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Series C: Speeches and Eulogies, 1967-1996.

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Speeches, 1989.

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American Jewish Archives website.

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Edie - Please retype & send to Montreal  
whoever requested it

A.M. Schindler: Installation of  
Rabbi Leigh Lerner  
Montreal, Canada June 2, 1989

Yarmulke Story

Nonetheless, I thank you for your warm introduction and of course your affection is reciprocated with a full and grateful heart

Although I am a stranger to many of you, this congregation no stranger to me. I have come here often in the course of my ministry. I have come to know many congregants, and many are now my close friends.

Traditional enjoins us never to specify lest we exclude.

So let me limit comments to those among you who serve on our national Board... Bernie Isaacs and Alfie Miller

Bernie is a wonderful human being, as industrious a man as we have in our foremost leadership ranks.

He is decent, devoted and never refuse 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

As for Alfie Miller, well, he is Alfie, irrepressible in every way.

If the truth be told, he did me dirt.

One of the reasons I came here was to honor him and his lovely Marjorie

Next Monday evening,

when, lo and behold, and without checking with me he turned the function topsy turvy by deleting himself for the honors list and adding my name in his stead.

That was nice and bespoke a essential modesty I never suspected.



*Reserve*  
Still, he ~~deserves~~ to be honored.

He is one of the pillars of the Reform movement, here in Canada  
~~sustaining the Reform Jewish community in this country,~~ and  
throughout the North American continent.

*P* You know what he has accomplished here...

his leadership of this congregation, —

his supervision of the rebuilding of this sanctuary

after it was destroyed in a disastrous fire, —

his single handed *guidance* leadership in the construction of a neighboring

synagogue, Rodef Shalom, —

his effectuation the merger between *Temple* Emanuel and Beth Shalom

and on and on through a long list of worthy deeds ~~and~~

~~accomplishments~~ that are altogether admirable.

*P* On a national level he has *saved* us in countless capacities

and on virtually every level of our doing.

*In* the realm of synagogue research, outreach, education, —

wherever there is a need he is there

and what ever he undertakes to do, he does with all his heart

and soul and might.

*He is the kind of lay leader we dream to have, fashioned in the*

image of Judaism's noblest ideals.

*P* Of course the best part of Alfie is his companion of life,

his Marge.

The fact *that* he gained and retained the love of a woman such as

she provides ultimate proof that he can't be all bad.

Why do I spend so much time praising Alfie and Marg and Bernie  
in a service dedicated to the installation of your new  
~~of you new~~ rabbi?

Because lay ~~leader~~ <sup>leader</sup> such as these reflect the kind of congregation <sup>Lee</sup> ~~which~~  
inherits now.

This is a superb congregation <sup>Leigh</sup> the fulfillment of a rabbi's dream.  
Its congregants will respond <sup>to</sup> to best whenever the best is sought.  
You are fortunate to have been chosen their leader

On the other hand, you ought to know that you are fortunate indeed in  
the choice of your rabbi.

He is much admired in the rabinate for those many qualities of mind and  
spirit he brings to his endeavors,  
his intelligence, his industry, his integrity,  
his ability to transmit his ideals forcefully articulated in the  
written and the spoken word and in the manner of his life.

<sup>achievements</sup> His ~~accomplishments~~ in his ~~former~~ community are quite extraordinary.  
<sup>in ST PAUL</sup>  
Rare like this kind of respect.

He led his Temple faithfully, building it into that superb  
congregation which it is.

His work in the realm of outreach and religious <sup>U</sup> action were  
noteworthy.

Moreover, he became a widely recognized leader in the larger community,  
in St. Paul, where he <sup>was involved in</sup> many institutions of human care such  
as the United Way.

He even became <sup>Campaign</sup> Chair of the ~~United Fund~~ <sup>St. Paul's Combined Federation</sup> ~~United Fund~~ <sup>OTFA</sup>  
So be forewarned, he will persuade you to support this Temple  
materially and in a manner in which it deserves.



I was especially impressed, as must <sup>have been</sup> you <sup>of</sup> by the fact <sup>T</sup> that he has already gained a measure of proficiency in French and that he is determined to master that language <sup>as</sup> as soon as possible.

This will enable him to reach out <sup>out</sup> to the larger <sup>community</sup> congregation of Montreal, especially its Sephardic community, and will doubtless add to your congregations strength, even as it will propel <sup>to</sup> him, into the foremost leadership circles of Montreal.

In a word, we have a perfect shidduch here, — a perfect match between rabbi and congregation. And all we need to is offer the prayerful hope that the beautiful promise of this installation hour will be fulfilled during the <sup>year</sup> 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 <sup>such</sup> 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 <sup>you</sup> us of those values which the world makes us forget.



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

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:

\* Add love to a house and you have a home.

\* Add righteousness to a city and you have a community.

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

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

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

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

And thus it is Leigh's task to make certain that this synagogue  
as its second name Beth Shalom 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 people,  
will our prayers have been answered.

\* \* \*

There is a second great purpose for which this sanctuary was built.  
It was meant to be a communal home for the Jewish people,  
the source of our strength to live as Jews.

This 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 bable of many peoples.



R 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.

R 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.

R Israel and the quest for her security will continue to pre-occupy us.  
This has been a particularly painful year in this regard.  
~~and all of us are ambivalent.~~

On the one hand we know that the status quo is untenable  
that a refractory population cannot be kept in check without the  
force that comes from the barrel of a gun.  
that the exercise of this force merely intensifies hatreds  
and makes the attainment of peace even more remote.  
and that in any event, peace is not just an abstraction,  
that it must be pursued in concrete ways and cannot be  
sequestered from the pursuit of justice for all  
-- Palestinians as well as Jews.



On the other hand, we recognize that the fear of the Israelis is valid,  
and so we too are afraid,  
afraid that the Palestinians say Westbank and Gaza  
but really mean Haifa and Tel Aviv;  
afraid that they have not foresworn their determination to drive  
the Jews into the Mediterranean Sea;  
afraid that Arafat is merely dissembling,  
that he has neither the will nor the powers to shackle those  
violent forces which he himself unleashed  
or with which he is allied.

Just before I left my apartment to <sup>fly</sup> ~~come~~ here, Minister ~~Misha~~ Arens phoned  
~~at home~~  
me to express his concerns.

It is an embattled nation, our Israel, -- not always in the <sup>R</sup>ight to be  
sure, but fully deserving of our strength.

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

Auschwitz is only one generation behind us,

but anti-Semitism is becoming respectable once again.

Often <sup>it</sup> comes in the guise of an anti-Zionism.

More often now it bares its own ugly face of Jew-hatred.

There have been too many incidents during the year just past

<sup>s</sup>ynagogues defaced, cemeteries desecrated, sacred scrolls  
profaned.

And their number is not decreasing.

P 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 our sisters wherever they may be.

R Wherever there is a Jewish community which is embattled, our help <sup>must</sup> ~~will~~ 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.

~~The way of the mind. The way of the deed...~~

TP ~~FINALLY, SURELY MOST IMPORTANT, NAME EMANUEL IMPLIES~~  
~~And one more way still: the way of the spirit, of intent, of will...~~

~~the direction which we give to mind and hand.~~  
LEIGH MUST FIND A WAY TO HELP YOU FIND YOUR WAY TO GOD,  
TO AWAKEN THE SENSE OF THE SACRED WITHIN YOU.  
~~I speak now of that sense of reverence which must animate our thinking~~  
~~and our doing and without which there is no faith.~~

R Those whose approach to religion is primarily intellectual may well disagree, but there is no Judaism where there is not also the numinous, a consciousness of the holy.

Our faith demands kavanah leading to devekus - (?)



a sense of reverence which flames into a cleaving, into a  
commitment, into a full-hearted response to the divine command,  
Yea, even as that of Abraham when he ascended Moriah,  
or that of Moses when he saw his vision of the burning bush,  
or that of Israel's children when they stood 'round Sinai  
and having seen the lightning  
and heard the thunder and the voice of God as did their teacher  
Moses, they proclaimed:

hayom hazeh ra-eenu kee elohim yedaber im adam  
"We see this day that God reveals himself to man."

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

Do you really believe all this?

Do you really believe that God revealed Himself to Moses,

that the children of Israel really heard His voice?

Why that is believing in miracles, in supernatural events,

which we moderns cannot possibly accept.

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

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

for in either case the essential truth remains the same.

Our forbears had a direct experience of God.

II Whatever it was that really happened,

they knew for certain that God revealed Himself to them.

They knew it with a knowledge of the heart,

a knowledge greater than the knowledge of the mind,

transcending logic or reason or the testimony of witnesses.



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

They sensed it as men and women sense love

though they cannot touch that love with their fingers

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

Oh, how empty, how shallow our own faith often is compared to theirs!  
To be sure now, we have our synagogues and we attend them sporadically.  
We cherish the principles of our faith and pray the world to keep them.  
We recognize those ties which bind us to the world community of

our people,

and we support our fellow Jews wherever they may be.

Why we even believe in God, some of us do, in an intellectual sort  
of way, and so we call ourselves Jews.

But something is missing, my friends,

something which makes the difference between cold, conventional  
religion and its vital transforming reality.

That something our forbears discovered,

and we, we need discover it too.

We need to desperately,

for while routine religion suffices to sustain our lighter hours,  
once life runs out into its depths

why, then, we need a different ~~sort~~ faith.

When death takes those we love,  
when our children slip through our arms,  
when dread disease makes waste our strength,  
when we think or even say:

now I have reached the bottom of the morass,  
now I can sink no deeper, — and yet we sink deeper.

Why, then, we need a deeper faith.

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

gami ki elech beqey tsalmoves lo iro ro ki ato imodi  
"Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of  
death, I will fear no evil, for Thou, Thou art with me."

<sup>THREE</sup>  
~~ARE YOUR PATHS LEIGH.~~

~~These, then, are the three dimensions of being we must bring to bear~~

~~MAY YOU FIND THE WISDOM + THE STRENGTH TO~~  
~~in our quest for God.~~

~~the searching mind,~~  
~~FULFILL them.~~

~~the heeding hand~~

~~the sensing spirit.~~

~~See attached sheet~~

See attached sheet.



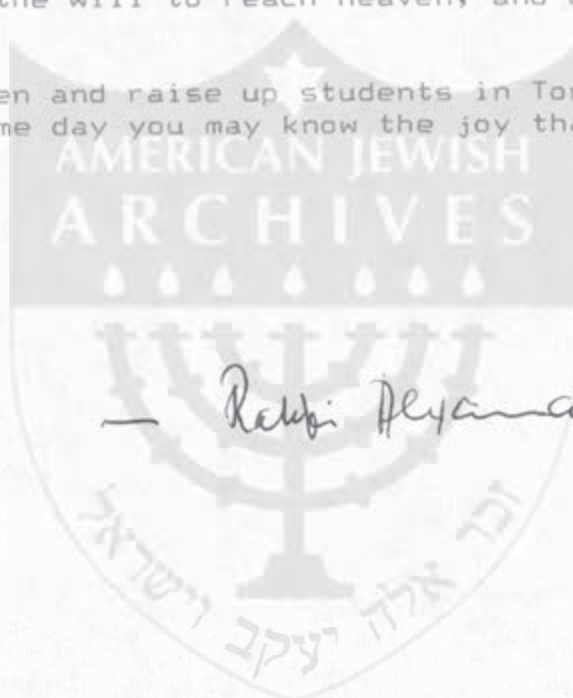
BLESSING  
(Adapted from 1989 Ordination Service)

We call on God to bless you, as our teachers once blessed us, and their teachers once blessed them; for you and we and they are linked in an unbroken chain from Sinai until now. Know then with what love we charge you: to go forth into the world, to sing ~~to~~ the Jewish song of centuries, and to tell the endless tale of an endless people called to service.

