the most elementary skills that are needed, for they have never learned to daven, let alone to read (or even decode) Hebrew. To put it bluntly, Reform Judaism is paying a heavy price for the "Union Prayer Book". Thus, Gates of Prayer represents a profound improvement; in a sense the first Reform siddur produced in the United States. And the movement is changing for the better in other respects, as well.

But as with Reconstructionists, Reform leaders face a central dilemma: how does the movement that has elevated personal autonomy above all else make demands on its members? How do we

reconcile notions of mitzvot with notions of personal autonomy? Or to put it more simply, what is the role of authority in Reform Jewish life? Can there be a role?

Let me point to one other problem within Reform Judaism -- one that grows out of the sociological dictum that the unintended consequences of change are often larger than, and in the opposite direction from, the intended consequences. You know, Alex, that I sympathize in general with your approach to intermarriage, particularly your formulation that "we reject intermarriage but accept the intermarried", and, in general, I agree with the ruling on patrilineal descent.

But the unintended consequences of that ruling, as I have discovered in the last six months of traveling around the country, is that it is creating enormous pressures on Reform rabbis -- rabbis who have always reserved Kiddushin for marriage between two Jews -- to officiate at marriages between Jews and non-Jews. That pressure arises because the parents of the Jewish spouse have a powerful new argument: "if you will accept the couple as synagogue members after they are married, why will you not officiate at the wedding itself?" I don't have a solution; I can only empathize with the rabbis involved and I suspect that Reconstructionist rabbis will soon be facing the same dilemma. Thus, if we liberal, Jews are going to stick to notions of patrilineal descent, we're going to have to talk more seriously about questions of authority, which in turn means talking about sanctions. We are also going to have to talk about questions of limits: Whom do we accept as Jewish, and whom do we not accept as Jewish?

Let me turn to the Conservative movement, which has been the largest branch, and in some ways, the most successful. Although I personally am more comfortable with the Reconstructionist approach, it seems to me that the Conservative movement has been more successful than its counterparts in reconciling traditional Judaism with modernity. Using the typology that Peter Berger has constructed to describe the religious responses to modernity, Conservative Judaism is the only one of the four branches that represents the so-called "inductive" approach; Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism are closer to Berger's "reductive" approach, and Orthodoxy conforms to his "deductive" model.

One of the things I missed most from this conference, therefore, was a direct confrontation between the Orthodox and Conservative claims to authenticity. Because we reject the binding nature of halacha, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism cannot claim to be the authentic form of Judaism; of necessity, our claim is more modest: that we each represent an authentic approach to a Judaism that we see in pluralistic terms. Conservative Judaism, on the other hand, can and does claim to be the authentic contemporary form of rabbinic Judaism. I would have liked to have heard a

conversation between Dr. Lamm and Dr. Cohen over the nature and validity of that claim.

So much for success; let me turn to the failures of Conservative Judaism. The fundamental weakness of the movement, it seems to me -- one that is becoming more and more exposed -- is that in their daily lives, the great majority of rank-and-file Conservative Jews do not accept the binding nature of halacha. As Charles Liebman pointed out some years ago, the overwhelming majority of American Jews are Reconstructionists in practice, but not in theory, which is to say that they are reluctant (perhaps unwilling) to acknowledge the intellectual consequences of the Judaism they practice; in a sense, they prefer to think of themselves as sinners -- as people who accept the binding nature of halacha in principle but reject it in practice.

In the case of the Conservative movement, what this means is that the commitment of most Conservative Jews has been to what Conservative Judaism is not, rather than to what it is. Specifically, American Jews have become Conservative Jews for one of two reasons: because it is not Reform, or because it is not Orthodoxy. For a long time -- during the period when Reform was associated with assimilation and Orthodoxy had overtones of being foreign-born and lower class -- this proved to be Conservative Judaism's greatest strength. Certainly it was the movement's principal engine of growth; it meant that when Jews in newly-settled suburbs organized their first synagogue, it was most likely to be Conservative. But in an age in which Orthodoxy is often as modern as Reform and in which Reform is increasingly concerned with ritual and tradition, that approach to Conservative Judaism has become a source of weakness, rather than of strength -- witness the generation-by-generation decline in the proportion of Jews identifying themselves as Conservative Jews.

There is a second weakness, as well: because there has been such a gap between the rabbinate and the laity, the Conservative movement rarely has created the kind of community that is essential if one is to live as an authentic Conservative Jew. What the movement is seeing now, therefore, is that many of its best young people are leaving either for Orthodoxy at one end or for the Havurah movement, or Reconstructionism, at the other end.

There is a new source of strength, however, if it is properly harnessed, and that is the women's movement. This is a controversial statement, I know; but I would suggest to my Orthodox colleagues, as well as to the right-wing within Conservative Judaism, that if you find it impossible to accept ordination of women or to accept the notion of women as members of a minyan or women being called up to the Torah, you can rejoice in the extraordinary increase in Torah study on the part of women.

And based on my non-stop travels since my book was published, I have concluded that the single most important source of vitality within the Conservative movement today is the adult woman's bat mitzvah study group. In congregation after congregation, significant numbers of women, ranging from their twenties to their sixties or even seventies, are devoting years of serious study to Jewish texts, history and liturgy in order to celebrate the bat mitzvah they did not have as a child. If the Conservative movement can harness the energy and vitality that is being unleashed, it may find itself once again being the largest single denomination.

Let me turn now to Orthodoxy. Certainly, more than any other denomination, there are current grounds for satisfaction, given all the predictions and the report of Orthodoxy's inevitable disappearance. The fact that Orthodoxy is more vital today than at any time in American history must be a source of enormous satisfaction. Not surprisingly, I think a sense of triumphalism has developed in some Orthodox circles -- a conviction that far from being the wave of the past as once was thought, Orthodoxy is the wave of the future -- indeed, that the future belongs to Orthodoxy and that the other movements will die out. That triumphalism seems to me to be one of two major reasons for the new aggressiveness that some Orthodox leaders have begun to display toward the non-Orthodox rabbinate. As we saw yesterday, there is nothing new about their delegitimation of non-Orthodox rabbis; what is new is the public expression of that delegitimation and the intensity with which those public expressions are made.

With all due respect, Orthodox triumphalism is premature. To avoid misunderstanding, let me emphasize that I am not saying that it is wrong; I'm only saying that it is premature. It is simply too soon to know what the future will bring. Orthodoxy may well be the wave of the future, but there are a great many forces working in the other direction. (The analysis that I will offer, I want to emphasize, is based on demographic data, and not on religious or theological judgments).

To begin with, the vitality of Orthodox Judaism today is a by-product of a reduction in numbers, not an increase. What has happened is that Orthodoxy has redefined itself, and the non-observant Orthodox, who were a majority in my childhood, have left or have been pushed out. (The result is that in the major centers of Orthodox life -- Orthodox shuls increasingly consist of nothing but people who live halachic lives. But outside these major centers, -- in New York, Baltimore, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Miami, and a few other places --) Orthodoxy is weak and numbers are declining. Consider the congregation in the Midwest that my grandfather founded about a century ago. The current sanctuary, built in the 1950's has elevated women's sections one each side. During most of the year, the congregation now has mixed seating,

and on the High Holidays, there are three sections: the large center section, which had been built for the men, is used for family seating; for those who want separate seating, the right balcony is for women, and the left for men. It is only through this kind of compromise that this Orthodox shul can survive; and this is the state of Orthodoxy in much of the United States.

