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**Report
of Rabbi
Alexander M. Schindler,
President
of the Union
of American
Hebrew Congregations
to the Board of Trustees**

November 30, 1984
Bal Harbour, Florida



It is good to be here tonight in this beautiful community of Bal Harbour, to greet the members of the several area congregations who have come here to join us in worship, and to welcome the members of our closer leadership family who have gathered here from distant places for our semi-annual Board of Trustees meeting.

These sessions are a source of inspiration for me, they always are, for this is a rare and precious companionship. What other organization on the American Jewish scene can boast of a leadership group such as this. Look about you and see! The best and the brightest are among us, keen minds and loving hearts united by but one resolve: to do whatever needs be done to enhance the well-being of our religious community, and to advance the cause of our people.

We owe our deepfelt thanks to Charles J. Rothschild, the Chairman of our Board. He faced no easy task when he assumed his high office a year ago, not only because of the stern demands of that office itself but because he was succeeding two bright and shining stars on the firmament of Reform Jewish life, Donald Day and Matthew Ross. Chuck has met and exceeded our high expectations of him. He guides our affairs with diligence and articulates our aspirations with force. Wherever he goes -- and he has travelled extensively during this year -- he wins friends for himself and for that cause which binds us in sacred union.

This is the first time that we convene as a Board since Ted Broide's death and while we eulogized him fully not only at his funeral but also at our Executive Committee meeting, I would be remiss were I not to say once again how profoundly we miss him in our work. An Honorary Life Member of our Board, Dr. Maurice Jacobs, and the Honorary Chairman of our Board, Dr. Samuel Hollender have also come to their journey's end. We will always remember their presence in our midst, even as their manifold contributions toward the advancement of our work will continue to sustain us.

One more note of sad regret must be sounded. I refer to the absence of our Comptroller, Josh Dwork who suffered a serious accident while vacationing in Kenya. There is every hope that he will fully recover, of course, but the road to that recovery will be long and arduous. What gives his mishap its special poignancy is the knowledge that Josh is one of those people who had his life all planned out. He was to retire within the year and he expected to spend the remainder of his days in ease and relaxation. And now, this fearsome misadventure! "Man proposes and God disposes." The Yiddish version of this adage is more sardonic and, hence, somewhat more to the point: *der mensch tracht un Gott lacht* 'Man keeps spinning his dreams but God sits in his heavens and laughs'. But life goes on, nonetheless, and our work must go on, for its fruitage alone invests our fleeting days with lasting worth.

Before I get into the substance of my presentation, I would like to make a brief comment concerning the recent presidential election. David Saperstein will give us his fuller analysis of its import later on this week-end and I have no intention of preempting him. Allow me only this limited commentary: I am exceedingly proud of how we American Jews voted.

I speak now not so much of for *whom* we voted -- that is personal and made no difference in the end -- but rather of *why* as a community we voted as we did. Exit polls reveal that Jews were greatly moved by a concern for the poor and the disadvantaged of our society; that they were worried about the unchecked proliferation of nuclear arms and the Administration's failure in its first term to come to grips with this issue; and that they feared the Christian right's threat to the constitution more than they were reassured by its verbal support of Israel. In other words, we voted our values more than we did our particular interests. Clearly better off than many other Americans, we nonetheless retained an empathy for those who do not share our good fortune. Vitally concerned with Israel, we nonetheless gave major weight to the domestic weal.

Perhaps our vote was but the expression of an enlightened self-interest. Perhaps we recognized that we cannot thrive and survive in a society where only power relationships matter; and that Israel will not survive in a world in which the calculus of force alone prevails. But in that case, at least, we saw an identity of our values and our special interests. In a word, though we may live like WASPS, we still voted like Jews -- and that is why I am proud.



This matter has some bearing on the subject on which I propose to focus tonight: the state of our youth. Here, too, we must be concerned not just with the well-being of the group as a whole, with that majority of our young people who are reasonably well-involved and well-served. Our care must extend also to those who have fallen through our Jewish safety net, who have become involved with religious cults and missionaries or who are contemplating suicide.

Our tradition enjoins us to do so. In the Mishna, tractate Sanhedrin, we are taught: "If a man saves a single life, it is as though he has saved the world." This familiar teaching proclaims the sanctity of each human life. It also contains a more subtle, almost mystical implication that each single life is a microcosm of the whole world. Within each life and each family are all the elements of war and peace, love and hate, cooperation and competition, creativity and destructiveness, that shape events in the world at large.

The Sandedrin's dictum also warns us -- and here is the lesson I choose to emphasize today -- never to overlook the saving of a single life in the course of trying to save the world. It's always so much easier to save the world. It's easier to sign a petition for a nuclear freeze than it is to quit smoking cigarettes, though both are matters of survival. It's easier to demand justice for all than it is to deal justly with those who stand near. It's easier to vote for a resolution on Ethiopia than it is to give succor to a neighbor who is out of work and out of hope and who despairs that there is anyone who gives a damn for him.

Thus does the Mishna remind us: care for the latter and you will help the former; save the single soul, and you will save the universe.

This matter applies to the smaller world of our Union family as well. Here too we must care not only for the many but also for the one. Our success must be measured not only by how we respond to vast groupings of congregants, but also by what we do or fail to do for those who are far fewer in number, the solitary souls, the lost souls, the disabled in body or in spirit.

Take our program of religious education, as a case in point. We have every reason to be proud of what we have accomplished in this sphere. Our texts and educational materials are second to none in their excellence. We pioneered in the preparation of visual aids for the religious school, today producing videotapes, as we once produced prize-winning film-strips. Our curriculum was just hailed as exemplary, by Tel Aviv University, no less, a model for the entire Jewish world to emulate. And so our schools are filled to the overflowing. More Jewish children receive their Jewish education in Reform Religious Schools than they do anywhere else in our land.

Yet there are many children who do not come to us, though they desperately need and want our help. It is a help that cannot be tendered through books or videotapes or award-winning curricula. I speak of the forgotten children, the retarded, the handicapped, the autistic, the deaf, the sightless. Their laughter is not heard in our classrooms, for we have done little to enable them to enter. And so their parents take them elsewhere, to state institutions that are pathetically inadequate to meet their special needs or to home under Christian auspices that may be filled with love and caring but understandably are devoid of any Jewish teaching and experience.

Several months ago, I was deeply grieved to read the following letter in the pages of *Reform Judaism*. It is from a Jewish man whose grandson is autistic, and his letter reads in part:

"My wife and I recently visited our grandson, and it was a most painful experience. The home where he now lives is surrounded by well-manicured lawns and shrubs. But everywhere we were greeted by statues and paintings representative of the Catholic religious order in charge of the boarding school. Why, I wondered, did my only grandson have to live in an environment so far removed from Judaism. I cannot help but feel anger towards my own Jewish community which has in effect, abandoned its mentally and physically handicapped children."

The author of this letter and his wife sit in this room tonight. How shall we answer their challenge? Words alone will not suffice. They offer no balm for wounds of heart as grievous as are theirs. Something more is needed. A substantive response is needed. Somehow we will have to find a way of bringing such a facility to be, if not alone then acting as catalyst in concert with others. The road will be long, its obstacles many and formidable to surmount. But we must make a beginning, remembering that our attainments in the larger sphere of Jewish education will be ever weighed against the manner in which we respond to such troubled, tender souls.



Much the same needs be said about our youth activities. Here too our attainments in the larger sphere abound. The North American Federation of Temple Youth is our proudest creation, our most precious possession. From its ranks have come our rabbis and teachers and leaders -- gifted, devoted all. Wherever I go I find NFTY alumni -- here and in Israel, all over the world -- strengthening our synagogues and serving our people. Yet the state of our youth cannot be adjudged by these attainments alone. It must be measured also by the incidence of teen age suicide and teen involvement with religious cults and missionaries.

Estimates are that 12% of all cult membership in the United States is Jewish, of a general population that is slightly less than 3% Jewish. Some 150,000 of our young people have fallen prey to the blandishments of these groupings. They are now the willing slaves who feed the drones who idle in the courts of cultic potentates.

And hard on the heels of the cults, come the Christian missionaries, the Jews for Jesus and their like. We haven't the vaguest idea how many of our Jewish youngsters have been captured and enraptured by these proselytizers. Some put the figure as low as 50,000. The missionary groups themselves claim 100,000 Jewish members.

Whichever figure is correct, we do know that better than a half-score national missionary organizations spend multi-millions of dollars each and every year for activities targeted exclusively at Jews. They have programs for the elderly and programs for children of nursery school age. They have activities for Junior High and High School youth. They even train special groups to work with Russian Jewish immigrants. They have established a chain of 'messianic synagogues' across the land that give every appearance of being normal synagogues -- yarmulkes are worn, talesim are offered, familiar melodies are intoned, the festivals are observed -- excepting only that benedictions invoking "yeshua hamashiach" (Jesus the Messiah) are superimposed on the liturgy, more often than not only in the Hebrew.

It is this deceptiveness, no less than the special targeting, that is so shamefully reprehensible!

Missions to the Jews are most active on college campuses where they also seem to be enjoying their greatest success. There our youngsters are exposed to the "double-whammy" of the more generally targeted Campus Crusade for Christ in whose behalf a Hunt-type Texas fundamentalist has promised to raise a paltry 1 Billion dollars -- at least so it has been reported. That may just be Texas puffery, but whatever it is it ain't hay.

Which brings me to our most tragic and terrifying problem: those lost and despairing of our young people who find release from their misery only in a self-inflicted death.

Adolescent suicide has reached epidemic proportions. It has increased 300 percent over the last several decades. Approximately half a million young people attempt to kill themselves each year. Ten percent of them succeed. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among adolescents, after accidents -- many of which are suspected suicides. Are these statistics not as grim and alarming as those that measure the nuclear arms race?

There is substantial evidence that the suicide rate among college students is considerably higher than it is among youths who do not go to college. And because the percentage of Jewish youth attending college far exceeds that of the general population, we must draw the grim conclusion that the suicide rate among Jewish adolescents is also disproportionately high. These troubling statistics are confirmed by alarming reports we are receiving, from rabbis and educators and counsellors and youth leaders in every corner of our land.

Should you be consoling yourself now with the thought: 'that's not my grandchild he is talking about... not my kid... we're okay,' just remember that every parent of every suicide once said the self-same thing, said it before suffering the worst shock of all, the most heartrending, guilt-provoking shock imaginable.

There was a time, not long ago, when I consoled myself in like manner, when I said to myself "not our kids... we are okay." But then I began to listen, more carefully, and with a more discerning ear.

I listened to some of the songs to which our children listen. Here, believe it or not, are some of the titles:

"Don't Fear the Reaper" by Blue Boy Oyster,
"Suicide Solution" by Ozzy Osbourne,
"Goodbye Cruel World" by Pink Floyd, and
"Killing Yourself to Live" by Black Sabbath.

All of these lyrics and many more suggest that a self-inflicted death is not to be overlooked once things go bad. The covers of some of these record-albums actually depict scenes of suicide!

But I listened not just to our children's songs but to their *own* voices with a more discriminating ear. And I suddenly realized how vulnerable our children really are, how overawed by the capriciousness of the outside world, how inadequate they felt to meet life's exacting demands and how they fear that in the end they will suffer a bitter humiliation.

Add to all of this the distorting influence of drugs, including alcohol. Add in the astounding and oftentimes frightening march of science, which brings us artificial hearts but also the dread of a nuclear denouement. Add the real randomness of our economy, and the flamboyance of our culture. Add the violence of our times and its canonization by the media. Add it all up, and we are left with some very confused and frightened young people.

Add it all up and you will share my grim conclusion that there probably isn't an adolescent alive who at one point or another has not inwardly screamed at the world to stop and said: "I'm getting off!"



These then are some of our children who have fallen through the Jewish safety net: those who become involved with cults and missionaries, and those who have determined to sever the thread of life completely and who are lost to us forever.

We do not have time to probe all of the reasons why this is so. Indeed we have alluded to many of these reasons already. Still, I am compelled to note that the Jewish safety net is not as strong as it once was. Its strands are frayed and weakened.

The strand of *faith* for too many of us is threadbare. Our approach to religion is hyper-rational and dry-as-dust. We feed on a pabulum of disembodied principles but make few demands on ourselves and least of all on our children. And what do *they* do? They tell us that they find us lacking in spirituality, and they wander off and join the cults and willingly submit themselves to disciplines that *we* refrained from imposing on them.

So too the strand of the Jewish *family* has unravelled. Its members are scattered. They no longer form a cohesive, embracing shelter. And so our children are beguiled by the message of the missionaries -- 'we love you... we are a family... we care about you' -- and they follow their siren song.

