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# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS



61st General Assembly  
of the  
Union of American  
Hebrew Congregations

**THE REFORM JEW:  
VALUES, PRACTICES, VISIONS**

BALTIMORE OCTOBER 31 - NOVEMBER 4, 1991



# PRESIDENTIAL KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER



November 2, 1991  
Baltimore, Maryland

I am most grateful to Allan Goldman for his extravagant introduction. I suspect though that there are not a few people here especially those who have heard my Biennial messages over the years who feel that I really need no *introduction*, that I am in infinitely greater need of a *conclusion*. Alas, he only gave me an introduction, so if my presidential message does not find its end, blame him, not me.

When I installed Allan four years ago, I forewarned him that leadership in Jewish life has its risks. I remember citing the Talmudic passage which tells of Rabbi Akiba consulting with his family before assuming a responsible post in the Jewish community. "If you take this position," Akiva's family cautioned, "know that they will curse and despise you. The Chairman of the Union successfully challenged Talmudic wisdom. He leaves his position not with a malediction but with our blessings and our highest esteem.

Allan was exemplary in the conduct of his office. His mind is keen, razor-sharp. He articulates his thoughts with precision, and he is witty and fair when he wields the gavel. This, above all, he really cares, cares deeply, about other people, and about the goals of all our striving. We cannot possibly thank him enough.

But at the least we can give him a token of our regard. I hold it in my hands now this beautifully crafted silver and gold menorah . . . receive it, Allan . . . use it . . . together with Ellie and your beautiful daughters... May it serve as symbolic reminder of our admiration and affection.

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My very best wishes also to the leaders of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, whose delegates have come here, in joint convention with us, for Sisterhood's 38th Biennial gathering. Judith Hertz has just completed her first two years of office as NFTS President. She too deserves to be commended for the excellence of her leadership. She guides the women of Sisterhood with dignity and strength.

Eleanor Schwartz is also seated on this dais. She is retiring as the Executive Director of NFTS, as many of you know, having served our Sisterhood affiliate for 32 years, and NFTY for 8 years before then, 40 years of devoted service all told.

Her superb contributions to our movement are in evidence everywhere you look about you. It was Ellie who, in full partnership with the phenomenally creative Sam Cook, gave shape to N.F.T.Y., our Youth affiliate. It was Ellie who designed and fashioned its programmatic pillars, those academies and institutes which sustain its progress still. It was Ellie who cultivated and strung the pearls of NFTY — what we sometimes call our alphabet soup: NEFTY and TOFTY and SCIFTY and PAFTY and on — those most precious jewels of our crown.

In like creative manner did she serve Sisterhood, here as before not front and center in the limelight, but always as enabler, empowering others to do the work and to reap the recognition. She is intelligent, knowledgeable, fiercely committed to the Jewish people and its faith.

She is also a good friend, whose counsel I will greatly miss. Indeed, had she not recruited me for youth and camp work four decades ago, I dare say that I would not be



the President of the Union today. I am in your debt, Ellie. We all of us are in your debt. May you enjoy that respite which is your full due.

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We have most grateful words also for our hosts this weekend, the many men and women comprising the Local Arrangements led by Bo O'Mansky and Chiaie Herzig and assisted by our Council Director, Richard Sternberger. They faced a Herculean task. We are here in unprecedented numbers — the largest Assembly on the North American Jewish scene. We thank them for their successful exertions. Moreover, the creation of a sense of community within a vast convention center such as this was a daunting task. The problems and details were endless; they mastered them all.

These men and these women follow a venerable tradition, for the Jewish legacy of Baltimore is rich. The Jews of this community have shown a tremendous unity and a profound capacity for leadership. To give but one example: Rabbis Morris Lieberman, Israel Goldman, Philip Schechter and Sam Glasner helped lead the historic civil rights demonstrations on July 4th, 1963 at Gwynn Oak Amusement Park. All four were arrested for their efforts, which helped turn the tide against segregation in the State of Maryland. Asked why he had gone to jail, Rabbi Lieberman replied: "I think that every American should celebrate the Fourth of July."

A Jew was President of the Board of School Commissioners when school desegregation was implemented in Baltimore; another was founder of the Greater Baltimore Committee, a key force in the revitalization of this city. The Meyerhoff Symphony Hall and the Hackerman House of the Walters Arts Gallery are but two of the many cultural institutions bearing Jewish names.

And just as Jews have provided leadership to Baltimore, so have they provided leadership for American Jewry: the first ordained rabbi permanently to settle in the United States, Abraham Rice, was of this community, as was Henrietta Szold, the brilliant founder of Hadassah. Baltimore's Rabbi Edward Israel led the UAHC for an all too brief period — alas, he was seized by a fatal heart-attack while giving his installation address. Helen Dalsheimer was the first woman President of a Reform Congregation. Chuck Hoffberger chaired the Jewish Agency. Irv Blum and Louis Fox were Federation Presidents along with Shoshana Cardin, now also Chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Joyce Ottenheimer, Bo O'Mansky and Barbara Balter presently serve on our National Board and they serve with distinction — sons and daughters of Baltimore all. We commend them and thank them for all that they are doing and for what they are.

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

I am indebted also to Rabbi Daniel Syme, Vice President of the Union, for many a personal kindness no less than for the superb manner in which he serves us all. He is ardently devoted to his work and leads the Union's staff with consummate skill.



### **Our Celebrations: JCS, and NATA**

We observe two golden anniversaries at our Assembly and both merit to be celebrated.

The Jewish Chautauqua Society marked the 50th Anniversary of its adoption by NFTB since last we were in convention assembled. Over the years, Brotherhood's dedications to our religious community have been many and substantial.

NFTB pioneered adult Jewish education in our movement. Brotherhoods were the first to recognize the need for leadership development; indeed, NFTB has been the seedbed for the nurturing of our congregational and national leadership. Most important of all, the men of Brotherhood were among the first to reach out to the Christian community in an organized dialogue and in the process they nurtured an altogether remarkable educational vehicle, the Jewish Chautauqua Society, the most extensive Jewish educational program of its kind in North America, if not in the world.

Generations of Christian college students have gained a greater appreciation of Jews and Judaism because of this endeavor. And countless generations of Jewish men and women on campus have deepened their knowledge of our spiritual legacy.

We salute Alvin Corwin, President, and Lewis Eisenberg, Executive Director of NFTB on this bright and promising occasion. Insofar as the Jewish tradition deems a child's true father to be he who provides for sustenance and education, our movement can claim patrimony from NFTB.

We are also celebrating the 50th anniversary of National Association of Temple Administrators, represented on this dais by Norman Fogel, their new President.

NATA, in effect, created a new profession in Jewish life: that of the Temple Administrator. This affiliate has grown magnificently since its inception. Its founders numbered seventeen. Today, its membership exceeds three hundred professionals. They provide stellar direction to our collective mission, applying new technologies, prudent management and streamlining innovations to the Reform Temple.

But they are more than mere managers, mere mechanics, these NATA professionals. They are also devoted Jews. They build and buttress the structures which house Torah. They safeguard the material resources without which there can be no Torah.

We therefore congratulate the men and women of NATA. May they continue to flourish. We require their unfailing strength.

### **A Tribute to Albert Vorspan**

Now, all of you will recognize a second retiring veteran of our movement who is seated on the dais, warming my back, as it were, and permitting me, as ever, to reflect in his light. But I dare not look at him, very frankly, lest I return to you with tears in my eyes, for I feel entirely unprepared to say farewell to him.

In a sense, I suppose, this second retiree, this second honoree, will never really leave us, for his voice has so thoroughly permeated the consciousness of the Reform movement that it has become an intrinsic element of our being. When we speak in

the voice of conscience, we speak in the voice of Albert Vorspan.

"My religion," Al said in a recent interview, "until I was 13, was baseball." Al's eye-hand coordination was pretty good, so he boasts, but his heart-hand coordination proved better still. Thus he became our Hank Greenberg, our slugger in the most major league of all: the movement for social justice.

Bred of the Depression and the Holocaust era, instructed in the ways of courage by his participation in the civil rights movement, outraged by the wanton bloodshed of the Vietnam war, deeply inspired by the Jewish yearnings of Soviet refuseniks, heartsickened by the political chicanery of the Nixon years and the social devastation of the Reagan years, — Al Vorspan has provided us with a leadership that spanned whole eras because his social vision is rooted in the durable and eternally relevant preachments of the Jewish prophets.

How rare a man: a prophet who nevertheless is the most human, the sanest member of the Union staff, an idealist who sways not with solemn exhortation but with laughter, a bush that burns and yet is not consumed! Fortunately for us and for the Jewish community Al has been institutionalized in the form of our Commission on Social Action and its Religious Action Center. He has forged the bond between social action and our religious mission, and that bond shall never be dissolved.

Al's career amply demonstrates the vast impact that an individual can have when working in a community with a shared value system. This is true for Ellie Schwartz too, and for Dick Sternberger and Bernie Zlotowitz, whose retirement is also imminent.

Their careers are Jewish texts, open to all of us for study and for guidance, — texts hardly different from this week's Torah portion, *Chaye Sarah*, which tells of the final deeds of Abraham to secure his and Sarah's legacy — *our* legacy before passing on.

Yes, lives too can serve as texts, not just Biblical or Rabbinic passages . . . indeed what are such passages, when all is said and done if not the life experiences of people boiled down to the size of an aphorism.

Even so are the lives of our retirees texts, texts about human beings *becoming* themselves by entering into a Covenantal dialogue.

"Creation happens to us" at that point when we are summoned, said Martin Buber. "It burns itself into us, recasts us . . . we take part in creation, meet the Creator, reach out to Him, helpers and companions. You need God in order to be — and God needs you, for the very meaning of your life."

### **Preserving our Prophetic Mission**

Surely, there is no greater gift that we could give to an Al Vorspan, than the assurance that his legacy will be upheld.

It is a legacy which is endangered nowadays, because too many in our midst are beset by fear.

We fear betrayal.

We fear that the freedom for which a young Russian Jew named Ilya Krichevsky



died on the barricades in Moscow, will be betrayed by the nationalist frenzies now fraying the Soviet Union.

We fear that the opportunity for disarmament and international amity afforded by the peaceful collapse of communism will be betrayed by a new orgy of arms sales to every dictator who has cash in hand.

We fear that the exodus of Soviet Jews, their vast and miraculous influx to Israel, will be betrayed by the Bush administration.

And here on the domestic scene in America, our sense of betrayal is heightened, as the flower of ethnic pride and assertiveness that we Jews helped foster during the last three decades has mutated into a noxious, strangling weed, with the Bayard Rustins and Martin Luther Kings replaced by the Al Sharptons and Professor Jeffries', builders of bridges replaced by demagogic clowns and anti-Semitic hatemongers.

In response to such betrayals as these, an ever-increasing number of American Jews have been infected by their own separatist virus. Even in our ranks, among Reform Jews, we hear such sentiments re-echoed: "We are surrounded by enemies . . . we have no friends, no allies . . . no one else will fend for us . . . let's go it alone."

But this simply is not so. We Jews have never achieved our freedoms alone. Even the glorious Maccabean victory was abetted by the rise of Rome as a rival to Syrian power. Our release from the ghettos of Europe was achieved because enlightened forces in the 19th Century European revolutions amplified and fought to realize our demands for equal status. Our present high status in this land is buoyed by the Bill of Rights — which was neither crafted nor realized by Jews. Aye, and the State of Israel itself would not have been established had not a majority of the world's nations recognized the moral justice of our cause and our need for a dramatic affirmative action following the holocaust.

No, we cannot do it alone, we never did. We need allies in order to prevail. Statistics show that we may soon be less than 2% of the American population. How shall 2% win battles on behalf of Israel, on behalf of Soviet Jewry, on behalf of church-state separation, on behalf of religious freedom involved in reproductive choice if we have no allies?

Separatism is bad for Jews. We need friends to prevail. But we will not find and retain them if we care only for ourselves. If we do not feel the pain of *others*, they will not feel *our* pain. If we stand aloof from *their* causes, we can scarcely expect them to stand at *our* side.

Yet, far more important than this consideration of an enlightened self-interest is the awareness of our duty as Jews to care not just for our own, but for all human kind. We must not allow the betrayals we have suffered to induce a betrayal of Judaism itself.

Some years ago, in what was one of his finest of Biennial addresses, Al Vorspan put this matter well. He said: "If in order to survive I must kiss the world good-bye and separate myself from humankind . . . If I must emulate the violence, the callousness, the bigotry and narrowness of my opponents . . . then survival is not worth the candle for me."

He is absolutely right, of course . . .

We Jews are not just another ethnic group or pressure bloc for parochial interests. Our survival is for a far higher purpose: to heal a fractured world.



"It is too light a thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the offspring of Israel. I will also give thee for a light unto the nations. To open the eyes of the blind . . . To loosen the fetters of the bound . . . To bring to light those who dwell in darkness . . ."

Only when we heed this mandate, will we preserve the legacy of an Al Vorspan. Only then will we secure our prophetic vision, and thereby confirm the distinction and authenticity of Reform Judaism.

### The Authenticity of Reform

Note well, that I emphasize authenticity when I speak of the vanguard role of the Reform movement.

We all know that Reform's growth rate has been vigorous, dramatic: a 25% increase in the number of congregations and in our over-all membership in the past two decades alone. We can recite too the virtues of Reform Judaism that inspire this growth: our resolve to be inclusive rather than exclusive, our social action commitments, our principle of full equality for men and women in the religious life, and the like.

Yet when it comes to the matter of spirituality and religious authenticity, our self-confidence often stumbles and falls. We act the *ger v'toshav*, the resident alien like Abraham in *Chaye Sarah* our Torah portion of the week. Though residing in the very land that God has promised to him, Abraham is insecure enough about his future that he feels he must purchase the Cave of Machpelah — at an exorbitant rate! — to buy full citizenship.