Love the people whom you meet no less than you love God, for every single soul reflects the glory of its Maker, and every man and woman may be someone you can touch, with the healing hand of wisdom, or an aged prophetic echo of our past. Build a life that is a mirror in which others see reflected the will to reach heaven, and be what God intended.

Go into the world, then and raise up students in Torah, God's blueprint for creation, that some day you may know the joy that we do, as we give you our blessing.

— Rabbi Aryeh M. Schindler





KEEPER OF THE FLAME AWARD



RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

PRESIDENT

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

MAY 20, 1989

Once again, I rise to speak in praise of a leader of Temple Beth El of Great Neck. I suppose the designer of this weekend's program knew that I would have to be reminded thrice to know the difference between Beth El and Emanuel.

At any rate, it is my present, altogether pleasant task to present the Keeper of the Flame Award to the honorary vice chairman of our Board, Gilbert Tilles.

You will recall that the Union conceived this award as a means of fulfilling the foremost mandate of our faith, which bids us to transmit its values. Orthodox Judaism, as we know, has the written text as the primary source of its authority. Tradition dictates, and it is the task of the individual to heed its summons. Reform Judaism rejects this notion and has made autonomy its hallmark, granting individuals considerable license in the religious life. They are called upon to interact with tradition, but tradition is given only a vote but not a veto.

Lacking a revealed text backed by the force of divine authority, Reform is compelled to rely essentially on the persuasive powers of teachers to transmit Judaism's message. But teachers teach better by example than they do by precept. Students internalize their values primarily by identification with the ego ideal. They follow the leader who is rather than the leader who only persuades with his lips.

barzel b'varzel yachad  
iron sharpeneth iron

A knife can best be honed against the edge of another knife. The words of MISHLE are reechoed in the words of a modern master:

He who teaches as books enable only babbles...  
not any profane man, not any liar, not any slave  
can teach...but only he can give who has, he only  
can create who is...courage, wisdom, piety, love,  
they can teach. Emerson



It is for this very reason that the Board of Trustees of our Union of American Hebrew Congregations resolved to choose, each year, one individual from our vast and vibrant constituency, a man or woman, whom we could hold up as our image ideal, whose commitment to Reform Judaism, the Jewish people, and the community-at-large exemplifies our highest values. Gilbert Tilles is only the second in our history to be thus selected.

Gil's life assuredly embodies those ideas and ideals to which we ascribe the name of our faith.

He is a past president of his own congregation, and it was under his stewardship that its magnificent new sanctuary was built.

He advanced the cause of Reform Judaism in countless ways, and on every level of our doing, regionally and nationally. Indeed, I first encountered him when I was a young rabbi in Worcester, Massachusetts, when he, then a leader of the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues, was a driving force in the effort to build the Camp of Living Judaism in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

On the national scene, there is virtually no aspect of our work that is untouched by his productive labors: youth and camping, education, synagogue management, you name it somewhere along the line you will find traces of involvement. His custodianship of our fiscal affairs has been exemplary. For a while he served as our treasurer. He has been a long-time chairman of our Endowment and Trust Fund Committee. And, he conducted the tasks with an exemplary fiduciary responsibility.

To be sure, his success in this arena comes as no surprise. After all, he was preeminently successful in his profession: an innovator of note, a creative genius in his field. Many of you may know this, but he developed the first regional shopping center in the Northeast, and many others and industrial park developments since.



The bottom line is never the all-exclusive goal of his commercial endeavors. This is why the American Institute of Architects gave him its coveted Preservation of the Environment Award.

He has devoted himself to the Jewish people on the American and world scenes. And, he has consistently sought to further the well-being of that larger community of which he is a part. His creation and sustention of the Tilles Center of the Performing Arts is but one example of the wider scope of his concerns. In short order, and under his programmatic guidance, it has emerged as one of the great cultural centers of our nation.

But all of these things describe only the attainments of the public man. The inner man, what man is, is altogether admirable. Granted he does his damndest to hide it. The first time I met him he growled and I ran for cover, but I soon learned that he is very much like the sabra, the cactus plant of the Israel he loves, prickly without but all softness within. He proclaims himself to be a dyed-in-the-wool conservative, but when issues have to be resolved, he invariably comes down on the side of compassion. He is the first to criticize, but he can also accept admonition. He is quick to anger, but he is also ready to understand and forgive.

There never was a better friend. He was ever that to me, and to many others as well. His public generosity is exceeded by countless private beneficences, hidden deeds of human kindness, known only to giver and receiver yet all the more precious for their tender privacy.

This is no hyperbole, no rabbinic exaggeration. He's no saint, to be sure, just a man — but what a man! You want further proof? Well, Rose loves him. And to have gained and retained the love of a woman such as she is ultimate evidence of his essential worth.

Gilbert, on behalf of our far-flung constituency, those who are here and those who are not assembled with us this night, I present you with this menorah, our Keeper of the Flame Award. The Reform Jewish community delights to honor you. You have our deepest thanks for what you did, for what you are. May you and your gracious Rose be granted many more years of life, health, and creative endeavor, for your sake and for the sake of the advancement of our mutual sacred cause.



#2

In Honor of Gilbert Tilles

— Alexander M. Schneider

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This is why the American Institute of Architects gave him its coveted  
award for "Preservation of the Environment."

~~Her has been generous with us in many ways of course.~~

~~Whenever a task needs doing, and additional funds are required to  
fulfill it, you can count on him.~~

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You have <sup>been</sup> ~~how~~ deepfelt thanks for what you did, for what you are.

May you and your gracious Rose<sup>✓</sup> be granted many more years  
of life and health and creative endeavor,

for your sake and for the sake of the advancement of our

<sup>m</sup>utual ~~f~~ sacred cause.

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**47th ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES**

**New York Federation of  
Reform Synagogues**

**“SHAPING JUDAISM  
FOR TOMORROW”**

*The Reform Synagogue's Challenge*

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

*Keynote Address by*

**RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER, President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations**



איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

April 15, 1989

Jewish Community Center  
of White Plains, N.Y.



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Your exaggerations to the contrary notwithstanding, I am grateful for your warm words of welcome, Florette. It was as gracious an introduction as I have ever received.

I am delighted to be here at this Assembly of Delegates, I always am. This is one of my favorite regions, not just because it is so close to home but because its people are bracing to the spirit. I have many good friends here and it is good to be reunited with them: my colleagues of the rabbinate, the lay leaders of the NYFRS, guided by its wise and able President, David Sampliner, and those other members of our National Board who are with us this day. Last, but not in the least, there are Allen Kaplan and Bernie Zlotowitz, who are really responsible for everything good that happens here. I am proud to have them as members of the Union staff and I embrace them as brothers of the spirit.

It is good to be with *all* of you, men and women from many places but of one faith bound together by a mutual sacred task. We are here to learn from one another, to share experiences and thoughts and feelings, and this above all: to gain that inner strength which flows only from the companionship of kindred and aspiring souls.

Bernie asked me to speak about the Judaism of tomorrow and to delineate some of those challenges which the Synagogue faces. I am glad to do so, of course, although I generally avoid prognostication, mindful of the Chinese proverb which holds that "to prophesy is exceedingly difficult, especially with respect to the future." Yesterday's forecasts are mocked by today's events and there really is no telling what the future will bring.

Let me begin by talking about the state of Reform Judaism today, and here the news is exceedingly good—at least from a quantitative point of view. Our family of congregations now exceeds 800 Temples, and in the past decade alone, our membership rolls have burgeoned by better than 25%. Obviously there are some contractions here and there, due to a shifting in the population from the North to the South, from the East to the West, but the over-all increase is sturdy. Thousands of households have been added to our Temple rosters in the past ten to fifteen years—well over one hundred and fifty, nearly two hundred thousand men,

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women and children. 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.

This enlargement of our ranks comes in the face of a general decline in religious affiliation within the American Jewish community. There has been a slow and steady erosion within Conservatism. And while there appears to be some gaining among the Orthodox in urban centers, this recovery must be seen against the virtual crumbling of Orthodoxy from its once high state as America's most populous synagogue movement, down to where only about ten to twelve percent of American Jews now identify themselves with that more traditional stream of Judaism.

To be sure now, there is a somewhat greater visibility of Orthodoxy nowadays. People are not as reluctant as they were once to display the signs of their Jewishness: their peyot and tsitsit, their stars of David and Chai pendants. Nonetheless, all available studies attest that Orthodoxy has suffered a precipitous decline over this century, and that Reform Judaism has emerged as the eminently predominant synagogue movement on the U.S. Jewish scene.

Interestingly enough, this burgeoning of American Jewry's liberal wing 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 preeminent 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 a resurgence of religion in America generally. In the sixties, the "God is Dead" theology prevailed; today religion departments are flourishing even in institutions where once an *odium theologicum*, a disdain of matters theological, reigned. Twenty years ago, the great Harvard



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scholar, Harvey Cox wrote a book entitled "*The Secular City*." His most recent work bears the name: "*Religion in the Secular City*." Still, the rise of religion within American Christendom is primarily in the fundamentalist sector, whilst the liberal groupings have declined in strength. In the present-day American Jewish community, 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 Reform Judaism's present-day growth, for in effect these reasons constitute the heart of the challenge for the Reform Synagogue of tomorrow. Those principles which assured our enlargement in the past, are likely to secure our future as well.

The first of these principles is inherent in the adjective Reform. I speak now of our capacity to change, of our conception of Judaism as a dynamic and not a static faith. Reform has always been on the cutting edge of Jewish life, and we must continue to be so. Let us not be frightened by those who counsel us to retreat from some of our innovations lest we break Jewish unity. That alarm was sounded incessantly during the recent "Who Is a Jew" controversy. We were told by many, here and in Israel, that Reform is at fault, that our stances on such issues as outreach and patrilineality led to efforts to change the Law of Return. That's bosh and nonsense, of course. The Conservative movement did not adopt the principle of patrilineality—not yet anyway, though I am convinced it will within the decade. But Jews-by-choice accepted by Conservative rabbis were not excluded from the proposed Law of Return amendment. In any event, there have been over forty legislative efforts to amend this Law, and thirty-eight of these attempts were made *before* our Central Conference adopted the Resolution on Patrilineal Descent. A retreat on this or any other issue will not gain us the acceptance of Orthodoxy. Only total surrender will have such an effect in that arena.

Don't misunderstand me. I do not oppose the reintroduction of more traditional practices in Reform Jewish observance patterns. I respect tradition and incline toward the emotive, deeming a hyper-rationalism too sterile for a vibrant religious life. But I favor the introduction of these traditions for their intrinsic worth and not

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because their observance might or might not make us more acceptable to others. Adaptive change is alien to the spirit of Reform. It substitutes political for religious judgments and thus does violence to our essential nature.

Let us not become sycophants, truckling for favor by becoming what we are not, it will not avail us. We will only demean ourselves and lose our distinctive character. Our forebears did not forge Reform Judaism to have us trade it in for a tinsel imitation of Orthodoxy. We owe halacha a vote and not a veto. And we owe ourselves that self-respect and integrity which holds fast to our finest values and our most cherished beliefs.

This then is the first challenge to the Reform Synagogue: to uphold and to transmit Reform's unique and passionate recognition of Judaism as a living faith. For us, Judaism is a flowering plant: 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.