Nor is the strand of the Jewish *community* as strong and as supportive as it once was. Our relationship to the outside world has diffused our distinctiveness as a community. That outer world is too much with us. Today, where you find

alcoholism. you find Jews; where you find drug abuse, you find Jews; where you find child-abuse, you find Jews. You find us in the prisons and among the exploiters. You find us even among those persecutors whom we once pitied.

Our children note well this vast disparity between preachment and practice. Some become cynical: the Yuppies become Yuppies, the "me" generation that plunges into the relentless quest for instant gratification. Others revolt against what they perceive as a lifeless and vulgar materialism; they drop out of our community and opt for the mental oblivion of the cults -- or worse yet, they opt for personal obliteration.



What can we do to remedy the wrong? What can we do especially to help our alienated youth, the solitary souls, the lost souls, the disabled in body or in spirit? There are many obstacles that mark the terrain that we must cross in order to be of help to them. To initiate that journey, I propose the following resolutions:

- I call on our Commission of Education and its staff to explore ways in which we as a Reform movement might provide for the Jewish education of the physically and mentally handicapped, the retarded and the autistic, the deaf and the sightless among our children. Perhaps we can also serve as catalyst and galvanize other branches of the Jewish community to establish residential facilities for those of our children who must be institutionalized.
- I call on our Committee on Cults and Missionaries vastly to enlarge its work. We need books and teachers guides and films for our schools and our programs of informal education. We need more information for the parents and the counsellors of our children. That information must be made more-readily available to them, perhaps by means of a data bank which can help us keep track of the multifold cults and missionaries with all their multifarious guises. And we must find the means to make all this possible. We face powerful adversaries with unlimited resources, and we cannot confront them with sticks and with stones.
- I also call on this Board to create a UAHC Task Force on Teen-Age Suicide, to provide us with the programmatic means to check this spreading, dreaded scourge. We must train our rabbis and teachers and youth leaders how to recognize the warning signals of this sickness. We must develop the educational materials in a preventative program. We must also devise some means for crisis intervention on a national, certainly regional and perhaps even congregation level.
- Lastly, I call on this Board to establish a new Foundation or Institute which can serve as an instrumentality through which the program mandates of the Task Force on Teen-Age Suicide can be realized and funded outside the regular budget of the UAHC. This institute is to bear the name *Yad Tikvah* -- a 'hand of hope' for our youth.

Will our efforts be sufficient for the need? I do not know, but we must do whatever *we* can, consoled by the thought of a courageous and compassionate American leader Robert F. Kennedy who, in a slightly different though not unrelated context said:

"Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Even so, there is something else that we must do, -- and here is where our newer tasks and our ongoing Union program converge. We must do everthing in our power to restrengthen the strands of the Jewish safety net, by deepening our Jewish faith, by repairing the walls of the Jewish home, by encircling our Jewish community in a loving embrace once again.

In seeking such a regeneration of our Jewishness as an "alternative identity" for the salvation of our youth, we are not preaching exclusivism, or isolationism, or withdrawal. We heed, instead, a far older and wiser mandate; to be a light unto the nations. We act in the spirit of the mishnaic dictum that by shedding light, first, into the remotest corner of our children's hearts we will thereby help to illuminate the entire world.

East–West Relations:

A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
World Jewish Congress, Vienna, Austria
January, 1985

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In preparing to speak on the subject of East-West relations, I might have selected metaphors of protest and peace—the twin pillars of our subject—from some 4,000 years of Jewish historical reality and prophetic teaching. I dare say that most of the papers addressing this subject from a Jewish perspective have done precisely that. Indeed, most of the resolutions on nuclear disarmament adopted by my own organization, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, have accentuated prophetic notes in the hope of making a uniquely Jewish contribution to the quest for peace. Yet the nuclear arms race—and the unthinkable apocalypse that it threatens to bring about—looms larger today, countless resolutions and conferences later, than ever before. And so I have come to fear that these precious precepts drawn from our sacred lore are heard as but clichés by those in power to whom they are directed: damned by silence in the East and by faint praise in the West.

Today, therefore, I will not call upon the prophet Isaiah to speak of swords and plowshares. I will not tell the story of Abraham protesting to God about the wholesale destruction of even the most sinful of cities. I call instead upon a collective Jewish experience, near enough in memory not to be labelled a cliché, large enough in magnitude never to be labelled a cliché. I speak of the slaughtering of six million Jews by the Nazis, whose cold, efficient murder machine gave rise to a singularly Jewish apocalyptic vision. I call upon the experience of those all-too-few thousands of concentration camp survivors who were liberated from this vision of the end of the world—liberated by the combined efforts of the East and the West, of the Soviet Union and the United States, and, in particular, by the heroic sacrifice of the Russian people.

Our Jewish victims and survivors of Nazism are with us now, as they are at every Jewish gathering of importance. They are here,

in particular, because the World Jewish Congress, alone among international Jewish organizations, has significant representation from Eastern Europe, where the worst of the Nazi murdering and the brunt of the anti-Nazi fighting took place. They are with us now and *they* speak in a prophetic voice. They incarnate the stark, contrarious choice that now competes for the will of the human race: being or non-being, survival or extinction, life or death. They trivialize by their presence the many differences between our systems: East and West, capitalist and communist, and they point to the insanity and immorality of defending *anything*—be it ideology or creed or nationhood—by threatening the destruction of *everything* there is.

The victims stand beneath the mushroom cloud and warn the world: *"This,"* they say, *"is the product of apathy, and nationalism, and illusions of racial superiority and world dominion. This is the smoke of the Auschwitz chimneys that is now billowing across the entire earth. Learn from us, the chosen, slaughtered people, or you will become what we are: wisps of smoke, ashes in blackened, barren soil."*

The survivors, on the other hand, stand beneath a rainbow. *"This rainbow,"* they say, *"was placed in the sky to assure that the Flood waters would never again envelop the earth, that we could live with some semblance of security about our tomorrow. The Nazis shattered the rainbow for us. They took its colors and pinned them to our hearts, yellow for Jews, red for Communists, brown for Gypsies, pink for homosexuals, purple for Jehovah's Witnesses, and on and on through the spectrum of murdered souls. And yet we lived to witness the reestablishment of the rainbow by the united effort of the world's great powers. Within the rainbow of an international peace, we, an international people, are resolved to be a primary color band."*

Let this be our resolve. Let this be the voice of prophecy that we amplify and broadcast to those men who will be meeting in Geneva in order to negotiate a new balance of terror for our world, rather than a swift and true restriction on nuclear armaments.

* * *

We are an international people, yes—but, when the symptoms of the Nazi plague began to show, in the Nuremberg Laws, in the

Kristallnacht, in the early revelations of the death camps, we Jews were the most isolated and abandoned people on the face of the earth. The holocaust therefore teaches us more than a lesson in peace and U.S.-Soviet cooperation. It teaches us also about the need to protest a growing injustice before it reaches full bloom.

In few places in the world is this lesson more applicable today than in the situation of Soviet Jewry—a situation in which the distinctive identity of the Soviet Jewish minority is being destroyed, the high hopes of the October revolution are being mocked, and the international Jewish commitment to peace is being imperilled, despite our best efforts to shore it up.

Protest and peace are the twin pillars of East-West relations. Topple either, and the whole structure falls. If we swallow our protest for the sake of peace—for the sake, perhaps, of not offending the governments of our Eastern European delegates—then the frail peace will be overturned by the writhings of the injustice itself. But if we abandon the peace in the name of protest—by becoming cold-war warriors and urging an acceleration of the arms race—then the protest corrodes into an immoral threat.

Our protest against Soviet anti-Semitism is therefore based on the firmest *moral* grounds. We reject the damning caricature of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" totally devoid of all humanity. Similarly, we reject the catch-all excuse of "socialist morality" for wrongdoings in socialist societies. A morality that is guided by expediency is no morality at all. Our protest, in other words—God help us—is founded on religious and humanistic grounds. Our protest is an appeal to conscience.

Our conscience cannot understand how a nation whose staggering loss of some 20 million citizens in WWII included 2 million Jews—over 40 percent of the Soviet Jewish population at that time—has failed to give commemoration, amid its countless war memorials, to the people whom Hitler slated for special extermination.

Our conscience cannot understand how a nation with a revolutionary commitment to extirpate its deep-rooted heritage of anti-Semitism—a commitment reflected in the Soviet constitution—can feed the flames of anti-Jewish hatred with the sorts of

Stuermer-and Streicher-like books and articles and films and cartoons that are regularly published in the Soviet Union and distributed internationally.

Our conscience cannot understand how a nation that prides itself on its "internationalism" and the cultural autonomy it grants to its national minorities nonetheless tramples on the culture of its Jews, denying them the means—the books, the schools, the teachers, and the languages—required for its sustenance.

Our conscience cannot understand how a government that describes its method of operation as "democratic centralism" can fail to grant its Jewish national minority either democracy or centralism; how it can fail to permit the development of a national Jewish organization and leadership to represent Jewish interests; and how instead it can present us with a puppet-like "Anti-Zionist Committee" that has no roots whatsoever in the Soviet Jewish community.

Our conscience cannot understand how a nation with the largest landmass on earth can close its borders to its own citizens and use the right of emigration as a bargaining chip at the negotiating table.

Our conscience cannot understand how a system that has given extensive aid to national liberation movements around the world can denigrate the Jewish national liberation movement and vilify Zionism.

Finally, our conscience cannot grasp how a "scientific" system of social thought can deem dissent to be a psychiatric disorder and how a society that considers itself to be "progressive" can refuse to admit error or even permit criticism that might point to error and thus be more inflexible, rigid, and unchanging than the most reactionary of the world's reactionary regimes.

It is a puzzlement, is it not: a government that defines itself as "progressive" prefers to define a problem out of existence with the blatant propaganda line: "*There can be no anti-Semitism under socialism,*" rather than to solve that very problem, perhaps beginning with the recognition that where there is anti-Semitism there simply is no socialism.

* * *

Let me digress here to say that I am no admirer of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, though I use its terms to express my criticisms. To me, there is something dangerous about its prescriptiveness and arrogant about its "scientific" method. There is something rather medieval-Christian about its messianic preachments and its inquisitorial procedures. My Jewish soul rebels against the existing communist systems as systems of idolatry. I am merely trying to show that the Soviet system today is a contradiction in its own ideal terms, just as, were my discussion here of American foreign and domestic policy, my criticism would be expressed in terms of the American Constitution and of the American tradition, and I would endeavor to show how certain policies that I oppose are contradictory to the best of my country's ideals.

Indeed, let it be confessed in this context that I deem some of the present U.S. formulae for human rights to be such a contradiction of the American ideal and injurious to the cause of Soviet Jewry. I refer to the formula, first articulated by the American ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, which distinguished between "authoritarian" governments of the right and "totalitarian" governments of the left, and which, in my judgment, undermines the moral thrust of U.S. foreign policy. We cannot divide torture victims into two classes based on the ideology of their tormentors! All bigotry and persecution are equally abhorrent! As long as the United States continues to pursue such a double standard—"constructive engagement" with South Africa and destructive covert war against Nicaragua; aid to Pinochet in Chile and boycott of Jaruzelski in Poland—its protestations of human rights lack sincerity and authenticity and will be ignored—particularly in the Soviet Union.

Neither superpower fully lives up to its own ideals. This is a crucial perspective for its leaders to adopt, I think: to recognize that neither country is an "evil empire" while both countries suffer deep-seated problems that contradict outstanding ideals. If change is to come to the Soviet Union, if change is to come to the United States, it will come in forms appropriate to each nation, arising from the conditions and culture within each nation.

But my focus must now return to the Soviet Jewish situation, which is grim to put it mildly. Consider some of the statistics:

- * The people of the Book are denied their Book in the tongue in which it was written. No Hebrew Bible is allowed to be published in the Soviet Union. None, in fact, has been published since 1919.
- * Nearly 400,000 Soviet Jews declare Yiddish to be their mother tongue. Yet less than 100 Yiddish books and only one Yiddish magazine have been published in a span of more than 20 years.
- * The doctoral degrees of at least 65 Jewish scientists have been revoked for political reasons.
- * The field of mathematics has been made virtually "Judenrein."
- * The enrollment of Jews in higher education has been reduced by over 40 percent in the last decade.
- * And, of course, Soviet Jewish emigration has suffered a cataclysmic decline from a high of 51,000 in 1979 to less than 1,000 during the calendar year just past.

