



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE  
**AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES**  
A DIVISION OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

**MS-630: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler Digital Collection, 1961-1996.**

Series A: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1961-1996.

---

Box  
11

Folder  
3b

Outreach [Missionizing], 1993-1994.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the  
American Jewish Archives website.

---

*Messner*

November 8, 1993  
24 Heshvan 5754

Rabbi Stanley T. Relkin  
512 Main Street  
P.O. Box 1333  
Greenville, MS 38702

Dear Stanley:

AMERICAN JEWISH

It was good hearing from you and while I am sorry that you were unable to attend the Biennial in San Francisco, I am pleased that you have heard such fine reports. It was, indeed, one of our best ever conventions, it certainly was the largest.

Many thanks for sharing with me your sermons on proselytizing. I was pleased to learn that you have spoken on this subject to your members and the class you conducted sounds fascinating. I look forward to some quiet moments when I will have an opportunity to peruse the pages of your sermons with care.

In the meantime, I write to convey my appreciation for your thoughtfulness in sharing your views with me and for your words of support.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



**RABBI STANLEY T. RELKIN, D.D.**

(601)335-9460 (Home)

(601)332-4153 (Office)

512 Main Street

P. O. Box 1333

Greenville, MS 38702-1333

November 1, 1993

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

I am sorry that I was not able to make the UAHC Biennial in San Francisco. I understand it was outstanding. I read the press coverage of your major address advocating a return to proselytism and am in full agreement.

Enclosed are copies of the four sermons on the same theme I preached for the 5754 High Holy Days titled, "An Old, But Daring Proposal." The sermons were well received by the congregation, not that they are going to become suddenly active. Many commented to me that the people they know in this Southern Baptist community are all affiliated. However, I did begin a twice monthly evening course, "All You Want To Know About Judaism, But Were Afraid To Ask," attended by about 15 individuals, of which 11 are non-Jews from the general community, without connections to the congregation.

Among other things, if the Jewish community had been active proselytizers in the recent past, than they would be more 'Jewishly literate,' not have lost as many Jews to intermarriages and the congregations in smaller communities would possibly be thriving rather than be entries in history books, etc.

I hope that something comes of your attempt to awaken the Jewish community.

Sincerely,



Enc.

An Old, But Daring Proposal  
by Rabbi Stanley T. Relkin, D. D.  
Hebrew Union Congregation, Greenville, Mississippi



5754---1993  
A Series of High Holy Day Sermons in Four Parts



Part One of Four  
Erev Rosh Hashana, September 15th, 1993

This evening we meet again to begin a new year, the year 5754 in our religious calendar. The year 5754 denotes, according to rabbinic reckoning, 5,754 years since the creation of the world. Please note that the beginning of our Jewish calendar is not calculated from the time that scholars believe Judaism to have begun, which is about 4,000 years ago, but from the time when, according to the rabbinic calculation, God began to create the world, as narrated in chapter one, verse one of Genesis.

An important parenthetical note: To be a believing Jew does not mean that you must believe that creation took place 5,754 years ago. The Biblical account of creation is an attempt by the Jews who recorded the Bible to understand the world, to understand how the world began, to explain the process of creation and to place the world in a value oriented context. That is why the Biblical account of creation is packed with value statements affirming that the creation was good and that the world is good.

The Biblical account of creation presents its own distinctive idea of evolution --- first the creation of day and night, then the creation of an expanse which is separated from the waters and is called sky, then the creation of earth, vegetation and trees, leading to the sixth day, featuring the creation of man and woman. Finally, on the seventh day we have Shabbat, the day of rest.

The Bible does not purport to be science; it is not a scientific account of creation. You can not use the Biblical understanding of creation to build an atomic bomb, manufacture a rifle, provide air cooling for your home or study astronomy. The Bible gives us a value packed understanding of the universe and a value packed understanding of the relationship of the human being to the universe, the world and everything therein.

As did sages of other cultures in later periods who believed that everything was composed of four elements: fire, earth, air and water, the Hebrew writers of the Bible had little understanding of what we know to be physics and chemistry. However, the Jews of the Bible experienced the same dynamics of living which we do: love and hate, avarice and unselfishness, good and evil, affection and lust, to name but a few. The Biblical Jew had an understanding of marriage and family life, sibling rivalry and incest, law and anarchy, to



name but a few of the many subjects about which the final word has not yet been written, but concerning which our tradition offers intriguing, sophisticated and subtle insights.

Our ancestors developed the idea of ethical monotheism. The Jews who knit together our sacred script gave us values, God centered values which our Jewish tradition has reformulated and redefined, values which our Jewish tradition has passed to us, and values which though we honor, are slowly eroding from our lives and the lives of many around us.

There are Jewish values. Yes, there are Jewish values and these values are worth transmitting to our children, to our children's children and to the world around us. We know that over the centuries a majority of the western world borrowed Jewish values and appropriated them. In recent years these values have been secularized, which is another way of saying that they have been divorced from religion and God. But that does not negate the fact that they are Jewish values, the same Jewish values which emanated from our Jewish tradition. We must remember that our people has given the world a code by which to live, values and ideals which are yet to be achieved.

This Rosh Hashana I propose a bold suggestion. It is time for the Jewish people to renew the active promotion of Judaism, to seek converts among unchurched, unaffiliated non-Jews. Judaism is not an ethnic identification but a universal religion, a religion welcoming all who will adhere to its values and ideals and welcoming all who will live by its teachings.

The time has come for all Jews to live their lives fully, to advertise their ideals and promote their values. The time has come for us to say to others that Judaism is worthy enough for them to adopt. The time has come for us to emerge from our self-imposed protective shell and proclaim that the religion of Abraham and Sarah, the religion of the prophets, is open to all and merits everyone's allegiance.

Judaism's search for converts is well grounded in Jewish teaching. Judaism's emphasis on conversion is not an original idea. Judaism's advocacy of conversion stems from Biblical teaching and was stressed during the Talmudic period. Conversion was down played only after the year 315 of the Common Era, when Christianity was established as the Roman state religion under Constantine.

After Constantine's conversion to Christianity, conversion was immediately prohibited by the Romans. By the year 407, because many people, I imagine, were still converting to Judaism, the convert to Judaism and the Jew who aided in the conversion were guilty of a capital offense and both were put to death.

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, has advocated an outreach program not only to Jews and their non-Jewish spouses, but to unchurched, unaffiliated non-Jews. Dennis Prager, a noted tradition oriented Jewish thinker, an author of Judaic texts and publisher of Ultimate Issues, a far

ranging Jewish quarterly, has urged Jews to pursue the conversion of unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews. I am indebted to Dennis Prager and I share his thorough research and thinking on this subject with you. The conversion of unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews to Judaism is an idea whose time has come and which, with proper and deliberate preparation and effort, should begin anew and will be eminently successful.

Are you shocked by this Erev Rosh Hashana declaration favoring proselytism? Is there a better time to suggest change than the New Year? Did you ever think that by not seeking converts to Judaism, non-Jews may resent Jews? Though this may sound far fetched, some non-Jews consider the Jewish tendency to shy away from proselytism as a belief that Jews consider non-Jews to be unworthy, that Judaism is a clan and that non-Jews will "pollute the purity of Jewish blood." They reason, further, that the Jewish tendency to not seek converts means that Jewish identity is ethnic, not religious.

Dennis Prager succinctly states that the non-Jew rightfully feels "there is a clannishness that pervades much of Jewish life." Unfortunately, this is accurate because the identity quotient of secular Jews is ethnic and many religious Jews share a similar identity crisis. However, if Jews seek converts, then they will overturn the idea that they do not care about outsiders. When we proclaim our values and not our blood lines, our actions will demonstrate that anyone of any racial or ethnic background can become a Jew.

We are different from other religions because we do not claim that to obtain God's blessing and reward we must be Jewish. From the very beginning our tradition has taught that divine reward or the world to come is not exclusive to the Jew. No one is eternally damned because he or she is not Jewish. Divine reward can be attained by any non-Jew if he or she adheres to the laws which guided Noah. Biblical Noah was not Jewish, but was selected to continue the world because he was righteous in his generation.

One of our great strengths is the teaching, embodied in the seven Noahide laws, that God judges people by their deeds. Hence, the teaching that non-Jews need not adopt Judaism to inherit the world to come. This is a noble precept and different from the teachings of many other religions, who teach that belief matters most, that faith brings salvation and deeds are secondary.

Our tradition has taught that if the non-Jew follows the seven laws of Noah, he participates in the world to come. The seven Noahide laws expostulate against murder, theft, incest, eating the limb of a living animal, blasphemy, idol worship and a society without courts of law. If we want people to take Judaism seriously, than we must teach more than the seven Noahide laws to non-Jews. We must reveal that the full greatness and magnificence of Judaism is a serious option for the non-Jew. Is it not condescending to tell the non-Jew that we are required to do more and they are required to do less? Does that not imply that the non-Jew is incapable or inferior?

Examine the world around us and, in particular, our small community of Greenville. What is Judaism to say to the non-Jew? Though we assert that we want all people to be



good people, should we not proclaim that we want them to repair God's world with us as Jews? Should we not announce that they are welcome to join us, to become one of us, to be as we are, direct spiritual descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, to join with us in the task of carrying the Torah forth to the world?

We must throw off the centuries of fear which began with the Emperor Constantine. We must emerge from the comfort of our self-woven protective cocoon and stand with Isaiah as a light unto the nations. We have an obligation to teach ethical monotheism, to teach that Judaism matters, to teach that we are judged by our deeds, to teach that God is the center of this human world.

The religious aspirations of non-Jews are similar to the religious aspirations of Jews. We both seek richer lives and Judaism will enrich their lives. Let us not be of faint heart. Let us understand that the Judaism for which our ancestors lived as martyrs and which has influenced the world, will be attractive to the unchurched, unaffiliated non-Jew. Let us understand that Judaism, which gave birth to two daughter religions, Christianity and Islam, still has the power to influence.

As Dennis Prager has aptly said, "Since Jews do not offer Judaism to non-Jews, non-Jews have developed, and will continue to develop, their own religions." Non-Jews make up 99.99 per cent of mankind, would it not be advantageous to have more Jews in the world? Maimonides, the towering Jewish philosopher of the 12th century, noted that though Jews introduced God into the world, Christians have taught the knowledge of God and even the Torah to the world. Is it not our proper and true role to bring God and Torah to the world? Were we not chosen to make God and Torah known to the world.

I am not advocating that armed with tracts we go knocking on doors. I am advocating that we sincerely suggest to our unchurched and unaffiliated friends they look at the possibility of embracing Judaism. I am advocating that interfaith couples, in which one is unchurched and unaffiliated, seriously examine, before and after marriage, the possibility of complete Jewish affiliation. It is only recently that when speaking to interfaith couples, I hear the Jewish partner say quite proudly, "I would not ask my fiancé(e) to think about converting to Judaism." I then think to myself, "Should not religious affiliation be among the most important questions facing this couple? Is not the Jewish half of the couple proud of being Jewish? Is not the Jewish half of the couple concerned about his or her Jewish future and the future of Judaism and the Jewish people?" Many non-Jews have told me that they were amazed that their Jewish partner had never suggested their conversion to Judaism.

But then I realize, only with sadness, that the Jewish half of the couple has not had a true Jewish experience, only an ethnic Jewish experience. The remembered Jewish experience revolved around gefilte fish, chopped liver, chicken and lox. How lamentable that so many Jews grow up thinking that gefilte fish, chopped liver, chicken and lox are Jewish, not comprehending that these are but food tastes based on environment. Judaism is not an ethnic identification, Judaism is a religion.

Judaism is packed with values. Among the many ideas that Rosh Hashana celebrates is the concept that Jewish values begin with the acknowledgement that God created a good world and that we are responsible to continue this good world. A sure way to continue a good world is to increase Jewish influence by increasing the number of Jews. Let our New Year be a New Year which portrays to the world that Judaism matters, that Judaism will make a difference in the lives of unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews and that Judaism can be theirs. May our people increase. May we experience a true New Year for us and all peoples. Amen.



Part Two of Four  
Rosh Hashana Morning, September 16, 1993

Last night I presented the daring suggestion that Jews rethink their aversion to proselytism and seek converts among unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews. I am not privy to your private reactions to my proposal but, as you can surmise, would have relished to listen in on your conversations.

Many Jews are startled to learn that our Jewish tradition overwhelmingly favors proselytism and that it was only because of the Roman Emperor Constantine's prohibitions, Christian hatred of Judaism and the deterioration of the position of Jews in the medieval period that Jews did not seek converts. As Dennis Prager states and these are his words, "Jew-haters, not Judaism, stopped Jewish convert-seeking."

Judaism cherishes those who convert. Listen to this Biblical commentary: "Said Resh Lakish: the convert is dearer than the Jews who stood before Mount Sinai. Why? Because had they [the Jews at Sinai] not seen the thunder and the lightning and the mountains quaking and the sounds of the horn, they would not have accepted the Torah. But this one, [a proselyte,] who saw none of these things, came, surrendered himself to the Holy One and accepted upon himself the kingdom of heaven" (*Tankhuma B, Lekh Lekha 6*). Amazingly, Resh Lakish affirms that those who convert are more precious to God than those born as Jews.

There is yet more commentary in favor of Jewish proselytism. Abraham, the first Jew, was a convert and Abraham's conversion did not escape the notice of the rabbis. In commentaries they emphasized this fact and claimed that God said: "I cherish the convert. Abraham was a convert" (*Tankhuma B. and N. Lekh Lekha*). They added: "If a man wishes to convert to Judaism but says, 'I am too old to convert,' let him learn from Abraham who when he was ninety-nine years old entered God's covenant" (*Tankhuma B, Lekh Lekha 40*).

The Rabbis championed conversion and proclaimed: "Every Jew should endeavor to actively bring men under the wing of God's presence just as Abraham did (*Avot de Rabbi Nathan*, Chapter 12). Can you now agree that Jewish proselytism is well supported by



Jewish sources and no longer think I am too far afield? I conclude that our tradition promotes and welcomes converts to our Jewish faith.

The pages of history are witness to Judaism's active and positive approach to proselytizing. The New Testament Book of Matthew describes the Pharisees as crossing seas to make one convert. The Jewish historian Josephus, who lived in the middle portion of the first century of the Common Era, records that "proselytism was widespread among the ordinary people." He explains that inhabitants of both Greek and Barbarian cities were zealous for Judaism (*Contra Apion* 2,39).

Research from the pen of the well known 20th century Jewish historian, Salo W. Baron, testifies that in the ancient world, Jews were not only active missionaries, but that by the time of Jesus, 10 per cent of the Roman Empire was Jewish. He concludes in his monumental work, *A Social and Religious History of the Jewish People*, that because Judaism actively sought converts, there were 8 million Jews in the Roman Empire.

Dennis Prager points out that it was because of centuries of anti-Semitism, which resulted in the segregation of Jews from non-Jews and the killing of both converts to Judaism and their Jewish supporters, that led to Judaism's lack of emphasis on conversion. Those who hated Jews forced Jews to ignore Jewish teaching and disregard promoting Judaism among non-Jews. Ironically, we can conclude, that when a Jew expresses negative attitudes about reaching out to non-Jews to convert to Judaism, that Jew expresses a non-Jewish attitude.

Religious Jews, who are opposed to seeking converts, frequently deny that Judaism has been shaped by history and environment. And yet, their lack of interest in converting non-Jews is evidence that history and environment have shaped their religious outlook. When religious Jews deny Jewish teaching and fail to promote Judaism among the non-Jew, they have permitted anti-Semites and the forces of history to determine their Judaism. These religious Jews do not grasp that they have dismissed the thrust of those portions of the Hebrew Bible and Talmud which advocate declaring "God's wonders among all people" (*Psalms* 96:3).

Religious Jews have lost their sense of mission to the world because of Jew-haters. Jews have become an insular community. They are fearful of stepping out of their religious and spiritual ghettos. Jews who are most absorbed by Judaism feel no mission to the world and are unable to focus Jewish purpose on the world outside their self-proscribed Jewish world. Rather than be guided by the global encompassing direction of our prophetic and Talmudic heritage, they live in a mental shtetl, imposed by centuries of anti-Jewish deeds. Paradoxically, Jews who feel a sense of mission to the world and act upon this noble task are usually those Jews who do not know about Judaism.

The activity of the ultra-religious Jew is inner-directed. They ignore the prophet Malachi's words: "From the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the nations" (*Malachi* 1:11). They ignore the prophet Isaiah's



words: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (*Isaiah 40:3*). Ultra-religious Jews isolate themselves from non-Jews, developing Jewish law into narrower and narrower concerns. When these ultra-religious Jews ignore the world they, according to Dennis Prager's surprisingly strong view, they "sin against both God and Judaism.

Secular Jews of the left feel a sense of mission and work tirelessly to bring the unchurched and unaffiliated to their special ideologies. These secular Jews, who could contribute greatly to Judaism, instead affiliate with either Scientology, pacifism, New Age thought, and other sects and cults.

Admittedly, we, Jews, have considerable negative association with missionary activities. We have been offended by the missionizing efforts of those who are determined to save souls. But, as I articulated last night, Jews do not seek to save souls. You do not have to be a Jew to inherit the world to come. Jewish teaching is clear and unequivocal that all who follow the Noahide laws merit the world to come. This is different from the thinking of Muslims or Christians, who believe that their particular path is the only path to salvation.

Judaism desires converts. It does require that its converts become ethical monotheists. But, as opposed to classical or fundamental Christianity, it does not maintain that non-Jews must become Jews. In classical or fundamental Christianity, only conversion to Christianity prevents the non-Christian from the eternal fires of hell. It is the effort and success of the Christian proselytizer that "saves" the non-Christian soul from damnation. Judaism, on the contrary, holds that every decent non-Jew can enjoy the world to come. Interestingly, by becoming Jewish, more is required of the newly converted Jew if he or she is to inherit the world to come.

As Jews we know that Judaism is not interested in saving souls. Judaism wants non-Jews to become Jews so that they help redeem the world, so that they help God repair and improve this world in the here and now. Judaism wants non-Jews to become Jews so that the world will become a better place.

Although Jews claim they do not seek converts, some Jews have been hyperactive when seeking converts to socialism, feminism, liberalism and many other movements. Dennis Prager claims correctly "that the only ideology to which modern Jews have not sought converts is Judaism. This," he continues, "has often been bad for the world, and it has often been suicidal for the Jews — in terms of the numbers of Jews lost to these ideologies, and in terms of the destruction that some of these ideologies have wrought upon the Jews."

Jews readily place advertisements in magazines and newspapers, canvass for political candidates and participate in various forms of social action, but become sensitive and refuse to ask others to convert to Judaism. If most Jews regarded Judaism as highly as they admire

secular movements, they would not hesitate to promote conversion to Judaism among unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews.

Some Jews divorce themselves from Judaism, but become active in causes they believe will eventually erase religious differences from the world. They postulate that if the world is changed, then anti-Semitism will disappear. They may, indeed, be unaware that they are fearful of fully identifying with Judaism. They do not recognize that Judaism represents the values which they themselves propose because they are insecure about being Jews.

They have ample reason to be insecure Jews. Throughout the centuries, have not many Jews been killed only because they were Jews? How long has religious anti-Semitism persisted? Did we not lose 6 million Jews in the Holocaust? They earnestly believe that the way to solve the problem of anti-Semitism is for Judaism to eventually disappear.

They fail to understand, however, that should many people convert to Judaism, there will be more Jews. Should there be millions of non-Jewish families with at least one Jewish member, anti-Semitism would decrease. Also, the more Jews in the world, the less apt that bullies will pick on a small minority people.

Jews who are not religious will have little interest in seeking converts. Why should Jews who do not care about Judaism want other to be Jewish? Obviously, they should have no interest in seeking converts to Judaism. But religious Jews, whether they be Orthodox, Conservative or Reform are the puzzle. Religious Jews should love Judaism and the question is why should they not want others to live Jewish lives?

I have given you one reason for the Jewish reticence to be active proselytizers: years of persecution and segregation which led Jews to see themselves as innately different from non-Jews. However, there is yet another reason and that is a concept which is philosophically incorrect: namely that the basis for our Jewish commandments and practices are unknowable or strange. Many religious Jews believe that God gave us commandments to obey and there is no rationality behind them, implying that Jewish thinking and practice, though morally correct, are beyond reason. Thus, Jews began to lose Judaism's meaning and purpose and the ability to explain Judaism's greatness to others. Pair this thinking with those Jews who saw Judaism as an ethnicity, meaning there is a Jewish look and Jewish food which the non-Jew can never attain or appreciate, and Jews no longer visualize Judaism as a world embracing religion.

A web of containment was spun: Jews did not want to offer Judaism to non-Jews because of the effects of persecution; and Jews did not want to offer Judaism to non-Jews, because although you can convert to a religion, and you can become the member of a people, you can not convert to an ethnicity.

We must admit that Judaism is capable of standing on its own in the marketplace of ideas, that Judaism is for individuals who want to enrich their lives, that Judaism is not only



a religion for us and for our children and children's children, but it is a religion for everyone. If not for everyone, why should it be for us?

When we understand that Jews have a mission which embraces the world, Judaism develops deep and significant meaning and our attitude towards non-Jews change. I repeat, this does not mean that we knock on doors and distribute tracts on street corners. It does mean, however, that we examine what Judaism and in particular, Reform Judaism, means to us. It means that we contemplate how we are different from other peoples in ways other than eating lox and kreplach, for if that be the case we can substitute saumon fumée and won ton, or should we call it ravioli. It means that Judaism and its teachings become not only familiar to us, but relevant in our everyday living. We then become reflecting pools of the transcendent Jewish experience, from bondage in Egypt to the revelation on Sinai, from the Golden Age of Spain to the meaning of the Holocaust, from the great yeshivas of Eastern Europe to the modern academies of Jewish studies, from the founding of the State of Israel to the recently inked Palestinian-Israeli bi-lateral agreements.

If Jews world wide, and particularly in the United States, embark on such a program to seek converts to Judaism, it will make a difference. Synagogues, Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, numerous Jewish organizations will change the way they look at themselves and the world. Jewish residences will become Jewish homes and Judaism, including Jewish practices and ritual, will become guideposts to Jewish living. It will mean that we share our Judaism by inviting our non-Jewish friends to share our Jewish experiences. But first we must celebrate Judaism, Jewish practices and Jewish ritual. We must make Judaism a joyous, treasured part of our lives.

Judaism has a distinctive outlook to offer our troubled world. For God's sake, for the Jew's sake and for a world in which we pray that the lion will lie down with the lamb and in which spears will become pruning hooks, for a world in which every individual can sit under his fig tree and none can make them afraid, let us dare to try to embrace the world. The challenge is before us.



### Part Three of Four Yom Kippur Eve, September 24, 1993

I have conducted services for the High Holy Days since 1957. This is the 37th Erev Yom Kippur Service I have preached, but there have not been many High Holy Days when I have preached a sermon series. I have been trying to recall when, and I do remember having done a series or two, but never a series which spanned the totality of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. I pray that you will not greet me after this service is completed and say, "Rabbi, you should never do that again. It's too much." I hope that you will be polite, sensitive and receptive; that is all I ask. I pray that my message will have some impact.

On Rosh Hashana I put forth the daring suggestion that Jews seek converts to Judaism among unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews. There is ample evidence in Judaism's past that Jews were active proselytizers. I examined the reasons why Judaism ceased to seek converts and why many Jews continue to shy away from proselytism.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is set aside for Jews to contemplate their actions of the year immediately past and set themselves on a new path. In Jewish thinking, sin means that we have missed the mark, that we have not lived up to expectations. Yom Kippur is the culmination of ten days of introspection in which we evaluate the expectations established for the past year and determine expectations for the new year.

We examine our past, and the examination should be both of our personal past and our actions as Jews, our actions as a people. Because we have examined our past, the future should be different, open to change. Introspection should lead to change and we all need change. Our Jewish future, as individuals and as a people, can be different. I am suggesting that we change, that we look towards a new and exciting Jewish future, that we again seek converts to Judaism.

Though Alexander Schindler, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, advocated some years ago that we revive our long dormant Biblical and Talmudic mandate to seek converts, there has been no rush among UAHC congregations to implement his words. It is almost three years now since Dennis Prager, a tradition oriented Jew, the publisher and writer of a quarterly Journal titled, *Ultimate Issues*, has written on the same theme and as Rabbi Schindler experienced, again there has been no rush of Jews seeking to embrace his words to convert unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews.

I credit Dennis Prager for being the springboard for this provocative series of sermons and I thank him for providing me with well researched material and various ideas. Increasing numbers, "Jews will become," and these are the words of Dennis Prager, "little more than a religious sect, much better known, but not much more influential, than the Amish."

There is more to consider. We are dwindling. Our birth rate is decreasing. In many small communities we have become a smaller and smaller percentage of the population. Synagogues, once vibrant and echoing with the laughter of children and the prayers of adults, have closed; their Torah scrolls and sacred ritual objects relegated to museums or antique stores. Synagogue structures, once built with hopes of reaching into the future, have become restaurants, warehouses, or stores. Our sacred space has devolved into secular expanse and in some smaller communities we have become a faint memory, faded paintings on the minds of older residents, but soon to be forgotten. This does not have to be our end. We can yet contribute to the quality of life in all of the communities in which we live. We must act.

If Jews do not seek converts among unchurched, unaffiliated non-Jews, then we must reconcile ourselves to knowing that many individuals in search of meaning and spirituality



will either adopt other religions or invent new ones. People are seeking spiritual alternatives and many are not turning towards Christianity. A perusal of bookstores gives evidence of the growth of "New Age" religions, an increase of various cults, and a fascination with neo-paganism and the occult. Islam, too, is growing throughout the world and in the United States, concomitant with a steady increase in Muslim fundamentalism. Secularism, also on the ascendancy, is another alternative embraced by many. Secularism generates moral relativism and political substitutes for religion. Though, we have witnessed the fall of communism, fascism and concurrent totalitarian regimes, we do not see a corresponding increase of morality and values to take their places. Judaism is a vibrant option to the many "isms" that were and are no more.

Jews should offer Judaism to non-Jews because Judaism can help bring about a better world. Many of the individuals who have influenced the world for good were born Jews. For two thousand years Jews have been reacting to the world, it is time that we begin influencing the world, begin acting on the world. But to exert an influence on the world, Jews must offer Judaism to the world; they must teach ethical monotheism to the world's humanity.

Judaism can and will make a difference in this world. If we seek converts, we will be instruments of change. Let us not permit the world to run wild. Why should we be witness to people choosing religions other than Judaism? Why should the unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews not have an opportunity to choose Judaism? Why should we, the Jewish people, not increase the number of Jews and thereby be instruments to help build a better world?

Six million Jews were lost to the Holocaust, which means that one out of every three Jews were killed by the Nazis. Today, it is estimated that we continue losing the same percentage of Jews to assimilation. We need more Jews. More Jews mean greater Jewish resources to help Soviet Jews and Ethiopian Jews. The fewer Jews in the world, the fewer Jews there are to fight anti-Semitism and help rebuild Israel. The more Jews the closer our Jewish problems and the world's problems are to solution.

We need all kinds of Jews to increase our numbers, not only the ultra-Orthodox, who though they have a larger birthrate than other Jews, avoid participating in the world at large. Because it is only the ultra-Orthodox who have an increasing birthrate, it is for Reform, Conservative and centrist Orthodox Jews to increase our numbers through conversion.