Too many of us suffer from such a mindset, that we are but resident aliens amid the true citizens of Judaism. And who are these true citizens? The bearded Jewish man, poring over the pages of the Talmud; the bewigged Jewish woman reciting *techin* en route to the *mikveh*; the Judaism of the 19th Century *shtetl* with its thick walls of *halacha* and its exclusivist mentality — somehow these images are normative in our minds.

This mindset is entirely self-defeating. For if "Torah true" is to be equated with literalism, as the Orthodox do, then faith becomes impossible for us, and our creative transformation of religious metaphor into human reality will always feel like a veiled atheism. If marching in solemn step with a literalist *halacha* is the only "authentic" Jewish way, our own dance with tradition will always feel frivolously improvisational, even clumsy. No matter how dynamic our growth then, no matter how vibrant our congregations, we will always feel like Adonijah, pretender to King David's throne in this week's *haftarah* rather than young Solomon, the true heir of the Covenant.

But Reform is not some "tinsel imitation of Orthodoxy," Nor are we even first and foremost a critique of Orthodoxy! Do we stand before the masterworks of van Gogh and evaluate them chiefly in contrast with the masterworks of his countryman, Rembrandt? Hardly that! We stand and marvel at the inspired way van Gogh recast the elements of color and texture and movement and composition to create a new channel of access to the truth. Each master used paint and brush and canvas — but their animating spirits were singular.

In like manner, Reform recasts tradition, deliberately and openly. We conceive of

Judaism as a dynamic and not a static faith. The inner life of the Jew is never in a fixed state of "being." It is always a "becoming," a relentless flowing on.

This, my friends, is what Judaism always was before it was forced by the repressive powers of Christendom to batten down the hatches, to ghettoize, to bind the community by tightening the links of codification in the name of self-preservation. Rabbinic Judaism was always a work-in-progress in the best sense; a religion not of obeisance, but of dialogue; not of mere ritualistic piety but of heart-felt responsibility; a religion in which *balacha* was not frozen like ice but a soluble substance to be mixed with human tears.

Rabbi Eleazar taught:

"A person should be soft as a reed, and not as hard as a cedar. Because of this quality, reeds have been privileged to be selected as pens with which Torahs, tefillin and mezzuzot are written."

So are we selected, in our flexibility, to write the Torahs and mezzuzot for this most dramatic period of Jewish history, this era of near-total destruction and epic reconstruction.

### Discussing our Religious Parameters

This very flexibility, however, of which I just spoke directs our attention to another problem confronting Reform, and that is the need to achieve ideological coherence. The elasticity of our Judaism has undoubtedly produced the elasticity of our numbers, but stretched too far it can rip us apart.

Reform allows for a wide spectrum of belief, a ranging gamut of theological stances. Nonetheless, some common understanding *is* necessary to give us the kind of ideological cohesion which a religious movement, or any movement, for that matter, requires to retain its distinctiveness, and to secure its continuity.

The parameters of Reform are especially difficult to draw. Which beliefs have a valid place in Reform Judaism and which do not? Is there *any* ideology that is beyond the pale of Reform? Can we accommodate all theological stances, just so long as they do not claim authoritative revelation or seek to impose their perceptions or practices on all of us? Just what *is* essential to a Reform outlook, what is optional — and what, if anything, is forbidden?

These questions may soon confront us in a less conjectural and more concrete form requiring a resolution. There are, as you know, a half-score of congregations in our land whose leaders and members identify themselves as adherents of a Humanistic Judaism. Their liturgy eliminates all references to God; not even the Sh'ma is included in the pages of their prayerbook.

Can we accept one of these congregations which has indicated its desire to join the Union, though it omits for ideological reasons all mention of God? And yet how can we not accept it, given that so many Reform thinkers and, indeed, thousands of



Reform Jews see God not from the perspective of a traditional supernaturalism, but rather as a redemptive Power that inheres in nature?

And if we close our doors to these congregations, will we not stifle the possibility of their spiritual evolution? As Rabbi David Polish so movingly wrote me:

"When I was a child, I moved in almost exclusively secular Jewish circles. Today, the children and the grand-children of that secular milieu who could easily have been excluded from the Union, God forbid, are the (present-day) leaders and rabbis in our movement."

The CCAR Committee on Responsa has already published the opinion that this congregation should not be admitted, and its views should be given due weight. But it was by no means a unanimous decision and in any event, as its Chairman, Rabbi Plaut, himself wrote, this committee's decision does not pre-empt that of the Union which must make the ultimate ruling in this case. I myself have encouraged this congregation to make its application, not because I have in any sense prejudged this controversy, but rather because I deem the debate which it will generate a boon to our community.

This is why I also fully endorse the resolution framed by our Honorary Chairman Matthew Ross, which urges that this sort of discussion be a central focus in our synagogues and regions and national gatherings, and in all of the educational endeavors of the Union. This resolution merely affirms what is already under way, as expressed in the very theme of this Biennial:

"The Reform Jew: Values, Practices, Visions."

We are engaged in a clarification of Reform Jewish boundaries, an exploration of the Reform Jewish tradition, a celebration of Reform Jewish identity. We mean to fashion a movement that is far more than a form of Jewish minimalism, but rather a Judaism that can satisfy the passionate heart.

### **Revisiting Outreach**

Clearly, more and more Jews are coming to view Reform as such, not as an intellectual exercise but as a life transforming faith.

The recent, widely-publicized National Jewish Population Survey substantiates our boast of steady growth. This study found that by far the largest number of Jewish households in America now is identified with the Reform movement of Judaism. Moreover, while only 28% of the religiously identified Jews were raised as Reform, fully 42% currently call themselves Reform. Two out of every five of our congregants, it seems, come from Conservative or Orthodox backgrounds and many, of course, come from the ranks of the unaffiliated or are Jews-by-Choice.

That self-same National Population Survey, however, presents us with some less palatable facts about the alienation of North American Jewry that we are duty-bound



to confront: a dramatic increase in the rate of intermarriage — to 52% A higher rate of conversion out of Judaism, than conversions in, and, alas, only one, a third of the children of interfaith marriages are being reared as Jews.

These statistics require interpretation and analysis, to be sure. Indeed, they have already been challenged by several prominent Jewish sociologists who feel that this study is seriously flawed. Still, even *their* rosier projections should give us reason for pause. Clearly, there has been a substantial attenuation of our faith because of intermarriage.

Does this mean that our Outreach program is flawed in its conception? Obviously not! We are not to be scapegoated for the high rate of intermarriage. Outreach was not designed to reverse the tide of intermarriage. It was designed, rather, to retain the intermarried for Judaism, to gather and keep them within the fold. We should be credited, therefore, with doing our share to staunch the bleeding and to infuse new blood into the Jewish body. Note, if you will, that we are the only stream of Judaism on the American Jewish scene that is swelling in numbers.

We do what we can and more with the limited resources at our command. Our talented and dedicated Outreach staff literally alchemizes pennies into gold. Lydia Kukoff was a master at this. It is amazing to see how many ideas discussed at past Biennials were translated into programming during her ten years at the helm. Be sure to read the fascinating Outreach census which has been included in your kits. It bespeaks the considerable impact this program has had especially on a congregational level. For all of this and more we have Lydia to thank, and we regret that she is no longer with us. But her chair is most ably filled now by Dru Greenwood, who has been a key player for several years, and who brings both critical intelligence and an empathetic soul to her work.

But is not all of this outreach activity counter-productive? When we accept the intermarried with open arms do we not run the risk of "giving license" to intermarriage itself? Undoubtedly so! But everything in life has its price — there is no free ride — and the price of their exclusion would be costlier by far! An exclusionary policy will not produce more *Jewish* marriages. It will only create more Jewishly *alienated* intermarriages, and painful rifts among Jewish families.

There is one respect, however, in which our outreach endeavor does require a revision. We need to intensify our efforts to gain converts, both before and after marriage. *All* studies agree that conversionary marriages are infinitely more stable Jewishly and in every other way. These couples lead more palpably Jewish lives, and their children receive a sounder Jewish rearing. And so we need to move away from the "neutral," non-proselytizing stance that has hitherto informed our outreach effort, and our desire to welcome converts should be made explicit rather than only implicit in our work.

The Outreach Commission has already determined on such a thrust, but it requires a "full court press" to be effective. Everyone must be involved in this effort, if it is to succeed, — rabbis, educators, lay leaders, and above all parents. We must lose no opportunity to persuade our children either to marry Jews or to urge their non-Jewish partners to opt for Judaism.

When our colleague, Charles Sherman of Tulsa Oklahoma, made precisely such an

appeal, in his Kol Nidre sermon no less, not a few of his congregants responded during the following weeks. When asked why they had not converted before, they told him: "Because nobody ever asked us to become Jewish."

Why don't we ask? Why are we so hesitant? Are we ashamed? Must one really be a madman to choose Judaism? Let us shuffle off our insecurities! Let us recapture our self-esteem! Let us demonstrate our confidence in those values which our faith enshrines!

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

I, for one, believe more firmly than ever that Reform Judaism has the capacity to win hundreds of thousands of hearts from among the religiously unaffiliated of North America. I believe more firmly than ever that we hold in our hands the ingredients to satisfy the spiritually hungry who are wandering across this continent. Indeed, included among those who convert to Judaism annually is a sizable number — nearly 80,000, according to the NJP survey — who are not currently married or engaged to Jews. Some among them are divorced, to be sure, but most of them come from among those who were reared in other religions or in none whose thirst for a meaningful faith was quenched by Judaism.

Let us not be daunted, then, or feel undermined by the statistics. Statistics are merely snapshots of where people are at any given moment, not where they will be tomorrow or where they ought to be or where we can move them to be. Let us use these statistics, then, to augment our intuition and to focus our labors.

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

Ultimately, *Outreach means inspiring a firmer embrace of Judaism within us all:* among the intermarried and the converted and the unconverted, yes, but also among born-and-bred Jews, the unaffiliated and the marginally affiliated who enter and leave our Temples as through a revolving door. In this sense, our educational enterprise in its totality is one great conversionary effort, for while the factors that deter the born Jew and the non-Jewish marriage partner from living a full Jewish life may be different for each the gulf is no less wide and perhaps even more yawning for the born-but-alienated Jew.

Let our Outreach Commission and its effective Taskforce on the Unaffiliated lead us in this wider mission, assured that we Reform Jews possess the water which can slake the thirst, the bread which can sate the great hunger for the holy that has seized so many in our generation.



### **Intensifying Education: The Encounter with Text**

But in order to fulfill that wider mission, we need vastly to improve the state of literacy of our constituency. If we are to teach others, we must first learn ourselves. If we are to transmit the heritage our forebears gave to us, we cannot remain merely its passive recipients. We have to earn that heritage for ourselves, absorb it, drink it in with every fibre of our being until it becomes wholly a part of us. Only then will we be able to bequeath our legacy to others.

I am therefore calling for an intensified program of Jewish study most especially for adults, as an absolute priority of our movement. I am not talking about patchwork now, a jumble of lectures and courses and institutes, sporadically attended, but rather a cohesive plan of the most serious study. The curriculum recently prepared by the Commission on Jewish Education and distributed at this Biennial titled "Welcome to the World of Torah," is a good beginning, but only a beginning, toward that end. We must do everything to make certain that adults will, "recover their roles as singers of songs and tellers of tales . . . (that they will) reclaim their generative powers to create memories and to answer questions." (Harold Schulweis)

I have a long range plan in mind here, and I might as well tell you about it now: Ultimately, I would like to see the creation within our movement of a kind of synod, a deliberative council composed of rabbinic scholars as well as highly educated lay people who would help, through their deliberations, to form a consensus about Reform ritual and ideology. The concept is not new to our movement. Isaac M. Wise campaigned for it on numerous occasions. H. G. Enelow, Rabbi of New York's Temple Emanu-El, also championed this idea, pointing out that there was such a Synod "at every notable historic juncture [of the Jewish experience]," the record of which "would make the best synopsis of the development of Judaism . . ."

In fact, Wise's concept of the Synod included legislative authority. No such body would be tolerated in our midst, of course, not then and not now. But rather than merely sighing in relief at our penchant for autonomy, perhaps it is time for us to visualize a movement sufficiently matured, and with a sufficiently educated laity, that might risk a little autonomy in the name of commitment, as we turn this century.

Be that as it may, and to return to the theme of my call for the educational renewal of adults, I believe our camps can be significantly helpful toward that end. They are, after all, the most effective vehicle for the transmission of Judaism at our command, a consistent spawning ground for our leadership. Why should the camping experience be limited to younger children and teen-agers? Why should they not also become a *multi-generational* experience? I speak of a year-round program now, and not just a few days a year.

We should also be making the camping experience available to special needs youngsters. I speak of the forgotten children now, the wheelchair bound, the retarded, the handicapped, the autistic, the deaf, the sightless. Alas, their laughter is not heard in our midst, for we have done too little to enable them to enter. In effect we have excluded them from our community.

The father of one such child told a soul-searing story which was printed in the



networking newsletter for Jewish parents of special needs children published regularly by the Union's Department of Education.

This is what he wrote:

When Miriam was born, the doctors told us that she was blind and mentally retarded. Many smart professionals said that this was a birth defect. But one wise professional said that perhaps it was not a defect, but rather that Miriam had seen the face of God . . .

At services last week a member of the congregation, thinking only about making a good impression on the guest speaker, asked my wife to take Miriam out of the Sanctuary . . . to ensure that no disturbance would occur . . .

When I went outside the sanctuary to make sure they were O.K, I saw my wife weeping as mothers will when strangers tell them yet again, that their child does not fit in. I also saw Miriam sitting there and talking quietly with God. It seems that when Miriam was asked to leave the sanctuary, God chose to go with her . . .

Why should these children be denied a Jewish experience, and why not use our camps to do so? [You will be pleased to learn, that one of our congregational leaders, who for the moment prefers to remain unnamed, has pledged \$2.5 million to fund such an effort].