The second principle which animated our religious community from its very beginnings is the unrestricted equality between women and men. We seek the full participation of women in the religious life, and we stand ready for the transformation that that participation will bring. We have made substantial progress in this realm, bringing our grasp ever closer to our reach. Currently, nearly one out of every two of our Temple presidents is a woman. Women educators and administrators and cantors have gained full acceptance. For nearly a score years now we have been ordaining women as well as men for the rabbinate. They have been well received and they serve us exceedingly well. Obstacles to their advancement persist, however. Old stereotypes don't die that fast. Some congregations—especially the larger congregations—still refuse even to interview women rabbis, not for assistantships, to be sure, but for the senior post. This is a grievous wrong. Unless we open all our pulpits to women and remove all obstacles to their advancement, their ordination will remain but a symbolic recognition. This, then, is the second challenge to our religious community, to make certain that our family of congregations will be and remain an equal opportunity employer.



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Social activism is another hallmark of Reform, our loyalty to the prophetic spirit of Judaism. Our Religious Action Commission and its Center in Washington have served to restore to the Jewish fold numerous idealists, young and old, whose prophetic yearnings had no Jewish expression, who knew only the language of universalist activism. It is a major source of our numerical 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. 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.

Here then is the third challenge to the synagogue of today and tomorrow: to rear a generation of Jews for whom there is no schizophrenic division between the "real world" and the world of Jewish devotion; who understand and are motivated to act on the understanding that *tikkun olam*, the search for justice and mercy in this world, is indeed the quest of Judaism.

The word "outreach" comprises the last and to some extent the most important of Reform Judaism's 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. Our performance cannot be measured solely by the many innovative programs that we developed nor even by the number of individuals we have helped, and regained for our people. It must be

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measured by the impact which we have had on the larger American Jewish community.

Indeed, our successes here have been stunning. We have transformed American Jewry's mindspace. 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 kayn moire wen du host nit kayn andere breyre,*  
—holds a Yiddish proverb—

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

Thus we have counselled, and the Jewish community listened.

Indeed, not long ago, the last bastion of opposition to the Outreach idea began to topple. Rav Soloveitchik, the most respected voice of mainline Orthodoxy, in a recently published *Hadoar* interview, voiced what he himself described as an opinion of revolutionary significance, one that would surely draw the ire and fire of his own traditional colleagues. And this is what he said:

*"Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been saved, it is necessary to do what the Reform Jews are doing—with, of course, an Orthodox content."*

And so everybody is doing it—the Conservatives, the Reconstructionists, Liberal Orthodox groupings, communal organizations, fund raising agencies—all have accepted our fundamental approach, each in his own way, nonetheless joined in a kind of Jewish patchwork quilt of outreach which has forever altered the landscape and the mindspace of American Jewry.

But our task is not yet over, and the challenge to the Reform Synagogue remains. Our present undertakings urgently demand extension and intensification. If the truth be told, we have barely scratched the surface. There is much soil beneath that remains to be tilled.



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Our many efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, the perception persists that the Jewish community is a closed society. Too many intermarried couples still feel abandoned by the Jewish community. Too many still feel the sting of rejection. Far too many of their children are reared in a manner in which two religious traditions are blurred together so that neither comes into focus. Moreover, the Reform synagogue's outreach should not be limited to the intermarried, but to the many born Jews who are unaffiliated. We may well take pride in our numeric growth, but the bitter fact remains that there is one segment of the American Jewish community which is growing at an even faster rate than we are: the unaffiliated Jews, those who are not identified with either Orthodoxy or Conservatism or Reform, those who eschew even a communal identification with our people and who are Jews in name alone.

Thus, for instance, recent studies suggest that of those dropping out of Conservatism, 5% become Orthodox, 14% join Reform congregations, while fully 81% opt out of Jewish life entirely. And so the need to go about the task of our enlargement with an even greater determination, to seek new members, to build new congregations, to regain the unaffiliated for our synagogues and our cause.

I expect to make some recommendations in this realm at our forthcoming Biennial. For instance, I would like to call on our congregations to suspend those rules which restrict religious school to the children of Temple members and to admit the children of the unaffiliated, not for an open-ended free service, but for one or two years. Don't reject this proposal out of hand. Think about it if you will. It might be a change in our procedures that would reap profits more surely than any other investment.

These then are the reasons I perceive as having contributed to our numeric growth: 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 lastly, our determination to be inclusive rather than exclusive, ever to reach out.

To all this I want to add only one other brief word, we must do everything in our power to make certain that our congregants will

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see and seize Reform as a serious religious enterprise and not just a name devoid of meaning and obligation. What purpose outreach, pray tell, if those who enter find nothing within?

But our Judaism is more than that, and only when we make it so, when we make of it a serious religious enterprise will we find our Judaism to be a sustaining faith. Only then will it give us what we in our age so desperately need: a sense of the sacred, a rebirth of our capacity for wonderment.

Aye, there is a growing yearning for the sacred in our day, is there not? We all of us can feel it. The very air we breathe is tense, a wind blows through space, and the tree-tops are astir. Men and women are restless, but not with the restlessness of those who have lost their way in the world and have surrendered to despair, but rather with the hopeful questing of those who want to find a new way and are determined to reach it. It is a searching after newer and truer values, for deeper, more personal meaning. It is a purposeful adventure of the spirit. These men and these women are in the grip of a great hunger which, like all great hungers "feeds on itself, growing on what it gets, growing still more on what it fails to get." The prophet Amos spoke of such a hunger when he said:

*"Behold the day cometh saith the Lord God  
that I will set a famine in the land  
not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water,  
but of hearing the words of the Lord."*

Can you find a more vivid description of the very body and spirit of our age? Can you paint a more vivid portrait of the Great Hunger that seized us? Never before, in recent history, has there been a greater yearning for those ideas and ideals which the synagogue enshrines.

Let us, therefore, recognize that Reform Judaism is a fateful religious pursuit. Let us not ask easy questions or offer facile answers. Let us, rather, make demands on ourselves and our fellow congregants too. Let us ever as Reform Jews provide a Judaism that is a spur and a prod and a relentless provocation!

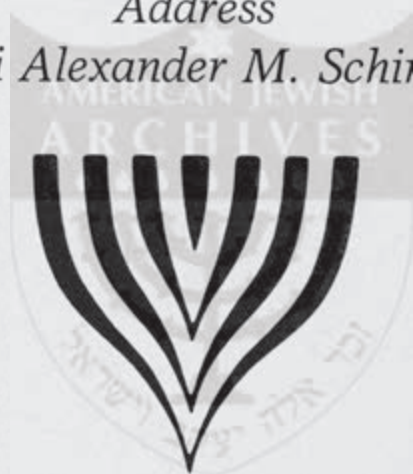


JEWISH COMMUNITY SERVICE  
IN SUPPORT OF PEOPLE WITH AIDS

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AIDS Committee, Union of American Hebrew  
Congregations Pacific Southwest Council

*Address*  
*Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler*



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Leo Baeck Temple  
Los Angeles, California

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March 12, 1989  
8 Adar II 5749

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**W**ith heavy hearts we gather in this sanctuary, summoned by a sacred service of remembrance.

Not that we really need an *hazkarah* lest we forget. We need no reminders. We remember too well. Memories come . . . to interrupt our sleep . . . to still our laughter . . . to fill our silence with the voices of the past.

An entire generation of young people going to waste . . . their abilities and their possibilities, what they were and what they might have been . . . all going, gone. It is a calamity . . . a disaster . . . a terrible defeat for civilization and for life.

How can we respond to these haunting memories, this hurtful knowledge except with silence? It must be that, it always will be that—silence. Words offer scant balm for wounds so deep. They cannot penetrate that immense isolation to which AIDS consigns so many of those who suffer it. How can mere words help those who must conserve each ounce of strength, devote every waking moment to the struggle for their own survival?

And, who am I to speak—I who know really nothing about AIDS? What authority do I claim, I who am untouched by its pain? How can my words sound anything but abstract if not banal to those whose lungs are strangled by disease, whose souls are crushed by the threat of death or abandonment?

Aye, our speech is stifled by darkness. Our experience is of a kind that has no tongue. We offer only silence—and that solidarity conveyed by our caring presence.

\* \* \*

Humankind has been laid waste by many a plague: the Black Death . . . tuberculosis . . . leprosy. Still, AIDS is the most dreadful epidemic of them all. For it has stirred demons in the depth of our collective soul, and of a kind we had long thought extinct.

It has spawned a secondary scourge as deadly in its own way as the primary affliction: a wave of hysteria whose symptoms include prejudice, ostracism, and violence. AIDS sufferers already threatened by death, are victimized a second time: they are tormented, thrown out of jobs, too often spurned by family and friends. It all reminds me of the bubonic plague—so Barbara Tuchman instructed us—when parents left their own children to die in the gutter for fear that they themselves would be infected.



Rejection is not the universal fate of AIDS patients, to be sure. There are thousands of exemplary partners who care for those they love and parents who care for their sons and daughters until their last breath is drawn, providing them with everything they could possibly need, most especially the need for a tender presence. Only thus, is the nightmare of abandonment pierced by the light of love.

Yet too often, even in such cases, the fact of illness is kept within a close circle, because this dreadful disease has spawned not just a secondary but a tertiary scourge: stigmatization; the contumely of those who are convinced that they are healthy because they are more deserving, because they lead a more virtuous life. This third scourge is the branding of victims as guilty, as having brought calamity on their own heads, because of what they did and how they live.

Alas, this third disease too often infects the victims as well. Their self-image mirrors society's distaste for them, and so they begin to hate themselves, convinced that they are somehow morally or physically inferior. And so they give up the ghost.

Doubtlessly, this is why so many parents of people with AIDS hide this grim fact from their friends and neighbors. It would mark their children as belonging to a sub-culture rejected by society. They themselves might be shunned by their friends, become the objects of obloquy. Some parents even try to keep the cause of death secret, pleading with the doctors to list some other illness on the death certificate; this, possibly also, because too many funeral homes refuse to embalm the remains of AIDS victims and insist on cremating them instead. It is a fearsome tragedy!

But let us focus on our own community: Janet Marder is disturbingly correct in her assessment here. In convening this assembly she wrote:

*"The Jewish community continues to deny the existence of AIDS in our midst, and Jewish families and individuals who do suffer from AIDS continue to hide from their community."*

That is true, is it not? Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome has revealed a deficiency in our Jewish community's own immune system: that we are not so immune to prejudice, that we are not so immune to the general human propensity for blinding our eyes to hurtful truth: that we are not so immune to the very process of stigmatization by which we as Jews have been shunned and persecuted and massacred.

Yes, some Jews have responded to the AIDS crisis. Yes, our Union of Congregations has published educational materials and established na-



tional and regional committees to sensitize our constituents, to spur them to speak out against the hatred attached to the AIDS crisis, against the scapegoating of those who are suffering most acutely. Yes, as individuals, some of us have been deeply, sacrificially involved; I am thinking particularly of the many Jewish nurses and doctors and other caregivers who have devoted their lives to people with AIDS.

Still, we have not as a community crossed the boundaries of Otherness—the fringed boundaries at which compassion gives way to identification. We have not extended our embrace to include gay and lesbian Jews. We have not acknowledged their presence in the midst of our synagogues, nor consciously included gay and lesbian parents as part of the Jewish family circle. Indeed, we have not affirmed that we *all* are family: that people with AIDS and their friends and their relatives and their lovers are *our* sons, *our* sisters, *our* neighbors, *our* fellow Jews.

In our denial, in our failure to see one another as one family—indeed, as one holy people—we exile ourselves from 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!

The Star of David has emerged as the most visible sign of Jewishness. Curiously enough, it is not the oldest or most venerable symbol of our people. While archeologists have discovered some ancient stones bearing this emblem, it did not become commonplace until more modern times. Indeed, rabbinic literature, in all its variety and vastness, makes absolutely no mention of it. There is a more recent event that has irrevocably rendered the Magen David as the preeminent Jewish sign. It was the *shoah*, the Holocaust, the martyrdom of six million Jews. It was the Nazis who stitched the six-pointed star to our hearts as a badge of shame, a mark of death. And, it was our own partisans and Zionist pioneers who reconverted it into a badge of pride and life.