More new Jews will have a positive effect on Judaism. In many Jewish communities, the community's more dynamic Jews are new Jews. In community after community, the leading voices on behalf of Israel and the leaders who establish innovative Jewish programs are new Jews. Jews by choice bring into Judaism a determination and freshness that makes Judaism glow with life and meaning. New Jews are not tied down by ideas that have worn thin. They want to make their Judaism succeed because they have chosen Judaism freely and openly. You may counter these statements and say that they do not come to Judaism with childhood memories of Shabbat. But how many Jews today have childhood memories of

Shabbat? How many Jews today have memories of Jewish observance tenderly and lovingly performed?

New Jews will challenge us and we do need challenge. They will be joyous and happy in their Judaism, rather than looking at Judaism as a difficulty with which they were born and are unable to shed. Many born Jews are amazed that the enthusiasm of Jews by choice extends to more than food. Being Jewish does not mean chicken on Shabbat. If we were to search our Jewish *halacha*, we would not find that this is a prescribed ritual meal for Jewish observance. It reminds me of when a woman in a former congregation planning a community Passover Seder told me that one must serve broccoli at a Passover Seder. When I asked why, she told me that her mother always served broccoli on Passover. I did not ask her if in her childhood home it was served at other times during the year or reserved only to tempt Elijah, the prophet, to visit their Seder table? I guess that George Bush would not attend that Seder.

Rather than live with assumptions that may be incorrect, new Jews will help us redefine our Jewish identity and rethink our Judaism. Being around new Jews will mean that we will ask questions about our Judaism rather than assume our Judaism. Converts to Judaism will persuade those of us who are born Jews to take our Judaism seriously. What better influence on born Jews than many non-Jews who are choosing to become Jews? Would not an infusion of committed new Jews, interested in walking in the path of prophets, interested in repairing the world, interested in giving witness to ethical monotheism, make for a better humanity and be a noble influence on all of Judaism? Imagine how influential newly committed Jews would be on Jews who take their Judaism for granted?

As we experience another Yom Kippur, I am convinced that there are a surprising number of non-Jews who would opt to be part of the Jewish people and live a Jewish life. I know of many non-Jews who simply go about without any religion, but do admire Judaism. Many, if given the opportunity and an invitation would become part of a religion that to quote Dennis Prager, "stresses right behavior over right faith, that teaches one how to incorporate the holy into everyday life, that stresses a life of the intellect, that makes one a member of a people as well as religion, that is the oldest ongoing civilization in the world, [and] that gave the world God and the Ten Commandments..."

On this Yom Kippur let us admit that Judaism is worth living, not only by people who have a Jewish parent, but by anyone. If Judaism does not have anything to say to anyone, then it does not have anything to declare to a born Jew. But, Judaism has something to say to everyone, to contribute to the world. Why direct the message of Judaism only to those Jews who have drifted away from Judaism? If a message has validity, then it is valid for Jew and non-Jew, it is for everyone. Why aim our message only to the estranged Jew? Yes, it would behoove us to regain those Jews who have drifted away. But, if our message is valid for the born Jew, it is valid for the unchurched, unaffiliated non-Jew.

Perhaps, if born Jews see their non-Jewish friends taking Judaism's message seriously, they, too, would take Judaism's teachings seriously. When many non-Jews, who are



respected by the community at large take Judaism seriously, I venture to declare that born Jews will find their way back to Judaism quickly.

Judaism is not provincial. Judaism touches the world. Many Jews ignore Judaism because they think it only has relevancy for Jews. When Jews understand that it relates to everyone, they will take Judaism seriously. This Yom Kippur let us vow to take Judaism seriously. Let us declare that we are Jews who desire to influence the world.

You may be surprised by my sermon this Kol Nidre evening. But, this is an evening when we are asked to think of the future, to contemplate what we expect of ourselves for the coming year. This is an evening when we evaluate our past and I am suggesting that we change, that we become true to what our sages taught, that we seek others to join with us and become Jews. If Judaism is worthy of our loyalty, is it not worthy of the loyalty of those who are not Jewish?

I admit that I do not know all the ramifications of how this challenge to seek unchurched, unaffiliated non-Jews can be carried forth. However, we should begin. We are part of a great world religion that has given much to the world and still has much to contribute to the making of a better world. We have not been superseded.

Judaism is attractive to highly intelligent individuals. Judaism is attractive to those who seek meaning and direction. Judaism is not provincial, but for everyone in the world. If we sit back and do not accept this challenge, we do not accept our mission to make this world into a world that reflects the Kingdom of God and reflects the divine. Let us echo the words of Isaiah and go forth. Let us declare that our house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Let each of us declare, "Here I am, send me."



Part Four of Four  
Yom Kippur Morning, September 25, 1993

This morning I conclude my High Holy Day sermon series on the daring proposition that once again Jews seek converts to Judaism. I have established, hopefully beyond any doubt in your mind, that it is not a new idea. Many scholars have concluded that Jews sought converts until those who were active in converting non-Jews and those they converted were not only threatened with death, but were killed by the authorities of the countries in which they lived. It was in the fourth century of the common era, when Constantine established Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire, that Jews were forced to abandon their successful efforts to convert non-Jews under pain of death.

As Jews, through the years, suffered from discrimination, they were not permitted to mingle and live with non-Jews. As discrimination against Jews intensified, Jewish authorities deserted the Biblical and Talmudic mandates urging them to seek converts. Under



Napoleon, they became citizens of France and other countries slowly changed their attitudes about their Jewish populations. But Jews still suffered in varying degrees. Even in countries like the United States, Jews experienced anti-Semitism. In more recent times, the Ku Klux Klan and derivative organizations are still active, performing deeds of hate against Jews. Though far less blatant than before World War II, Jews still experience the shock of discrimination, violent acts against their persons and destruction of their property.

I have presented to you the bold and daring idea, not original with me, that once again Jews seek converts, converts from unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews. It is a viable recommendation and should be part of Jewish practice. The big question is how to implement this audacious program. Judaism has always held that Christians are ethical monotheists and that together we can work to repair and improve the world. But, we must strive to influence the world as much as we can, and that means that we should strive to increase the number of Jews in the world, seeking converts from unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews.

Listen to this simple reasoning. Increasing the number of Jews in the world improves the world. The more Jews in the world the better the world will be. The more Jews in the world, the less chance that we may again be victims of mad men and despots. The more Jews in the world, the more we can motivate the world towards the noble, the good, the true and the beautiful. I am convinced that more Jews will mean less anti-Semitism and more Jewish security. Let me tell you why.

The most searing experience in Jewish history was the Holocaust. The great German rabbi, Leo Baeck, who survived imprisonment in Theresienstadt, the concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, said: "If all Germans had had a Jewish relative, the...[Holocaust] could not have happened.<sup>1</sup> Dennis Prager, a tradition oriented Jew, who I have quoted in earlier sermons, claims that "people do not generally slaughter members of their family, or that person's friends and relatives. Furthermore, people are simply more disposed to liking those whom they trust, and they are more likely to trust those whom they know well."

Samuel and Pearl Oliner, authors of a study published in 1989<sup>2</sup> and also quoted by Dennis Prager, state that one of the few traits that seemed to typify rescuers of Jews was having a relationship with individual Jews prior to World War II. The more that Jews will relate to non-Jews, the more positive will be the reactions of non-Jews. In other words, Jewish interaction with non-Jews helps to diminish anti-Semitism.

The more that Jews who identify as full and believing Jews relate to non-Jews, the more positive will be the relationship of non-Jews to Jews. To quote Dennis Prager again, "...nothing will induce Jews to relate more and better to non-Jews than a sense of mission to them." We are not living in the Middle Ages, when Jews were not considered equals to non-Jews and when Jews were separated from non-Jews behind ghetto walls. When living under Christian and Muslim rule, Jews rarely thought they could relate to non-Jews as equals, nor dare to advocate conversion to Judaism. Since Emperor Constantine of the

Roman Empire, Jews have been forced to turn inward toward themselves, to forgo the Biblical and Talmudic mandates to seek converts among non-Jews.

Today, we acknowledge that to live in a physical or spiritual ghetto, to forgo outside contact, is not ideal. Today, Jews have a choice. Today we live in freedom and freedom means we have the opportunity to once again fulfill our mission to the world. Our mission "is to teach the world ethical monotheism, the affirmation of one God whose primary demand is that people treat each other justly."<sup>3</sup> We have the opportunity to offer Judaism to those who are unchurched and unaffiliated, to individuals who do not possess a religious tradition congruent with Judaism's religious values of ethical monotheism. But I must emphasize again, that I am not advocating the organization of either door bell ringing brigades or street corner tract distributors as a means of finding new Jews for Judaism.

Admittedly, not all converts will be fully observant Jews, but not all Jews are fully observant Jews. Should we not lead a more Jewish life? Just as all Jews, no matter what wing of Judaism they affiliate with, do not heed Sabbath observance, so not all converts will heed Jewish halacha meticulously. Just as it is painful for rabbis to observe that born Jews set priorities where Judaism is lower in rank than a sports event, or lower in rank than attendance at an extra-curricular school activity, converts to Judaism may do the same. However, Jewish converts will not lead a pogrom, will not contend that Jews are inferior, will not teach that Jews killed Christ, or organize and be part of anti-Israel groups. We can be assured of certain minimal Jewish living by Jewish converts. And if we want more, then it is for us to set an example.

I doubt that Judaism will attract people who are seeking Jewish salvation. Judaism teaches that all people who live decent and righteous lives will inherit the world to come. Judaism proclaims that an individual can attain salvation without converting. But, there is a good likelihood that we will attract some of the finest people because they will be attracted to Judaism not for a lolly-pop reward, but for idealistic reasons. People will not affiliate with a minority culture for the sake of popularity. An individual who becomes a Jew knowingly moves to a minority group for altruistic reasons. The non-Jew converts to Judaism not to live a more casual, easier life, but to identify with and become part of a tradition which has helped change the world.

As Jews, sitting in this synagogue on Yom Kippur, is it not easy to reach the conclusion that if there were millions more people living a committed Jewish life, the world would be better? I have been careful to say a committed Jewish life, because then we would have a world with millions more people living by Jewish values. Would it not be an amazing world if people observed the Sabbath, remembered that there are values above and beyond the cash in one's bank account? Would it not be an amazing world if people could spend one day per week occupied with matters other than the material, thinking about the values which undergird good living? What kind of world would it be if individuals develop a sex ethic that did not glorify sexual repression, but sexual fulfillment and understand that sex is not sinful? What kind of world would it be if people read the Bible and Jewish



commentaries, the prophets and Jewish sources, striving to understand the values which motivated their spiritual ancestors? Is this not an amazing prospect?

I may sound too romantic, not having my feet planted on the ground, expressing what you consider far fetched. But what about America? Would not America be better if there were more Jews. And what about Black-Jewish relations, which has developed an impasse because Jews and Judaism are not understood. And to restate the words of Dennis Prager, would not America be better "if blacks looking for an alternative to Christianity had become Jews rather [than] Black Muslims?"

I must admit that when I first thought about the idea of Jews again engaging in proselytism, I was not enthralled. But, after thinking about the prospect of Jews seeking the conversion of unchurched and unaffiliated non-Jews, I am excited by its possibilities. New Jews will invigorate us, give us the understanding that we are not alone, but that Judaism is a religion which is wanted and chosen by non-Jews, by individuals who earnestly believe that being Jewish will make a difference in their lives.

If we believe Judaism to be worthwhile, let us behave on the basis of this belief. If Judaism is worthwhile for us and for our children, then it is worthwhile for the non-Jew. I have already recounted to you on Rosh Hashana, the New Testament reports that the Pharisees would cross seas "to make one convert." I quoted the late Columbia University professor, Salo W. Baron, who wrote that by the time of Jesus 10% of the Roman Empire was Jewish and that there were 8,000,000 Jews in the Roman Empire.

I can understand how difficult the idea of Jews seeking converts is for you to accept. I know that it is difficult for the overwhelming majority of Jewry to accept. I have lived all the years of my rabbinate without confronting this issue because it rarely emerged. It is well understood by Jews that Jews do not engage in proselytism. True, they once did because there is evidence of it in Biblical and Roman times, but not since then. Only because of preparatory reading for the High Holy Days, when I read again the powerful writing of Dennis Prager, did I understand that we abandoned proselytizing non-Jews not because of intellectual or religious reasons, but because we were forced to by those who want Judaism and Jews to vanish. We should ask ourselves if our decision to abandon seeking the conversion of non-Jews is rational. I have come to the decision that the reason we have abandoned the seeking of converts is because we were forced to by those who hate us, would like to see Judaism disappear and for Jews to become extinct.

I have said ~~that~~ I do not know how we are to go about actively seeking converts. I do know, however, that I would not want to act so that I reflect the actions of those whose proselytism tactics you and I dislike. Last Spring our youngsters attended a conclave in Jackson focusing on the attempts of Christian groups to convert affiliated Jewish youngsters. At the conclave the youngsters had the opportunity to note the difference between honest legitimate groups, those who are upfront with their conversion agenda and those who are dishonest and masquerade as Jews, such as Jews for Jesus and Messianic Jews. I commented to the panel of invited Christian evangelists during the question and answer

period that I appreciated their expression of love for me, but much more than love, I would appreciate their respect.

If we are to seek converts, we must do so with the utmost respect for the unchurched, unaffiliated non-Jews we seek to bring into the covenant of Abraham and Sarah. When we show respect, we show more than love. Respect demonstrates that we are concerned with the individual's integrity and personhood, that we consider his or her understanding of relationship to the world, its inhabitants and God, that we are concerned with more than the non-Jew becoming a member of the people of Israel.

Love, may I suggest, is frequently self-directed, not other directed. Love makes the one who does the loving feel good. Respect, however, demonstrates consideration and regard for the other individual's person, mind and intellect. Respect is other-directed. Remember, we are not offering salvation, because the individual who follows the Noahide Laws already has salvation, we want the unchurched, unaffiliated non-Jew to be one of us, to be an ethical monotheist.

I recently attended a lecture by Eli Wiesel, who spent his teen years in a concentration camp and went on to become a Nobel Peace Laureate. Eli Wiesel said that his fight for many years was and continues to be against indifference. He considers indifference to be the worst of human failings. The opposite of love, he said, is not hate, but indifference. The opposite of education is not ignorance, but indifference. The evil in the world, he affirmed, results from indifference. I thought, then, of my High Holy Day message. I plead with you to awake from a Jewish slumber and not treat Judaism cavalierly, to not be indifferent to Judaism. Let us be passionate about our Judaism, let us prove to ourselves and to others that Judaism has meaning, that Judaism counts, that Judaism matters in our lives and that Judaism matters in the lives of non-Jews.

As I confessed earlier, I do not know how to institute a program to convert non-Jews. I do know that it is a program which should involve all Jews, whether living in the big city or the small town. First, however, we have to be Jews, and I mean true Jews. And yes, Reform Jews can be true Jews. We can be true Jews if we care about what we do today and what it will mean for tomorrow. Then, by our actions, we transmit Judaism to our family and friends, and to the community in which we live. You may claim that you do not know what to do. If you think about it, I am sure you will know what to do. You will know how to lead a Jewish life which, I suggest, means conversing with the Jewish past so that there will be a Jewish future. If those two objectives are met, then Jewish life has significance in the present.

We stand at a crossroads. The number of Jews is not increasing. We, as Jews who care, as Reform Jews, must be concerned enough to declare that Judaism is vital for the ongoing success of the human endeavor. Let us decide to influence the world so that the world does change, so that it does reflect the divine, so that it is a manifestation of Jewish aspiration and ideal. Can that be bad? Of course not, it is good. Let us so live as to share our hopes and our dreams to make this world a better place. A sure way of making this



world a better place is to increase the number of Jews. This year and in future years, declare, "Here I am, I will do it."

1. Quoted by Dennis Prager, as reported to him by the late Prof. Jakob Petuchowski of HUC-JIR, who heard Rabbi Baeck make this statement at a public lecture.
2. Oliner, Samuel and Pearl, The Altruistic Personality, Free Press, 1989.
3. Quote is from Dennis Prager.



*Congregation Beth Israel*

ORGANIZED 1854

*5600 North Braeswood Boulevard  
Houston, Texas 77096*

SAMUEL EGAL KARFF, D.H.L.  
RABBI

November 16, 1993  
2 Kislev 5754

*no further  
action  
perhaps  
RJ as  
a negative*

Dear Alex:

Thank you for your kind letter. I was pleased to attend and participate in the 62nd General Assembly. I needed to be back in Houston Sunday night and I combined attendance at the Biennial with visiting my sister's only son and his significant other.

Nevertheless I was able to experience the Friday night and Shabbat morning services which I found exceedingly spiritual and inspiring. Your presidential address was a model of eloquence, passion and soulfulness. There was, as always, much wisdom in your perspective even if I found myself taking issue with your "missionary" stance.

I did get to see Rhea. She is as vivacious and pretty as ever.

In the hope that one of these days we can do some catching up and with fond regards to Rhea in which Joan joins me, I am

As always,

  
Samuel E. Karff

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

*Message*

November 16, 1993  
2 Kislev 5754

David R. Frazer, Esq.  
3101 North Central Avenue  
Suite 1600  
Phoenix, AZ 85012-2652

Dear Mr. Frazer:

It was thoughtful of you to write after reading my Biennial President's Message. I much appreciate your warm words of commendation.

While brick-bats have been flying from some co-religionists, there are also many thoughtful expressions of support for my call for proselytizing. Your own words of favor are appreciated! While I do agree with your list of areas which you believe will help Judaism grow, there is one exception. I personally do not officiate at interfaith marriages nor do I believe that officiation will bring the couple closer to Judaism.

There are, however, ways to accept and welcome interfaith couples into our community without rabbinic officiation at their marriage. I have often said it is not the "yes" or "no" response to the couple which brings them close to Judaism. Rather, it is how the rabbi's position is articulated to the couple so they understand the rabbi's views. There must be an open exchange and explanation, one cannot merely put off a couple with a negative response. The rabbi must show care and concern in dealing with such couples and no one else at the synagogue should respond to requests for interfaith ceremonies. An immediate no from a secretary or temple administrator or leader can be a terrible put down to a family reaching out to the synagogue! The rabbi must take time to speak with the couple, preferably to meet with them, most certainly so if they are members!



David R. Frazer, Esq.  
November 16, 1993  
Page -2-

Be that as it may, I thank you for writing and for sharing  
your thoughts with me. They are much appreciated.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



# FRAZER, RYAN & GOLDBERG

## ATTORNEYS AT LAW

DAVID R. FRAZER\*  
JAMES W. RYAN\*  
YALE F. GOLDBERG\*  
JOHN R. FITZPATRICK  
SUSAN WARD HARRIS

3101 NORTH CENTRAL AVENUE  
SUITE 1600  
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85012-2652

TELEPHONE  
(602) 277-2010  
FAX  
(602) 277-2595

\*PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION

November 8, 1993

Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

I was delighted to read of your keynote address at the Biennial of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in San Francisco on the subject of evangelizing non-Jews.

In order for Judaism to grow, we need to move forward in several areas simultaneously: more creative Jewish education for young Jewish adults, Jewish outreach, user friendly synagogues and temples, Rabbi officiation at interfaith marriages, and finally proselytizing non-Jews.

Critics of the evangelizing plan will be many but dramatic change of any kind is always opposed by the majority. Isn't it ironic that so many members of the Rabininate have conveniently forgotten our long history of proselytization.

Sincerely,

  
David R. Frazer

DRF:ib  
Enclosure

P.S. Enclosed is an article I wrote for the Phoenix Jewish News on "Rabbi Officiation at Interfaith Marriages" which may be of interest to you.

D.R.F.



# Intermarriage: are rabbis out of touch?

By DAVID R. FRAZER

**F**ive years ago, rabbinic officiation at intermarriage ceremonies was only a Reform Jewish issue. Serious controversy raged among Reform rabbis as to whether or not they should officiate at the wedding of a Jewish and a non-Jewish partner, and if so, under what conditions. In the Conservative and Orthodox movements, there was no dispute. Those rabbis would not then, and will not now, perform an interfaith marriage.

Today, the situation is much the same. Nationally, about 40 percent of Reform rabbis will perform interfaith marriages with certain stipulations: that the children will be raised as Jews; that the couple agrees to join the rabbi's temple; or that the non-Jewish partner is willing to initiate the conversion process.

## Shocking changes

In Phoenix, typical of many cities across America, no Reform rabbi with a pulpit will officiate at an interfaith marriage, leaving such marriages to two part-time rabbis, a part-time cantor or to the Christian clergy.

A recent survey conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations reveals that from 1985 to 1990, 61 percent of the marriages of people raised as Reform Jews and 50 percent of the marriages of those raised as Conservative Jews were mixed. An equally shocking change occurred among Orthodox Jews, where 25 percent of the marriages were outside the faith. In 1974, only one Jew in four married a non-Jew.

But while the views of the rabbinate — Reform, Conservative and Orthodox — have not changed, the views of lay people have changed dramatically.

## Out of touch?

In a recent survey sponsored by the Jewish Outreach Institute, 90 percent of the Reform laity and 70 percent of Conservative laity said that they would like to see their rabbis officiate at interfaith marriages if the couple was committed to raising their children as Jewish.

In addition, more than 70 percent of the Conservative laity said that if a grandchild of theirs was being raised as a Jew they would regard the child as Jewish even if the mother was not a Jew. Less than one out of three Conservative rabbis agreed.

Are rabbis out of touch?

Some Jewish leaders believe that lay people are substantially ahead of their religious leaders. Included in this group is David Belin, founding president of the Jewish Outreach Institute, which deals exclusively with questions of Jewish intermarriage. Belin suggests that "rabbinic leadership is in danger of being out of touch with the changing demographics of the American Jewish community, and the rank and file of American Jews are ready to recognize the reality that in a free society intermarriage is going to take place, and therefore new approaches must be undertaken if Judaism is to survive."

One new approach by lay people in the Jewish community would be to communicate their concerns to their rabbis, since there is a substantial discrepancy between the more flexible views of the laity and the strict constructionist views of the rabbinate.

It is surely no secret that congregants in

temples and synagogues do not regularly confer with their rabbi on controversial issues of the day nor do they write letters to the editor of the congregation's internal bulletins. Rabbis are thus insulated from the changed views of their congregants.

Moreover, religious organizations are not run as democracies when it comes to "rabbi-type" issues. Those decisions are left to the discretion of the rabbi, though in some cases in conjunction with the religious committee.

## Questioning opinions

What usually occurs in temples and synagogues is that a few people in the congregation become exercised about religious issues including, from time to time, a small minority of board members. Even then, if the rabbi takes a strong position, the opposition usually will dissipate. Congregational democracy only applies to non-religious issues because rabbis, like doctors and lawyers, are considered highly trained and educated experts, and their word is considered the "law."

Consider, however, what has happened in the medical and legal professions in the last 10-15 years. Second and third opinions are commonplace in both medicine and law. Today many third-party payors insist on second opinions before agreeing to pay for a medically recommended procedure.

## Question views

In a similar vein, and without suggesting disrespect, it would also make sense to question the views of your rabbi when you are told that rabbis cannot officiate at an interfaith marriage because the marriage cannot be conducted "according to the law of Moses and Israel."

Ask your rabbi, if your family is about to be turned away because of a proposed mixed marriage, where in the Bible or Talmud is it stated that interfaith marriages cannot be performed by the rabbinate? The answer is that such a prohibition does not appear in either place. As a matter of fact, the words "according to the law of Moses and Israel" did not appear as part of the oral formula of marriage until the 11th or 12th century, and there is little credible evidence that failure to use those words invalidates the marriage.

## Arguing tradition

Where the issue of intermarriage officiating gets off the track and into the never-neverland of religious tradition is when the rabbi argues that if he officiates at the ceremony he is putting the stamp of approval on the interfaith marriage. But is the rabbi who refuses to officiate putting his seal of approval on the interfaith marriage when, after the ceremony, he welcomes the same couple into the congregation as part of Operation Outreach?

In both cases, the answer should be the same. The rabbi is not supporting the interfaith marriage; he is simply making an attempt to retain the Jewish spouse as an active member of the Jewish religion and hoping to bring the non-Jewish spouse in by conversion.

In many Reform, Conservative and Orthodox congregations, the post-marriage scenario, as described above, is exactly what is taking place. "No, we will not marry them but yes, if they show up on our doorstep we will take them in," much like the newborn homeless child, wrapped in old newspapers, that is left at the back door of Jewish Family and Children's Service.

## Hypocrisy marches on

The problem with the rabbinic rationale for not officiating is that it does not address the large missing persons group. What happens to those interfaith couples who, after rejection, never come back to their temples or synagogues? How many of these Jewish missing persons are permanently disaffiliated from the Jewish community? How many are now attending services in the church of the minister who married them, or are disassociated from organized religion completely?

The recent Council of Jewish Federations survey provides a partial answer. It was found that

the children of interfaith couples tended not to be raised as Jews. Forty-one percent were being raised in other religions, primarily Christianity. Thirty-one percent were being raised without any religion at all, and only twenty-eight percent were being raised as Jews.

## Conflicting positions

One Jewish organization that is in the middle of the controversy on officiation at interfaith marriages is the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a group that has been in existence for over 100 years.

On one hand, CCAR has delayed taking a revised stand on officiation at interfaith marriages since 1973, while during this period, intermarriages have reached crisis proportions.

On the other hand, in 1990, in a rather surprising action, the CCAR supported the legitimacy of gay and lesbian rabbis notwithstanding the specific language in the Torah and elsewhere condemning homosexuality. Thus, it appears that on the subject of homosexuality, the CCAR is willing to overlook a direct prohibition in the Bible, while on the subject of officiation at interfaith marriages, the Reform rabbinate condemns the practice on the basis of questionable and suspect grounds.

David Frazer is a Phoenix attorney.

Where is it stated that interfaith marriages cannot be performed by the rabbinate?



*Missing*

COPY

November 16, 1993  
2 Kislev 5754

Rabbi Daniel Pernick  
Beth Am Temple  
P.O. Box 1200  
Pearl River, NY 10965

Dear Dan:

Many thanks for your most gracious letter. I am pleased to enclose herewith a copy of my Biennial address so you may read it first hand rather than draw conclusions on my comments by second hand accounts.

As a matter of fact, I do plan to send the speech out to all of our rabbis and presidents with a letter of explanation concerning my call for outreach to the unchurched. From the mail and comments I have received, there is obviously quite a bit of misunderstanding, not so much from those who heard my speech, but from people who reacted to the press releases on my President's Message.

I am also grateful for your comments about way and means to undertake this new dimension of Outreach. Let me assure you that your suggestion concerning the media will certainly be included in the ideas with which we will struggle in the coming months in order to come up with the best possible means of going about this critical program.

As to working with our regional Outreach staff and laity, you may be assured that we will certainly do so. As a matter of fact, one of my dreams is to provide for an Outreach staff which is full time in every region and even possibly in major communities of the United States and Canada. Our present coordinators, most of whom are part time, do a remarkable job in behalf of Outreach, just think of how much more could be done were they engaged on a full time basis!

In any event, I am truly grateful for your words of appreciation and support.