Statistics do not really tell the story. Only the story of people's lives can convey the cruelty and the maiming of it all. This is why I commend to you Martin Gilbert's recently published book, *The Jews of Hope*, which allows the victims to speak for themselves.

The first story he tells is that of Evgeni Lein, who applied for an exit visa to Israel and was turned down. The day he applied he lost his job as a computer mathematician and his wife lost her job as a chemist. Their unemployment made them subject to persecution as "parasites" and so they looked for jobs, but no one would hire them because they were refuseniks.

Their daughter Nehama was taunted in school and, while out walking with her father one day, she was seized by two men and severely beaten. A man on a passing tram saw the assault, jumped off the tram, and joined Mr. Lein in chasing down the attackers. They caught them and called the police, and Mr. Lein insisted that the thugs be tried. Government officials did all they could to prevent the trial, but, because of the publicity, they were forced to

hear the case. The assailants never appeared in court; the authorities sent substitutes and *they* were found guilty.

On the evening of Sunday, May 17, 1981, Mr. Lein and about 70 other Jews met in an apartment in the suburbs of Leningrad. They were going to hear and discuss a lecture about the Sabbath. The meeting had just begun, when a uniformed militiaman and three civilian auxiliary police burst into the crowded apartment. They confiscated all books and papers, searched the handbags of all the women, and took down the name of every person there. Evgeni Lein demanded the names of those who invaded his apartment on the grounds that the gathering had not violated any Soviet law. He was dragged from the apartment and arrested. As he stood in the street, he heard some onlooker yell out that it was a pity that all the Jews had not been killed in the war, and he heard some of them chant the well-known refrain: "*Beat it, Jews, get the hell out of our country!*" Understandably, the chant had a special edge for Mr. Lein because that is precisely what he had been trying to do for the last several years—to get out of Russia.

Now, the Soviet Union insists that such and like incidents are in all respects domestic affairs and, hence, no one else's business. Yet we cannot and will not consider them "strictly internal affairs," not any more than we can consider South Africa's apartheid pass laws to be strictly "an internal affair."

* * *

These incidents give offense to a universal sense of justice. They also, as I have tried to detail, directly contradict the precepts, both ideological and constitutional, of the Soviet system.

Were I a Soviet citizen making this very point, not in Vienna but in Moscow, I would undoubtedly be arrested for anti-Soviet "agitation and propaganda," just as Iosif Begun was charged when he insisted that teaching Hebrew was permitted by Soviet law. In solidarity with him, and with the many other Jews who have fallen through the holes of illogic and inconsistency in the Soviet system, I repeat the words that Begun uttered when he was

sentenced to seven years in prison and five subsequent years of internal exile: "*Am Yisrael Chai!*" No matter if the Soviet authorities try to define, slander, or assimilate us out of existence: "*Am Yisrael Chai!*"

The Jewish people live—and many want to remain where they live, in the USSR amid the world's third largest Jewish community. "Rootless cosmopolitans" we may be, yet even in the bloody days of the czars, in the days of the worst pogroms, over two-thirds of Russia's Jews ignored the lure of the *goldene medine* as well as the arguments of the fledgling Zionist movement and they remained where they lived. Today, despite the recriminations and the discriminations that filing for emigration heaps upon the heads of Soviet Jews, over 200,000 applications for visas are on file in Moscow. On behalf of these would-be emigrants, and on behalf of the many more who are afraid to file, it is appropriate for us to demand: "*Let my people go!*" But for the two million who will remain, and whose natural increase will replace those who leave, for them we must demand of the Soviet government: "*Let my people stay! Let my people stay a people: with a national organization, with full human rights, and with a full encouragement of the Jewish tradition.*"

* * *

But, having given voice to our protest, we must not fall into the trap of joining the shrill voices of those who wish to sink Russia and America ever more deeply into incendiary rhetoric and reciprocal military confrontation. That will scarcely serve our purposes. Peace—and not war—along with protest is the second of the twin pillars of the East-West relationship.

Certainly the cause of Russian Jewish emigration will not be served in such a manner. The present abrupt decline of this emigration grimly reflects the tensions on the international scene. Soviet policy on Jewish emigration often fluctuates for mysterious reasons, but two facts are clear: the volume of emigration has never been high unless Jews and governments in the West were raising their voices to demand it and emigration is always diminished when Soviet-American relations are strained.

(Note, if you will, that, the moment there was a change of climate in Geneva, Anatoly Shcharansky's mother received permission to visit him at a labor camp.)

In Martin Gilbert's book on the Russian Jews, he writes that the elder statesman among the refuseniks, Lev Ovsishcher, has this to say:

At the time when Soviet-American relations are becoming sharp, our situation is becoming sharp...and the emigration policy became horrible....In our souls we are against this link, but we are realists. We must face it.... There must be made some steps among the nations' leaders to avert a new war. I believe that then Jewish emigration will begin again....

Ovsishcher who rose to the rank of colonel in the Russian army, and was a war hero who won fifteen medals, realizes something else, and we must remember it too: that we Jews are not a breed apart, that our fate is bound up with the fate of humankind. Ovsishcher said:

We Jews must raise our voice for peace... we must not align ourselves with its enemies... the Jewish love for peace must be stressed everywhere... I know what war is. I know that throughout the war Jewish blood flowed—at the front, in the camps, in the ghettos. I raise my voice against war, against confrontation....

A point of connection must be found [between the United States and the Soviet Union]... if not we will become like two sheep who met on a ford across the river. They were very obstinate. They didn't want to give way—and the tale ends: "Early in the morning two sheep were drowned in this river." Such things can happen with mankind.

Aye, the fate of the Jew and the fate of the earth are inextricably intertwined. If the world plunges into a nuclear saturnalia, there will be no Russian Jews left to worry about, and no Israel left to worry over, and no American Jews left to do any of the worrying.

* * *

The Jewish people, in ancient times, always found themselves sandwiched between great powers, some in decline, some on the rise—all threatening to sweep away the Promised Land's autonomous existence. Today, that situation has been heightened

beyond biblical analogy. An entire world finds itself sandwiched between the great powers, imperilled not merely in terms of political identity and human rights but in terms of sheer physical survival. The so-called rivalry between the United States and Russia thus becomes a cooperative act, a grotesque dance of death. How obscene, how blasphemous this danse macabre appears to be and is!

How obscene to hear statistical and strategic discussions of how to fight a nuclear war!

How blasphemous the increased stockpiling of monstrous weapons at incredible expenses, when in the world there are more starving people—and more available food—than ever before!

How maddening to see Schultz and Gromyko coming to Geneva, not as penitents, not with a sense of profound humility, but as smiling pawnbrokers throwing humanity the crumb of hope as they negotiate about negotiations! (Don't misunderstand me: Talking is better than non-talking, and the Geneva decision to resume talking—a full year in the making—is a modest step forward.) Yet how hypocritical is their argument about introducing arms into outer space, even while both nations are perfecting ground-hugging cruise missiles against which "Star Wars" defenses would be perfectly useless. And, if President Reagan truly intends to share such technologies with the Soviet Union, why not simply and mutually ditch offensive weapons to begin with and save trillions of dollars in expenditures that translate into hardship for both peoples.

How idolatrous, indeed, for both systems, East and West, to view their virtues and their differences with such a blind devotion that they would destroy the whole world in order to establish their views!

And how painful for us, as Jews, to see the warning of our six million martyred brethren ignored today, only forty short years after their slaughter.

Some will say to me, perhaps even today, that as a rabbi I am no expert on national defense or nuclear weaponry. My answer is that there is no human being alive who deserves to be entrusted with so-called "expertise" on the subject of the end of the world.

That is the subject that we are discussing, and any effort to downgrade it to less apocalyptic dimensions is an outrage and an incredible conceit.

We are standing at a crossroad of human history and our first task is to recognize that fact. These are scarcely ordinary times. These are extra-ordinary times in which all of humanity is summoned to the task of human survival. These are times in which spiritual and material reality merge, in which all the faces of the human race merge. It is a merger brought about not, alas, by the hand of God, or of a messianic presence, but by the mushroom-shaped, skull-shaped shadow of death.

In darkness we merge. Our Jewish chosenness becomes the yoke of all human beings. Our Jewish consciousness becomes a global consciousness. Our Jewish prophets become voices of pain, anger, fear, and vision that speak, not only to Israel, but to the entire world. And we become, each of us, a rabbi and a nuclear arms expert. We must become precisely that, for such a sense of responsibility is the only alternative we have to the final anonymity that the Bomb, if we permit it, will bring.

* * *

Albert Einstein ushered in the nuclear age by uncovering the mysteries of energy and matter—mysteries that truly resemble, at their core, religious mysteries.

Confronted by the spectre of Hitler and the Nazi holocaust, Einstein then urged the creation of the atomic bomb.

He spent the last years of his life searching for a "unified field theory" and working for world peace. Both endeavors, he knew, were mandated by his earlier discoveries.

It is our task, today, as a people, to help complete the quest of this great Jew, for a *unified world* theory—one that would indeed shed a magnificent light, the light of the rainbow, on the mysteries of existence. As an international people, we are already in the forefront of this search. As experts in survival, we have so very much to teach. As human beings, we have no other choice.

Consultation On Conscience

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler
Washington Hebrew Congregation
Washington, D.C.
April 14, 1985

Consultation On Conscience

Text of
Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler's comments
during a debate with
Dr. Pat Robertson

April 14, 1985
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Washington, D.C.

First, I want to thank Rabbi Joshua Haberman for his kind words of introduction and for opening his communal home to this function. It is altogether fitting that tonight's dialogue be held in the sanctuary of the Washington Hebrew Congregation since Rabbi Haberman is an ardent champion of a rapprochement between Christian evangelicals and American Jews. What better place, then, than this synagogue for an honest probing of our differences regarding the proper role of religion in American public life.

I am genuinely sorry that Jerry Falwell couldn't make it tonight and that illness kept him from coming here. But sometimes you luck out. Sometimes, when Pavarotti has a cold, you end up with Plácido Domingo, and while the one might be flashier the other has the more solid voice.

Even so it is with Pat Robertson. He is truly among the foremost spokesmen of that viewpoint which has come to be known as the Christian Right. Head of the Christian Broadcast Network, his own program, the 700 Club, commands an audience of millions. And so I join you in thanking him for his graciousness in coming here on such short notice, and after four hectic days of leading a conference of his own.

Now, Dr. Robertson has told David Saperstein that he would really rather not get into a sharp debate, that, while he is perfectly prepared to discuss his views on Church and State, he would just as soon eschew harsh rhetoric. That speaks well for him, and it is in character, for he has always been among the more responsible of evangelical leaders. And he certainly was most forthcoming in his remarks tonight. How can I possibly argue against such an approach?

And yet I must. Having a responsible dialogue does not import that those who engage in it are compelled to voice platitudes. A responsible dialogue demands frankness as well—it requires that divergent views be openly explored and that perceptions be freely stated. That rapprochement which Dr. Robertson wants requires openness. We can't lift the curtain of stereotypes without first looking at the stereotypes. I will do so, even as he does. I beg him to understand, though, that I never speak dispassionately, that it is against my essential nature to do so. But know that, if I do speak with emotion tonight, it is directed not against you, Dr. Robertson, personally, but only against those views and means which we Jews generally ascribe to that ideological alliance which has come to be known, for better or for worse, as the Christian Right.

* * *

Let me say at once that we uphold the right of fundamentalist preachers to speak out on public policy. American Jews cherish the First Amendment separating Church and State but we do not see that principle as precluding a political involvement by the religious community. Indeed, the right to such an involvement is secured by the Free Exercise Clause of that Amendment itself.

We Jews claim this right for ourselves with a passion, and we will *not* deny it to others, however divergent their views. If Eisendrath could thunder against the war in Vietnam and Schindler can hold forth on nuclear disarmament and economic justice, why then, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell have every right to take the stump for prayer in the public schools and against abortion.

The public debate is enriched when different groups bring their divergent moral perspectives to bear on the issues of the day. Even so has the Moral Majority refocused our attention on concerns we had neglected: the deterioration of the family, and the debasement of sex, and the indiscriminate permissiveness in our society. None of these issues has ever evoked an appropriate moral response by our liberal Jewish community—and we might as well admit it.

Now I trust that you will not construe these words as an endorsement of the fundamentalist manifesto as a whole. Quite aside from our wide divergence on many of its specific items, I find the scope of that agenda to be entirely too narrow, ethically inadequate, unfaithful to the fullness of religious witness.

Maybe my own conception of religion is at fault. But I cannot understand how an agenda that calls itself religious can oppose our government's ratification of the Genocide Convention.

