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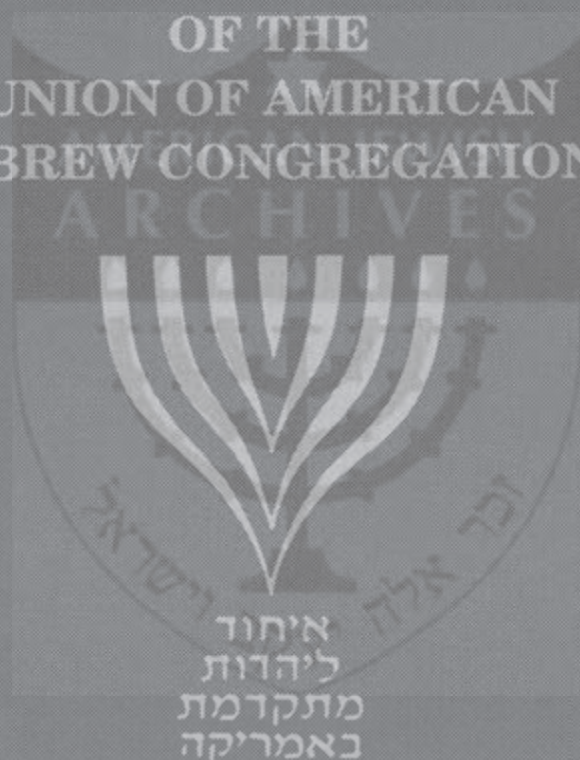
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# **RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER**

***PRESIDENT***  
**OF THE**  
**UNION OF AMERICAN**  
**HEBREW CONGREGATIONS**



## **ADDRESS TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

June 7, 1991  
Montreal, Canada

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I am exceedingly grateful to Rabbi Lerner as well as to the leaders of this congregation for inviting our National Board to this their communal home for Shabbat dinner and worship. This is a historic congregation, over 109 years old, the very first Reform Temple to be established in Canada. Over the years of my ministry, I have come here often, have come to know many members of this congregation and many are now my very good friends.

I dare not even specify lest I exclude, but let me acknowledge by name at least the three Emanu-El-Beth Sholomites who serve in our highest leadership councils: Jewel Poch, Bernie Isaacs, Alfie Miller. Bernie is a member of our officers corps, chairs one of our key committees and never says NO when a task needs doing. Alfie has been recommended for an honorary life trusteeship, a distinction rarely granted and only to those few who rendered singular service to our religious community. And so, I do not feel a stranger here. This is a place endeared to me by memory and by affection.

Indeed, I stood on this pulpit exactly two years ago this week-end, to install Leigh Lerner as your rabbi. Obviously, I did a good job. Your Temple has flourished under his stewardship, it is growing in numbers as well as in the depth of its programming, and little wonder - - he has so very much to offer, rich gifts of mind and spirit too. Thus may it continue!

Now, before I get into the substance of my commentary, I want to say just a word about an *inyan deyomo*, about an event of the day. It is of legendary dimension, and we simply cannot allow it to pass by un-noted.

I refer, of course, to the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry. . . 14,000 of our black co-religionists airlifted from Addis Ababa to Tel-Aviv, from a primitive society to a high-tech nation, from servitude to freedom, all in a matter of 48 hours. What a remarkable achievement that was. What a sublime moment in the history of modern Israel.

The Reform movement played a modest role in these events. Since 1984 we have sent doctors to Ethiopia, volunteers from our congregations, several months at a stretch. . . to care for our fellow Jews in that blighted land. And one of our Religious Action Center staff members spent this past year in Addis Ababa to help in the work of their rescue. Glenn Stein was on the last plane leaving Ethiopia for Ben Gurion and he will be with us this week-end to render his report to our Board.

Clearly, Israel must be given virtually all of the credit for paving the way for this complex operation and then effecting it with so much spunk and sparkle. Israel may well disappoint us at times - - its policy decisions are not always in harmony with our image ideal of a Jewish state - - but in this instance, as in so many others before as well, Israel has given us occasion for enormous pride.

This is what the state of Israel was created for, was it not - - to protect Jewish lives and rights wherever they are threatened; and to 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.

What other country would open its doors in such a manner, and especially in such a time. It will cost upward of 60 Billion dollars to absorb this immigration, and the Russian immigration which preceded and will follow it. Israel hasn't the vaguest idea how it will manage this influx, this cost, but its ports are never closed to our fellow Jews who are embattled - - whatever be their national origin or race. I emphasize the word *race*, for as Al Vorspan likes to remind us - - quoting William Safire, I believe - - this is the first time in human history when blacks were taken from one continent to another not in chains, but in love.

And so we have every reason to be supportive of Israel, and offer what we can, we American and Canadian Jews, we haven't given nearly enough. The ingathering of Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry is a decisive turn of Jewish history. It is unthinkable that we 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 then let go of it.

And this, too, we must do; we must buttress our synagogues, that source from which Jews always drew the strength required by the struggle for our collective continuity.

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Which brings me to my subject for tonight: the condition of our religious community and our self-image as Reform Jews.

Let me begin by talking about the state of Reform Judaism today, and here the news is exceedingly good - - at least from a quantitative point of view.

Here in Canada, Reform may still be in the minority, but taking the North American continent as a whole, we have emerged as the predominantly fastest-growing synagogue movement. Indeed, even in Canada, Reform has made a steady advance, growing from the 4 or 5 Reform temples when the Canadian Council was formed, to the 23 Reform temples it numbers today.