And so I call on our National Commission on Camps to develop a masterplan for the multiple use of our camps, and to build the facilities required for this purpose.

In this context, I am glad to add my word of welcome to our new affiliate, PARDES, the presence of whose leaders on this dais was already acknowledged by our Chairman. PARDES is an acronym for Progressive Association of Reform Jewish Day Schools, and as its name suggests its membership will consist of the professional and lay leaders of our burgeoning day school movement. There are 13 such schools now operative in our religious community, and many others are in various stages of formation. The purpose of this affiliate is to provide a supportive network for all synagogue leaders who are involved in the operation of these schools.

Hopefully, too, they will foster and facilitate the extension of this educational endeavor. We wish them well . . . their work is essential to our continuity. Part-time Jewish education simply does not suffice for the need. It will not create that cadre of Jewishly informed and motivated young leaders we require to remain a vital vibrant movement within Judaism.

One *more* thought in this context: I want to urge a heightened encounter with Jewish texts in all of our educational endeavors, texts which at present we more often teach about than teach.

Encountering a text can be a religious experience. Even so we read in the Yalkut Shimoni (Shoftim 47)

*Kol ham'chadesb divre torah al pif  
dome kfi sbemashmi-im min hasbomayim*

Whosoever interprets a text in a new way  
it is as if it were revealed to him from heaven.

Reading a text is certainly a transforming experience. We approach the text, and soon the text begins to reach out to us, to envelop us, until we almost become the text.

I would like our Commission on Education to institute a curriculum review beyond the self-study which it is presently conducting, to test the effectiveness of the curriculum which we have been using these past fifteen years, and to explore ways of shoring up its textual content.

Altogether, I am afraid that our movement has taken too literally the rabbinic teaching *lo hamidrash ba-ikar elo ha-maaseh*, that the essential thing is not study but deeds. True enough, study without action is denounced as a vanity, yet deeds, however good, when detached from Torah study are trivialized and denied their Jewish moorings. Without such a mooring, mitzvot become entirely non-obligatory. They can be accepted or rejected at whim.

I know that we Reform Jews are easily deterred by that word "obligatory." But I do not speak of the coercion of religious authority. I speak rather of the coercive power of truth itself: the truth that our patriarch and matriarchs discovered in lonely places and in encounters that forever changed their lives; the truth that generations of commentators, in peril and in safety, in exile and in Jerusalem, debated and expounded and applied to the details of daily life; the truth that only life itself can ultimately teach, and which Judaism posits as a core spiritual perception: that life is a holy unity, a single web of meaning.

As Martin Buber wrote, in a magnificent passage:

"It is the striving for unity that has made the Jew creative. Striving to evolve unity out of the division of 'I,' we conceived the idea of the unitary God. Striving to evolve unity out of the divisions of the human community, we conceived the idea of universal justice. Striving to evolve unity out of the divisions of all human matter, we conceived the idea of universal love. Striving to evolve unity out of the division of the world, we created the messianic ideal."

When this perception of unity leaps off a page of Scripture or rabbinic commentary — when we drink it deeply with our eyes — it goes directly to the heart. There it resonates with all those feelings of wonder and compassion stored since our childhoods, and it gives rise to the irrepressible *mitzvot* commanded by the life force itself. Such should be the impact of our encounter with religious reality.

If you sense an urgency in my message, you are listening well. The Talmud pro-



claims that each day God regrets the creation of this world of ours, and each day a destroying angel is sent forth to revert it all to chaos. But when God sees young children studying the Torah, when God sees would-be-sages studying with their masters, the heavenly rage transforms to compassion, and the world once again is spared. This reprieve is earned not by prayer, mind you, not by deed, but by study, by the encounter with the text. Let us study, therefore, with the same urgency that we bring to other aspects of our Jewish lives.

### Equity for Women Rabbis

The crucial word is "encounter," which implies a give-and-take, an interpretive intelligence brought to the text. In this manner, I took the liberty, just a moment ago, of *misquoting* Buber to you, by way of altering his outdated, non-inclusive language: for every "he" which Buber had, I substituted a "we;" instead of saying "he" the Jew evolved unity out of division, as Buber had it, I said "*we*" evolved that unity, etc. I simply did not want to exclude half of you while speaking earnestly about unity.

Generally speaking, I do not like to alter texts, especially when they are poetry, and Buber's language is scarcely prose. But there *are* times when we have to correct a text to amplify its meaning — even as there are times when we have to correct our practice to reflect our true intentions. I therefore put before you a resolution submitted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis regarding equality for women rabbis. It makes clear that while "our movement is on record consistently to support the advancement of women in the work force and to support women's rights the ideals of our movement have yet to be realized." Glaringly is this so in the realm of compensation paid to women rabbis, which ranges up to 24% less than the median for comparable men, with the degree of discrepancy rising with the size of the Temple. The larger the Temple, the greater the discrepancy in favor of men.

In terms of dollars and cents, this needs no comment. It needs only correctives, for it is a disgraceful situation. Surely there are none among us who believes that the prayers and the counsel and the leadership of women rabbis is but a bargain-basement copy of the original design! Surely, there are none of us who would deny that, far from being an act of *noblesse oblige*, the ordination and empowerment of women within Reform Judaism was a gift to ourselves — an endowment from which the dividends of renewal and rejuvenation have not ceased to flow.

But unconscious prejudice remains operative here — fueled by long traditions both within and outside Judaism, that make of woman an "other" and lesser being. I therefore want not only to endorse wholeheartedly the CCAR resolution. I want to take it a step further, or backwards if you will, to the very cradle itself. I propose that the ceremony of *Brith Chayim*, the covenantal ritual for girls, be observed more diligently in our midst, on the 8th day after birth, in the home, as a rite fully on a par with the *brit mila* and not just as a co-equal naming of the baby in the synagogue, as it is too often now. From the very outset of Jewish life, let there be no lesser valuing of the female than the male; Let there be no devaluation of the creative genius of God, who made us *all* in Her image.

## **Commission on the Elderly**

There is another example of devaluation that I want to bring to your attention. It involves the plight of some of our retired rabbis, and especially of many widows of retired rabbis. Judaism teaches us that when a parent gives to a child, both of them smile; but when a child must give to a parent, both of them weep.

If this be so we should be weeping, for a recent CCAR survey reveals that too many of our older retirees, and too many of their widows, suffer serious financial difficulties, especially in the face of medical needs. Their situation is desperate. Many subsist below the poverty line. These older retirees began their years of service long before the present Rabbinical Pension Program was fully established. Virtually none of them have incomes from sources other than social security and their pensions; and because inflation erodes these up to 50% within a decade, their retirement benefits do not nearly match those of the present generation of rabbis — though the devotion and sacrifice of our older retirees were no less.

Chiefly, this matter must be addressed by the CCAR. Yet we, as the congregational body of Reform Judaism bear some responsibility too. The Boards of their erstwhile temples should find out precisely what their financial situation is, and we as a national family of congregations should help sensitize our synagogue leadership to their plight.

This situation leads me to suggest that our Reform movement advance toward the creation of a National Commission on the Elderly. There are now more than one-quarter of a million Jews over 65 years of age in our congregational family, nearly one hundred thousand of them 75 years of age or over, and their number is rapidly growing. Their needs require far more concentrated attention.

Sandy Seltzer has done pioneering work in this sphere, and much material of worth to our congregations and their members has been developed by various committees and task forces. Rabbi Richard Address and his largely unfunded Bioethics and Caring Community Committees merit special praise, for they have greatly extended the reach of Reform Judaism into the private places of pain and travail where too many elderly congregants and their families now languish alone. It is high time now to coalesce these fragmented efforts and to provide a more extensive and comprehensive program.

There is so much more that could be done and that is required:

- the development of meaningful educational materials which will raise our congregants' awareness and sensitivity regarding aging concerns.
- the design and testing of innovative congregational programs for the elderly, supported by a national data bank and a national network of lay volunteers who are experienced in this sphere . . .
- the extension, nationally, of the imaginative Legacies Program, an oral-history project for the elderly, which was conceived and pioneered by our distinguished lay leader Maury Leibovitz, who also serves as Chairman of our Taskforce on Substance Abuse.



- the training of Ombudspersons for each of our regions whose job it would be to have resources and information on health care and social support at the ready . . .
- the creation of special liturgy for use by the elderly and their families during those concluding passages of life.
- the acquisition of lightweight, large-type prayerbooks for our congregations, hearing devices for use in sanctuaries and other innovations that will facilitate the participation of the broadest possible range of Jews.

These and a host of other ideas could be pursued and realized by the projected Commission on the Elderly.

God willing, my friends, we shall all someday face what Abraham faces in *Chaye Sarah*, and what King David faces in our *baftarab*: the condition of being "advanced in years," when our own steps will slow and our bodies will fail our spirit.

Let us therefore "rise before the aged and show deference to the old;" let us provide for our elderly kin and for our *own* futures, so that as we become advanced in years, we need not also become advanced in tears and fears.

### **An Endowment for Reform Judaism**

There may be some here who must be questioning now the good sense of my call for the enlargement of our endeavors, "How can you expect us to do so in these recessionary times?" "Haven't you heard about budgetary crunches, and the S & L crisis, and the imperilled future of American productivity?" Anxieties in the financial realm do abound and our concerns are fully justified. While we are striving at present — our movement is growing at a remarkable pace, as we have noted and has not run a deficit in over 18 years — the vicissitudes of Jewish history warn against complacency. To build a secure future: this is the practicum of our vocation, the applied lesson of our past.

This is why I wholeheartedly endorse the new Endowment Fund drive which is being launched at this Biennial, and which envisages a partnership between the Union and its congregations in the effort to secure our future.

Allan Goldman was absolutely right when, in his splendid Chairman's report, he observed that if this endeavor were successful and enlarged beyond its present goals it could eventually and substantially reduce the contributions which Temples now make to the Union and the College-Institute. It would certainly help us fund present as well as newer, much-needed programs.

As just one case in point, I would like to establish a fund which will enable us to subsidize the rabbinic salaries of our smaller congregations, whose size and location has made it difficult if not impossible for them to obtain the services of rabbis and cantors and teachers.

Again, this plan is envisioned as a partnership between the Union and its Congregations. Thanks to the unstinting labors of Mel Merians, who helps us in countless ways, and with a strong assist from Larry Rothenberg, we have already established

instrumentalities — such as the pooled income fund — which will enable individual Temples to secure their financial future. In this endeavor, no demands will be made on the already overburdened budget of our congregations. Together we will turn to individual Reform Jews for help, Jews who presently provide an extraordinarily generous stream of funds to Israel and to communal agencies, as they properly should; the saving of life must be our first concern. But they assign little or no priority to the needs of the synagogue.

Yet who is responsible for teaching our children to be Jews? The synagogue — our financially pressed, over-burdened, short-staffed synagogues! Who will assure that there will be a Jewishly educated, Jewishly committed generation twenty years from now? Who will provide the teachers and the rabbis and the scholars for that generation? Who will assure those many other communal and national Jewish organizations a reservoir of Jews on which they will be able to draw for their membership a score years hence? Who will provide the State of Israel with a continuing corps of understanding and supportive Jews? The answer in every case, of course, is the synagogue. It has to be the synagogue — the synagogue and those camps and seminaries and multitudinous educational efforts that they sustain.

The synagogue is where Jews are made, where the individual soul and the community are joined. It is the place where modernity and eternity cross-fertilize, where the seeds of the Jewish identity are sown. All other institutions in Jewish life are created *by* Jews. Only the synagogue creates Jews — child by child, family by family, minyan by minyan,

American Jews are incredibly shortsighted here. We act without foresight, without the slightest thought for the future. We are like lumberman who fell the whole forest but neglect to plant new seedlings. And so I beg this constituency, this throng of Jewish leaders, to think ahead for just a few years, and thus to bring some sanity to our giving. We must do everything possible to ensure the permanence and central status of the Reform synagogue in Jewish life, so that we can continue to be the guarantor of Jewish well-being and the inspiring force of Jewish spirituality into the 21st Century.

### **Israel and America: The Dawning of Peace?**

Let me follow the pattern set by Abraham in our *parasha*, who first secures the dignity of his soul-mate Sarah and then proceeds to secure the future, — our future as a people — by arranging a marriage for Isaac, father of Jacob, surnamed Israel. Much of what I have said so far pertains to the internal securing and enlargement of our movement — but we need to look as well at the drama of the whole of the people of Israel.

Twenty-four years ago in Madrid, a joint ecumenical prayer-service was conducted by Jews and Catholics, the first open religious gathering involving Jews since the dread year 1492. It was an historic milestone, precipitated by Vatican II. After all, Christian anti-Semitism oftentimes centered in Spain. The inquisition pressed most heavily upon us, there. And so this simple utterance of prayer in Madrid, had immeasurable significance to the soul of the Jew. Coming as it did on the heels of the Six-Day War, this



worship service seemed to be a spiritual watershed, a harbinger of Jewish deliverance from the maw of history.

This week-end, in the same Spanish capital of Madrid, another encounter of immeasurable significance is under way: the convening of peace negotiations between Israel and her foes. It is only the beginning of a long and arduous process, that we know. The negotiations with the Palestinians will prove especially thorny, after these many years of bloodshed, hatred and unrelieved, harrowing tension. Many obstacles, real and psychological, need to be surmounted. Spoilers of the peace lurk everywhere about.

Still, on this Sabbath morning, our hearts are filled with hope, and fervent supplications surge from our soul.

We pray for peace, for an end to the 43-year war that has frayed Jewish nerves, lost thousands of young Jewish lives, and tested the moral fibre of our people.

We pray for a "new heart and a new spirit" in the Middle East, a recast mindset and a reconstructed reality that might enable Israel to uncurl from her defensive posture and to apply her amazing resources to the task of human development that the past year of immigrant absorption has vastly enlarged.

We have in our hearts a vision of an Israel flowering in such a hospitable world.