Today, as we meet to remember those who have died of AIDS, to speak of their suffering and our own, there is another meaning that we can attach to the Magen David. It is an interpretation that any Jewish child with a crayon can tell you: that the Star of David contains, within it, the triangle.

For those of us here who would, a generation ago, have been wearing the pink triangle as a badge of shame and a mark of death; for those of us here who today wear it as a badge of honor and resistance and identity: it is time to complete the outline of your Jewish star.

For those of us who have been willingly blind to the geometry of Jewish life, who would keep invisible the presence of the triangle within



the Shield of David: it is time to complete the outline of our Jewish star.

\* \* \*

Let me not camouflage my own omissions with the omissions of the larger community. Let me confess my own failure of courage and of will... that in thinking about what I was to say today I had to wrestle with demons in the depths of my own being, demons I never thought were there.

I, a leader of this movement for Reform Judaism; I, a refugee from Hitler's Germany, I will no longer be content to speak in the first person plural declaring that "we have dealt perversely." Instead, I declare myself your ally today, and ally to all those whose Star of David needs completion.

I declare myself a mourner for all those who have died of AIDS, most of them young, in the fullness of life and self-discovery.

I declare myself a rabbi for *all* Jews, at every moment of life, not only for heterosexual Jews, or for gay Jews only at their funerals.

I declare myself a consoler for those who have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, accompanying friends and loved ones on their last painful journey.

I declare myself a compatriot of those who are living with AIDS, living more fully than many of us who take God's gifts of life for granted. I, too, know the experience of looking on death's face, personally, as a heart patient, and, historically, as a Jew. I have felt the intense love of every shred of God's creation that fills the soul after the dread of the extinguishing moment has passed.

I declare myself the compassionate ally of every person heterosexual and homosexual, Jew and non-Jew, who is wrestling with the shame, the confusion, the fear, the endless torment involved in the inner struggle for sexual identity. It is a struggle that includes, but also goes beyond, civil liberties. It is, when all is said and done, a struggle for the integrity of selfhood.

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In such a way, I see myself as heeding the precepts of Torah, that Torah which is revealed not by focusing narrowly on a particular passage but rather on what permeates the whole, and that is compassion. This is our tradition's over-arching purpose: to love God, to love our neighbor, to love the stranger, even as we were strangers in the land of Egypt. Thus we read in tractate Sanhedrin:

**TORAH B'HATCHILA V'SOFA GEMILUT CHASADEEM**

*"The beginning and the end of Torah are deeds of loving kindness."*

To be sure now, the Torah has many and divergent strands, but seen singly, they do not reveal the whole: the tapestry must be seen in all its wondrous fullness. There is the single text, but there are others, and beyond them, there is their interpretation which is never fixed but ever in flux. Yes, there is the reproving 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." Indeed, the Torah has many faces, but the most authentic is the one that reflects its heart.

In the Talmud, again in tractate Sanhedrin, it is written—

*The sages wondered:*

*"Where shall we look for the Messiah? Will he come to us on clouds of glory robed in majesty and crowned with light?"*

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi put this question to no less an authority than the prophet Elijah himself.

*"Where shall I find the Messiah?" he asked, and the prophet replied: "At the gate of the city."*

*"But how shall I recognize him?"*

*"He sits among the lepers."*

Rabbi Joshua was startled and exclaimed:

*"Among the lepers? What is he doing there?"*

*"He changes their bandages," Elijah replied.*

*"He changes their bandages one by one."*

*[Free Translation by Kenneth Roseman]*

As individuals, we still have much to fear, much to reckon with. But let us not add to our loneliness and our suffering by believing that God does not recognize us and our relationships. Let us rather exalt our relationships so that they be worthy of God's gaze. Let us learn that God's image is reflected in each and every face. Let us not add to our heart-ache by separating or by letting ourselves be separated from the Jewish people. As Jews, together, let us search through the Torah, the written Torah and the Torah of life, to find those affirmations for which we yearn.

\* \* \*

This is a service of remembrance. It is also a service of healing and hope.



Of this I am certain, the day of healing will come. Even as I wrote these lines, within the last two weeks, two promising medical developments were reported. There is a Jonas Salk somewhere even now, engaged in serious research, who will discover or design those human anti-bodies that will sweep the ravaging virus from off the face of the earth. We pray for that day to arrive within the life time of everyone in this synagogue.

In any event, we must never surrender to despair. That word has no place in the Jewish lexicon! We Jews hope. . . we remember and we hope. . . we hope not just when hope comes easy, but when earthly reason defies all hope. Then especially do we hope. We hope until hope creates out of its own wreckage that good which it contemplates.

Let us therefore remember, and let us always hope.



Yom Kippur morning  
Union Temple, 1989

Once again, my friends, we have reached this holiest day in the  
calendar year of the Jew.

Again we convene in this sanctuary to perform the rites and  
to voice the prayers of our Atonement Day.

Again, we are gathered here,  
persumably prepared to discharge this day's demand  
for a cheshbon hanefesh, for a self-reckoning of the soul.

I say "persumably" because I suspect that many of us are here  
impelled by an admixture other reasons:  
to feel a part of the Jewish community...  
to be stirred by the liturgical music...  
to glean those insights contained in our prayerbook...

Others are here to honor their parents' wish or memory  
or to abate their terrible loneliness by reaching out to others  
Still other may be here determined to do what Jews have always done,  
to assure that our tradition will continue,  
to demonstrate for all to see that the evil design of those  
who sought to destroy us has been frustrated,  
that even Hitler was denied his final victory.



Now, none of these reasons are flawed.

All of them are altogether worthy.

They fully justify our coming here.

For the synagogue service is the expression of the soul of a people,  
a living people.

In the synagogue we meet as Jews...

and Jews have human as well as spiritual needs.

All of them warrant to be served.

Still, none of these reasons, however worthy, go to the heart of what  
this great day is all about, for this is the day of God.

We come here in response to a summons "as exalting and as enduring  
as the everlasting hills: Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

We invoke God as the master of our destiny, and ask

that He will inscribe us in the book of life for blessing.

Over and again, during this solemn service, do we assert

that we yearn to be at one again with God,

that we need to feel His nearness.

that we are utterly lost without Him at our center.

"This is the day of God...(so we pray)

what are we as we stand in your presence...

a leaf in the storm...

a fleeting moment in the tide of time...

a whisper lost in the vastness of creation...

Help us to find you, God...

Renew our spirit...

Rekindle within us the faith

that will dispel the darkness of our doubt and confusion."

If this be the quintessential theme of our day,  
why, then, I had best address it in my sermon  
even though I know that my words will fall short of the need.

Can anyone speak of God?

Dare anyone speak for Him?

But I do not propose to formulate a credal statement,  
well-disciplined from a theological perspective.  
All I really want to do is to share some reflections,  
currents of thought that flow more from the soul  
than from the mind,  
and in the hope that my musings will help others  
in their spiritual quest.

\* \* \*

Now, the first of these reflections arises from the realization  
that God-talk is rare among us,  
that most moderns tend to avoid the subject altogether.  
The sense of the sacred just doesn't reach us in the rough and tumble  
of our daily lives...  
not often anyway, though there are times when it does...

But even then we don't talk about it.

We are too embarrassed to do so.

Victor Frankl has noted that "people will talk shamelessly about  
their innermost sexual life and fanatasy,"  
but that they hesitate to share their religious experience.  
"It is too personal," he wrote. "It is ineffable."  
And that is manifestly so.



But here, in the stillness of this place and hour, we overcome  
our timidity and invoke the name of God without reluctance.  
Here, His presence draws us near and we sense it:

when we pray,  
when we listen to the majestic music of our liturgy,  
and especially in moments of quiet reflection.

Then do we recognize our need to be drawn to  
and to draw upon the sacred.

Then do we acknowledge that the quest for God is an essential  
part of our life's striving and that it sets our task as Jews.

The Hebrew word for 'holy' is kadosh,  
as in kiddush or kaddish or kedusha.

Literally translated the word means sequestered, secluded, set-apart.

It seems that we can find God best when we turn inward or away  
from the world of every-day life,  
-- even as Moses saw his vision of the burning bush,  
not in the marketplace but while tending his father-in-law's sheep  
in the wilderness of Horeb.

\* \* \*

Which leads me directly to the second of my musings:

To find the holy, we must consciously will to do so,  
we must open ourselves to receive it.

When Moses saw his vision of the bush that burned but was not consumed,  
he was not alone.

Presumably there were other shepherds there who must have seen  
the self same bush -- but they ignored it.

Moses did not and so he, and not the others, heard the voice of God.

This is a p'shat, a literal interpretation,

The Biblical text is quite straightforward on this point, just listen:

"And Moses said: ~I will turn aside now and see this great sight why the bush is not burnt.' And only when the Lord saw that Moses turned aside to see did He call to him out of the midst of the bush saying: 'Moses, Moses,' draw not nearer, take off your shoes, for the place whereon you stand, it is holy."

The experience of the holy begins with a readiness to perceive it.

You cannot sense the grandeur of nature if you look at a sunrise through sleepy eyes.

You cannot expect a worship service to stir you to the depths of your being if you approach it casually, with a yawn, as it were.

There is a prior need for kavanah, for intent, for a conscious determination to be so stirred.

\* \* \*

Now the fact that we experience the sacred most frequently in public worship or in private meditation led the rabbis to conclude that religious observance is the best way of achieving at-one-ness with God.

In other words, kavana, that intent to pursue the sacred of which we just spoke, needs be coupled with the performance of mitzvot, of of religious acts, if our pursuit of the sacred is to be productive.

Usually, we think that lack of belief is an impediment to piety, that unless we accept God without doubt and reservation we cannot really pray or observe.

Not so, taught the rabbis.



The faith-deed relationship is not fixed eternally in one direction. The former is not, of necessity, the pre-condition of the latter. Often, so teaches Judaism, the deed is father to the thought; In going out to meet the commandment, we may find the One who commands.

Modern Jewish existentialists take up a like refrain.

They bid us take a 'leap of action' rather than a 'leap of faith.'

Israel's clarion call naaseh v'nishma is interpreted to mean:

in doing we perceive.

What is the Jewish way to God, they ask.

It is not the way of ascending the ladder of speculation.

It is not the triumphant outcome of an assault on the riddles of the universe.

Nor is it a gift which we receive in return for intellectual surrender.

By living as Jews, we attain our faith as Jews.

We do not have faith in deeds.

We attain faith by means of deeds.

To all this one need only add that when Judaism speaks of mitzvot, it does not limit itself to the performance of rites.

The word mitzva encompasses the ethical deed as well

Our teachers did not believe that holiness can be found in the privacy of the personal religious life alone.

And so they insisted that while the quest for holiness may well begin with the self and within the self it must not end there.

There is an equal if not greater need to turn outward, to move about our broken world

and to engage in the effort to repair it.

The primacy of the ethical mandate is incontestably established  
by the prophets:

"When you come to appear before me, who has required this  
at your hands to trample my courts...your new moons and  
your appointed seasons my soul hateth...I am weary to bear  
them...And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide  
mine eyes from you...yea, when ye make many prayers,  
I will not hear, for your hands are full of blood...  
Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings  
from before mine eyes...Cease do do evil...learn to do well...  
seek justice...

Aye...mitzva means ever so much more than ritual observance.

It comprehends the ethical deed as well.

Only when we observe the mitzvot in this wider, fuller sense  
do we enter the pathway to spirituality.

Thus, Leo Baeck taught:

"Commandment and mystery are inextricably intertwined...our  
deeds open up the gate through which the floods of the divine  
surge into human life."