I cannot understand how a *religious* agenda can concern itself almost exclusively with personal rather than with public morality, more with what happens in the privacy of the bedroom than with what happens in our urban ghettos.

I cannot understand how a *religious* agenda can identify itself with a particular economic theory—clearly secular in its essential nature—which leaves it up to God to take care of toxic waste dumps, and rent gouging, and unemployment, and unequal pay for women, and all those other scarcely self-corrupting by-products of the rigid laissez-faire approach.

And, finally, while I will yield to no one in my love for this land for which I fought and bled, I cannot understand how those who speak in the name of a religion that claims adherents in every corner of our world can nonetheless be so narrowly nationalistic as to attain to a blatant chauvinism. The embrace of the Christian Right is scarcely global. And its preachments about nuclear disarmament make it almost impossible for me to believe that the more traditional Christian quest for peace on earth emerged from the same Holy Scriptures in worship for the same Lord.

Forgotten the injunction about "turning the other cheek" to one's enemy. No inspiration derived from God's promise to Noah, sealed by the rainbow sign, that God would never again destroy the world. Foreign policy decisions made with reference to an approaching Armageddon. All countermeasures to Soviet influence appear condoned by that camp, dictatorships and death squads and grinding poverty and apartheid right on up to nuclear brinksmanship—they all appear condoned if not blessed by the Christian Right. It is a puzzlement!

* * *

While there may be some or even many Jews in this audience who disagree with one or another of my views implicit in this critique, few here will disagree with me when I say that the American Jewish community is most perturbed about the fact that the Moral Majority has made "prayer in public education" a centerpiece of its national agenda.

We are exceedingly sensitive on this subject and the reason is not far to seek: we see the public classroom as the very first line of defense in our struggle to maintain Church and State separation on the American scene.

This is a "gut issue" for American Jews. We hold this principle to be our fundamental protection, the ultimate ground of that unique freedom which we have experienced in this land. Everywhere else in our wanderings we suffered persecution, never here. In all other countries there was an established faith; here, in this blessed America, there is none. That is why we prize the First Amendment as the very cornerstone of our liberties.

Even the slightest chip in that separating wall evokes our anxious concerns, and properly so. For instance, could there be anything more innocuous than the "equal access" program adopted by Congress last year? It seemed so harmless! America's secondary schools were to be opened to a wide variety of religious activities, no more; and everything was to be voluntary, nothing was to be required.

Yet look at what has happened across the land! In Illinois, the Jews for Jesus established chapters in various high schools. In one West Coast community the Moonies asked for equal time and space; in another, it was the American Nazi Party. On Long Island so many cults and missionary groups are competing for available resources, the despairing local school officials have actually recommended the closure of *all* extra-curricular activity, including sports, just to get out from under. Next thing you know, Louis Farrakhan will ask for high school space to spew his venom—in the name of his Black Muslim sect.

And thus it is that the American public school which always was and always should be the primary unifying force of our country's divergent religious and ethnic groups is threatening to become a battleground for competing sectarian interests.

And this is why we American Jews will continue most vigorously to resist the Moral Majority and its allies on their every suggestion to introduce religion into the public school. We will do so, lest the separating wall crumble into a moat where the sharks of religious hatred thrash about and sharpen their teeth for victims.

* * *

Now the fact that we are opposed to this or that aspect of the Moral Majority Manifesto does not really go to the root of our distrust. We oppose many other groupings on divergent issues, but we don't necessarily hold them suspect, we don't fret and fume about them as we do with the Religious Right.

The real reason, I believe, is style, the manner in which the arguments of the Moral Majority are advanced. There is entirely too much hyperbole. Extremist solutions are often endorsed. And everything is cast in apocalyptic terms, as a struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, between the forces of light and of darkness.

This kind of language violates the bounds of a reasonable democratic discourse. In effect it forecloses such a discourse for, if a political opponent is wrong or misguided or even stupid, he can be dealt with in the marketplace of ideas. But, when he is immoral and a sinner, the case can be made that he does not deserve to be in the debate at all.

Let me give you a concrete example of what I mean, Pat Robertson.

Back on September 25, 1984, on the 700 Club broadcast, you said the following:

The Constitution of the United States is a marvelous instrument for self-government by Christian people. But the minute you turn it into the hands of non-Christian people, and

atheistic people, they can use it to destroy the very foundations of our society. And that's what's been happening.

What, in effect, are you saying to American Jews? We hear it only one way. You are saying in effect:

I'm going to keep you Jews from holding public office, and I want you out of the political arena.

You certainly didn't have that in mind, heaven forefend. Now that I have met you and heard you, I know you don't have that in mind. But that's the only way we can read it. Put yourself in our shoes.

Don't misunderstand me to demand that you restrain your feelings, Dr. Robertson, in public debate on the subject of abortion or anything else, for that matter. How can you be dispassionate! Your views flow from the deepest wellsprings of your being. They are tempered on the anvil of your soul. But, when you and other spokesmen of the Christian Right publicly advance arguments in a narrow sectarian context and in absolutistic terms, we Jews become very anxious indeed.

When we hear that those who favor E.R.A. are "anti-family," and those who insist on civil rights for homosexuals are "perverts," and those who are opposed to school prayer are "anti-Christ," and those who believe in free choice are "murderers," the "Nazi-like perpetrators of another holocaust"—when we hear all this we somehow get the feeling that just maybe there is somebody out there who would rather not have us about.

It is in this context that I made comments some years ago that were later misrepresented to imply that I hold Jerry Falwell and other leaders of the Christian Right to be anti-Semites. I did not. That simply is not so. What I did say—I repeat—is this:

...that the extreme and absolutistic language of the Christian Right "creates a climate of opinion which is hostile to religious tolerance. Such a climate... is bad for civil liberties, for human rights, for interfaith understanding, and for mutual respect among Americans.... Therefore, it is also bad for Jews.... I do not accuse Jerry Falwell and Bailey

Smith of deliberately inciting anti-Semitism. But I do say that their preachments have an inevitable effect. Jerry Falwell tells us that only one brand of politics is acceptable to God, and Bailey Smith tells us that only one brand of believer is acceptable to God. It is no wonder, then, that those who hold different political views should be branded 'Satan' and those who hold different religious beliefs should become the victims of vandals. . . ."

That's what I said, and I stand by every word. The health of the American democratic process requires civility, temperateness, and a genuine respect for divergent views, even if these views involve a divergent interpretation of Holy Writ.

* * *

Which leads me to the final comment I want to make on the manner in which arguments of the Christian Right are advanced. I refer now to the frequency with which its followers invoke God's name to sanctify their positions.

This troubles me on theological grounds. We realize, of course, that Christian ministers draw on Scripture for inspiration, that they believe it to be the revealed word of God. I respect these beliefs, and I admire the steadfastness with which they turn to the Bible for guidance as they make their life decisions. But can we really know God's will on all the issues facing our nation? Can any being of flesh and blood know with a certainty just what God Almighty wills on a particular policy matter? Surely that is a knowledge which neither Christian nor Jew, however learned and pious, has the right to claim!

In his elegant Lynchburg speech, Senator Kennedy made a similar point when he asked respect "for the independent judgment of conscience." He said:

Those who proclaim moral and religious values can offer moral counsel, but they should not casually treat a position on a public issue as a test of fealty to faith.

Illustrating the problem, the senator quoted Jerry Falwell's own

statement that "to stand against Israel is to stand against God." Said Kennedy:

There is no one in the Senate who has stood more firmly for Israel than I have. Yet I do not doubt the faith of those on the other side. Their error is not one of religion but of policy.

The senator's example is well chosen. Many congressional leaders who receive extremely high marks on the "morality index" of the Christian Voice, because of their conservative positions on such "holy" subjects as gun control and U.S. relations with Zimbabwe, have only mediocre if not poor voting records on Israel. The liberals did much better on that score, I'm afraid. Thus, for instance, more than 90 percent of the senators who co-sponsored the Prayer Amendment also voted in favor of selling AWACs to the Saudi dictatorship. Were they saints on some issues and sinners on others? Did their religion lapse on the AWACs vote?

Surely not. Surely, they had other considerations that came to play in their decision, such as the extension of U.S. influence in the Middle East, and the dampening of Syrian power, and the need to recapture petro-dollars. If this be so, it is a confession that the AWACs sale was a complicated matter that involved many considerations all at once. And, if *that* confession is made, it must apply as well to domestic gun control, and to U.S. relations with African nations, and all of those other issues which the Christian Voice crowns with the halo of divine approval.

Let me make it crystal clear here that Pat Robertson did *not* line up with the other conservatives on the AWACs sale. Nor did Jerry Falwell. Dr. Robertson opposed it then as he opposes the delivery of those planes now, and we are grateful for his steadfast support. Nonetheless, the hazard—indeed the blasphemy!—of proclaiming "God's will" on specific policy issues is demonstrated by example.

* * *

Now, in one respect, my critique of the Religious Right hasn't been fair at all. I freely intermingled the views of the Moral Ma-

jority with those of the Christian Voice and of the Religious Roundtable, and of many other conservative political action groupings. I tossed them all together under the rubric of the Christian Right. That isn't really fair play. The Christian Right is not a monistic grouping, all of whose followers are of one mind on each and every issue or approach. It is, rather, a companionship of kindred spirits, aspiring to the selfsame goal.

But this is the way we see the religious right. This is the way we hear it. And, since by coming here, and by what you have said and done before, it is clear that you are eager to reach out to American Jews, you must understand what *our* perception is. We have no other choice but to identify you with others, especially when those words of moderation *you* speak are so widely contradicted by those with whom you confer, or whom you endorse, or on whose letterhead your name appears.

This is the burden of politics for the responsible leaders of the Christian Right, especially for the Pat Robertsons and Jerry Falwells. So long as there are haters in your camp, so long as there are Jim Swaggarts and Tim LaHayes around who say that God rejects the Jews because of their sins, that in rejecting Jesus the Jews have placed themselves "under Satan's domain who kills and steals and destroys," so long as such voices are heard, your assurances about the integrity of Jews and Judaism will be scrutinized and doubted.

These, therefore, become your tasks as the responsible leader of a nationwide movement: to tame extremism within your own ranks, to convince your allies of the correctness of your newer understanding.

If you are successful, we will certainly be able to work with you, especially on issues of vital, common concern such as the securing of Israel's safety, the rebuilding of the family, and, this above all, the joining in the noble task of moving America ever more closely toward the fulfillment of its ideal vision, most especially the vision that this is a land where men and women of divergent creeds and differing convictions can live together in concord and mutual respect.

1985
Revised Speech

Draft Notes for Op-Ed on Terrorism
A.M. Schindler

The recent Beirut hostage crisis has given rise to the suggestion that the United States should distance itself from Israel in order to minimize the danger of terrorist attacks against this country and its citizens.

Insofar as these suggestions emanate from the hostages themselves they can be understood as the natural defense reaction of victims adapting themselves to their tormentors. Those who are kidnapped invariably do everything in their power to to please the extortionists in order to protect themselves. Political hostages more often than not identify themselves with their captors' views to gain their favor as well as their own eventual release.

But when such ideas are advanced by more serious students of contemporary affairs (e.g., the recent Post-ABC Poll published in the Washington Post on June 26) one can only react with incredulity and wonder at the political naivete that these notions lay bare.

To begin with, it ought to be remembered that the Middle East is scarcely the only locus and source of terror. For more than two decades now the United States has been made target for terrorist groups as diverse as the Latin American Tumpamaros and Monteneros, the European Red Brigades and Red Army Faction and the Phillipine ? . U.S. Ambassadors were murdered not just in Lebanon, but in Greece and in Cyprus and in the Sudan. American citizens were kidnapped and killed not just in Beirut but in virtually every corner of our far-flung globe. Should America, therefore, withdraw from the rest of the world? And how, thus bereft of friends and allies, will we protect ourselves and our citizenry then?

Equally to the point, ~~that~~ wherever and whenever terrorists made our allies target -- from Israel to Italy, from the-then democratic Uruguay of the 1960s to West Germany a decade later, from post-Franco Spain to Turkey -- they did so because these countries were held to be the "allies of American imperialism." Invariably, the United States was the primary target and our friends were victimized because they were faithful to us.