More significantly, the strength and the vitality of Orthodoxy today is not primarily due to a return to Orthodoxy on the part of third-, fourth-, or fifth-generation American Jews. The extent of the baal teshuvah phenomenon has been exaggerated. True, large numbers come in; but large numbers also leave. The strength and vitality is largely a phenomenon of the second generation -- the second generation of a whole new stream of immigration that historians refer to loosely as the World War II immigrants, which is to say those who came to the United States in the 1930's, 40's, 50's, and 60's. This was a far larger immigration than most had realized -- well over half a million. Equally important, the World War II immigrants have been far more successful than previous immigrant streams in maintaining and transmitting Orthodoxy. I think we need to look at some of the reasons, some of the differences between that immigrant stream and the ones that preceded it.

The World War II immigrants, firstly, were far more committed to Orthodoxy than the bulk of Eastern European immigrants -- those who came here between 1870 and the mid-1920's. The latter tended to be the least observant members of Eastern European Jewry. They had to be, for they had to defy their rabbis, who forbade congregants, from leaving Europe for this trefe medina.

Equally important, perhaps more so, the World War II immigrants had already made their adjustment to modernity. This was true even of the Hasidim. The adjustment may have been to build walls against modernity or, in the case of the disciples of Samson Raphael Hirsch, it was to construct a modern Orthodoxy. But in one way or another, to over simplify just a bit, the World War II immigrants had already come to terms with modernity; their only adjustment had to be to American life. By contrast, those who came to the United States between 1870 and 1920 had to make two adjustments: to modernity, and to American culture.

The third crucial difference is that the World War II immigrants came to a different United States than the one in which my grandparents settled. For one thing, the United States was becoming an increasingly pluralistic society. Thus, it was far easier to be different in the 1940's, 50's, and 60's than it had been in the 1920's and 1910's. Most important of all, perhaps, the World War II immigrants came to a United States that had a five-day week. They were the first group of immigrants who

did not have to pay an enormous economic price for being Shomer Shabbat, and I think it is impossible to exaggerate the significance of this factor. I do not in any sense mean to underestimate the recent immigrants' commitment to Shabbat but I know the size of the economic penalty that my father of blessed memory paid for being Shomer Shabbat. The new immigrants did not have to pay that price, and so it was far easier to retain their Orthodoxy.

The fourth factor that distinguishes the World War II immigrants is that their rabbis came with them -- in some cases preceded them -- and in their extraordinary wisdom, the rabbis proceeded to build an educational infrastructure unlike anything that had existed before in this country. First, they built advanced yeshivas; and then, in part to employ the graduates of the advanced yeshivas, and in part to minimize the impact of American culture on the children, they built a network of day schools. The result was that this new stream of Orthodox Jews lived in a different and far more observant world. (As Reuven Kimelman points out in his background paper for the conference, each of the movements has made its own particular contribution to Jewish institutional life; Orthodoxy has contributed the day school, Reform the youth movement, Conservative Judaism summer camping, and Reconstructionism invented the synagogue center and the bat mitzvah; I was reminded last night that the congregation that Dr. Lamm used to serve was founded by Mordecai Kaplan).

To return to my theme, the result of this extraordinary educational infrastructure that the World War II immigrants built are the close-knit, organic Orthodox communities that sprung up around them. Thus, it is likely that Orthodoxy will retain far greater holding power in the future than it has in the past. Whether that means an expanding Orthodox community, however, or simply an Orthodoxy that is able to hold its own, is still an open question.

The point is that no Orthodox community is wholly immune to the pushes and pulls of American culture. There is, firstly, the impact of the women's movement. One can see that impact within Orthodox communities in the increasing tendency for women to go to college, to have professional careers, or to return to work or to college after their children reach school age. I believe that it is impossible to predict what impact the women's movement will have on Orthodoxy; I find it impossible to believe that it will have no impact whatsoever.

Second, there is the impact of American hedonism, and of the American emphasis on self-fulfillment. There is a paradox here. On the one hand, glatt kosher vacations in Acapulco or glatt kosher pizza parlors or teenage bicycle trips across the United

States make it far easier to remain Orthodox; no Orthodox Jew need feel deprived of the pleasures of life. On the other hand, glatt kosher cruises and vacations in Acapulco involve a certain concession to secular American values: they involve an acceptance of American hedonism and of the American concern with self-fulfillment that seems antithetical to the spirit of Orthodoxy. (That emphasis on self-fulfillment can also be seen in the increase in divorce that Orthodox, as well as non-Orthodox communities, are experiencing).

To sum up, I'm not predicting an erosion in any sense; I do not know what the future will bring. What I am suggesting, quite simply is that too little time has elapsed for anyone to know what Orthodoxy's holding power will be; and too little time has elapsed to know whether, and in what ways, Orthodoxy will change in response to American culture.

Orthodox triumphalism is ill-advised for one other crucial reason: it simply is not true that Orthodoxy is the only bulwark against assimilation. If one looks at the behavior of the rank and file, of amchah, as opposed to the leaders, the differences from one movement to another are far smaller than assumed; and, as Rabbi Schindler pointed out last night, the differences among the movements are minute, compared to the differences between those who are committed to Judaism and those who are secular and uncommitted.

Let me illustrate the point with one piece of data, a recent study done in Cleveland on the extent of intermarriage among the children of Cleveland adults. (I'll talk only about the mixed marriage rate, not the overall inter-marriage rate, which includes marriages where the born Gentile spouse has converted to Judaism). The overall mixed married rate is 22 per cent, i.e., 22 percent, of the children of Cleveland residents are married to someone who currently is not Jewish. That figure conceals huge variations from one segment of the community to another; it was 10 percent among Orthodox Jews, 18 percent among Conservative Jews, and 25 percent among Reform Jews. But it was 45 percent among unaffiliated Jews, which is to say, Jews who do not identify themselves as either Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, or Orthodox. Thus, the intermarriage rate among those who do not identify with any religious form of Judaism was four and a half times as high as among the Orthodox, and almost twice as high as among Reform Jews.

But if one looks at the figures differently -- if one looks only at the children of Cleveland residents who currently are synagogue members, as opposed to those whose identification with one of the denominations is purely nominal, the difference between the Orthodox and the Reform mixed-marriage rate is cut in half, and

the difference between the mixed marriage rate among the Reform and unidentified Jews is almost doubled. So, clearly, belonging -- merely belonging, -- to a Reform synagogue has a huge impact on Jewish continuity, using the mixed marriage rate as a crude but reasonable measure of Jewish continuity. The impact would have been far greater if the questionnaire had gotten at actual religious behavior. If the questionnaire had determined the mixed marriage rate among the children of Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews who, let us say, lit Shabbat candles, I am certain that the differences would have been far smaller. So this is one piece of evidence -- I could cite any number of other studies -- to suggest the impact of liberal forms of Judaism on Jewish continuity, on Jewish commitment, on Netzach Yisrael.

To recognize the value of Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaism, I should point out, is not necessarily to accept their validity. The crucial point, it seems to me -- and it's one that I think a number of my critics have misunderstood -- is that it is better that Jews remain Jews than that they abandon their Jewishness. For so long as Jews remain Jews, the possibility exists that they will become better Jews, however one defines the term "better"; but if they stop being Jews, that possibility disappears altogether. We can't have Judaism without Jews. So to the degree to which Netzach Yisrael is a consideration, Orthodox and traditional Conservative Jews should be able to accept the value, if not necessarily the validity, of Reform, Reconstructionist, and liberal Conservative Judaism.