And we have too in our hearts a vision of an Arab civilization that might some day be known in the world not for terrorism and autocratic repression, but rather — as it once was — for its poetry and science and art, of a day when Isaac and Ishmael might again meet as brothers, at the mouth of their father's burial cave in Hebron, where the Cave of Machpela is thought to be, and share a glad greeting of Shalom/Salaam with neither suspicion nor fear in their voices.

We applaud Secretary of State Baker's dogged determination in the pursuit of peace. The success of this quest serves to ease the hurt inflicted on us during the recent loan guarantee controversy. President Bush should not have treated the opposition to his policies as a personal affront — it ill befits his role as the defender of the constitution. But all this will be completely forgiven and forgotten, if America truly plays the role of honest broker in those arduous negotiations that lie ahead.

For the sake of that peace, also, do I implore our government to make a serious effort to curb arms sales to the Middle East, and in a manner consistent with the security of Israel.

During the Gulf crisis, there was considerable talk about reducing the flow of sophisticated weaponry to the region. But as soon as the dust settled, the Administration's course was quickly adjusted, and a plethora of such sales was announced. During the past half year alone, since the end of Operation Desert Storm, our government has made deals for more than 15 billion dollars of lethal weaponry including cluster bombs and missiles and fighter planes, arming to the teeth lightly populated desert kingdoms and emirates along with their newfound and scarcely proven protectors. Only heaven knows what Syria was promised to induce it to come to Madrid.

These sales will doubtlessly spur Israel to increase the quantity and quality of its own arsenal, and rightly so. For if the anti-Israel feelings of moderate Gulf states were "so important to those states that they could not profit from Israeli military strength

during the Gulf War, then their weapons must be counted as a danger to Israel."

(Kirkpatrick)

What a cynical exercise all this . . . what mockery to sow the seeds of future militarism even while peace efforts are under way. Good God, did we learn nothing at all from Iraq's treacherous invasion of Kuwait, which was enabled by the uncontrolled greed and the unrestricted reach of the arms merchants? No less than 450 Western companies were involved in providing Iraq with the goods and technology required for developing its nuclear capacity.

Yes, who sold Saddam all those arms and their supporting technology? None other than the five permanent members of the Security Council who are charged with the keeping of the peace but who, at the same time, are the most enterprising purveyors of arms in all the world. It is a puzzlement . . . and a disgrace . . . it is the betrayal of a sacred trust.

Let us therefore call on our government to rein in the machinery of war, and to persuade the five major arms supplying nations to do so too so that the tables of Madrid will not be standing astride a minefield which can detonate with the slightest misstep and blow our slender hopes for peace sky high.

### **Energy, The Environment, and Ethics**

Let me, by way of conclusion, briefly touch on four matters which really enter Al Vorspan's domain, and we eagerly await his Social Action keynote scheduled for tomorrow morning.

First of all, I learned to my dismay that the Union's multitudinous resolutions, seeking redress for every conceivable social ill, nonetheless omit reference to the trespass of sexual harassment.

This is a serious omission for a movement which boasts that it is committed to the full equality of women in the religious life and in society. We must speak out about this problem, admit its wide scope, raise consciousness among men who do not even recognize the elementary realities of sexual harassment, and lower the boom on those who continue this abuse of their power. We must reach out to the victims, mitigate their isolation and their unwarranted shame. And we must guard our own behavior so that nothing that we do or say, even unwittingly, will violate our fidelity to the ideal of women's equality.

Second, I wish to urge a resolution calling on the President to seek David Duke's expulsion from his party, and to deny him the Republican line in the election. A man of Nazi and Klan background has no place in the party of Abraham Lincoln, no matter where Duke now goes for his tailoring. There is precedent for such an expulsion, at least on a state level. Without it, the racism and anti-Semitism of this would-be governor will function as a toxic pollutant in the ground-water of the Republican Party. Faint damnation is not enough — the Republicans need to disinvest entirely in Duke's political fortunes.

Third, I would like to see our Resolution on National Energy strengthened with a reiteration of our position on nuclear power, whose proponents are attempting to



stage a comeback in the face of the Gulf War. The spur to nuclear proliferation that nuclear power provides makes it a kind of golem run amok. Human or technological error in a nuclear plant can produce cataclysmic disasters. The environmental hazards posed by certain radioactive wastes extend to eternity. To entertain such a technology as viable, whether for economic or political reasons is an arrogant blunder.

Lastly, I wish to endorse the Resolution on the Environment. Al Vospan asked me to do so, since he will not be able to touch on this theme in his keynote.

Consider how we live in relation to the world, to this planet earth, how we take God's handiwork and despoil it: the sweet air God gave us to breathe and the fresh water with which God blessed us, the fertile green that 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."

No, it isn't carelessness or callousness which makes us do all this! It is greed, that corrosive materialism of our time which we must counter!

The depletion of the rainforests and the daily extinction of still another species is not a function of the "human condition." It is the work of a specific peasant forced to slash and burn for want of his own land. It is the work of a specific cattle rancher selling meat to the chains, those "fast food" spots that burgeon when a culture becomes too insanely pressured to take pause for a blessing before the meal.

The Exxon Valdez disaster in Alaska, or the radioactive disaster zone in Hanford, Washington, or the proliferation of every form of cancer in our society, are not the "price of progress." They are the price of profit, the price of corporate thinking about human values, the price of a materialism so corrosive that it can rupture an oil tanker's hull or a nuclear reactor's containment vessel.

And now the Exxon company is following up this disaster, by intensifying its opposition to laws requiring double-hulled tankers. And the Bush administration is seeking a redefinition of the term "wetlands" to permit more exploitation of these nurseries of life. What a mockery this . . . what cynicism . . . what hypocrisy . . .

"One generation goes," we read in the Book of Ecclesiastes, "and another generation comes . . . but the earth remains forever." That is the Scriptural injunction most imperilled by our times, and hence most needful of protection.

Yet it is difficult, I know, to feel anything but helpless about our world's environmental crisis, so large and multilayered are the problems that we face. It is so easy to turn off all the dire projections, to apply more suntan lotion and hope for the best.

The Commission on Social Action has tried to counter this sense of alienation, by emphasizing in its resolution the *individual* deed, the need for each of us to pursue an environmentally sound behavior, "from office, to sanctuary, to classroom." With the doing comes the believing; with the doing comes the end of despair and cynicism. This the Jewish process of empowerment.

Similarly, the Resolution on Economic Justice in the Jewish Community submitted by the Union's prolific Ethics Committee proceeds from the individual congregation to the society at large. This is good and proper, for we have seen in the junk-bond scandals and the SEC jailings how the acts of individuals — including an embarrassingly disproportionate number of Jews — can throw a whole system out of whack, creat-

ing an evil such as the Savings and Loan scandal that seems anonymous in source while delivering economic devastation to hundreds and thousands of families.

But so can the deeds of individuals effect a healing. Tradition assures us that the whole world was created for our benefit. Assuredly, its fate is in our own hands.

### **We are Each Abraham or Sarah . . .**

So I leave you charged as caretakers of both our movement and the world — this world which is spinning like a dreidel between a new age and an old chaos, this world in which historical change seems to be outpacing our very heartbeats . . . I leave you pledged, like Abraham's faithful servant Eliezer, to devote yourself to the resonant blessing that God bestowed upon us, the promise of "an everlasting covenant throughout the ages . . ."

Of course, I can ask no oath from you, as did Abraham of Eliezer. The days of coercive rabbinic authority are long since past, and we do not mourn them. But I have clasped your hands this weekend. I have heard the passion in your voices, seen the elevation of spirit that our coming together has evoked — and in so doing, I have gained full confidence about the successful continuation of Reform Judaism's redemptive mission in our needful world.

Each of you is as worthy of the Covenant as were Abraham or Sarah. Each of you embodies their pain, their human frailties, but also their strength of spiritual receptivity. Each of you is an Al Vorspan, or an Ellie Schwartz, or a Richard Sternberger or a Bernie Zlotowitz . . .

You cannot withhold your gifts from the world! You cannot withdraw from the prophetic path! Your strength shall not be overwhelmed by the weight of your responsibility!

For you are one of the people who, even in Auschwitz, were able to sing: *Ani Ma-amin*, I believe in redemption. You are one of the people who sang:

*"Zog nit kainmol as du geist dem letzten veig,  
Ven himlen blayene varshetln bloie teig . . .  
Never ever say you walk the final way."*

Aye, even there — in the innermost circle of hell — we took the curse that Hitler made of Jewishness and rendered it a blessing. Even there we celebrated the Jewish holidays, including the most festive among them.

Elie Wiesel describes an event which took place in an extermination camp, one year on Simchat Torah, the festival of the giving of the Law, when Jews are enjoined to rejoice by dancing in their synagogues, Torah scrolls held in embrace.

On this day and in such a place, inside the "kingdom of the night" several hundred Jews gathered in one of the barracks to celebrate Simchat Torah. "In the shadow of shadows? Yes — even there. On the threshold of the death chambers? Yes— even there." But there was no Sefer Torah in the camp, so how could they arrange the traditional procession, the customary dancing, with the sacred scrolls?



As they were trying to solve their problem, an old man noticed a young boy, standing against the wall, "looking on and dreaming." The old man turned to him and asked: "Do you remember what you learned in *cheder*, in your religious school?" "Yes," replied the boy, "I do." "Really" said the man, "and do you remember the *Sh'ma Yisrael*?" "Of course, I remember the *sh'ma*," answered the young man, and I remember much more.

"The *Sh'ma* is enough" shouted the man . . . And with that he lifted the boy, and embraced him in his arms, and began dancing with him as if he, the boy, were the Torah. "And all joined in. They all danced and sang and cried. They wept, but they sang with fervor. Never before had Jews celebrated Simchat Torah with such a fervor."

Even in such a place did our people sing and celebrate. They did not allow their enemies to sunder the covenant! Even in such a time, when hope meant a crust of bread and God was hidden by the smoke of the crematoria, they danced and made a living scroll of their bodies.

Shall we who withstood such a hellish world now be daunted by the challenges of peace and possibility? Shall we, who declared God's unity at the threshold of the gas chambers, now lower our voices?

We shall not do so! Never! Instead we shall aspire to our biblical destiny as a "nation of priests" whose lives comprise a holy text . . . not bound by lock and key, but open to any who would read it, not of dogma, but of a living, breathing, applied faith, not of an indecipherable mystery, but of a lucid and shining truth.

This, indeed, is the text of Reform Judaism, which can be enlarged and deepened by every individual in every congregation throughout this continent.

Aye, let us each dance with the Torah scroll — embracing our loved ones as the Torah, and the Torah as our loved one.

Then shall we be known to the generations not only for reforming Judaism but for using our Judaism to re-form meaning, to re-form creation, to re-form faith and hope on this breathless, uncertain, and most precious planet.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
61st UAHC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. I call on this Assembly to thank our Chairman, Allan B. Goldman, for the manner in which he has led us these past four years. He has been "exemplary in the conduct of his office." He leaves his position "with our blessings and our highest esteem."

2. I call on this Assembly and its delegates to express our collective gratitude to all those who brought this convention to be:

a) To our host congregations of Baltimore for their most gracious hospitality. This is a proud Jewish community which has provided American Jewry and Reform Judaism with an extraordinary leadership.

b) To Mark C. Levy, Chairman, and to all the members of our Biennial Program Committee for that rich fare with which they feasted us. They responded fully to the felt needs of our constituency.

c) To Bo O'Mansky and Chiae Herzig who chaired the Local Arrangements Committee and who did everything in their power to make us feel at home and to have this convention run smoothly. We are grateful, also, to our area director, Richard Sternberger, who assisted them in this work.

d) To Arthur Grant, the Union's Director of Program and Regions, who single-handedly coordinated the multitudinous details of this convention. He is an efficient administrator and a warm and wonderful Jew.

3. We salute Eleanor Schwartz on the occasion of her retirement as Executive Director of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. "Her contributions toward our advancement are in evidence everywhere" in our religious community. During her eight years as the Associate Director of NFTY, she "fashioned and designed those programmatic pillars . . . which sustain its progress still." Her thirty two years of service to NFTS were marked with equal excellence. We wish her well in her retirement.

4. We congratulate NFTB and JCS on the 50th Anniversary of their merger. JCS is a "remarkable educational vehicle . . . the most extensive Jewish educational program of its kind in North America, if not the world."

5. We congratulate NATA on its 50th Anniversary. The founders of this affiliate "created a new profession in Jewish life, that of the Temple Administrator." They provide "magnificent direction" to our collective mission."

6. We salute Albert Vorspan on the occasion of his retirement from the Senior Vice Presidency of the Union. He will never really leave us, for "his voice has so thoroughly permeated the consciousness of the Reform movement, that it has become an intrinsic element of our being . . . when we speak in the voice of conscience, we speak in the



voice of Albert Vorspan." Let us strive to preserve his legacy by nurturing our prophetic vision.

7. I fully endorse the resolution framed by our Honorary Chairman Matthew Ross which urges us to stimulate discussions concerning the future direction of Reform Judaism in our synagogues and regions and national gatherings . . . and in all the educational endeavors of the Union."

8. I call on our congregations to intensify our efforts to gain converts both before and after intermarriages. All studies agree that conversionary marriages are infinitely more stable Jewishly, and that their children receive a sounder Jewish rearing. Let us therefore "move away" from the "non-proselytizing stance that has hitherto informed our Outreach effort." Everyone must be involved in this undertaking — "rabbis, educators, lay leaders, and especially parents." We must lose no opportunity to persuade our children to marry Jews or to urge their non-Jewish partners to opt for Judaism.

9. I ask for the formation of a taskforce which will explore the desirability of creating within our movement a deliberative council of rabbinic scholars as well as highly educated lay people "who would help, through their deliberations, to form a consensus about Reform ritual and ideology." I do not envisage according such a body legislative authority. Nonetheless it may be time for us to "visualize a movement sufficiently matured, and with a sufficiently educated laity, that might risk a little autonomy in the name of commitment."