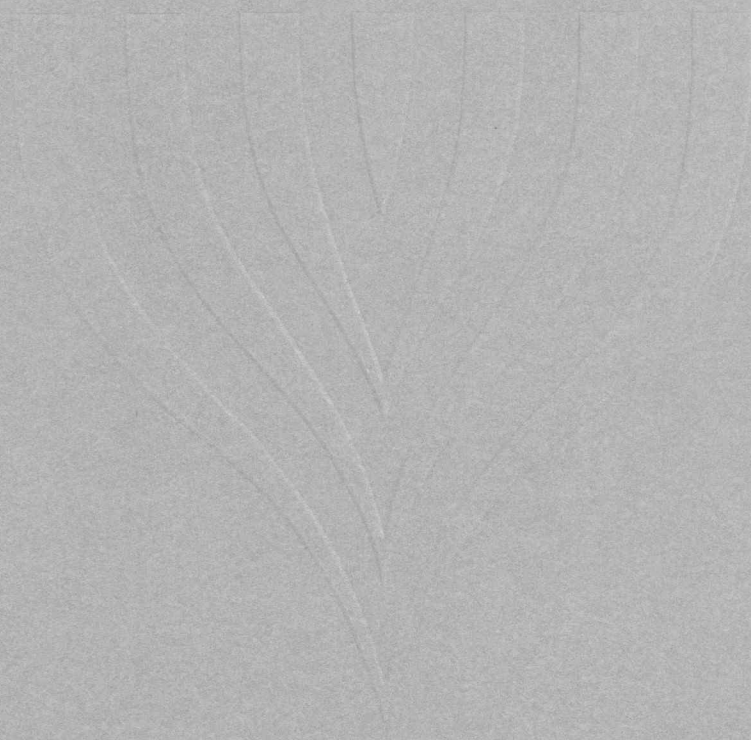
Much the same is true of radical Shiism. Its spiritual matrix is Khomeini's Iran and its nemesis is modernity. The West is the bearer of modernity and America is the leader of the West. America, therefore, is the ultimate quarry. All others, including Israel, are only secondary targets, obstacles along the way to America's downfall.

The TWA hijackers were certainly not worried about their imprisoned fellow Shiites; everyone knew that 500 of them had already been sent home to Lebanon from Haifa and that the remainder were also scheduled to be released. Their real purpose was to humiliate the United States. This is why they chose an American and not an Israeli plane. This is why they brutalized American citizens. This is why they murdered an American marine. They wanted above to bring America low and if at all possible to drive a wedge between our country and one of its staunchest allies.

Those who suggest that America distance itself from Israel are either fools or do the bidding of America's implacable enemies. Their ill-conceived proposal would hand the ~~TWA~~ barbarians their ultimate, bloody victory.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

58th General Assembly
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
October 31-November 5, 1985 / Los Angeles, California



SEARCHING AND TESTING
BELIEVING AND ACTING

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

I am deeply grateful to Chuck Rothschild for his gracious introduction. His words are pleasing to the ear. But an honest self-appraisal compels me to confess that I do not really deserve all this kindness. Too much of what is credited to me is truly the accomplishment of others: my colleagues of the Union staff, the members of our national committees and commissions, all the leaders — both lay and professional — of our vibrant religious community. I accept Chuck's words, then, as descriptive not of my attainments alone but of our collective achievements, and as a prescription, a map, a set of directions that we should follow to build on our successes.

Chuck himself deserves much credit for what he is: a most capable Chairman of our Board. He is diligent and forceful. He has good ideas and the verve and skill to effect them. He comprehends our complex program, and has mastered it in all of its intricacies. In a word, he has all the stuff that goes into the making of an effective leadership, and we are fortunate to have him lead us.

My very best wishes, also, to Connie Kreshtool, President of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, whose delegates have come here, in joint convention with us for Sisterhood's 35th Biennial gathering. We honor Connie and NFTS as well, and for good reason. Many of our finest attainments — especially in the field of youth and education — were given birth by Sisterhood. The House of Living Judaism could not have been built without Sisterhood. There were times in our early history when the Union itself would not have survived without Sisterhood.

Ellie Schwartz, the Executive Director of NFTS, marked the 35th anniversary of her service on the Union staff since last we were in convention assembled, and we congratulate her. First, she worked in the Youth Division and added luster to that crown jewel of our collective endeavors. And now she leads Sisterhood with intelligence and skill. We have reason to be grateful to her and to wish her many more years of creative endeavor.

Now, I want to acknowledge the presence on our *bimah* of a very special person, Miss Jane Evans. Nominally, she retired from our staff as the Director of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods ten years ago, and we honored her then. But she never really retired. She has been coming to the office week in, week out, these many years serving us in countless ways and without recompense, except for the gratefulness of the many whom she helps. We simply could not manage without this rarest of persons. We continue to rely on her judgment and tact and wise counsel. Since the last Biennial, Jane passed a milestone, her 50th year of active, glorious service to her Union. That demands recognition and esteem and so we do well to salute her!

We are deeply grateful to the many men and women that veritable army of volunteers, fully 750 of them, drawn from our thirty host congregations for everything they have done and will yet do to make us feel at home in this community. Under the leadership of Peachy and Mark Levy, and Lenny Thal, they have labored for nearly two years now to

prepare for our coming. Like thanks must go to our National Convention Committee under Paul Vanek and Iris Franco, and especially to Leonard Schoolman who coordinated the multitudinous details of this complex venture. The fruitage of all their labor is rich, indeed. This bodes well to be an altogether memorable convention, stimulating in content and setting alike.

The larger Los Angeles Jewish community also deserves to be commended, for its vitality and creative endeavor. I am particularly impressed by the harmonious Synagogue-Federation relation that obtains here. It demonstrates to all of us that this relationship need not be strained but can be mutually enriching. May this example, along with all the other insights gained at this Assembly, serve to enhance our own communal endeavors once we return to our homes.

* * *

And so we are gathered, my friends, men and women, young and old, from many communities, indeed from many lands. We each bring our own *pekel* of *tzores*, our very own burden of concerns, as well as our individual hopes and dreams, for there is not one among us here who has not been both bruised and inspired by life. But to Los Angeles, we have come specifically with our communal concerns, with our cares as Jews. We want our synagogues to grow in strength. We want Israel to endure, the Jewish people to live. We want our children and their children to be Jews, to gain from and in turn to enrich our wondrous tradition.

The questing of our Jewish souls for continuity finds encouragement in the thematic synchronism between our Torah portion and this date in history. For you see, today, November 2, is the 68th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Great Britain's recognition of the Jewish right to a national home in Palestine. This promise marked a turning point for Zionism. Before then, the dream of a Zion restored was laughed at, indeed scorned, by most people, including most Jews, as a form of lunacy. But Lord Balfour's promise gave the last laugh to the dreamers and builders of modern Israel.

Today's Torah portion, *Parshat Vayera*, tells of a like promise: from God to Sarah and Abraham. God pledges an end to their barren years, despite their age. It was an assurance so unlikely that it made our mother Sarah laugh, "Shall I who am waxen old bear a child, my husband being old also?" Nonetheless the promise was renewed and the child was born and it was called Yitzchak, the root meaning of which is 'laughter.'

Conventional homiletics sees this name as commemorating the laughter of the doubting parents. But one master of the midrash perceives a more significant lesson inhering in Scripture when he points out that the name is actually in the third person singular, future tense, that is to say that its literal translation is "he will laugh." The laughter of the parents, therefore, could not have been in mind. It is the laughter of the son, rather, which was predicted.

This same imaginative preacher reminds us that when Abraham and Sarah first came to Haran, their neighbors did not take kindly to them and placed many obstacles in their way. The idol-breaker was feared; his message was resisted. But as the two grew older, the neighbors grew less harsh. They probably mocked the old couple as if to say: "Look at these old people. How foolish they are, and how futile their labors. They want to change the world, but they don't even have a son whom they can teach and who will carry on

their work. Soon they will die, and their message will be buried along with them.” It is then that the messengers of God appear to Abraham saying: “The people are laughing at you now. They think that no one will succeed you. But you will have a son. And you will call him Yitzchak, ‘he will laugh,’ yes, he and his descendants will laugh at those who herald your extinction.” And thus it was that the promise to Abraham and Sarah was extended to their children and their children’s children for all time to come. In naming their son, God granted the last laugh to the Jewish people: the promise of continuity whenever that continuity appears tenuous.

Surviving the Demographic Crisis

Let me apply this perception to our present situation, here on the American Jewish scene. Not too long ago, there were many who laughed at the futility of all our striving and predicted our imminent demise. The Cassandra’s held sway; everyone, or so it seems, foresaw our doom. Jewish nationalists were certain that the American diaspora will soon wither away along with all the other communities of our exile. American Jewish sociologists dolefully re-echoed their forewarnings and even the media took up this sad refrain. You may recall that both *Look* and *Life* featured pieces that spoke of the “Vanishing American Jew” and predicted that by the year 2000 we would be less than half a million strong. Well, we are but fourteen years from that millenium and we remain better than ten times that number. Our death notices were premature; night has not drawn the curtain over our communal lives.

The Reform Movement has particular reason to be proud of its response to this demographic crisis. Inter-marriage was thought to be striking a lethal blow to our collective continuity, but we refused to bow to the inevitable and thereby helped to transform the crisis into an opportunity for renewed growth. Indeed, the rate of conversion to Judaism has tripled over the past years, and an ever increasing proportion of the children issuing from interfaith marriages are being reared as Jews. Our open-door policy, our outreach to the intermarried, our decision on patrilineal descent, our efforts to address the actual needs of our community — all these have helped significantly to capitalize upon changing trends and to turn the tide of erosion into a current toward a significant renewal. We owe much to the devoted labors of our Outreach Commission and to David Belin and Lydia Kukoff who orchestrate its work in so imaginative a way.

A second supposed cause of our demise — the much bemoaned declining Jewish birth-rate — has also proved to be chimerical. Projections of a zero population growth and worse were speculative and failed to take into account that Jewish couples today are simply having their children later in life. Those appearing to be childless or one-child couples in the 1970s have become as fecund as Jewish couples of an earlier generation. In fact recent evidence of a higher birthrate among the better educated suggests that the Jewish birth-rate may even be slightly higher than that of the general population.

Whatever the reasons, our Jewish numerical strength has not suffered the ominous decline that had been forecast. As far as our Reform movement is concerned, there has actually been substantial growth these past decades, and not only because most of the intermarried and converted are choosing to join our religious community. Since 1973, nearly one hundred and fifty new congregations have been added to our roster — from

650 to nearly 800 temples — and the combined total membership of our congregation has burgeoned by some twenty-five percent, to some 1.3 million men, women and young people.

More encouraging still, there is an increasingly pronounced trend toward Reform in the younger generation. It began with the second generation of American Jews when Conservative Judaism still held a clear edge of 50% against 33% for Reform. Among third generation Jews, Reform has gained a slight plurality of 41% versus 40%, whilst orthodoxy dropped from 11% to 3% in this particular grouping. The current toward Reform flows most perceptibly in the fourth generation of America's Jews, the preponderant majority of whom choose Reform — so all of the recent demographic studies indicate.

In truth, if numbers were our only standard of success, we might laugh our Isaac laugh right here and now. There is, however, a third factor involved in Jewish continuity and it is highly subjective. I speak now of our inner well-being and vitality, of the intensity of Jewish identification in America and within our own community. I believe this factor of identity constitutes the key challenge to Jewish continuity. It is a challenge less about numbers than about quality, less about physical survival than about the ultimate meaning of that survival.

Religious Commitment

Here too the news is not as bad as we had been led to expect. The past decades have brought no substantial erosion of over-all Jewish cohesion on the American scene. On the contrary, there is evidence of a persistent and even resurgent Jewish self-awareness.

Success has not spoiled us. Our climb up America's social and economic ladder has not caused us to dissimulate our Jewishness. Shapiro didn't have to become a Sinclair in order to make it at Du Pont.

We are politically self-aware, with an agenda all our own, and a distinctive view of the larger national agenda.

We remain supportive of Jewish causes. The *pushka* of old may have been replaced by Section 501-C-3 of the Internal Revenue Code, but *tsedaka* — tax-exempt or not — endures as a given in Jewish life.

Our ennoblement of education continues to distinguish us; indeed there has been a veritable explosion of Jewish studies programs on a university level.

And of course there is a good deal of social bonding among American Jews. Family ties continue to be strong. Occupational choices tend to be similar. Distinct residential patterns can still be perceived. There is consistent Jewish networking and interaction.

Is all of this enough as the underpinning of a Jewish identification? Is it sufficient to sustain Jewish continuity? Are there no difficulties at the core of our culture that require attending?