There is a second reason to abandon triumphalism -- one more closely tied to Orthodox self-interest: Orthodox Jews need Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Jews to maintain Orthodox institutions. The blunt reality is that few major Orthodox institutions in this country exist on Orthodox financial support alone. Let me emphasize that I am describing, not prescribing, but recent experience in Baltimore and elsewhere suggests that there are limits to non-Orthodox Jews' willingness to provide support to institutions whose leaders deny their own legitimacy. Indeed, resentment -- and a concurrent desire for action -- is growing very rapidly. I have spoken in 30 or 35 communities since early September, and there is only one question that, to the best of my recollection, has been asked at every single lecture I have given. There have been innumerable evenings where no one asks about intermarriage at all; there has been no instance in which someone has failed to ask about the current disunity within the Jewish people in general, and about Orthodox leaders' rejection of the legitimacy of Reform and Conservative rabbis, in particular. So there is a sociological reality out there which we all need to address; something is happening.

One final point, if you'll permit me to play lay analyst. It seems to me that a second reason for the new aggressiveness on the part of some Orthodox leaders grows out of a certain frustration on their part over their need to accept the basic rule of American interreligious life, of American religious pluralism. That basic rule -- the religion of civility, as the sociologist John Murray Cuddihy calls it -- is that one does not make in public the religious claims one makes in private. That is to say, one does not publicly deny the validity of someone else's religion, nor does one publicly claim to have a monopoly on religious truth. Since Jews cannot make that claim vis-a-vis Christianity, I have a feeling there is a kind of frustration that has built up, that has led to making the claim vis-a-vis other Jews.

What I would suggest is that we need to apply that same rule of civility within the Jewish community. I respectfully differ here with Rabbi Lamm: In my judgment, American religious pluralism is not a statement of religious relativism; it is a recognition of the fact that, although one may not be able to accept the next person's version of religious truth, one can accept the honesty and sincerity of his or her belief in that religious truth. What I'm proposing, therefore, is my own variation on Dr. Lamm's wise suggestion that when a larger goal seems unattainable, we try for a smaller one. It is unlikely, it seems to me, that we will achieve agreement on questions of personal status in the foreseeable future. The question then becomes how we live together as part of a community if we disagree. What I would ask of my Orthodox mishpachah is not that you accept the validity of my Reconstructionist approach to Judaism or Alex Schindler's Reform approach; I ask only that you accept the validity of my commitment to that approach -- that you accept, the honesty of my beliefs that Reconstructionism is an authentic expression of Judaism, (Not the authentic, but an authentic, expression).

I am indebted to Reuven Kimelman for his superb background paper, which I urge all of you to read if you haven't, for demonstrating persuasively that this is an authentically Jewish, as well as an authentically American, approach. The Tosefta tells us that, by eating together, the members of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai acted out the verse "Every way a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts." According to Rashi, the verse demonstrates that God judges us by our intentions. Since only God can judge what is true, human beings must be satisfied with the knowledge that the next person's way is right in his or her own eyes. In short, let's not confuse our own commitment to truth with God's knowledge of truth; Let us acknowledge that although our fellow Jews may be wrong, they are as committed to the truth as we are. (In his paper, Reuven describes the various ways, historically, in which Jews have acted out this religious pluralism).

That brings me to my last point, one that is hard to express without being misunderstood: what Dr. Lamm somewhat disparagingly referred to as the entertainment value of joint appearances by leaders of the various denominations. I want to emphasize that I am not criticizing Dr. Lamm's reluctance to appear with the other leaders yesterday; I explicitly want to disassociate myself from my friend Ira Silverman's criticism of Dr. Lamm for that. I think we liberal Jews must recognize the high cost that someone like Dr. Lamm pays simply for coming to this meeting. It took courage for him to come. I think he went further than any Orthodox leader has done in recent years in the substantive position that he expressed in proposing a basis for rapprochement, and I think we need to recognize that he pays a cost for coming in ways that are not true of the other denominations.

What I would have liked to have heard from Dr. Lamm, however, and what I missed most, was some recognition that he also pays a price for his inability to sit down with the other leaders. My point is best expressed in a D'var Torah that Martin Buber once gave, in which he asked rhetorically, "Why does our most sacred prayer begin 'Shema Yisrael'?" His answer was -- "because that is the hardest thing of all -- to listen, to really listen". I think, had Dr. Lamm been able to listen, to really listen, to Gerson, Alex, and Ira, the tone of his talk, and, even more, of his answers to questions, if not the substance, would have been different.

I don't want to end by singling out Dr. Lamm. I think we all need to listen to one another; I think we all have much to learn from one another; I think we all need the courage to risk condemnation from extremists in our own camp. We can perhaps take courage from a midrash on Parshat Shelach Lecha, which tells the story of the twelve spies who were sent to investigate the promised land, or as one rabbinic commentator suggests, to investigate the future of the Jewish people. (Just as an aside, this is one of my favorite sedrahs: I like to remind my critics that although the optimists were a minority of two, it was their view that prevailed, while the pessimistic majority was condemned to death). The midrash concerns the puzzling fact that it was not just the ten pessimists who were destroyed; every Israelite over the age of twenty was condemned to die in the desert, rather than to enter the promised land -- even those who had agreed with Joshua and Caleb's optimistic report. Why were the latter condemned? the midrash asks. The answer is -- because they kept their agreement to themselves -- because they failed to speak up when Joshua and Caleb were being attacked.

Let me conclude, then with another midrash, on Moses's charge to the spies "to see what kind of country it is. Are the people dwelling in it weak or strong?". The midrash elaborates on

Moses's instruction: "If you find the inhabitants dwelling in open places, he tells them, "then know that they are mighty warriors and have no fear of hostile attack. If, however, they live in fortified places, then know that they are weaklings, who in their fear of strangers, seek shelter behind their walls".

The future of Judaism in America depends on our ability to follow Moshe Rabbeinu's advice: on whether through fear of strangers -- in this instance, through fear of Jews whose understanding of Judaism is different from our own -- we live behind walls of our own construction; or whether we have the courage to live like mighty warriors in this great open place we call the United States.



RABBI IRVING GREENBERG
CRITICAL ISSUES CONFERENCE

MARCH 17, 1986

Division and variety have always been a part of Jewish life. Sometimes they would lead to fruitful conversation; sometimes they would end in schism. Today, there again exists a serious threat that the differences within the world-wide Jewish community may end in schism.

The foremost reason for the gravity of the situation is the explosion in Jews of contested status. Conversion in American Jewish life has probably doubled in the past decade. The Wall Street Journal recently estimated that 10,000 people convert to Judaism each year. There have not been that many converts to Judaism since the first century, when Judaism was a worldwide missionary religion competing with Christianity for adherents. Even in an age of freedom, we have to ask why should one, why would one, become a Jew? Because Jews have been mass murdered in this generation? Because there are still strong residues of anti-Semitism so that every time the economy shakes, Jews start shaking, too? Yet, 10,000 converts join Judaism each year; This is, in and of itself a remarkable statement about America. Such a wave of conversion could only happen thanks to the openness, respect and willingness to listen, which characterizes America, and about Judaism and its appeal in a world of choices. But the fact that so many of the conversions - probably 90 percent - are of contested status makes this development a matter not only of joy, or pride, or hope, but of concern.