10. I am calling for an intensified program of adult Jewish study as an "absolute priority of our movement." Our camps, already the most effective vehicles for Judaism at our command, should become a "multi-generational experience."

11. I ask that our camps make a determined effort to make the camping experience available to special needs youngsters. "I speak now of the forgotten children: the wheelchair bound, the retarded, the handicapped, the autistic, the deaf, the sightless." I therefore call on our National Commission on Camps to develop a masterplan for the multiple use of our camps, and to build the facilities required for this purpose.

12. We welcome our new affiliate, PARDES, the Progressive Association of Reform Jewish Day Schools, composed of the professional and lay leaders of "our burgeoning day school movement." We wish them well. Their work is essential to our continuity.

13. I urge a "heightened encounter with Jewish texts" in all of our educational endeavors. I call on the Commission of Education to institute a curriculum review "beyond the self-study which it is presently conducting," to test the effectiveness of our curriculum and "to explore ways of shoring up its textual content."

14. I endorse "wholeheartedly" the CCAR Resolution on Equality for Women Rabbis. The "glaring discrepancy" between the compensation paid to women and the salaries paid to men "requires a corrective."

I urge that the ceremony of *brit cbayim*, the covenantal ritual for girls, be observed

more diligently in our midst. I propose this as an amendment to the Conference Resolution. "From the very outset of Jewish life, let there be no lesser valuing of the female than the male."

15. I ask our member congregations to be more sensitive to the financial plight of our older retirees in the rabbinate many of whom, and their widows, are suffering severe financial difficulties. These older retirees "began their years of service long before the present Rabbinical Pension Program was fully established" and in consequence their retirement benefits do not nearly match those of the present generation of rabbis.

16. I call for the creation of a Commission on the Elderly. There are no less than one-quarter of a million men and women over 65 years old in our congregational family. And while the various committees and commissions of the Union and Conference have produced materials of great worth in this realm, "it is high time now to coalesce these fragmented efforts and to provide a more extensive and comprehensive program."

17. I endorse the new Endowment Fund drive which is being launched at this Biennial. This drive envisages a partnership between the Union and its congregations in the effort to secure our future. "We must do everything possible to ensure the central status of the Reform synagogue in Jewish life." I urge the establishment of a fund which will enable us to subsidize the rabbinic salaries of our smaller congregations, whose size and location has made it difficult if not impossible for them to obtain the services of rabbis and cantors and teachers.

18. I fully endorse the Israel Resolution which has been placed before our delegates. As the representatives of Israel and her Arab neighbors convene in Madrid, we "pray for an end to the 43-year war, that has frayed Jewish nerves, lost thousands of young Jewish lives, and tested the moral fibre of our people."

I urge, also, that we call on our government to put to an end the devastating arms race in the Middle East. "Let us rein in the machinery of war . . . lest our hopes for peace blow sky high."

19. I ask that the Resolution on Violence against Women, already before this Assembly, be amended to make reference to the trespass of sexual harassment. "We must speak out about this problem . . . admit its wide scope . . . reach out to the victims . . . and, above all, guard our own behavior, so that nothing that we do or say will even unwittingly violate our fidelity to the ideal of women's equality."

20. I urge a resolution calling on the Republican Party and its National Chairman, to expel David Duke from the Republican party and to deny him the Republican line in the forthcoming elections. "A man of Nazi and Klan background has no place in the party of Abraham Lincoln."

21. I ask that our Resolution on National Energy be strengthened with a reiteration of our position on nuclear power. "The environmental hazards posed by certain radioactive wastes extends to eternity."



[kevakorat ro-eh edro]

Yom Kippur Sermon  
Union Temple, Brooklyn  
5752 - 1991

Once again, by the grace of God, we have reached this holiest day  
of the Jewish calendar year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.  
Again we stand before the throne of God and lift our voices in prayer.  
We call on God as the master of our destinies.  
May he judge us with mercy and seal us and our loved ones  
in the Book of Life for blessing.

We are assembled in the courtyards of the Almighty heeding a mandate  
as exalting and as enduring as the everlasting hills.

It is a mandate from on high: hikkon likras elohecho, Yisrael  
Prepare to meet your God O Israel.

It is a mandate from out of the past, a voice from yesteryear:  
The voice of seer and of sage...The voice of hero and of martyr.

We stand here also in answer to a summons from within:  
Our souls seek solace and sustenance.  
We long for inner harmony...We yearn for inner peace.  
Weary of seeking without finding,

weary of journeying without arriving  
we turn from our daily toil to the rest and quiet of the House of God  
Here the noise of the market place is hushed.  
Here the clamor of commerce is silenced.

and in the quiet of worshipful devotion we can hear and  
heed the divine command:

Be still and know that I am God.

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are called the Days of Awe,  
and awesome is the mood which fills us as we contemplate our lives  
as we relive our past, and strive to pierce the veil of our future.  
Somber though our sentiments may be,

the fundamental force impelling our worship is really one of hope,  
for the Yameem Noraeem speak to us primarily of t'shuva  
of our redemptive capacity,  
of the power that inheres within us to turn from evil to good.

During these holy days we are reminded of our failings not to debase us,  
not to cast us into gloom,  
but to inspire us to higher and to nobler striving.

We are enjoined to confess our sins,  
not to enfeeble our sense of self-worth,  
but rather to fortify our faith that out of feebleness  
new strength can come  
that we can, if we will,  
turn every tear of disappointment into a pearl of virtue  
every defeat of yesterday,  
into the laughter and triumph of tomorrow.

Judaism maintains an abiding faith in human nature,  
the passionate conviction that we can choose the good.

Ours is not a Panglossian creed which sees only good  
and closes its eyes to all evil...Quite the contrary!

Yom Kippurs al cheyt is long and detailed.

No sin conceivable is left unspoken from its self-accusing lines.

But Judaism refuses to see us as sinners who must  
by our very nature sin.



It bids us rather nourish the seed of self-improvement.

Im Chato-eychem Kashoneem Kasheleg Yalbinu

Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be whiter than snow

Every sinner can be a saint, every Jacob can become an Israel

if he only wrestle with his God.

This is the beautiful promise of our faith and this its mandate:

that we find and fire the divine sparks within us...

those sparks of God that lift us from dust to spirit

and mark us human.

Can we heed this mandate?

Can we share this vision?

Is not faith in human nature an empty dream, a vain illusion?

How can we talk of human goodness,

we who live in this age of wanton and wasting destruction,

in this savage century when anarchy was loosed upon the world

and the slaughter of innocents continues without surcease?

And how can we Jews talk of human goodness,

we who have been wounded more grievously than any other people

by the naked blade of man's brutality to man?

Just where shall we look for the good?

Shall we look for it in others?

But there is not one among us who has not been hurt by another,

whose heart has not been lacerated by someone near: through slander

humiliation, the deprivation of some deep possession

a promise broken, a trust betrayed, even by friend and by mate.

Shall we perhaps look for the good within ourselves?

But we know that we too are capable of evil

oftimes in our thoughts, but sometimes, alas, even in our deed,  
when we stand guilty of unpardonable wrong.

And yet we continue to affirm our faith in human nature.

It is far too secure to be shaken by the grim reality of human evil.

Evil, after all, is only one aspect of that reality.

It is only one chapter of the human story.

There is goodness there also, and in abundant measure.

Where can this goodness be found?

Paradoxically, we can find it first in our propensity to rationalize  
our sins.

When we choose evil we feel a compulsion to pretend the opposite.

We feel the need to excuse ourselves and make the wrong seem right.

I suppose there are few evil-doers in all the world

be they mobsters, or corrupt politicians, or even tyrants  
who do not justify themselves as somehow virtuous.

They will always point to some things that they think would  
vindicate them,

or to other things they count as meritorious.

So powerful is the pull of goodness within humankind

that even those who resist it nevertheless pay tribute to it  
-- if only in hypocrisy and self-deception.



We can find the traces of human goodness also in our aspirations,  
in our dreams  
We are what we seek, and what we seek is the image of our spirit.  
And what we seek is good, no matter what our attainments.  
Whenever we rehearse the deeds of the past year, as we do even today,  
a sense of real dismay seizes us  
and this very dissatisfaction is a true measure of our idealism.  
We are never satisfied with the lives we are living,  
with the thoughts we are thinking,  
with the deeds we are doing.  
There is forever beating at the doorway of our soul a desire  
for a life of added beauty, of greater meaning.  
We reach high...the spirit within us seeks the heights.  
Our dreams are noble -- no matter what our achievement --  
and their nobility mirrors and essential worth within us.  
And this above all, we can discover evidence of human goodness  
not just in people's dreams but also in their deeds.  
They may stoop to meanness, but they can also show great love.  
They may be quick to anger,  
but they are often infinitely patient and gentle.  
They are humble as well as vain,  
forgiving as well as vengeful.  
And often they not only restrain their self-centeredness;  
they sacrifice all that they have and all that they desire  
for someone they love or for some cause they embrace.



Our hearts can well surge with pride, when we think of the heroic deeds of loving kindness to which we are frequently witness. Take Jack Epstein here, wonderful, caring Jack, who was the most successful membership chairman that Union Temple ever had. Four years ago his lovely wife Irene suffered a devastating illness that robbed her of her mind and eventually she had to be hospitalized, but then the hospital soon told him that they could no longer give her the kind of attention she required...and so he took her home. He is ready to spend every penny he has in order to provide her with 24 hour-a-day care.

He himself is with her virtually all the time, hugging her, kissing her. He brings her her favorite stuffed animals and dolls, to whom she talks. He takes her to the clinic for treatments, or a ride through the park or a picnic on the beach...The doctors tell him that the love and attention he showers on Irene will keep her alive for many more years...He is happy about that...He remembers his wedding hour when he promised that they will drink from one cup of life, whether it runs bitter or sweet...He doesn't forget that...he'll never forget it..."It's a pledge I made then," he writes, "and I'll keep it as long as I live."

Few of us are tested as is Jack...but I have little doubt that many of us would show a like resolve when challenged as was he. Of course we all have gone astray, we all have sinned, we all have transgressed. There is not one among us who has not yielded to the evil impulse. But neither is there one among us who has not shown some good, who has not had his God-like moments.



If there is a note of sadness in our cheshban hanefesh,  
in the self-reckoning of our soul,  
it is not that we abound in evil and lack in good,  
But rather it is this: that all too often we fail to respond  
to the good that is within us, that knowing it, sensing it,  
feeling it, we fail to heed its call.

We suppress the voice of kindness within us, We restrain our impulse  
for good...

We speak less honestly than we think...We act less nobly than we feel.

That cause we nearly made our own,  
but we could have been defeated,  
we could have been ridiculed,  
we could have been made to suffer

-- and so we did not make that cause our own.

The word of truth we almost spoke, but ultimately didn't,  
for truth has its price and we were loath to pay it.

Justice too was calling us, and the clean winds of righteousness were  
blowing through our lives;

we were about gave up that bias, that rancor, that aversion  
but eventually we didn't.

We were tempted to be good, but in the end resisted the temptation.

Embattled self-centeredness, we nearly conquered it,

-- Oh, how close we came to victory.

But reaching out to others, loving others poses risks,  
which we were reluctant to incur

-- and so another God-like moment slipped by.

These are the remembrance which bring us to remorse.

But with these remembrances comes the consoling message of this  
holy season:

'If you truly will it, it can be otherwise...'

"Why should a man while living worry over his sins,  
over which he is the controlling master,"

Scripture reminds us.

Mend your errors and they will become warnings,  
incentives to higher and to nobler striving.

Cast your sins into the depths of the sea  
and strive to do better in the year ahead.

Turn the defeats of yesteryear into the victories of tomorrow,  
and out of feebleness new strength will come.

Aye, the redemptive capacity of man is limitless...

This truth is demonstrated over and again in life.

But the most dramatic and moving instance I know is provided  
by a parable drawn from recent history...

It is a true tale,

the tale of Walther Rathenau and his assassin.

Perhaps you know the story.

Surely many of you know of Rathenau.

He was the Adenauer of post WWI Germany,

the foreign minister of the Weimar Republic who negotiated  
the Rapallo treaty that set his country's reparations  
and restored its sovereignty.



Walter Rathenau was a Jew.

Indeed, not long ago I read some autobiographical notes  
by Albert Einstein who knew Rathenau rather well

and remembers him saying:

"When a Jew says that he goes hunting and enjoys it,  
he's a liar:"

Rathenau was the progeny of a non-observant Berlin Jewish family  
Still, he was conscious of his Jewishness and wore its badge with pride.

This enraged the militarists and ultra-nationalists of Germany.

They didn't like the Jew, and they certainly didn't like the peace  
he negotiated.

They wanted a Germany re-armed,  
a Germany prepared to conquer once again.

Those were the days of the Munich Putsch and brawls in the streets  
of Hamburg.

And in Berlin, a group of Nazis determined to dramatize their cause,  
by plotting the death of the peace-maker.

Rathenau was assassinated...the assassin was apprehended.

And on the day following his funeral,

Rathenau's aged and sorrow-stricken mother penned the following  
letter to the mother of the assassin...

"In grief unspeakable, I give my hand to you of all women  
most to be pitied..." [mind you, this is the victim's mother  
addressing the killer's mother as the woman most to be pitied]  
"I give my hand to you of all women most to be pitied, and in  
the name and spirit of him whom he has murdered, I forgive,  
even as God may forgive. Had he known my son, he would not  
have turned the weapon on him...May these words bring peace  
to your soul."

(signed) Marthilda Rathenau



Mrs. Rathenau fought against the assassins wexecution  
and thanks largely to her intervention, his life was spared.  
Now leave this part of the story for the moment, and take a leap  
in your mind of time and space, some 25 years later and  
to the West, where Hitler's minions had over-run Holland  
and Belgium and half of France.