\* \* \*

The last of my ruminations concerning the godly focuses on a perplexing  
paradox in Jewish theological thinking which holds  
that God, though unknowable, nonetheless makes Himself known.

God is wholly other -- we are taught.

He is completely different from us.

He cannot be grasped by ordinary modes of thought and perception.

We cannot, should not even conjure up His image.

We must not describe Him, or, following Maimonides,

we can describe Him only by means of negations,

by saying what He is not.

And attributes ascribed to God by Biblical poets are but metaphor.



But at the same time we are taught that though unknowable,  
God reveals Himself in countless ways.

So Moses was told atop Sinai when he stood in the cleft of the rock:

"Thou canst not see My face,

but I will make all my goodness pass before Thee."

Even so can we behold God's goodness "in the realm of nature  
and in the varied experiences of our lives."

You remember those heaven soaring words of our liturgy:

"When justice burns like a flaming fire within us...  
when love evokes willing sacrifice from us...when,  
to the last full measure of selfless devotion,  
we proclaim our belief in the ultimate triumph of truth  
and righteousness...then (does God) you live within our hearts  
and we behold (His) presence."

Unknowable, yet known...

Modern science confronts us with a like seeming paradox.

Physicists, in their endeavor to study the nature of matter,  
developed a device called a cloud chamber.

Cloud chambers allow the observer to see paths traced by particles  
resulting from nuclear reactions.

The actual particles, however, remain unobservable.

They have never been seen, might never be seen,

with naked eye or instruments however well-refined.

Here too then, a leap of faith is required,

a scientific leap of faith, if you will,

to acknowledge the existence of a particle that can be  
known only through its traces.

Unknowable, yet known through its traces.

Invisible, but real, nonetheless.

This paradox may account for much of our present-day reluctance  
to reclaim and proclaim our spiritual identity as Jews.

Like the rest of humankind, we are creatures in bondage to our eyes.  
Only seeing is believing, we say; only the visible is fact.

We also tend to value primarily things that are of use,  
that have their practical application,  
that can be measured and weighed and, above all, bought and sold.

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.

No one can see or 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 an ordinary auditorium.

Take justice from the far-flung round of human endeavor,  
and civilization reverts into a jungle.



Music is such invisible force, every form of art is that:

dance, sculpture, painting, architecture,

-- "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.

And then there is love which is also an invisible force.

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.

Aye, there is a world of reality

beyond those worlds perceived by the physical sense alone.

And altogether multitudinous are life's gifts that have no

practical worth but nonetheless are altogether wond'rous:

The earth's green covering of grass.

The blue serenity of sea and sky.

The song of day, the silent wonder of the night.

Petals on the grass and wings in the air.

Oh, how flat, how narrow our world is,

when we measure its gifts by their usefulness alone,

when, in Rilke's happy simile

"we take a hold of peacock's feathers to tickle one another  
while being oblivious to their essential charm."

Then do the words of prophecy apply to us:

they have eyes but they do not see  
they have ears but they do not hear  
they do not know  
they do not understand  
they walk in darkness

No, the human story simply cannot be told

without reference to that mystery and majesty that transcends  
all logic and reason.

Only those who open themselves to such a mystery

can transcend the grandeur and terror of their lives  
without being blinded by life's grandeur  
or crushed by its terror.

\* \* \*

These, then, are some of my reflections on this day of awe,  
currents of thought that flow more from soul than from mind,  
offered in the hope that they will help others  
in their quest for God.

It is a quest we dare not eschew.

It is, when all is said and done, the life-task of the Jew.

It is our mission, our historic calling,

"Who is a Jew" - asked Leo Baeck - "He is a man who experiences  
himself in the direction of God...He is a man who directs himself  
toward God in such a way that no part of his life is without  
this center, without this contact..."

To pursue the quest for God, to strive to know Him, to seek to serve Him

-- this is the duty that defines us as the covenant people.



On this great and holy day, then, we pray to Him who is enthroned  
above our praises:  
help us to find our way to you, God...  
Renew our spirit...  
Rekindle within us the faith  
that will dispel the darkness of our doubt and confusion.

We need the strength which flows from such a faith,  
the kind of faith which will enable us  
to heal isolation with community;  
to bind sorrow with comfort,  
rejection with acceptance,  
separation with inclusion;  
to reawaken our sense of reverence toward Creation,  
toward that Tent of Meeting on which we live,  
lest we trample holiness into dust.

Help us to gain such a faith.  
Then will the promise inherent in this holy hour be fulfilled.

Amen...thus may it be...Amen.

THE SHALOM CENTER

BRIT HADOROT PEACE AWARD

AMERICAN JEWISH  
To  
ARCHIVES

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

PRESIDENT, UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

MAY 31, 1989

NEW YORK, NY



I am deeply moved that this presentation was made by young people. That was a splendid idea. After all, they and the securing of their future is what this evening is really all about.

I am proud that by virtue of this award my name is linked to that of its donors, the Liss. It is a name which has become synonymous with creative philanthropy. Indeed, the List family is an enabling force for countless worthy causes, the Shalom Center, only one, but not the least among them.

Your introduction, Al, was delightful, even as it was gilded. You've spent a good part of your life in the company of rabbis, and clearly were infected by their penchant for hyperbole.

My sense of lamentably lacking in merit is deepened when I think of those who were honored before me -- Carl Sagan, Elie Wiesel, Robert and Betty Lifton -- or even as I look about and see the many veterans of this work, men and women who spent a life-time in the trenches, who did infinitely more than give an occasional speech or urge the passage of a resolution.

My acceptance of this award is therefore not a matter of personal honor or achievement. I stand before you only as a representative: of the mothers and fathers whose dreams for their children have been hemmed in by fears of annihilation, of the poor who see their own communities become bleak wasteland while military budgets have swelled our national deficit to bursting. I stand here as surrogate for the young whose idealism has been soured by the fatalism that even in peacetime is the fallout of nuclear weaponry; and for the Jewish people whose suffering at Auschwitz has become the metaphor for the fate of the human race if nuclear frenzy continues unchecked. I stand before you as anyone involved in peace activities must: as a humble participant in a calling of global and cosmic dimensions that summons every rational, responsible member of the human race.

No issue arouses an international perspective as does the specter of the Bomb. Just the same, we Jews have a special place in the struggle to avert this monstrous evil. The metaphors of Judaism and our Jewish historical awareness give us such a unique voice.

Last week's Torah portion, Bechukotai, provides such a metaphor. Setting forth God's blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience the passage begins with the admonition: "You shall make no idols for yourselves." Our history has made us understand the validity of this forewarning. It has made us aware of the extended meaning of idolatry and the destruction that proceeds from it. We certainly remember how the idol worshipping Nazis tried to shatter the rainbow sign of the Covenant, taking its colors and pinning them to the hearts of their victims: yellow for Jews, red for communists, brown for gypsies, pink for homosexuals, purple for Jehova's Witnesses, and on and on through the spectrum of murdered souls.

Our history has also taught us that our fate is the barometer of the world's well-being, that our suffering increases when conflict rages, and that our pain is eased only when harmony prevails in the world.

This matter applies with special force to the interaction between the superpowers: whenever Soviet-American relations are strained, Jewish rights are constricted; when they ease, our rights are enlarged.

Soon after World War II, when the superpowers were still in alignment and not yet on a full collision course, the state of Israel was born, and the battered remnants of the Jewish people were given a bridge on which to cross over from genocide to survival. But as soon as Soviet-American tensions flared, and the window of opportunity was slammed shut, the "window of vulnerability" was opened.

You remember that phrase "window of vulnerability." It referred to the alleged disparity between the holocaust capacities of the Soviet Union and the holocaust capacities of the United States. Many frightening phrases flew through that window: Alexander Haig's remarks about "nuclear warning shots," mind-boggling discourse about "limited nuclear war," fundamentalist Christian proclamations about the impending Armageddon and even efforts to speed its coming.

And what happened to the Jews during this period of heated rhetoric and over-heated military budgets? Russia trampled on the culture of its Jews; the rolls of refuseniks and prisoners of Zion swelled; and the Soviet Union became the staunch ally of Israel's most ferocious enemies.



Today, we are again witnessing an oasis moment in the desert of diplomacy. The Soviet Union is wrestling with its own soul, and in the United States the wanton arrogance of the early Reagan years is behind us and the promise of a "gentler, kinder" spirit has been held forth. Only two days ago, in Brussels, President Bush answered the arms reduction initiatives by Mr. Gorbachev by making some dramatic proposals of his own, calling for the reduction of U.S. troops in Europe, for the lowering of the level of tanks, artillery, planes and other conventional weaponry -- and to do all this sooner than Mr. Gorbachev suggested. What a splendid form of competition between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.!

The "window of opportunity" is open again, open for Jews as well. Russian Jewish immigration has turned into a veritable flood-tide. Opportunities for the enhancement of Soviet Jewish culture now beckon. And the Soviet government has begun a process which will inexorably lead to full diplomatic relations with Israel. There is even some indication of Russia's willingness to play the role of conciliator rather than agitator in the Middle East.

This is a time of vindication for those of us who have insisted all along that the struggle for peace cannot negate our protest against Soviet anti-Semitism, even while the struggle against Soviet anti-Semitism must not deter us from our efforts to gain East-West cooperation.

As I said before the World Jewish Congress in January of 1985, in an address in Vienna that was republished widely, to my delight and amazement, throughout Eastern Europe: "Protest and peace are the twin pillars of East-West relations. Topple either and the whole structure falls. If we swallow our protest for the sake of peace... then the frail peace will be overturned by the writhings of the injustice itself. But if we abandon peace in the name of protest -- by becoming cold-war warriors and urging an acceleration of the arms race -- why, then, our protest corrodes into an immoral threat."

Yes, we can feel vindicated -- yet we must remain ever vigilant, Despite Mikhail Gorbachev's far-reaching rhetoric, and despite the very concrete steps the Soviet Union has undertaken -- the test bans, the withdrawals from Afghanistan, and the like -- Soviet self-searching is still only a fragile emotion that could easily crumble under stress and bring the

Stalinists to power once again. And despite Ronald Reagan's end-of-term transformation into a dove, and despite George Bush's less ideological, more pragmatic orientation, there are powerful forces in our land, forces with a vested interest in maintaining profligate military spending, and filled with fear or loathing or greed to justify it. These forces are well hidden from public scrutiny. They are not subject to elections every two or four or six years.

There is, moreover, the ever increasing danger of global nuclear proliferation. No longer is the superpower wrestling match the only act on stage. No longer can the bloody wars that rage around the globe be viewed merely as regional or local wars.

There are forces afoot on this planet of ours who will gladly bring the world down for the sake of heaven, who exalt martyrdom as the highest virtue, who obliterate the distinction between civilian and military targets, whose unholy frenzy blinds them to the difference between a new-born infant and a five-star general, so long as both are of the enemy race, the alien religion, the reviled nationality.

In the minds of such as these, nuclear arms are not deterrents; they are opportunities for power or vengeance or extortion. In the minds of such as these, nuclear war is not unthinkable, it is a fond fantasy, a development devoutly to be desired. In the minds of such as these, the threat of wholesale destruction is but a higher glory.

We see, then, that there is no way to bottle up the demon of the Bomb without U.S.-Soviet cooperation on an unprecedented level. Nor will superpower arms-agreements alone avert the evil decree unless we end the proliferation of nuclear weaponry. Nor will we assure against proliferation, unless we restrain those of our own and among our allies who sell the materials and the technology required for the manufacture of deadly weapons to terrorist nations. Nor will we check these madmen unless we address the economic inequities that ravage the globe.

In short, the quest for peace cannot be piecemeal -- though every small step away from the brink is to be encouraged and applauded. The nuclear menace, the menace of total war, apocalyptic in its proportions, demands solutions likewise rooted in a sense of totality.