Secondly, the Reform rabbinate repudiated the get more than 100 years ago. But that decision did not substantively contribute to problems of marriageability for, until this generation, there was no Jewish divorce rate worthy of consideration. In the last 20 years, the Jewish divorce rate in America has tripled. The rate is 30 percent in some communities, higher in others. The rate is going up, divorce is not going to go away.

This new divorce phenomenon is not all bad. My wife talks of an uncle and an aunt who were married for 50 years, but for the last forty years they never spoke to each other. He was an Orthodox rabbi, and at that time, divorce was out of the question. Now, as a consequence of growing freedom and choice, people are not going to stay together for the rest of their lives in a miserable marriage simply because it's embarrassing, 'a shonda; to get a divorce. But after they dissolve their marriage, Jews choose to

marry again. As a group, Jews have the highest remarriage rate in America - 50 percent. As a result, there is a growing number of children defined as mamzerim, children of a second marriage whose mother remarried without a get.

It is also true that accepting patrilineal Jewish descent is a two-hundred year old practice in Reform. But we have never had a surge of intermarriage like the one in modern Jewish history. We did have such intermarriage rates in Germany. But in Germany, 95 percent of the intermarried raised their children as non-Jews. People intermarried to rid themselves of the 'stigma' of being a Jew. In America, even when the non-Jewish mother does not convert, eighty percent of the parents tell their children, "You are Jewish." Two-thirds of the intermarriages are Jewish-male/non-Jewish female. Rabbi Alexander Schindler's insight was to recognize that. They're not intermarrying to revolt against their Judaism, or to spite their parents. They intermarry because they go to the same schools, live in the same neighborhoods, work in the same offices, and fall in love. Most consider themselves as Jewish, and the non-Jewish parent considers Jewish status for the children as a plus. Given that extraordinary truth, intermarriage can be seen as a recruitment opportunity for Jews. The question is how you deal with the opportunity, and the accompanying risk. I estimate there are today from 300,000 to 500,000 children of patrilineal status. While they are a compliment to America's respect for Jewishness, they also pose a grave crisis to a unified community built on Jewish personal status.

The other half of the crisis born of freedom is that Jews feel at home in America, and hence feel free to act boldly against one another. When Jews were insecure in America they withheld acting out their hostility toward other Jews (What will the gentiles say?). Now Jews feel at home in the United States; their pacifying inhibitions have been dropped.

In short, much of the Jewish religious polarization is a crisis of freedom and of success. This is wonderful, but the problem can kill you if you don't know how to handle it.

The question is, how should we manage freedom? There is no obvious answer. But fundamental to the challenge of Jewish unity is each movement's claim that they have the exclusive and independent right to define who is, and who is not, a Jew. Personal status is the explosive issue which threatens to force the current controversy in a runaway fission. Lawrence Schiffman pointed out, in his book "Who Was A Jew", that the differing definitions of who is a Jew caused the final split between Jews and Christians. Personal status issues make schism so frighteningly real today.

The issue goes beyond the numbers of people actually on contested status. How does it feel to be a child of a woman converted to Judaism, whose both parents raised you to be a Jew? You went to temple, participated in UJA, campaigned for Russian Jewry, and at the age of 20 or 25, someone approaches you and says, "You're not Jewish." To the parents with the child, it is infuriating, it is humiliating, it is degrading. But what do you want the other side to say? "You are right. This causes you pain. Therefore I give up my commitments and my principles" These are genuine conflicts of principle - backed by raw emotions. They arouse the passions of succession.

It is not enough to say, that if a Jew of patrilineal descent falls in love with a Jew of matrilineal descent, the parents will be so delighted their children are choosing to marry any sort of Jew that they won't look out which of their future in-laws is not Jewish. My fear is that these two Jews won't have the opportunity even to meet each other, let alone get to know each other. Long before that point, the Orthodox or traditional Jewish parent may say to their children, "Don't hang out at the JCC because they have the most insidious form of assimilation ever invented. There are people there who walk like Jews, talk like Jews, dress like Jews, present themselves like Jews, - but they're not Jews! It was bad enough when I was afraid you would meet Christopher Scott McCloud, who would wear a cross and approach you and say, "Want to see a movie?" I would hope you'd turn him down. But if he says, "I'm Christopher Scott Cohen", and he's wearing a chai, how would you know what to do?" Interdiction would lead to social withdrawal. Then it is going to be war, civil war. Parents are going to tell their children, "I don't want you to mix with the other kind of Jews."

I myself was guilty of complacency. My conviction was that Israel and the Holocaust are such overwhelming events that they form the bedrock of Jewish unity. I believed that issues such as women's role, prayer, and definitions of God, were rabbinic squabbles, confined to synagogues and theological journals, unable to break the bonds of a united Jewish people. But the division of camps over "Who is a Jew?" proved me wrong. Here, non-Orthodox Jews said if Israel changes the law to exclude our converts, it will "endanger" our relationship with Israel.

What they really meant to say was "If you change the law to exclude our converts, you will break the bonds of our relationship." They wouldn't say it in so many words because they're still Zionists! But how much longer will it be before religious delegitimation overwhelms Zionist loyalties? How much longer before humiliation and indignation sever the unity of the Jewish people? I don't know. But it can happen. If anger can

override Zionism, it can overwhelm religion. The crucial question becomes how to stop the trend before it gets that far.

Very few people, in their right mind, are calling for a split of the Jewish people; 90 percent don't want it. What people want is the next victory. Reform Jews want a way of reaching their youth who are up for grabs; Some respond by rejecting any halachic restraints that might limit their approach to their children. Orthodox Jews want a way of closing out the threat of assimilation; some respond by treating the Reform Jews as Traife rather than by facing the challenge of an open society. If those who respond this way have the next victory, the result will be a fundamental split of the Jewish people.

Within Orthodoxy a hundred years ago, there were people who said that Reform Jews should be prohibited from marrying Orthodox Jews. The difference is that a hundred years ago, those advocating such a position were intimidated by modern culture. The most ultra-Orthodox were in their hearts intimidated by the power of modern culture. The intimidation which kept all the extremes in check is now lost.

Given the breakdown of intimidation, we have to do something - together - to get a grip on ourselves as well as on the others. In the last 20 to 30 years there has been a growth in "principled liberalism". I consider this a major upgrade of non-orthodox Judaism. In the past, many of the liberal positions were held by fallen Orthodox, with healthy doses of guilt bolstering their beliefs. Today we have "principled liberalism", liberalism without guilt. The issues it deals with are the very ones the halakhah should be wrestling with. One good example is egalitarianism as a principle. But principled liberalism will do what 'unprincipled' liberalism would not do. It will follow its own logic all the way, unrestrained by guilt, or a visceral response to the traditions of the past. If necessary, principled liberalism will even cause a breach with the Orthodox. That is the danger of principles. Principles too well upheld are dangerous. That is why the Torah was given to human beings, not to a computer; with case studies, not with sweeping categories; so that people would know the limitations of principles. But all the groups that have to learn that together.

