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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

60th General Assembly
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
November 2-6, 1989
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The Covenant of the Generations

I am deeply grateful to Allan Goldman for his gracious introduction. His words are pleasing to the ear. But an honest self-reckoning compels me to confess that I do not really deserve all this praise. 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 each of whose principal components is represented on this dais. I accept Allan's words, then, as descriptive not of my attainments but rather of our collective accomplishments.

Allan himself deserves much credit for what he is: a highly capable Chairman of our Board. The challenges facing him were formidable. He was the youngest in our history to be elected to this office. He was the first from the Far West, requiring that distance and time zones be spanned continuously for effective control. Moreover his predecessors had set the highest possible standards of leadership. Think of them for a moment, if you will; their names are still honored in our midst: Chuck Rothschild, and Donald Day, and Matthew Ross - - giants of the spirit all.

Allan has met his challenges well. He brings rich talents to his endeavors: a well-trained, retentive mind, a quick wit, the ability to articulate his thoughts precisely and, this above all, a driving determination to steer our movement forward, never to allow it to drift. He deserves our admiration and applause.

My very best wishes, also, to Dolores Wilkenfeld and Ellie Schwartz, leaders of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, whose delegates have come here, in joint convention with us, for Sisterhood's 37th biennial gathering. Dolores now completes her final years of office as NFTS President. She too deserves to be commended for her manifold contributions toward the advancement of our work. She led the women of Reform Judaism with dignity and strength.

Lastly, I want to express our deep felt gratitude to the many men and women comprising the Local Arrangements Committee for everything they have done and will yet do to make us feel at home. They faced a Herculean task. We are here in unprecedented number – the largest Assembly on the North American Jewish scene. The energetic and effective chairlady Betty Zivitz, assisted by Larry Jackofsky, our Council Director, was able to assemble a veritable army of volunteers who labored for nearly two years now for our coming. And we do appreciate their many deeds of human kindness.

Like thanks must go to our National Convention Committee under Iris Franco Vanek and Mark Levy, and especially to Arthur Grant, who coordinated the multitudinous details of this complex venture. The fruitage of all their labor is rich, indeed. This bodes well to be a memorable convention, stimulating in content and setting alike.

Let me also, in this context, publicly acknowledge my indebtedness to Edith J. Miller, my trusted associate, who has served our Union with devotion for many decades now. I could not possibly function without her.

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And so we are gathered in this jewel of a city whose reputation is one of allure and excitement. This very Southern city of New Orleans is not as far removed from the Jewish experience, both negative and positive, as one might think.

From here, after all, the slaves of African descent were marketed to the entire South—from here a whole people was forced to “harsh labor with mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field.” Here, too, healthier forms of commerce yielded the kind of cosmopolitanism that could enable this city, like the Jewish people to grow through historical misfortune and ruin to renew its stature in our own era.

At every step Jews were involved in that growth. New Orleans was home to Judah Touro, America’s greatest philanthropist of his day, from whose bequest was founded Touro infirmary, which grew into the Hebrew Hospital of New Orleans, one of the South’s outstanding health care institutions. More contemporary Jewish contributions to New Orleans can be seen in Tulane University, Audubon Park and Zoo, and the recently dedicated Woldenberg Riverfront Park.

New Orleans, in kind, has proved to be a secure home for three Reform Temples, each over one hundred years old. In this city, a Jew has owned a church; a rabbi once left services to ride as a volunteer on a fire engine, and a native who was cousin twice removed of Heinrich Heine became Princess Alice of Monaco. New Orleans might even have a Jewish Mayor soon, in Donald Mintz, who cut his political teeth when he successfully ran for the presidency of NFTY. Yes, we are well at home, gathering in this place we, the reconstituted people of the Covenant, at home in the reconstituted American South.

Ours has been no small contribution to that process of renewal in the South, during the decades of the civil rights struggle and continuing unto this day. One text proof of that commitment has been the inclusion, today, of the name of Mickey Leland among those for whom we said Kaddish. The Congressman was one who creatively engaged the American Jewish community and drew forth the best that we had to give. The Congressman was closely associated with our Religious Action Center. The disadvantaged black youngsters whom he sent on an African-Israel experience year after year, used our Kibbutzim, Yahel and Lotan, as their base. He was deeply committed to the security of the Jewish State. And he had a visceral concern for the Black Jews of Ethiopia. Indeed, the mission that cost him his life, was undertaken, at least in part, to advance their well-being. It is fitting then, that we include Leland’s name amongst those others whom we deeply mourn, especially those who were taken from us since last we convened: Earl Morse, past Chairman of our Board, a proud Jew, a faithful servant of this Union all his life; and Annette Daum of our Executive Staff, who guided our interfaith activities with ability and devotion.

May we honor their memory by continuing to pursue our own missions of Jewish continuity and human betterment.

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This week’s Torah portion, *parshat noach*, tells the story of the great flood that engulfed the world in the long ago.

It has always seemed odd to me and odd it seemed to the rabbis of old – that this man Noah, who alone is “righteous in his generation,” can hear word of the impending destruction of all living things without uttering a word of protest or shedding a tear of sorrow. Perhaps this is why the medieval interpreter of the Torah, the great Rashi, proclaimed Noah to be of “insufficient faith.” So, at least, the Hassidic master Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev interpreted Rashi to mean. Noah failed to recognize his own saintliness, his own ability to reverse God’s decree. He “walked with God” – but only with God, said Levi Yitzchak. Noah did not walk with his fellow human beings, or serve as a bridge between them and their God.

It was only “after the flood,” so we read in an earlier *midrash*,

“when Noah opened the ark and looked out and saw that the earth was desolate as, forests and gardens uprooted, corpses visible everywhere...no grass, no vegetation...the earth a wasteland. Only then did he cry out in pain and sorrow... (only then) did he understand that he had sinned, because he thought only of himself and his household, while all else perished by fire and water!”

Only then did Noah erect an altar unto God, to make sacrifices of atonement. And God forgave him, and promised never again to destroy the earth; and set a bow in the sky as a token of the covenant between Him and the earth.

The Book of Genesis itself takes a dramatic shift, following the story of the flood, a shift from mythology to history. It launches its narrative over God’s rainbow and finds Abraham: Abraham who has the compassion to argue with his God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham who has the vision to launch a new religion, to bring forth a new people, to establish a renewed Covenant.

Our challenge, as Reform Jews in 1989, is to develop our faith to exceed the “insufficient faith” of Noah. Our challenge is to cross over from flood to renewal, to realize that it is within our power to avert the evil decree, to know, with a certainty and out of the fullness of our faith, that we stand but at the foot of the rainbow, and not its ending, and that there is a future before us and for humankind.

Our Celebration CCAR Centennial, NFTY at Fifty, Outreach at Ten

Like Noah we have marked the holy place of our disembarkation, America, by constructing an altar here: an institutional life that enables our creative best to rise up in unified purpose. At its base is our Central Conference of American Rabbis, now in its centennial year. What a century it was – the most awesome, the most momentous in Jewish life since the *churban* of the Second Temple. We have been transplanted and dismantled. We have been destroyed and reborn.

It was the Reform rabbinate – prodded by Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver – that succeeded in transforming Zionism from a historical footnote into a stirring chronicle of statehood.

It was the Reform rabbinate, as institutionalized by Isaac Mayer Wise, that set the pattern for rabbinic training, congregational cooperation and rabbinical networking for all Jewish movements in North America.

Again, it was the Reform rabbinate that insisted on the empowerment of women in the religious life, and that engaged and prodded us to engage in social action, impelled by the quest not for power or ideology, but for holiness.

It was the Reform rabbinate and its prodigious collective Jewish scholarship that kept us as a movement within Judaism that permitted us to adjust to the changes of Jewish life only within the framework of our historic tradition. And then they reinforced this ideological nexus by goading Reform Jews to regain and retain their sense of Jewish peoplehood.

And think of what the Reform rabbis did and do for us, not collectively, but individually, each in his own community. We are bound to them by tears of sorrow and joy alike. They "carry our burdens," and they "sing our songs."

What bears special mention on this anniversary is the Reform rabbinate's contribution to the UAHC itself. For the Union is not only a lay body. It is a *congregational* body in which all Temple professionals have equal voice. Most of our programmatic task forces and commissions are joint bodies, often involving the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion too, and our affiliates as well: Social Action, Education, Religious Living, Outreach and many more. There is no aspect of our work that is untouched by the creative endeavors of the rabbinate. Such unity is not the rule in other Jewish religious streams in American Judaism, and likely is the true source of our strength and ever growing vitality.

We congratulate our Conference and its leadership, Sam Karff and Joe Glaser - as well as Dick Scheuer and Fred Gottschalk, the lay and professional heads of our seminary, on whose shoulders the awesome responsibility of rabbinic preparation rests. Let all rabbis assembled here rise now, so that we may give you the acclaim you so richly deserve.

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Our vitality is further assured by another massive stone in our institutional altar, the North American Federation of Temple Youth. NFTY was founded during the last week in December of 1939, and quickly grew to become a most creative affiliate. Tens of thousands of our young people have participated in its activities, and their lives were transformed by the experience.

Wherever I go on this continent of ours I find NFTY alumni. They are our rabbis and cantors and educators and administrators. They are the lay leaders of our congregations, and their most devoted members. And whenever they speak of their NFTY years, a dreamlike, wistful gleam illuminates their faces.

NFTY spawned many programs of great worth: junior youth groups, and activities for its alumni on campus; the Eisendrath International Student Exchange program; Bible tours and Archaeological digs in Israel, NFTY Mitzva Corps bringing religious action to life in Puerto Rico and Mexico and in the ghettos of America. A group of NFTY song and dance leaders even toured Russia this past summer, to help rekindle the Jewish spark among Soviet Jews.

To this day, the Reform movement sends more teenagers on summer programs to Israel than does

any other youth movement in the world. Indeed, without NFTY, there would be no Kibbutz Yahel and Lotan and no Mitzpe Har Halutz in the Galilee; these very settlements lend primary credibility to Israel's Progressive Movement.

Most notable of all, NFTY brought the Union's Camp Program into being and it remains the most effective vehicle for the transmission of Judaism at our command. By a magic all their own, our camps make Judaism come to life in the hearts of our children, they make it true for them, truer than mere preachment, truer than vague recollection, much truer, indeed, than pride in a heritage that is mere hearsay and not a true possession.

Rabbi Allan Smith leads our national youth program directing a staff exceeding one hundred in number, and he does so exceedingly well. But even he will agree, that while many must be credited for this half-century of maturation, two must be singled out for special mention: the first an institution, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, the women of Reform Judaism who nurtured NFTY from its very beginnings.

The second is a Rabbi, Samuel Cook, creative genius, master-builder, ever confident in the capacity of youth to grow in spirit. His own singular soul became and will remain the flaming soul of NFTY. Incidentally, it was Ellie Schwartz, Sam's long time associate during NFTY's formative years, who cooked up that alphabet soup - - SOFTY and CAFTY and NEFTY and PAFTY, etc. - - that has become NFTY's trademark. That's good cooking, Cajun style!

To be sure now, we cannot, dare not rest on our laurels. If anything, the task is even greater, certainly more complex. The family patterns of today's youth are more diverse, competing interests more compelling. At any rate, soon there will be many more young people about, now that the babies of the baby-boomers are growing up fast.

There is a need, then, for renewed attention to youth work on a congregational level: We should reach out to our young people at an even earlier age, by developing a network of Junior youth groups; and strive to hold them to a later age, while they are on campus. Innovative program patterns must be designed to attract those who stand at the periphery of our work and remain uninvolved.

And this above all: there is a need for role models, for rabbis and cantors and educators and committed lay leaders willing to spend quality time with our young people, ready to come regularly to their conclaves and conventions and camps, determined to amplify the heartbeat of our precious heritage loud enough to let it be heard above the noisy rhythms of modern life. Then will our "sons and daughters prophesy," even as we, of the older generation, will go on dreaming our dreams.

* * *

Our institutional altar is incomplete, as is our acknowledgment of anniversaries. until I salute our Outreach program now in its tenth year. If there is a single innovation in present day Reform Judaism for which I would like to be remembered, it is this! It is an innovation that has transformed Jewish attitudes, that has opened the community's eyes and ears and hearts to those Jews for whom the love of mate and the love of their people once seemed mutually exclusive.

Indeed, virtually every Jewish denomination and organization in North America has accepted the fundamentals of our approach, renouncing the wagging finger or the pounding fist for the open hand, in fulfillment of the Talmudic injunction that bids us always be "soft as a reed and not as hard as a cedar." "It is because of this quality," taught Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon, "that reeds have been privileged to be selected as pens with which Torah scrolls, Tefillin and Mezuzot are written." Yes, by being flexible and not hard, we are creating Torahs and mezuzot. By being responsive and not resistant, we are turning dire fears into inspiring hope.

Good and timely as my notion might have been it would have died aborning had not others seized it and engaged in the toilsome task of its implementation. Many deserve credit for the success of this endeavor: lay leaders, rabbis, educators, administrators, numerous members of our congregations and of the Union's staff. The present chairman of the Outreach Commission, Mel Merians, belongs to this honored companionship as does David Belin who preceded him in office. So does Bernie Rapoport, who provided us with the initial means, no less than \$1,000,000, to launch this effort.

Of course, Lydia Kukoff stands at the center of it all. She is the prime mover of our labors in this sphere, architect and artisan alike, so much so that the words Kukoff and Outreach have become virtually synonymous; when you think of the one, the other spontaneously springs to mind. We cannot possibly praise her enough.

So very much has been accomplished in but a decade.

- * Conversion curricula were revised to represent Judaism as an emotional and not just intellectual reality.

- * Congregations were stimulated to integrate Jews-by-choice more effectively into their synagogal lives, to break the sense of isolation and alienation that is spurred by the absence of a more genuine communal support.

- * Many varied programs were designed and refined to reach unaffiliated interfaith couples with unconverted spouses.

- * The children of such couples are now the focus of our concern. Imaginatively conceived programs have been devised, as you will hear.

- * A special Outreach curriculum was constructed to sharpen the sensitivity of teachers to the needs of students who have non-Jewish relatives.