With every good wish from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler





60 Madison Avenue • P.O. Box 1200 • Pearl River, N.Y. 10965 • Tel. (914) 735-5858

Affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Rabbi Daniel Pernick

Cantor Geri Zeller

Charles Silverman, *President*

Iris Schwartz, *Principal*

November 10, 1993  
26 Heshvan, 5754

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Ave.  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex,

Like many who were unable to be in San Francisco, I have been reading second-hand accounts of your address to the UAHC delegates (will copies be sent to rabbis and/or all UAHC congregations?).

I'd like to share a suggestion and a comment with you regarding this new dimension of Outreach. In the first place, I believe that the monies raised could be most effective as part of a national media campaign. TV commercials, such as those done by the Mormons are very impressive. I believe that if we wish to reach "the unchurched", television is an essential medium. Neither should we leave the pages of the nation's newspapers and magazines to Jews for Jesus (sic) during the seasons of Hanukkah and Pesach. A coordinated multi-media strategy affords the best opportunity to achieve your stated goals.

Ah, but what if we succeed? I know that in the New Jersey-West Hudson region of the UAHC, up till recently led by another of us Worcesterites, Danny Freedlander, there is a shortage of rabbis willing to devote meaningful time to working with Jews by Choice. If this is true elsewhere, we may find ourselves with people knocking at the door, but no one to let them in. Perhaps some thought could be given to hiring a non-congregational rabbi (or other Jewish professional), in each region, whose sole purpose would be to work with these prospective Jews by Choice.

In any event, I would suggest continuous contact with regional Outreach chairpeople as the future program develops.

Best wishes to you and your family.

Shalom

  
Rabbi Daniel Pernick



COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 18, 1993  
4 Kislev 5754

Martin J. Warmbrand  
365 West 25th Street  
New York, NY 10001

Dear Martin:

Thank you for your thoughtful note and the most welcome contribution toward our effort.

It might interest you to know that I am familiar with the United Israel Movement as David Horowitz and my father were friends and the very first article I ever published was in what was then the United Israel Bulletin. It was an article on Ame Palliere, who was a Catholic priest who found his way from Rome to Jerusalem.

I am, of course, delighted that I was able to institutionalize this idea, and indeed we have made quite a bit of progress since I first made my proposals in 1978. Literally thousands of men and women have become "Jews by Choice", have been welcomed with open arms into our congregations - - most of them via marriage to a Jew, but not exclusively so by any manner or means.

Again, my thanks for all your help.

Cordially,

Alexander M. Schindler



Martin J. Warmbrand  
365 W. 25th St., #19-B  
New York, N.Y. 10001

November 16, 1993

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

The decision to institutionalize the conversion of lapsed Jews and non-Jews to Judaism is commendable.

Many years ago when I <sup>read</sup> "Gentile Reactions To Jewish Ideals - Subtitle 'Special Reference To Proselytes'" by Jacob Salomon Kaiman, Philosophical Library, New York 1953, it confirmed my conviction of the need to re-introduce the centuries long conversion activity on an institutional basis.

For many years I have helped to keep the United Israel Shodl Union afloat but microscopic thrust in this direction alone by encouraging its leader David Horowitz and sending the small contributions that I can afford.

Please accept the enclosed fee with offering in your new outreach and as a vote for what may be the most important decision of your rabbinic leadership career.

Sincerely,  
Martin J. Warmbrand



COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 15, 1993  
1 Kislev 5754

Rabbi Amiel Wohl  
Temple Israel of New Rochelle  
1000 Pinebrook Blvd  
New Rochelle, NY 10804

Dear Amiel:

Many thanks for your good wishes concerning my call for Outreach to the unchurched. I am grateful for your support and I will certainly bear in mind your offer to be of assistance in this endeavor.

Thank you, too, for sharing your recent sermon on the subject, I look forward to some quiet moments when I may peruse its pages.

With fondest regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



# Temple Israel of New Rochelle

1000 Pinebrook Blvd. • New Rochelle, NY 10804 • 914-235-1800

AMIEL WOHL, RABBI

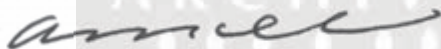
November 5, 1993

Dear Alex,

May your call for conversion efforts prosper.  
As a covenant people, we are to be a light to  
the nations.

I would like to help you in this work.  
Enclosed is a recent sermon on this subject.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Amiel Wohl

AW:hl  
enc.



MEETING THE CHALLENGE  
CONVERSION TO JUDAISM

Rabbi Amiel Wohl  
Temple Israel of New Rochelle



Friday, October 18, 1991  
11 Heshvan 5752



MEETING THE CHALLENGE  
CONVERSION TO JUDAISM

Rabbi Amiel Wohl  
Temple Israel of New Rochelle  
Friday, October 18, 1991 - 11 Heshvan 5752

If there is one principle which Judaism taught unceasingly it is the right of every group to maintain its identity and to perpetuate itself. This is why the Jew withstood all adversities, and all punishment; he refuses to give up his identity; she refuses to be absorbed by the majority among whom she lives. As a correlary to this principle, the Jew always granted the same right to other groups, and has, as a matter of consistency, discouraged overt proselytising, considering that every group, every people, by remaining loyal to its own tradition and its own values can contribute its best to the common reservoir of civilization.

The bases of the Hebraic contribution to western civilization, and the Hebrew's greatest gift to humanity, is the ideal of the one God, Creator of heaven and earth. According to the Biblical account, this conception first dawned on Abraham and was carried forward by Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and reaffirmed at Mount Sinai. This one God idea was proclaimed aloud - Shema Yisrael - adhered to through persecution and vilification. The Jew sacrificed his life for its sake, and made it central to his whole existence.

The Jews of today, adhering to the monotheistic tradition of their fathers, number some 12 million souls. But, through Jesus and Paul, the Hebraic teaching (in a modified form) passed to Christendom and is now cherished by 1,600,000,000 Christians throughout the world. Six centuries later, it was reiterated in Arabia, with desert sternness, by Mohammed, and is now the creed of 800,000,000 Muslims. The kernel of both religions is the terse declaration which we Jews traditionally believed to be uttered by the Almighty at Sinai: "I am the Lord thy God....Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." (The first of the ten commandments.) There is, of course, more to monotheism than this dogmatic affirmation, for it was we in Judaism who broke the shackles of polytheism and animism, the worship of animals and images, of the stars and planets, of the winds and spirits, of a plurality of deities such as those in the Hellenic Pantheon, with their human appetites and lusts and failings. There was in this a degrading and demoralizing effect. The moral code accompanying biblical monotheism emphasized the value of human life, the sanctity of the home and the dignity of the marital relationship. If God and the covenant people were to be faithful, so each man and wife.

Monotheism undergirds the triumphs of modern science. Such advances were propelled by confidence in the rationality of the universe, proclaimed by the Hebrew prophets and the ethical monotheism that they taught. The God of Israel was a God of righteousness. This overwhelming passion for righteousness is insisted upon in the Bible and is partner to the monotheistic idea: The God of Israel was no impersonal deity, indifferent to human affairs, nor a selfish God, swayed by flattery and bribes; but a God who loved goodness, who abhorred oppression, who laid down positive standards of conduct between man and his fellow, who insisted on justice, truth and morality. The ideals of social justice, so necessary for our own times, are the ideals taught by Isaiah, Amos and Micah.

Abraham left Mesopotamia (Aram Naharayim) and went from Ur to Haran. This believer in the one God left a society strictly regulated on principles of polytheism and demonology. His belief in one God at variance with the idolatry of his age, he had to go out alone, on the open road, fortified by faith. And that was all he had! Abraham represented that quest for pure truth that has marked our people - to smash the idols and go forth. To be a Jew is to carry forward the noblest ideas in civilization. Abraham, the first Jew, is the one who entered the covenant for us. This is why we pray to the God of Abraham at each service.



Abraham was very zealous in seeking to bring people under the wings of the Divine Providence, the God he had discovered, that was leading him on, that he understood to be the God for all humankind. And Christianity and Islam, centuries later, looked back to Father Abraham as well. Abraham's most consistent mitzvah was bringing new people into the new faith. Today, all male converts brought into Judaism are given the addition name abraham, not only because he was the first Jew but because he was not born a Jew, but came to it.

Today there are hundreds of new people entering Judaism every month. Most come through marriage, but some of conviction alone. Yet, in practice and in theory, we Jews have historically discouraged conversion. We had no doctrines of exclusive salvation and therefore no motivation to "save" anyone. Although we had the the Covenant of Abraham, others could abide by the Covenant of Noah.

Asher Ben Yeheil in his Ethical Testament said: "Be the first to extend courteous greetings to every man whatever be his faith and provoke not to wrath one who belief differs from thine." Beside the innate wisdom of our tolerance for others, we were a persecuted people and therefore were reluctant to have others share our fate. And besides Christian or Islamic law forbade us from seeking converts or admitting non-Jews to our ranks. But today, in America, a new situation has emerged. Intermarriage as a product of a free and open environment is widespread. We teach universal values, not insularity, and we honestly and naturally feel that what is good for us can be shared with others. Nor is anyone contesting us or preventing us from sharing in America.

Nearly every Rabbi in the country can tell you of converts to Judaism who have been marvelous additions to our faith. Many of them are playing important roles in Jewish life. Everyone of us can tell you of personal interviews that demonstrate the vitality of the new Jewish faith in the life of the newcomer to Judaism. "I have always wanted a faith I could believe. I wanted to have a faith that made sense, that harmonized with the modern world."

Jews in America today are for the most part admired as successful people. Rather than being a people despised, Jews are well accepted. Judaism with its emphasis on the rational rather than the mystical has a great appeal for humanity in this secular age. In fact, in some Christian circles, the ferment in their theology has brought them to what they call an "Old Testament approach," which is in fact a Jewish outlook. And, in our times, many are unchurched and are practicing no formal religion, and they could become interested in particularly our Reform Jewish expression.

Judaism is the experience of a people in history, rich in human experience, and not merely a set of principles. It has a tremendous appeal to individuals who need embodiment for their identity in these depersonalized times. Victor Hugo said: "Nothing is so powerful in the world as an idea whose time has come." That idea is Judaism, its emphasis on human tasks, its concern about universal goals. It remains true, of course, that we in Judaism are more concerned that all people be righteous, than we are that they join our faith. And we have always felt that they could be righteous, as they were in their own religious backgrounds.

Judaism is motion, direction, purpose. Abraham was on the move. He and his household left an intolerable Mesopotamia and migrated to Elon Moreh, to Shechem, and then to the Negev, where he became known as a godly prince and a prophet. He established the worship of God in his family and among his followers. Wherever he went Abraham did three things: he pitched his tent, he dug a well, and he built an altar. "And God blessed Abraham and said, I will make your followers as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the desert sands."



It is a great mandate we are given. Like Abraham, courage and daring is needed in our time too, to overcome the many false beliefs that condemn human beings to suffering and failure. For example, that hunger and homelessness must persist; that Israel in her region can never be secure; that America's problems remain unsolvable - crime, drugs, AIDS, hate.

God entered the lives of our ancestors and they were changed, bound up in the eternal quest. As God said to Abraham, so may He say to us: "Be thou a blessing."





*M. Schindler*

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 15, 1993  
1 Kislev 5754

Mr. & Mrs. Alex Port  
5919 Ostrom Avenue  
Encino, CA 91316

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Port:

I have just received your letter and am grateful to you for writing as you did. Your comments are well taken and I thank you for sharing them with me. I have not yet had an opportunity to read the lengthier article enclosed with your letter, but I assure you that I will peruse it page by page just as soon as I have some quiet moments.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



MR. & MRS. ALEX PORT  
5919 Ostrom Ave.  
Encino, CA 91316-1453

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW  
838-FIFTH AVE CONGREGATIONS  
NEW YORK N.Y. 10021

ATTN. RABBI ALEXANDER  
M. SCHINDLER  
PRESIDENT

DEAR RABBI,

I WAS HAPPY TO READ OF  
YOUR NEW MISSION. I ASKED  
OF OUR RABBI GOOR OF TEMPLE  
JUDEA, SOMETIME PAST WHEN WE  
WERE MEMBERS, DOESNT THAT  
STATEMENT IN THE UNION PRAYER  
BOOK MEAN PROSELYTIZE. HE  
SAID I KNOW YOU WOULD ASK - NO MORE.

TOO MANY PEOPLE THINK THAT JEWS  
ARE THE CHOSEN PEOPLE; THAT IS  
FAVORITES ETC - WE ARE GIVEN A TASK.  
WE ARE NOT A SECRET GROUP. I  
THINK IT IS GOD'S WILL TO DIVULGE  
OUR TEACHINGS AND PROMULGATE THOSE  
WORDS.

THAT COULD BE A TASK OF TIKKUN  
OLAM.



I FEEL THAT TOO FEW OF OUR  
CONGREGATION ARE AWARE OF  
THE JEWISH EFFORTS IN THE  
UNITED STATES AS EXPLAINED  
BY THE ENCLOSED.

THIS TEACHING WOULD BRING MORE  
MORTAR TO THE BRICKS AND  
CREATE A HIGHER DEGREE OF  
PRIDE IN BEING A JEW.

TIKKUN OLAM IN AMERICA TO  
HELP ALL MANKIND.

RESPECT FULLY—  
SHOLOM

Ally Port



(B)

## SURIVAL OF THE JEWS

A CONTINUED EMPHASIS ON  
OUR FOUNDATIONS - MORAL,  
ETHICAL - AND TZEDAKA.  
"THE JEW IS THE PIONEER  
AND CHAMPION OF A MORAL  
ORDER, TAUGHT IN THE TORAH.  
WE MUST EMBODY OUR SPIRIT  
IN A LIVING EXAMPLE FOR THE  
GOOD OF ALL MANKIND". ISRAEL KASOVICH

A STUDY WILL RESULT IN SURVIVAL.  
THE JEW HAS BEEN A PROFOUND  
INFLUENCE IN WHATEVER COM-  
MUNITY HE HAS RESIDED, ALL  
OVER THE WORLD THRU THE  
CENTURIES.

A STUDY WILL CREATE A STRONG  
FEELING OF PRIDE, HENCE  
SURVIVAL.

IN MODERN AMERICA <sup>AS IN PAST HISTORY</sup> THE JEW  
HAS BEEN A GREAT INFLUENCE  
AND CONTRIBUTOR IN MANY  
FIELDS SUCH AS MEDICINE  
PHILANTHROPY, PHYSICS, MUSIC,  
PEACE, CIVIL RIGHTS + YES COMEDY (HUMOR)

LEARNING WILL BRING PRIDE.  
IT IS A WORTHWHILE ADVENTURE.

THE TEMPLES & SYNAGOGUES  
WOULD DO WELL TO INCLUDE  
THIS KNOWLEDGE AS PART OF  
SABBATH OR OTHERWISE. THAT  
WOULD CREATE PRIDE, HENCE  
SURVIVAL (ALSO ATTENDANCE)  
ERASE THE UNAWARE.

LEARN ABOUT THE NUMBER OF  
JEWS WHO HAVE BEEN AWARDED  
THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE. IN  
MEDICINE, LITERATURE AND  
PEACE ETC.

BY NOW YOU MUST HAVE FELT  
THE PRIDE IN BEING JEWISH.

THE JEW HAS ANSWERED GOD'S  
CALL FOR "TIKKUN OLAM" REPAIR-  
ING THE WORLD.

IN THE UNITED STATES YOU WILL  
FIND JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS  
SUCH AS -

AMERICAN JEWISH WORLD SERVICE.



AJWS STRIVES TO TRAIN PEOPLE IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD TO LIFT THEMSELVES OUT OF POVERTY TO GAIN SELF RELIANCE & SELF RESPECT THROUGH NEWLY ACQUIRED SKILLS & EDUCATION. THIS IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF TZEDAKA.

THEY ARE BUILDING STRONG BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP CREATING A RESERVOIR OF GOOD WILL FOR THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY AMONG THE PEOPLES OF AFRICA ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA.

ALSO -

JEWSH FUND FOR JUSTICE.

HELPS COMMUNITIES FIGHT FOR THEIR RIGHTS REGARDLESS OF RACE OR RELIGION. IT ALLOCATES GRANTS, PARTICIPATES AS PARTNERS IN SOLVING THE COMMON PROBLEMS OF OUR DEMOCRACY. THEY HAVE REPRESENTATIVES WHO SIT ON THE ECCUMENICAL REVIEW BOARD THAT CONSIDERS REQUESTS FOR GRANTS FROM ANTI- POVERTY GROUPS.

ALSO—  
AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS  
AJC FIGHTS DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST JEWS AND BLACKS.  
IT TAKES A FORCEFUL STAND  
AGAINST RACISM, RELIGION &  
BIGOTRY.  
THEIR VOICE IS ONE OF COM-  
MITMENT TO EQUAL JUSTICE  
UNDER LAW FOR ALL AMERICA.  
THE NOTABLE—  
WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS.

ACTIVE WORLDWIDE IN ALL  
MATTERS PERTAINING TO JEWS  
COORDINATES WITH PROTESTANT  
CATHOLIC, MUSLIMS & OTHER JEWISH  
LEADERS' CONCERNS ARE ANTI-  
SEMITISM, PREJUDICE.  
REPRESENTS JEWS ON HOLOCAUST  
REPARATIONS -  
CONCERN IS FOR PEOPLE WHO SUFFER.  
MEN WOMEN & CHILDREN EVERYWHERE  
IN THE WORLD.  
INTERRELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION  
"MANKIND SHOULD BE UNITED AGAINST  
IN HUMANITY"



AND—  
A.D.L. ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE.

FOR 80 YEARS, AGAINST TERRORISTS  
HATE GROUPS, WHITE SUPREMACISTS,  
ANTI-SEMITES WHO THREATEN TO  
UNDO THE BASIC RIGHTS AND  
FREEDOMS OF <sup>ALL</sup> AMERICANS  
THE PROFOUND —

B'NAI B'RITH INTERNATIONAL

ORGANIZED OCTOBER 1843 (150 YRS OLD)  
IN B'NAI B'RITH HILLEL FOUNDATIONS  
REACH <sup>IN</sup> 400,000 JEWISH STUDENTS PARTICIPATE.  
HAVE EDUCATIONAL, RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL  
& SOCIAL PROGRAMS AT 450 CAMPUSES  
HELPED STEM RISING TIDE OF ANTI-  
SEMITISM IN FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS  
IN ISRAEL THEY CONTRIBUTE TO  
DAY CARE, HEALTH CARE, COM-  
MUNITY CENTERS, WORKSHOPS FOR  
DISABLED.

B'NAI B'RITH COMBATS RACISM &  
BIGOTRY — EXPOSES GROUPS THREAT-  
ENING DEMOCRATIC & RELIGIOUS  
FREEDOM FOR ALL.



PAUSE FOR A MOMENT AND REFLECT  
UPON WHAT YOU HAVE READ -  
WHAT DO ALL THE GROUPS HAVE  
IN COMMON? TO ACCOMPLISH  
GOOD FOR ALL MANKIND.  
DONT YOU FEEL A SENSE OF  
PLEASURE AND SATISFACTION TO  
REALIZE WHAT YOU ARE PART OF.

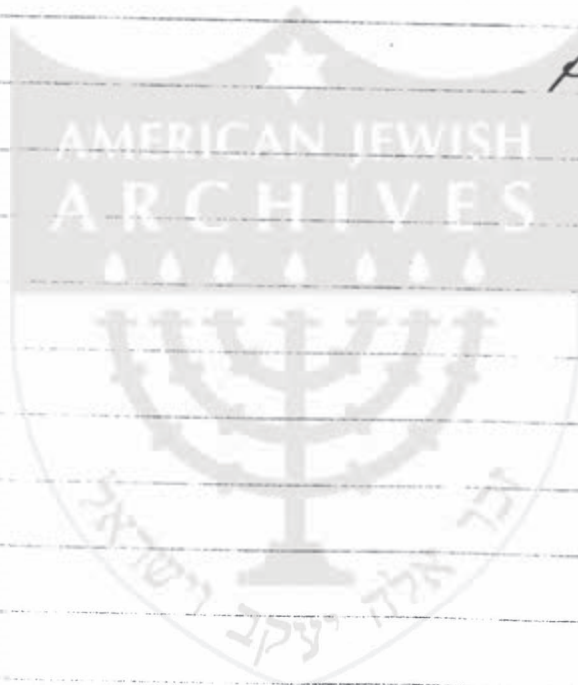
THESE ARE NOT EMPTY WORDS -  
BUT BY OUR DEEDS YOU WILL  
KNOW US - THE JEWS,  
A WORLD OF ONE RACE - HUMANITY.  
ARE YOU READY TO EMBRACE  
JUDAH WARMLY -  
DONT YOU FEEL A SENSE OF  
PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT WE HAVE  
A JEWISH STATE? HERE IS A  
TINY COUNTRY, SPEAKING 80  
LANGUAGES, FROM 100 COUNTRIES,  
WHO HAS FULFILLED THE  
OBLIGATION (THE CHOSEN ONE)  
OF "TIKKUN OLAM" REPAIRING  
THE WORLD. SHE HAS FULL  
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH  
102 NATIONS. (MORE DETAILS TO  
FOLLOW.)



IT IS TIME TO BLOW OUR SHOFAR  
AND PROCLAIM :  
WE ARE BANAYICH (THY CHILDREN)  
AND BONAYICH (THY BUILDERS) FOR  
ALL MANKIND)

SHALOM

Alex Port



# Reform chief urges big campaign for converts

By Ari L. Noonan

**W**ith one grand sweep of his arm, the colorful Rabbi Alexander Schindler, leader of the Reform movement, sought to end abruptly a two-thousand-year-old Jewish tradition. He urged Reform rabbis at Saturday's UAHC Convention in San Francisco to reverse the direction they have been taught to follow and to pursue aggressively converts to Judaism.

It's about time we made this move, said two of Los Angeles' prominent rabbis, Isaiah Zeldin, founding rabbi of Stephen S. Wise Temple, and Allen Maller of Temple Akiba, Culver City. Non-Jews have been active for years in both congregations and converts are, too!

"In my writing 30 years ago, I was advocating proselytizing, but people just shrugged," said Rabbi Maller, a seminal thinker. "Now, maybe, people will pay attention."

Jews have mostly resisted any desire to proselytize ever since the Second Temple, the center of Jewish life, was destroyed in 70 CE, and Jews dispersed around the world.

Seeking converts is a cornerstone of Christianity and Islam. Throughout history, followers of these traditions have persecuted Jews when they have sought converts. So Jews declined to seek converts for two reasons: Because it was often a crime in the societies in which they lived, and because Jewish tradition teaches that all good persons, Jew and non-Jew, have an equal opportunity to enter the World to Come.

However, for several years, Reform and Conservative rabbis and Federation leaders around the country have been worrying out loud about Jewish continuity. Rabbi Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, a master at operating with a flourish, now sees flip-flopping the custom of not

Continued on Viewpoint D

For  
Alex

*[Handwritten signature]*



## NOTE: CONVERTS

Continued from Page 1

seeking converts as the most effective way to bulk up the shrinking Jewish community.

Based on the responses of Rabbi Zeldin, Maller and others in the Reform movement, Schindler may have struck yet another grand slam home run.

Schindler has been the catalyst of several monumental changes in Jewish life. He and the Reform movement triggered one of the biggest upheavals in the history of Jewish thinking a decade ago. With a large shove from Schindler, the Reform movement ruled that patrilineal descent was as valid as matrilineal descent. In that attempt to stem the shrinking of the community, Reform determined that a child was Jewish as long as one parent — it didn't matter which — was Jewish.

Against that background, Rabbi Zeldin and Maller are pinning their enthusiastic endorsements. They have been working with the tidal wave of intermarried couples for a decade, and the result has been that numerous non-Jews and converts have become quite active in their temples.

More traditional wings of Judaism have criticized Reform temples for permitting non-Jews to play official roles in the sanctuary and elsewhere. But Maller and Zeldin defend the decision. They see it as a pragmatic response to the swelling numbers of Jews just inside and just outside of *Yiddishkeit* who want to take a part in synagogue life.

Is wanting enough?

Is wanting equal to conversion?

Take the case of one woman at Stephen S. Wise, who is well-known to most members. She is an officer of the temple.

Is she Jewish? Has she ever converted? Rabbi Zeldin doesn't know. He has not inquired of her because "I don't want to embarrass her." A more important principle, he says, is that she is an activist in the temple. She is a positive model for her children and the Stephen S. Wise community, he says.

Rabbi Maller is sure that Schindler's admonition will be welcomed by lay and

The message that Schindler delivered last Shabbat, was the same one he first promoted in the late 1970s. He was turned away that time when Reform decided to concentrate on educating non-Jewish spouses and children of intermarriage.

Schindler is saying that now it's time to fan out across the entire country to try and interest any man or woman who is unaffiliated. Emphatically, Rabbi Schindler said that Jews should not pursue anyone who is involved in another religion.

"I think this is a great idea," Maller said, "because converts bring in enthusiasm, energy and commitment."

He will make it one of his themes at the annual weekend retreat by several dozen Temple Akiba members this weekend in Montecito. "The main theme is Judaism in the 21st Century," he said. "But if we are not successful in proselytizing in the 21st Century, there won't be many Jews left to start the 22nd Century."

The impact of non-Jews in participating at Stephen S. Wise has become stimulated in the last several years by the temple's still-new community high school, which has a whopping 292 students. Only temple members can enroll their children. That rule has brought in a number of non-Jewish families. In fact, one non-Jewish couple, prominent in the general community, regularly sit on the *bimah* at Stephen S. Wise.

Other couples are scattered throughout the sanctuary for Shabbat services. One couple recently told Zeldin, "we've been to many churches, and we have found them unfulfilling. We like what we have found here."

Will they ultimately convert? Only if they bring up the subject, Zeldin says. He will not ask them.

The rabbi said that there is "a handful" of non-Jews in the Stephen S. Wise family, which has one of the world's largest memberships.

While persecution, or the threat of it, was the main historical deterrent to proselytizing, Jews have lived in an open society in America for a century and still have not made any effort to convert

Lethargy is the explanation, Maller said. "It doesn't have anything to do with philosophy. All of us have been taught, since childhood, that it was a crime for Jews to seek converts. That lesson stuck. We also have been taught that we should stay with our own kind. It's safer."

"Most Jews I have known over the years would be in favor of going after converts. But, well, they want somebody else to do it. They just don't want to get involved. Even when someone in their own family intermarries, they agree to support the notion of having the non-Jew convert, they just don't want to take the lead."

Maller said Reform and Conservative rabbis long have been sympathetic to the notion of pursuing converts. "But it hasn't been a priority because there are too many other daily responsibilities on their agenda," he said.

In the 450-family Temple Akiba, Maller estimated, 10 per cent of its members were

converted and the other half are living a Jewish lifestyle," said Maller. "They just haven't made the formal commitment."

Non-Jews serve on the board of Akiba, but none are officers. Two vice presidents of Akiba are converts, and so is the cantor, Ilbert Phillips, an African-American. He will be featured Dec. 5 in a program about blacks and Jews at Hebrew Union College.

Non-Jews are permitted to do English readings during Shabbat services at Temple Akiba, Maller said, but they are not honored with *aliyot*.

Since the bureaucracy in Reform Judaism clanks along as it does everywhere else, with the speed of a dead dinosaur, Maller said it will be up to each individual synagogue to advertise and pursue converts.

"Every temple will have to make its own policy," said the rabbi, "because as a movement, I know from experience, it takes too long for something to happen."