It requires mentioning that it is not with the Bomb alone that we must concern ourselves. There is a growing and palpable swell in the production and use of chemical weapons. Here is another fruitful area for Russian-American cooperation.

Be that as it may, the "window of opportunity" afforded by the advent of a new hopeful era in U.S.-Soviet relations must therefore be wedged open ever wider. For the nuclear age, which has merged us all into one single quest for survival, must be made to yield to a New Age in which the Force of Life, rather than the mushroom-shaped, skull-shaped shadow of death becomes the driving power of our unification.

\* \* \*  
AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

The tasks before us therefore are clear. And let me begin with the more parochial goals and then widen the focus. In the first instance, we must seize the present opportunity to build a Soviet Jewish culture force so powerful that it can even withstand a setback in Soviet policy. We must take advantage of every opening that the emerging U.S.-Soviet relationship affords us, responding to this opportunity with the same energy and the same devotion with which we have responded to crisis.

In line with this matter, I think it time to ask for a temporary waiver of the Jackson-Vanek amendment in hope of strengthening glasnost and perestroika by the barriers to Soviet-U.S. trade. I do not want to pre-empt the Jewish community's present consideration of this issue, and will feel bound by its discipline. Still, I do not hesitate to assert my personal views on this subject. After all, a waiver of Jackson-Vanek was always held forth as the quid pro quo for an increased Soviet Jewish emigration. We have that, in abundant measure, and we have no right, in all justice, to increase the ante in mid-game.

In any event, where there is economic tension, there is political scapegoating; where there is political repression, there is need of an official "enemy." Today, as ever, the rules of anti-Semitism obtain. It is, therefore, in our self-interest to hope that the Gorbachev experiment succeeds in the Soviet Union -- and to do what we can here to help it succeed.

And now, to widen the focus of our concerns: from the parochial to the universal, it is time for us as Jews, and as Americans, strongly to support and encourage every effort by the Bush Administration to respond creatively and positively to Soviet initiatives, as indeed he did last Sunday in his NATO address, and to advance still further steps in that direction.

We might begin by advocating the removal of nuclear missiles from West Germany. That's scarcely such a radical proposal. No less a hawk than Richard Perle, the former Assistant Secretary of Defense under Ronald Reagan, now says: "We don't need land based missiles in Europe...we would be better off," he says, "if both sides had no short range missiles."

Certainly, we should insist that our country cut off from its markets any friends or allies who sell terror weapons to terrorists, and to make absolutely certain that we are not in that trade in any way ourselves.

Finally, it is time too to take advantage of public disaffection with the military establishment -- a disaffection prompted by scandal and waste and unseemly greed -- once and for all to derail Star Wars and bring the Pentagon to heel before the democratic process.

Yet greatest of all is our potential as Jews, the sons and daughters of prophets, to project a vision:

\* a vision of a world in which U.S.-Soviet cooperation brings about healing of our ailing earth, an earth sickening under the shadow of the mushroom cloud but sickening too from oil spills and ozone depletion, from all the deadly by-products of our blind materialism.

\* a vision of Jerusalem where no weapons are carried, no children are made into refugees, no vine tree is uprooted.

\* a vision of a world free from the obscene danse macabre in which superpowers engaged, a world free from the idolatry that makes our "skies like iron and our earth like copper" that lays "our cities to ruin and our sanctuaries desolate."

Bechukotai



It is our task to project such vision, for it was a Jew, Albert Einstein, who ushered in the nuclear age by uncovering the mysteries of energy and matter -- mysteries that truly resemble, at their core, religious mysteries.

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

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

It is our task, today, as a people, to help complete the quest of this great Jew, for a unified world theory one that would indeed shed a magnificent light, the light of the rainbow, on the mysteries of existence.

As a international people, we are already in the forefront of this search.

As experts in survival, we have so very much to teach.

As members of the human race, like our neighbors at home and abroad, we really have no other choice.

Have Sagan retype  
regular

Shalom Center Award Dinner  
New York, N. Y.  
May 31, 1989

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my name is linked to that of its donors, <sup>the</sup> ~~Albert~~ List.  
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and clearly were infected by their penchant for hyperbole.

~~(varmlike story)~~

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-- Carl Sagan, Elie Wiesel, Robert and Betty Lifton --  
or even as I look about and see the many veterans of this work,  
men and women who spent a life-time in the trenches,  
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or urge the passage of a resolution,  
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unless we end the proliferation of nuclear weaponry.  
Nor will we assure against proliferation, unless we restrain those  
of our own and among our allies  
who sell the materials and the technology required ~~for~~  
for the manufacture of deadly weapons to terrorist nations.  
Nor will we check these madmen unless we address  
the economic inequities that ravage our globe.

R In short, the quest for peace cannot be piecemeal  
-- though every small step away from the brink is to be  
encouraged and applauded.  
The nuclear menace, the manace of total war,  
apocalyptic in its proportions, demands solutions likewise rooted  
in a sense of totality.

R It requires mentioning that it is not with the Bomb alone  
that we must concern ourselves.

There is a growing and palpable swell in the production and use  
of chemical weapons.

Here is another fruitful area for Russian-American cooperation.



R There is, moreover, the every increasing danger of global nuclear proliferation.

No longer is the super-power wrestling match the only act on stage.  
No longer can the bloody wars that rage around the globe be viewed merely as regional or local wars.

R There are forces afoot on this planet of ours  
who will gladly bring the world down for the sake of heaven,  
who exalt martyrdom as the highest virtue,  
who obliterate the distinction between civilian and military targets,  
whose unholy frenzy blinds them to the difference between a  
a new-born infant and a five-star general,  
so long as both are of the enemy race, the alien religion,  
the reviled nationality.

R In the minds of such as these, nuclear arms are not deterrents;  
they are opportunities for power or vengeance or extortion.  
In the minds of such as these,  
nuclear war is not unthinkable,  
it is ~~a~~ a fond fantasy,  
a development devoutly to be desired.  
In the minds of such as these,  
the threat of wholesale destruction is but a higher glory.

Be that as it may, the "window of opportunity" afforded

by the advent of a new hopeful era in U.S.-Soviet relations

must therefore be wedged open ever wider.

For the nuclear age,

which has merged us all into one single quest for survival,

must be made to yield to a New Age in which the Force of Life,

rather than the mushroom-shaped, skull-shaped shadow of death

becomes the driving power of our unification.

\*\*\*\*\*

The tasks before us therefore are clear.

And let me begin with the more parochial goals and then widen the focus.

In the first instance, we must seize the present opportunity

to build Soviet Jewish culture force so powerful

that it can even withstand a setback in Soviet policy.

We must take advantage of every opening that the emerging U.S.-Soviet  
relationship affords us,

responding to this opportunity with the same energy and

the same devotion with which we have responded to crisis.

In line with this matter, I think it time to ask for a temporary  
waiver of the Jackson-Vanek amendment

in the hope of strengthening glasnost and perestroika

by the barriers to Soviet-U.S. trade.

I do not want to pre-empt the Jewish community's present consideration  
of this issue, and will feel bound by its discipline.



*1* Still, I do not hesitate to assert my personal views on this subject.

After all, a waiver of Jackson-Vanek was always held forth as the  
quid pro quo for an increase Soviet Jewish emigration.

We have that, in abundant measure, and we have no right,  
in all justice, to increase the ante in mid-game.

*P* In any event, where there is economic tension, there is political  
~~scapegoating~~ scapegoating;

where there is political repression, there is need of an official  
"enemy."

Today, as ever, the rules of anti-Semitism obtain.

It is, therefore, in our self-interest to hope that the Gorbachev  
experiment succeeds in the Soviet Union

-- and to do what we can here to help it succeed.

*P* And now, to widen the focus of our concerns from the parochial  
to the universal,  
it is time for us as Jews, and as Americans,  
strongly to support and encourage every effort by the Bush  
Administration to respond creatively and positively  
to Soviet initiatives,  
as indeed he did last Sunday in his NATO address,  
and to advance still further steps in that direction.

Ⓡ We might begin by advocating the removal of nuclear missiles  
from West Germany.

That's scarcely such a radical proposal.

No less a hawk than Richard Perle,

the former Assistant Secretary of Defense under Ronald Reagan,  
now says:

"We don't need land based missiles in Europe...we would be  
better off," he says, "if both sides had no short range missiles."

Ⓡ Certainly, we should insist that our country cut off from its markets  
any friends or allies who sell terror weapons to terrorists,  
and to make absolutely certain that we are not in that trade  
in any way ourselves.

Ⓡ Finally, it is time too to take advantage of public disaffection  
with the military establishment  
-- a disaffection prompted by scandal and waste and unseemly greed --  
once and for all to derail Star Wars  
and bring the Pentagon to heel before the democratic process.

\* — \* \*

✱

✱

✱

Ⓡ Yet greatest of all is our potential as Jews, the sons and daughters  
of prophets, to project a vision:

- \* a vision of a world in which U.S.-Soviet cooperation brings  
about healing of our ailing earth,  
an earth sickening under the shadow of the mushroom cloud  
but sickeing too from oil spills and ozone depletion,  
from all the deadly by-products of our blind materialism.



\* a vision of Jerusalem where no weapons are carried,  
no children are made into refugees,  
no vine tree is uprooted.

\* a vision of a world capable of ending the paralysis that leaves  
millions homeless and starving.

\* a vision of a world free from the obscene danse macabre in which  
superpowers engaged,  
a world free from the idolatry that makes our  
"skies like iron and our earth like copper"  
that lays "our cities to ruin and our sanctuaries desolate."  
(Bechukotai)

R It is our task to project such visions, for it was a Jew,  
Albert Einstein, who ushered in the nuclear age  
by uncovering the mysteries of energy and matter  
-- mysteries that truly resemble, at their core, religious  
mysteries.

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

R He spent the last years of his life searching for a "unified field  
theory" and working for world peace.

Both endeavors, he knew, were mandated by his earlier discoveries.

P It is our task, today, as a people,  
to help complete the quest of this great Jew,  
for a unified world theory  
one that would indeed shed a magnificent light,  
the light of the rainbow,  
on the mysteries of existence.

P As an international people, we are already in the forefront of this  
search.

P As experts in survival, we have so very much to teach.

P As members of the human race, like our neighbors at home and abroad,  
we really have no other choice.

— Rabbi Alexander S. Saperstein



JEWISH COMMUNITY SERVICE IN SUPPORT OF PEOPLE WITH AIDS

AIDS COMMITTEE, UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PACIFIC SOUTHWEST COUNCIL

RABBI

ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER



LEO BAECK TEMPLE  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

MARCH 12, 1989  
8 ADAR II 5749

With heavy hearts we gather in this sanctuary, summoned by a sacred service of remembrance.

Not that we really need an hazkarah lest we forget. We need no reminders. We remember too well. Memories come...to interrupt our sleep...to still our laughter...to fill our silence with the voices of the past.

An entire generation of young people going to waste...their abilities and their possibilities, what they were and what they might have been...all going, gone. It is a calamity... a disaster...a terrible defeat for civilization and for life.

How can we respond to these haunting memories, this hurtful knowledge except with silence? It must be that, it always will be that -- silence. Words offer scant balm for wounds so deep. They cannot penetrate that immense isolation to which AIDS consigns so many of those who suffer it. How can mere words help those who must conserve each ounce of strength, devote every waking moment to the struggle for their own survival.

And, who am I to speak -- I who know really nothing about AIDS? What authority do I claim, I who am untouched by its pain? How can my words sound anything but abstract if not banal to those whose lungs are strangled by disease, whose souls are crushed by the threat of death or abandonment?

Aye, our speech is stifled by darkness. Our experience is of a kind that has no tongue. We offer only silence -- and that solidarity conveyed by our caring presence.