Outreach has brought us one other boon – not anticipated at first. It has compelled us to look at ourselves: to ask ourselves as born Jews some very fundamental questions: Who are we...what do we really believe...what must we know and feel and do when we claim the name Jew? And once we grapple with such questions, an inner transformation takes place.

None of our outreach programs was instituted in a casual manner. Every idea was scrutinized with care, every program fully tested, and only then carefully extended. The custodians of Outreach have been uncanny in their ability to match inspiration with perspiration, to render concrete activities out of gossamer notions.

A perfect case in point is Rabbi Steven Foster's imaginative and marvelously successful Stepping Stones project, in Denver. Steve's idea was simple, as all great ideas are. Why not offer a time-limited,

tuition free, separate-track Jewish educational program to children of unaffiliated mixed-married couples?

Well, he did, enlisting the cooperation of his Temple's leadership and the Allied Jewish Federation. It is a two year program, open to children from kindergarten through senior high school at no cost to them. Sessions are held Sunday afternoons throughout the school year. A special curriculum was prepared by the Union, founded on respect for the non-Jewish parent of these children, yet rich in Jewish content. A weekly program for parents is also offered, giving them an opportunity to clarify their family goals and to learn more about Judaism and about the Jewish people.

Stepping Stones has been a spectacularly successful experiment. Each year twenty-five percent of the parents who enroll their children do affiliate; there are virtually no drop outs; several conversions of the non-Jewish partners ensued; and every family felt closer to and more accepted by the Jewish community. It is a program that bears emulating, and I call on our congregations to do so. I earnestly hope, indeed I am confident, that they will.

It is our hope to establish a special endowment fund for this and like purposes: to supplement resources where federations cannot be found to do so, to provide camperships, and scholarships to these young people. Here too we have an angel waiting in the wings. Our newly elected Board member, Bill Daniel, and his lovely wife Lotte have determined to restructure their charitable trust so that it will eventually make two million dollars available for such a fund. The children of the unaffiliated intermarried must not be allowed to fall through our community's cracks; they cannot be lost to the Jewish people forever.

We are not talking about a problem of narrow scope, now; vast numbers are involved. The intermarriage rate for Jews in the 1980s has reached forty percent, with less than half involving a conversion to Judaism. Over 500,000 – yes more than one half million children – are the products of such marriages. By the year 2000, over fifty percent of children in Jewish religious schools will come from a home in which one of the parents was not born Jewish. Fifty percent of today's Jewish college students are expected to intermarry, and the trend shows no sign of abatement. And while the conversion rate out of Judaism remains limited, too often the rule is non-affiliation, and the result an atrophied Jewish identity.

Insufficiency of faith is the problem: but it is not the insufficiency of faith of the intermarried of which I speak. Rather it is the Jewish community's faith that is insufficient, when they cringe passively, like Noah, before the statistical flood. It is our pioneering Outreach effort that reveals a truer faith, faith in the power of Judaism to attract followers, to slake their hunger for the holy, their thirst for the dew of heaven. In the Talmud we are taught that Israel was "exiled among the nations only so that converts be added to them." (Pesachim 87b) And in our Haftarah of this very Sabbath, the prophet Isaiah assures us that our labors will not be in vain: "...Incline your ear and come to me; Hearken and you shall be revived...*goy lo teida tikra*...reach out to those people you did not know...and peoples that did not know you shall run to embrace you."

Reaching out to the Unaffiliated

"Enlarge the size of your tent," Isaiah further bids in the opening sentences of today's Haftarah.

"Extend the size of your dwelling, do not stint!" Even so must our tent of Outreach be enlarged to enfold not just the intermarried but the many Jews-by-birth who are unaffiliated. *Their* numbers too are legion. As Reform Jews, we may well take pride in our continuing numeric growth; but the bitter fact remains, that there is one segment of the American Jewish community that is growing at an even faster rate than we: the unaffiliated.

It may be hubris for us to say that a lack of synagogue affiliation indicates an utter lack of Jewish identity, as there are many other pathways of identification open to American Jews: philanthropic, communal, literary, political, focusing extensively, though not exclusively on Israel. But the fact remains that synagogue affiliated Jews are Jewishly more involved. They visit Israel more often, devote more volunteer time to other Jewish organizations; they give more to Jewish causes, insist on a better Jewish education for their children; and, of course, they are more likely to participate in communal worship and home observances. Ultimately, the pathways of Jewish identification must lead to a center, a center where Jews can meet and form community. That center, more than ever, is the synagogue.

About a year ago, responding to this problem, the Conference and the Union joined to organize a special Task Force on the Unaffiliated, for the time being to operate under the aegis of the Outreach Commission, but if its work shows sufficient progress, it will stand on its own. Dru Greenwood, is staff director of this Task Force, and she recently pointed out that membership *retention* rather than a disinclination to affiliate is our primary challenge. Unbeknownst to its architects, our Temples are equipped with revolving doors: fully eighty-five to ninety percent of all Jews on this continent will belong to a synagogue at some time in their adult lives, passing in and passing right out again. Our outreach to the unaffiliated must therefore begin with inreach to our own sanctuaries.

Manifold opportunities present themselves to achieve this enlargement:

For instance, our synagogues might provide day care services. Because they are lacking in our communities, too many Jewish parents place their children in non-Jewish centers, and they pay for them. Then why shouldn't temples fill this critical need. What a potential to bring more people into our synagogues! What a "window of opportunity" for Jewish family education!

Or they might open their adult education classes to the entire community. Many are the modern Jews who shy away from worship, yet engage in study, who are willing to glean life-lessons from our tradition though they do not perceive the study of Judaism's classics as a means of encountering the Divine.

Mel Merians had a splendid idea to retain NFTY alumni. "Why not give them special privilege cards" he said, "granting them free membership in any UAHC congregation the world over, while they are in college or pursuing graduate work." The concept is not without its problems, but once overcome, its harvest might be rich, indeed.

The manner in which we collect our synagogue dues bears careful re-examination. Despite our stated devotion to the fair-share principle, our reputation is too often one of exclusivity; the perception persists that belonging to a temple is a luxury beyond the means of most.

I, for one, would like to extend the Stepping Stone concept to embrace all who are unaffiliated, and not just the unaffiliated intermarried. In other words, I want to call on our congregations to suspend those rules which restrict religious school to the children of Temple members and to admit any Jewish

child to our schools, not for an open ended free service, but for one or two years. Don't reject the notion out of hand. It might be a change in our procedures that would reap profits more surely than any other investment. At any rate, there is really no down side risk, here, for in this way, and at the very least, we of the Reform movement will have moved toward the ultimate goal: a Jewish education for every Jewish child in our communities.

The burgeoning of our Day School program will also help toward this end...twenty-two congregations either have or are in the process of developing such schools, requiring that we provide supportive staff in our a national department of education.

Perhaps most important of all, we must continue to adjust our temples' programming, indeed their entire ambience, to reflect the newer realities of Jewish family life: of divorce, of single parenting, of coupling without marriage, and their like. Too much of what we do still assumes the traditional Jewish family structure – mother, father, and child – which has become the minority configuration in the world of today.

These are but some of the means our new task force in concert with our congregations might pursue. Let us be daring in these efforts, willing to err, to stumble, to make mistakes. As a Jewish proverb tells us: "More lovely is an ugly patch than a beautiful hole." Patches, after all, can lead to a patchwork quilt, while holes lead only to emptiness.

When the poet and ghetto fighter Abba Kovner, of blessed memory, first came to Israel, he felt alienated from everyone and everything, he said, until someone asked him: "Would you join us for a minyan, we need a tenth." Kovner immediately joined the worshippers and felt he was no longer alienated. Years later, when he conceived his idea of the Diaspora Museum he designed a corner called "the minyan," with wax figures representative of various Jewish communities. Yet there are only nine and not the required ten figures because, explained Kovner, he wanted to call out to the viewers as others had called out to him: "Come join us, come and be counted, we cannot do without you. We need you as you need us." These are the words we must inscribe on the door posts of our synagogues.

Spirit Conveyed by Means of Art

Let all of us be assured that resolutions passed at these Assemblies do not go unheeded; in one way or another they are acted upon and have an impact on the evolvement of our religious community.

I could demonstrate this to you in countless ways, by setting forth the wide spectrum of our activities, the many-varied colors of this wondrous rainbow that is our Union.

I could tell you about the National Kallah on Spirituality held at Brown University this past summer which engaged one hundred and twenty seven men and women of all ages in intensive prayer and study.

I could tell you about how our Corps of Service, mandated by our Los Angeles Assembly, is ripening; a solid infracture has been established, individuals and couples of all ages have come forward to volunteer their services; projects are under way in Italy, Switzerland and Israel, in Ethiopia and South Africa. Incidentally, I have urged that volunteers be sought for isolated, disadvantaged Jewish

communities, not just abroad but also within the United States and Canada.

Another, even more recent success has been our Rabbinic Aide program, mandated at our Chicago Assembly but two years ago. This past summer fifteen men and women, most of them from small, isolated, congregations without rabbis, joined for two weeks of intensive study and training in practical rabbinics: how to lead services, read from the Torah, write a sermon, conduct various life-cycle rites. *Mirabile dictu*, three of these eager fifteen have now determined to make the rabbinate their life career and have applied for admission to HUC- JIR!

Several of the projects I just mentioned were actuated by Danny Syme whose faithful stewardship serves us well in so many ways. He brings to us a combination of creativity and energy which enhances every aspect of our work.

The UAHC-CCAR Commission on Jewish Music, called into being at our Los Angeles Assembly, has been particularly productive. Ably chaired by Jack Geller and directed by Danny Freeland it has done much to heighten the musical literacy of our congregations. As you know, the Commission is very much present at this Biennial with its wonderful Friday evening program, as well as five workshops for temple leaders in the course of our gathering.

It has been so successful, in fact, that I ask the Commission to expand its purview to include not just music, but other arts as well: drama, dance, sculpture, architecture, even painting. The Zohar tells us that "there are halls in the heavens above that open but to the voice of song." This is true for the other forms of art as well. They too can serve to deepen our sense of the sacred, our awareness of the holy in life.

You see, so much of our present-day reluctance to believe in God is due to that paradox with which Jewish theological thinking confronts us: that God, though totally other and unknowable, nonetheless makes Himself known. "Thou canst not see My face," so Moses is told atop Sinai, standing in the cleft of the rock. "But I will make all my goodness pass before thee."

Unknowable, yet known through its traces; invisible, and yet real. The paradox is vexing, perplexing.

Like the rest of humankind, we are creatures in bondage to our eyes. Only seeing is believing, we say; only the visible is fact. But the invisible world has a reality all its own, and its force may well be more intense than is the force of the world that is seen.

Consider the world of the invisible, if you will.

Ideas, for example...they are impalpable. Thoughts are free...no one can seize them. Yet ideas can seize us and they hold the power to transform our lives. Ideals too are of such a kind. They are intangible, yet what is life without them? Take truth from a school and you reduce it to a rubble of red bricks. Take religion from a sanctuary, and it becomes just an ordinary hall. Take justice from the far-flung round of human endeavor, and civilization reverts into a jungle.

Love, - - love, wondrous, luminous love; it is also invisible. We can see its expressions, to be sure: the caress, the kiss. But no one has ever seen love itself. It certainly cannot be anatomized, or schematized, or reduced to clearly identifiable elements. Yet how powerful a force love is! It can evoke our willing sacrifice, inspire us to the noblest of deeds.

Music, too is of such a kind; all forms of art are that: dance, sculpture, painting, architecture, "Music in space," Schelling called them. They may be discernible in outer form but in their innermost essence. The sources and nature of art are a mystery even to those who create it. Yet art has the power to heal us. It can make the spirit soar, for art *is* spirit from the realm of the unseen, conveyed by means of matter.

Let our Music Commission expand its scope, then. Let its purview encompass all the arts. Let their inspiring power be felt throughout our movement.

Including Gay and Lesbian Jews

Yes, our resolutions express our resolve to act. There is one realm, however, in which our resolutions have been forthright, but our actions considerably less so. I speak now of the plea of gay and lesbian Jews for fuller acceptance in our midst.

I know that I raise a subject which will make many here feel uncomfortable, but this is precisely why I must raise it. Our discomfort is a measure of our continuing prejudice. I do not exclude myself from this harsh decree, for in thinking about what I would say on this subject, I had to wrestle with demons in the depths of my own being, demons I never acknowledged were there. Let us admit it, then: that in spite of past declarations urging the contrary, the singling out of homosexuality from the whole human constellation as a loathsome affliction remains a widespread sentiment in our midst.

True enough, over fifteen years ago, we admitted the first synagogue with an outreach to gay and lesbian Jews into the UAHC, and we have added three since. Gay men and lesbians by the hundreds who had felt themselves alienated from Judaism have joined these congregations and have added their strength and commitment to our religious community. But in most mainstream congregations, we have not extended our embrace to include gay and lesbian Jews. We have not acknowledged their presence in the midst of our synagogues. We have not dispelled the myth of the "corrupting homosexual" of the counselor or teacher who would fashion children in his or her sexual image. And we have not consciously included gay and lesbian parents as part of the Jewish family circle.

To be sure, many of us feel pity for gays and lesbians, and we agree, intellectually, that it is a grievous wrong to stigmatize them, to ostracize them, to hold them in moral disdain. But something more than a grasp of the mind is required; there is a need for a grasp of the heart. Something different from pity is called for; we need, as a community, to cross those boundaries of Otherness, those fringed boundaries where compassion gives way to identification.

Indeed, we have not affirmed that we *all* are family. We speak of "them" and "us," as though gay men and women were descended from a distant planet. If those who have studied these matters are correct, one half million of our fellow Jews, no less than one hundred thousand Reform Jews, are gay. They are our fellow congregants, our friends and committee members and yes, our leaders both professional and lay. Whether we know it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, some of them are our sisters and brothers, our daughters and our sons.

In our denial, in our failure to see one another as one family indeed, as one holy body—we forget Jewish history, we opt for amnesia. We who were beaten in the streets of Berlin cannot turn away from

the plague of gay-bashing. We who were marranos in Madrid, who clung to the closet of assimilation and conversion in order to live without molestation, we cannot deny the demand for gay and lesbian visibility!