*Mess*

By Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

It was with disappointment tinged with sadness that I read Prof. Jack Wertheimer's article titled, "Proselytizing is Bad for Jews."

Disappointed because he wrote a 1074 word essay on the basis of a brief report in a newspaper without taking the trouble to read my speech -- a most unprofessorial act, it seems to me.

And sadness for two reasons -- first, because his words place him among those who are ashamed of the notion of an assertive Judaism, who believe that it has little if anything to offer to the world; and second, because he fails to grasp the historic nature of the opportunity that now avails itself to offer our faith and the spiritual strength it contains to the many of our fellow Americans who have no religious affiliation but who are searching for meaning in their lives.

Indeed, Professor Wertheimer bypasses my central theme in its entirety, and instead initiates a multiparagraph diatribe against Reform Judaism and its synagogues which distorts reality and denigrates the Reform rabbinate.

Had he attended our Assembly and seen and felt the earnestness with which our nearly five thousand delegates approach their faith -- the fervor with which they voiced their prayers, the eagerness with which they engaged in Torah study -- he could not have written as he did. Come to think of it, he might have anyway, for I find that those who hate usually see ~~see~~ what they want to see and hear what their bias inclines them to hear.



Professor Wertheimer manifests such a sinat chinam, an unreasoned hatred of Reform. Just as one case in point, he writes that Reform Rabbis are "so intimidated by the Outreach 'lobby' that they will not publicly affirm the desirability of Jews marrying Jews for fear of offending or alienating interfaith families." What nonsense this! He isn't describing any Reform Rabbi I know!

Indeed, at the Baltimore Biennial, and before an audience equally massive, I made precisely the kind of plea which Professor Wertheimer accuses us of muting. I said then, that "we must lose no opportunity to persuade our children either to marry Jews or to urge their non-Jewish partners to opt for Judaism...We need to affirm our Judaism frankly, freely, proudly, and without fear that it will offend the non-Jewish spouses. Quite the contrary, it can only enhance their regard for Judaism, for if we lack in missionary zeal, they are bound to surmise that we have no message at all, or, at any rate, that we do not prize it."

This indeed, is my central thesis: that Judaism, from its very beginnings was a missionary religion; that our Tanach and subsequent rabbinic literature underscored the compelling need for such conversionary activity -- indeed, the prophets made Israel's mission a clarion call; and that it was only when our enemies instituted severely restrictive legislation that our conversionary zeal waned. But such restrictive legislation no longer inhibits us. Then why not resume our ancient vocation of being champions of Judaism?

Why does Professor Wertheimer resist the notion of an assertive Judaism? Is it that his self-image still mirrors the contempt of our

traducers? Or does he, perhaps, think that Judaism has little if anything to offer to our world?

Well, look about you and see: Look at this planet earth, riven as it is by conflicts of every conceivable kind? Would not Judaism's insistence that every human being is created in God's image provide healing for such a fractured world?

Consider the fear that shuts doors to the hungry and borders to the persecuted. Mightn't the Judaic emphasis on loving the stranger -- and the Jewish experience of being the stranger -- help to wedge open the doors of the world's conscience?

Consider the yearning in our lands for a deeper life rhythm than the rat race, a richer reward than the accumulation of wealth, a fuller purpose than just "making it." Cannot Judaism's sanctificati.. of time and space and of the daily things of life satisfy that hunger?

Yes, Judaism has and enormous amount of wisdom and experience to offer to our troubled world, and we Jews ought to be proud to proclaim it with fervor and with pride.

Professor Wertheimer charges that Reform proselytism encourages "religious switching," that we promote the trend toward religious identity as "a matter subject to easy disposal," indeed, that we are encouraging individuals "to treat religion yet as another replaceable shmate, a cheap suit...and dispose of it when the fashion passes." That is an affront not just to me personally, but above all to the many thoughtful, feeling men and women who have within their own brief lives recapitulated the entirety of the Jewish experience -- the exile, the



longing, the returning in love. He owes these people an abject apology. His intemperate language ill befits an academician. It also violates the manner in which Judaism enjoins us to behave towards those who have chosen to share our faith and fate.

And let his thoughts and language be tempered by the knowledge that fully 50% of those who are raised as Conservative Jews <sup>are currently marrying</sup> ~~also marry~~ non-Jews -- at least so the demographers instruct us.

My dream is to see our Judaism unleashed as a resource for a world in need: not as the exclusive inheritance of the few, but as a renewable resource for the many; not as a religious stream too small to be seen on the map of the world, but as a deep flowing river, hidden by the overgrown confusion of modern times, that could nourish humanity's highest aspirations.

Let us therefore be champions of Judaism. Let us not be among those who in their pain and confusion respond to the fear of self-extinction by declaring casualties before the fact; who respond to the suffering of the past by living in the past; who react to the long-drawn isolation of our people with an isolationism of their own.

Let us rather recall and act on those lofty passages from the Tenach and the Chazal, from Bible and Commentary that define Jewish "chosenness" not as exclusive but as exemplary, not as separatist but as representative, not as closed but as open, not as rejecting but as all-embracing and compassionate.

"It is too light a thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the offspring of Israel. I will also give thee for a light unto the nations, that my salvation may be unto the ends of the earth."

*Mission*

November 5, 1993  
21 Heshvan 5753

Rabbi David J. Zucker  
12227 East Amherst Circle  
Aurora, CO 80014-3303

Dear David:

Please forgive the delay in responding to your letter of October 18 which reached my office after I had left for San Francisco and the Biennial. I do hope this late response has not caused you any major inconvenience.

My Biennial President's Message deals with missionizing and I enclose a copy herewith. Please note my comments on page 18. For your perusal, I also enclose my original speech (1978) urging an Outreach program. This paper suggested proselytizing to un-churched but that section was put on a back burner when the Outreach Commission was formed.

Professor Jack Wertheimer of JTS wrote an article which appeared in the Jewish press following our Biennial. I don't have a copy but, as you can appreciate, he was in disagreement with my stance. I enclose a copy of my response herewith, It should be appearing in the Jewish press this week-end but I don't know if your local Anglo-Jewish newspaper will carry the item.

I hope all of this is of assistance to you.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



Rabbi David J. Zucker, Ph.D.  
12227 East Amherst Circle  
Aurora, Colorado 80014-3303  
(303) 750-5543

Send him  
copy of my  
speech -  
point to  
appropriate  
section

Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
UAHC  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021-7064

18 October 1993

Dear *Alex*

I had written to you about a month ago, but perhaps the letter was inadvertently misplaced.

I am preparing a paper in conjunction with Leon Klenicki which will be published by the Interfaith Department of the Anti Defamation League's "In Dialogue" series. I want to prepare a balanced article that will reflect the views of all of the major areas of thought of contemporary Judaism.

The subject of the paper will look at contemporary viewpoints on the Jewish Mission and Missionizing. It would be very helpful if you could send me any articles (addresses/ essays/ position papers) of which you are aware which address these issues. These might be your own writings or statements representative of the Movement. Likewise if you can suggest reading material published, say in the last ten years or so, this too would be helpful.

I shall probably focus on a contemporary understanding of God's statement to Abraham (Gen 12:2, 3) "you shall be a blessing . . . and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you" or Isaiah's "l'or goyim" in 42:6 and 49:6. Do we have some kind of mandate to bring God's word to the families and nations of the earth? Does it mean merely by personal or collective example? Is there a stance on the thoughts in Midrash Genesis Rabbah 39.14 that whoever brings a "heathen" to God, it is as if one had "created" that person and likewise the parallel passage in B.T. Pesachim 87b, that we were exiled in order to bring in proselytes. I do not necessarily mean going out and proselytizing or "missionizing", but rather is there still a Mission of Israel? Are we called upon to give Religious Witness to the world? Is it at least to "teach" or "show the way"? Again, is this only by example, or is there some other, more active aspect to convey the message? And what is the message?

Do we have some mission to live with the other nations of the world and to share with them the truths we have come to know? Is this restricted to personal and collective example, or is there something else that God wants us to do, something more proactive in the call "le-takken olam be-malkhut Shaddai"?

I look forward to your response.

Cordially,

*Dad*

David J. Zucker

DJZ/st



COPY ✓

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
\*PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 4, 1993  
20 Heshvan 5754

Rabbi Stephen J. Weisman  
Beth Sholom Temple  
515 Charlotte Street  
Fredericksburg VA 22401

Dear Steve:

Thank you for your thoughtful and responsible letter of October 28th. Thank you also for sending me your High Holy Days Sermon, which I have not had a chance to read yet but will take home with me for some more leisurely time I will have this weekend.

I really don't know why Joe sent this out. He did not even ask my permission to distribute the transcript of the Union's Executive Committee. Generally speaking, he has been very conservative in his approach and so has the leadership as a whole. Indeed, when I first proposed the Outreach program back in 1978, the establishment of the CCAR rose at that Board meeting to caution against my approach - Fred Gottschalk, Joe Glaser, Ely Pilchik, (who then was the President of the Conference) but by and large, when they began to see the effectiveness of this work, they changed their minds, although the reservations still continue.

As far as your specific points are concerned, first of all I, too, am painfully aware of the fact that no matter how clearly I understand what I want to say, and no matter how careful I am in phrasing and rephrasing what I intend, nonetheless, a lot of people misunderstand me. This is true for all of us, for you see, people bring their own feelings and attitudes to bear. As a consequence, they tend to see what they want to see, and hear what they are predisposed to hear. On the specific question of governance in this context, I do believe that



leadership in the congregation should be reserved for born Jews since leaders are examples and examples persuade not just by what they say, but by what they are. People tend to internalize their values primarily by identification with the ego ideals. You might look at my text - I assume you have a copy - and I am pretty clear on that issue, although my views as far as temple committees are concerned are somewhat more liberal than the consensus.

As far as your second point is concerned, I could not cover everything that I wanted to say. My speech was long enough as it is - fully 90 minutes, and that is more than most people can bear. My printed text is a little bit wider than that. But you ought to know that at the Baltimore Biennial, I addressed this specific issue:

"Yes, we should encourage Jewish romances to flourish among our youth - like Abraham who enjoined his servant, Eliezer, to find a wife for his son, Isaac, from amongst his kin, and not the Canaanites, those the strangers in whose midst he dwelt. We must not raise a generation, as Stephen Fuchs so felicitously put it in his Yom Kippur sermon, whose values are that 'people are people, love conquers all, and religion should not really be a factor when our children seek a mate.' We must, rather arouse a passion for Judaism within all young Jews, so that they will be bestirred to impart it to their soul-mates, be they born Jews or not."

I also said somewhat earlier in that speech:

"We need to affirm our Judaism frankly, freely, proudly, and without fear that it will offend the non-Jewish spouses. Quite the contrary, it can only enhance their regard for Judaism, for if we lack in missionary zeal, they are bound to surmise that we have no message at all, or, at any rate, that we do not prize it."

I am sorry that I was not able to return to this particular theme, but as indicated, I can't do everything all the time else they would drum me out of town.

I append a copy of a letter I received from our colleague, Norman Cohen of Hopkins, Minnesota, who has some fascinating things to say about the process which he used in his own temple and also about the approach which he takes when it comes to the public observance of life cycle rites. His commentary on passing the Torah and what he says in connection with that ritual as well as what he allows the non-Jewish partner to do during Aliyahs is very moving and in my judgment, very effective.

Again, my thanks for your thoughtfulness. I continue to be instructed by my colleagues.

Sincerely,

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Alexander M. Schindler







## Beth Sholom Temple

STEPHEN J. WEISMAN, Rabbi

515 Charlotte Street  
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22401  
Telephone (703) 373-4834  
Rabbi's Study 373-4879

28 October, 1993

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

Dear Alex:

As we all settle back into our "normal" modes following the biennial, I wanted to write to say thank you and *kol hakavod*. The biennial, on the whole, was all it was supposed to be. As always, your candor, insight, vision, and eloquence came through in your speech.

I have taken the liberty of enclosing copies of my three High Holy Day sermons from this year, largely in gratitude, not only for your sharing of yourself, but for your views. When I received Joe Glaser's letter with the copies of your comments and Walter's presentation, I was both concerned and confused -- not so much by your words as by Walter's, and by the total lack of clarity as to why Joe was sharing this with us.

As you can see from my rather self-serving humorous aside on Yom Kippur, I thought I read in your words what I thought I heard you repeat in San Francisco, and what I believe you clarified at breakfast on Monday -- that in matters of ritual relating specifically to life cycle celebrations, involvement of the non-Jewish parent is necessary and desirable to avoid having the child potentially stigmatized, and possible through careful thought, planning, and creativity of ritual. What I did not hear in those words was a call to allow non-Jews to be called as *aliyot* -- either according to the traditional formulation or through some alternative -- so I was certainly glad to hear that clarification.

However, I do share some of the concerns that I heard expressed by our colleagues on Monday, and wanted to reemphasize them personally with you. Unfortunately, I was one of those taken in by the alleged change in scheduling to a 7:30 starting time for the breakfast, which, compounded by the necessity of my attendance at the 8:00 meeting of the Small Congregations Committee (Norman had asked me to attend), limited my ability to talk with you personally, or even to hear much of the discussion first hand. Thus, I am reduced to sharing in this form.



The points I felt concern over were two. First, was the very cogent expression of the difference between what you thought you were saying, what we heard, and most importantly, what our congregants would hear in your words. The fact that those were, in most cases, three very different realities is quite disconcerting, not only for the potential to offend without (or even contrary to) intent, but also for the limits this necessarily places on our ability to discuss, and thereby, to educate in this area. This was a lesson which I had learned on the Holy Days, in what I felt was a very fair, open, and clear presentation (what may not appear as clearly in print when you read the text as it should have and did to my congregation is my total commitment to Outreach -- as coordinating Rabbi of the DC/MAC Intro to Judaism class, in my willingness to perform interfaith ceremonies under given circumstances (which do not compromise my understanding of the rite), and within the congregation as a full supporter of the involvement of non-Jewish partners, within clearly defined limits) of what we had already done, and still needed to do, in involving the non-Jewish partner, as part of the larger rubric of the issues of family.

In our congregation's constitutional evaluation and updating process last year, we had converted from "families" as the unit of membership, to "households," with individuals given membership rights and responsibilities, if they sought them, for being part of a household with at least one Jew. We had addressed the issues of ritual involvement earlier, although there are always new questions and challenges in this area. What we have not yet fully done is explore the bottom line when it comes to governance, in terms of clearly formulating our policy. This has proven to be our stickiest area.

My second concern was also voiced during breakfast, namely contrasting your words on Saturday, and your explanations on Monday, with the inability of our movement to any longer even take a stand expressing a preference for Jews to date and marry Jews, assumedly out of fear of alienating our Outreach constituency. It was absent from your remarks, it was absent from the resolutions, and, sadly, it is absent in the text of "What We Believe...What We Do..." as it was distributed at the biennial. I was encouraged to hear you twice use the politically incorrect "problems" in connection to intermarriage on Saturday, but this glaring absence of a strong and clear preference, all other things being equal (which we all acknowledge they rarely are), for Jews to marry Jews for the sake of Jewish continuity and survival is, I feel, a grave risk. For it is this which will be heard, and understood, most clearly by our congregations, and especially, by our youth, far more than your spoken words. I encourage and implore you to act, immediately and forcefully to correct this oversight, assuming that it is an oversight, and not indicative of your true stance, or the official policy of our movement. Alternately, if this does reflect our "official" position, I urge you to use your considerable influence to open up a re-evaluation, before too much damage is done.



Finally, and on a far more positive note, I applaud your call for a new name for our organization, and look forward over the next few years to the numerous serious and comical suggestions which will come through the pipeline in this area.

I thank you again for your leadership and inspiration, and the time that you have taken to read and respond to the reactions of one of the less significant Rabbis in our movement. I offer, as always, my time and efforts in any way you see fit and appropriate to seek them, in the important work of our movement. *Yesher koach!*

B'shalom,



Stephen Weisman,  
Rabbi

I must add one other request. I would have liked to have used the text of your San Francisco speech as part of an adult education series we are beginning that was inspired by the reaction to my High Holy Day sermons. However, in the crush of everyone exiting the hall, and being rudely herded to the lobby, I was unable to get even a single copy. How can I receive one now? Is it possible to receive as many as ten copies? If not, may I have permission to photocopy the text for internal use only? In advance, I thank you for this as well.



## SERMON FOR ROSH HASHANAH EVE 5754

It seems to have become the tradition here at Beth Sholom for the High Holy Days, for the Rabbi to set out at the very beginning of the Rosh Hashanah evening sermon a theme -- both for the year, and for the Holy Days. I can see no good reason to deviate from that tradition now, and a great deal of value in maintaining it. Knowing that there is a thread which runs through all of the presentations of the Holy Days, we are better prepared to more deeply take in all of the significance of each of the presentations in proper perspective, using parts of one to elucidate parts of another. Knowing that there is something binding them together, we are more likely to find a relevance to ideas and statements which might otherwise have gone unrecognized. The question, then, is simply finding an appropriate theme.

Those of you who read the View from the Pulpit this month know that if you take the Hebrew letters for our new year 5754 -- הושע -- and rearrange them, you get הושע -- to cause to grow. Let us pray that this is a year of growth -- physical, emotional, and spiritual -- for each of us as individuals, and for our congregation, community, and world.

We have already seen ample proof that 5754 can be a year of growth -- those of you who were here Sunday for the opening of Religious School and the rededication of the Marlowe Education Building know what I mean! We start this year with increased numbers -- of participants in worship, of identified members of the Jewish community, of members and potential members, of children in our religious school. This is the first full year in which we will operate under our new congregational constitution, the first year of an established building fund, a year in which the Long Range Planning committee will begin to tackle the challenges of our next Temple building, and a year in which we have already begun, and will continue to improve our current building. The Board has taken careful measures to develop a very responsible operating plan of repairs and improvements for our Temple based upon both need and value, to insure that while we remain here we are operating at full strength in a safe, attractive, and productive building, without pouring money unnecessarily into things we will leave behind when the time comes. And, lest we be perceived as being interested in cosmetic changes, we have worked to improve what goes on in this building as well, and will continue to do so.

We need to grow in other ways -- as a community. This growth is far more than a mere numbers game. It is growth in how we treat each other and ourselves, how we view our community and our part in it, how we embrace communal responsibilities, how we help each other in times of need and celebrate together in times of joy, how we model for others the behaviors and treatments we hope to receive ourselves, how we support our communal institutions with time, money, and our physical presence, and so much more.

For years, philosophers and sociologists alike have contended that the dual foundation stones of the Jewish people have been our familial and communal structures. Clearly, both of these have been critical to not only understanding Jews and Judaism, but also to defining its very core, its essence. The strength that families and their members have gained, and some still do, from the table rituals of Shabbat, from gathering for seder, or to light the chanukiah at Channukah, the support that individuals have received from the community, particularly in times of individual or collective need, speak eloquently to this.

While there is absolutely no question as to the veracity of labeling our family and community structures as critical factors in the continuity and survival of Judaism, I would contend that there is a third, equally significant and essential piece, that even this cursory evaluation of the significance of the other two factors points up -- the importance of the individual. Especially for us, as Reform Jews, who put such a high value on autonomy -- on the need and right of each individual Jew to decide for himself or herself the particulars of their belief, practice, and identity -- this must be a part of our equation.

There is an advantage to adding this third foundation piece. Just as the Jewish people has been stronger for having two foundation stones, rather than one, the addition of a third should make us even stronger. If you take a paper pyramid, and try to balance it along one of



its edges, you know that it is much harder to balance that way, than by setting it on one of its triangular sides as a base.

However, with this greater strength comes more potential for weakness. There are two specific problems here. First, as we all know from our studies of mathematics in school, the triangle has some strange properties. If one of the three points of the triangle changes even slightly, either the whole triangle must shift its position as well, or the nature of the triangle itself changes -- sides get longer or shorter, the angles between them become more obtuse or acute. The second is contained in the first -- the question of determining whether all will change together, or the whole will be changed. Unless all the points work together, like a skilled team of rowers in a racing shell, the actions of the one or more forces acting out of unison will totally undermine the efforts of all the others.

For us, as the Jewish people, with our triangular base of support, both of these concerns weigh mightily. Our world is constantly changing -- witness the events of the last week in the Middle East -- and therefore, our community, as an institution which is part of the larger world, is changing. Thus, we need to change with it, both as individuals and as families, in order to keep our triangular base intact, albeit in a different location. If we fail to do so, our actual foundation changes. The difference between the one and the other is the degree to which we are in sync with our community as families and individuals -- the greater and deeper our involvement, the more likely that the things which change the community will directly, and automatically, affect us, so that our shifting occurs almost imperceptibly. The less well connected we are to the community, however, the more each shift becomes a potentially catastrophic event, requiring our immediate and undivided attention.

Turning to another of the points on the triangle, as individuals, we would seem to be beyond having significant impact. After all, what can any individual do? However, that is not an accurate assessment, when it comes to gauging the impact of the individual, especially in a community the size of ours. Each of us can, and does, dramatically impact and determine the nature of the triangle in our own lives, our families, and our communities. When we gain a new member, with new ideas, and new energy, we all benefit. When another member's life changes in a manner which requires them to reevaluate their involvements and priorities, and change their participation in the life of the congregation, eventually, all of us are affected. The impact may seem negligible, or occur significantly after the fact, but it will cause a change in the triangle nonetheless.

Please don't misunderstand the point here -- both individual and community are essential to the Jewish people. Requiring members to march in lock step is, in fact, defeating the strength of the triangle, by obliterating the value and strength of individualism. Likewise, although we want to encourage and empower every person to be as self-fulfilled and self-fulfilling, both Jewishly and generally, as they are able, we cannot afford to do so without also instilling a clear and solid understanding of the need and importance of the community. For when the individual removes themselves from the community, again we lose the support of the triangle, and return to the precarious nature of the line.

Rabbi Hillel was not merely speaking for the sake of the organized community when he said "Al tifrosh min hatzibur -- do not separate yourself from the community." He had an acute awareness of the dichotomy we have just observed, which he stated in one of his most famous aphorisms: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?

Clearly, there are times and situations in which individual and communal needs and directions appear to be in conflict, pulling against each other, as the rowers out of sync that we mentioned earlier. In some cases, the conflict between the two may even be actual, and not merely perceptual. In those cases, there is obviously a need for a moderating force between the two, a forum in which feedback and an external ear and voice can inform the situation. The family can, and probably should, be in a position to play that role.

Just as clearly, the community is the pillar most likely to be affected by events and circumstances beyond our control. On the opposite end, the individual would seem to be the most likely and most frequent to change. Therefore, if we were to try to determine which is the



most stable of the three pillars, in its most basic structure, an attribute quite useful in playing the role of moderator, we would probably have to conclude that it is the family which is the anchor point of the triangle, supporting the varieties of individuals and the vagueries of the larger world, serving as a buffer, and working to maintain the tradition, the heritage of Judaism in a fairly stable and consistent form, in the face of often conflicting forces, both internal and external.

Thus, if we were to focus on the viability of the Jewish people, if we were to try to analyze the possibilities and the potential for the future of Jewish life, we would probably choose to focus first and primarily on the family. In truth, that is the approach that most experts, who make their living at this process, have taken, and thus, most of the survey data and analysis points us in that direction.

The centrality of the role of the family in the life of the Jewish people has been clear for thousands of years. It is a support both to its individual members, and to the community as a whole, as well as having significance on its own. 800 years ago, Maimonides summarized the role of parents when he said: There are four things a parent must provide for their child: an ability to read Torah, skills with which to earn a living, a spouse, and the ability to swim. While the first three are expected and seem obvious, it is the fourth which puts the whole statement in perspective. With the addition of the fourth, what all these things have in common is their importance in insuring the survival of the child, and of the tradition -- the individual and the communal. The role of the community in these things was entirely secondary and supportive -- it was the role of the community to make sure that the resources and opportunities were provided so that parents could fulfill these obligations. It is assumed that the role of the individual child in this case was to be willing to accept the importance and need for these things, and a willingness to work along with parents and others in obtaining them.

Where we have failed, in our modern world, and show no sign of improving, is in recognizing this very reality -- that none of these three pillars stand alone, isolated. None acts individually, none is protected by a vacuum. In fact, a proper analysis MUST, of necessity, analyze all three of these factors, even if it only focuses on one. Because, particularly as pertains to the family, the primary, if not the only, factors of influence, and therefore change, are the individual and the community. Families rarely, if ever, change without there being either an internal influence from one of its members, or an external push from the community.

So, while it is very useful to have data like the Committee of Jewish Federations survey from 1991, which has been quoted and analyzed *ad nauseam*, it must be evaluated and understood in a larger context which explains the individual and communal influences on the family, as well as the familial changes which were noted as well. Otherwise, it is not taking the realities of Jewish life into account.

The evidence in these surveys makes one important point painfully clear, at least. The reality of the Jewish family, however, at least today, is not nearly as stable as the empirical evidence we have already presented would otherwise lead us to believe. In fact, as a group of Rabbinical students discovered several years back, and others of us have commented on since, even agreeing on a working and workable definition of the term "family" in today's reality is a far greater task than most of us are aware of, or up to. As such, as the moderating force between the individual and the community, as the anchor point of the base of the triangle that is our Judaism and our life, if this concept of family is weaker than we would like or hope or expect, then so too is our Judaism and the Jewish people weaker than they should be.

So as we start 5754, which we hope to make a year of growth, we will focus on the family, in the hope that with a deeper understanding of both its current realities and its ideal role Jewishly, we can make up whatever strength has been lost to external change. We will look at the family in the larger Jewish context, particularly as it affects both the individual and the community, and therefore, by extension, the Jewish people as a whole. We will do so through a prism of the High Holy Days and its liturgy, taking the words that we are so familiar



with and focused on at this time, and using them to try to learn some deeper truths which will help us to better understand ourselves, and those with whom we work to create our community. May it be a fruitful journey into knowledge and insight, providing us with the ability to withstand the external and internal factors which threaten us, as they have every generation of the Jewish people, with disaster or destruction. Individually and collectively, knowledge and awareness will lead to strength -- strength necessary for the continuation of what we recognize, and are hopefully comfortable with as Judaism.



## SERMON FOR KOL NIDREI 5754

LAST WEEK, AS WE BEGAN OUR CELEBRATION OF THE NEW YEAR, WE LOOKED AT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FAMILY WITHIN JUDAISM, AND THE IMPACT THAT SOCIETAL CHANGE HAS HAD ON THE FAMILY AND OUR JEWISH COMMUNITY. MANY OF YOU, FAR MORE THAN USUAL FOR A SERMON, EVEN A HIGH HOLY DAY SERMON, SPOKE TO ME ABOUT IT AFTERWARDS. I THANK ALL OF YOU FOR YOUR HONESTY, YOUR ATTENTION, AND YOUR RESPONSE. WHAT WAS SAID WAS NOT EASY TO SAY, NOR, I KNOW, WAS IT EASY TO HEAR. THE TRUTH FREQUENTLY ISN'T. BUT THAT DOES NOT CHANGE THE FACT THAT WE MUST DEAL WITH IT, HONESTLY AND AS IT IS, IN ORDER TO MOVE AHEAD AND GROW.

ON THIS KOL NIDREI NIGHT, I WOULD LIKE TO FOLLOW THE SAME FORMAT AS WE FOLLOWED LAST WEEK -- BEGINNING WITH A LOOK AT PART OF THE LITURGY OF THE DAY, AND THEN APPLYING OUR NEWLY GAINED INSIGHTS IN FURTHER EXPLORING THE FAMILY AND ITS VARIOUS ISSUES. THE PRAYER WE WILL TURN OUR FOCUS TO IS KOL NIDREI ITSELF.