\* \* \*

Humankind has been laid waste by many a plague: the Black Death ...tuberculosis...leprosy. Still, AIDS is the most dreadful epidemic of them all. For it has stirred demons in the depth of our collective soul, and of a kind we had long thought extinct.

It has spawned a secondary scourge as deadly in its own way as the primary affliction: a wave of hysteria whose symptoms include prejudice, ostracism, and violence. AIDS sufferers already threatened by death, are victimized a second time: they are tormented, thrown out of jobs, too often spurned by family and friends. It all reminds me of the bubonic plague -- so Barbara Tuchman instructed us -- when parents left their own children to die in the gutter for fear that they themselves would be infected.



Rejection is not the universal fate of AIDS patients, to be sure. There are thousands of exemplary partners who care for those they love and parents who care for their sons and daughters until their last breath is drawn, providing them with everything they could possibly need, most especially the need for a tender presence. Only thus, is the nightmare of abandonment pierced by the light of love.

Yet too often, even in such cases, the fact of illness is kept within a close circle, because this dreadful disease has spawned not just a secondary but a tertiary scourge: stigmatization; the contumely of those who are convinced that they are healthy because they are more deserving, because they lead a more virtuous life. This third scourge is the branding of victims as guilty, as having brought calamity on their own heads, because of what they did and how they live.

Alas, this third disease too often infects the victims as well. Their self-image mirrors society's distaste for them, and so they begin to hate themselves, convinced that they are somehow morally or physically inferior. And so they give up the ghost.

Doubtlessly, this is why so many parents of people with AIDS hide this grim fact from their friends and neighbors. It would mark their children as belonging to a sub-culture rejected by society. They themselves might be shunned by their friends, become the objects of obloquy. Some parents even try to keep the cause of death secret, pleading with the doctors to list some other illness on the death certificate; this, possibly also, because too many funeral homes refuse to embalm the remains of AIDS victims and insist on cremating them instead. It is a fearsome tragedy!

\* \* \*

But let us focus on our own community: Janet Marder is disturbingly correct in her assessment here. In convening this assembly she wrote:

"The Jewish community continues to deny the existence of AIDS in our midst, and Jewish families and individuals who do suffer from AIDS continue to hide from their community."

That is true, is it not? Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome has revealed a deficiency in our Jewish community's own immune system: that we are not so immune to prejudice, that we are not so immune to the general human propensity for blinding our

eyes to hurtful truth: that we are not so immune to the very process of stigmatization by which we as Jews have been shunned and persecuted and massacred.

Yes, some Jews have responded to the AIDS crisis. Yes, our Union of Congregations has published educational materials and established national and regional committees to sensitize our constituents, to spur them to speak out against the hatred attached to the AIDS crisis, against the scapegoating of those who are suffering most acutely. Yes, as individuals, some of us have been deeply, sacrificially involved; I am thinking particularly of the many Jewish nurses and doctors and other caregivers who have devoted their lives to peoples with AIDS.

Still, we have not as a community crossed the boundaries of Otherness -- the fringed boundaries at which compassion gives way to identification. We have not extended our embrace to include gay and lesbian Jews. We have not acknowledged their presence in the midst of our synagogues, nor consciously included gay and lesbian parents as part of the Jewish family circle. Indeed, we have not affirmed that we all are family: that people with AIDS and their friends and their relatives and their lovers are our sons, our sisters, our neighbors, our fellow Jews.

In our denial, in our failure to see one another as one family -- indeed, as one holy people -- we exile ourselves from 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!

The Star of David has emerged as the most visible sign of Jewishness. Curiously enough, it is not the oldest or most venerable symbol of our people. While archeologists have discovered some ancient stones bearing this emblem, it did not become commonplace until more modern times. Indeed, rabbinic literature, in all its variety and vastness, makes absolutely no mention of it. There is a more recent event that has irrevocably rendered the Magen-David as the preeminent Jewish sign. It was the shoah, the Holocaust, the martyrdom of six million Jews. It was the Nazis who stitched the six-pointed star to our hearts as a badge of shame, a mark of death. And, it was our own partisans and Zionist pioneers who reconverted it into a badge of pride and life.



Today, as we meet to remember those who have died of AIDS, to speak of their suffering and our own, there is another meaning that we can attach to the Magen David. It is an interpretation that any Jewish child with a crayon can tell you: that the Star of David contains, within it, the triangle.

For those of us here who would, a generation ago, have been wearing the pink triangle as a badge of shame and a mark of death; for those of us here who today wear it as a badge of honor and resistance and identity: it is time to complete the outline of your Jewish star.

For those of us who have been willingly blind to the geometry of Jewish life, who would keep invisible the presence of the triangle within the Shield of David: it is time to complete the outline of our Jewish star.

Let me not camouflage my own omissions with the omissions of the larger community. Let me confess my own failure of courage and of will ... that in thinking about what I was to say today I had to wrestle with demons in the depths of my own being, demons I never thought were there.

I, a leader of this movement for Reform Judaism; I, a refugee from Hitler's Germany, I will no longer be content to speak in the first person plural declaring that "we have dealt perversely." Instead, I declare myself your ally today, and ally to all those whose Star of David needs completion.

I declare myself a mourner for all those who have died of AIDS, most of them young, in the fullness of life and self-discovery.

I declare myself a rabbi for all Jews, at every moment of life, not only for heterosexual Jews, or for gay Jews only at their funerals.

I declare myself a consoler for those who have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, accompanying friends and loved ones on their last painful journey.

I declare myself a compatriot of those how are living with AIDS, living more fully than many of us who take God's gifts of life for granted. I, too, know the experience of looking on death's face, personally, as a heart patient, and, historically, as a Jew. I have felt the intense love of every shred of God's creation that fills the soul after the dread of the extinguishing moment has passed.

I declare myself the compassionate ally of every person heterosexual and homosexual, Jew and non-Jew, who is wrestling with the shame, the confusion, the fear, the endless torment involved in the inner struggle for sexual identity. It is a struggle that includes, but also goes beyond, civil liberties. It is, when all is said and done, a struggle for the integrity of selfhood.

\* \* \*

In such a way, I see myself as heeding the precepts of Torah that Torah which is revealed not by focusing narrowly on a particular passage but rather on what permeates the whole, and that is compassion. This is our tradition's overarching purpose: to love God, to love our neighbor, to love the stranger, even as we were strangers in the land of Egypt. Thus we read in tractate Sanhedrin:

TORAH B'HATCHILA V'SOFA GEMILUT CHASADEEM  
"The beginning and the end of Torah are  
deeds of loving kindness."

To be sure now, the Torah has many and divergent strands, but seen singly, they do not reveal the whole: the tapestry must be seen in all its wondrous fullness. There is the single text, but there are others, and beyond them, there is their interpretation which is never fixed but ever in flux. Yes, there is the reproving 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." Indeed, the Torah has many faces, but the most authentic is the one that reflects its heart.

In the Talmud, again in tractate Sanhedrin, it is written --

The sages wondered:  
"Where shall we look for the Messiah? will he  
come to us on clouds of glory robed in majesty  
and crowned with light?"

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi put this question to no less an authority than the prophet Elijah himself.

"Where shall I find the Messiah?" he asked, and  
the prophet replied: "At the gate of the city."  
"But how shall I recognize him?"  
"He sits among the lepers."

Rabbi Joshua was startled and exclaimed:

"Among the lepers? What is he doing there?"



"He changes their bandages," Elijah replied.  
"He changes their bandages one by one."

[Free Translation by Kenneth Roseman]

As individuals, we still have much to fear, much to reckon with. But let us not add to our loneliness and our suffering by believing that God does not recognize us and our relationships. Let us rather exalt our relationships so that they be worthy of God's gaze. Let us learn that God's image is reflected in each and every face. Let us not add to our heartache by separating or by letting ourselves be separated from the Jewish people. As Jews, together, let us search through the Torah, the written Torah and the Torah of life, to find those affirmations for which we yearn.

\* \* \*

This is a service of remembrance. It is also a service of healing and hope.

Of this I am certain, the day of healing will come. Even as I wrote these lines, within the last two weeks, two promising medical developments were reported. There is a Jonas Salk somewhere even now, engaged in serious research, who will discover or design those human anti-bodies that will sweep the ravaging virus from off the face of the earth. We pray for that day to arrive within the life time of everyone in this synagogue.

In any event, we must never surrender to despair. That word has no place in the Jewish lexicon! We Jews hope...we remember and we hope...we hope not just when hope comes easy, but when earthly reason defies all hope. Then especially do we hope. We hope until hope creates out of its own wreckage that good which it contemplates.

Let us therefore remember, and let us always hope.

April 13, 1989  
Clark University

Remembering Frances Hiatt

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

I am grateful to Jack Hiatt for asking me to participate in this dedicatory event, to share this moment of deep meaning in his life, and to re-evoke, to freshen memories of an altogether remarkable woman. Frances Hiatt was precisely that: a shining example of how life should be lived.

I remember her well, though many seasons have come and gone since our lives last touched. How could it be otherwise? She certainly was not of a lamblike nature, passive, supine, and hence forgettable. She was a veritable lioness. There was a power which swelled from within her, leaving its lasting mark on all whose lives were intertwined with hers however fleetingly.

Without doubt, she had a firm-set will. The very way she walked conveyed that message, never leisurely, always determined, heading straight to the mark. Once she had her mind fixed on a course, she was relentless in its pursuit; there was no deflecting or checking her. She had a fixity of purpose, and because she did, she molded the world to herself.

She was straight as an arrow in her judgment of others, impatient with slovenliness, coldly disdainful of the counterfeit, yet she never demanded of others what she did not demand of herself. I think that Frances was of Eastern-European descent; but she manifested those qualities usually associated with German Jews: self-discipline, self-command, self-domination. Once she assumed a responsibility she fulfilled it to the nth degree. She always did her homework. She prepared with care. She studied. She thought. And only then did she commend and pursue a course of action. She conquered twice by conquering herself in victory.

So far, I have drawn a portrait that is rather stern, almost severe. But that is only its surface. Once you penetrated that, you found a softness underneath, a tender care -- very much like those sabras, those cactus plants of that Israel she loved, prickly without but luscious sweetness within.

At the very core of her being there was compassion. She was essentially good and kind. She cared for people. She was determined to help ~~them in their need~~. Just think of those institutions which called forth her most intense involvement:



Worcester's Visiting Nurse Association and City Hospital, both of which she served and ultimately led with distinction. She nurtured these institutions with an uncommon devotion precisely because of her concern for those who are most in need: the solitary souls, the lost souls, the disabled in body and in spirit.

Let it be noted and remembered also, that these public benefices properly acknowledged and acclaimed were equalled if not exceeded by many individual acts of human kindness known only to giver and receiver and all the more precious for their tender privacy. I know of an elderly, lonely woman, not one of the 'pnai ha-ir,' of the very important people of the city, but rather one of the poor, the disadvantaged, on whom Frances lavished special attention visiting her regularly, talking with her, walking with her, giving her cheer. And there were many more...

Frances cared for those who suffer most likely because she was schooled in suffering herself. But she did not allow adversity to defeat her. She surmounted it by reaching out, by helping others. She was a gutsy lady, Frances was, and nothing in human life is as commendable as courage.

There certainly was no more faithful friend than Frances. Once she embraced you as such, she shunned no pain -- even to the death -- to stand in your stead.

Clearly, she cared most for those who stood nearest: her children, her grandchildren, her sister, and above all her Jack. Had God only granted a longer life, they would have celebrated their 50th anniversary but months ago. Together the two walked the way of life, drinking from its cup, when it ran bitter, when it ran sweet, giving true meaning to the words: husband, wife, and marriage.