I know full well what our literal tradition has to say on the subject. Yet built within it is the possibility of change, once advancing knowledge enlarges our understanding. There was a time – so our colleague Gene Mihaly instructed us –when deaf-mutes were considered mentally incompetent, and, hence, denied the right to participate in the religious life. But no less an authority than Maimonides was prepared to lift this restriction when deaf-mutes give evidence of a capacity to learn; he codified the flexibility provided by the Talmudic sages themselves. Similarly, the Bible enjoins us to sequester lepers, to isolate them. Like AIDS patients today, they were not only shunned but told that they suffer only because they sinned. Yet few indeed are the *poskim*, the Halachic decisors, of today who would enforce the Biblical ostracism of lepers. Then why are *we*, and especially we Reform Jews, not willing to set aside the halachic despatches of homosexuality in order to reflect equally *our* newer knowledge.

In any event, the Torah has many strands; seen singly, they do not reveal the whole; the tapestry must be seen in all its wondrous fullness. There is one text, but there are others, and beyond them, there is their interpretation which is never fixed but ever in flux. Yes, there is the reproofing God who visited His wrath upon the men of Sodom; but there is also the loving God who enjoins us not to “stand idly by while our neighbor perishes.” Our Torah has many faces, but the most authentic is the one that reflects its heart.

Our Rabbinic Conference, through its Committee on Homosexuality, which has yet to render a final report – has called on the Union to embark on a “movement-wide program of heightened awareness and study.” Very well! I support its summons to do so, hence my commentary on the subject. I endorse the notion of dialogue and education in regard to sensitive issues. But education in a vacuum is not enough. Ultimately, there must be a policy enunciated by which the many gay and lesbian Jews of our community can know that they are accepted on terms of visibility, not invisibility. Ultimately, they must know that we place no limits on their communal or spiritual aspirations.

In all of this, I am working to make the Reform Jewish community a home: a place where loneliness and suffering and exile ends; a place that leaves it to God to validate relationships and demands of us only that these relationships be worthy in His eyes; a place where we can search, together, through the written Torah and the Torah of life, to find those affirmations for which we yearn.

Concerning Substance Abuse, and Abortion

Let me now touch briefly on two matters which really enter Al Vorspan’s domain, and we eagerly expect his Social Action keynote scheduled for tomorrow morning. He always sharpens our sense of what is right and wrong. He is certainly the first among equals on the Union’s staff, immensely admired by us all.

My first comment is prompted by a report from Allan Smith, the able head of our youth and camping division that during the summer just past, substance abuse, – particularly of alcohol – proved to be a more pervasive problem than ever before. It was controlled, of course, but it *had* to be con-

trolled. And there's the rub. This flies in the face of those "denial myths from the shtetl past," to which we cling, that Jews never become drunkards. They do, and their children do.

Much the same must be said of narcotics. A recent report by the National Center of Drug Abuse concluded that "Jewish students constitute one of the most 'at risk' college groups...that they have consistently higher risk rates." Not long ago, the National Cocaine Hotline conducted a poll of randomly chosen callers and identified eighteen percent as Jewish - eighteen percent in a population that constitutes less than three percent of the general public. Those are grim statistics and we had better face them. We'd best stand at the mirror and see ourselves, transform ourselves, rather than smash the glass in self-denial.

The resolution on substance abuse that has been put before you at this gathering is significant in its acknowledgment of our problem, though much more needs to be done to fashion a solution.

I also call on our Task Force on Youth Suicide to lead our efforts in this realm. This problem is properly within its purview. After all, so many of the self-inflicted deaths among adolescents are drug-related, even as the causes of suicide and substance abuse are akin: a loathing of the self, a fear of the world. Hopefully, our task force will provide our young people with life-affirming alternatives that can compete with the death-defying thrills of narcotics and alcohol.

In this context, a few words concerning the Bush administration's strategy in the war against drugs. We admire the President's insistence on tackling America's drug problem head on. Just the same, the scourge of drugs cannot be curbed solely or even primarily by cops, judges and jail houses. "Get tough" preachments are no substitute for a responsible social and economic analysis of the drug epidemic. Hardening the hearts of the public toward drug users, and indeed toward the suffering inner-city communities that have been disemboweled by crack addiction, can only lead to a heightened plague.

* * *

A few words on the subject of reproductive rights for women. Our past resolutions still hold with respect to their thrust. For decades now we called for freedom of choice, and we have resolved continuously since then to oppose the constant effort to restrict, endanger or overturn abortion rights.

I found only one problem in reviewing our past resolutions: the last, resolved as it was after the Roe v. Wade decision, sang hymns of praise for the Supreme Court and its then majority.

Perhaps we need a new resolution to reflect our reservations concerning some of the more recent majority opinions of the Supreme Court. Not for a generation has there been a week of court decisions as debilitating and morally hypocritical as the week before Independence Day, 1989, during which a majority of the justices in one breath declared minors and mental incompetents to be reasonable targets for capital punishment, and in another breath lowered the curtain of privacy that rightfully surround a pregnant woman so that state legislatures could take a pot-shot at her. Simultaneously, affirmative action programs were gutted, and the wall of church-state separation battered with a menorah that was, said the court, not really of any great religious significance.

A few weeks ago, I chanced to be with Floyd Abrams, perhaps the country's foremost authority on

the First Amendment. Some of you will recall his successful defense of the New York Times in the Pentagon Papers case. Floyd told me: "Alex, the Reagan counter-revolution isn't over - it has just begun. We had better be on our guard."

In any event, now is the time, to translate our past resolutions into action. I call on the women of Reform Judaism to lead us in this crusade and to galvanize the forces required for a state by state campaign. It is a battle that can be won. Recent events in Florida and Washington, may well signal a change in the political tide.

Toward Peace in the Middle East

But now let me turn to Israel, and the process toward peace in the Middle East. It is a process that has been stagnant too long, and threatens to collapse like an old swaying bridge in a hurricane.

Two years ago, at our Chicago gathering, we declared the status quo in the West Bank and in Gaza to be untenable, that something had to give. Two months later the intifada began.

Throughout these bitter months I have consistently held to the view that the effort to repress this rebellion by force would only serve to deepen mutual hatreds and fears. And I supported every effort to move toward negotiations, even as I resisted any attempt, whatever its source, to impede the process.

Our hopes were always frustrated. The counsel of timidity prevailed. And the intifada became more fierce, both in the struggle to further the rebellion, and in the effort to repress it. Arab hatred has deepened, and so have the fears of the Israelis. The corrupting sense of it all being a trap without escape, has begun to gnaw away at the vestiges of good will.

Neither the PLO leadership nor the Israeli government has really said "yes" to peace, except on its own strict terms. Both sides, in their apparent inability to move forward, reveal dangerous vulnerabilities: Shamir to the right wingers of his party, the PLO to younger, more reckless leaders.

Both sides have their messianic fundamentalists - - the Muslim Hamas movement, the Orthodox Gush Emunim. These are the most dangerous forces, for as Shulamit Aloni recently pointed out: "People who speak in the name of God and hear voices do not compromise. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that the God of the Muslims has more soldiers than the God of the Jews."

There is an urgent need for statesmanship, for a leaders with vision. Opportunities for peace are no less sudden than outbreaks of war, and they require a similar response of strength and courage.

I am afraid that time is not on Israel's side. Two years ago the price of peace was not nearly so high. The Jordanian option was still alive then, while Arafat was slogging in a diplomatic trough rather than riding its crest as he is today. If the slim chance for peace is allowed to pass by again, if the transient evanescent possibility for dialogue is not seized soon the result is likely to be far more terrible than the intifada. Look and see: even now Israel is biting into its own flesh, dividing into ideological factions that vie for power and deface each other's lifestyles.

In this situation, this country has a significant or perhaps crucial - - role to play. The U. S. government should be relentless in the effort to build bridges between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. No

peace has ever been concluded between Israel and her neighbors without outside mediation.

At its core, Israel is still strong...nor is it devoid of wisdom. This is why I am certain that the peace will eventually come. And when that peace comes - - so Amos Oz has written - -

"when that moment of peace comes, we ought to mark (its arrival) with a huge monument in memory of blindness, stupidity and folly. For in the end, Israel will get something that she could have obtained on better terms ten and perhaps even twenty years ago. And the Palestinians will finally get only a part of what they could have achieved peacefully and honorably more than forty years earlier but for their fanaticism and wickedness. ... Only the thousands of dead will get nothing. Except our wreaths. And perhaps the spit of those who have died will be on all our faces when the day of peace comes - - a peace that will extend from Baghdad to Khartoum and from Beit Alpha to Kamei Shomron."

New Hope for Russian Jews

My final observations will concern the state of Soviet Jewry, for a new day in their history appears to be dawning. Glasnost, with its loosening of repressive governmental policies, has brought a greater freedom to them, holding out the hope of a Jewish renaissance. And those heavy iron doors barring their exit have opened wide. The trickle of Jewish emigration has become a veritable flood.

It is almost a miracle. Certainly, nowhere has the resiliency of the Covenant of generations been better proved, as each week we hear of new cultural groups, historical associations, Hebrew language classes, the establishment of scores of Jewish libraries - - all the fruit of many Noahs who withstood the crushing weight of a half-century of Soviet repression that sought to grind Jewish literacy and Jewish identity into the dust.

Not all is well, by any manner or means. The list of refuseniks is still long, their hopes for visas thwarted, most of them on the false ground that they once were, years ago, privy to secrets of state. That is a Kafkaesque charade, this toying with people's lives for spurious reasons of security.

Moreover and paradoxically, greater freedom of speech has given license to a greater anti-Semitism. Klu Klux Klan-like associations such as the Pamyat have come out of hiding and now feel free to spew their venom. Ethnic movements have emerged and clamor for freedom...Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Moldavians, and their like. We understand and even sympathize with their desire for greater autonomy. But we cannot forget their specific history of radical anti-Semitism. Nor can we ignore the potential of these movements to turn against the minorities among them. And everywhere in the Soviet Union, let us remember, Jews are a minority

Nonetheless, efforts toward greater democratization within the Soviet Union must be encouraged. Anti-Semitism is an ever present factor, even in democracies. It is *state sponsored* anti-Semitism rather than we must fear and fight. Let us not forget Stalinism: the murder of Jewish poets, the infamous doctor's plot, the wholesale destruction of Jewish culture down to the melting of Hebrew type. The present, with all its faults and failings is infinitely better than the past.

Of course, we must remain on guard. The roots of freedom are still insufficiently vigorous. Will Gorbachev survive? Will the fraying of unity within his land lead him or those who would replace him,

to emulate the the brutal masters of China? No one can say what the future will bring. But for the moment, at least, we can shift from protest to politics.

This is precisely why I have been among those who urged a greater flexibility on Jackson Vanik, even while we continue to pressure the Kremlin to institutionalize its more liberal policies. A window of opportunity has been opened, and we must do everything in our power to keep it from slamming shut.

Now is the time to help build vigorously the Soviet Jewish culture and the movement for emigration into a force so irrepressible that it can withstand even a setback in Soviet policy. We must take advantage of every opening that the new governmental tolerance affords us, with the same ferocity with which we have responded to crisis.

In this context, you will be pleased to learn that the World Union for Progressive Judaism has taken up the task which I proposed to our Chicago Assembly and which you then endorsed, for a Reform Jewish network within the Soviet Union. A Reform rabbi was sent to Russia for a month. A Russian language Progressive Jewish newspaper has been published, for distribution in Russia, as well as among Russian Jewish immigrants in Israel and in the United States. Professional and lay leaders of the World Union visited the USSR recently, and were amazed at the overwhelmingly positive response they received to their presentation of the Reform Jewish alternative - - the only alternative to Lubavitch-style Judaism that many Soviet Jews ever encounter.

The World Union merits more than praise for these efforts. It merits our material support - - for what it does in Russia and Israel and to enable it to do many things it can't do in other lands because it lacks the required resources to do so.

Yet, there is a shadow that has loomed up and darkened our joy at the betterment of the Soviet Jewish condition, and that is the immigration-resettlement problem, a problem of great technical and moral complexity. Russian Jewish immigration to the United States is so large, that the refugee ceiling of fifty thousand from the Soviet Union provided by our immigration laws will soon be reached. This ceiling will push many Jews into a less-than-voluntary aliyah. Yet - and herein lies my ambivalence - - we cannot, in all good conscience, ask for a greater share of available refugees slots; it is most generous as it is, forty percent of the total. There is a qualitative difference in desperation between Soviet Jews and the Vietnamese boat people, or the Chinese political refugees or Salvadorans fleeing from the death squads and the ravaging civil war in that tortured country. Given the limited places for refugees available, how can we demand that *their* chances of finding sanctuary be reduced for the sake of Soviet Jews who do indeed have the alternative of Israel? Yes, we have the right and obligation to press for a dramatic increase in the over-all refugee ceiling, both in the United States and in Canada. But in a world awash with fourteen million refugees, we dare not declare this Ark America to be chiefly ours.

Moreover, while we as Reform Jews are committed to the principle of free choice in Jewish emigration, we are equally committed to the task of nation-building in Zion. The prospect of a massive aliyah by Soviet Jews is to be celebrated and encouraged. It is also to be supported, through support of the State of Israel whose absorption capacities are being sorely tested by lack of sufficient housing and jobs.

In this context, we might as well confess that American Jewry has been intolerably remiss in its outreach to Soviet Jewish immigrants. The result is that most Soviet Jews in the United States have

dropped out of Jewish life entirely and are without contact with the Jewish community.

There are exceptions to our failures, thankfully. Some individual congregations have had remarkable success in effectively integrating substantial numbers of emigres. The UAHC, nationally, has been of some help here, by translating and publishing pamphlets on Reform Judaism and one service from the Gates of Prayer, all this, thanks primarily to a gallant lady, Betty Golomb, who has almost single-handedly coordinated the Union's efforts in this realm.

Let it be admitted, also, that American Jewry has been less than magnanimous in providing the monies or guarantees required for the absorption of Soviet Jews here, in the United States. I refer specifically to the UJA Passage for Freedom Campaign, which is intended to sustain both Israel's absorption machinery and our own, with all sums received to be shared equally between them. But since domestic absorption needs have first call on funds transmitted to the national office by local Federations there has been a serious erosion of sums transferred to Israel. In effect, then, and indirectly, Israel is bearing the cost of absorbing Soviet Jewish immigrants into the United States.