Let us narrow our focus on Reform. Our external success is indeed remarkable. Yet an honest self-appraisal compels us to confess that problems of internal development do beset us. Thus, while our membership numbers are up, the quality of affiliation in burgeoning Reform is nothing to boast about, let us admit it. For most of us that synagogue affiliation is only marginal, it is mere form without sufficient substance.

As liberal Jews, we assert our autonomy, we insist on the right to choose. But all too often we choose nothing at all, or choosing something we observe it only haphazardly. Moreover, as synagogue leaders we make few demands on our constituents beyond the financial. We thereby give substance to the perception that Reform Judaism is but a religion of convenience, that we wear the Covenant only as adornment on our outer garment alone, that this is a place where easy answers are given and few if any questions asked, in a word, that we need commit or do little if anything at all, yet we still can call ourselves Jews.

It is to counteract this very failing that we convened our "Task Force on Spiritual Commitment" two years ago, at our last Biennial in Houston. At our present assembly, we are called upon to receive and evaluate the Task Force Report, to weigh its findings and recommendations.

We are grateful to the members of this Task Force and especially to its co-chairmen, Joe Kleinman and Sam Karff, as well as to Alan Kaplan, the staff director, for their persistence and for the earnestness of their approach. I certainly endorse their report to this body. It is an excellent preamble, a "Hear, O Israel" spoken from the heart. The spirit of individual commitment is its guiding light, and it summons us as individuals to assume responsibilities, to see ourselves, each of us, as a crucial link in the chain of obligation, that golden chain of *mitzvot* that is our Covenant.

All of this is good and proper. It is in fullest harmony with the essential spirit of Reform, indeed, with Judaism as a whole, which has always maintained that the rabbi, the teacher, the exemplar, plays a crucial role in *teshuva*, in our people's return to the Covenant. The growing availability of such people is a critical factor for Jewish survival. The abstract demand to seek faith, to find God, is bound to be abortive. Only concrete examples of Jewish living can have an impact.

But all of this is still not enough. As with all good beginnings the Task Force report raises more questions than it solves. Foremost among them is the task of reconciling its almost exclusive emphasis on individual spiritual commitment with the Reform movement's need to reach a collective consensus on religious practice in order to remain both authentically Jewish and whole. For you see, when the concept of individual autonomy is allowed to become the central, exclusive concept of liberal Judaism, Judaism is destroyed. And when everyone "makes shabbos" for himself, the Jewish community disintegrates. This is why the choice of the individual should never be fully unfettered. It should always be an "informed and responsible" choice — so the Task Force report itself concedes. But that requires collectively established criteria against which the individual can measure his way. Somehow we must create a communal discipline strong enough to assure group coherence and integrity, but not so rigid and restrictive that it will stifle the vitality that springs from individual freedom.

At the very least, the collective conversation, so well begun on a national level, ought to be replicated regionally and even locally, so that the spiritual heat generated at this core will radiate in ever widening circles. And so I call on this assembly to keep the Task Force on Religious Commitment intact, in the hope that it will show us the way, show us how to resolve the tension between authority and freedom, show us how to achieve Reform's Jewish authenticity without at the same time dampening its brisk vitality.

May the work of their hearts and minds be established. Theirs is a sacred task and Jewish continuity requires its rich fruitage. It requires that outer form be given inner substance, that thought be translated into deed. It demands the disciplined observance of our sacred calendar and a determined nurturing of our values. Only such a bonding — a spiritual and not just a social bonding — will assure our community its power and its future.

Full-Time Jewish Education

The Task Force on Reform Jewish Day Schools, ably led by Lillian Maltzer and David Saperstein will also submit its report to this Assembly. Its recommendations well serve to reinforce that spiritual bonding of which we just spoke.

Those in our midst who see themselves the bearers of the classical Reform tradition should not feel dismayed by the option of full-time Jewish education. This issue has a venerable history among us. Indeed, Isaac Mayer Wise was a fervent proponent of the day school idea and he labored to maintain such a school in his own synagogue. His eminent colleague and co-worker Max Lilliental established a like school in New York — he even called it the Hebrew Union School — and he managed to enroll nearly 300 students. Through the middle of the 19th Century, virtually all communities in which German Jews settled opened all-day Jewish schools for their children.

In our own century, Emanuel Gamoran persistently advocated the idea and our Commission on Jewish Education — under both Solomon Freehof and Roland Gittelsohn — gave sanction to his views. Indeed, I myself, when I was the Director of Education and subsequently, gave frequent public voice to my conviction that only a full-time setting can provide our students sufficient opportunity to be fully schooled in their heritage.

It will come as no surprise, therefore, when I tell you that I endorse our present resolution whole-heartedly, all the more so because we now have some half score congregations who operate their own day schools and dozens of others who send substantial numbers of their students to community operated schools. It is our clear obligation to respond to the expressed needs of our constituency.

The Day School Task Force Report is well-balanced. It affirms Jewish support for public education — an affirmation that, in the present climate, becomes a commitment to *defend* public education. At the same time, it moves our religious community toward a future of greater self-reliance. It gives us a way to harvest the fruits of our deepening commitment to Judaism without betraying our universalist concerns. Surely the resolution's description of a "cadre of Jewishly informed and motivated young people" is a description of every Jewish organization's dream! I urge us not to delay in building this vision into an educational reality.

The Jewish Family

Consequential as is the school for the Jewish future, it is exceeded in its importance by the family itself. Here is the first and foremost cell of our community, for Jewish survival and the Jewish family are inextricably intertwined.

A Jew, after all, does not become a Jew, because he or she is born a Jew. Genealogy — be it maternal or paternal — only confers the presumption of Jewishness but not its

realization. Identity is developed only in interaction with others, and the family remains the primary arena for such interaction. It is also best equipped to nurture and to reinforce this identity and to provide a framework of meaning within which the individual can make sense of his or her life.

I began my journey of this morning by speaking of the original Jewish family: of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac. Family life goes back further than that, of course, to the dawn of human history, when God created Adam and quickly realized that "it is not good for man to be alone." It is true, then, that the family is the oldest of social institutions. It is also true that almost simultaneously with its birth the family has been in crisis; remember if you will, the marital strife of Adam and Eve and the sibling conflict of their sons.

This kind of long-range view is helpful in looking at the present condition of the family. It may be in crisis once again, but its essential reason for being has not been diminished. As a matter of fact, the family has proven itself to be remarkably robust despite the massive social changes of our time. Family ties remain strong. Their importance for the individual has not lessened by even one iota.

There have been stresses on the family structure, to be sure, and changes in family life have taken place: the separation of work from home, the yielding of education to the school, a transfer of functions from mother to father and back again. These changes continue at a furious pace. Most important of all, new types of families have emerged: one-parent families and families with two working parents, unmarried parents and remarried parents combining several families, and children reared by grandparents, and so on.

Unfortunately, most synagogue leaders, in their programming, still tend to look on fully constituted families as the only participants. Those who do not share such a status often find it awkward if not impossible fully to take part in synagogue life. I therefore seek your endorsement for the creation of a National Task Force on the Jewish Family whose mandate it will be to redirect and coordinate our present efforts to address the needs of our variegated families. The UAHC presently has many of the needed programming elements, but we need a more direct and comprehensive approach.

This Task Force might well begin its work by determining just what the structure of the families comprising our movement is. In this task, it can draw on the labors of the Synagogue Research group led by Alan Iselin and Sandy Seltzer, the progress of whose efforts are amply evidenced at this Biennial by the questionnaire that has been distributed to all the delegates.

One more word on this subject, and that is to underscore its relation to our overall theme. The linchpin of our quest for religious commitment will be the modern Jewish family's ability to find time to be together. Sociologists actually refer to this as "sacred times," times that neither a husband's nor a wife's career are allowed to violate. The Jewish calendar — our Sabbaths and our festivals — offer ample opportunity for such sanctification of space and time. When we seize these opportunities fully, we will be able to re-render Yehuda Halevi: "Even as the Jewish family has preserved the Sabbath, so has the Sabbath preserved the Jewish family."

Synagogue Music

I have one other internal programmatic recommendation to place before you today. It is a call for the establishment of a permanent Commission on Synagogue Music. This is to be

a multi-partite group involving in addition to the UAHC, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the American Conference of Cantors, and our College's School of Sacred Music.

As I travel about the country and especially in places where no Jewishly trained professional is in charge of synagogue song I find my ears and my emotions too often assailed by a cacaphony of sound. For you see, the various modes and melodies of the synagogue are each identified with specific occasions and meant to evoke their mood, and while it might be at least within reason, though still objectionable, to hear Chanukah melodies on Purim, it is indescribably grating to the inner ear to hear the dirges of Tisha B'Av on Simchat Torah.

Music is a bridge to the sacred. It cleanses the soul from the dust of everyday life. It can carry us to spheres to which the spoken word, rooted as it is to the earth, cannot aspire. How common is the plaint that the *words* of prayer are not meaningful enough, not powerful enough in imagery, not humanistic enough to be relevant. Yet how diminished such complaints are when the exalting music of our faith becomes an equal partner to the word in prayer.

Think about it, for a moment, if you will. Who among us would truly care about the Kol Nidre without its gripping melody? Reading only the words of this prayer is like reading Section 521.3 of Roget's Thesaurus. It consists of nothing more than a string of synonyms. But once the melody is intoned, a transformation takes place. Just listen to the Kol Nidre song without its words, and feel. It is the melody alone that plunges us into our self-reckoning of the soul. Reb Schneur Zalmen of Ladi knew this when he taught that music is the outpouring of the soul — an outpouring that words merely interrupt. And so he would frequently interrupt his own preaching by singing a song without words.

Outreach to Orthodoxy

Here my own song reaches a cacaphonous moment, for in mentioning Reb Zalmen of Ladi, I felt a catch in my throat. I imagined hearing a chorus of ultra-orthodox Jewish voices, Reb Schneur Zalmen's own spiritual descendants, singing anything but a wordless, delightful melody about the Reform movement. You have heard their holier-than-thou dissonance: how they mock our commitments, how they ridicule our aspirations, how they deprecate our renewing of Judaism as a perversion of Judaism.

Surely, you were as pained as I was to read that ad which appeared in the Jewish press all over the land warning the Jews of America not to pray in Reform or Conservative synagogues during the High Holy days or at any other time, for that matter. Speaking in the name of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis the ad declared it a "serious violation" of *halacha* even to "enter a Reform Synagogue," and it counselled its readers to stay and pray at home, if they cannot find a nearby orthodox synagogue, even on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

These sentiments re-echoed the views of one of the leading *Poske Hador*, the influential interpreter of Orthodox law, Reb Moshe Feinstein, who ruled that a professor from the Conservative rabbinic seminary must not be invited to speak in an Orthodox synagogue because his teachings are heretical, and that a believing Jew must not say "amen" after a

Reform Jew makes his *motzi*, and that when a Reform Jew has an *aliyah* his “blessing is not a blessing,” whereas an Orthodox Jew who approaches the Torah though he violate the Sabbath, “his blessing is nonetheless a blessing.”

And why? Because, according to Rabbi Feinstein, the latter, though a sinner, believes in God, whilst Reform Jews do not!

Whatchutzpah, this! What arrogance! What desecration! To presume to know just which rites and prayers are and are not acceptable to the *ribono shel olam*: to claim the clairvoyance to look into the soul of another human being and judge his feelings for God!

Still another related incident occurred in Cracow, Poland, a month or two ago. Surely, you remember the details: how a young Jewish boy from America determined to celebrate his Bar Mitzva in Poland and how he and his family and his rabbi, all of them liberal Jews, were harried by the Orthodox, driven from one Temple to another, the liberal rabbi's *talit* ripped off, because she was a woman, a woman rabbi, imagine that!

What a beautiful idea this Bar Mitzva was — to bring solace to a dying community to demonstrate to all the world that the evil designs of our enemies came to nought, that the Jewish people lives! Unhappily the beauty, the sanctity of this moment was marred by Orthodox extremists who resented the fact that non-Orthodox Jews were the celebrants.

What a perversion of history for Orthodoxy to claim a monopoly on Polish Jewry! That community embraced a diversity of Jews. The synagogue in which this service was finally held was dedicated as a Reform Temple in 1844. Among the Jews who lived in Poland were not just Orthodox Jews, but also Jews of every other kind, including Reform. And that butcher, *y'mach sh'mo y'zichro*, who stood at Auschwitz's gate never asked: “What kind of Jew are you? Are you Zionist, Bundist, Orthodox, Reform?” He consigned us all to the toxic fumes of Cyclon B.