"LET ALL OUR VOWS AND OATHS, ALL THE PROMISES WE MAKE AND THE OBLIGATIONS WE INCUR TO YOU, O GOD, BETWEEN THIS YOM KIPPUR AND THE NEXT, BE NULL AND VOID SHOULD WE, AFTER HONEST EFFORT, FIND OURSELVES UNABLE TO FULFILL THEM. THEN MAY WE BE ABSOLVED OF THEM."

WE SAY THESE WORDS EACH YEAR -- IN FACT, WE MAKE AN EFFORT TO ATTEND THE **SYNAGOGUE** TO SAY THESE WORDS ON THIS DAY, AN EFFORT FAR GREATER THAN ANY OTHER WE MAKE IN RELATION TO OUR COMMUNITY AND THIS BUILDING. IF WE ARE FORCED TO BE OUT OF TOWN, UNLESS WE ARE GOING OUT OF TOWN BY CHOICE TO BE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS ON THIS OCCASION, WE FEEL AN ABSENCE -- IT ISN'T THE SAME. WE MAKE SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS TO MAKE SURE THAT WHEREVER WE ARE, WE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND A SYNAGOGUE AND A CONGREGATION IN WHICH AND WITH WHICH TO RECITE THESE WORDS. SO WE TAKE A MOMENT NOW, AT THIS SPECIAL TIME, TO SAY TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT HERE -- "WE MISS YOU! HURRY BACK!" AND TO THOSE WHO ARE WITH US JUST FOR THE HOLY DAY, WHETHER BECAUSE THIS IS THE "SOMEPLACE ELSE" IN WHICH YOU FIND YOURSELF, OR BECAUSE YOU CHOOSE TO ONLY JOIN US ON THESE DAYS, WE SAY "WELCOME! WE'RE GLAD YOU ARE HERE WITH US, HELPING US TO FIND STRENGTH TO FACE OURSELVES AND OUR GOD! MAY WE BE THAT SAME SUPPORT TO YOU!" AND WE ADD THE HOPE THAT YOU, TOO, WILL HURRY BACK, AND JOIN US AGAIN, BEFORE WE EVEN HAVE THE CHANCE TO MISS YOU!

BUT EVEN WITH THE TREMENDOUS EFFORT WE MAKE TO BE IN SYNAGOGUE TO SAY THESE WORDS, EVEN WITH THE SPECIAL RESTRICTIONS ON ENTERING AND LEAVING THE SANCTUARY WHILE THEY ARE BEING SUNG AND READ AND MEDITATED UPON, EVEN WITH THE POWER OF THE MELODY WHICH ACCOMPANIES THEM, JUST AS WE SAW ON ROSH HASHANAH, HOW MANY OF US, IF ASKED, COULD GIVE A COMPREHENSIVE EXPLANATION OF WHAT KOL NIDREI IS ALL ABOUT?

IN FACT, THE VAST MAJORITY OF US HAVE A BASIC MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE MEANING AND FUNCTION OF THIS PRAYER. WE THINK OF IT AS A RELEASE FROM THOSE PROMISES AND VOWS MADE WHICH WE WERE UNABLE TO KEEP IN THE PRECEDING YEAR. IN FACT, IT IS NOT THAT AT ALL, BUT RATHER A DISCLAIMER FOR WHAT WE ARE ABOUT TO DO IN THE COMING YEAR.

THERE IS A POWER IN HAVING THE HUMILITY AT THE MOMENT OF MOST AWESOME CONFRONTATION WITH OUR GOD TO ADMIT THAT WE ARE LIKELY TO NEED TO INVOKE THE TERMS OF THIS SMALL PRINT ON OUR CONTRACT DURING THE COMING YEAR -- THAT WE ARE HUMAN, THAT WE WILL MAKE MISTAKES AND SUFFER FAILURES. HOW MANY OF US IN THE REAL WORLD, WHEN GIVEN A CHOICE BETWEEN FESSING UP TO AN ERROR, OR HOPING TO HAVE IT SLIDE BY UNNOTICED, CHOOSE THE LATTER. HOW MUCH MORE, THEN, WOULD WE BE EXPECTED TO DO SIMILARLY AT THIS MOMENT



OF HEIGHTENED SIGNIFICANCE AND CONSEQUENCE, AS WE HOPE TO APPROACH EACH OTHER AND GOD.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THERE IS ALSO A TRAP. HAVING ALREADY ESTABLISHED THIS "ESCAPE CLAUSE," THERE MAY BE MOMENTS IN WHICH WE ARE NOW COMFORTABLE IN SAYING TO OURSELVES, "AT LEAST I HAVE A REASON FOR HAVING SAID KOL NIDREI NOW," FINDING A COMFORT TOO SECURE IN NOT MAKING OUR BEST EFFORT, BUT ALLOWING SOMETHING TO SLIDE BY IMPERFECTLY. WHILE WE ALL EXPERIENCE TIMES IN WHICH THAT WOULD BE WELCOME, OR EVEN NECESSARY, OR EVEN SUCCUMB TO THAT TEMPTATION, THAT IS NOT THE INTENT OF THE EXERCISE.

NO, THE KEY WORDS ARE "... SHOULD WE, AFTER HONEST EFFORT, FIND OURSELF UNABLE TO FULFILL THEM." FIRST WE MUST MAKE THE HONEST EFFORT. WE MUST ENTER INTO EACH UNDERTAKING PLANNING, EXPECTING, AND WORKING TO MAKE IT AS SUCCESSFUL AS POSSIBLE. IF WE CAN'T MAKE THAT ASSUMPTION WITH RELATIVE EASE, IF WE CAN'T START OUT EXPECTING TO SUCCEED, WE PROBABLY OUGHT NOT ENTER INTO THE PROCESS IN THE FIRST PLACE. BUT HERE TOO, DON'T LET THAT SERVE AS A SIMILAR TRAP -- DON'T HEAR THAT AWARENESS AS AN EXCUSE NOT TO PUSH OURSELVES TO DO ALL THAT WE CAN AND ACCOMPLISH ALL WE HAVE WITHIN US TO DO. THAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS INDIVIDUALS TO OUR FAMILIES AND OUR COMMUNITY, IN RETURN FOR THE SUPPORT WE RECEIVE. AS THE OLD CLICHE GOES: IF YOU NEED TO GET SOMETHING DONE, ASK A BUSY PERSON TO DO IT.

ONCE WE HAVE BEGUN, WE ARE EXPECTED TO DO ALL THAT WE CAN TO GET IT DONE. HOWEVER, WE ARE TAUGHT -- YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO COMPLETE THE TASK, BUT NEITHER ARE YOU FREE TO LEAVE OFF FROM IT. NO ONE SHOULD EVER BE FORCED TO FEEL THAT THEY **MUST** GET SOMETHING DONE, OR ELSE IT WON'T GET DONE -- THAT IS WHERE COMMUNITY AND FAMILY MUST SUPPORT THE INDIVIDUAL -- BUT NEITHER ARE WE FREE TO JUST WALK AWAY ONCE WE'VE STARTED, UNTIL THE PROCESS IS COMPLETED, UNTIL WE'VE DONE ALL THAT WE CAN.

AND THEN, ONLY AFTER ALL OF THAT, OUR BEST EFFORTS AND INTENTIONS, IF WE STILL COME UP SHORT, ARE WE ALLOWED THE LUXURY OF REMEMBERING THE WORDS OF KOL NIDREI WE ASKED FOR THIS NIGHT -- WHICH WILL THEN AND ONLY THEN FREE US FROM RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FAILURE.

THAT IS THE FUNCTION, THE POWER OF KOL NIDREI. LIKE ALL OF THE PRAYERS WE UTTER ON THIS DAY OF AWE AND ATONEMENT, IN WHICH WE ACKNOWLEDGE OUR HUMAN SHORTCOMINGS, IT IS WRITTEN AND RECITED IN THE PLURAL. IT IS EASIER FOR EACH OF US AS INDIVIDUALS TO ADMIT OUR OWN WEAKNESSES WHEN WE KNOW THAT NOT ONLY IS EVERYONE ELSE GATHERED HERE DOING THE SAME THING, AND ADMITTING THE SAME WEAKNESSES, BUT ALSO WHEN THE ADMISSION IS IN THE PLURAL. THIS IS A BIT OF A CRUTCH, IN THAT IT ALLOWS US TO SLIP PART OF OUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY BY SAYING "WE" INSTEAD OF "I", BUT "WE" IS STILL BETTER THAN THE LACK OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE THE REALITY FOR SO MANY OF US.

THERE IS AN INSTITUTION WITHIN OUR FAMILIAL AND COMMUNAL LIFE WHICH FUNCTIONS VERY SIMILARLY TO KOL NIDREI -- ONE WHICH INVOLVES VOWS, AND SELF-EVALUATION, AND GROWTH, BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND WITH ANOTHER, ONE WHICH IS OUR ESCAPE FROM LIFE'S STORMS AND CHALLENGES. THAT INSTITUTION IS THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE.

SO TONIGHT, WE LOOK AT MARRIAGE -- A SACRAMENT; A HOLY UNION; THE BASIS FOR FAMILY, THE GREATEST OF THE TRIAD OF THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. IN OUR WORLD, THOUGH, EVEN THE REALITY OF OUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS ON THIS SUBJECT HAS BEEN GREATLY CHALLENGED -- LIVING TOGETHER, PRE-MARITAL SEX, FEMINISM AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY, ADOPTION, DIVORCE, INTERMARRIAGE, GAY AND LESBIAN RIGHTS, AND SO MUCH



MORE, HAVE ALL BROUGHT MAJOR PRESSURES AND CHANGES TO THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF FAMILY. IT IS TRULY, A WHOLE NEW WORLD.

IF, AS IT SEEMS, THE JEWISH TRADITION VIEWS MARRIAGE AS BEING THE NECESSARY PASSAGE THROUGH WHICH NEW JEWISH FAMILIES AND A NEW JEWISH GENERATION ARE ACHIEVED, THEN THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT QUESTION WE MUST ASK IS "IS THIS NECESSARILY STILL THE CASE?" AS WE NOTED ON ROSH HASHANAH, WHAT WITH SINGLE PARENT ADOPTION, DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE, CHILDREN BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK, IN VITRO FERTILIZATION, ETC., IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT "FAMILY" AS A BASIC CONCEPT NEEDS TO BE (RE)DEFINED VERY CAREFULLY.

IN THE CLOSING DAYS OF MY TRAINING AT HUC-JIR, A GROUP OF CLASSMATES AND I GOT INTO A DISCUSSION AFTER A PRESENTATION, WHICH QUICKLY DEVOLVED INTO A DEBATE AS TO THE FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION OF THE TERM FAMILY IN OUR WORLD. FEWER THAN 50% OF JEWISH FAMILIES -- OF AMERICAN FAMILIES IN GENERAL, FOR THAT MATTER -- FIT THE OZZIE AND HARRIET INSPIRED DEFINITION ANY MORE! FURTHER, WHAT WE DISCOVERED, ONLY AFTER SEVERAL DAYS OF HEATED BACK AND FORTH, WAS THAT THE ONLY REALISTIC DEFINITION IS BOTH DANGEROUSLY VAGUE AND SELF DEFINING -- ANY GROUP OF TWO OR MORE PEOPLE WHO HAVE AGREED TO SHARE A HOUSEHOLD, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND MUTUAL RESPECT AND LOVE WITH THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THAT GROUP, AND CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE A FAMILY. ANYTHING MORE LIMITING THAN THAT LEFT OUT REAL SITUATIONS WHICH TOO MANY OF US FELT UNCOMFORTABLE EXCLUDING, EVEN THOUGH WE ALL RECOGNIZED HOW BROAD THIS NON-DEFINITION REALLY IS.

IT WAS PARTIALLY WITH THIS EXPERIENCE IN MIND, THAT I WAS VERY GLAD AND PROUD TO SEE THOSE WHO DEVELOPED OUR NEW CONGREGATIONAL CONSTITUTION ELIMINATE THE "FAMILY" AS THE BASIC MEMBERSHIP UNIT, REPLACING IT WITH INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, AND REFERENCES TO HOUSEHOLDS. HOWEVER, IT WAS NOT WITHOUT A LITTLE CONCERN, WHICH WE NEED TO ADDRESS HERE. THE REMOVAL OF THE "FAMILY UNIT" CANNOT BE CONSTRUED AS A STATEMENT OF VALUES. I AM, AS A RABBI, AND I HOPE WE ALL ARE, STILL ABSOLUTELY COMMITTED TO THE IDEAL OF THE JEWISH FAMILY, AND SUPPORTIVE OF ITS UNIQUE AND UNQUESTIONED ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS OF JEWS. IF I, AND WE, WEREN'T SO COMMITTED, HOW THEN COULD WE JUSTIFY THIS KIND OF FOCUS ON ISSUES OF FAMILY AND FAMILY VALUES AT THIS SEASON? COMBINED WITH THIS, HOWEVER, IS THE NECESSARY AWARENESS THAT OTHER CHOICES AND LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES LEAD TO OTHER REALITIES, NONE OF WHICH IS, BY ITS NATURE OR DEFINITION, JEWISHLY "WRONG" OR "BAD." THESE ALTERNATIVES DO HOWEVER, IN GENERAL, MAKE THE TRANSMITTAL OF CLEAR JEWISH TEACHINGS, VALUES, AND MESSAGES, WHICH ARE SO TRADITIONALLY BOUND UP IN THE MODEL OF THE "JEWISH FAMILY," HARDER FOR ALL INVOLVED, AND THEREFORE REQUIRE MORE AND BETTER EFFORT.

AS WE WERE VERY CLEAR AT THE CRITICAL JUNCTURE LAST WEEK, LET US AGAIN PLEASE BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT HAS JUST BEEN SAID. TRADITIONAL, PURELY JEWISH, 2 PARENTS BOTH BORN JEWISH, LIVING TOGETHER WITH CHILDREN IN THE SAME HOUSE, THIS PICTURE OF THE FAMILY IS BEST, ALL OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL; OTHERS ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURES ARE OKAY, BUT MORE OF A CHALLENGE. DO NOT CONFUSE THIS EMPIRICALLY TRUE STATEMENT WITH A STATEMENT AGAINST CONVERSION, INTERMARRIAGE, DIVORCE, ETC. REALITY IS REALITY, AND THE IDEAL USUALLY HAS LITTLE OR NOTHING TO DO WITH REALITY. FURTHERMORE, NOT ACHIEVING THE IDEAL IS NOT AT ALL AUTOMATICALLY SYNONYMOUS WITH FAILURE. THE ONLY REASON I DARE TO MAKE THESE STATEMENTS, BESIDES MY BELIEF IN THEIR VERACITY, IS THAT I TRUST THAT WE ALL KNOW WHERE I STAND ON THE RELATED ISSUES, AND THAT HAS NOT AND WILL NOT CHANGE! I, AND WE, WILL CONTINUE TO BE WELCOMING AND OPEN TO ANY JEW, REGARDLESS OF THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES, AND TO ANY NON-JEW WHO IS RELATED TO THEM, EVEN TO THOSE UNCONNECTED NON-JEWS WHO ARE SINCERELY INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT JUDAISM! I, AND WE,



WILL CONTINUE TO TREAT EVERYONE FAIRLY, AND EQUALLY, TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY, REGARDLESS OF THEIR PERSONAL AND FAMILIAL CIRCUMSTANCES. TO DO ANY LESS WOULD BE UNFAITHFUL TO THE JEWISH TRADITION WE ARE ALL TRYING TO MAINTAIN AND PASS ON.

BUT THERE, AS SHAKESPEARE WOULD SAY, IS THE RUB. IF WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE MAJORITY OF HOUSEHOLD SITUATIONS OF OUR MEMBERS ARE LESS THAN IDEAL FOR THE LIVING, TEACHING, AND TRANSMISSION OF OUR JEWISH TRADITION, WE ARE MOST LIKELY TO BEND OUR ENERGIES, OUR ATTENTION, AND OUR EFFORTS TO OVERCOMING THOSE DIFFICULTIES. HOWEVER, IF WE DO SO, THE TAIL WAGS THE DOG. WE FIND OURSELVES GIVING IN TO THE VERY FORCES WE ARE WORKING TO OVERCOME.

FURTHERMORE, WE NEED TO BE VERY CLEAR IN MAKING POLICIES ABOUT WHO CAN AND CANNOT DO CERTAIN THINGS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY, AND WE EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANTLY NEED TO EXPRESS THESE LIMITATIONS CLEARLY TO ALL IN OUR COMMUNITY, SO THAT THERE IS FULL UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS ALLOWED AND APPROPRIATE, UP FRONT, RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING. TO SOME, THIS LAST STATEMENT MAY SEEM A BIT LUDICROUS IN A CONGREGATION OUR SIZE. HOW CAN WE AFFORD TO TALK ABOUT NOT ALLOWING PEOPLE TO DO CERTAIN THINGS, WE WHO ARE ALL INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY SO STRAPPED FOR TIME TO GIVE? YET, THERE ARE CERTAIN CLEAR ISSUES HERE, AND RECENTLY, THE UAHC BOARD SPENT AN ENTIRE DAY EXPLORING THE ISSUES RELATING TO THE NON-JEW IN THE CONGREGATION, SOLELY FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES!

OUT OF THAT EFFORT CAME A MAILING WHICH I RECEIVED, WHICH CONTAINED THE TEXTS OF TWO SPEECHES -- ONE BY RABBI WALTER JACOB, PRESIDENT OF THE CCAR, THE OTHER BY RABBI ALEXANDER SCHINDLER, PRESIDENT OF THE UAHC -- AND WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE THOUGHTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CCAR. THE THREE PRESENTATIONS WERE VERY ENLIGHTENING, AND I WILL BE HAPPY TO SHARE THEM IN MORE DETAIL WITH THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED.

IN SUMMARY, RABBI JACOB SEEMED TO BE SPEAKING MORE WITH HIS TRADITIONAL HEART THAN WITH HIS PRAGMATIC MIND, MAKING COMMENTS WHICH, WHILE TECHNICALLY ACCURATE AND CLEARLY HEARTFELT, WERE HARDLY CONDUCTIVE TO PROBLEM SOLVING AND INCREASED UNDERSTANDING. SCHINDLER, AS USUAL, SPOKE ELOQUENTLY, AND WITH OBVIOUS THOUGHT HAVING BEEN GIVEN TO THE VERY DIFFICULT MAZE OF TOPICS AT HAND. AS FOR RABBI GLASER, I AM STILL NOT AT ALL CLEAR WHAT HE HOPED TO ACHIEVE BY SHARING THESE TEXTS, OR BY HIS OWN COMMENTS, BUT I HAVE TO BELIEVE HE FINDS HIMSELF MUCH MORE ON THE SIDE OF JACOB THAN SCHINDLER, WHICH IS PARTICULARLY FRIGHTENING, IN THAT IT REPRESENTS THE SAME REACTIONARY, OVERLY CONSERVATIVE, ISOLATIONIST OVERVIEW WHICH IT SEEMS OUR ENTIRE COUNTRY IS HEADING TOWARDS -- FAR FROM THE POSITION WE WOULD EXPECT OR HOPE FOR FROM THE LEADERS OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT.

MANY OF THE ISSUES EACH RAISED ARE ESSENTIAL, AND MOST OF THEIR VIEWS ARE ACCURATE AND GERMAINE. I WANT TO SHARE PIECES OF THEM WITH YOU, SO THAT YOU CAN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND JUST HOW COMPLEX THE ISSUES ARE!

JACOB'S BASIC CONTENTION IS THAT THE NON - JEW, EVEN AS THE SPOUSE OF A MEMBER, AND THE PARENT OF ACTIVELY INVOLVED, JEWISHLY IDENTIFIED AND IDENTIFYING CHILDREN, CANNOT BE A MEMBER OF A CONGREGATION. YET HE MAKES THIS STATEMENT WITHOUT EVER DEFINING WHAT IT IS THAT A MEMBER IS, DOES, OR RECEIVES (HE DOES ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY SHOULD BE WELCOME AT SERVICES AS PART OF THE CONGREGATION, AND AT PROGRAMS AND EVENTS), OR NOTING THE SOURCE OF HIS BELIEF. HE DEFINES THE SYNAGOGUE AS A HOUSE OF WORSHIP, BUT COMPLETELY IGNORES ITS ROLES AS HOUSE OF STUDY AND HOUSE OF GATHERING. HE APPEARS NOT TO TRUST NON - JEWS, FOR THEIR INABILITY TO GIVE UP THEIR



BELIEF, AND HE TENDS TO VIEW THEM MONOLITHICLY, STILL AS CHRISTIANS (AS IF NO OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUP INTERMARRIES WITH JEWS!). HE CONFUSES THE CONCEPTS OF PERCEPTION AND REALITY, AND THEIR RECEPTION BY THOSE HE DEFINES AS OUTSIDE THE GROUP -- THOSE IN FACT MOST LIKELY TO BE SO CONFUSED THEMSELVES!

BUT THEN THERE IS HIS MOST DAMAGING AND DANGEROUS PARAGRAPH --

"THE NON-JEW KNOWS THAT IT WOULD BE ABSURD TO HAVE A JEW ASSIST A MASS OR TAKE COMMUNION IN A CATHOLIC CHURCH....A NON-JEW MAY SWIM IN THE POOL OF A JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER WITHOUT BEING JEWISH, AND PERHAPS EVEN BELONG TO IT, BUT ONE MAY CERTAINLY NOT BELONG TO A SYNAGOGUE WHICH HAS A DEFINITE IDEOLOGY WITHOUT BEING COMMITTED TO THAT IDEOLOGY. ANYTHING ELSE WOULD BE AN ABSURDITY."

AS TO HIS FIRST STATEMENT, AS OBVIOUS AS IT SEEMS, IS IT TRUE? HOW IS IT THAT SO MANY CONGREGATIONS IN THIS MOVEMENT AND IN OTHER BRANCHES CAN BE COMFORTABLE THEN WITH NON-JEWISH VOICES IN THEIR CHOIRS ON THE HIGH HOLY DAYS, AND HOW CAN SOME EVEN HIRE NON-JEWISH "CANTORS," WHILE THE SINCERE, DEDICATED MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY, IF NOT THE CONGREGATION, IS TO BE TREATED DIFFERENTLY, AND NOT EVEN AS A MEMBER? STOP AND THINK WHERE WE WOULD BE HERE AT BETH SHOLOM WITHOUT THE SIGNIFICANT INVOLVEMENTS OF MANY OF OUR TECHNICALLY NON-JEWISH MEMBERS. AND, WHILE WE'RE AT IT, HOW MANY OF US EVEN MAKE A DISTINCTION IN OUR OWN MINDS BETWEEN THEM AND OTHER MEMBERS?

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE HELD THE JEWS WHO BELONG TO SYNAGOGUES TO THE SAME STANDARD OF COMMITMENT TO IDEOLOGY WHICH HE PROPOSES, MAYBE NOT HERE, BUT IN LARGER COMMUNITIES, HOW MANY JEWS WOULD FAIL TO LIVE UP TO THIS LITMUS TEST? YET NO ONE HAS EVER QUESTIONED EITHER OF THESE REALITIES PUBLICLY!

AS TO HIS SECOND POINT, HOW MANY CONGREGATIONS HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED, POSITIVELY STATED IDEOLOGIES? WE DON'T! AND THOSE WHICH DO, HOW MANY OF THEIR MEMBERS ARE AWARE OF THEM? NOT MANY! AND HOW MANY OF THOSE THAT ARE LEFT, ARE WORDED INCLUSIVELY AND NOT EXCLUSIVELY? EVEN FEWER! SO, HOW THEN, CAN WE JUSTIFIABLY EXCLUDE ANYONE FROM MEMBERSHIP IN A REFORM CONGREGATION, WHERE AUTONOMOUS RESPONSIBILITY IS THE KEY, ON IDEOLOGICAL GROUNDS?

IN CONTRAST, SCHINDLER, WHILE ALSO AVOIDING THE PITFALL OF TRYING TO DEFINE TEMPLE MEMBERSHIP, AT LEAST HAS THE WHEREWITHAL TO DIVIDE IT INTO THREE GERMAINE AND DISTINCT AREAS -- MEMBERSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND INVOLVEMENT IN RITUAL. HIS BASIC ANSWERS ARE ABSOLUTELY YES TO MEMBERSHIP IF IT IS SOUGHT OUT, IN THE HOPES OF ENCOURAGING CONVERSION AND EDUCATING THE CHILDREN JEWISHLY (HE EVEN QUOTES RABBI LEO BAECK, ONE OF THIS CENTURY'S LEADING TRADITIONAL JEWISH MINDS AND LEADERS, IN SUPPORT OF THIS POSITION); CLEAR, CONSISTENT LIMITS TO LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE; AND CAREFUL PLANNING OF HOW LIFE-CYCLE AND OTHER RITUALS ARE CELEBRATED BEYOND THIS ISSUE, SO THAT INTERFAITH ISSUES DO NOT CREATE A DISTINCTION IN PRACTICE, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME, THEIR CELEBRATION IS UNIQUELY AND APPROPRIATELY JEWISH.

IT IS GRATIFYING TO FIND SCHINDLER AGREEING WITH ME ON ALL THREE OF THESE POINTS (PAUSE FOR CHUCKLE!). HOWEVER, AS TO THE FIRST TWO, I AM CONCERNED THAT WE STILL HAVE NOT, AS A MOVEMENT, GIVEN THE SAME CAREFUL, PRAGMATIC ATTENTION NECESSARY TO FULLY UNDERSTANDING AND RESOLVING THE RELATED ISSUES THAT THE THIRD ONE HAS RECEIVED.

OUR NEW TEMPLE CONSTITUTION, WHICH MAKES ALL INDIVIDUALS OF JEWISH, FEE PAYING HOUSEHOLDS MEMBERS, MEANS THAT THE NON - JEW IS A MEMBER HERE, AS WELL AS THE JEW, IF THEY CHOOSE TO BE. HOWEVER, OUR CHANGE TO



INDIVIDUALS AND HOUSEHOLDS, INSTEAD OF FAMILIES, PUTS US AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF THE MOVEMENT IN THIS AREA. LONG THOUGHT WENT INTO DETERMINING THE DEFINITIONS BY WHICH WE MADE OTHER DECISIONS. IN ADDITION, WE DISCOVERED THAT MANY ISSUES WHICH WE THOUGHT WERE RESOLVED WERE REOPENED BY THIS CHANGE, AND ONCE AGAIN HAD TO BE ANALYZED. HOW MANY CONGREGATIONS, WHEN THEY SHIFT MEMBERSHIP TO THE INDIVIDUAL, AS THEY WILL, WILL THINK LIKE WALTER JACOB, AND EXCLUDE NON-JEWISH INDIVIDUALS FROM MEMBERSHIP, THUS CREATING THE "SECOND CLASS STATUS" FOR SOME FAMILIES THAT NEBULOUS DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY HAVE AVOIDED, AND THE EXACT PERCEPTION OF UNWELCOMENESS SCHINDLER RECOGNIZES AND JACOB MISSES?