That is a travesty of justice, is it not! What is happening to the claim of Jewish communal self sufficiency of which we always boast? Where is our historical memory as immigrants, our appreciation of the fact that every one of us here in North America has been sustained at some point in history in my case within my own lifetime – by the good works of organized Jewry? We received affidavits from total strangers, Jews whose resources were infinitely more slender than are ours. Have we indeed become so selfish as to allow our sense of responsibility for fellow Jews to atrophy? Were we demonstrating a quarter of a million strong in Washington on behalf of flesh and blood Soviet Jews, or simply to achieve some kind of emotional catharsis?

I, therefore, call on every Reform congregation to form or revitalize a Committee on Soviet Jewry that will prod our own membership, and the Jewish community-at-large through local Federations to give or guarantee the resources required for the absorption of Russian Jews both here and in Israel, as well as to engage in a person-to-person effort to integrate Soviet immigrants into American Jewish life.

We cannot be content to quote Scripture only in part, saying: "Let my people go." For what Moses said to Pharaoh was: "Let my people go *that they might serve Me.*"

* * *

Dear friends, our Union is first and foremost a union of hearts - - hearts that shed the light - - light which God collects and places as a rainbow in the sky. Then is our path upon the earth illumined by the sign of the Covenant. Then can we join hands and form a human rainbow, to span and sanctify and to protect this spinning planet we call home.

I can think of no keener symbol of our mission than this sign of the Covenant from the story of Noah. The rainbow, alone among nature's phenomena, is a sight shared by all, yet uniquely experienced by each. The sun, the observer's eye, and the center of the arc must be aligned. *Each of us, in fact, sees his or her own rainbow, even while we share the sight.*

Let us each strive, therefore, to see the rainbow, to "walk with God," as if we alone, like Noah, were

righteous in our generation.

Only together, however, can we find "that sufficiency of faith" to go beyond Noah's dutiful effort to forestall the flood. Only then will we hear "the funeral dirge of the ocean, (and) with its sound...a mingled voice that whispers: 'Despair not!'" (H. W. Longfellow)

Despair not! Not for as long as you can look into the eye of another Jew, and see your own reflection. Come close to each other now. Be confident in your faith, and comfortable enough with it to find an intimacy in our bond of Judaism. For in those reflections that we see in each other's eyes, in those prayers we hear in each others voices, in that yearning for connection we feel in each others touch, that is where God most intimately dwells. We, in our unity, form the portal through which God the Redeemer enters into the world. We, in our mutual discovery, reignite the very sparks of creation, and the Covenant of the generations, as eternal and as lofty as a rainbow, is renewed.

Despair not! So much has been washed away by the floods of history. So many of the hopes that we have had, each of us and collectively, have floated out of grasp and gone under.

Our losses as Jews have been monumental; and our monuments have often proved to be of sand. Yet we have survived.

We have survived the Nazi era when the "earth was filled with lawlessness."

We have survived the Soviet attempt to obliterate our people's identity.

We have survived the relentless military and diplomatic onslaught against Israel.

The Jewish people lives!

And now the rain clouds are parting. Now our hearts must leap to the rainbow; our prayers must soar to God's ears; our sacrifices must rise to God's nostrils. Like Noah, we must till the soil, plant the vineyards for the sake of generations yet to come. And in so doing, we are declaring our survival to be: not merely an ending but only another beginning.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE 60TH UAHC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. I call on this Assembly to thank our Chairman, Allan B. Goldman for the manner in which he has led us in office. He has a "well-trained, retentive mind, a quick wit, the ability to articulate his thoughts precisely," and he is determined "to steer our movement forward, never to allow it to drift."

2. I call on our Assembly and its delegates to express our collective gratitude to all those who brought this convention to be: a) To our host congregations of New Orleans and Baton Rouge, for their gracious hospitality. They faced a Herculean task – "we are here in unprecedented numbers" – and performed it effectively and with devotion. b) To Iris Franco Vanek, her co-chairman, Mark Levy, and to all of the 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 "able and effective chairlady, Betty Zivitz," and her army of co-workers on the Local Arrangements Committee who did everything in their power to make us feel at home and to have this convention run smoothly. We are grateful, also, to our area director, Larry Jackofsky, who assisted them in this work. d) To Arthur Grant, the Union's Director of Regions, who single-handedly coordinated the multitudinous details of this convention. He is an efficient administrator and a warm and wonderful Jew.

3. We salute the Central Conference of American Rabbis on the occasion of its centennial celebration. Our Rabbinic conference has done much for us. There is literally no aspect of our doing locally, regionally and nationally, that is "untouched by the creative endeavors of the rabbinate." We are indebted for these its manifold contributions toward the advancement of our sacred tasks. It is thanks primarily to its leadership that we have emerged as the overwhelmingly predominant synagogue movement on the North American Jewish scene.

4. We congratulate the North American Federation of Temple Youth as it marks the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. NFTY alumni are our "rabbis and cantors and educators and administrators...they are the lay leaders of our congregations, and their devoted members." NFTY spawned many activities of great worth, particularly the camping program. But we cannot rest on our laurels, for the task ahead is "even greater, if anything, more complex...the family patterns of today's youth are more diverse, competing interests more compelling." I therefore

(a) call on our congregations to focus on youth work with renewed vigor, and to make certain that adequate budgetary resources are allocated to it;

(b) I ask them to provide scholarships and camperships so that all young people, and not just the children of the wealthy, will be able to participate in the full range of NFTY national and regional activities.

(c) I urge that we reach out to our young people at an even earlier age, by developing a network of Junior Youth groups; and that we seek to involve youth longer by intensifying our activities on campus;

(d) I request our rabbis and cantors and educators to become more fully involved in the Union's camp and youth program, even as I ask our congregational leadership to encourage them to do so and to deem this participation a part of their ongoing professional task.

5. I congratulate the Outreach Commission and its lay and professional leaders -- particularly Lydia Kukoff who is "the prime mover of our labors in this sphere."

I ask our congregations to accept this Commission's recommendation that the innovative "Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me" program pioneered in Denver be extended through the length and breadth of this land. It is our hope to have no less than a half-score congregations embark on this venture during the coming year. The children of the unaffiliated intermarried "must not be allowed to fall through our community's cracks; they cannot be lost to the Jewish people forever."

6. I urge our member congregations to place the highest priority on reaching unaffiliated Jews, and I ask our recently formed UAHC-CCAR Task Force to develop the means which will enable our Temples to fulfill this mission. I propose the following areas for exploration and implementation:

- (a) the establishment of daycare centers in our synagogues;
- (b) opening the Temple's adult education courses to the entire community and not just to Temple members;
- (c) providing privilege cards to high school graduates giving them free membership in any UAHC congregation while they are in college or pursuing graduate studies;
- (d) a careful re-examination of our dues structure and the manner in which it is administered in order to "dispel the notion that belonging to a temple is a luxury beyond the means of most."
- (e) suspending those rules which restrict religious school to children of Temple members and to admit any Jewish child to our classes, "not for an open-ended free service, but for one or two years;"
- (f) adjusting our Temples' programming to the "newer realities of Jewish family life: of divorce, of single parenting, of coupling without marriage, and the like . . . the traditional Jewish family structure - mother, father and child -- has become the minority configuration in the world today."

7. I endorse the "Resolution on Jewish Literacy" passed by the Commission on Jewish Education urging that "all meetings convened on behalf of Reform Judaism in North America . . . be programmed in such a way as to afford the maximum time for *torah lishma*," and that our leadership on every level "demonstrate a continuing commitment to Jewish education."

8. Taking note of the burgeoning day school movement in our religious community -- some 22 such schools either have been or are in the process of formation -- I urge the UAHC to provide

supportive staff in our Department of Jewish Education as one of our highest priorities. "Part time Jewish education simply does not suffice for the need. It will not create the cadre of Jewish informed and Jewishly motivated young leaders we require to remain a vital, vibrant movement within Judaism."

9. I ask that our Corps of Service, mandated by the Los Angeles Biennial four years ago, be empowered to seek volunteers for "isolated, disadvantaged Jewish communities not just abroad, but also within the United States and Canada.

10. Similarly, I ask your authority to extend the scope of our Joint Commission on Jewish Music to encompass not just music but other forms of art as well: drama, dance, sculpture, even painting. "Art can make the spirit soar, for art is spirit from the realm of the unseen, conveyed by means of matter."

11. Endorsing the summons of the CCAR Committee on Homosexuality, I ask the Union to embark on a "movement-wide program of heightened awareness and study" to achieve the fuller acceptance of gay and lesbian Jews in our midst. Our Union of congregations must be a place "where loneliness and suffering and exile ends."

12. I ask this Assembly's assent to my request that the Task Force on Youth Suicide take the problems of substance abuse also under its purview. "Many of the self-inflicted deaths among adolescents are drug-related, even as the causes of suicide and substance abuse are akin: a loathing of the self and a fear of the world."

13. I call on this Assembly to reiterate its conviction that peace in the Middle East can only be achieved by political means, that the use of force only serves to deepen mutual hatreds and fears, and that the Bush Administration be relentless in its efforts to build bridges between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. "Opportunities for peace are no less sudden than outbreaks of war and they require a similar response of strength and courage."

14. I call on every Reform congregation to form or revitalize a Committee on Soviet Jewry, to prod our synagogue members, and the Jewish community-at-large through local federations, to give or guarantee the resources required for the absorption of Russian Jews both here and in Israel, and to engage in a person-to-person effort to integrate Soviet immigrants into the life of our synagogues.

Schindler: State of the Union Message
November 4, 1989, New Orleans, La.

I am deeply grateful to Allan Goldman for his gracious introduction.
His words are pleasing to the ear.

But an honest self-reckoning compels me to confess that I do not
really deserve all this praise.

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 each of whose principal components
is represented on this dais.

I accept Allan's words, then, as descriptive not of my attainments
but rather of our collective accomplishments.

Allan himself deserves much credit for what he is:

a highly capable Chairman of our Board.

The challenges facing him were formidable.

He was the youngest in our history to be elected to this office.

He was the first from the Far West, requiring that distance and time
zones be spanned continuously for effective control.

Moreover his predecessors had set the highest possible standards
of leadership.

Think of them for a moment, if you will;

their names are still honored in our midst:

Chuck Rothschild, and Donald Day, and Matthew Ross

-- giants of the spirit all.

Allan has met his challenges well.

He brings rich talents to his endeavors:

a well-trained, retentive mind,

a quick wit,

the ability to articulate his thoughts precisely

and, this above all,

a driving determination to steer our movement forward,

never to allow it to drift.

He deserves our admiration and applause.

My very best wishes, also, to Dolores Wilkenfeld and Ellie Schwartz,

leaders of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods,

whose delegates have come here, in joint convention with us,

for Sisterhood's 37th biennial gathering.

Dolores now completes her final years of office as NFTS President.

She too deserves to be commended for her manifold contributions

toward the advancement of our work.

She led the women of Reform Judaism with dignity and strength.

Lastly, I want to express our deepfelt gratitude to the many men and

women comprising the Local Arrangements Committee

for everything they have done and will yet do yet do

to make us feel at home.

They faced a Herculean task.

We are here in unprecedented number --

the largest Assembly on the North American Jewish scene.

The energetic and effective chairlady Betty Zivitz,
assisted by Larry Jackofsky, our Council Director,
was able to assemble a veritable army of volunteers
who labored for nearly two years now for our coming.
And we do appreciate their many deeds of human kindness.

Like thanks must go to our National Convention Committee under
Iris Franco Vanek and Mark Levy, and especially to Arthur Grant,
who coordinated the multitudinous details of this complex venture.
The fruitage of all their labor is rich, indeed.
This bodes well to be a memorable convention,
stimulating in content and setting alike.

And so we are gathered in this jewel of a city
whose reputation is one of allure and excitement.
This very Southern city of New Orleans is not as far removed
from the Jewish experience, both negative and positive,
as one might think.

From here, after all, the slaves of African descent were marketed to the
entire South --

from here a whole people was forced to "harsh labor with mortar
and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field."

Here, too, healthier forms of commerce yielded the kind of
cosmopolitanism that could enable this city, like the Jewish people
to grow through historical misfortune and ruin
to renew its stature in our own era.

At every step Jews were involved in that growth.

New Orleans was home to Judah Touro, America's greatest philanthropist of his day,

from whose bequest was founded Touro infirmary,

which grew into the Hebrew Hospital of New Orleans

one of the South's outstanding health care institutions.

More contemporary Jewish contributions to New Orleans

can be seen in Tulane University, Audobon Park and Zoo,

and the recently dedicated Woldenberg Riverfront Park.

New Orleans, in kind, has proved to be a secure home for three Reform Temples, each over one hundred years old.

In this city, a Jew has owned a church;

a rabbi once left services to ride as a volunteer on a fire engine,

and a native who was cousin twice removed of Heinrich Heine

became Princess Alice of Monaco.

Yes, we are well at home, gathering in this place

-- we, the reconstituted people of the Covenant, at home in the reconstituted American South.

Ours has been no small contribution to that process of renewal in the South, during the decades of the civil rights struggle and continuing unto this day.

One textproof of that commitment has been the inclusion, tonight, of the name of Mickey Leland among those for whom we said Kaddish.

The Congressman was one who creatively engaged the American Jewish community and drew forth the best that we had to give.

The Congressman was closely associated with our Religious Action Center. The disadvantaged black youngsters whom he sent on an African-Israel experience year after year, used our Kibbutzim, Yahel and Lotan, as their base.

He was deeply committed to the security of the Jewish State.

And he had a visceral concern for the Black Jews of Ethiopia.

Indeed, the mission that cost him his life, was undertaken, at least in part, to advance their well-being.

It is fitting then, that we include Leland's name

amongst those others whom we deeply mourn,

especially those who were taken from us since last we convened:

Earl Morse, past Chairman of our Board,

a proud Jew, a faithful servant of this Union all his life;

and Anette Daum of our Executive Staff, who guided

our interfaith activities with ability and devotion.

May we honor their memory by continuing to pursue our own missions of Jewish continuity and human betterment.

* * *

This week's Torah portion, parshat noach, tells the story of the great flood that engulfed the world in the long ago.