This too I remember about Frances: She had a well-refined sense of the fitness of things. Everything had to be just so, in the proper place, in perfect harmony.

She loved good music. She appreciated fine art. Her home was tastefully appointed. Beautiful paintings adorned its walls, matchless sculptures filled its spaces. Many of these works were on Jewish themes, reflecting her appreciation of her heritage. It was a blending of the arts with her people's tradition, a singular integration of aesthetic values and Jewish values.

Perhaps it was this yearning for wholeness which led her to withdraw from her friends and even from her family to some extent during the last few months of her life. She did not want anyone to see the ravages of her illness, to see her less than whole, to know her less than perfect.

In the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Sh'kalim, it is written:

EYN OUSIM N'FASHOT LAZADIKIM, DIVREYHEN HEYN,  
HEYN, ZICHRONOM

One need not erect monuments in memory of the  
righteous. Their own words and deeds are their  
monuments.

Still, it is wonderful, is it not, that Jacob Hiatt is able to amplify his soul-mate's good deeds, to make her name known to those who were not privileged to know her, and to do so by erecting not monuments of stone but living memorials: scholarships that enable countless young people to stretch their minds, a museum wing which awakens their sense of beauty, a lovely park in Jerusalem which gives rest to the weary, and now this school: the Frances Hiatt School of Psychology which gives further expression to their joint commitment to discover and develop the latent potentiality of young men and young women.

There is a Talmudic epitaph that is reserved only for those who are endowed with a special talent in the art of living, who bequeath a rich spiritual legacy to humankind. It reads as follows:

CHAVAL AL D'OVDIN V'LO MISHTAKCHIN

Alas for those who are gone and cannot be replaced.

Francis Hiatt is gone and cannot be replaced. But her memory continues to be a benediction!



april 13, 1989  
Clark University

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Rabbi Abraham Schindler

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TO RBA  
4/17/89

Schindler: Dedication of Sanctuary  
Temple Beth David, Westwood, Mass.  
April 9, 1989

Your extravagant exaggerations to the contrary notwithstanding,

I am grateful to you, Hank, for your warm words of introduction.  
As you know, as you must feel, your sentiments of affection and  
regard are reciprocated with a full and grateful heart.

I like Henry Zoob.

I respect those rare qualities of mind and heart he brings to

his endeavors:

his intelligence,

his industry,

his integrity,

and this, above all, his sensitivity, his essential humaneness

his ability to transmit his ideals not just in the written and  
the spoken word, but in the manner of his life.

I really need not tell you all this.

You know it so much better yourself.

After all, your relationship spans the years.

It has been cemented by tears of joy and of sorrow alike.

But I can tell you that his influence is felt far beyond these  
sacred walls.

Many others, in our vast and vibrant national family of congregations,  
know of his work and appreciate his worth.

We are especially grateful to him for being a prime mover in the  
creation of the Rashi School, whose graduates will doubtlessly  
provide our religious community with its future leadership.

This community, this congregation is a place endeared to me by memory  
and by affection.

As you have heard, and as some among you will recall,

I helped in the founding of this congregation  
I was your first rabbi, as it were, and those were exciting days,  
days of hope, of unbounded expectation.

There is one incident of that time which is forever etched in my memory.  
You had purchased a church, as I recall it, and set about the task of  
reconverting it into your first permanent sanctuary.

I came in one afternoon, just to see how work was progressing,  
and found an elderly man, standing on a ladder, busy driving  
nails into the wall to keep new wood panelling in place.

He identified himself as Moe Rimmelman, told me that he was a carpenter  
by trade, and that instead of going on vacation  
he took the money he would have spent on a trip  
to purchase the panelling  
and the time allotted to rest from his labors to affix it.

"I talked it over with my wife," he said, "and we decided that doing  
this is also restful -- it brings rest to the soul."

This is the spirit which animated this congregation from its very  
beginnings, and it is doubtlessly this kind of spirit which enabled  
you to surmount adversity and phoenix-like  
rebuild your new sanctuary out of the ashes of the old.



When you rabbi officiated at the burial of your three scorched Torah scrolls, he reminded you of a midrash which bears retelling, about Chanina ben Teradyon, noblest of Jewish martyrs,

who was burned at the stake wrapped in a Scroll of the Law  
When his pupils witnessed his terrible agony, they cried out:

"Our master, our teacher, what seest thou,"

and he replied:

"I see the parchment burning, but the letters of the law,  
they soar on high."

Even so it was with you,

the sons and daughters of this holy congregation.

Your sacred scrolls were scorched and had to be buried,  
your sanctuary left smoldering.

But the spirit which they enshrined remained alive in your hearts,  
and you mustered the strength to build anew.

What you have wrought here -- rabbi and congregation together --  
behold, it is exceedingly good.

This is an altogether beautiful new sanctuary,  
a blossoming in stone,

music in space.

The lines are clean.

Everything is well-proportioned.

It is a place which makes the spirit soar.

I am reminded of something Heinrich Heine once said.

Standing before the cathedral of Amien his friend asked him,  
why don't we build something like that nowadays,  
and Heine replied:

"Men in those days had convictions, we have only opinions.  
and it requires something more than an opinion to build  
a cathedral."

This sanctuary, in all its glory, bears testimony to the  
strength of your convictions.

It also bears testimony to the convictions of the many who stood by your  
side.

I refer now to that coalition of decency which was forged in this  
community -- by sundry civic and religious groups,  
men and women of divergent theologies, but of one faith,  
faith in that God who is the creator of us all.

But an anniversary is not just a time for the backward glance.

It is a time, also, to look ahead.

It is not just a time for recollection,  
but also a time for rededication,

for a refocusing on those ideas and ideals for which this  
sanctuary was build and which it presumably enshrines.

These purposes are familiar to you.

Your rabbis have articulated them over the years.

and you have demonstrated your understanding of them.



The first of these ideals assuredly is the moral mandate.

It is a foremost task of the synagogue to remind us of

those values which the world makes us forget.

Within these sacred walls we must always be confronted with the ideal

and summoned to measure ourselves against it.

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 our communal conduct, for a moment, our demeanor as a nation.

Here we are, the wealthiest country on earth, yet poverty abounds

and the ranks of the disadvantaged are swelling.

Too many in this bounteous land of ours are out of work and out of hope

and they have lost the faith that this is a society that

gives a damn for them.

Or consider what we do with our world -- just read the newspapers of the

day and see: how we take God's handiwork and despoil it,

the sweet air He gave us to breathe

and the fresh water with which he blessed us

the fertile green which delights the eye.

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

we poison them...we tear apart the ozone...we carbonize the oxygen

we acidify the refreshing rain...as we plunge the world

headlong into a nuclear saturnalia of burnt flesh & maimed

bodies & torn limbs & the whole dark butchery without a soul.

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

It must remind us of those values which the world makes us forget.  
For only if we emerge from this place as better human beings,  
as better people  
will our prayers have been answered.

There is a second great purpose for which this sanctuary was built.  
It was meant to be a communal home for the Jewish people,  
the source of our strength to live as Jews.

This 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 bable of many peoples.  
Beaten down and crushed by tyrant's rage  
our fathers and mothers came into the synagogue,  
and straightened their backs and held their heads high,  
for within the sacred walls of the synagogue they felt free.  
There they felt themselves to be what indeed they were:  
princes of God,  
proud scions of God's people.

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 pre-occupy us.  
This has been a particularly painful year in this regard  
and all of us are filled with foreboding,  
and all of us are ambivalent.

On the one hand we know that the status quo is untenable  
that a refractory population cannot be kept in check without the  
force that comes from the barrel of a gun.  
that the exercise of this force merely intensifies hatreds  
and makes the attainment of peace even more remote.  
and that in any event, peace is not just an abstraction,  
that it must be pursued in concrete ways and cannot be  
sequestered from the pursuit of justice for all  
-- Palestinians as well as Jews.

On the other hand, we recognize that the fear of the Israelis is valid,  
and so we too are afraid,  
afraid that the Palestinians say Westbank and Gaza  
but really mean Haifa and Tel Aviv;  
afraid that they have not foresworn their determination to drive  
the Jews into the Mediterranean Sea;  
afraid that Arafat is merely dissembling,  
that he has neither the will nor the power to shackle those  
violent forces which he himself unleashed  
or with which he is allied.

And in back of it all, there loom those arms merchants,  
leaders of nations presumably pledged to pursue pathways of peace,  
who persist in selling sophisticated weaponry  
to confrontation states...

the latest, the Soviet Union, conveying long flight capacity  
to that purveyor of international terrorism, Quadafi.

It is ominous, portentous, frightening!

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

Auschwitz is only one generation behind us,  
but anti-Semitism is becoming respectable once again,  
witness what happened in this place,

and this was not an isolated incident.

And so we will need the synagogue as a source of strength for  
our collective continuity.

Within the sheltering walls of Beth Hillel  
you will have to find that inner force that flows  
only from the companionship of fellow Jews.

But the synagogue must serve one more purpose still:

It must evoke a sense of the sacred.

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



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

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

Alas, the voice from out of the whirlwind or from the burning bush  
finds but few listening ears in our time.

By and large in our day we are not given to amazement and to wonder  
as blandly we walk the way of life untouched by its essential magic

The temper of our times does not allow us to hear...

our proneness to consider as real only things perceived by the  
physical sense

things that can be touched and felt and measured and weighed  
and our tendency to ascribe a worth only to things that are of use  
that can be bought and sold, and are of practical worth.

Yet there is a world of reality beyond that world perceived  
by the physical senses alone

and some among us are blessed with the capacity to preceive that realm.

To one man, for instance,

a primrose by a river's brim, a yellow primrose is to him  
and it is nothing more.

Another man has a clearer vision and so he finds

tongues in trees, books in running brooks, and God in everything.

For the physicist, water is composed of 2 part of hydrogen and  
1 part of oxygen.

That is a scientific fact.

But is this all that we can say about water?

Is this the sum and substance of its essence?

Shakespeare, as we just heard, read 'books in brooks,'  
and Israel's sweet singer found firm faith  
'by still and stilling waters'

Surely their discoveries are as real as are the  
scientific formulae of the laboratory.

Aye, there is a world of reality  
beyond those worlds perceived by the physical sense alone.  
And altogether multitudinous are life's gifts that have no  
practical worth but nonetheless are altogether wond'rous:  
The earth's green covering of grass.  
The blue serenity of sea and sky.  
The song of day, the silent wonder of the night.  
Petals on the grass and wings in the air.

Oh, how flat, how narrow our world is,  
when we measure its gifts by their usefulness alone,  
when, in Rilke's happy simile  
we take a hold of peacock's feathers to tickle one another  
while being oblivious to their essential charm.

Then do the words of prophecy apply to us:

they have eyes but they do not see  
they have ears but they do not hear  
they do not know  
they do not understand  
they walk in darkness



No, the human story simply cannot be told

without reference to that mystery and majesty that transcends  
all logic and reason.

Only those who open themselves to such a mystery

can transcend the grandeur and terror of their lives  
without being blinded by life's grandeur  
or crushed by its terror.

These, then, are the purposes for which this sanctuary was built

and whose pursuit alone justifies the effort to assure its survival

This synagogue must be a force for good in human life,

a source of strength for the Jewish people.

And it must be a place where men and women can find the companionship  
of kindred and aspiring souls in their quest for God.

Pursue these purposes, these dreams, this quest!

Then will the future of Temple Beth Hillel be as glorious  
as was its past.

Then also will the celebration of this dedicatory hour be

not for present use nor for present delight alone,  
but they will be forever.

Then the time will come when the wood and the stone and the mortar  
of this sanctuary will be held sacred because your hands  
have touched them

And many years hence, men and women will behold the beauty and  
the worthy substance of them and they will say:

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

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