Leon Klinghofer also wasn't asked by his foul PLO assassins what kind of Jew he was. It so happens that he *was* a Reform Jew, a long-time member of Manhattan's Temple Shaaray Tefila. And he became one of the *kedoshim*, whose death served his people, an unwitting martyr to be sure, but a martyr nonetheless.

Today, only one generation after Auschwitz, and only one month after the tragedy on the Achille Lauro, Orthodox zealots persist in their efforts to establish their own kind of selecting process — not in Poland, but before the gates of Jerusalem, not to sort the strong from the weak, but Jew from Jew.

What a *chilul hashem*! What despicable conduct all this! Don't these people have anything better to do than to fight their fellow Jews? Have they forgotten that *sinat chinam*, the sowing of unreasoned hatred which our sages saw akin to harlotry, destroyed the Temple, that it threatens Jewish survival more than any outer menace?

Intellectually, I suppose we can understand this kind of narrowness, this arrogant intolerance as the inevitable concomitant of a waning influence which the Orthodox establishment must know and fear. Besides, the world as a whole has gone mad with the fundamentalists so why shouldn't we Jews have our *ayatolahs*!

You will understand that I am not speaking against orthodoxy as such. Rather do I speak against a politicized Orthodox establishment which is interested only in power, which is concerned not so much with “what” is done but rather with “who” is doing it, which seeks to bolster its waning authority with a scornful rigid exclusiveness.

It is because I truly respect a more genuine orthodoxy and deem it essential to Jewish life, that I call on you to affirm the Resolution on K'lal Y'Israel which has been placed before us by Temple Sinai of Atlanta. It is an offering that we must make for the sake of our principles, and for the sake of progress toward necessary unity within the Jewish world. We must not counter narrowness with a rigidity of our own. If we can reach out to the Catholics and Blacks and every other community, then certainly we should reach out to the whole of the House of Israel.

In fact, I would like to strengthen this resolution, by calling on the heads of our seminaries — The Hebrew Union College, the Jewish Theological Seminary and Yeshiva University — to undertake joint studies involving their respective faculties in the hope of evolving some kind of trans-denominational approach to such matters as marriage and conversion. Let us begin with something less controversial, for that matter, the process of joint study has a worth all its own. In such a process, I am certain, Reform will not be found wanting, provided the "how" and not the "who" becomes the object of the scholars' quest and every grouping accords the other respect.

But whatever the results of such an effort, the Jewish world must know this: Reform is an adjective, it is not a noun. The noun is Jew. And so we are Jews. And we will not be read out of the Jewish fold: not in Israel, not in Europe, nor anywhere else on this God's earth!

And let members of our Reform congregation know this: Reform Judaism is undisputedly authentic, profoundly true to the spirit of the Jewish tradition. Let no one denigrate its worth. It has contributed immeasurably to the creative continuity of the Jewish people. Yes, we are reviled and stoned. But let us not be dismayed. Let us remember that the prophets too were stoned in every generation by those for whom the law is a rockpile. Yet it was the prophets, not the stone-throwers, whose vision inspired our people and gave them the courage to survive.

May this certain knowledge of our relevance strengthen us as we strive to secure the Jewish future.

A Jewish Corps of Service

In an effort to demonstrate and realize our commitment to K'lal Y'Israel more forcefully still, I propose herewith the establishment of a Corps of Service to the Jewish world. What I have in mind is a kind of Reform Jewish Peace Corps not for young people alone, but for adults as well who will give a year or more of their lives to serve disadvantaged Jewish communities throughout the world.

We have some experience in this sphere already on a youth level, domestically and in Israel, on an adult level, through our REAP program which brought doctors and nurses drawn from our congregations to relieve the plight of Jews in Ethiopia. I have explored this idea with the leaders of the Joint Distribution Committee, and they appear eager to help us develop a wider, more permanent effort.

The focus of such a Corps would be to lift the Jewish spirit and literacy of needful communities. For example, a summer camp for the Jews of Yugoslavia requires supplementary staffing; Jewish educational institutions in Latin America can use additional teachers and

group workers. There is a Jewish Home for the Aged in Morocco that needs the counsel of an epidemiologist; Jewish nursing homes in Rumania need gerontologists; in Tunisia someone is required to organize the archives. Israel itself can well use additional hands for its massive effort to integrate Ethiopian Jews into Israeli society. Young Jewish Americans, as well as older adults, should be encouraged and trained and financed to bring their idealism, their Jewish pride and their talents to every corner of the Jewish world.

A Jewish Corps of Service will give greater substance to the concept and feeling of K'lal Y'Israel than any other resolutions. It will expand our global sense of peoplehood and communal responsibility even beyond our enriching ties to the multi-colored, patchwork of Israel. Most importantly to the dominant theme of my message today, the Jewish Corps of Service will produce generations of Reform Jews for whom the word *mitzva* will evoke a stunning set of memories and experiences.

Social Action: Farrakhan and Kahane, AIDS and Apartheid

Such a Corps of Service could conceivably also deepen our social action agenda, making our commitment to *tikun olam*, our commitment to repair a shattered world, less abstract and more acute. It is to this agenda that I wish to devote my concluding comments, although I will not make it my task to detail all the agonies that afflict our society and world. That responsibility falls to our Union's great leader of conscience, Al Vorspan, who will command this podium tomorrow. I intend merely and most briefly to add one item to his agenda, and to expand another resolution by asking you to strengthen it.

Before I do so, I would be remiss, however, were I not to give praise to the Reagan administration's firm and forthright handling of the recent terrorist incident on the Achille Lauro. Our President drew a boundary line, and fortified it, against the predations of those who perform cowardly violence in the name of a political cause. Hopefully, our country's timely action will move other nations to deal forcefully and effectively with these fanatics who slaughter innocents, these killer-termites who gnaw away at the foundations of the civilized world.

Indeed, we must begin to draw our own boundaries against terrorism *before* it explodes into violence, while it still incubates in the hearts of the Farrakhans and the Kahanes of our world. Both are of one ilk, demagogues, rabble-rousers, politico-religious fundamentalists who seek to seize power by giving the hapless, helpless masses both a Satan and a savior. For Farrakhan the Satan is the Jew, for Kahane, the Arab. And each considers himself the messiah, the righteous crusader who imposes order on primordial chaos. Both are to be feared and both are to be fought. We simply dare not tolerate them, not in the name of "coalition," not in the name of "dialogue," not in the name of "Jewish unity," not in any name whatever.

Also on the social action front, I want to introduce a resolution on the AIDS crisis. It is a resolution that summons our national leadership to deal with this illness as a top health priority, and to put a final end to that mindless discrimination to which the victims of this dread malady are subject. It is my intention, also, to appoint a national panel of experts who will be prepared to counsel our Temples and their schools on how to deal with this issue in an informed and compassionate way, consistent with the demands of public health.

The AIDS epidemic has spawned a secondary scourge as deadly as the primary affliction: a wave of hysteria whose symptoms include ostracism, prejudice, and violence. AIDS victims, already serving a death sentence, are victimized a second time: they are tormented, thrown out of jobs, often spurned by family and friends; they have been denied admission to hospitals and refused desperately needed medical services; and organizations and even families offering refuge to patients have been subjected to bomb threats and to vandalism.

It all reminds me of the bubonic plague when — so Barbara Tuchman instructs us — parents left their own children to die in the gutter for fear that they themselves would be infected. In the 14th Century, Jews were made scapegoat for the horrors of the plague. Today, homosexuality and not AIDS itself, receives the pointed finger. This shared victimization gives proof of our common humanity — and of the seamlessness of human hatred.

Finally, I would like you to strengthen the Resolution on South Africa which has been placed before us by the Social Action Commission. Its members have never lacked in courage or political foresight, but in this instance, events have passed them by. What seemed a forward-looking resolution last May, is almost irrelevant today. The black majority of South Africa has taken the bit into its own teeth. They will no longer settle for a slight loosening of their chains; they want them removed completely and they are prepared to pay the price. All we can really do is to make certain that this price will not be too heavy in human blood.

And so I would like to have our resolution strengthened in several ways: by calling on the South African government to release Nelson Mandela and the other political prisoners and to negotiate with the responsible and recognized leaders of the black and colored communities, and by calling on our own government to increase its pressures on South Africa by the setting of deadlines for compliance and by lowering the level of our diplomatic ties to that country; I also urge that the “disinvestment clause” of the resolution be expanded to allow the UAHC to join a selective boycott of firms engaged in business with South Africa and not yet in compliance with the provisions of the Sullivan Act.

Our country’s voice must be heard clearly on this moral issue. Too many of those who have jumped on the bandwagon of anti-apartheid sentiment, including the President of the United States, are only half way aboard and are still dragging their feet in the dust. Me thinks that their aim is more to kick up the dust than to be aboard the wagon. As the Yiddish saying goes: “If their words were a bridge, I wouldn’t cross.”

And our own resolution must mince no words. Apartheid is an abomination. Apartheid is institutional racism. Apartheid is a first cousin to the Nuremberg laws. Apartheid means the stunting of millions of lives. These are the political realities that must form the terms of political debate about South Africa. And any attempt to subordinate the question of racism to other political concerns is but an attempt to prop up an ungodly system of human exploitation. Racism cannot be countenanced in this world of ours, for any reason whatsoever, and never by Jews.

Now what I have said in these past several paragraphs should forestall the fear that our present programmatic emphasis on the deepening of spiritual commitment in any way represents a flight from the world. In fact the very opposite motive impels us towards God and Torah: to discover those inner resources we require to grapple with the torments of

this world. We turn to the Jewish calendar and clock to immunize ourselves against the cynicism and alienation that surround us. We absorb the light of the Sabbath candles, so that we in turn might be a "light unto the nations."

There is no such thing as a disembodied universalism. We have to be something, someone first, and so the more Jewish we are, the more universal we can become. Consider the shofar: If we try to blow through its wider part by choosing to be universal and not Jewish, no one will hear us. But if we blow through the narrow end of the shofar, ever choosing to be Jews first, then its summons can be heard around the world.

* * *

And so I prepare to descend from this podium. (I had better before some of you tell me to jump.) Still, I am reluctant to leave: it is inspiring to look across this sea of eager faces, to sense the earnestness of your concerns, to feel the strength that flows from this companionship. Once I step down, I must return to the world, a world that undergoes fantastically swift change; change that corrupts and erodes, change that demands and challenges, change that threatens and terrifies.

Perhaps my fear of ending is like the fear of a swimmer who is reluctant to plunge into icy currents of water.

Perhaps my fear is of my own vulnerability, and I am simply reluctant to shed my preacher's mantle and see myself once again as a human being, a frail individual among frail people.

Perhaps my hesitation is an expression of impatience, of the wish that the Messiah would speed his coming and relieve us of all our resolutions!

But descend I must, and so do we all, into free fall . . . into winter . . . into the new year . . . into the tumultuous world . . .

Our fall into the world is softened by the Covenant's promises: our calendar's promise of renewal, our Sabbath's promise of contentment, our Torah's promise of redemption.

We face the winter, yet we have a prayer shawl, a strong, dynamic community of Jews, to keep us warm.

We face the new year, yet we stand upon thousands of years of Jewish tradition, and there is no firmer rock.

We are not swimmers facing a plunge into a river of change. We are a tree on the riverbank, nourished by deep roots, secured by our flexible trunk, that blends earth, and sun and water to bring life to our branches.

We are not frail individuals among a frail people. We are earnest civil servants among God's civil servants, made strong by pain and prophecy.

And we are not impatient for the messiah to come. The messiah is but a fulfillment of ourselves. The messiah brings nothing that we have not earned. The messiah simply comes — to share in our laughter.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE 58TH UAHG GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. I call on this Assembly to express the indebtedness of our religious community to our chairman, Charles J. Rothschild, for his "diligent and forceful" leadership of our Union.
2. I ask that we salute Jane Evans on the completion of her fiftieth year of professional and voluntary service as a member of the UAHG staff. We simply "cannot manage without this rarest of persons."
3. I bid this Assembly and its delegates to accept the summons implicit in the report of our Task Force on Religious Commitment. I ask that this Task Force be kept intact for another two years to give it time further to define and implement its purposes through the various arms and agencies of our religious community. Hopefully, it will also be able to provide us with a set of communally-affirmed standards against which individuals can measure their way so that their choices will indeed be "responsible and informed."
4. I endorse the report of our Task Force on Options for Full Time Jewish Education and call on this movement to provide the means necessary for its implementation.
5. I urge this Assembly to create a Task Force on the Jewish Family, to help us develop a comprehensive response to the many changes taking place in family form and structure. There is an especially great need to help the many new kinds of families — single parent families, remerged families, etc. — to take their rightful place in synagogue life. We must do everything we can to strengthen this "first and foremost cell" of our religious community.
6. I recommend the establishment of a Joint Commission on Synagogue Music in order to raise the level of liturgical music literacy in our movement. Hopefully, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the American Conference of Cantors, and our College's School of Sacred Music will join us in this venture.
7. I fully support the resolution on K'Lal Y'Israel submitted for our consideration by Temple Sinai of Atlanta, Ga. I would like to strengthen this resolution by calling on the heads of our seminaries — JTS, HUC and Yeshiva University — to undertake joint faculty studies in the hope of helping the larger American Jewish community evolve a "trans-denominational approach" to the problems of marriage and conversion that beset us.
8. I call for the creation of a Jewish Corps of Service which will make it possible for young people as well as adults to give some time of their lives to serve disadvantaged Jewish communities throughout the world.
9. I urge you to hail President Reagan's bold decision and our country's successful action in bringing the murderous hijackers of the Achille Lauro to the bar of justice. Hopefully, this timely decision signals a commitment — long overdue — by all civilized

nations to deal forcefully and effectively with fanatics who flout international law and victimize innocent people.