It has always seemed odd to me

-- and odd it seemed to the rabbis of old --

that this man Noah, who alone is "righteous in his generation," can hear word of the impending destruction of all living things without uttering a word of protest or shedding a tear of sorrow.

Perhaps this is why the medieval interpreter of the Torah,
the great Rashi, proclaimed Noah to be of "insufficient faith."
So, at least, the Hassidic master Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev
interpreted Rashi to mean.
Noah failed to recognize his own saintliness, his own ability
to reverse God's decree.
He "walked with God" -- but only with God, said Levi Yitzchak.
Noah did not walk with his fellow human beings,
or serve as a bridge between them and their God.

It was only "after the flood," so we read in earlier midrashim,
"when Noah opened the ark and looked out and saw that the earth
was desolate, forests and gardens uprooted, corpses visible
everywhere...no grass, no vegetation...the earth a wasteland.
Only then did he cry out in pain and sorrow...(only then)
did he understand that he had sinned, because he thought
only of himself and his household, while all else perished
by fire and water!"

Only then did Noah erect an altar unto God, to make sacrifices of
atonement.
And God forgave him, and promised never again to destroy the earth;
and set a bow in the sky as a token of the covenant between
Him and the earth.

The Book of Genesis itself takes a dramatic shift, following the story
of the flood, a shift from mythology to history.

It launches its narrative over God's rainbow and finds Abraham:
Abraham who has the compassion to argue with his God over the
destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,
Abraham who has the vision to launch a new religion,
to bring forth a new people,
to establish a renewed Covenant.

Our challenge, as Reform Jews in 1989, is to develop our faith
to exceed the "insufficient faith" of Noah.

Our challenge is to cross over from flood to renewal,
to realize that it is within our power to avert the evil decree
to know, with a certainty and out of the fullness of our faith,
that we stand but at the foot of the rainbow, and not its ending,
and that there is a future before us and for humankind.

Our Celebrations
CCAR Centennial, NFTY at Fifty, Outreach at Ten

Like Noah we have marked the holy place of our disembarkation, America,
by constructing an altar here: an institutional life that enables our
creative best to rise up in unified purpose.

At its base is our Central Conference of American Rabbis, now in its
centennial year.

What a century it was -- the most awesome, the most momentous
in Jewish life since the churban of the Second Temple.

We have been transplanted and dismantled.

We have been destroyed and reborn.

It was the Reform rabbinate -- prodded by Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hilel
Silver -- that succeeded in transforming Zionism from a historical
footnote into a stirring chronicle of statehood.

It was the Reform rabbinate, as institutionalized by Isaac Mayer Wise,
that set the pattern for rabbinic training, congregational
cooperation and rabbinical networking for all Jewish movements
in North America.

Again, it was the Reform Rabbinate that insisted on the empowerment of women in the religious life, and that engaged and prodded us to engage in social action, impelled by the quest not for power or ideology, but for holiness.

It was the Reform Rabbinate and its prodigious collective Jewish scholarship that kept us as a movement within Judaism that permitted us to adjust to the changes of Jewish life only within the framework of our historic tradition, And then they reinforced this ideological nexus by goading Reform Jews to regain and retain their sense of Jewish peoplehood.

And think of what the reform rabbis did and do for us, not collectively, but individually, each in his own community, each in his own community.

We are bound to them by tears of sorrow and joy alike. They "carry our burdens," and they "sing our songs."

What bears special mention on this anniversary is the Reform rabbinate's contribution to the UAHC itself.

For the Union is not only a lay body.

It is a congregational body in which all Temple professionals have equal voice.

Most of our programmatic task forces and commissions are joint bodies, often involving the Hebrew Union College too, and our affiliates as well:

Social Action, Education, Worship, Outreach and many more. There is no aspect of our work that is untouched by the creative endeavors of the rabbinate.

Such unity is not the rule in other Jewish religious streams
in American Judaism,
and likely is the true source of our strength and ever growing
vitality.

We congratulate our Conference and its leadership, Sam Karff and
Joe Glaser -- as well as Dick Scheuer and Fred Gottschalk,
the lay and preofessional heads of our seminary, on whose shoulders
the awesome responsibility of rabbinnic prapARATION rests.
Let all rabbis assembled here rise now, so that we may give you
the acclaim you so richly deserve.

Our vitality is further assured by another massive stone in our
institutional altar, the North American Federation of Temple Youth.
NFTY was founded during the last week in December of 1939,
and quickly grew to become a most creative affiliate.
Tens of thousands of our young people have participated
in its activities,
and their lives were transformed by the experience.

Wherever I go on this continent of ours I find NFTY alumni.
They are our rabbis and cantors and educators and administrators.
They are the lay leaders of our congregations, and their most devoted
members.

And whenever they speak of their NFTY years, a dreamlike, wistful
gleam illuminates their faces.

NFTY spawned many programs of great worth:

junior youth groups, and activities for its alumni on campus;

the Eisendrath International Student Exchange program;

Bible tours and Archaeological digs in Israel,

NFTY Mitzva Corps bringing religious action to life

in Puerto Rico and Mexico and in the ghettos of America.

A group of NFTY song and dance leaders even toured Russia

this past summer,

to help rekindle the Jewish spark among Soviet Jews.

To this day, the Reform movement sends more teenagers on summer programs

to Israel than does any other youth movement in the world.

Indeed, without NFTY, there would be no Kibbutz Yahel and Lotan

and no Mitzpe Har Halutz in the Galilee;

these very settlements lend primary credibility

to Israel's Progressive movement.

Most notable of all, NFTY brought the Union's Camp Program into being

and it remains the most effective vehicle for the transmission

of Judaism at our command.

By a magic all their own, our camps make Judaism come to life

in the hearts of our children, they make it true for them,

truer than mere preachment, truer than vague recollection,

much truer, indeed, than pride in a heritage that is mere hearsay

and not a true possession.

Rabbi Alan Smith leads our national youth program

directing a staff exceeding one hundred in number,

and he does so exceedingly well.

But even he will agree, that while many must be credited for this half-century of maturation, two must be singled out for special mention: the first an institution,

the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods,
the women of Reform Judaism who nurtured NFTY from
its very beginnings.

The second is a Rabbi, Samuel Cook, creative genius, master-builder,
ever confident in the capacity of youth to grow in spirit.
His own singular soul became and will remain the flaming soul of NFTY.

Incidentally, it was Ellie Schwartz,
Sam's long time associate during NFTY's formative years,
who cooked up that alphabet soup

-- SOFTY AND CAFTY AND NEFTY AND PAFTY --

that has become NFTY's trademark.

That's good cooking, Cajun style!

To be sure now, we cannot, dare not rest on our laurels.
If anything, the task is even greater, certainly more complex.
The family patterns of today's youth are more diverse,
competing interests more compelling.

At any rate, soon there will be many more young people about,
now that the babies of the baby-boomers are growing up fast.

There is a need, then, for renewed attention to youth work on a
congregational level:

We should reach out to our young people at an even earlier age,
by developing a network of Junior youth groups;
and strive to hold them to a later age, while they are on campus.
Innovative program patterns must be designed to attract those who
stand at the periphery of our work and remain uninvolved.

And this above all: there is a need for role models,
for rabbis and cantors and educators and committed lay leaders
willing to spend quality time with our young people,
ready to come to their conclaves and conventions and camps,
determined to amplify the heartbeat of our precious heritage
loud enough to let it be heard above the noisy rhythms
of modern life.

Then will our "sons and daughters prophesy," even as we,
of the older generation, will go on dreaming our dreams.

* * *

Our institutional altar is incomplete,
as is our acknowledgment of anniversaries.
until I salute our Outreach program now in its tenth year.
If there is a single innovation in present day Reform Judaism
for which I would like to be remembered, it is this!
It is an innovation that has transformed Jewish attitudes,
that has opened the community's eyes and ears and hearts
to those Jews for whom the love of mate and the love of their
people once seemed mutually exclusive.

Indeed, virtually every Jewish denomination and organization
in North America has accepted the fundamentals of our approach,
renouncing the wagging finger or the pounding fist for the
open hand,
in fulfillment of the Talmudic injunction that bids us always be
"soft as a reed and not as hard as a cedar."
"It is because of this quality," taught Rabbi Elazar the son of
Rabbi Shimon, "that reeds have been privileged to be selected
as pens with which Torah scrolls, Tefillin and Mezuzot are
written."

Yes, by being flexible and not hard, we are creating Torahs and mezuzot.
By being responsive and not resistant, we are turning dire fears
into inspiring hope.

Good and timely as my notion might have been
it would have died aborning had not others seized it
and engaged in the toilsome task of its implementation.

Many deserve credit for the success of this endeavor:
lay leaders, rabbis, educators, administrators,
numerous members of our congregations and of the Union's staff.
The present chairman of the Outreach Commission, Mel Merians,
belongs to this honored companionship.

So does Bernie Rapoport, who provided us with the initial means,
no less than \$1,000,000, to launch this effort.

Of course, Lydia Kukoff stands at the center of it all.
She is the prime mover of our labors in this sphere,
architect and artisan alike,

so much so that the words Kukoff and Outreach
have become virtually synonymous;
when you think of the one,
the other spontaneously springs to mind.

We cannot possibly praise her enough.

So very much has been accomplished in but a decade.

* Conversion curricula were revised to represent Judaism as an emotional
and not just intellectual reality.

* Congregations were stimulated to integrate Jews-by-choice
more effectively into their synagogal lives,
to break the sense of isolation and alienation that is spurred by
the absence of a more genuine communal support.

* Many varied programs were designed and refined to reach unaffiliated
interfaith couples with unconverted spouses.

* The children of such couples are are now the focus of our concern.

Imaginatively conceived programs have been devised, as you will hear

* A special Outreach curriculum was constructed to sharpen the
sensitivity of teachers to the needs of students who have
non-Jewish relatives.

Outreach has brought us one other boon -- not anticipated at first.

It has compelled us to look at ourselves:

to ask ourselves as born Jews some very fundamental questions:

Who are we...what do we really believe...what must we know and feel

and do when we claim the name Jew?

And once we grapple with such questions,

an inner transformation takes place.

None of our outreach programs was instituted in a casual manner.
Every idea was scrutinized with care,
every program fully tested, and only then carefully extended.
The custodians of Outreach have been uncanny in their ability to match
inspiration with perspiration,
to render concrete activities out of gossamer notions.

A perfect case in point is Rabbi Stephen Foster's imaginative and
marveously successful Stepping Stones project, in Denver.

Steve's idea was simple, as all great ideas are.

Why not offer a time-limited, tuition free, separate-track Jewish
educational program to children of unaffiliated mixed-
married couples?

Well, he did, enlisting the cooperation of his Temple's leadership
and the Allied Jewish Federation.

It is a two year program, open to children from kindergarten through
senior high school at no cost to them.

Sessions are held Sunday afternoons throughout the school year.

A special curriculum was prepared by the Union, founded on respect
for the non-Jewish parent of these children,
yet rich in Jewish content.

A weekly program for parents is also offered,
giving them an opportunity to clarify their family goals
and to learn more about Judaism and about the Jewish people.

Stepping Stones has been a spectacularly successful experiment.
Each year 25% of the parents who enroll their children do affiliate.;
there are virtually no drop outs;
several conversions of the non-Jewish partners ensued;
and every family felt closer to and more accepted by the
Jewish community.

It is a program that bears emulating,
and I call on our congregations to do so.
I earnestly hope, indeed I am confident, that they will.

It is our hope to establish a special endowment fund for this and like
purposes:
to supplement resources where federations cannot be found to do so,
to provide camperships, and scholarship to these young people.
Here too we have an angel waiting in the wings.
Our newly elected Board member, Bill Daniel, and his lovely wife Lottie
have determined to restructure their charitable trust so that it
will eventually make two million dollars available for such
a fund.

The children of the unaffiliated intermarried must not be allowed
to fall through our community's cracks;
they cannot be lost to the Jewish people forever.

We are not talking about a problem of narrow scope, now;
vast numbers are involved.

The intermarriage rate for Jews in the 1980s has reached forty percent,
with less than half involving a conversion to Judaism.

Over 500,000 -- yes more than one half million children --
are the products of such marriages.

By the year 2000, over fifty percent of children in Jewish religious
schools will come from a home in which one of the parents
was not born Jewish.

Fifty per cent of today's Jewish college students are expected to
intermarry, and the trend shows no sign of abatement.

And while the conversion rate out of Judaism remains limited,
too often the rule is non-affiliation,
and the result an atrophied Jewish identity.

Insufficiency of faith is the problem: but it is not the insufficiency
of faith of the intermarried of which I speak.

Rather it is the Jewish community's faith that is insufficient, when
they cringe passively, like Noah, before the statistical flood.
It is our pioneering outreach effort that reveals a truer faith,
faith in the power of Judaism to attract followers,
to slake their hunger for the holy,
their thirst for for the dew of heaven.

In the Talmud we are taught that Israel was "exiled among the nations
only so that converts be added to them." (Pesachim 87b)

And in our Haftarah of this very Sabbath, the prophet Isaiah assures us
that our labors will not be in vain:

"...Incline your ear and come to me; Hearken and you shall be
revived...goy lo teida tikra...reach out to those people
you did not know...and peoples that did not know you shall run
to embrace you."

Reaching out to the Unaffiliated

"Enlarge the size of your tent," Isaiah further bids in the opening sentences of today's haftarah.

"Extend the size of your dwelling, Do not stint!"

Even so must our tent of outreach be enlarged to enfold not just the intermarried but the many Jews-by-birth who are unaffiliated. Their number too are legion.

As Reform Jews, we may well take pride in our continuing numeric growth; but the bitter fact remains, that there is one segment of the American Jewish community that is growing at an even faster rate than we: the unaffiliated.

It may be hubris for us to say that a lack of synagogue affiliation indicates an utter lack of Jewish identity,

as there are many other pathways of identification open to

American Jews: philanthropic, communal, literary, political, focusing extensively, though not exclusively on Israel.

But the fact remains that synagogue affiliated Jews are Jewishly more involved.

They visit Israel more often, devote more volunteer time to other Jewish organizations;

they give more to Jewish causes, insist on a better Jewish education for their children;

and, of course, they are more likely to participate in communal worship and home observances.

Ultimately, the pathways of Jewish identification must lead to a center, a center where Jews can meet and form community.