EVEN MORE STRIKING, REGARDLESS OF WHERE CONGREGATIONS DRAW THE LINE ON NON - JEWS SERVING ON THE BOARD, WHAT ABOUT THEIR SERVING AS COMMITTEE CHAIRS? SHOULD THE RITUAL, OR THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, HAVE A NON - JEWISH CHAIRMAN? ISN'T THIS REALLY WHAT WALTER JACOB IS CONCERNED ABOUT? WHEN EXPRESSED IN BOTTOM LINE TERMS, THIS MIGHT SOUND OVERLY HARSH TO SOME, BUT SEEMS TO BE FAIRLY OBVIOUS. HOWEVER, WHAT OTHER STRICTURES AND LIMITATIONS OUGHT ALSO TO BE LOOKED AT FOR THESE POSITIONS AT THE SAME TIME? FOR ULTIMATELY, IF WE ARE TO CLAIM THAT INTERFAITH COUPLES ARE, WITHIN REASON, ACCEPTED FULLY, THEN WE MUST BE FREE TO ALSO ASSERT THAT THERE ARE NO DOUBLE STANDARDS. IF WE ARE TO CLAIM THAT THERE ARE POSITIONS IN WHICH IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE TO HAVE THEM SERVE, THEN WE NEED TO BE VERY CLEAR THAT THERE ARE OTHER STANDARDS BY WHICH OTHERS MIGHT BE REJECTED AS WELL, FOR THESE SAME, OR OTHER, POSITIONS.

AGAIN, LET'S STOP HERE AND FOCUS WHAT IS AND ISN'T BEING SAID. THE GOAL IS FOR OUR CONGREGATION TO BE AS OPEN AND INCLUSIVE AS POSSIBLE, BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF MAINTAINING ITS UNIQUE JEWISHNESS. EVERYONE WHO WANTS TO BE INVOLVED, SHOULD AND WILL BE WELCOMED AND ENCOURAGED TO BE AS ACTIVELY INVOLVED AS THEY WISH. BUT OCCASIONALLY, FOR THE SAKE OF THE GREATER GOOD, IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO SAY TO SOMEONE, "WE'D LOVE TO HAVE YOU INVOLVED. MAYBE THERE IS ANOTHER AREA IN WHICH YOUR EFFORTS WOULD BE EVEN BETTER UTILIZED."

AND WHAT OF COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP, WHICH MOST WOULD AGREE SHOULD NOT BE LIMITED ON VIRTUALLY ANY BASIS? THERE STILL NEED TO BE GUIDELINES, BECAUSE THE SAME LOGIC WHICH WOULD PRECLUDE NON - JEWISH CHAIRS FOR CERTAIN COMMITTEES OUGHT EVEN MORE TO PRECLUDE NON - JEWISH MAJORITIES FOR THOSE (AND PROBABLY OTHER) COMMITTEES (A REALIZATION WHICH, ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH, NO ONE HAS YET FORMALLY MADE)! THIS REALLY CAN GET COMPLICATED. AND AGAIN, WHILE THIS MAY SOUND OVERLY OR UNNECESSARILY RESTRICTIVE, LET'S KEEP IT IN PERSPECTIVE. HOW MANY NON - JEWS WOULD SEEK TO SERVE ON THE RITUAL COMMITTEE IN THE FIRST PLACE?

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT THOUGH, CAN BE SUMMED UP IN TWO STATEMENTS. FIRST, WHATEVER RESTRICTIONS OR PROHIBITIONS ARE SET UP MUST BE CLEARLY STATED, FULLY EXPLORED TO INSURE THAT THEY ARE LEAST OPPRESSIVE AND OFFENSIVE, AND PART OF A TOTALLY CONSISTENT OVERALL FRAMEWORK WHOSE GOAL IS INCLUSIVE AND JEWISH. ONLY IN THAT WAY CAN WE HOPE TO HAVE ANY OF THIS DEBATE HAVE ANY REAL, POSITIVE IMPACT FOR THIS AND FUTURE GENERATIONS OF JEWS. WITHOUT THIS, WE GET TURN-OFF, CONFUSION, AND HYPOCRISY, AND THE GENERATIONS TO COME WILL WALK AWAY, AND NOT SEEK TO STAY INVOLVED. IN LARGE PART, THAT IS HOW THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN AMERICA HAS GOTTEN TO THE POINT WE ARE AT TODAY.

IT IS SAD TO NOTE THAT THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CCAR, IN HIS COVER LETTER, FELT COMPELLED TO POINT OUT THAT IT HAS NOW REACHED THE POINT WHERE FEW IF ANY RABBIS ARE PREACHING SERMONS ON THE SUBJECTS OF INTERMARRIAGE AT ALL, OUT OF FEAR OF ALIENATING OR OFFENDING SIGNIFICANT



NUMBERS OF MEMBERS AND OTHERS. I CONFESS THAT THIS AWARENESS IS BEHIND THE FREQUENT STOPS IN THIS SERMON TO RESTATE WHAT HAS BEEN SAID, TO AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS. HOWEVER, I CANNOT ACCEPT THAT JUST BECAUSE A SUBJECT IS COMPLEX, AND DEEPLY HELD OPINIONS ON BOTH SIDES ABOUND, IT SHOULD NOT BE PREACHED. INDEED, IT OUGHT TO BE PREACHED FOR THOSE VERY REASONS. BUT THE PREACHER MUST TAKE CARE TO INCLUDE, NOT EXCLUDE, TO JOIN TOGETHER AND NOT TO SEPARATE. IF WE WERE TO ABDICATE THE ABILITY TO PREACH, AND TEACH, ON ANY SUBJECT WHICH MIGHT CAUSE OFFENSE OR DISCOMFORT TO SOME, WE MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP SERMONS ALTOGETHER, AND PREPARE FOR THE WORLD THAT WILL RESULT, IN WHICH JEWISH TEACHINGS ARE EVEN LESS STRONGLY HELD, AND THEREFORE JEWISH IDENTITY IS EVEN MORE TENUOUS, A WORLD IN WHICH THE VERY ISSUES WE HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING THROUGHOUT THIS WEEK ARE EXACERBATED, AT THE EXPENSE OF THE FUTURE VIABILITY OF JUDAISM.

FINALLY, WE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT, AS REFORM JEWS, WE ARE TRYING TO MAKE OUR RELIGIOUS BELIEF MAKE SENSE IN OUR WORLD. FOR WITHOUT THIS ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT, NO JEWISH TEACHING WILL BE SUCCESSFUL. HOWEVER, A CRITICAL PART OF THAT BELIEF IS OUR CONNECTION TO K'LAL YISRAEL -- THE UNITY AND TOTALITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE -- AND TO OUR COMMON JEWISH HISTORY. THIS LIMITS OUR FREEDOM TO RADICALLY INVENT AND REFORM, REQUIRING US RATHER TO BASE CHANGE ON INFORMED CHOICE, MANDATING THAT WE ACT RESPONSIBLY, WITH A SENSE BOTH OF HOW THINGS HAVE BEEN DONE IN THE PAST, AND OF HOW OUR ACTIONS CAN OR MIGHT AFFECT OTHERS. THIS IS THE SYSTEM TO WHICH WE HAVE CHOSEN TO ATTACH OURSELVES, SO NO MATTER HOW MUCH OF A BURDEN THESE LIMITS BECOME, WE NEED TO EMBRACE THEM AND SUPPORT THEM.

SO IT IS CLEAR THAT THERE IS STILL MUCH TO DETERMINE AND WORK OUT IN THE AREA OF OUTREACH AND INTERFAITH FAMILIES -- AND THIS WAS ONLY 1 OF THE CHALLENGES TO JEWISH MARRIAGE AND FAMILY WE RAISED AT THE START! MOST OF THE OTHERS ARE AT LEAST AS COMPLEX -- SOME EVEN MORE SO. AT THIS MOMENT WHEN WE ACKNOWLEDGE OUR SMALLNESS, OUR WEAKNESS, OUR HUMANNES, MAY WE GAIN STRENGTH FROM OUR FAMILIES, OUR COMMUNITY, FROM THE WORDS OF KOL NIDREI. MAY WE BE STRONG IN THE YEAR TO COME -- FOR OURSELVES, OUR FAMILIES, AND OUR JEWISH COMMUNITIES, ACTING WITH WISDOM AND FAIRNESS, WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD AND THE SURVIVAL OF JUDAISM, AND NOT NEEDING TO RELY ON THE ESCAPE CLAUSE WE HAVE ESTABLISHED ANY MORE THAN IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. MAY WE BE UP TO THE CHALLENGES THAT BEING A JEW IN FREDERICKSBURG, OR WHATEVER OUR COMMUNITY, IN 5754, THROW AT US.



## SERMON FOR ROSH HASHANAH MORNING

Last night we established our focus, and justified the need for understanding and strengthening the family in this year of 5754. As was promised, we are going to start that exploration process this morning with a question. Of course, the question, on first glance, has very little to do with the larger topic of the role of the family in strengthening the individuals and communities of the Jewish people, but, if it did, could we get a whole High Holy Day length sermon out of it?

The question is very simply this -- *Avinu malkeinu* -- how do we translate these words, and more important, how do we understand those words. As some of you are fond of pointing out, and state far more eloquently than I am capable of doing, what we have here appears to be a question of words, and their meaning. It would be nice if we could find unifying and reinforcing ground in these concepts, which would allow these words themselves to be a source of strength.

For many of us, particularly those who tend to more closely follow the traditions of Judaism as our grandparents and greatgrandparents did, these words *avinu malkeinu* already are a source of strength. If one were to ask what is the prayer you think of first when you think of Rosh Hashanah, the odds are pretty good that the answer would be *Avinu Malkeinu*. There is a grandeur, a stature contained in just the words, and the memories of hearing them recited and sung, that even transcends our ability to translate or comprehend their meaning.

What other prayer do we sing twice in immediate succession, according to two very different, and unrelated melodies? How moving are the crescendos of the first version, traditionally done here as a solo (although this year supplemented by the addition of the choir's moving counterpoint), so powerful and full! How enriching and uplifting the sheer volume of the second melody, a simpler folk tune, which we are almost all intimately familiar with from repetition year after year. It is almost as if the solo version lifts us up, and challenges us to follow, and the congregational response is our triumphant *Hineni* -- I am here and I am ready.

Imagine then, how much more powerful, and moving, and significant these words are, when we understand them. Sure, we have the English translation, which we read in response to the Hebrew. It is even a fairly exact translation. However, there is an inherent flaw in translations -- no matter how good they are, they are reduced in places to commentary, as decisions are made as to which of several synonyms to best use. Other times, it is impossible, regardless of the choice of English, to capture the multiple nuances, the meter, rhythm, and flow of the original language, and therefore, the translation is rather shallow and uninspiring compared to the original.

But let's look at the English. *Avinu malkeinu* -- Our Father, Our King. The words do have a majesty, even in English, also probably because we are so used to them. They also convey a tone and a power, that frankly, despite my own desire to choose and use language that is inclusive, despite all of Rabbi Spitzer's comments last month during and after our gender sensitive service, just is not conveyed in nearly the same way by "Our Parent, Our Ruler." And, let's be honest for another second -- that tone and power of "Our Father, Our King" -- isn't that exactly the tone and power of the day we have come to expect, even to need? Wouldn't we feel the absence if we had read together "Our Parent, Our Ruler"? I certainly would have.

But something bothered me in all of this. Maybe it was the inconsistency, the fact that at all other times and places in our liturgy, I have become so uncomfortable with exclusive language, language which does not fully allow as many worshippers as possible to be comfortable and feel welcomed and a part of the proceedings, language which unnecessarily and overly limits our thinking and conceptualization of our Gcd, whom we recognize to already be hopelessly beyond the ability of our words to express, while at this specific time and place I am left equally uncomfortable without this specific exclusive language -- "Our



Father, Our King." Maybe it was the fact that I could not find a simple corrective -- an equally short, yet equally powerful formulation which would be inclusive.

Only after I got past this first level, did I realize that, in this case, the problem is not the inclusivity or exclusivity of the language, it wasn't even the words themselves. It was the *kavannah*, the intention, the personal comfort with, and interpretation of the words, that was the culprit here. How much of the tone of this prayer, and of the day as a whole, is influenced by the fact that we have, for all these years, translated these words as "Our Father, Our King"? How much of the overriding tone of awe and fear and dread comes from the associations we make internally with father instead of parent, and king instead of ruler? And, if these are true, then, in fact, might our limited and limiting translation over the years have done a great disservice by changing the tone and spirit of the worship of Rosh Hashanah? Might we have been missing the real intent all along?

It is true that in raising these questions, somewhat blasphemous to some, we are working against a widely held generic rule -- if it ain't broke, don't fix it. But, it could be argued, even if we are totally comfortable with what this prayer has become, the fact that it is based on a misinterpretation of the original Hebrew, is enough reason to see it as broken, enough to justify trying to recapture what once was. We can go even further, and claim that, even if "Our Father, Our King" is actually in keeping with the intended tone of the day, there is far more contained in the Hebrew *Avinu Malkeinu*, which it would be useful to have available and to understand.

We come to this last possibility simply by asking "What does OFOK convey that OPOR doesn't?" as part of our search for an inclusive parallel. And, at the same time, the mere raising of this question compels us to deal with the larger one -- "What are we supposed to get from *Avinu Malkeinu*?"

For me personally, this year in particular, there is a heightened awareness of at least the words father and parent, and what they involve, that comes from being one for the first time. And that awareness leads me, and now I hope, all of us, to realize that what we are really talking about in this whole, seemingly trivial, academic discussion, is the very understanding and definition of parenting (and also ruling) which we have chosen to focus on this year. For OF, or OP puts us into the system of family, in which there are parents. OK, or OR turns us to being part of the community, in which the ruler rules. Their combination here, brings us back to the original duality that has always been the foundation of the Jewish people. Our personal grappling with the words and the concepts brings the individual into the system as well.

Tomorrow morning, as part of our second day worship, we will try out an experimental English version of the A'M, one which seeks not to neuter the masculinity of OFOK, but rather to better express the incredible breadth of what is involved in OPOR, of which OFOK is just one aspect of many. It will be interesting to see and to hear the reactions to this new alternative.

FATHER -- what comes to mind when we say this? The male parent, in earlier generations frequently the sole provider for the family, but as a result, the parent less often present in the life of the family. Yet, despite this last item, if we play the metaphor out along its stereotypical lines, the father was also the disciplinarian, and this is probably the most pervasive aspect of the term in connection with our liturgy. There are many other, and certainly more personal images which come to mind with this term, but these set the tone.

What about "Mother"? Nurturing, care-giving, source of life. The image of the baby nestled in her arms, held close to the reassuring heartbeat which was the first and only sound heard for so long. The one who cleaned the house, and your clothes, and ironed them, cooked the meals, soothed the cuts and bruises, both physical and emotional, refereed the sibling spats that never seemed to go on when Dad was around, etc. etc.

Parent, then, would seem to be the sum total of all of these and then some. And yet, there is something about parent that limits it primarily to the function of giving and developing life. All the other neat memories and nuances seem to be lost on the back burners,



hardly, if at all called to mind by a cursory mention of the term. Interestingly, it seems that the distinction between king and ruler is similar. King raises many aspects, but the primary one tends to be that of the sole authority figure, sometimes despotic. Ruler, on the other hand, is the kindly, benevolent despot, if there is any aspect of despotism involved at all. It is a fascinating analysis.

Yet, for our purposes, even in a world in which gender roles have changed dramatically, and, for the most part, cannot even be called gender roles, what is clear in this discussion as it pertains to family, is that, at least historically, families work best when they have all of the attributes listed under both father and mother present, when someone, no matter whom, is fulfilling all of those roles. If we recognize this fact, then we must offer up a serious apology, in this season of atonement and seeking forgiveness. To quote the cover of *The Atlantic* several months back, in a discussion of this very subject -- Dan Quayle was right!

I know we have several single parent families within this congregation right now, so before everyone gets carried away, and misconstrues the last statement, let me rephrase what we have just said clearly and slowly. All other things being equal, a family is better off with two parents than one, so that there is more chance that all the roles will be filled. No one is saying that one parent families are bad, it is just harder to be successful when one person must fulfill all the roles. I am constantly amazed, in fact, by the ability of our parents to fulfill all the roles as well as they do. And I think we all realize that rarely, if ever, are all things equal. It is not a perfect world. We do the best we can, especially when it comes to our children.

However, why stop there. Let's take it back two generations or so, to the world before commercial air travel, automobiles, and suburbs, when the extended family lived in close proximity. Because, in fact, in that world, there were not two parents but 3 or 4 or 6, when you count in the grandparents, aunts and uncles, who all lived in the neighborhood and helped each other out, so that everybody could get everything done, and all the roles could be even better met. We are a long way from that world. We now talk about family members coming for 2 or 3 days, or a week, and how nice the extra hands and help will be.

We live in a world in which few families can afford to have one parent (if there are still two living together) stay at home to take care of the house and the children, without having to go out and earn a salary. We therefore pay babysitters and day care providers to raise our children with us and for us through the vital early years. What factors go in to making the incredibly significant decision of whom to entrust our children to? Certainly reliability, a good reputation based on the experiences of others, and personal comfort are all significant. But, are cost, and proximity (and therefore convenience) more often determining factors than the style and philosophy of childrearing? And how many of us have been able to find someone who can Jewishly enrich this process, or at least provide some level of priming for our own religious training of our children?

And when they reach the age when we, in our youth, began going to school, things change, but don't get easier. A world of all parents working, combines with a world in which you have to work harder to get ahead, spend more years in school to get a job, and compete against more and better others for places in the growing world of higher education, to create a family lifestyle that is overprogrammed to the hilt. These are lofty and noble expectations and dreams we have for our family, and that is good. However, they don't come without significant costs as well. Individuals and families can't come to services on Saturday morning, because there are other things which must be done, or which are perceived to have more immediate importance in life. I remember a decade ago, hearing the parent of one of my potential Confirmation class students explaining that stage band rehearsals conflicted with Confirmation class, and since her child couldn't get a scholarship to college for Confirmation, he was going to go to stage band and not confirmation. How many of us would use a similar yardstick? But aren't we fooling ourselves if we do? In the long run, won't the additional insights, familiarity, and comfort with Jewish things, facts, thoughts, and values gained from confirmation take this child far further than the clarinet will? More on that question in a moment.



And what about all the depressing data and statistics. We all have heard them -- more than 50 percent of marriages end in divorce. This area has one of the highest rates in the country of teen pregnancy and unwed single motherhood. That one in five children in this country lives in poverty, or will in some other way suffer from circumstances which will prevent him or her from attaining the best that is inside. While these last two may not directly apply, often, or at all, to our own community, don't be lulled into a false sense of security. Up until a couple of years ago, we could say the same thing about divorce within our community. It was a rare occurrence. Not anymore. Trickle down sociology has reached Fredericksburg, and as the number of Jewish teenagers grows, as the number of Jewish children grows, it is only a matter of time before all of these are significant personal concerns of members of this community, if they aren't already.

There is one other demographic phenomenon which needs to be addressed here as well. Technology has made it possible for more people to live longer, and as a result, the phenomenon of the "sandwich generation," of children finding and feeling their parents' need for their support more and longer. This too is a strain on the family structure, and a significant change, which we need to address.

Thus far in this discussion, there has been virtually nothing which can easily be identified as Jewish, since we left off our discussion of Avinu Malkeinu. But we need to remember the basis from which we began this discussion -- namely, that the Jewish people is built on a triangular foundation of the community, which is subject to outside influences beyond our control, the individual, who is free to make decisions for herself or himself, including those which aren't in the best interests of the community, and the family, serving as the anchor of the stabilizing foundation, and the moderator between the other two, often contentious, forces. If the family is in this much disarray, how strong can the foundation be? How long can Judaism survive?

Is there a solution? Short of mandating a return to the days of Ozzie and Harriet, of bubbe and zayde and cheder, probably not. Are there remedies? Absolutely, but they are not easy, nor popular, based on experience. The example and the model is the teaching of Maimonides we noted last night. Not the part about parental responsibility, but the part about the community's role. We need to provide structures, programs, and support, to SUPPLEMENT (notice we didn't say REPLACE) the family's decreasing ability to fulfill all the Avinu Malkeinu roles by themselves.

Up until now we have said, "Wouldn't it be nice to have a nursery school?" I would contend that we are asking the wrong question. The right question isn't a question, it is a ringing statement -- WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE OUR FAMILIES WITH SOMEPLACE WHERE THEY CAN GET COMFORTABLE, JEWISH SUPPORT IN CARING FOR THEIR CHILDREN WHILE THEY EARN THE NECESSARY LIVING! Some of you may think that the impetus for this statement comes from being a new parent. It does not, as those who have been involved in trying to establish such a program over the past several years know. I am very comfortable with Emily's situation. I wish it didn't have to be that way, but I also know that Loren and I can provide the Jewish component, and that our care provider is in consonance with our styles and philosophies. But what about those of us for whom some or all of those statements aren't accurate. And then, compare that to the reality that we can't even find anyone willing to chair the committee to organize babysitting for Friday nights!

We need to provide a support system for single parents, regardless of how they come to be single, that gives them the necessary escape from being constantly on duty, and allows them a little time on a regular basis to be themselves, not mommy or daddy.

We need to provide programming specifically targeted to and for singles, to help encourage the establishment of more families with two adults who can share all of the many parental roles.

We need to provide assistance, experience, and training to parents, to help make us more effective and better parents, more able to fulfill all those roles in the more limited time we have today to actually be parents.



Our religious school needs to help the parents Jewishly educate our children, and find ways to do so in an ever decreasing available time period. Despite our size limitations, we need to reach out, and encourage more parents to involve their children. And as good as our program is, we need to make it even better, as more and more the responsibility for education falls unto the the community. And we need to supplement this enhanced education program with experiences which are both enjoyable and bring home to our families how and why what is being taught is important in their lives.

We need to provide support for our older members, especially for those who do not have family nearby to help them. We must do so in a way which helps them to meet their day to day needs, and allows them to maintain their integrity. We need to provide training and support for those who are finding themselves part of the sandwich generation, to help them deal with added stresses and burdens.

And, most important, we all need to work together to turn the words of a sermon from nice talk into glorious reality. In this, we have been notoriously weak in the past, and I include myself prominently in that particular "we." All of these are ESSENTIAL, if we are to reestablish the foundation triangle in a manner that will make it possible for it to support a Judaism which has a chance to survive. Financial, space, time, and personnel limitations force us, at best, to pick and choose some over the others. However, we are talking about the equivalent of a chain here -- the chain of tradition which is Judaism. It is, to quote the cliché, only as strong as its weakest link. Favoring one area at the expense of another does nothing more than shift where the weak spot is, it does nothing to prevent potential breakage.

There is one final aspect which must be addressed in this discussion -- how do we get it done. Sadly, the answer is that it must come from all of us, every single one of us. Despite the claims of some, it is not a Rabbi, or even a Board of Directors, which can be solely blamed for failing to address these issues. They have been raised. They have been discussed. In most cases we do our best within the severe limitations with which we are faced. However sincere that best is, however, it is clearly not good enough. These challenges are too big for anything less than a full and total communal effort, involving every family and every individual. Neither the Rabbi nor the Board act in a vacuum, neither is a "they" to the congregation and community's "we." We are all in the same boat, hopefully rowing together. Those who need and would benefit from these programs need to be at the forefront of working to establish them. We all need to be involved, once the start has been made, in making sure things work and continue. That is what a community is. That is what a community does. If it takes a new building, to have the facilities necessary, then one or more of us in this room must step forward and say, "Who is with me to build a new building." If it takes raising an additional \$100,000, or whatever the amount may be, to provide staff and training for all these areas, then as unbelievable and impossible as it may sound to a congregation whose annual budget is about 1/2 of that, and a constant struggle even at that level, people need to step forward and say, "Here's my support."

Nothing is impossible if we all get behind it. If we fail to get behind this, however, we will have no one else to point the finger at, whether it is 2 generations from now or 20, when what passes for Judaism as practiced by our descendants, shares none of the values that were so dear to THEIR PARENTS, THEIR RULERS. Avinu Malkeinu, hear our prayer. Pardon us, forgive us, show us the way to walk in your path. Strengthen our families, and strengthen our communities, so that we can provide the support for each other, that will enable us to keep your teachings alive, and meaningful, and vibrant in our lives and in the lives of our children, and their children, now and forever. AMEN.

*Message*

November 3, 1993  
19 Heshvan 5754

Rabbi Marc A. Gruber  
Temple B'rith Kodesh  
2131 Elmwood Avenue  
Rochester, NY 14618

Dear Marc:

Thank you for sharing with me your genuinely moving sermon, "Access to Judaism." It is in the image of my own most deepfelt convictions.

Your thoughtfulness is very much appreciated.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



# Temple B'rith Kodesh

2131 Elmwood Avenue  
Rochester, New York 14618  
(716) 244-7060



MARC GRUBER  
RABBI

October 27, 1993

Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

Dear Rabbi Schindler,

Rabbi David Hachen suggested you might want to see this sermon.  
I look forward to your feedback.

*מאד תודה וברכה*  
*Marc*

Rabbi Marc A. Gruber

MAG/raz

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES



*Thank you -  
deeply moving  
sermon,  
"in the image of  
my own most  
deepfelt  
convictions."*

**Access to Judaism  
Yom Kippur--Morning--5754**

**Temple B'rith Kodesh  
by Rabbi Marc A. Gruber**

There was a King who owned a diamond of the greatest value. He was very proud of this diamond and he kept it isolated in a secret private room for his own pleasure. He never allowed it to be displayed. He was afraid that some ambitious jewel thief might find a way to steal it. He handled it with great caution. He feared that even the slightest move might injure its pure and perfect beauty. In fact, he was so fearful of injuring this diamond that his hands trembled as he turned it and turned it feasting his eyes on its perfection. But sure enough one day the diamond dropped right out of his hand, it crashed onto the hard tiles of the floor in the secret private room. When he picked it up he was dismayed to see that there was a terrible blemish right in the middle of the diamond. A long crooked line marred its center.

Then, a little late, the King took the gem out of hiding; he lamented to all the disaster that occurred. He consulted with diamond cutters and jewel experts and lapidaries. They all told him the very same story. Even if they worked endlessly at polishing this stone, they would never ever be able to remove the imperfection. "What shall I do, what shall I do," moaned the King. "If only I hadn't been so selfish to keep this jewel to myself, it might be intact right now. My selfishness was the cause of the destruction of this jewel." He thought now it was surely destroyed. "I will never hide this treasure again. I will have all my people see it."



One time a jeweler from a distant land came to view the diamond which was now displayed in the public museum, and like all the others he had admired the splendid gem. Amused he quipped, "Why doesn't the King work the stone and shape it into some carving that will beautify it. It could be ever more beautiful if it was carved correctly." One of the attendants heard him and reported what this artisan had said to the King. The King summoned the diamond cutter and begged him to explain what he meant. "Why, I could make your gem even more beautiful than it was before the accident if you let me try," said the diamond cutter," Eager the King consented. With the greatest, most careful art he began his work. He made the imperfection the center of his carving. Out of the crooked line he cut roots and the stem of a rose bud. You see, in nature, there are not any straight lines on a rose, they are crooked. He built on that crooked line, leaves and petals and a bud, finally the beautiful rose. It was delicate and beautiful; out of the deep scratch, there was now a rose bud engraved in the diamond. When the King and the other diamond cutters and the lapidaries and the viewers saw what had been wrought with such great ingenuity, they were filled with admiration. The worst fault in the diamond had been changed into a virtue.