Despite all the evidence regarding the fracturing of the Jewish community, there are those who say, "there is no problem." And there are others who say divisiveness is a real problem but the matter is insoluble, hopeless. Religion, they say, is something non-negotiable, something irrational, something beyond, and therefore, something beyond our control. The tendency to schism is all too real, but something important can be done to stop it. The ability to respond effectively is within our hands, within our control.

At this conference, we see that major leaders of American Jewry, who were not necessarily eager to meet publicly in the first place, nonetheless came together to propose bold solutions which might move us closer to finding an answer to our divisiveness. The power of dialogue was evident here. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, who has been here the whole time, took the trouble not only to speak and to teach, but to listen and to learn. Rabbi Schindler is perceived by some Orthodox as an abrasive antagonist who has attacked Orthodoxy in very harsh, inhuman terms. In many cases, Orthodox Jews see him as the initiator, the instigator of all this "patrilineal" trouble. In his talk at this conference he was able to communicate, through his deeply moving speech, the pain, the needs, the pride of being a Reform Jew, as well as to provide us with a list full of constructive suggestions. He could have and probably would have presented those thoughts at some other occasion sooner or later, but part of the reason he gave that talk in all its richness was that the opportunity to give it was created for him. There is only one regret; there aren't enough Orthodox rabbis and leaders here to hear. I wish there had been ten times more; I myself, who thought I understood, certainly felt differently after hearing it. That is the power of dialogue. We are all humans and we are affected by hearing each other.

Rabbi Lamm, who also has many pressures and priorities, had the opportunity to reflect deeply on the issue due to the challenge of coming to this conference. It was here, that for the first time he publicly repudiated those rabbis who deny recognition to Reform and Conservative rabbis. And he went on to speak of the difference between validity and legitimacy. We are all struggling to create a new vocabulary, one that recognizes that while we disagree fundamentally we still respect one another. This is the kind of dialogue we should have, dialogue which gives birth to models and categories that allow us to disagree and respect each other at the same time. My only regret is that there were not more reform and liberal Jews here to hear his presentation. Getting all Jewish groups, together, to hear is our challenge.

Now, how do we accomplish this? By persistent effort in dialogue. Jews have been partners in dialogue with Christians on theological and religious issues for 50 years. The Jewish community in the United States is spending in excess of \$10 million a year on Jewish-Christian dialogue and it makes a difference. We're not spending a fraction of that on Jewish -- Jewish dialogue. We are more eager to sit down with the Gentiles than we are to sit down with each other. Recall the famous line from American history -- "Millions for defense but not one penny for tribute." I would paraphrase that regarding the Jewish community. Jews have apparently decided, "Millions for defense agencies but not one a penny for paying tribute to each other." This is an incomplete

set of priorities; internal dialogue is now as important to Jewish survival as external dialogue.

We must organize to make sure that Jews learn from each other. Question: What do Yeshiva University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Hebrew Union College have in common? Answer: In all three places you can study to be a rabbi without ever being exposed to the serious thinkers of the other religious groups. At the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, that is less true; the other schools named can learn from that. Jews must dedicate their energies to getting to know each other, to getting to understand and learn from the other denominations, to meeting them on a regular basis.

The task is not for the rabbis alone. Philanthropy has played a key role in strengthening the tendency to split. Therefore philanthropy has to play a key role in mending it. Philanthropy has funded the enormous growth of the extreme right in Orthodoxy and has tipped the balance of power in favor of the most separatist elements. Lubavitch raises, by its own proclamation, \$50 million a year in America. The baal teshuvah yeshivas probably raise almost as much. That is an enormous investment in Jewish outreach. Yet, the bulk of Jewish people these groups contact will never live the ultra Orthodox lifestyle. As a result of the division of resources, many, if not most, Jewish children are never exposed to outreach they would consider a serious alternative. It's time that the center, whether it be modern Orthodoxy, Conservatism, Reconstructionism, or even secular Judaism, engage in aggressive outreach programs to reconnect with unaffiliated youth. Hillel struggles every day to do this with limited funds. Outreach is a job for all of us - to work on together.

The conditions of intra-Jewish dialogue today are less developed than Jewish-Christian dialogue at its beginning 50 years ago. While Jews may have greater access to each other, while they share the same history, and are members of the same people, the actual process of dialogue itself is less developed inside the community. So the results are poor.

Consider: When Jewish-Christian dialogue first started, most Jews lumped all Christians together. "All Christians are the same," Jews thought. Through dialogue Jews discover and that Catholics are different from liberal Protestants, who are different from Evangelicals. Jewish organizations have developed specialized outreach to each Christian group. Most Jews think about the other Jewish denominations in the same generalizing stereotyping fashion. During these two days of CLAL's Critical Issues Conference, people discovered that within Orthodoxy there are fundamental divisions. Gerson Cohen denied that the divisions exist in the Conservative

movement - and then proceeded to document and footnote those splits. Rabbi Schindler also spoke about the same type of disagreements in the Reform movement. He spoke quite candidly about Reform rabbis who are performing intermarriages, a policy which he personally does not support. Since there are fundamental disagreements within each movement, we have to learn to avoid the excesses of lumping them all together.

Too many talk of the Orthodox as if they all had the same policy of rejection and separatism. Too many talk of the Reform as if all Reform rabbis perform intermarriages. Several years ago, the CCAR passed a resolution calling on its members not to perform such marriages. At the same time, a record number of Reform Rabbis publicly signed a statement saying they would perform such marriages.

We must learn to respect the diversity and the inner conflict because we have a stake in each other's outcome. Reform Jews have a major stake in which group in Orthodoxy sets the tone. Orthodoxy has a major interest in which direction the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist movements go. Recognizing that truth is part of the task of dialogue. Start by making distinctions. If you lump the other group all together, there is no incentive to diverge. More than one Reform rabbi responded to the criticism of patrilineage by saying, "And if I hadn't endorsed it, would the Orthodox recognize my marriages? Would traditional Jews except my conversions?" The answer is obvious. If the Orthodox want the Reform to observe halakhic norms, they have to give them some incentive in terms of recognizing such behavior.

It is very hard for any rabbi to stand up and risk delegitimation in one's own group. But it is no harder for an Orthodox rabbi to face a Rosh Yeshiva and say "That Reform rabbi's conversion is kosher" than it is for a Reform rabbi to face the chairman of the board and say, "Your granddaughter is not Jewish unless she goes through a certain ceremony". Why would anyone want to put their neck and career on the line for someone who then will turn around and say, "Your marriages are not valid"; "You're not a rabbi"; "I don't respect your religious life, anyway"? The only reason for extra effort to stay in one marriageable universe is if there is a bonding between us. If an Orthodox Rabbi feels as close to a Reform Jew as to a right winger in his shul, if a Reform Rabbi were deeply allied with Orthodox - only then would people feel that it was worth risking getting fired or delegitimated.

When I personally started I also didn't want to be threatened with being delegitimated. There came a point, however, when I decided it was as important not to lose the respect of Jacob Petuchowski and Eugene Borowitz as it was not to lose the respect of a

particular rosh yeshiva. That was the critical dividing line for me. No one takes high risks voluntarily. One does it only when there is no choice, only when one has the kind of relationships that transform one's life. We have to work together on forging relationships that transform each other's lives.