That center, more than ever, is the synagogue.

About a year ago, responding to this problem, the Conference and the Union joined to organize a special Task Force on the Unaffiliated, for the time being to operate under the aegis of the Outreach Commission, but if its work shows sufficient progress, it will stand on its own.

Dru Greenwood, is staff director of this Taskforce, and she recently pointed out that membership retention rather than a disinclination to affiliate is our primary challenge.

Unbeknownst to its architects, our Temples are equipped with revolving doors:

fully 85-90% of all Jews on this continent will belong to a synagogue at some time in their adult lives, passing in and passing right out again.

Our outreach must therefore begin with inreach to our own sanctuaries.

Manifold opportunities present themselves to achieve this enlargement:

For instance, our synagogues might provide daycare services.

Because they are lacking in our communities, too many Jewish parents place their children in non-Jewish centers, and they pay for them.

Then why shouldn't temples fill this critical need.

What a potential to bring more people into our synagogues!

What a "window of opportunity" for Jewish family education!

Free adult education is another avenue that might pursue to our advantage.

Many are the modern Jews who shy away from worship, yet engage in study,

who are willing to glean life-lessons from our tradition
though they do not perceive the study of Judaism's classics
as a means of encountering the divine.

"Today's uninvolved college student is tomorrows unaffiliated Jew,"

Jan Epstein, Chairman of our College Youth Committee
is wont to say, and she is absolutely right.

Mel Merians came up with a wonderful notion to help stem this bleeding.

Why not give our high school graduates special privilege cards

giving them free membership in any UAHC congregation the world
over, while they are in college or doing graduate work.

while

The concept is not without its problems, but once overcome,
its harvest might be rich, indeed.

The manner in which we collect our synagogue dues bears careful
re-examination.

Despite our stated devotion to the fair-share principle,
our reputation is too often one of exclusivity;
the perception persists that belonging to a temple is a luxury
beyond the means of most.

I, for one, would like to extend the Stepping Stone concept to embrace
all who are unaffiliated,
and not just the unaffiliated intermarried.

In other words, I want to call on our congregations to suspend those
rules which restrict religious school to the children of Temple
members and to admit any Jewish child to our schools,
not for an open ended free service, but for one or two years.

Don't reject the notion out of hand.

It might be a change in our procedures that would reap profits
more surely than any other investment.

At any rate, there is really no downside risk, here,

for in this way, and at the very least, we of the Reform movement
will have moved toward the ultimate goal:

a Jewish education for every Jewish child in our communities.

The burgeoning of our Day School program will also help toward

this end...22 congregations either have or are in the process of
developing such schools, requiring that we provide supportive
staff in our national department of education.

Perhaps most important of all, we must continue to adjust our
temples' programming, indeed their entire ambience,

to reflect the newer realities of Jewish family life:
of divorce, of single parenting,
of coupling without marriage, and their like.

Too much of what we do still assumes the traditional Jewish family
structure -- mother, father, and child -- which has become
the minority configuration in the world of today.

These are but some of the means our new taskforce in concert with
our congregations might pursue.

Let us be daring in these efforts,

willing to err, to stumble, to make mistakes.

As a Jewish proverb tells us:

"More lovely is an ugly patch than a beautiful hole."

Patches, after all, can lead to a patchwork quilt,
while holes lead only to emptiness.

When the poet and ghetto fighter Abba Kovner, of blessed memory, first came to Israel, he felt alienated from everyone and everything, he said, until someone asked him:

"Would you join us for a minyan, we need a tenth."

Kovner immediately joined the worshippers and felt he was no longer alienated.

Years later, when he conceived his idea of the Diaspora Museum he designed a corner called "the minyan," with wax figures representative of various Jewish communities. Yet there are only nine and not the required ten figures because, explained Kovner, he wanted to call out to the viewers as others had called out to him:

"Come join us, come and be counted, we cannot do without you.

We need you as you need us."

These are the words we must inscribe on the doorposts of our synagogues.

Spirit Conveyed by Means of Art

Let all of us be assured that resolutions passed at these Assemblies do not go unheeded;

in one way or another they are acted upon and have an impact on the evolvement of our religious community.

I could demonstrate this to you in countless ways, by setting forth the wide spectrum of our activities, the many-varied colors of this wondrous rainbow that is our Union.

I could tell you about the National Kallah on Spirituality
held at Brown University this past summer which engaged
120 men and women of all ages in intensive prayer and study.

I could tell you about how our Corps of Service, mandated by our
Los Angeles Assembly, is ripening;
a solid infracture has been established,
sixty individuals and couples of all ages have come forward to
volunteer their services;
projects are under way in Italy, Switzerland and Israel,
in Ethiopia and South Africa.

Incidentally, I have urged that volunteers be sought for isolated,
disadvantaged Jewish communities, not just abroad
but also within the United States and Canada..

Another, even more recent success has been our para-rabbinnic program,
mandated at our Chicago Assembly but two years ago.

This past summer fourteen men and women,
most of them from small, isolated, congregations without rabbis,
joined for two weeks of intensive study and training in practical
rabbinnics:

how to lead services, read from the Torah,
write a sermon, conduct a various life-cycle rites.

Mirabile dictu, three of these eager fourteen have now determined
to make the rabbinate their life career and have applied
for admission to HUC!

Several of the projects I just mentioned were actuated by Danny Syme
whose faithful stewardship serves us well in so many ways.

The UAHC-CCAR Commission on Jewish Music,
called into being at our Los Angeles Assembly,
has been particularly productive.

Able chaired by Jack Geller and directed by Danny Fiedlander it has done
much to heighten the musical literacy of our synagogues.

As you know, the Commission is very much present at this Biennial
with its wonderful Friday evening program, as well as five
workshops for temple leaders in the course of our gathering.

It has been so successful, in fact, that I ask the Commission to
expand its purview to include not just music, but other arts
as well: drama, dance, sculpture, architecture, even painting.

The Zohar tells us that "there are halls in the heavens above
that open but to the voice of song."

This is true for the other forms of art as well.

They too can serve to deepen our sense of the sacred,
our awareness of the holy in life.

You see, so much of our present-day reluctance to believe in God
is due to that paradox with which Jewish theological
thinking confronts us:
that God, though totally other and unknowable,
nonetheless makes himself known.

"Thou canst not see My face,"

so Moses is told atop Sinai, standing in the cleft of the rock.

"But I will make all my goodness pass before thee."

Unknowable, yet known through its traces;

invisible, and yet real.

The paradox is vexing, perplexing.

Like the rest of humankind, we are creatures in bondage to our eyes.

Only seeing is believing, we say; only the visible is fact.

But the invisible world has a reality all its own,

and its force may well be more intense than is the force
of the world that is seen.

Consider the world of the invisible, if you will.

Ideas, for example...they are impalpable.

Thoughts are free...no one can seize them.

Yet ideas can seize us and they hold the power to transform our lives.

Ideals too are of such a kind.

They are are intangible, yet what is life without them?

Take truth from a school and you reduce it to a rubble of red bricks.

Take religion from a sanctuary, and it becomes just an ordinary hall.

Take justice from the far-flung round of human endeavor,

and civilization reverts into a jungle.

Love, -- love, wondrous, luminous love; it is also invisible.

We can see its expressions, to be sure: the caress, the kiss.

But no one has ever seen love itself.

It certainly cannot be anatomized, or schematized,

or reduced to clearly identifiable elements.

Yet how powerful a force love is!

It can evoke our willing sacrifice, inspire us to the noblest of deeds.

Music, too is of such a kind; all forms of art are that:

"Music in space," Schelling called them.

They may be discernible in outer form but not in their innermost essence

The sources and nature of art are a mystery even to those who create it.

Yet art has the power to heal us.

It can make the spirit soar,

for art is spirit from the realm of the unseen,
conveyed by means of matter.

Let our Music Commission expand its scope, then.

Let its purview encompass all the arts.

Let their inspiriting power be felt throughout our movement.

Including Gay and Lesbian Jews

Yes, our resolutions express our resolve to act.

There is one realm, however, in which our resolutions have been
forthright, but our actions considerably less so.

I speak now of the plea of gay and lesbian Jews for fuller
acceptance in our midst.

I know that I raise a subject which will make many here feel
uncomfortable, but this is precisely why I must raise it.

Our discomfort is a measure of our continuing prejudice.

I do not exclude myself from this harsh decree,

for in thinking about what I would say today,

I had to wrestle with demons in the depths of my own being,
demons I never acknowledged were there.

Let us admit it, then: that in spite of past declaration urging
the contrary, the singling out of homosexuality from the whole
human constellations as a loathsome affliction
remains a widespread sentiment in our midst.

True enough, over fifteen years ago, we admitted the first synagogue
with an outreach to gay and lesbian Jews into the UAHC,
and we have added three since.

Gay men and lesbians by the hundred who had felt themselves alienated
from Judaism have joined these congregations and have added
their strength and commitment to our religious community.

But in most mainstream congregations, we have not extended our embrace
to include gay and lesbian Jews.

We have not acknowledged their presence in the midst of our
synagogues.

We have not dispelled the myth of the "corrupting" homosexual,
of the counselor or teacher who would fashion children
in his or her sexual image.

And we have not consciously included gay and lesbian parents as
part of the Jewish family circle.

To be sure, many of us feel pity for gays and lesbians, and we agree,
intellectually, that it is a grievous wrong to stigmatize them,
to ostracize them, to hold them in moral disdain.

But something more than a grasp of the mind is required;
there is a need for a grasp of the heart.

Something different from pity is called for;

we need, as a community, to cross those boundaries of Otherness,
where compassion gives way to identification.

Indeed, we have not affirmed that we all are family.

We speak of "them" and "us," as though gay men and women were descended from a distant planet.

If those who have studied these matters are correct,

100,000 Reform Jews, one half million of our fellow Jews, are gay. They are our fellow congregants, our friends and committee members -- and yes, our leaders both professional and lay.

Whether we know it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, some of them are our sisters and brothers, our daughters and our sons.

In our denial, in our failure to see one another as one family -- indeed, as one holy body -- we forget Jewish history, we opt for amnesia.

We who were beaten in the streets of Berlin cannot turn away from the plague of gay-bashing.

We who were marranos in Madrid, who clung to the closet of assimilation and conversion in order to live without molestation, we cannot deny the demand for gay and lesbian visibility!

I know full well what our literal tradition has to say on the subject. Yet built within it is the possibility of change, once advancing knowledge enlarges our understanding.

There was a time -- so our colleague Gene Mihaly instructed us -- when deaf-mutes were considered mentally incompetent, and, hence, denied the right to participate in the religious life.

But no less an authority than Maimonides was prepared to lift this restriction when deaf-mutes give evidence of a capacity to learn.

Similarly, the Bible enjoins us to sequester lepers, never to get near them, "not nearer than a hundred cubits," one Talmudic master insisted.

Not unlike AIDS patients today, they were not only shunned but told that they suffer only because they sinned.

Yet few indeed are the poskim, the Halachic decisors, of today who would enforce the Biblical ostracism of lepers.

Then why are we not willing to set aside the halachic despisals of homosexuality in order to reflect equally our newer knowledge.

The Torah has many strands; seen singly, they do not reveal the whole; the tapestry must be seen in all its wondrous fullness.

There is one text, but there are others, and beyond them, there is their interpretation which is never fixed but ever in flux.

Yes, there is the reprovng God who visted his wrath upon the men of Sodom; but there is also the loving God who enjoins us not to "stand idly by while our neighbor perishes."

Our Torah has many faces, but the most authentic is the one that reflects its heart.

Our Rabbinic Conference, through its Committee on Homosexuality, -- which has yet to render a final report -- has called on the Union to embark on a "movement-wide program of heightened awareness and study."

Very well!

I support its summons to do so, hence my commentary on the subject.

I endorse the notion of dialogue and education in regard to sensitive issues.

But education in a vacuum is not enough.

Ultimately, there must be a policy enunciated by which the many gay and lesbian Jews of our community can know that they are accepted on terms of visibility, not invisibility.

Ultimately, they must know that we place no limits on their communal or spiritual aspirations.

In all of this, I am working to make the Reform Jewish community a home: a place where loneliness and suffering and exile ends; a place that leaves it to God to validate relationships and demands of us only that these relationships be worthy in his eyes; a place where we can search, together, through the written Torah and the Torah of life, to find those affirmations for which we yearn.

Concerning Substance Abuse, and Abortion

Let me now touch briefly on two matters which really enter Al Vorspan's domain, and we eagerly expect his Social Action keynote scheduled for tomorrow morning.

He always sharpens our sense of what is right and wrong. He is certainly the first among equals on the Union's staff, immensely admired by us all.

My first comment is prompted by a report from Allan Smith,
the able head of our youth and camping division
that during the summer just past, substance abuse,
-- particularly of alcohol --
proved to be a more pervasive problem than ever before.
This flies in the face of those "denial myths from the shtetl past,"
to which we cling, that Jews never become drunkards.
They do, and their children do.
Much the same must be said of narcotics.
A recent report by the National Center of drug abuse concluded
that "Jewish students constitute one of the most 'at risk'
college groups...that they have consistently higher risk rates."
Not long ago, the National Cocaine Hotline conducted a poll of
randomly chosen callers and identified 18% as Jewish -
eighteen percent in a population that constitutes
less than three percent of the general public.
Those are grim statistics and we had better face them.
We'd best stand at the mirror and see ourselves, transform ourselves,
rather than smash the glass in self-denial.

The resolution on substance abuse that has been put before you
at this gathering is significant in its acknowledgment of our
problem though much more needs be done to fashion a
solution.

I call on our Task Force on Youth Suicide to lead our efforts
in this realm.

This problem is properly within its purview.

After all, so many of the self-inflicted deaths among adolescents are drug-related, even as the causes of suicide and substance abuse are akin: a loathing of the self, a fear of the world. a loathing of the self.

Hopefully, our taskforce will provide our young people with life-affirming alternatives that can compete with the death-defying thrills of narcotics and alcohol.

In this context, a few words concerning the Bush administration's strategy in the war against drugs.

We admire the President's insistence on tackling America's drug problem head on.

Just the same, the scourge of drugs cannot be curbed solely or even primarily by cops, judges and jailhouses.