\* \* \* \* \*

On Yom Kippur we Jews are to pray as if each of us were the High Priest in the Temple on the Holy Mount in Jerusalem. There is no priestly cult today; each of us offers prayers of atonement for ourselves, our families, and *Am Yisrael*--the people Israel. This is an awesome task. In ancient times the High Priest prepared for this task by purifying himself for an entire week. He cleansed himself both physically and spiritually. We understand what it means to be physically clean but what is spiritual cleanliness?

In Hebrew there are different words for the concepts of physical and spiritual cleanliness and uncleanness. Physical cleanliness is represented by the word *naki*; its antonym is *maluklakh*. Spiritually the word for clean is *tahor* and for unclean, *tameh*. I will illustrate the differences: *Maluklakh* is dirty as if you were out playing in the mud; you get *maluklakh*; you do not get *tameh*. When you come in and take a shower you become *naki*, squeaky clean, not *tahor*. *Tahor* is not clean in the sense of 'fresh out of the shower.' Rather *tahor* is more like our diamond before the accident. It is elementally pure, it is crystalline purity, it is spiritually purity; and *tameh*, it is not *maluklakh*, it is not like dirty playing in the mud, it is contaminated or polluted or defiled in some way. Events which bring one to a nexus point between the forces of life and death render an individual *tameh*. Traditionally this is why a *Kohen* who is not a mourner does not go to the cemetery. *Tameh* and *tahor* are spiritual states not physical states.



How should we understand all of this? Is it all some anachronistic tradition that we recall for posterity's sake? Does it have anything to do with our lives today? Like our ancestors we categorize the universe. We do not use the same terminology, but for each of us and for our society as well, we regard situations and circumstances and places and relationships and even persons as polluting or contaminating or dangerous. We protect ourselves and our children from all sorts of contamination. One type of separation is particularly painful for me. You see in our society we separate ourselves from people we call disabled. We fail to realize that those who cannot see or hear or walk or speak, are often gifted in ways to which we are blind and deaf. We hide ourselves away in well protected homes or offices; we safeguard our sensitivity with self imposed blindness. We save our strengths and our resources for more important struggles.

You know what, our insensitivity is our worst contaminant; it is self-polluting. We hurt others and we diminish *Am Yisrael*, the people Israel. I do not know why, but we Jews seem to be high on the list of the self-deluding. We do not want to own up to the fact that there are Jewish people with disabilities.

How do I know? I have two children with disabilities. Some of you have seen my children and look surprised. Micah and Ayal are both severely speech and language delayed. My children have what we call hidden disabilities. If you look at Ayal or Micah, you will not know they are disabled. A trained eye might notice Micah's disability. Ayal's is totally invisible. As a parent, I have advocated for my

children and worked hard so they have the assistance necessary to overcome their disabilities. Micah is now mainstreamed and Ayal is in a year round program at the BOCES I.

Last Spring, I was identified in the Democrat and Chronicle as a parent with a child in a special program. I wanted to appreciate the BOCES I bus drivers; they are a special crew. You know that column by Carol Ritter in the D & C, where she notes all sorts of things. I called her up one day and I said, "you know there's a group of people who really deserves mention" I did not expect that I would be mentioned; I wanted the bus drivers praised. You see there is one driver Bob on bus #258 who is marvelous; I "catch" him reading children's stories to the kids while they wait to get off the bus. Another driver who had only one youngster on her bus was teaching him how to drive already; of course the bus was turned off while they were doing this. They really are a special crew and I felt they were deserving and are deserving of public acknowledgement and appreciation. Carol Ritter printed the thanks and credited Ayal and me with that appreciation; that was fine, Renee and I are quite open about our children's disabilities. This little mention in the paper brought phone calls, unexpected calls from people I never met. I received calls from Jewish people who have children with various special needs. To a person, they were delighted that a Jewish leader publically admits that he has children who are disabled. I had not thought of it this way. Their experience of our Jewish community has been less than supportive.



On certain institutional levels we appear to be supportive; on personal levels this is not the reality. Through Federation we have a community wide committee on Jews with disabilities. The committee mostly does some advocacy and some education work like the annual Shabbat for people with disabilities. Even though we have such a committee, it is struggling to keep the Compeer program for Jews alive. In July you may have seen the article in the Democrat and Chronicle about the Compeer program. It provides volunteers who serve as buddies for people who are recovering from mental illness. One of our own congregants, Bunny Skirboll, has started this program in over fifty cities around the United States where it thrives successfully. It thrives here in Rochester too except in one way; she is having the most difficult time getting Jewish volunteers for fellow Jews. I have a hunch it is because we do not want to own the fact that these people are part of our community; they are us, we are them.

I know that my son has been felt by some as a contaminant, a source of pollution. When my little cutie is with me, and some well meaning person approaches and speaks to him, he does not respond. He cannot speak. If he tries, the other person will not understand. Ayal can form the words in his mind, but he cannot make the muscles around his mouth create the sounds which we recognize as words. After a few minutes I will tell the well intentioned individual who has been drawn to my little cutie (truly, he is adorable), "he can't respond, you see he has a disability." Invariably the person stops playing with him, mumbles something to me and hurries away. I

want to tell you something, my son is not something *tameh*; he will not contaminate anybody else.

Last Fall before Ayal entered the BOCES program he attended a toddler separation program. The mother of a little girl in the class, and the teacher of that class feared contamination. There were only four students in the class to the one teacher. With Renee in earshot, this mother of a two year old complained loudly that her daughter was being held back by another child. It was clear from the description to whom she was referring. The boy who does not speak yet. The teacher did not ask, "at two years old, what do you expect from your daughter? From what is she being withheld? You mean she won't get into Princeton or Brandeis next year?" On the face of it, it is a foolish expectation of a two year old. The teacher did not say that this boy is cheerful, or that he plays well with other children. She did not do anything except exhibit her own prejudice which matched the bias and insensitivity of this mother. Renee came home in tears and I was livid. Two sessions in a row Ayal came home after sitting in a soiled diaper. His teacher's insensitivity led her to tell us that Ayal did not want his diaper changed. He did not tell her. At the start of the program we told her that he has a disability and cannot speak. Yes we complained and yes there was an official response. Yes remembering how my son was treated still hurts.

I could go on and on this morning. I do not need to share anymore war stories about parent advocacy; about what it has taken to provide appropriate programs for



our boys. I just note that it is not only institutional. Ayal does not have many play dates; we find that other parents do not want their children diminished by playing with a kid who cannot speak. They might view it otherwise; they might want their child enriched by playing with the two year old who is learning to sign, the kid who may be bilingual when he is mainstreamed. Let me say, we all need to work on our own sensitivity. It is not just when its apparent that someone has a disability, it is all the time. There are plenty of us with invisible disabilities. When our brains do not connect to our hearts and we open our mouths too soon, we hurt others. We all need to engage our own fears of contamination and transform them so that each of us can come closer to being *tahor*, that state of spiritual purity.

At Temple B'rith Kodesh we are trying to make our building and our programs accessible; we need to do more. This Summer our Reform movement published requirements for congregational certification as accessible to Judaism, the *Liheyot* program. I place a challenge before the membership of Temple B'rith Kodesh. I would like us to become among the first congregations nationwide so certified.

We do provide a fair amount of physical assistance. We have a loop system and sign language interpretation for the hearing impaired and deaf members of our community. We provide braille prayerbooks and large print prayerbooks. We have started a serious assessment of our physical accessibility. We know that we have a long way to go. We know that it will require capital investments in our facility to make it accessible to people with physical disabilities. The Endowment Drive includes plans

to fund changes in our building in order to make it more accessible to all Jews. I believe we will need more money than we expect. First, I ask you to give generously so that our Temple is well supported financially and fully accessible physically and programmatically.

The *Liheyot* certification requires us to work on our own sensitivity as well as our physical plant. This may be difficult; it is easy to change our building, it is harder to change ourselves. We need to do self-assessments personally and congregationally. We need to train ourselves to open our minds and hearts as well as our building. We need to learn to experience our Jewish life from another's point of view. To be certified we need sensitivity workshops for adults and youngsters.

I have a mission to make Judaism and Jewish education and Jewish celebration accessible to all Jews. I hope we can stimulate all Jews including those with special needs or disabilities to grow as knowledgeable, committed and involved Jews. I want Temple B'rith Kodesh to build a supportive environment so that every Jew can have the good feelings that result from taking personal responsibility for her or his participation in Jewish life. I want to establish a network within our congregation focused on the concerns of Jews with special needs and disabilities and their families regarding Jewish identity so as to promote feelings of self-esteem and inclusion.

(Adapted from sample material in *Liheyot...Guidelines*). I need you to volunteer for this effort.



I need folks to serve on a committee and work groups to help us become accessible and sensitive. I need you to help our community live up to the words of this afternoon's Torah portion and remove the stumbling blocks and end our insensitive cursing in order to revere God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

There is a group called *Chaverim*. It is a community group for Jews with developmental disabilities and their families which meets at the JCC. Our Cantor Martha Rock Birnbaum volunteers time to help with this group. They sing a song which expresses the spirit with which I would like this effort to proceed:

Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow--

Don't walk behind me, I may not lead--

Just walk beside me and be my friend...

And together we will walk in the way of God.

My colleague, Janet Marder, explains why we need the *Liheyot* program. The program of "Access to Judaism." She says, the *Halalach* stipulates almost nothing about the external appearance of synagogues except this. It is forbidden to pray in a room without windows. Our synagogues need to have windows. They must be porous, accessible structures open to the world and its problems, not fortresses that shut us away in cozy complacency. In our chapel the windows are all covered, we can catch the light but we can not see through to the outside. In our main sanctuary the windows only show us the sky. Look out the windows sometime, let us see the Jews who can not get into our praying places. The Jews in wheelchairs, the Jews with

crutches and canes and walkers. Jews who are blind and deaf or have impaired hearing. Jews with developmental disabilities. Jews who do not have perfect bodies or a *yiddishacup*. Jewish children who will never go to Harvard Law School or Yale Medical School. They belong to us. It is a spiritual act to open our windows to draw Jews with disabilities into the community of Israel. For as long as our synagogues are inaccessible, these Jews will remain invisible.

Some day who knows, the Jew who is blind, the Jew in a wheelchair, the parent of a special child, might be us or someone dear to us. If that day should come, let us pray that each of us belongs to a congregation of *shana yiddin*, of Jews who really know what beauty is all about (adapted from Liheyot...Guidelines).

This morning's Torah portion teaches us that the choice for life and the blessing or for death and the curse is ours to make. The Torah also tells us that it is not a far off thing, rather it is within our power to choose Jewish life and blessing for all Jews.

Let us include all of our gems; let them all be included among those diamonds which are inscribed with roses.



*Oliver  
Messinger*

November 3, 1993  
19 Heshvan 5754

Rabbi Lawrence M. Colton  
Union Reform Temple  
475 North Brookside Avenue  
Freeport, NY 11520-1099

Dear Larry:

Thank you for your supportive letter and for sharing with me Union Reform Temple's very fine welcoming brochure for prospective members. Your thoughtfulness is very much appreciated.

While I would welcome an opportunity meet with you, I fear my meeting and travel schedule during the coming weeks preclude setting an appointment at this time. After a few days of catching up following the Biennial, I'm off and "on the road" again.

Be assured I shall keep your offer in mind and I thank you again for your support.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

**DR. LAWRENCE M. COLTON**

*Rabbi*

Union Reform Temple  
475 North Brookside Avenue  
Freeport, New York 11520-1099

*find out about him*

October 29, 1993

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

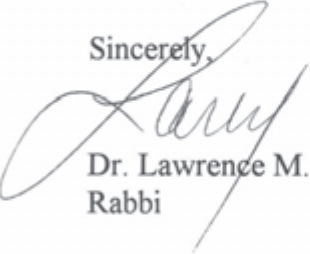
Dear Alex:

Enclosed please find a pamphlet I wrote that I believe answers many of the questions raised in your presidential message.

I would appreciate speaking with you regarding my concerns that your remarks not be misunderstood. This pamphlet has been very favorably received. Our congregation expresses no uneasiness with what has evolved here.

I welcome the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue opening Judaism to all.

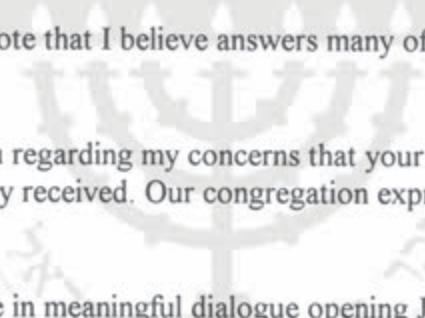
Sincerely,

  
Dr. Lawrence M. Colton  
Rabbi

LMC:bc

Enc.

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES





## IF YOU ARE WONDERING...

### CAN WE JOIN A TEMPLE?

## Welcome!

### Union Reform Temple is...

A Reform Congregation, affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Union Reform Temple serves Baldwin, Freeport, and the surrounding communities.

### Who may join Union Reform Temple?

We welcome those who wish to affiliate with Reform Judaism. We need you and that which you can particularly offer to our Temple Community. We welcome any person of the Jewish faith eighteen years of age or over. A non-Jewish spouse shall be considered a member in good standing and welcome to share in the fellowship of the Congregation.

### Reform Judaism is ...

Dedicated to knowing the past of Judaism, to finding its present course and to forging ahead into the future with bold, relevant and forthright initiatives.

### Outreach is ...

A program of Reform Judaism dedicated to developing responses to the needs of individuals

converting to Judaism, intermarried couples, children of intermarriages and those interested in learning about Judaism.

### Outreach at Union Reform Temple...

Union Reform Temple, since its inception, has been in the forefront of the desire to welcome families of an intermarried agenda without being judgmental, argumentative and/or missionizing. Our goal is to provide supportive settings in which you can meet with others sharing your similar concerns. Specifically, we can provide you with an opportunity to discuss the impact of your children's interfaith relationship on your family and help you to develop constructive responses to various family issues that arise.

### Limits...

Judaism never considers itself superior to any other faith heritage. Judaism hopes that no other faith would present itself as being superior to Judaism. While it is true that one cannot be both Jewish and Christian this does not mean that a child of inter-religious background, electing to be Jewish, cannot maintain positive and loving relationships with non-Jewish members of his or her family.

There are sensible limits to defining the role of the non-Jew in the Synagogue. Obviously, the Temple is a Jewish institution. Its governing body, the Board of Trustees, is made up of representatives of the Jewish community. The chairpersons of its committees and of its auxiliary organizations are Jewish.

### Interfaith Activities...

Union Reform Temple is extremely active in interfaith dialogue and commitment. Our Rabbi

and the congregation participate frequently in activities sponsored by the Baldwin Fellowship, the Baldwin Interfaith Conference and the Freeport Interfaith Clergy.

### Life cycle ceremonies...

A non-Jewish spouse married to a person of the Jewish faith may participate in Jewish life cycle functions as part of the moment because he or she must be part of the family celebration. At Union Reform Temple, our rabbi is prepared to help you.

### Please ...

We only ask your cooperation in understanding the concerns of the Temple for its boundaries as they are reasonably suggested by the need of the Jewish community to survive. We pledge ourselves to respect and to understand the point of view of non-Jews who seek to deepen their involvement in the life of the Temple, but who, for whatever reason, do not currently choose to convert.

### Please join us!

UNION REFORM TEMPLE

475 NO. BROOKSIDE AVENUE

FREEPORT, NEW YORK 11520

516-623-1810

Serving Baldwin, Freeport and surrounding communities.

The preceding has been prepared by Dr. Lawrence M. Colton, Rabbi.

URT



COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

November 3, 1993  
19 Heshvan 5754

Rabbi Robert A. Seigel  
Temple Beth Israel  
6622 N. Maroa  
Fresno, CA 93704

Dear Bob:

Thank you for your thoughtful note of October 26th. It was especially encouraging because of the many brick bats which are flying my way. Not because anyone was dismayed by the convention itself, quite the contrary, but because of my stance on Outreach.

Believe me, I am pushing to have full time Outreach workers in each of our regions. That is an absolute must and you can count on me to be in your corner when the next Budget Committee takes place. Unfortunately, our resources are limited and my own priorities do not of necessity hold sway.

Still, you won't find me lacking in spirit.

All the best.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler





# TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL

בית ישראל

#10

October 26, 1993

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

Your Presidential Address in San Francisco was masterful and dynamic (as usual). You raised many points which I hope will be followed up as the months go by. I was particularly impressed with your courageous stand on Outreach, which is the purpose of this brief note.

We have an outstanding Outreach Worker in our regional office, but she is serving both the Northern California region as well as the Pacific Northwest region in only a total of twelve hours a week. It is my understanding that salaries were frozen, and additional hours cannot be allocated for her to work more than these few hours. To be consistent with the dream you envisioned in your address, we need more staff presence for Outreach work.

I am writing to request that somehow the Outreach position in our region be upgraded a few more hours a week for the two regions based in San Francisco. Give us the tools to achieve your vision.

L'Shalom,

Robert A. Seigel  
Rabbi

cc: Rabbi Daniel Syme, Senior Vice President, UAHC  
Arthur Grant, Director of Programs and Regions, UAHC  
Dru Greenwood, Director, Outreach Commission  
Melvin Merians, Chairman, UAHC  
Harris Gilbert, Chairman, Outreach Commission

RABBI ROBERT A. SEIGEL, D.D.



COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

*Messing*

November 3, 1993  
19 Heshvan 5754

Ms Barbara Shair  
V.P. Outreach - NY Division  
P.O. Box 78  
Pomona, NY 10970

Dear Barbara:

Thank you for your encouraging note which is all the more welcome now that the brick bats are falling my way. But I can take them and it was my desire to evoke such a debate. In this matter, perhaps, we can change the mindset of too many Jews whose self image reflects the disdain of our traducers.

While my area of primary concern is the American landscape, I am most sympathetic with your own efforts and of course I wish you well. If there is anything at all that I can do to help you, please let me know.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler





# Amishav, U.S.A.

*Helping Lost Jewish Communities Return*  
1211 Ballard St.  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Tel and Fax 301-681-5679

## Officers

Jack Zeller  
President

Robert Lande  
V.P./Treasurer  
Abe Kriss  
V.P. Fund Raising  
Melody Ziff  
V.P. Grants Development  
Sherman Taffel  
V.P. CIS Jews  
Kassahun Tefiero  
V.P. African Affairs

Jack Bresler  
V.P. Asian Affairs  
Richard Kutlick  
V.P. Latin American Affairs  
Jose Brito

Regina Ingle  
V.P. Brazilian Affairs  
Melvin Laney  
V.P. Outreach Programs  
Barbara Shair  
V.P. New York Outreach  
Jordan Brinn  
V.P. Washington Outreach  
Leonore Levin  
V.P. Jewish Education

Michael Cook  
Secretary  
Bruce Terris  
General Counsel  
Joe Hautman  
Archivist  
Aron and Karen Primack  
Newsletter Editors

DEAR RABBI SCHINDLER:

THE ARTICLE IN THE NEW YORK TIMES ABOUT THE REFORM MOVEMENT SEEKING CONVERTS TURNED AN AVERAGE SUNDAY BREAKFAST INTO AN EXCITING EVENT. AS OUTREACH DIRECTOR FOR AMISHAV, U.S.A. WHICH REACHES OUT TO MARGINAL JEWISH COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD, I CAN ONLY APPLAUD THE DECISION.

WE FEEL THERE ARE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WORLD WIDE WHO WISH TO RETURN TO THEIR JEWISH ROOTS AND WE ARE HELPING.

ENCLOSED IS A COPY OF OUR FIRST NEWSLETTER WHICH DEALS WITH OUR CONVERTING THE SHINLUNG/MENASHE TRIBE IN INDIA. OUR SECOND NEWSLETTER WILL DEAL WITH MARRANOS/CONVERSOS IN SOUTH AMERICA. WE HAVE IDENTIFIED NUMEROUS JEWISH COMMUNITIES WHICH PRACTICE SOME JEWISH CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS. PERHAPS THERE MAY BE SOME AREAS IN WHICH OUR INTERESTS MEET.

SINCERELY,

*Barbara Shair*

BARBARA SHAIR

V.P. OUTREACH- N.Y. DIVISION  
P.O.BOX 78  
POMCNA, N.Y. 10970-0078

## *He aims to return Portuguese to Judaism*

**J**EWISH SCHOLARS SUSPECT that many descendants of Marranos, the Jews forced to convert to Christianity during the Inquisition some 500 years ago, continue to live quasi-Jewish lives in the hills of northern Portugal. Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail wants to prove it.

The Jerusalem author and educator is going to Portugal next week. Accompanied by a Portuguese-speaking friend from Lisbon, he will visit the isolated villages where Jews settled after being expelled from neighboring Spain in the late 15th century.

"I want to bring them back to Judaism," Avichail said at the end of a three-week speaking tour in the United States on behalf of his Amishav ("My people return") organization.

Though Jews abroad have established initial contacts in recent years with about 300 Marranos in Belmonte, a village in central Portugal, few inroads have been made in the northern part of the country, Avichail said. Inspired by reports that putative Catholics in the region observe such Jewish practices as lighting candles on Friday night and eating a matzah-like cracker on Passover, the rabbi wants to confirm their Jewish roots, teach them the tenets of Judaism and help them convert back to their original faith.

"We have to awaken the Yiddishkeit in their souls," he said.

Avichail will distribute a Portuguese-translation book he wrote on basic Jewish practice. If he finds enough interest among the villagers, he will send supporters from Israel to teach advanced classes.

Avichail, a sabra, has spent the past 18 years traveling around the world to locate such hidden Jews as Iberia's Marranos, far-flung communities that may be descended from the lost tribes and scattered groups that express an interest in becoming Jewish. He estimates the total number of people in these groups at 22 million.

Amishav members have visited Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Japan, Spain, Mexico, Burma, Peru and three of the former Soviet Union's republics as part of the rabbi's effort to collect dispersed Jews.

Brazil is next, said Avichail, who has helped a few hundred newly found Jews immigrate to Israel.

Avichail claims it is not too late to ignite a Jewish spark in Portugal's Marranos, who have largely assimilated into Catholic culture.

"A Jewish soul is always a Jewish soul," he says. "If someone has a Jewish soul, he will come back."



Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail (l) of Amishav together with Joseph Hantman who will deliver a series of lectures entitled "Little Known Jewish Communities Around the World" at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington starting Fall 1993.





# Amishav USA

*On Behalf of the Dispersed of Israel*

1211 Ballard Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910

Telephone and FAX: (301) 681-5679

Vol. 1, No. 1

Autumn 1993



Shinlung women at their studies in Israel.

## My Visit with the Shinlung Immigrants

By Bruce Terris

*Early in August, a group of about 40 young members of the Shinlung tribe arrived in Israel. They came from northeastern India near the Burma border. None had been outside their country before.*

*I had the good fortune to visit them on August 11, just a week after their arrival in Israel. I went with Rabbi Avichail, who had helped them come to Israel, and a television newsman, who was filming for a program to be shown nationwide in India. They had come to a moshav where they are earning their way by working in the morning in hothouses where tomatoes, melons and other produce are grown. Then they spend their afternoons learning Hebrew. They are filled with enthusiasm for Israel and Judaism.*

*The television reporter tried hard to see if the young people had any dissatisfaction with Israel. Their only criticism was that it was a little hot and humid in Gaza. But as their enthusiastic singing of Hebrew songs demonstrated, they were thrilled to be home.* (cont. p. 2)

## A Message from Rabbi Avichail to Amishav USA

My Dear Friends in the USA:

Warmest Greetings! Our organization, Amishav ("My People Return"), has undertaken for itself the difficult yet tremendous task of helping to bring back dispersed Jews of the world to their Jewish religion and to Israel. Our role is to be a bridge to the dispersed Jews around the world. We open a door for their future return.

Jews have returned to Israel from many nations and are currently returning from Russia, Syria, Yemen and other nations. Almost all of these returnees, however, have been from the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. But there now appears to be the beginning of a stirring among the dispersed of the ten tribes of Israel, as it is written: "And He will gather the dispersed of Israel and assemble the scattered of Judah." (Is. 11:12)

But the exile of the ten tribes of Israel is different from the exile of the tribes of Judah, in two ways. First, the ten tribes of Israel live generally as non-Jews, with only some indications of their Jewishness, and will largely return as converts. As the Palestinian Talmud says: "They [the ten tribes of Israel] will be converts to Judaism in the future." (10.6) Second, with exceptions (such as the Ethiopian Jews), they will largely come from the east: "From the east I will bring your offspring and from the west I will assemble you." (Is. 43:5)

Although our task is tremendous, our means are meager. We have managed to work in cooperation with others on some of our projects, such as our project to facilitate the return of the descendants of Marranos in Belmonte, Portugal. But for many other projects we have to act largely by ourselves -- such as our project to bring to Israel and back to Judaism some members of the tribe of Menashe who are from India. (According to tradition, the tribe of Menashe will be the first of the ten lost tribes to return from the East.)

After my recent trip to the United States I went to Braganza, Portugal, and met with descendants of Marranos who are

(cont., p. 4)



# Pushto Translation Advances

By Susan E. Pollack

In 1989 Rabbi Avichail's book *The Tribes of Israel* was published in Israel in both Hebrew and English. While it explores the historical Jewish roots of several groups of people around the world, a large part of the book presents evidence of both ancient and recent Jewish ancestry of a large group of Moslem people of Central Asia -- the Pathans. The evidence demonstrates that the Pathans, who number about 15 million and live primarily in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Central Asian states, are probably the direct descendants of one or more of the lost tribes of Israel. Personal accounts in the book describe Moslem families keeping up Jewish practices in their homes as recently as 70 years ago.

This relationship, like many other facts about Judaism, world history and other cultures, is almost totally unknown in Central Asia, as well as in the larger international community. Widespread enmity of the Moslems of the region toward the Jewish people prevails; any commonality after Abraham has been lost or suppressed.

Now, a new Amishav-sponsored project has begun: Translating sections of the book which describe the history and traditions of the Pathan people into Persian and Pushto, two major languages of Afghanistan and Pakistan. One of the primary purposes of this project is to improve relations and understanding between Moslems of Central Asia and the Jewish world -- by introducing these people to their Jewish roots rather than trying to convert them from Islam.

Translating Rabbi Avichail's book in Persian and Pushto will make the information it contains

## "to improve relations between Moslems and Jews"

available to the people of Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and India, as well as to millions of immigrants from these nations now living in other countries. The cultural material and the personal stories are compelling evidence that the Pushto people's ties with the Jewish people and Israel are both deep and recent. It is hoped that this translation, which will be distributed in Pakistan and Afghanistan initially, will help develop understanding and awareness among the people of Central Asia in order to improve regional and international relations, and help reduce the animosity that now exists between these Moslems and the Jewish people.

The Persian/Pushto edition, which will include additional chapters to assess its significance from the standpoint of the Moslem reader, is being translated by an outstanding and well-known Afghan scholar living in the United States who views the project as one of "peace and reconciliation." His personal and professional credibility will help in producing a high

## "a project of peace and reconciliation"

quality product and in distributing the information to a Moslem audience.