Clal Yisrael is not a cliché. The test of sincere commitment to the principle of Clal Yisrael is: Are you willing to pay some price for it? That means, for example, that an Orthodox layperson faces the rabbi and says, "I will back you. I know that it is difficult to disagree with the rosh yeshiva, but I will back you. I will hire you more quickly if you make clear that you're willing to extend yourself for unity". One hundred years ago the bulk of the modern Orthodox defied their own roshei yeshiva and supported Zionism. They went without the halachic guidance that they desperately wanted and needed because they correctly believed that rebuilding Israel was of historic necessity. Jewish unity now is no less historic and no less crucial to Jewish survival. Then, laypeople have to go to the Rabbi and say, "I am willing to pressure my own daughter; I am willing to risk my own grandchild's disapproval if you will work to create a unified Jewish conversion". Rabbi Soloveitchik once said that each Jew has to bring an Akedah comparable to Abraham's binding of Isaac. In other words, each Jew has to be prepared for ultimate sacrifice. Thank God, I was spared. I have 32 cousins whose sacrifice was that they were shot by Einsatzgruppen in Siedlice and Lomzha, Poland. What is my Akedah? That I'm threatened with delegitimization by some colleagues? Not everybody is called upon for ultimate heroism. Each one is called upon for the heroism that's possible in their lifetime and in their particular situation.

The pressure placed by the laypeople on the rabbis will play a major role in the future outcome. Many Orthodox rabbis perceive that their laypeople want them to move to the right. Many Reform rabbis see that their laypeople want them to perform intermarriages. Many Conservative rabbis respond to their laypeople who want women's equality. Rabbis in each group respond to their lay people.

Am I saying that Rabbis are purchasable? Am I saying that lay power alone will decide? No. But lay people do have influence; by their judgments; by their words; and yes, by their pressure. Pressure can not do it all. Each person has their integrity -- but pressure helps. That is the reality of human experience. All of the speeches at this Critical Issues Conference, including mine, are influenced by our constituency. The community's responsibility is to create respectful and intelligent pressure, sometimes less and sometimes more. The pressure should respect principle and integrity, and yet rework

the dynamic between the groups. Those individuals most engaged in efforts of Clal Yisarel are to be found in Federation and UJA, leaving the synagogue leadership more likely to be denominational. Therefore, UJA leadership should get involved in the dialogue process and Federations and UJA should serve as models to move rabbinic leadership towards a Clal Yisrael orientation.

Many of the obstacles to unity will melt away once the dialogue starts. Today's answers are not the same as the answers we will get after dialogue. Dialogue is not negotiation; it is not even compromise. What people think is possible before dialogue is different from what is possible after. If Jews had gone to the Catholics 50 years ago and said, "You are going to have to repudiate the anti-Semitism of the New Testament," they would have been rejected. After 50 years of dialogue, Catholics and Evangelicals are repudiating anti-Semitism in the New Testament. If I would come today and say what policies I believe are possible to achieve within the halakhah, people would laugh at me. Things I do not dare dream of will be brought about by people who care deeply enough after going through the dialogue process.

People have to care first; they have to socialize and meet with each other. They have to share the experience and the pain and the love. Then, the obstacles fall away, even as it happened through interreligious dialogue. Through dialogue we allow ourselves to ask different questions, questions which break open the possibility of different answers.

This does not mean that there is infinite flexibility in halacha or in liberal principles. But when you are convinced of the truth and integrity of the other, you begin to rethink your positions in every area and in every way. People will discover new ways of interpreting the divine will and many approaches and values they did not know existed before.

Dialogue allows us to get inside the other's shoes - and even walk around a bit in them. A Reform rabbi recently said to me, "The patrilineal decision is three years old; we're not going to go back now." Another Reform Jew said, "We have not required a get for 100 years. We're not going to violate Reform principles now." I replied "I'm not asking you to override principles. I am just asking you to think the question through with people that you love. And please show a little more tolerance next time someone says to you, 'This law is 3,000 years old. I'm not going to change.'" This, too, is part of the discovery of dialogue - we learn to respect that people develop attachments. Whether it is three years old or 3,000 years old, people are seriously attached to their traditions. One has to learn to live with it, to deal with it in a constructive way. Pluralism does not mean that I accept everybody and everybody accepts me. Pluralism means a

willingness to accept limits, on both sides. Pluralism means knowing our limits and discovering how we can work together.

Let us suggest some guideline to create an atmosphere of dialogue in the Jewish community. Let each group begin by criticizing itself first. Justifying one's own position and criticizing the other's is the standard human way, but for the sake of Clal Yisrael, one does the reverse. Rabbi Israel Salanter once said that before he studied Mussar, the Jewish literature of self-perfection, he used to criticize the whole world and justify himself. As his studies developed he learned to criticize himself and to criticize the world. As his studies climaxed, he learned to criticize himself and justify the world. The challenge, then is to see others as they see themselves, and to see yourself as others see you. The double benefit is that we gain insight into the other but we also avoid self-deception. It is difficult to criticize one's self - and it is dangerous. Your own group may become suspicious of your loyalty. But it is a moral responsibility one has to one's own people. It shows that you love them.

Secondly, every Jew has to develop a dual loyalty. One's primary denominational affiliation must be balanced by loyalty to Clal Yisrael. The test of the dual loyalty is the willingness to confront one's own group, to speak up for and represent the needs of those who are not there.

Thirdly, dialogue must be held at every level. Rabbinic dialogue, as we have in Chevra; lay dialogue, which we've started at this conference; and advanced scholarly dialogue. Had we come together years ago to discuss problems surrounding conversion, there would be far more understanding of each movements attempts to deal with the issue. We need serious scholarly and halakhic dialogue on every issue that potentially divides us.

We need public demonstrations of the desire for unity. CLAL organized a "Symposium for Unity" in Washington D.C., in which the past presidents of the four major rabbinic associations participated. The truth of their message lay as much in the format that was presented as in the words that were spoken. By accepting the invitation to appear they were saying: we want to be together.

The fourth principle is that dialogue is a common search through which we upgrade ourselves. The payoff is that, in dialogue, each group is transformed for the better. The average Conservative, Reconstructionist, or Reform Rabbi, is as frustrated as the average Orthodox rabbi by the constant struggle to upgrade the laity's commitment. The single most powerful way to upgrade

laypeople, as the UJA has shown, is to have a laypeople solicit each other. The best way to increase observance is to have Jews mix with people who are more observant, people who they would like and admire. When lay people say, "I keep Shabbat", it's credible. When Yitz Greenberg or even Alexander Schindler says "I keep Shabbat", others say, "He's paid to do that." I was raised in a family that taught ma'aser and tzedakah, yet I have learned a totally different level of giving from exposure to non-Orthodox laypeople. The Orthodox laypeople have a lot to learn from liberal laypeople in terms of commitment and in terms of ethical issues. There are so many things to learn from each other instead of beating up on each other.

We should avoid Cassandra like proclamations that without dialogue, Jews are doomed. It may well be that in isolation each individual group will survive. But each will thrive only in the company of the others, only if all avoid creating their own isolated disciplines and commitments. Dropping the antagonisms will pave the way for objective judgements without party pressures on each policy tactic. The real critique of the patrilineal descent ruling is not so much that it violates halakhah as that it is a mistaken tactic. There is strong evidence showing that children are more likely to affiliate with the Jewish community as adults if their parents are converts or if they themselves convert.