"Get tough" preachments are no substitute for a responsible social and economic analysis of the drug epidemic.

Hardening the hearts of the public toward drug users, and indeed toward the suffering inner-city communities that have been disemboweled by crack addiction, can only lead to a heightened plague.

* * *

A few words on the subject of reproductive right for women. Our past resolutions still hold with respect to their thrust. Six years before Roe v. Wade was established

we called for freedom of choice on th issue of abortion, and we have resolved continuously since then to oppose the constant effort to restrict, endanger or overturn abortion rights.

Perhaps we need a new resolution to reflect our reservations concerning
some of the recent majority opinions of the Supreme Court.
Not for a generation has there been a week of court decisions as
debilitating and morally hypocritical as the week before
Independence Day, 1989,
during which a majority of the justices in one breath declared
minors and mental incompetents to be reasonable targets
for capital punishment,
and in another breath lowered the curtain of privacy
that rightfully surround a pregnant woman so that
state legislatures could take a pot-shot at her.
Simultaneously, affirmative action programs were gutted,
and the wall of church-state separation battered with a menorah
that was, said the court,
not really of any great religious significance.
The Webster decision has been rendered.
Now is the time, to translate our past resolutions into action.
I call on the women of Reform Judaism to lead us in this
crusade and to galvanize the forces required for a
state by state campaign
It is a battle that can be won.
Recent events in Florida and Washington,
may well signal a change in the political tide.

Toward Peace in the Middle East

But now let me turn to Israel, and the process toward peace
in the Middle East.

It is a process that has been stagnant too long,
and threatens to collapse like an old swaying bridge in a hurricane

Two years ago, at our Chicago gathering, we declared the status quo
in the West Bank and in Gaza to be untenable, that something had
to give.

Two months later the intifada began.

Throughout these bitter months I have consistently held to the view
that the effort to repress this rebellion by force
would only serve to deepen mutual hatreds and fears.

And I supported every effort to move toward negotiations,
even as I resisted any attempt, whatever its source,
to impede the process.

Our hopes were always frustrated.

The counsel of timidity prevailed.

And the intifada became more fierce, both in the struggle to further
the rebellion, and in the effort to repress it.

Palestinian moderates or innocents simply in disfavor with their
neighbors have become principal targets --
assassinated by their fellow Arabs.

Arab hatred has deepened, and so have the fears of the Israelis.

The corrupting sense of it all being a trap without escape,
has begun to gnaw away at the vestiges of goodwill
between Arab and Jew..

Neither the PLO leadership nor the Israeli government

has really said "yes" to peace, except on its own strict terms.
Both sides, in their apparent inability to move forward,
reveal dangerous vulnerabilities:

Shamir to the right wingers of his party,
the PLO to younger, more reckless leaders.

Both sides have their messianic fundamentalists

-- the Muslim Hamas movement, the Orthodox Gush Emunim.

These are the most dangerous forces, for as Shulamit Aloni recently
pointed out:

"People who speak in the name of God and hear voices do not
compromise. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that the God
of the Muslims has more soldiers than the God of the Jews."

There is an urgent need for statesmen, for a leaders with vision.
Opportunities for peace are no less sudden than outbreaks of war,
and they require a similar response of strength and courage.

I am afraid that time is not on Israel's side.

Two years ago the price of peace was not nearly so high.

The Jordanian option was still alive then,

while Arafat was slogging in a diplomatic trough

rather than riding its crest as he is today.

If the slim chance for peace is allowed to pass by again,

if the transcient evanescent possibility for dialogue

is not seized soon

the result is likely to be far more terrible than the intifada.

Look and see: even now Israel is biting into its own flesh,
dividing into ideological bands that vie for power
and deface each other's lifestyles.

In this situation, this country has a significant
or perhaps crucial -- role to play.

The U.S. government should be relentless in the effort to build bridges
between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs.

No peace has ever been concluded between Israel and her neighbors
without outside mediation.

At its core, Israel is still strong...nor is it devoid of wisdom.
This is why I am certain that the peace will eventually come.
And when that peace comes -- so Amos Oz has writtten --

"when that moment of peace comes, we ought to mark (its arrival)
with a huge monument in memory of blindness, stupidity and folly.
For in the end, Israel will get something that she could have
obtained on better terms ten and perhaps even twenty years ago.
And the Palestinians will finally get only a part of what they
could have achieved peacefully and honourably more than 40 years
earlier but for their fanaticism and wickedness. ..
Only the thousands of dead will get nothing. Except our wreaths.
And perhaps the spit of those who have died will be on all our
faces when the day of peace comes -- a peace that will extend
from Baghdad to Khartoum and from Beit Alpha to Karnei Shomron."

New Hope for Russian Jews

My final observations will concern the state of Soviet Jewry,
for a new day in their history appears to be dawning.
Glasnost, with its loosening of repressive governmental policies,
has brought a greater freedom to them,
holding out the hope of a Jewish renaissance.
And those heavy iron doors barring their exit have opened wide.,
The trickle of Jewish emigration has become a veritable flood.

It is almost a miracle.

Certainly, nowhere has the resiliency of the Covenant of generations
been better proved,

as each week we hear of new cultural groups,

historical associations, Hebrew language classes,

the establishment of scores of Jewish libraries.

-- all the fruit of many Noahs who withstood the crushing weight
of a half-century of Soviet repression that sought to grind
Jewish literacy and Jewish identity into the dust.

Not all is well, by any manner or means.

The list of refuseniks is still long, their hopes for visas thwarted,
most of them on the false ground that they once were,
years ago, privy to secrets of state.

That is a Kafkaesque charade, this toying with people's lives
for spurious reasons of security.

Moreover and paradoxically, greater freedom of speech has given
license to a greater anti-Semitism.

Klu Klux Klan-like association such as the Pamyat have come out of
hiding and now feel free to spew their venom.

Ethnic movements have emerged and clamor for freedom...

Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Moldavians, and their like.

We understand and even sympathize with their desire for greater autonomy

But we cannot forget their specific history of radical anti-Semitism.

Nor can we ignore the potential of these movements to turn against the
minorities among them.

And everywhere in the Soviet Union, let us remember, Jews are a minority

Nonetheless, efforts toward greater democratization within the Soviet Union must be encouraged.

Anti-Semitism is an ever present factor, even in democracies.

It is state sponsored anti-Semitism rather that we must fear and fight.

Let us not forget Stalinism: the murder of Jewish poets, the infamous doctor's plot, the wholesale destruction of Jewish culture down to the melting of Hebrew type.

The present, with all its faults and failings is infinitely better than the past.

Of course, we must remain on guard.

The roots of freedom are still insufficiently vigorous.

Will Gorbachev survive?

Will the fraying of unity within his land lead him to emulate the the brutal masters of China?

No one can say what the future will bring.

But for the moment, at least, we can shift from protest to politics.

This is precisely why I have been among those who urged a greater flexibility on Jackson Vanik, even while we continue to pressure the Kremlin to institutionalize its more liberal policies.

A window of opportunity has been opened, and we must do everything in our power to keep it from slamming shut.

Now is the time to help build vigorously the Soviet Jewish culture
and the movement for emigration into a force so irrepressible
that it can withstand even a setback in Soviet policy.
We must take advantage of every opening that the new governmental
tolerance affords us,
with the same ferocity with which we have responded to crisis.

In this context, you will be pleased to learn that the World Union
for Progressive Judaism has taken up the task which I proposed
to our Chicago Assembly and which you then endorsed,

for a Reform Jewish network within the Soviet Union.

A Reform Rabbi was sent to Russia for a month.

A Russian language Progressive Jewish newspaper has been published,
for distribution in Russia, as well as among Russian Jewish
immigrants in Israel and in the United States.

Professional and lay leaders of the World Union visited the USSR
recently, and were amazed at the overwhelmingly positive response
they received to their presentation of the Reform
Jewish alternative

-- the only alternative to Lubavitch-style Judaism
that many Soviet Jews ever encounter.

The World Union merits more than praise for these efforts.

It merits our material support - for what it does in Russia and Israel
and to enable it to do many things it can't do in other lands
because it lacks the required resources to do so.

Yet, there is a shadow that has loomed up and darkened our joy
at the betterment of the Soviet Jewish condition,
and that is the immigration-resettlement problem,
a problem of great technical and moral complexity.
Russian Jewish immigration to the United States is so large,
that the refugee ceiling of 50,000 from the Soviet Union
provided by our immigration laws will soon be exhausted.
This ceiling will push many Jews into a less-than-voluntary aliyah.
Yet -- and herein lies my ambivalence --
we cannot, in all good conscience,
ask for a greater share of available refugees slots;
it is most generous as it is, 40% of the total.
There is a qualitative difference in desperation
between Soviet Jews and the Vietnamese boat people,
or the Chinese political refugees
or Salvadorans fleeing from the death squads and the ravaging
civil war in that tortured country.
Given the limited places for refugees available,
how can we demand that their chances of finding sanctuary
be reduced for the sake of Soviet Jews
who do indeed have the alternative of Israel?
Yes, we have the right and obligation to press for a dramatic
increase in the over-all refugee ceiling,
both in the United States and in Canada.
But in a world awash with fourteen million refugees,
we dare not declare this Ark America to be chiefly ours.

Moreover, while we as Reform Jews are committed to the principle of free choice in Jewish emigration, we are equally committed to the task of nation-building in Zion. The prospect of a massive aliyah by Soviet Jews is to be celebrated and encouraged.

It is also to be supported, through support of the State of Israel whose absorption capacities are being sorely tested by lack of housing and jobs.

In this context, we might as well confess that American Jewry has been intolerably remiss in its outreach to Soviet Jewish immigrants. The result is that most Soviet Jews in the United States have dropped out of Jewish life entirely and are without contact with the Jewish community.

There are exceptions to our failures, thankfully. Some individual congregations have had remarkable success in effectively integrating substantial numbers of emigres. The UAHC, nationally, has been of some help here, by translating and publishing pamphlets on Reform Judaism and one service from the Gates of Prayer, -- all this, thanks primarily to a gallant lady, Betty Golomb, who has almost single-handedly coordinated the Union's efforts in this realm.

Let it be admitted, also, that American Jewry has been less than magnanimous in providing the monies or guarantees required for the absorption of Soviet Jews here, in the United States.

I refer specifically to UJA Passage for Freedom Campaign, which is intended to sustain both Israel's absorption machinery and our own with all sums received to be shared equally.

But since domestic absorption needs have first call on funds transmitted there has been a serious erosion of sums transferred to Israel. In effect, then, and indirectly, Israel is bearing the cost of absorbing Soviet Jewish immigrants into the United States.

That is a travesty of justice, is it not!

What is happening to the claim of Jewish communal self sufficiency of which we always boast?

Where is our historical memory as immigrants, our appreciation of the fact that every one of us here in North America has been sustained at some point in history -- in my case within my own lifetime -- by the good works of organized Jewry?

We received affidavits from total strangers, Jews whose resources were infinitely more slender than are ours.

Have we indeed become so selfish as to allow our sense of responsibility for fellow Jews to atrophy?

Were we demonstrating a quarter of a million strong in Washington on behalf of flesh and blood Soviet Jews, or simply to achieve some kind of emotional catharsis?

I, therefore, call on every Reform congregation to form or revitalize a Committee on Soviet Jewry that will prod our own membership, and the Jewish community-at-large through local Federations

to give or guarantee the resources required for the
absorption of Russian Jews both here and in Israel,
as well as to engage in a person-to-person effort
to integrate Soviet immigrants into Americann Jewish life.

We cannot be content to quote Scripture only in part, saying:

"Let my people go."

For what Moses said to Pharaoh was: "Let my people go that they
might serve Me.

* * *

Dear friends, our Union is first and foremost a union of hearts
-- hearts that shed the light --
light which God collects and places as a rainbow in the sky.
Then is our path upon the earth illumined by the sign of the Covenant.
Then can we join hands and form a human rainbow, to span and sanctify
and to protect this spinning planet we call home.

I can think of no keener symbol of our mission that this sign of
the Covenant from the story of Noah.

The rainbow, alone among nature's phenomena, is a sight shared by all,
yet uniquely experienced by each.

The sun, the observer' eye, and the center of the arc must be aligned.
Each of us, in fact, sees his or her own rainbow,
even while we share the sight.

Let us each strive, therefore, to see the rainbow, to "walk with God,"
as if we alone, like Noah, were righteous in our generation.

Only together, however, can we find "that sufficiency of faith"
to go beyond Noah's dutiful effort.

to forestall the flood,

Only then will we hear "the funeral dirge of the ocean, (and) with
its sound...a mingled voice that whispers: 'Despair not!'"
(H.W.Longfellow)

Despair not!

Not for as long as you can look into the eye of another Jew,
and see your own reflection.

Come close to each other now.

Be confident in your faith, and comfortable enough with it
to find an intimacy in our bond of Judaism.

For in those reflections that we see in each other's eyes,
in those prayers we hear in each others voices,
in that yearning for connection we feel in each others touch,
that is where God most intimately dwells.

We, in our unity, form the portal through which God the Redeemer
enters into the world.

We, in our mutual discovery, reignite the very sparks of creation,
and the Covenant of the generations,
as eternal and as lofty as a rainbow, is renewed.

Despair not!

So much has been washed away by the floods of history.

So many of the hopes that we have had, each of us and collectively,
have floated out of grasp and gone under.

Our losses as Jews have been monumental;

and our monuments have often proved to be of sand.

Yet we have survived.

We have survived the Nazi era when the "earth was filled with lawlessness."

We have survived the Soviet attempt to obliterate our people's identity.

We have survived the relentless military and dipomatic onslaught against Israel.

The Jewish people lives!

And now the rainclouds are parting.

Now our hearts must leap to the rainbow;

our prayers must soar to God's ears;

our sacrfices must rise to God's nostrils.

Like Noah, we must till the soil, plant the vineyards for the sake of generations yet to come.

And in so doing, we are declaring our survival to be: not merely an ending but only a beginning.

MS Speech *LA Letter*
Banquet of Celebration, Beverly Hills Hotel, June 13, 1989
June 13, 1989

Thank you for your warm introduction, Allan,

I am afraid that you have been living with rabbis too long
and have caught their penchant for hyperbole.

A young chassidic boy once put me in my more proper place...