Understandably, the Jews of unoccupied France were very apprehensive.  
The ultimate and complete fall of France was a forgone conclusion.  
And even then, the collaborator, Marshall Petain,  
was flirting with his version of the Nuremberg Laws.

In order to avoid their dreaded fate, three young Jewish friends  
decided to escape to Africa by joining the Foreign Legion.  
They did not relish the prospect.

They knew of the hardships that they would be made to suffer.

They knew that most of the Legionnaires were criminals, outlaws,  
the outcasts of civilization.

They had even heard reports of virulant anti-semitism in their ranks.  
But caught between Scylla and Carybdes, between the devil and the  
deep-blue sea, they determined on the Legion  
as the lesser of two evils.

When they arrived at the outpost in Algiers, they stood in line  
with the other enlistees, and an orderly took attendance.

Behind him stood the camp comandant, a tough looking veteran,  
with a wide scar marring his weather-beaten face.

When the roll call was completed, the commandant singled them out,  
obviously for their Jewish names -- Goldberg, Goldman, Levy --  
and ordered them to report to his quarters.



Fearing the worst, they came to him,

but to their amazement, this is what he said:

"Gentlemen, you are my guests...all you need do is to keep some order around here...as for the remainder of your time, you can read my books, listen to my music and eat at my table."

And thus they spent the years, in his home and company.

They found the commandant to be a genteel and cultured man who, surprisingly, knew a great deal about the Jewish people and manifested a profound interest in Judaism.

As soon as the war was over, even though their period of enlistment had not yet terminated, he gave them their release and enjoined them to return to their homes.

Only then, as they bade him farewell, did they ask him that question that had been burning within them these many years:

Why us? Why this kindness? why this consideration?

Why this compassion?

And the commandant explained:

"I am the man who killed Walther Rathenau, and my life was changed by the letter which the slain man's mother wrote to mine."

Man's redemptive capacity is limitless, is it not?

An act of compassion has the power to evoke a like response.

In another parable, we are told that when Michelangelo fashioned his now immortal statue of Moses, a servant came in each morning to sweep away the chips of marble which had fallen to the floor.

The servant was a novice, unfamiliar with the craft of his master.  
And when the fiery head of Moses finally emerged from the stone,  
he turned to Michelangelo with a wonderment and asked:  
"How did you know that that man was in there?"

The point of the parable is clear, is it not?  
In the unhewn rock of each human life there is great goodness.  
Its call is unmistakable within us,

the call to live from the fulness of the heart.  
We can hear it, we can heed it.  
And having done so once, we can do so over and again.  
We can lead those lives we dream to live  
-- lives large and generous,  
bold and adventurous,  
lives great in the scope of their desire,  
warm with imagination,  
courageous as an act of faith,  
magnanimous in forgiveness,  
smilingly triumphant over setback and over disaster.

My friends, in a few brief hours, our Yom Kippur service  
will draw to its close.

Once more the struggling blasts of the shofar will resound  
over our heads, heralding the end of our fast,  
and the beginning of still another year of duty.

We know the sound of the ram's horn:

first a wail, then a rumble, and at last a victorious cry.



How jubilant are those final tones.

They summons us to a life of faith.

Faith, that supreme creative function of the human mind...

faith which cries YES in defiance of a thousand voices crying NO...

faith which sees beauty where others see only unsightliness...

Faith which dares hope where others yield to despair..

Faith which by a magic all its own

raises all things out of their native dust

and exalts them to the empyrean of lasting worth.

Aye, the truth about us human beings is

that in the unhewn rock of our unformed lives

there exists the possibility of something beautiful and good.

This is what we Jews believe.

This is our faith...

Amen.

EULOGY

HASKELL R. GORDON



by

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

September 19, 1991  
11 Tishri 5751

Temple Emanuel  
Worcester, MA



With heavy hearts we gather in this place to say our words of farewell to Haskell Gordon, who meant so very much to all of us, whose care sustained us, whose zest for life inspired us, whose soul's sublime song filled our own lives with wondrous music.

The agonizing "why" of suffering remains unanswered, does it not? Why? Why did it have to happen? Why this relentless law of life that exacts the price of sorrow for each of its joys, the penalty of loss for each of its gifts?

Haskell's death is made the more tragic by its essential absurdity. Here is a man who was uncommonly resilient, whose sheer will to live conquered death over and over again, only to be cut down by a freak and ghastly accident. Why? Why did it have to happen?

Our hearts go out to Ina and to Susan and Larry and Gary, to their spouses and children too. They feel the loss most keenly, yet there is precious little that we can say to them. Words bring but scant comfort at a time like this. But perhaps the knowledge that there are others who share their sorrow will bring them at least a chatzi nechama, a half measure of consolation.

There are many such others who mourn today - - look about you and see - - a community mourns - - and I count myself in this

companionship of sorrow. I too am bereft; I too will miss Haskell's presence and feel the want of his tireless care.

My instinct tells me not to be overly mournful in my comments today, not to evoke sorrow here, but rather happier memories. Not to make this a solemn service of remembrance but rather a celebration of Haskell's life. I feel that this is precisely what Haskell would want his final tribute to be. He was too life affirming to have this hour dampened and darkened by dirge, by somber strains of sorrow. Still, we cannot fully repress our sadness and only radiate cheer. Our sense of loss is too great . . . deepened as it is by the greatness of that gift that was taken from us. Tears, too, are a fitting tribute to Haskell, for what are tears, when all is said and done, if not remembered smiles.

Haskell was too young, or at least too vital when he was torn from us. He still had much to give and we to receive. And so we weep not just for the loss of his life, but also for the loss of all that might have been.

No, Haskell did not reach the full measure of his days. Alas, he fell short of those four score years that Scripture allots to the strong. Still, he lived his life fully, with a fierce intensity and zest. Other people may live longer, but more often than not, they husband their energies and defer their pleasures. Not so



Haskell. He luxuriated in just being. He allowed no moment of his existence to slip by unawares. He seized each golden moment of his life, with all his heart and soul and might.

It was a life in which he achieved a rare blending of intellect and imagination. He had the mind of an engineer and the soul of a poet. Indeed, he received a degree in aero-engineering from MIT and performed important and impressive scientific work for the United States Navy during World War II. But he also and always nurtured the life of the soul, dreaming great dreams, ever reaching beyond the practical needs of the moment, building not only for use but also for beauty, not only for comfort but also for delight.

His life of the spirit found its most meaningful expression in the world of music. It is a world which Ina and he shared, which they both explored, hands held and souls united. But in this realm, too, Haskell brought his mind to bear. He studied music - - learned everything there was to know - - about the composers and the performers and all the fine points of their art . . . and this knowledge enhanced his appreciation of music. Yet he did not stop with its analysis. He did not remain a detached, passive listener. He also felt the music, with every fiber of his being, allowing it to wash over him, to cleanse his soul from the dust of every-day life.

In a way, music was his religion, and this is no belittling of his life of faith. After all, music is no human invention. It is the gift of the Gods. . . the speech of angels.

Now, Haskell's many attainments notwithstanding, he was essentially a humble person. He did not bloat with pride, nor brook any pretense. He was also an exceedingly gentle man, never strident, always restrained. I never heard him lift his voice in anger or impatience. He held strong conviction, to be sure . . . he knew what he wanted, what he wanted others to be, but he never bullied. He preferred to persuade. He taught not by precept but rather by example. Humility, patience, simplicity, truth - - these elements combined in him in wondrous harmony which was altogether beautiful to hear, to see, to feel.

This above all, Haskell cared for people . . . his reach in this regard was wide. His love was seamless. This is why he served not only those who stood near, but those who stood far as well. Note the wide scope of his communal involvements: this synagogue, the Jewish Federation, the Worcester Foundation, the Foundation for Experimental Biology, this community's Music Festival, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and, of course, and not in the least, that glorious musical instrument, the Boston Symphony Orchestra.



But Haskell did not limit himself to these visible beneficencies, publicly and properly so acclaimed. There were also many hidden deeds of human kindness known only to giver and receiver, yet all the more precious for their tender privacy.

The great Chassidic master, Reb Moshe Leib Sassover, taught:

A peasant helped me to understand the true meaning of love. I overheard him at an inn talking to his companion. He asked his friend: "Do you love me, Ivan?" And Ivan replied, "Of course, I do." And then the peasant asked: "And do you know what hurts me Ivan?" "No," replied he, "how can I possibly know that?" Concluded the peasant: "But if you do not know what hurts me, how can you say that you love me?"

Haskell felt the pain of others. And when he did, he went about the task of alleviating that pain. And this is why he had so many friends.

Obviously, the greatest measure of Haskell's care was given to those who stood nearest to him: the members of his family and foremost, his three children and their spouses. He reared them exceedingly well. He did not compel their life's course. He gave them the freedom to develop as they chose. Here, too, he taught not by precept, but rather by giving them the example of

his own multifaceted life which they then sought to emulate. Ultimately, he liked what he saw and he gloried in their attainments.

As for their children, his grandchildren, of course, they were the jewels of his crown.

And he adored Ina, as she loved him. She was the true companion of his life and soul. Together they walked the way of life, these fifty-one years drinking from its one cup - - when it ran bitter, when it ran sweet, giving true meaning to the words:  
husband, wife, and marriage.

In a word, Haskell Gordon lived the kind of life many of us only dream to live - - a life large and generous, bold and adventurous, a life great in the scope of its imagination, magnanimous in forgiveness, courageous as an act of faith, smilingly triumphant over set-backs and disasters.

And now he is no more, and because he was what he was and is no more, we weep. Weep because a star has been torn from the firmament of our lives, and our lives are darker because of it.

Yet his memory can brighten our way as it did throughout his life. Above all the memory of his inner strength, which surely surged from him to Ina and through her to his children.



It is a strength that flows to us even now, when we remember him.  
It steels our own resolution to turn from death to life, life  
when he embraced so fervently, life to which he clung so fully,  
life for which he fought so gallantly, and with uncommon courage.

A leaf has fallen to the ground, but the trunk remains firm and  
strong. And once the winter has passed and spring has come, new  
leaves will spring from its branches.

Thus, is Haskell's soul bound up in the bond of lasting life.





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

Rosh Hashona 5752

Dear Friend:

I write these lines -- my annual High Holyday greeting to the leaders of our congregations -- under the impact of those stormy three days, last week, when Russia's long suffering citizens determined to reject those who sought to return the Soviet Union to the evil days before there was glasnost and perestroika. Let there be no doubt about that: freedom was won, not by a successful counter-coup, or because the conspirators were clumsy, but because the Russian people had the courage to resist.

When liberty is imperiled, Jews invariably are found in the vanguard of its defense. During the early hours of the insurgency, while Gorbachev was made hostage and the tanks began to roll in the streets of Moscow,, the leaders of the Vaad, the umbrella body of Jewish organizations in the Soviet Union, called on all Jewish communities to back Yeltsin's administration and to join in the struggle "against the unconstitutional coup."

They did. Indeed, the very first casualty of this struggle was Ilya Krichevsky, a Jew. He was shot in the head while attempting to mount a tank advancing on the Russian parliament building. Two others, non-Jews, members of the Russian Orthodox Church, died with him -- one of them crushed under the treads of that tank. The three of them were buried on the same day. They were eulogized by Boris Yeltsin and by Zinovy Kogan, the president of Hineni, Moscow's Reform congregation. Mr. Kogan also provided the tallis that, with the Russian flag, draped the young man's coffin.

It was good for freedom, but was it good for the Jews? Alas, the joy of the momentary victory comes with real fears, for the future holds peril as well as promise for our people.

On the one hand, the acceleration of liberal reforms will benefit Russian Jews and serve to stabilize their condition. On the other hand, the unravelling of the Soviet empire is a destabilizing force and therefore a threat to its Jews; none of the Russian republics can boast of a liberal patrimony and anti-Semitism has always been a rallying-cry in their quest for ethnic independence.



As far as Israel is concerned, the restoration of democracy in Russia puts the peace process back on its tracks. (Note if you will, how quickly the spoilers of the peace, Iraq and the PLO, embraced the leaders of the abortive coup). But here too, the centrifugal force of ethnic nationalism in the USSR poses a risk to the Jewish state. Six of the republics are Moslem and should they secede from the Soviet Union, the Middle East conflict could expand geographically as well as politically.

And what can we do, we American Jews?

We can continue to stand at Israel's side and on the side of Russian Jews, helping them materially and in the political arena. As a telling case in point, we can bestir ourselves to convince Congress to approve the loan guarantee package that Israel urgently requires for the task of absorbing its many immigrants.

And we can do what we Jews have always done in uncertain times, and that is to strengthen our synagogues and schools, those magic ingredients of our people's wondrous endurance.

According to the Shulchan Aruch, synagogues should be built "on the high point of the city...higher than any of the city's buildings."

Yes, "the high point of the city," for the synagogue serves as the principal landmark for our Jewish children on their homeward journeys. Only the synagogue, with its school and camp networks, can provide those childhood memories to which our young people will return and recommit themselves despite the many forces that tug them away. Only the synagogue can provide the teachers and rabbis and scholars who are capable of creating from among our children a reservoir of learned, committed Jews who will be the guarantors of our future.

\* \* \* \*

My thoughts are with you as we approach our holy season. I wish you and your family good health and good spirits in your personal and communal lives.

Cordially,



Alexander M. Schindler

#4  
Schindler: Rosh Hashana  
Union Temple, Brooklyn.  
Rosh Hashana 5754

Once again, my friends we are gathered here at this turning hour  
of the year.

Once again, the shrill sharp sounds of the shofar shake us from our  
complacency with their demand for a cheshbon hanefesh  
for a self-reckoning of the soul.

Once again, we respond as did our forbears through countless generations

This, believe it or not, is the 21st year that I stand before you,  
that I and my family worship with you for these high holy days.