I had a fantasy once that Reform, Orthodox and Conservative Jews had a dialogue and came away enamored with and deeply respectful of each other. Each group goes back and studies its own tactics. And the Conservative and Orthodox are so determined not to be separated from the Reform Jews that they figure out a halakhic way of recognizing patrilineal descent. The Reform Jews go back and are so determined not to split with the Orthodox, and Conservatives, they review the pragmatics of patrilineal descent and conclude that it is not such a good tactic; so they drop the policy. So we end up -- once again -- that one Jewish group is for patrilineal descent and one is against. What have we gained in my fantasy? Such a community will never split apart because each group understands the other fully instead of reacting in terms of stereotypes and cliches.

Did the Orthodox seriously consider halakhic sources for patrilineal descent? No. Contemporary Orthodox theory says change is anathema to halakhah, let alone changing for people who cannot be taken seriously and who are perceived as selling out to assimilationist sources. And liberal Jews feel that the Orthodox are using the Torah as a club to beat them instead of seeing Orthodox response as a loyalty to halacha, a loyalty to be cherished and respected, to learn from. If channels are open and efforts at working together are forcefully made, ~~then the Orthodox~~ group may learn to reconcile its needs with that of the other.

Take women's ordination, for example. The Conservative movement should have said -- with the consent of the women involved only -- that for ten years women rabbis will not serve as witnesses, but on one condition: during those ten years a serious, halakhic, and scholarly dialogue must be held in which both proponents and opponents try to come up with sources and approaches that would give women a broader and more equitable religious role. That kind of mutual challenge could upgrade the religious life of everybody.

After all the alarms and problems between denominations, there is no room for despair. And we can make a difference in the outcome of the policy conflicts. Despair is unjustified because Jews have not even tried to mend the rifts yet. An investment of one million dollars a year would transform the atmosphere of the Jewish community. One million a year could transform the political and religious dynamics of the community. It is costing more than one million now a year for duplicate mikvahs, for triplicate day schools in communities that can barely sustain one. The failure to structure and organize leads into wasteful rather than constructive policies.

Secondly, we should not despair because this generation has already accomplished miracles. Jews must now do for religion what they achieved in politics and fundraising. This generation translated the greatest historical events of Jewish history of the last 2,000 years into miraculous and incredible responses -- into the State of Israel, into UJA, into Jewish political action. Jews took the lessons of Holocaust and the State of Israel and translated them into extraordinarily efficient political action. The time has come to do the same for halakhic action.

Many have spoken of the unity of Jewish faith in the Holocaust. But it is not just because our enemies deny us that we are unified. The Holocaust dramatized the truth that we are Israel of the flesh. The Torah said that Jews are a family. We are not a church that is defined by faith. One of my concerns about the patrilineal decision is that it may lead to a denial of all lineage as significant. Yet Judaism's fundamental statement is that lineage makes a difference. In a church based on faith, when you lose faith, you lose your status. But one cannot forfeit family status. In Judaism, you remain fundamentally attached to me, even when you or I lose our faith, because I am your brother. The Nazis understood that; the PLO understands that. It is not just that our enemies hate us. They understand that as long as one Jew is alive, that Jew is carrying the message of the covenant. Let us have the courage to translate the family principle into spiritual truth. When a Rabbi rules on a policy issue, the rabbi must understand that he/she is dealing with other Jews who are members of the family and are carrying the message of the family.

In an essay, "Towards a Principled Pluralism" I have cited Rabbi Solovchitch's assertion that all Jews share the covenant of fate. Such a conclusion obliges us to respect the dignity of all Jews not only as individuals but together as a group. I reject the idea that Clermont-Tonnerre suggested: to the Jews as individuals everything, to the Jews as a people nothing. I reject the equivalent notion offered by right wing Orthodox Jews, to Reform Jews as individuals everything, but to Reform Jews as a movement, nothing.

Then, once we reject delegitimation, there are all kinds of halakchic issues and problems to resolve. The current standard Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements' beliefs about God, revelation, and observance tend to divide the Jewish people. If the present convictions of the movements are absolutely upheld, a fundamental split is the likely outcome. But the great events of Jewish history of this millenium, the Holocaust and the recreation of the State of Israel, clearly imply the fundamental unity of our people. Our challenge is to translate these orienting events of Jewish history into each movement's spiritual truths. If we understand the implications of Exodus and Sinai in ways that divide us, it is because we have failed to draw proper conclusions from the Holocaust and Israel. Thus our interpretation of the nature of God and Torah is flawed and leads to the wrong conclusions.

The rabbis understood the event of the destruction of the Temple as an orienting event and developed the tradition and Halacha accordingly. They turned the implications of the destruction and exile into a new spiritual centrality for the synagogue as an institution; into prayers and fast days; and into a hermeneutic of Bible and tradition. Our challenge is the same. How shall we translate the implication of the Holocaust into the way we pray, and into deciding which institutions are spiritually central. How we shall view those who are one in fate with us although they disagree with our views of God and Torah? As we were one in martyrdom, there were no distinctions in the gas chambers, so our religious decisions, our interpretations of God, law, authority, must yield ultimate unity within diversity and not divisive conclusions that split our destinies apart. Otherwise our parsing of the text, our commitments to follow precedent, have yielded little truths that falsify or utterly miss the larger truth that "We Are One!"

The same challenge applies to the understanding of the rebirth of the state of Israel. Israel was built -- could only have been built -- by a coalition of all kinds of Jews -- secular and religious, observant and non observant alike. This accomplishment, translated into spiritual understanding, makes a mockery of those views which seek to absolutize our religious differences and split us over observance.

The creation of Israel constitutes the renewal of the covenant in our lifetime. Israel is the reaffirmation of the central claim of the Torah: The divine promise that life is sacred and will triumph. Without establishing Israel what conviction could there have been to our belief that the world will be perfected in partnership and therefore hope and faith is an appropriate response to life.

After the Holocaust and the experience of Jewish powerlessness and the worthlessness of Jewish life, what credibility could there have been to the promises and affirmation of the Torah? In establishing Israel, the Jewish people took power to restore the dignity of life and spiritual credibility of the Torah. But for Israel, what moral/spiritual right would there be to pray to God? But for Israel what good faith could there have been in speaking of and praying to God as the redeemer of Israel? How else could we have the right to utter the words in the Shmoneh Esrei "Who remembers the loving kindness of the patriarchs and brings the redeemer to their children's children"? To whom does God bring redemption - to the children burned at Auschwitz?

The Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform Rabbis must understand that their prayers are made possible by the state of Israel's existence. In recognition of the greater truth that no one group could have accomplished the state of Israel, their task is to apply the tradition and to establish religious practice in ways that spiritually actualize the unity implicit in the miracle of Israel and not in ways that split support for Israel and shatter the people's oneness.

In short, we have to translate the reality of Israel into God language, into observance patterns and policy conclusions. By and large the synagogue movements have failed to adequately incorporate Israel as a seminal spiritual fact, which should guide Jews to cross lines rather than erect barriers. This failing to draw proper historical conclusions is why the synagogues have lost ground compared to the Federations during the past four decades. Jewish fundraising organizations have made the implications of the Holocaust and Israel central to their life and policies. Making the Holocaust and Israel central, enabled the Federations to unite all Jews in common endeavor, action and prayer. Unfortunately, Federations translated the great events into Tzedakah and political action and not into prayer and learning.