(Yarmulke story)

Your exaggerations to the contrary notwithstanding, Allan,

I appreciate your warm words.

I only hope that you know and feel that your sentiments

of regard and of affection are reciprocated with a full heart.

Incidentally, I trust that the members of this community recognize your
extraordinary attainment.

Allan is not only the youngest, but also the first from the western
half of our continent to have been elected to the highest office
of the Reform Jewish community.

That should be a source of pride for all who are assembled here tonight.

I want to thank all those who made this evening possible.

Foremost among them is our dinner chairman Bruce Corwin.

He labored zestfully to make this evening be,

and its success is a tribute to his great skill and spirit.

Incidentally, Bruce's father Sherril, of blessed memory'

was among the early lay leaders, one of the first presidents

of the Pacific Southwest Council of the UAHC

He too was a builder of Reform Judaism in Los Angeles.

And how wonderful it is that Dorothy Corwin is here to see

that ~~and~~ Sherril's and her spiritual legacy

continues to be nurtured through their children.

Bruce did have many helping hands, not the least among them was

Lenny Thal, Rabbi Lennard Thal,

the impish, irresistible, irreplaceable Director of this Council.

I appreciate his great worth, and I am proud to call him colleague^v and to have him call me friend.

Thanks to all of you for coming here.

It is gracious of you to do so, and to lend us your strength.

In recompense, I can give you the assurance that the cause which your presence advances is exceedingly worthwhile.

That quartet of rabbis, that pride of rabbis whom we have chosen to honor tonight -- Bauman and Beerman and Lewis and Wolf -- they know that that.

They neither craved nor relish such open flattery.

They responded favorably to our pleadings

only because they saw this evening as a means of furthering a cause that has been central to their lives of public service the nurturing of our people's spiritual being the sustaining of the synagogue, and the strengthening of its supportive institutions.

They never saw their efforts limited by the walls of their own temples or even by the boundaries of this city.

They recognized that the individual synagogue requires the strength that flows only from a wider fellowship of congregations,

And so they committed their temples' resources to our Union

and they themselves served us heart and soul and might, regionally and nationally, and in virtually every aspect of our doing.

As A MATTER OF FACT - 3 of the 4 CONGREGATIONS WERE
FOUNDED BY ALFRED WOLF WHEN HE SERVED
HS COUNCIL -

THIS IS TOWARD FOUR

Thanks to ~~them~~ and others like them, the Union of American Hebrew
Congregations has become the most influential force on the
American Jewish scene.

Our innovative programmatic projections have had a lasting impact
on the community as a whole:

We have a youth and camping movement which serves thousands
of young people every year.

It is our most precious resource, for it provides us and our
great seminary the Hebrew Union College
with our rabbis and teacher and lay leaders
for the present and the future.

The Union is the world's largest publishers of Jewish texts
in the English language.
our books have been translated into Hebrew for use in Israel,
and into Russian to further Jewish revival in the Soviet Union.

We produce films for Jewish educational TV.

We have a half-score affiliates - NFTS and NFTB, NATA and NATE,
and the ACC and ARZA -- all of them major organizations in their
own right.

We maintain a Religious Action Center in Washington,
It is a veritable beehive of activity, the vortex of a network
of coalitions through which we express our religious convictions
in the national arena.

We even support an extensive overseas youth program.

We send more youngsters to Israel per annum than any other grouping in north America -- and that includes all the Zionist youth groups. This year we will even have a group of 40 talented boys and girls touring the Soviet Union, to teach Hebrew songs and dances to young Russian Jews -- in Kiev and Leningrad and Moscow.

All this, and ever so much more, is the fruitage of the creative endeavor of many congregations working together through our union of congregations.

Our movements numeric enlargement in and of itself is astounding. We represent well nearly 850 congregations now, and our combined rolls have long since passed the million and a half member mark.

In the last decade alone our membership has swelled by 25% that is to say that tens of thousands of new households have joined our nation-wide family since the mid-seventies. And if Jewish sociologists are to be believed, our growth rate will accelerate even more during the years ahead, for their studies show that the fifth generation of American Jews inclines to identify itself almost exclusively with Reform.

Now this enlargement of our ranks flies in the face of a general decline of religious affiliation within American Jewry.

The ranks of the unaffiliated are rapidly increasing.

Conservatism is steadily contracting.

Orthodoxy has made some headway in urban centers.

It may have bottomed out.

But the fact remains that it has toppled from its once high state as America's most populous synagogues movement, down to where only about ten to twelve percent of American Jews now identify themselves with that more traditional stream of Judaism.

Only Reform Judaism has held its own, is growing. We have emerged as the overwhelmingly predominant synagogues movement on the U.S. Jewish scene.

Interestingly enough, this burgeoning of American Jewry's liberal wing also flies in the face of what is happening in America generally. It denies a maxim of Jewish historiography which holds that patterns of the general community are usually replicated within the Jewish community.

"Wie es Christelt es sich, so Juedelt es sich,"

Heinrich Graetz, that pre-eminent Jewish historian used to say. "Whatever happens among Christians, happens among Jews." And so it was, even when Jews were isolated in their medieval ghettos. When for instance, in the early 18th century pietism emerged among European Protestants, a like movement, Chassidism, came forth among Jews.

Not so today.

True enough, there has been an over-all resurgence of religion in America, ^{but} it is manifested primarily in the fundamental sector -- among baptists, evangelicals and their like, -- whilst the liberal Christian groupings have dramatically declined.

In present day Jewish America, however,
the trend is in the opposite direction;
liberalism rather than orthodoxy is leading the religious revival.

We might do well to ponder the reasons for this reversal in form,
for this surging of Reform Jewish strength,
for those reasons that assured our enlargement in the past,
are likely to secure our future as well.

The first of these factors, assuredly, is our capacity to reform,
our readiness to change when present need demands.

We conceive of Judaism as a dynamic and not a static faith.

Reform has always been on the cutting edge of Jewish life,

for we see Judaism as a living faith, as a flowering plant,

as it were

not merely a tangle of roots but an organism that draws nourishment

from those roots;

not only a bare stem, but a firm and flexible stem full of sprouts

and buds;

not only a flower fast to wilt and fade,

but a plant that flourishes anew in each generation.

A second factor fueling our growth is our insistence on the unrestricted
equality of women and men.

We have sought and will continue to seek the full participation of women
in the religious life,

and we stand ready for the transformation

that this participation brings.

Social activism is another hallmark of Reform,

our loyalty to the prophetic spirit of Judaism.

Our religious action program also is a major source of our growth,

even as its attainments give substance to our reason for being.

For you see, religious action lends a completeness, a wholeness to

our total enterprise.

Without it, we would be but a truncated faith.

It helps us skirt a current self-contradiction,

for we live in a time when the revival of religion has,

paradoxically, led to a narrowing of ethical consciousness.

Religious moralists peek into our bedroom windows without paying

attention to the homeless who are huddled at their feet.

Religious censors drive Anne Frank and E.L. Doctorow from library

bookshelves,

but fail to address the problems of illiteracy and the failure

of public education in our country.

Religious zealots decry abortion as "genocide" and equal rights for

women as "anti-family,"

yet they oppose the reassigning of monies from the bloated military

budget to meet the needs of desperate American families.

ONLY THIS P.M. - P.S.S.

Amid all this compulsive narrowing of religious concerns,

Reform Judaism's Social Action program is a solid wedge

holding open the door of the Jewish conscience.

It is an amplifier through which the voices of the prophets still echo,

drowning out the ritualistic obsessions of the priests.

The word "outreach" comprises the last and to some extent
the most important of Reform Judaism present-day burgeoning.
Rather than cloaking ourselves in an exclusive chosenness,
we have declared ourselves open to those who would choose us.

In this realm, our accomplishments have been incandescent.
We have transformed American Jewry's mindscape.

The subject of intermarriage is no longer taboo,
and the concept of outreach, even conversionary outreach,
is no longer a heresy within the American Jewish community.
We have taken the discussion of intermarriage out of the house
of mourning and into the house of study
-- indeed, into the sanctuary itself.

Without condoning intermarriage, we have recognized its reality
and have begun to grapple with it.

hob nit kaym moire wen du host nit kayn andered breyre,

-- holds a yiddish proverb --

"Don't be afraid if, when you have no other choice."

Thus we have counselled, and the Jewish community listened.

These then are the four factors I perceive as having contributed to our
present-day numeric enlargement:

the perception of Judaism as a living faith,
our insistence on the full equality of men and women in the
religious life
our social activism,
and our determination to be inclusive rather than exclusive,

These four themes have been dominant in one way or another
in the lives and attainments of each of this night's honorees.
We selected them from amongst others who might have been chosen,
because they each served their congregation and this community
for no less than forty years.

Forty years of ceaseless, creative labor in the service of our people.
Forty years -- it is life-span of a generation.

Forty years -- forty --

that is an oft recurring number in our literary tradition,
that number '40.'

forty days before the rainbow sign signalled the end
of Noah's flood;

forty years of our people's wandering in the desert
from Egypt to the Promised Land.

and, most applicable to tonight's event, those 40 days and nights
that Moses spent on Sinai's heights communing with his God
whence he descended with the tablets of the Law,
+ gave us
with out Torah.

We marked that numenous event just a few days ago, last Friday,
when Jews all over the world celebrated Shevuot,
the Festival of the Giving of the Law.

It is a festival thematically linked to a second, Simchat Torah,
the ~~of~~ Festival of Rejoicing in the Law.

Elie Wiesel, great chronicler of the holocaust, tells how this second
feast was celebrated one year in the death-camp of Auschwitz.

In happened one Simchat Torah there, inside that "kingdom of the night."
Several hundred Jews gathered in one of the barracks

to celebrate this joyous feasst.

"In the shadow of shadows? Yes -- even there.

On the threshold of the death chambers? Yes-- even there."

But there was no Sefer Torah in the camp, so how could they arrange
the traditional procession, the customary dancing,
with the sacred scrolls?

As they were trying to solve their problem, an old man
noticed a young boy, standing against the wall,
"looking on and dreaming."

The old man turned to him and asked: "Do you remember what you learned
in cheder., in you religious school?"

"Yes," replied to boy, "I do?"

"Really" said the man, "And do you remember our affiirmation of
faith, the sh'ma yisrael."

"Of course, I remember the sh'ma," answered the young man,
and I remember much more."

"The sh'ma is enough" shouted the man...

And with that he lifted the boy, and embraced him in his arms,
and began dancing with him
as if he, the boy, were the Torah.

"And all joined in.

They all danced and sang and cried.

They wept, but they sang with fervor.

Never before had Jews celebrated Simchat Torah with such a fervor."

Aye, even in such a time and place did our people sing and celebrate.
They did not allow their enemies to determine
when to celebrate and when not to celebrate,
"when to be joyous and when to mourn,
when to sing and when to be silent."

Even then was this deathless people "renewing itself, its life."

Whose faith is equal to Israel's? Whose will to live?

"The storm ends. In the sky, a rainbow signals hope and new life.
Again, and yet again, there is a song to sing."

We Jews live in difficult times, my friends,
and even more difficult days lie ahead for us.

And we will continue to sing and celebrate as did our martyrs.
As they "drew reasons for hope from their despair" so will we.
As they buckled on and burnished the armor of faith so will we.

We do so by sustaining the synagogue and its supportive institutions,
the Union, the College.

We do so also by celebrating the lives and attainments of its builders.
Foremost among them are the four rabbis we acclaim tonight,

Morton Bauman, Leonard Beerman, Albert Lewis and Alfred Wolf.
We honor them not just with the service of the lips,
but by sustaining that cause which is central to their
lives of communal service.

I call on

INSTALLATION

OF

RABBI LEIGH LERNER

TEMPLE EMANU-EL-BETH SHOLOM
MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA

ARCHIVES

JUNE 12, 1989



ADDRESS BY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER
PRESIDENT, UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

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Tradition enjoins us never to specify lest we exclude. So let me limit comments to those among you who presently serve on our national Board...Jewel Poch, Bernie Isaacs and Alfred Miller. Bernie is a veteran, a wonderful human being, and as industrious a man as we have in our foremost leadership ranks. He is decent and devoted and he never refuses an obligation, however great its demands. He represents this congregation with honor. Jewel is new to our Board, but I am confident that she too will serve with distinction.

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In a word, we have a perfect shidduch here, a perfect match between rabbi and congregation. And all we need to do is offer the prayerful hope that the beautiful promise of this installation hour will be fulfilled during the year and years ahead.

Now, an installation service should not be devoted to words of praise alone, mere sentiment melts away, taught the rabbis, whilst a truth taught remains engraved upon the mind forever. On an occasion such as this, it is my task to charge the rabbi as well as the congregation with their common tasks, tasks which flow from the ideas and ideals which the synagogue enshrines.

The first of these ideals assuredly is the moral mandate. It is a foremost task of your rabbi to remind you 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. Its doors must always be open wide, so that those who require sanctuary will feel free to enter. Its windows must never be shut so tight that humanity's weeping will go unheard.

Our age needs such a reminder. It urgently requires the prod of religion's moral mandate.

Consider only 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 acknowledging 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 torn limbs and the whole dark butchery without a soul.

These are some of the many issues which must be raised in this sanctuary and issues of personal conduct as well, for witness the moral malaise that afflicts our generation. Greed is its hallmark, and ideals are relegated to the realm of the subjective, the relative, and assigned but scant value. Yet consider the truer worth of these moral ideals:

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And thus it is Leigh's task to make certain that this synagogue, as its second name Beth Sholom implies, will remain 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 this place as better human beings, as better

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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 is a purpose the synagogue served throughout 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 babble 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.

It is a purpose that 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 continuity.

Israel and the quest for her security will continue to preoccupy us. This has been a particularly painful year in this regard.

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And so we will need the synagogue as a source of strength for our collective continuity. And Leigh Lerner must be a generating force in this effort. We must gird our loins to serve our brothers and sisters wherever they may be.

Wherever there is a Jewish community which is embattled, our help must be forthcoming. Wherever there is a single Jew in danger, in whatever country or continent or the remotest corner of our far flung world, there will we find him. There will we reach out to him, offering our hands, our hearts, our life. Never more will it be said: that we had eyes but did not see, that we had ears but did not hear, that we had mouths, but that we failed to speak.

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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

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