I watched our five children grow up in this place,  
Emil Baar and I would look at them year after year,  
sitting there in the first row  
-- fidgeting then and fidgeting still --  
and we commented on how much they had changed.

They were toddlers when we first came here  
ranging from two or three to eight years of age.

Now they're all grown up.

Indeed, one of my daughters is here together with her husband  
and three children of her own...And another, Jonathan's twin sister,  
is preparing to preach her first sermon at her student pulpit  
in Northern California.

Thus do the years fly by.

Life is a mist...silvery...tremulous;

It appears for a time, then swiftly lifts  
and all that is left is memory.



And so Union Temple is a place endeared to me

-- by memory and by affection...

It is good to be here,...to feel your presence...

to draw the strength which flows from this companionship.

Yet there is also a sorrow intermingling

with the joy of our renewed embrace.

Too many who were with us last year are here no more.

They have reached their horizon and are gone out of sight.

We miss them....We lament their passing...

But there is the solace

-- feeble at first but growing stronger in time --

which comes with the gift of memory..

"So long as we live they too shall live,  
for they are now a part of us as we remember them."

Now, as those of you who have worshipped here over the years know,

I have made it my habit to devote at least one of my

two high holy day sermons each year to 'inyane d'yoma,'

to events of the day as they affect the life of our people.

My sermon on Yom Kippur, God willing, will be of a more reflective

nature -- unless, of course, some other crisis bursts forth...

which would scarcely surprise us in this year of ceaseless

surprises, of cataclysmic changes' consider them if you will:

the war in the gulf, missiles raining on Tel Aviv,

quick victory, but the tyrant still in power,

Soviet Jews freed, flooding into Israel,

the daring rescue of Ethiopian Jewry,

the abortive coup in Russia

and the unravelling of the Soviet empire...

These events astonished us, they made us stagger...

the walls spin round...the world reels...

the pavement, the earth, sinks under the feet...

I was in Israel twice during the war,

It was a different Israel than that to which I had become accustomed.

Tel Aviv and Jerusalem ghosts towns at night,

the streets empty, their silence eery

The image of an old Jew rushing to services wrapped in a tallit

with gas masks on his forehead where t'fillin' are wont to be.

The sudden howling of sirens... rushing for shelter...

and, then, most searing of all

babies screaming in terror at sight of their parents

made monster by these masks...

It was a nightmare come true.

The destruction, incidentally, was greater than the media conveyed.

Only 4 dead, to be sure...and three score injured.

Still better than a thousand people had to be pulled out of the rubble,

and well over 4,000 were made homeless by these attacks.

Those patriot missiles were not quite as effective

as they were trumpeted to be

They did not destroy the incoming scuds.

In most instance they merely deflected them,

or at best ruptured them, with the fragments and often

even the warhead falling to the ground to wreak their damage.



In the light of all this, the restraint of the Israelis,  
their decision not to retaliate, was all the more remarkable.  
But their head ruled...though their heart might have dictated otherwise.  
Hussein's intent was transparent:  
Just as anti-Semitism was the cement that bound the Nazi conspiracy  
so did the Iraqi leader seek to bestir an Arab world,  
riven by fratricide,  
to unite in a holy war against Israel.  
And the Israelis refused to be caught in his snare.  
Still, they had a share in the gulf victory, at least vicariously.  
The grating attached to the advancing American tanks enabling them  
to clear the minefields were manufactured in Israel.  
And those remarkably accurate smart bombs  
which we watched with amazement on television  
were developed by the Jewish state's electronics industry.  
Obviously, the Israelis shared our of relief that the war went so well.  
Their most dangerous enemy was defanged,  
and they did not have to face him alone.  
Their diplomatic isolation was also broken...  
many of the European nations that only months before shunned Israel  
-- in fact imposed sanction against them --  
began to make supportive gestures.  
To be sure now, their relief on this score, and ours, for that matter,  
is spiked with a measure of wryness, a touch of irony, if you will.

The Germans offered Israel \$165,000,000.- in aid.

How much did they make in building those chemical and biologicqal  
factories for Iraq.

And why, O why is it that the world sympathizes with the Jews  
when we are victims?

That's always been our lot in life, has it not?

As Paul Johnson put it:

"writing the history of the Jews is almost like wrwiting the  
history of the world, but from a peculiar perspective...  
It is world history seen from the viewpoint of the victim..."

Aye, we Jews have learned to see the great events of world history  
from below

from the perspective of those who are excluded...

who are under suspicion

ill-treated...powerless...

oppressed and scorned...

in short, from the perspective of those who suffer...

Be that as it may, there was justified relief at the moment of victory.

But it was a temporary lifting of the spirit, no more.

Israel continues to be at considerable military risk.

Sophisticated weaponry of unprecedented magintude has flooded  
the Middle East and much of it will remain there

Moreover, there is the likelihood of still further such sales  
to the Saudis, to Egypt, to Syria,

and not too far down the pike even to Iran and Iraq...

the arms merchants will eventually have their way.



How will Israel, outmanned and outgunned as it is even now,  
maintain that qualitative edge which is essential to her survival?

And who is the guarantee that these technologically superior arms will  
not fall into more radical Arab hands than are the rulers of today!

It has happened before

- the AWACS sent to the Shah subsequently became available  
to Khumeini --
- American state-of-the art tanks and planes sold to Kuwait  
replenished Saddam Hussein's vast arsenal.

If the present relatively moderate Arab governments do not remain  
in power,  
if they yield to or are toppled by the streets,  
all of this weaponry is likely to be turned against Israel.

Aye, Israel is at risk militarily...it is also at risk diplomatically.  
Now, that all this is over, our administration may eventually conclude  
that it has other allies in the Middle East,  
that it might just be able to do without Israel.

Indeed, Bush and Baker seem to have done so already.

How else are we to interpret America's endorsements of UN resolutions  
critical of Israel during the war!

How else are we to read our administration's more recent decision  
to delay congressional consideration of the Loan guarantee package.  
1 million Russian Jews held hostage...read Safire's column in this  
morning's TIMES

And, pray tell, just who are these new-won allies of ours?

They are tyrants most of them,

sworn enemies of the free world and the United States...

Did not Assad of Syria harbor the killers of American marines.

Did he not shelter the terrorists who brought down Pan Am Flight 103.

Does he not control the area where Americans and other Western  
nationals continue to be held hostage.

Some friends, these...some allies...

Walpole's dictum applies:

" This world is a comedy to those who think...  
It is a tragedy to those who feel."

How facile, also, the Bush-Baker analysis -- and I heard it articulated  
over and over on my several visits to the oval office and the  
State Department this year -- that the heart of the Middle Eastern  
problem is the plight of the Palestinians.

Solve that and all else will fall into place.

What a naive conception this!

Even if modern Israel had never been created,

re-emerging in history out of the ashes of the holocaust,

Iran and Iraq would have slaughtered each other,

Arab fratricide would have cannibalized Lebanon,

Syria would have butchered Christians and trained their

artillery on Palestinian refugee camps there as they did,

and Iraq would still have sought to devour her neighbors.

Still, I am glad that our administration has brought the peace  
process on track.



In this realm its efforts deserve applause --

even as Prime Minister Shamir gained my admiration for the manner  
in which he conducted the more recent negotiations.  
He was firm, but not unyielding, never the first to say no.  
To be sure, the projected October talks are only the beginning  
of a long and difficult process,  
but at least a beginning has been made.

As Prime Shamir wrote me in a recent personal note:

"It is not a simple matter, to resolve a one-hundred-year-old complex problem...and so we cannot know whether these negotiations will be productive, but we are certain that without these negotiations nothing can be achieved."

\* \* \*

Now, the gulf war was always been seen as offering a narrow window  
of opportunity for Arab-Israeli talks...  
and that opportunity has now been seized.

I strongly suspect, though, and many concur,  
that it wasn't so much the danger of further regional aggression  
like Iraq's, that impelled a Syria to come  
to the negotiating table.

It was, rather, the disintegration of her patron-state, the Soviet Union  
That left Assad little choice but to bend to America's will.

This brings me full square to that second great happening  
which I want to discuss with you briefly today.

I refer to those stormy three days two weeks ago,  
when Russia's long suffering citizens determined to reject those  
who sought to return the Soviet Union to those evil times  
before perestroika and glasnost.

Let there be no doubt about that:

Freedom was won, not by a successful counter-coup

or because the conspirators were clumsy,

but only because the Russian people had the courage to resist.

When liberty is imperilled, Jews invariably are found in the vanguard of its defense,

During the early hours of the insurgency,

while Gorbachev was made hostage

and the tanks began to roll in Moscow's streets,  
the leaders of the vaad,

the umbrella body of Jewish organizations in the Soviet Union  
called on all Jewish communities to back Yeltsin's administration  
and to join in the struggle "against the unconstitutional coup."

They did,

Indeed, the very first casualty of this struggle was Ilya Krichevsky,  
a Jew.

He was shot in the head while mounting a tank advancing on the Russian  
parliament.

Two others, non Jews, members of the Russian Orthodox Church,

died with him -- one of them crushed under the treads of that tank.

The three of them were buried on the same day.

They were eulogized by Boris Yeltsin,

as well as by Zinoviy Kogan, the President of Hineni,  
Moscow's Reform Congregation.

Mr. Kogan also provided the tallis that,

together with the Russian flag, draped the young man's coffin.



It was a good day for freedom, but was it also good for the Jews?  
That is a fair question, for many times before in human history  
did Jews enlist in causes that ultimately failed them.

The three Russian martyrs of resistance must surely remind us of three  
American hero martyrs: Goodman and Schwerner and Cheney,  
the murdered civil rights activists whose sacrifice has been  
repeatedly betrayed by the hatemongers of the black community,  
as it is by the Sharptons and Maddoxes in Crown Heights even now.

Jews participated in other universalist cause of earth-shaking importance  
the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and 1905,  
the European Revolutions of 1848,  
movements in which Jews participated and benefitted and often led,  
only to find their hopeful expectations sold out by revolutionary  
failures in need of a scapegoat.

How will it be, then, in the Russia of today?

Alas, here too the joy of the momentary victory comes with real fears,  
for the future holds peril as well as promise for our people.

On the one hand, the acceleration of liberal Reform bodes well  
for Russian Jews.

It will help to stabilize their condition.

It will enable them to advance more rapidly up the social and  
economic ladder.

Even now, 80 per cent of the private businesses in the Soviet Union  
are held by Russian Jews.

On the other hand, the unravelling of the Soviet empire is a  
distabilizing force.

None of the Russian republics can boast of a liberal patrimony.  
Anti-Semitism is endemic to their people...

they drank it with their mothers milk

or absorbed it with their baptismal water.

Jew hatred has always been a rallying cry in their quest for ethnic  
independence.

As far as Israel is concerned, there are also two possibilities.

The restoration of democracy in Russia puts the peace process  
back on its tracks-- and that is good.

Note, if you will, how quickly the spoilers of the peace,

Iraq and the PLO, embraced the leaders of the abortive coup.

They hoped to restore the status quo ante when they could play the  
superpowers one against the other.

That won't happen if the center holds.

But here too, the centrifugal forces of ethnic natonalism in the USSR  
poses a risk to the Jewish state.

Six of the Russian republics are predominantly Moslem,

They are in the Southern tier of the Soviet Union

-- nearer to the Perisna Gulf --

and should they secede from the Soviet Union,

the Middle East conflict could well expand

geographically as well as politically.

So what can we do, we American Jews?.



We can continue to stand at Israel's side on the side of our fellow Jews  
wherever they are embattled.

Israel certainly deserves our full support.

We may well have been disappointed, at times,

by this or that Israeli policy decision or utterance or act.

But there is no denying that authentic purposes of the Jewish state  
have, in fact, been fulfilled.

Israel has become become a thriving state capable of defending  
Jewish lives and rights within without its boundaries:

And Israel has become our people's haven of refuge,  
the one place in the world which Jews can enter without visas,  
without restrictive barriers,  
without those ever elusive entry permits.

Russian Jews continued to stream in, planeload after planeload,  
even when war erupted and the missiles flew.

The Israelis were there to greet them as they disembark at Ben Gurion,  
providing them with gas mask, alas, but also with every other need.

And think of the rescue Ethiopian Jewry.

Over 14,000 of our black co-religionists air-lifted  
from Addis Abeba to Tel Aviv  
from a primitive society to a high-tech nation,  
from servitude to freedom

all in a matter of 72 hours.

What a remarkable achievement that was.

What a sublime moment in the history of modern Israel.

It was the first time in all of human history that blacks were  
taken from one continent to another not in chains but in love.

Pray tell, what other country would open its doors in such a manner  
and especially in such a time.

America's ceiling of 50,000 refugees a year from Eastern Europe  
has long since been reached.

Where would our wretched co-religionists go if not to Israel?

It will cost upward of 60 Billion dollars to absorb this immigration.  
Israel hasn't the vague idea how it will manage this influx, this cost  
but its ports are never closed to our fellow Jews who are embattled

And so we have every reason to be supportive of Israel,  
and to marvel at the wonders of that amazing land:  
the prodigious achievements of construction, agriculture, and industry.  
the miraculous regeneration and relocation of our people from all  
around the world;  
the creation of a democratic oasis in a harsh landscape of dictatorships  
and fundamentalism;  
the weaving of a whole Jewish tapestry from countless threads of  
language and culture;  
all of this in the face of continuing warfare and external threat,  
all of this in a political wilderness,  
-- and all of this at a dizzying pace.

Let us then stand at Israel's side - without reserve --  
helping the Jewish state materially  
and in the political arena as well.

Let us do what we can, we American Jews,  
we haven't done nearly enough.



As a telling case in point we can bestir ourselves to convince Congress  
to approve the loan guarantee package,  
and to over-ride a presidential veto if that is necessary.

Let each of us here resolve to contact our legislators and senators  
this very week, before Yom Kippur and the closing of the gates.