Donations to support the project are urgently needed. Translation and computer costs will total nearly \$10,000. While \$2500 has been donated, \$7500 is still required. The most pressing need is for \$1500 to purchase an up-to-date computer and printer which can run Persian software, or the donation of such a computer. A computer with DOS 5.0 or higher, at least 2 MG RAM and 80 MG hard drive and Windows is required. A laser quality printer is also urgently needed. Other needs include Persian alphabet software, which costs an additional \$275. All donations, made payable to "Amishav USA," are tax deductible. Please note on your donation that it is for the "Pushto Project."

## MY VISIT

(cont. from p 1)

All this may sound as if they have been missionized for Judaism the way other people have been missionized by other religions. But this is absolutely untrue. They come from a tribe which has an ancient tradition that they are descendants of the lost tribe of Menashe. In the 19th century, as a result of missionary activity, they became Christians. However, about 30 years ago a small group began, entirely on its own, to return to Judaism. This group has grown until there are now approximately 5000 or more practicing Jews among the Shinlung in India, and perhaps more in Burma, out of a total Shinlung population of approximately 2 million.

Rabbi Avichail discovered these Jewish Indians about 15 years ago. He has worked with them until now and has readied them to rejoin the Jewish people. It is truly an inspiration to see their spirit and dedication. They have been very well received on their moshav because of their spirit, enthusiasm and energy. The moshav has told us to bring as many additional Menashe as we are able.



# JUST WHO ARE THE SHINLUNG?

By Jack Bresler

## Background

The Shinlung are a group of tribes of approximately 2 million people that reside in several northeastern Indian states, including Manipur, Mizoram, Assam and Nagaland. They also reside in the Chin mountains of Burma and the Chittagong tracts of Bangladesh. "Shinlung" is the Chinkuki word for "cave", while some say Shinlung means "closed valley." The Shinlung have also been called "Mizos," from the state of Mizoram, but "mizos" also happens to mean "spread out" in Hebrew.

Members of the Shinlung tribe believe they are descended from Menashe, and many wish to come back to their true Jewish roots and migrate to Israel. About 5,000 to 10,000 of these tribe members are actively involved in practicing Judaism, trying to follow the Torah and perform the mitzvot. But these members of the Shinlung say they find it difficult to live as observant Jews in their local setting.

The Shinlung were "discovered" about 100 years ago by Christian missionaries, who became excited when they realized that these people were probably Jews since they had customs very similar to the Jews, and felt they had the chance to convert these Jews to Christianity. With the help of British troops, these missionaries were able to rob the Shinlung of their religious treasures and destroy the Shinlung religious hierarchy, thus preventing their religious leaders and people from performing their own Jewish religious customs and practices.

One problem the Shinlung face is that their neighbors deride them for acting like Moslems (such as wearing kipot) in an area where Moslems are hated. It was recently reported that in Burma huge numbers of Moslem villages were destroyed and their populations killed, forced into manual labor, or deported to Bangladesh. It has also been reported that members of the Shinlung tribe are sometimes murdered by other inhabitants of the area. Another problem the Shinlung face is not being accepted as "real Jews" and not being given priority over non-Jews in studying at training facilities such as the ORT in India.

## Customs

The Shinlung call their god Y'wa, although some use the term Pathien. They have feast days corresponding to the Jewish holidays and an elaborate system of animal sacrifices resembling the Jewish sacrificial system. They practiced levirate marriage (a man marries his deceased brother's widow), buried their dead simply (no cremations) and maintained the patriarchal system of inheritance. On the eighth day a newborn boy was sanctified. They also slaughtered an animal and drained its blood before eating it, and wore blue and white tsitsit.

At the heart of the Shinlungs' identification with Judaism is the belief that all 2 million are descendants from the tribe of Menashe, the son of Joseph. They sing the following traditional song:

*We observed the Sipkui festival,  
Crossing over the Red Sea running dry before us,  
and the walking enemies of mine,  
the riding foes of mine,  
were swallowed by the sea in the thousands.  
We were led by fire at night*

*and by cloud in the day.  
Thou art Manmasi (Menashe), begot forefathers  
coming from beyond the river,  
Following the rivers and streams  
Passing through the mountains and hills,  
Brought us thou into the land of strangers.*

(cont., p. 4)

## The Media Take Notice

From time to time articles in various publications have covered the activities of Amishav or of Rabbi Avichail. For example, a major article with pictures appeared in the Religion section of *The Washington Post* on June 26, 1993. But the most visible coverage is probably in the September 9, 1993, issue of *The Jerusalem Report*. Its cover story, "Return of the Lost Tribes," features an attractive cover photo and a six-page article by Yossi Klein Halevi with seven pictures. The piece reviews several groups' claims to lost-tribe status, some well documented, others more fanciful. An accompanying column by Stuart Schoffman in the same issue observes:

*Here we may take a lesson from the Shinlung and other lost tribesmen. For these are people who may understand better than we do the power of tradition. Only the thinnest mythic thread binds the Shinlung with their alleged Biblical forebears, the tribe of Menashe, yet here they are, claiming with great dignity a rich patrimony that history and geography have all but erased. If they can manage that in India, can't a Jew in Indiana?*





# WHO ARE THE SHINLUNG?

(cont. from p. 3)

## History

According to the Shinlung the tribe of Menashe settled in Persia and were eventually driven eastward to Afghanistan and then to China. Around 600 C.E. (some say during the time of the Mongol invasion) religious persecution forced them to flee from China and settle in Vietnam, where they lived as cave dwellers (shinlung). During that time the Shinlung were continually in a state of fear and of hunger and found it impossible to rest on Shabbat.

They were eventually driven from Vietnam by a Chinese king (at that time China controlled Vietnam, and the Vietnamese were fighting for independence). They lost their Sefer Torahs and were forced to follow their traditions by memory. They wandered around Thailand and then through Burma for hundreds of years. Their priesthood was preserved until the middle of the 19th century, when Christian missionaries, supported by foreign troops, were able to end their traditions. In 1854, the American Baptist Mission was established in Manipur. By 1890 Presbyterian missionaries were also active in the region. By 1990, 90 percent of the tribal people in Mizoram had been converted to Christianity.

Thirty years ago a local prophet named Tanuma of Manipur began preaching to the Shinlung, saying that they would be destroyed if they did not go back to their old Jewish faith. He told them that they were all destined to return to Israel. The return to Judaism started in Churachandpur in southwestern Manipur and has since spread throughout the area. Small synagogues have been established around towns in the Imphal area. Those who have returned to Judaism but have had exposure to Christianity may still have some belief in Jesus, while others with less exposure will not have this belief. The Shinlung who presently want to go on aliyah do not have this belief and are eager to study Judaism.

## Rabbi Avichail's Message

(cont. from p. 1)

interested in returning to Judaism. Our book *Judaism*, which was translated into Portuguese, will be sent to them to enable them to learn about Judaism and advance in their efforts to lead full Jewish lives. I discussed the matter with the two rabbis now entering their posts in Portugal, Rabbi Cohon in Lisbon and Rabbi Babag in Belmonte, and they will assist in this matter.

The 41 young Shinlung men and women from the tribe of Menashe arrived from northern India (Mizoram and Manipur). The group of 39 who came on August 2, together with two who arrived earlier, were greeted at the Ben Gurion Airport with flowers and new kipot by members of the board of Amishav and representatives of the settlement Gan-Or, which absorbed the group. We rented a special bus from Jerusalem that took the group and the greeting party to the Gush Katif area.

The ride, the dancing and the reception they received in Gan-Or was a very moving experience. The occasion was taped on a home video camera, and I will show the tape during my next visit to America. In Gan-Or they were housed in new homes where they are working and studying Hebrew and Judaism. The work that they are doing, in hothouses, is difficult, but all of the people we have brought are young, strong, and willing to work hard while they live Jewish lives and learn about Judaism. **The arrangements for their absorption necessitated a special financial effort which we still need to overcome.**

Following their arrival, some 20 articles appeared in the local press as well as several appearances by myself on television and radio. Most of the articles were favorable but there were those who did not grasp the fact that new converts need a warm, comfortable and religious atmosphere where there is ample employment. All these conditions are found in the Gush Katif area. The cost of their transportation to Israel, \$20,500, was covered by our dear friend and member Dr. Irving Moskowitz. **We are hoping that other friends of Amishav will help cover the cost of the Ulpan** for these new immigrants until their formal conversion to Judaism. After they have converted, the Israeli Absorption Ministry will pay their expenses.

We hope to bring another group of 40 individuals from the Menashe tribe to Israel. Of course, we would like very much to find someone who would be willing to cover part or all of the expense involved.

We here in Israel cannot do our work alone. We turn to you, members of the Jewish community in the United States, to give us support. We ask you to contribute to the redemption of the Jewish people by helping Amishav undertake projects such as the one that is bringing the Shinlung to Israel and to Judaism. **We have to provide for their material and spiritual needs, for the sake of all of us.**

May G-d help us toward the complete redemption of Israel.

Rabbi Eliahu Avichail  
Director, Amishav



## Choose-A-Mitzvah

Here's what your tax-deductible contribution to "Amishav USA" can buy:

\$ 7,500	Persian/Pushto translation of book <i>Tribes of Israel</i>
\$ 6,000	New English version of book <i>Tribes of Israel</i>
\$ 5,000	Trip to Afghanistan or Pakistan for Pathan contact and research
\$ 3,000	Rabbi Avichail's trip to Marranos in Brazil
\$ 1,500	Computer and printer for Rabbi Avichail
\$ 1,400	Portuguese printing of book <i>Judaism</i>
\$ 1,300	New English edition of book <i>Judaism</i>
\$ 600	Transportation of a Shinlung person from Northern India to Israel
\$ 275	Persian alphabet software
\$ 100	Tefilin for a Shinlung man
\$ 70	Work clothes for a Shinlung immigrant
\$ 55	Siddur and Chumash for a Shinlung in Israel or India
\$ 27	Talit and kipah for a Shinlung man
\$ 10	A Portuguese copy of <i>Judaism</i> for a Portuguese or Brazilian Marrano

## Honorary, Memorial Certificates Now Available

Amishav USA now has available both Memorial and Honorary certificates. If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation either in honor of someone, or in memory of someone, please send your donation of at least \$18 to Jeri Lande, 1211 Ballard St., Silver Spring, MD 20910. Make out your check to Amishav USA and please specify how the certificate should be made out (whether the donation is in memory or in honor of someone), your name, and the name and address to which the certificate should be mailed.



## AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES Books Forthcoming

Our stock of Rabbi Avichail's 176-page book *The Tribes of Israel: The Lost and the Dispersed* is low. We have enough to lend out a few. Hopefully, our stock will be replenished in a month or two. The price is \$40 (\$34 of which is tax-deductible). Call 301-585-5229 to borrow a copy or to check on availability for purchase.



## Local Courses Study "Lost Jews"

Two courses at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington this fall will discuss "Lost Jews."

Yoav Karny, an Israeli journalist, will give a four-session course on "The Lost Jews of the Caucasus" beginning the evening of October 12. His material will stress a group he discovered in 1992, the hitherto unknown "Yeleofka Jews" in the mountains of Armenia.

A daytime course for retirees on "Little Known Jewish Communities Around the World" will be taught by Joseph Hantman. This eight-week course, to begin October 6, will explore Jewish communities of India, the Crimea, Ethiopia, China and Kurdish lands.

Call 301-881-0100 for further information.

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ I/We would like to become a Member of AMISHAV USA, 1211 Ballard St., Silver Spring, MD 20910

Name

Address

City  State  Zip

Phone(s): (  )  day (  )  evening

Interests and affiliations useful to Amishav's work

☐ \$18 Member ☐ \$36 Supporting Member ☐ \$100 Sustaining Member ☐ \$200 Contributing Member ☐ Other



## Amishav USA Is Launched

Although Rabbi Avichail has been searching for dispersed Jews around the world for 30 years, prior to 1993 he was barely known in the American Jewish community. He had given a few speeches in the United States and had been written up in Jewish and secular publications (including the *Wall Street Journal*). But his US mailing list consisted of only a dozen names. Bruce Terris incorporated Amishav USA as a tax-exempt organization and then -- nothing.

Two of the Americans on Rabbi Avichail's mailing list, Silver Spring residents Bob Lande and Jack Zeller, tried to convince mainstream national Jewish organizations to sponsor a speaking tour for Rabbi Avichail, but to no avail. The response was always the same -- his work is fascinating but we are too busy on other issues right now.

Even though American friends could not arrange a sponsor, Rabbi Avichail told Lande and Zeller he would come anyway. They were asked to arrange as many speeches and interviews as possible, and he would take his chances that his US tour would be worthwhile. Lande and Zeller arranged speeches and interviews in the Washington area, and others arranged a few events in Boston, New York and Baltimore.

Rabbi Avichail's gamble appears to have paid off. He received coverage in the Jewish and secular press and was widely heard in radio interviews and synagogue speeches. He also had a number of private meetings with people connected with several Jewish organizations.

Most importantly, he made many new friends. Of the people who heard him speak in the Washington-Baltimore area, 20 gathered at Jack Zeller's house in July to meet, get to know one another, and attempt to launch Amishav USA as a "real" organization. This was followed by a larger meeting in August that was joined by two members from New York who plan to launch a group there. We all pledged to do what we could to help Rabbi Avichail succeed.

We are a diverse group with a diverse set of motives. Some want to help him because they feel an obligation to help anyone with Jewish roots who is interested in returning to Judaism and making aliyah. Others see it as a way of strengthening the state of Israel and the spirit of Zionism. Some see it as a way to help bring the Moshiach. Still others want to demonstrate that Judaism welcomes everyone -- not just rich white people who live in industrialized countries. Others believe that spreading the fascinating story of these diverse people from all over the world who want to return to Judaism will help reverse the assimilationist tendencies in the American Jewish community.

While our motives are different, our goal is the same. We all want to help Rabbi Avichail in his important and exciting work. Please join us!!!

## ARCHIVES Needs and Opportunities!!!

Amishav USA is just getting started, and we have a tremendous need for volunteers. We need people to write for this newsletter, fundraisers, people to help us publicize our work, researchers, translators who know Hebrew, Portuguese, Pushto, or Spanish, writers, speakers, educators to help us teach the Jewish community, people with State Department, foreign country or Jewish organizational contacts, and liaisons to synagogues and umbrella organizations in all branches of Judaism. **Above all, we need people with ideas, energy and enthusiasm, and with the broadest vision of Klal Yisrael.** To find out more about volunteer opportunities please call Jack Zeller at 301-681-5679.

There are also several ways your **religious, service, cultural, or social groups** can get involved:

- Let us know who in your organization(s) should receive Amishav literature and would serve as a contact for announcements and lectures.
- Request speakers for your group. We have speakers who can talk about the Jewish and Marrano communities in Brazil, Afghan relations, the Jewish communities in India, and other topics.
- Tell us about people in your group who travel abroad and would be willing to be emissaries for Amishav. We need people who travel to such areas as northern Brazil, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and northeastern India. The travelers can contact known or reported Jewish groups there, deliver Jewish literature and religious items, and bring back reports.
- Write to some of the dispersed communities Amishav has contacted. Develop a correspondence (this may appeal to youth groups). For those struggling under difficult conditions, words of encouragement are important.

Deadline for the next issue: November 15, 1993

Karen Primack, editor



### Amishav USA

On Behalf of the Dispersed of Israel  
1211 Ballard Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Telephone and FAX: (301) 681-5679

Nonprofit Org  
US postage paid  
Suburban MD  
Permit No. 7210





COPY

*Message*

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

November 3, 1993  
19 Heshvan 5754

Gene I Maeroff  
23 Carriage Place  
Edison, NJ 08820

Dear Gene:

Thank you so much for your encouraging note. Since the brick bats are flying too, your comments are all the more appreciated.

My heartfelt thanks.

Cordially,

Alexander M. Schindler



Gene I. Maeroff

23 Carriage Place

Edison, NJ 08820

908-549-9097

October 28, 1993

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

As a Reform Jew (Temple Emanuel, Edison, N.J.), I welcome your proposal on proselytizing. It is an essential step for the viable survival of progressive Judaism in the United States. The accident of birth should not determine who is Jewish.

Your stand is courageous, just as it was on patrilineal descent. The brickbats are sure to come, but you should hold your ground. Traditional Jews have no right to determine authenticity in progressive Judaism. We do not have to look to them for the imprimatur.

Thank you for being a true leader.

Sincerely,

*Gene I. Maeroff*



10/28/93

08:15

☎3107884471

U A H C

001

ACTIVITY REPORT

TRANSMISSION OK

TRANSACTION #

4438

CONNECTION TEL

13104587912

CONNECTION ID

G3

START TIME

10/28 08:14

USAGE TIME

01'47

PAGES

2





RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

TELECOPIER COVER LETTER

PLEASE DELIVER THE FOLLOWING PAGE(S) TO:

NAME: Richard Cohen

LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_

FAX NUMBER: 310-458-7912

TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES: 2 INCLUDING THIS COVER LETTER.

OUR FAX NUMBER IS (212) 570-0895

WE ARE SENDING FROM A CANON FAX 270

If you do not receive all of the pages, please call our office number and the noted extension immediately. Thank you.

UAHC - (212) 249-0100 Extension: 210 or 211

DATE: 10/28

TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

*Dick:*

*This will help answer Wertheimer*

*A.M.S.*



OCTOBER 28, 1993

-3-

DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

**FOCUS ON ISSUES:****REFORM JEWS BEGIN STRUGGLE FOR NEW SENSE OF SPIRITUALITY**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) -- Reform Jews are thirsting for God.

The quest now is to develop a language for spirituality and a Reform way to grapple with the existential questions of Jewish life.

"Reform has made explicit the universalism in Judaism, but now we must make more explicit the resources for a personal relationship with God in our tradition," said Rabbi Samuel Karff of Houston's Congregation Beth Israel.

At the 62nd biennial of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the number of sessions devoted to spiritual issues, and the number of people who crowded into them, attested to the fact that the Reform movement is beginning to grapple with the theological issues it long eschewed in favor of concentrating on social action.

According to Rabbi Daniel Syme, senior vice president of the UAHC, Reform Jews are ready to deal with theology.

"Never has the expressed need for spiritual sustenance been so great," he said in an interview. "The workshops are in response to demand."

Reform Judaism, which began 120 years ago as a response to Jewish Orthodoxy and as an outgrowth of the religious and philosophical enlightenment of the 19th century, has historically distanced itself from Jewish tradition.

The movement rejects halacha, or Jewish law, as binding and emphasizes instead the right of each Jew to make autonomous decisions about Jewish practice.

Not long ago yarmulkes, the head coverings traditionally donned by Jews while praying and studying religious texts, could hardly be found in Reform temples.

At one point, the Reform movement even moved Shabbat worship from Saturday, the Jewish sabbath, to Sunday mornings.

More recently, even after resistance to tradition had softened, the Reform movement focused almost exclusively on social action as the vehicle for expressing Judaism's prophetic mission.

**Time To Reclaim Mitzvot**

In most Reform temples, there was little energy devoted to Judaism in purely religious terms.

But all that is changing.

Tools for incorporating spirituality into Jewish life are being borrowed from many streams of Jewish thought and behavior.

At the workshop on "Consecrating the Ordinary," Rabbi Peter Knobel of Beth El, The Free Synagogue, in Evanston, Ill., advised the overflow, standing-room-only crowd to reclaim mitzvot, or commandments, in their traditional forms as a way of integrating spiritual practice into life.

He spoke of reciting the "Modeh Ani," the prayer traditionally recited in the morning upon waking that thanks God for restoring life; of reciting Shacharit, the morning service; and of saying the "Shema" as he goes to sleep each night.

Knobel, who is also president of the Reform movement's Commission on Religious Living, advocated integrating blessings into each daily activity, to elevate and consecrate even the most

mundane acts of life, much as the most observant Jews do.

He also suggested double-dating correspondence, even to non-Jews, with both the English and Hebrew dates at the top of the page.

In contrast, another panelist, Rabbi Alan Berg of Peninsula Temple Beth Am in San Mateo, Calif., spoke of integrating spirituality in ways that seemed more inspired by the creative format developed by the Jewish renewal movement.

He urged that Reform Jews relate Torah-based images to things they encounter in their daily lives. For example, when you see a tree, he suggested, think about the Garden of Eden.

Other images he suggested included a picture of hugging the Torah, the image of the bush burning in front of Moses without being consumed, and the image of the Red Sea splitting as the Israelites escaped from Egypt.

The Reform movement's emphasis on individual autonomy has had some problematic consequences, rabbis said.

**'Unclear About Who We Are'**

Autonomy has resulted in the movement's reaching in so many different directions that "we're unclear about who we are," said Arthur Gross Schaefer, a rabbi from Los Angeles who left the pulpit out of frustration with this issue.

Moreover, autonomy may have been taken too far and destroyed concepts that are necessary for Jewish spiritual growth. It may have been a central reason for the lack of spiritual direction for which so many Reform Jews now search, said one observer.

The emphasis on autonomy will continue to pose an obstacle for rabbis trying to guide their congregants toward spirituality through observance when most members of the denomination's 850 congregations do not want Reform Judaism to expect spiritual discipline of them.

"It's a tension between making demands and losing members," said Gross Schaefer.

Reform Jews, Karff said, must develop a sense of "commandedness" and consider "what God wants from us."

The movement has "been too cavalier in setting aside the sanctified in Judaism, like covering our head in prayer," Rabbi Dow Marmur of Toronto's Holy Blossom Temple said at one workshop. "The cumulative effect has been indifference."

As the denomination struggles to balance the often-contradictory demands of individual autonomy with developing ways to express spirituality that will bring people together, Reform Jews are anxiously seeking a relationship with the divine.

At a session titled "Bringing God Back Into Your Life," workshop leader Syme encouraged participants to stand and speak of a time in their lives when they most felt connected with God.

There have been times, he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency earlier, when a roomful of people sits silently. No one gets up to speak about having a relationship with God.

But now, at the biennial, Reform Jews were eager to do so. About 30 people stood and spoke of times of tragedy when they felt the presence of God. Others spoke of sensing God during the course of their day-to-day lives.

And one woman spoke of the power of God she had sensed the day before, when, during Shabbat services she had stood in common bond with 4,000 other Reform Jews to recite Judaism's enduring statement of faith, "Shema Yisrael."



If you have any comments. Let us know. Will hold off on the mailing until I hear from you.

Mickey *gust*

November 2, 1993  
18 Cheshvan 5754

MEMORANDUM

To: Chairs and Co-Chairs of Regional Outreach Committees  
UAHC Regional Outreach Staff

From: Harris Gilbert, Dru Greenwood

Re: Seize the Moment: Response to Outreach Segments of Rabbi  
Schindler's Biennial Address

cc: UAHC Regional Directors

As expected, Rabbi Schindler's call for increasing efforts toward conversion of non-Jewish partners in intermarriage, his challenge to define boundaries for the role of non-Jews in the synagogue, and particularly his renewed call for Outreach to religiously non-preferenced Americans have created a flurry of articles and editorials--not all positive in tone--in the press. This increased attention and controversy about Outreach creates a rare opportunity for us, as opposition is flushed out, to speak forcefully on behalf of Outreach, its philosophy, its accomplishments and its future.

Enclosed you'll find some sample articles from The Jewish Week, (NYCity), The Jewish Standard (Northern NJ), and The New York Times, along with responses from David Belin and Rabbi Schindler.

We would urge you to look for articles in your local papers about these issues and to respond to them quickly, emphasizing the traditional openness of Judaism, the very real accomplishments of Outreach (local examples would be good), and the continuation and expansion of these successful programs that we anticipate. Use your title with your name. Also encourage others whose lives have been affected by Outreach to write letters as well. We would also appreciate receiving from you copies of the articles and responses.

If you have any questions or concerns about this, please call either of us. Thank you in advance for your help. We look forward to hearing from you.





איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach  
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS - CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS  
William & Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach  
SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA  
838 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

October 31, 1993  
16 Cheshvan 5754

*Free  
handed  
by me*

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

To: Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
From: Dru Greenwood *Dru*  
Re: The Outreach Aspects of Your Biennial Address: Response and Next Steps

Welcome back! I hope you've had a chance to rest up after San Francisco.

I wanted to alert you to some responses to the Outreach aspects of your address and I'd like to confer on where we go from here.

1. External Response: Naturally, there has been a great deal of press coverage on all three aspects, particularly the \$5 million for proselytizing, missionizing or evangelizing Christians (I've seen all three). None of your proposals is well understood by the press, which is trying to maximize divisiveness and therefore newsworthiness. The piece sent around by Rabbi Glaser is fueling their speculation about "schism" on the role of non-Jews in the synagogue.

I know that at least some regional directors, Outreach staff, certainly myself, have been asked for comment from the press. I think there is need for intra-staff discussion or further clarification of these issues. There is far from a clear understanding among the UAHC staff, let alone a consensus and people don't know what to say, not wanting to publically disagree with you or let on that they don't know the answers. I have been focusing on the continuity of your three proposals with what Outreach has already been doing in terms of inviting conversion and helping congregations to define the role of non-Jews in the synagogue. I don't answer the question of whether or not I agree with your stance on ritual participation, instead discussing the necessity of setting boundaries (which we are doing), pointing out your more restrictive stance on governance, and explaining the role of autonomy and informed choice in Reform Judaism. I also state that my personal preference is irrelevant to the discussion and I uphold the role of the rabbi on the bimah. With regard to the extension of Outreach into the arena of the religiously non-

Chairperson  
Harris Gilbert  
Co-Chairperson  
Rabbi Leslie Guttenberg  
Vice Chairpersons  
Elizabeth Linkon  
Pamela Waechter  
Director  
Dru Greenwood

preferenced, I have been saying that this is a natural extension of Outreach that has already been mandated since 1981, we already have many single non-Jews in our Introduction to Judaism programs, the \$5 million is only a gleam (we hope) in someone's eye at this point and that how this new program is institutionalized and implemented will require extensive discussion and planning before it becomes reality.

2. Internal Response: The first two areas, while certainly controversial, clearly grow out of what we have been doing for the past 2 years in terms of inviting conversion (although there is great resistance, I think there's also been significant movement toward acceptance) and defining the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue (general acceptance of the need for welcoming and setting boundaries, but continued major disagreements as to where and how the boundaries should be drawn). If we can follow through on your lead in de-toxifying the debate on the role of the non-Jew, handing it to rabbis and congregations to decide in a responsible manner, I feel these two areas have been given a tremendous boost by your address.

AMERICAN JEWISH

The last proposal, \$5 million for a new program to reach out to the religiously non-preferenced, does not seem from what I've heard to have support within the movement, even among the leadership or staff. Perhaps you anticipated this. There seems to be a feeling that UAHC policy is being donor-driven, that resources that are badly needed in existing programs will be diverted to something that, at best, has no internal constituency owning it and, at worst, is not supported at all. As you pointed out, Outreach as it stands now is understaffed and stressed with the programs that are already on its plate. Given the other priorities we have set--your first two areas of emphasis--we have not yet built a consensus for the fifth plank of Outreach on the Commission. Since the Commission meeting was held before the Biennial, I have not gotten a read on its response. The Task Force on the Unaffiliated, as you'll see from the minutes, was not happy, particularly with process.

Again, I have been saying internally the same things that I reported above. However, I feel that this new initiative, to have any credibility or chance of success, will need major attention from you and other top leadership to build understanding and consensus both within the Reform movement and beyond (the latter doesn't look possible at least at this stage). Please let me know if you'd like me to take a different direction, or how I can be of greatest assistance.