Only now are Federations beginning to articulate Israel's implications in Jewish education - and are becoming channels of learning Torah and developing observance. Federations must go further and become educational institutions that turn Jews on to

synagogue observance and prayer while making manifest the unity that underlies their pluralism of practice and theology. The process of unifying must go forward or it will go backward. If federations and synagogues fail to extend the implications of Israel into the spiritual realism, then the unity accomplished for fundraising and political action will be shattered by the deepening divisiveness in observance and communal religious policies.

The irony is that our growing divisiveness reflects a mistaken application of the principle of freedom. America has given Jews unprecedented acceptance, access to all values and lifestyles, and liberty to choose. The result was an initial surge in intermarriage and assimilation. Goaded by fear that once they are given a choice, the mass of Jews will opt out, each group is pursuing drastic policies to keep Jews on the reservation. Each group proposes solutions that meet its own needs but which distance and alienate the others. These policies, such as patrilineal descent, separatism and delegitimation, tend to divide us. Furthermore, in the light of the acceptance which Jews feel in America, they allow themselves to fight and act out vis-a-vis each other in ways that they did not allow themselves when fear of Gentile reaction or persecution kept Jews together.

Why should we allow the fear of freedom leading to assimilation drive us to try to save our denomination's skin at the cost or rejection of the other? It is better to recognize that the great calling of this generation is to learn to live in freedom. Let all of us become Jews by choice. Let the groups divide up the water front and reach different Jews in different ways. Let all groups learn from each other and incorporate the others' insights and strengths into their own behavior and policies. Then by cooperation we can develop the first and most committed Jewish community of all time. By not excluding the alternatives, we show our respect for our humanity. Allowing alternative viewpoints affirms the convictions that, given a choice, people can be mature and choose discipline voluntarily. It bespeaks a conviction that given a choice, Jews will upgrade their commitment and live with - may incorporate - the variety of Jewish expression and commitment.

This is the ultimate message of the central Jewish religious model, the covenant. The all powerful God has voluntarily self-limited and decided not to impose redemption but allow humans full participation in the process of perfection. God accepted the risks of human failure and betrayal, the risks of human diversification and modification of the way of the Lord, our conviction that by choosing, by being exposed to the variety of models, humans will commit more deeply and become more totally transformed.

In this generation we have seen with our own eyes that, given a choice, people commit to higher levels of loyalty and responsibility and dedication than when values, even if they are good, are imposed. Compare the devotion and bravery of the free Israel soldier to the dragooned Arab conscript. Compare the willingness of Filipino or Haitian citizens to voluntarily stand unarmed for freedom before armed soldiers ordered by a despot to hold them down. Compare the incredible productivity of an American free market economy with the centralized, imposed collectivism of the Russian system.

Strengthened by our faith in the covenantal model, armed by the incredible accomplishments of this Jewish generation in rebuilding Israel, in liberating oppressed Jews and renewing life, Jews must reach out to each other and respond to the challenge of living spiritually as Jews by choice. To do that best we must learn from each other. We need the multiple paths and experiments which point the way to a new golden age. We need the variety and the disagreements which lead to the establishment of a voluntary community, built on love and fulfillment in Judaism, not on persecution, exclusion or rejection of the other.

I want to finish with a story



I want to finish with a story. It is a story I heard about Rabbi Soloveitchik originally. Years later, I heard a second version, and this week I heard a third version. It is the same story and it represents the best hope for what we are doing here today.

When Rabbi Soloveitchik visited Israel in the 1930's, he was invited to speak at a kibbutz which was totally secularist, non-observant, indeed anti-clerical. He was surprised that they invited him in the first place. After his presentation, the kibbutz invited him to lunch. He declined saying, You know my principles. I cannot eat non-kosher. They said, Rabbi, we have a kosher kitchen. He replied, You have free love and you have a kosher kitchen? And he laughed. They took him inside and lo and behold there was a kosher kitchen. And then they explained.

In the 1920's, they said, Rabbi Kook went on a tour of the kibbutzim. He came to our kibbutz uninvited. (At that time, the kibbutzniks were so antagonistic that they would not even invite him to visit). At his own initiative, he came for Shabbat, whereupon they boycotted him. They vowed to avoid him and ignore him. But Rabbi Kook was a loving person, an attractive man, and slowly over the course of the day, one person came to speak with him, then a second, then a few more. By the end of Shabbat, half the kibbutz was with him; by Sunday the whole kibbutz was with him. When he went to the bus to leave—he never said a word the whole Shabbat about how they treated him—when he got to the bus, he turned around to say goodbye. He said, maybe the next time I come to spend Shabbat, we'll eat together.

They did not know if he meant by that they should have kosher food, but they held an emergency meeting and voted to set up a kosher kitchen. If Rav Kook ever came back, they would be able to eat with him.

Ten years later, I came across a book which tells of the battle of Gush Etzion. During the siege of Jerusalem, this bloc of four kibbutzim was surrounded by an Arab legion. The kibbutzim fought valiantly, but eventually they fell. The last two kibbutzim were Etzion, which was a religious kibbutz, and Revadim, which was a Shomer Ha-Tzair kibbutz, totally non-observant. The last cow of Kfar Etzion was struck by a shell and killed. Since it was not properly slaughtered, the people at Kfar Etzion could not eat it. But, it was the last cow, and it would have been terrible to waste the meat, so they sent it over to Revadim. Revadim voted to stand shoulder to shoulder with Kfar Etzion and did not eat any food their brothers and sisters in battle could not eat.

The third version of the story appeared this week in the *Cleveland Jewish News*. Rabbi Susan E. Berman tells the following story: "Last week, I went to Israel for three days . . . as part of what was officially called *The Rabbis Special Conference on Tourism*. The rabbis made me feel both proud and grateful that I, too, am a rabbi. As the only woman on this trip, I expected to stand out and to be stood out. That happened. But what else happened was that a spirit of cooperation, acceptance and understanding between Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox rabbis prevailed. We ate together, *davened* together and sang in one voice.

"When some of my colleagues realized that our planned closing ceremony at the Western Wall would have excluded me (men and women pray separately at the Wall), the venue was quietly changed. We walked to the newly excavated entrance to the Holy of Holies,

located behind the Western Wall, where I was, perhaps, the first woman ever to stand in that place. Singing and praying with other rabbis, this Jewish soul was elevated toward new heights of joy."

There are those who say that women rabbis are a religiously divisive issue and traditional Jews will never accept them. But when people have gone together, defying terrorism to stand together for Israel, then they will not allow themselves to be divided over religious issues.

There is a famous talmudic midrash that I always think of when I remember the story of Kfar Etzion and Revadim. Rabbinic midrash tells the story of two brothers who loved each other. One brother was rich and single, the other brother was married and poor. When the harvest was in, the rich brother lay in his bed at night and said, "My brother is poor. He has a family. He needs support. I'll sneak out and transfer some grain to his side."

The other brother lay in bed at night and said to himself, "I have so much—my wife, my children, my land. But my poor brother, what does he have? All he has is his wealth. Maybe he'll feel better if he had more grain." So he sneaked out and transferred grain to the other side. Night after night this happened. Come morning, each brother could not figure out why his grain was never diminished. One night they met each other on the road hauling a load of grain. Each one realized what the other was doing. They dropped the grain and silently ran to embrace each other. And that spot, says the Talmud, is where the third Temple will be built.

I submit that in this incident Rabbi Berman has shown us the location of the Third Temple, the spot where we, with all our rich diversity, will be able to embrace, signifying the truth and the power of *Clal Yisrael*.