And let us also do what we Jews have always done in uncertain times,  
and that is to strengthen our synagogues and schools  
those magic ingredients of our people's wondrous endurance.

According to the Shulchan Aruch synagogues should be built

"on the high point of the city...  
higher than any of the city's buildings..."

Yes, "the high point of the city,"

for the synagogue serves as the principal landmark for our  
Jewish children on their homeward journeys.

Only the synagogue with its schools and camp networks, can provide  
those childhood memories to which our children will return  
and recommit themselves

despite the many forces that tug them away.

Only the synagogue can provide the teachers and rabbis and scholars  
who are capable of creating from among our children  
a reservoir of learned committed Jews

who will be the guarantors of our future.

May God be with His people as we begin our festive season.

May he inscribe you and all those you love for a good year  
a year of life and health and creative endeavor.



## COVER

A new survey shows that 210,000 Jews have severed their ties with Judaism. Photo by Gary Rekstad.



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## Statement of Purpose

Reform Judaism is the official voice of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, linking the institutions and affiliates of Reform Judaism with every Reform Jew. **RJ** covers developments within our Movement while interpreting world events and Jewish tradition from a Reform perspective. Shared by 290,000 member households from 850 congregations, **RJ** strives to convey the creativity, diversity, and dynamism of Reform Judaism. Members of UAHC congregations receive **RJ** as a benefit of membership.

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# Dear Reader

I am troubled by our self-detractors—Reform Jews who question the authenticity of Reform Judaism. Our critics from within believe that the phrase “a religious Reform Jew” is an oxymoron, that “piety” and “Reform” are mutually exclusive states of being.

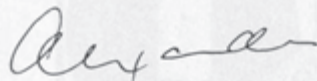
Too many of us suffer from such a self depreciating mindset. The bearded Jew pouring over the pages of the Talmud somehow remains the normative Jew in our minds. All others are refugees, deportees, amputees. The Judaism of the *shtetl*, with its thick walls of *halachah* and its exclusivist mentality, somehow remains the homeland in our minds. All other places are viewed as way stations, as places of temporary sojourn in our escape from the demands of the supposedly authentic Judaism.

What makes this mindset so troubling, even damaging, is that we might use it as an excuse for our own slackness and shallowness as religious Jews. For if Orthodoxy is normative, if Orthodoxy alone is what Reform Jews are intent on reforming, then our task ultimately is hopeless. No matter how great our numbers, no matter how successful our temples, we will always feel like illegitimate, rebellious offspring. Why, then, even try? Why even respond to the music? Why even open the books?

Reform recasts tradition deliberately and openly. We conceive of Judaism as a dynamic and not a static faith. This is what Judaism was before it atrophied amid repressive encounters with Christendom, and before it became encrusted by the codification process of our Dark Ages.

According to a well known legend, when Moses visited the Academy of Rabbi Akiba, who lived many centuries later, he did not recognize the newer Judaism as his own. Moses, our great teacher, failed to understand the teachings that Akiba quoted in his name. This midrash teaches us that the rabbis of old understood Judaism to be a developing faith, a continuously reforming religion; one not of stagnation, but of growth and change, tempered by a profound sense of responsibility; one in which *halachah* was not frozen like ice, but a soluble substance to be mixed with human tears. To put the matter bluntly, it is modern Orthodox literalism that is inauthentic, that represents a fundamental break with tradition. Reform Judaism, in its ideal conception, is palpably truer to that tradition.

We in Reform do not deem sanctity synonymous with immutability. We do not equate holiness with a rigid immobility. For us, the Jewish tradition did not end in 17th-century Poland; it is an ever evolving faith.



**Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler**  
President, UAHC



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## COVER

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler conducts a model Passover seder at a Reform nursery school. Photo by Ted Spiegel.



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# Dear Reader

**A**s of this writing, the U.S. has been at war for two weeks. The dramatic events in the Gulf fill us with mixed emotions—foreboding for what lies ahead, pride in America's servicemen and women, and fervent prayers for an early end to the conflict.

The warnings sounded by many (including the UAHC Board of Trustees) of the acute dangers posed by Saddam Hussein's offensive capabilities have been more than justified by actual events. Destroying the ecology of the Gulf, hurling scuds at innocent civilians in Saudi Arabia and Israel, and parading captured pilots all demonstrate the criminal character of the Iraqi regime and the clear and present dangers it poses not only to the region but the world.

The quiet courage with which Israel has borne this burden of anguish has inspired the world and filled every Jewish heart with pride. Also, the U.S. commitment to Israel's security deserves our profound gratitude.

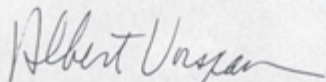
Although the war has revealed the malevolent nature of the Iraqi killing machine, it has also exploded the myth that disposing of Saddam would be quick and easy. Our sense of anxiety is deepened by the evidence that the Iraqi leader is capable of nightmarish surprises. The war against Iraq is just, but the human price of victory will likely be heavy.

One of the first casualties of the war was the spread of intolerance and hatred in the United States. Anti-Semites are blaming Jews for allegedly pushing the U.S. into a war on behalf of Israel. Arguments for "linkage" often serve as a cover for Jew-baiting. Also disturbing are signs of discrimination against American citizens of Arab descent. Both forms of discrimination are equally repugnant and must be resisted.

At moments of national crisis, synagogues and churches are uniquely situated to respond to the deep spiritual and emotional needs of their congregants. Many of our temples have organized special services, some to raise needed funds to assist Israel in this time of great peril and, in the light of Soviet and Ethiopian aliyah, of great hope.

The Gulf crisis has had a profound impact on the programs of the UAHC in serving its congregations. The Union's Department of Synagogue Management has counselled all congregations on how to improve security. Our Department of Religious Education has distributed materials on the meaning of shalom and the Jewish definitions of what constitutes a just war. Our Interreligious Affairs Department is involved in intense dialogue with Christian church bodies on the fraudulence of linking Iraq's invasion of Kuwait with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Our Youth Department, which normally sends more young people to Israel each year than any other Jewish organization in America, is revising programs and monitoring the situation in Israel to assure the safety and security of our youngsters. ARZA, the Reform Zionist movement, brought a leadership mission to Israel in January to demonstrate our unbreakable solidarity with Israel. Our Religious Action Center in Washington, DC is spearheading efforts to curb discrimination against Arab-Americans, while monitoring Congressional support for the U.N. Security Council Resolution and for the State of Israel. At the same time, the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism and the Religious Action Center are striving to keep alive the equally urgent domestic agenda—the homeless, the unemployed, the urban crisis, AIDS, crime, and drugs—which must not be allowed to be eclipsed by our preoccupation with the Gulf war.

The right to protest is fundamental to American liberties. Impugning the motives and patriotism of those opposed to the war against Iraq revisits the same brand of McCarthyism that so stained America in the past. Whether one believes that sanctions should have been tried longer, or that this war was inevitable, we are all now united in solemn prayer that out of this heart-breaking destruction may emerge a genuine and lasting peace.



**Albert Vorspan**  
Director of Social Action and Senior Vice President, UAHC



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## NEWS RELEASE

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### KEEP THEM IN THE TRIBE

By Alexander M. Schindler

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At the present rate, Israel will absorb 1 million Soviet immigrants within the next several years. An estimated 30 percent of these immigrants, including the children of intermarried couples in which the woman is non-Jewish, are not considered Jews according to *halachah*. These children, numbering in the tens of thousands, will share the fate of the Jewish people -- speaking Hebrew, attending Israeli schools, celebrating Jewish festivals, serving in the army. But unless they yield to the stringent requirements of Orthodox conversion, the rabbinic courts will bar them from marrying Jews within Israel's borders. Given the sheer numbers of Soviet immigrants in this predicament and their estrangement from ritual observance, the conversion option is as unfair as it is impractical.

The Israeli government must find a realistic solution, and fast. Otherwise a large minority will be consigned needlessly to the margins of society, becoming a caste of untouchables. Fortunately, the Reform rabbinate, in struggling with the dilemma of intermarriage in America, has passed a historic resolution on Jewish identity that is as relevant in Israel as it is in the Diaspora.

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

The Reform decision on patrilineal descent eliminates the distinction between men and women, between fathers and mothers. It holds that, insofar as genealogy is a factor in determining Jewishness, the maternal and paternal lines should be given equal weight. By adopting a similar resolution, the Knesset could guarantee that all children of intermarried immigrants admitted to the country under the Law of Return would be presumed to be Jews, regardless of whether the Jewish parent was the mother or the father -- so long as the children were raised as Jews.



When first proposed, patrilineal descent was condemned in certain Jewish quarters as a radical departure from every Jewish law and tradition. Today, according to a recent survey by prominent Jewish sociologist Stephen Cohen, about 80 percent of the American Jewish laity, including some Orthodox, accept the principle. They recognize that Jewish survival depends on adaption to changing circumstances, no less today than in times past, and that this broadened definition of who is a Jew does not in fact represent a break with tradition.

True, for the past 2,000 years or so, Jewish identity has been determined by the maternal line alone. But in the early days of our history, children were considered Jewish primarily because their fathers were Jewish, even if their mothers were not. In the Torah, genealogical tables are overwhelmingly patrilineal; it was the male line that determined descent and status. In matters of inheritance, the patrilineal line alone was followed. Perhaps more to the point, the Jewishness of the children of non-Jewish mothers is never questioned. Moses, for example, married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest; yet her children were considered Jews, following the line of the father. And Joseph married Asenath, daughter of a priest of On; her children too were regarded as Jews. To this day male Jewish children receive the blessing that they be like Ephraim and Menasseh, the sons of Joseph and a non-Jewish mother!

Significantly, both the Torah and rabbinic law hold the male line absolutely dominant in matters affecting the priesthood. Whether one is a *cohen* or a *levi* depends on the father's priestly claim, not the mother's. If the father is good enough to bequeath the priestly status, why isn't he good enough to bequeath Jewishness? Reform has concluded that he is; hence its old-new definition of who is a Jew.

The time has come for Israel's rabbinate to admit that Judaism allows for more than one interpretation of law and custom. The most authentic interpretation, I believe, reflects not only the wisdom of Torah but its heart, which is precisely why we must embrace all the children of the Soviet immigrants, matrilineal and patrilineal Jews alike.

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6/21/91

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Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler is president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, central body of Reform Judaism in North America.



## THE DREAM, AGAIN

In all of Jewish history, there have been no more than ten or so dates that will be remembered as long as there are Jews to remember things. Most generations of Jews have lived and have died without ever witnessing the decisive turns of Jewish history except through the clouds of memory. Yet, within the lifetime of our own generation, those clouds have parted not once, but twice, and we have seen the turning with our own eyes.

First was the Kingdom of Night, then was the rebirth of the Republic of Hope.

And now there is the Reunion, the great homecoming of hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union, yesterday's trickle becomes today's flow, tomorrow's flood.

Through the tumultuous years of modern Israel's brief history, there have been moments of pure vindication, moments when all complexity has disappeared and the elemental reason for a Jewish State has stood in stark and pure relief. The mass immigration in the late 1940s and early 1950s, from the displaced persons' camps of Europe and from North Africa; years later, Operation Moses, the rescue of Ethiopian Jews; now, Operation Exodus, perhaps as many as a million and a half Soviet Jews ingathered, welcomed.

For the Soviet Jews themselves, the new freedom means, at last, the chance to build a life far from the quickening curse of anti-Semitism.

For the Jews of Israel, the new freedom means the renewal of a dream that some had supposed was obsolete, the chance to refresh the authentic purposes of a Jewish national home.

And for us, for the Jews of North America, there is an essential role to play in the fulfillment of this new chapter of our people's dream. Two years ago, a quarter of a million of us gathered in Washington to speak for the freedom of our people. That freedom is now ours to enable.

But freedom is not free. To bring masses of Soviet Jews to Israel means to provide housing, schools, jobs, lest the invitation to a new life prove a cruel and bitter hoax, lest the reunion sour. Here are Jews, eager to come; here is a nation eager to receive them. But they cannot come and they will not if there is nowhere for them to live, to learn, to work.



Plainly, it is our task to provide the resources that will translate the dream of freedom into the reality of reunion. As plainly, we want and mean to be more than passive financiers as that translation is written into our people's history. We want and mean to be partners with the Soviet Jews and partners with the Israelis, going beyond the raising of dollars and the signing of checks to helping ensure that every dollar that is spent is spent responsibly, efficiently, effectively.

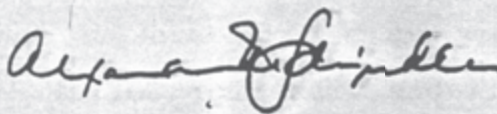
It is unthinkable that the Jewish people will allow this glorious opportunity to shrivel, that we will allow ourselves to be remembered as the generation that had history in its grasp --- and let go of it.

Nor is our shared opportunity limited to the wonders of reunion. The restoration of the early vision of Israel's purpose is inherently a restoration of a vision of peace, as well. The people of Israel know that chronic violence and war not only inhibit immigration, but also exhaust the energies and the treasure of the nation, the energies and the treasure that must now be turned to the sacred task of absorption.

We call attention to the danger of seeking to use this new opportunity for political purposes. The homecoming of our people transcends politics -- but politics can poison it. Soviet Jews are not "settlement-fodder," nor ought Operation Exodus be a cover for the pursuit of ideological goals. The absorption of Soviet Jews must not become a pawn in the debate over a Greater Israel; if those who enter the partnership with enthusiasm are led to conclude that their efforts are being exploited by partisans of one view or another, their enthusiasm will surely wane.

Above all, we call on each and every American Jew, in all our congregations throughout the land, working through our local federations, to join in this partnership in reunion, to lend hand and heart and pocketbook so that we may together enter history. For that is what is here at stake. Together, it has been given us to write a new chapter, to make possible a new beginning, to bring new life to our people and to our dream --- the dream of freedom, of peace, of home.

In this book of life, it is we who must inscribe our names.



Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
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