10. I urge this Assembly to pass a resolution on the AIDS crisis, summoning our nation's leadership to deal with this illness as a top health priority and to "put an end to that mindless discrimination to which the victim of this dread malady are subject."

11. I ask that the Resolution on South Africa set before us by the Social Action Commission be strengthened, calling on the South African government to release Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners and to engage in negotiations with the rightful representatives of the black and colored peoples, and calling on our own government to increase its pressures on South Africa by setting deadlines for the dismantling of Apartheid and by lowering the level of our diplomatic contacts with that country. I would also like this Assembly to authorize the Union to join a selective boycott of firms engaged in business with South Africa and who are not in compliance with the provisions of the Sullivan Act.

12. I call on this Assembly and its delegates to express our collective thanks to all who brought this convention to be:

a) to our host congregations, their rabbis and lay leaders, for the graciousness of their hospitality, and for building so vital a Reform Jewish community in this city.

b) to the chairpersons and members of our Biennial Program Committee for that rich fare with which they feasted us. They responded fully to the felt needs of our constituency.

c) to the chair and co-chairpersons of the Local Arrangements Committee and their army of co-workers who did all that was humanly possible to make this convention run smoothly and to make us feel at home.

d) and to Rabbi Leonard A. Schoolman, the Union's National Director of Program who single-handedly coordinated the multitudinous details of this Assembly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leonard A. Schoolman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

December 7, 1985

Speed file

Centennial Dinner Dance
Temple Emanuel
Wichita, Kansas

Thank you for your warm words of introduction, Richard.

You are too kind.

Be assured that your sentiments of affection and regard

are reciprocated with a full heart

You have served in the highest leadership councils of our Union

for many years now

and always you served us and represented this congregation

exceedingly well.

We have reason to be grateful to YOU and to admire YOU.

You merit our lasting gratitude.

It is good to participate in the joyous and yet solemn

ceremonies of this anniversary hour

This is a moment of meaning not just for you, but for all of us,

for the entire Reform movement

indeed for the whole of the household of Israel.

Temple Emanuel does not stand alone.

It is surrounded by a caring community of many congregations

whose strength derives from this place.

You are a precious link in that golden chain of faith which

binds us one unto another.

It is altogether remarkable what you have accomplished here.

A rich and meaningful program in a beautiful sanctuary

And a continuing reaching out from your Temple to the larger
community of which you are a part.

You have every reason to be pleased and proud

And we have every reason to praise your name.

100 years ago, then, this congregation was founded
its physical and spiritual foundations laid.

100 years ago...

In the stillness of the night one can almost hear
the rushing of the waves of time,
their relentless pounding against eternity's shores.

100 years ago...

We can imagine how they felt, your fathers and your mothers
the doubts that seized them
the dreams that stirred them on.

Well, they conquered doubt and built and they built well,
with wisdom and with strength
and so did those who followed after them,
their children and their children's children even unto this day.

The holy halls of your Temple are their memorial
even as they are a tribute to those who continue their work.

Blessed be their memory,
altogether blessed be the work of your hands.

But an anniversary is not just a time for the backward glance.
It is a time, also, to look ahead.
It is not just a time for recollection,
but also a time for rededication,
for a refocusing on those ideas and ideals for which this
sanctuary was built and which it presumably enshrines.
It is a task which is in the fullest harmony with the theme
of the festival which we celebrate this night as well,
the Feast of Lights, Chanukah, the festival of rededication.

The first of those ideals to which we must rededicate ourselves
is Judaism's moral mandate.

It is a foremost task of the synagogue to remind us of
those values which the world makes us forget.

Within these sacred walls we must always be confronted with the ideal
and summoned to measure ourselves against it.

This, in the final analysis is what prayer is all about.

In any event, this is what the Hebrew word for prayer literally means:
lehitpalel...to judge the self.

When we pray we judge ourselves, we measure ourselves against the ideal.
As a talmudic master taught: when we rise from our prayers
as a better Jew, as a better human being,
then, and then only, is our prayer answered.

Our age does need this reminder, does it not?
Consider our communal conduct, for a moment,
our demeanor as a nation.

Here we are, the wealthiest country on earth,
Our economy appears to be in better shape than it has been for
many a year.

The stock market has reached historic heights.

And yet so much of this has come at the expense of the weak
and the elderly, the poor and the handicapped.

And in this bounteous land of ours

there are many cities in which nearly 50% of black and Hispanic
youth are out of work and out of hope
and they have lost the faith that this is a society which
gives a damn for them.

Or consider what we do with our world,

how we take God's handiwork and despoil it:
the sweet air He gave us to breathe
and the fresh water with which he blessed us
the fertile green which delights the eye.

Instead of scknowledging and making proper use of all these gifts,

we poison them
we tear apart the ozone
we carbonize the oxygen
we acidify the refreshing rain.

as we plunge the world headlong into a nuclear saturnalia

of burnt flesh and maimed bodies and the whole dark butchery
without a soul.

These are some of the issues which must be raised in this sanctuary
and issues of personal conduct as well.

In this realm too we must be reminded of those ideals
that flow from the well-springs of our faith.

Our age makes too light of these ideals.

It relegates them to the realm of the subjective, the relative
and assigns them but scant value.

Yet consider their truer worth:

Add love to a house and you have a home.

Add righteousness to a city and you have a community.

Add truth to a pile of red brick and you have a school.

Add art and imagination to a series of spires and arches
and you have a cathedral.

Add religion to the humblest of edifices and you have a sanctuary.

Add justice to the far-flung round of human endeavor
and then, and then only, do you have a civilization.

And thus it is that the synagogue must be a moral force in our
personal and communal lives.

It must remind us of those values which the world makes us forget.

For only if we emerge from our Temples as better human beings,
as better people

will our prayers have been answered.

There is a second great purpose for which this sanctuary was built.

It was meant to be a communal home for the Jewish people,
the source of our strength to live as Jews.

This at the purpose which the synagogue always served through the ages.

It was our home when we had no other home,

our land when we were wanderers over the face of the earth.

The synagogue enabled us to speak the proud language of our faith

even while we were compelled to voice the bable of many peoples.

Beaten down and crushed by tyrant's rage

our fathers and mothers came into the synagogue,

and straightened their backs and held their heads high,

for within the sacred walls of the synagogue they felt free.

There they felt themselves to be what indeed they were: princes of God

proud scions of God's people.

This is a purpose, then, which the synagogue must continue to fulfill.,

for as we look at the not so distant horizons of Jewish life

many a danger cloud can be perceived,

and we will need the synagogue as a source of strength for our

collective being.

My grandfather, of blessed memory, would have put it this way:

honig wet men nisht leckn

we Jews won't be licking any honey, during the months and years

ahead.

Israel and the quest for her security will continue to pre-occupy us.

so long as we are alive, I'm afraid.

The dream of an Irsael secure and at peace remains but a dream.

Lebanon did not becoem the second Arab nation to come to terms with

Israel

And Hussein cannot find the courage or a cover to come to the

peace table.

But not just Israel, the security of Jews all over the world
will continue to evoke our concern as American Jews.

The Great Hatred of the Jew did not come to an end
with the end of WWII.

It only went into hiding for a while,
and now it is beginning to wax and ravage once again.

Once again, and but one generation after Auschwitz,
Jews are imprisoned -- as they are in Russia --
for no reason other than because they are Jews.

And on hijacked cruiseships and skyjacked planes
Jews are once again selected for special treatment
and the base assassins bullet.

Alas, even in this precious land of ours, this blessed America
we hear discordant noises....

the foul-mouthed fulminations of a Farakkhan
poisoning the air-waves
and re-echoing in our nation's arenas

where tens of thousands hail and heil his rantings.

It is an abomination -- and frightening.

Aye, we will need the synagogue as a source of strength for
our collective continuity.

Within the sacred walls of Temple Emanuel
you will have to find that fortitude which flows
from the companionship of fellow Jews.

But the synagogue must serve one more purpose still:

It must evoke a sense of the sacred.

It must enhance our capacity to respond with wonderment
to the essential mystery of life.

Surely it is this purpose that your fathers and mothers had in mind
when they named your congregation

Emanuel -- God be with us.

I speak now of the numinous, of a consciousness of the holy...

Where wast Thou when the foundations of the earth were laid,
When the morning stars sang together
And the hosts of heaven shouted for joy?
Hast Thou commanded the light?
Hast thou entered the springs of the sea?
Have the portals of death been opened unto thee?
Take off thy shoes from off thy feet,
for the place whereon thou standest, it is holy!

How rare such a feeling is in our lives...

kavanah leading to devekus...a sense of reverence which flames

into a cleaving, into a commitment, into a full-hearted response
to the divine command,

Yea, even as that of Abraham when he ascended Moriah,

or that of Moses when he saw his vision of the burning bush,

or that of Israel's children when they stood 'round Sinai

and having seen the lightning

and heard the thunder and the voice of God as did their teacher

Moses, they proclaimed:

hayom hazeh ra-eeenu kee elohim yedaber im adam

"We see this day that God reveals himself to man."

Come now, you will say, you are a Reform rabbi.

Do you really believe all this?

Do you really believe that God revealed Himself to Moses,

that the children of Israel really heard his voice?

Why that is believing in miracles, in supernatural events,

which we moderns cannot possibly accept.

And yet, my friends, it does not matter does it,

whether we read this text in its literal sense or merely as an
interpretive account,

for in either case the essential truth remains the same.

Our forbears had a direct experience of God.

Whatever it was that really happened,

they knew for certain that God revealed Himself to them.

They knew it with a knowledge of the heart,

a knowledge greater than the knowledge of the mind,

transcending logic or reason or the testimony of witnesses.

They knew it as the artist knows beauty though he cannot see it.

They sensed it as men and women sense love

though they cannot touch that love with their fingers

and yet their lives are completely transformed by such a love.

Oh, how empty, how shallow our own faith often is compared to theirs!

To be sure now, we have our synagogues and we attend them

--sporadically.

We cherish the principles of our faith and pray the world to keep them.

We recognize those ties which bind us to the world community of

our people

and we support our fellow Jews wherever they may be.

Why we even believe in God, some of us do,

in an intellectual sort of way,

and so we call ourselves Jews.

But something is missing, my friends,

something which makes the difference between cold, conventional

religion and its vital transforming reality.

That something our forbears discovered,

and we, we need discover it too.

We need to desperately,

for while routine religion suffices to sustain our lighter hours,

once life runs out into its depths

why, then, we need a different faith.

When death takes those we love,

when our children slip through our arms,

when dread disease makes waste our strength,

when we think or even say

now I have reached the bottom of the morass

now I can sink no deeper...and yet we sink deeper

Why, then, we need a deeper faith.

Then we need the kind of faith that led the Psalmist to exclaim

gami ki elech begeh tsalmoves lo iro ro ki ato imodi

"Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death, I will fear no evil, for Thou, Thou art with me."

These then are the commitments which we are called upon to make.

These are the ideals which your splendid synagogue was built

to enshrine.

May you pursue these purposes, these dreams, this quest!

May all of us resolve to do so.

Then will the future of Temple Amanuel be as glorious as was its past

Then also will the celebration of this hour be

not for present use nor for present delight alone,

but they will be forever.

Then the time will come when the wood and the stone and the mortar

of this sanctuary will be held sacred because your hands

have touched them

And many years hence, men and women will behold the beauty and

the worthy substance of them and they will say:

"See, this our fathers and our mothers built for us."

ken yehi ratzon... thus may it be God's will.