Be that as it may, our continental family of congregations now exceeds 850 temples - - 5 more will be admitted at our Board meeting this week-end - - and in the past two decades alone, our cumulative membership rolls have burgeoned by better than 22%. If Jewish sociologists are to be believed, our growth rate will accelerate even more during the years ahead, for *their* studies show that young adults, the coming generation of North American Jews inclines to identify itself almost exclusively with Reform.

This enlargement of our ranks comes in the face of a general decline in religious affiliation

within the North American Jewish community. There has been a slow and steady erosion within Conservatism. And while there appears to be some gaining among the Orthodox in urban centers, this recovery must be seen against its virtual crumbling in mid America. In the Christian community, fundamentalism is fueling the religious revival. Within the Jewish community the opposite hold true: liberalism rather than orthodoxy is leading the religious advance.

Our numbers have doubtlessly been swelled by our resolve to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

In last week's Torah portion, *beha'alotecha*, Moses seeks relief from his leadership burdens and is instructed to gather seventy of Israel's elders to help him govern. Two of them, Eldad and Medad, though not of the seventy, nonetheless receive God's inspiration and "speak in ecstasy" in the camp. Joshua asks Moses to jail the two, but Moses replies: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets."

All the Lord's people - - aye, says Reform Judaism!

All the Lord's people - - including women.

All the Lord's people - - including gay and lesbian Jews.

All the Lord's people - - including families in all of their new constellations.

All the Lord's people - - including the intermarried, and Jews-by-choice, yes, and the hearing impaired and the wheelchair bound and the disabled in body and spirit.

Their needs are also numbered among our responsibilities, and their energies, too, need to be tapped. If we render them invisible, we only render ourselves blind. If we condemn them as "other," we condemn ourselves to isolation. Reform has resolved to pierce this darkness and to break through this isolation.

But more than a numeric growth marks our advance. There has also been a flowering of Reform Jewish literacy and spirituality that is unfolding at the grass-roots; a new sense of discipline in the performing of the mitzvot; a renewed appreciation of the Jewish calendar; a greater interest in Judaism's classical texts. More and more Reform Jews are coming to view our movement not as a form of minimalism, but as a Judaism that can satisfy the passionate heart.

Obviously, there is a need and an opportunity for greater progress in all of these realms . . . more serious Jewish study for children *and* adults. A heightened spiritual intensification, and an ever greater heedfulness of Jewish observance in synagogue and home. But at least a heat is being generated at the core now, and all we need do is see to it that this heat will radiate in ever widening circles.

Most significant of all, our movement has been able to raise up a vigorous new generation. Our rabbis and teachers, our scholars and leaders are our very own, the graduates of our



religious schools and seminaries, the full sheaved harvest of our youth groups and camps. Our detractors say that Reform Judaism has become brittle, that it is devoid of spirit, utterly lacking in vitality. What nonsense, this! A movement that has the inner strength to generate its own leadership is not brittle, but lives.

In any event, such detractors, belittling us from without, do not really trouble me. I *am* troubled, however, by those who belittle us from within, by our self-detractors. Reform Jews who question the authenticity of Reform Judaism, who believe that the phrase "a religious Reform Jew" is really an oxymoron, who think 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 *shtetle*, with its thick walls of halachah and its exclusivist mentality somehow remains the homeland in our minds. All other places are merely places of temporary sojourn where we can escape the demands of an allegedly more 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 is ultimately 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?

The truth is that Reform Judaism should not be viewed and judged as a critique of Orthodoxy, first and foremost. Do we stand before the masterworks of Van Gogh and evaluate them chiefly in contrast to the masterworks of his countryman, Rembrandt? Hardly! 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 unique.

In like manner, Reform recasts tradition, deliberately, openly so. We conceive of Judaism as a dynamic and not a static faith. But, my friends, this is what Judaism always was before it atrophied amid repressive encounters with Christendom. This is precisely what Judaism was 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, he failed to understand the teachings that Akiba quoted in his name. This midrash means to teach us that the rabbis of old understood Judaism to be an evolving faith, an ever changing faith, a continuously reforming religion, in the best sense of that adjective; a religion not of obeisance, but of a dialogue tempered by a profound sense of responsibility, a religion 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 unauthentic, that represents a fundamental break with tradition. Reform Judaism, in its ideal conception, is palpably truer to that tradition.

Canada's great Jewish scholar, Rabbi Gunther Plaut, in commenting on Beha'alotecha, last week's Torah portion, puts the matter well.

He wrote:

"[Halachah functioned well,] as long as the rabbis felt free to mold the law in accordance with the demands of the time. Halachah ran into serious difficulties only in modern times, when the rabbis no longer considered themselves qualified to interpret the law freely. This absence of a vigorous process in the turbulent days following the Emancipation gave rise to the Reform movement, which opened new ways for reinterpretation."

Are not our contemporary "turbulent" days - - this era of unsurpassed holocaust and most remarkable redemption - - as impactful as any since the Sinaitic period? Shouldn't the sacred Jewish texts, therefore, still be considered open for interpretive study, for new commentary, for outright revision? Reform answers the questions with a resounding YES, and this is why Reform - - more than any other contemporary stream of Judaism - - speaks to our people in a language that the greatest number of modern Jews will hear and understand . . . a language that speaks - - to name but one of our principles - - of the full equality of men and women in the religious life and then sets forth practices that give meaning to these words.

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 the 17th Century Poland, but is an ever evolving faith.

Look and see; how many of our reforms, at first deemed so radical, have become acceptable to most of our fellow Jews. Indeed, our most recent innovations have become normative - - at least in the American Jewish community.

Outreach is a novum no longer . . . everybody else is doing it - the Conservatives, the Reconstructionists, liberal Orthodox groupings, communal organizations, fund raising agencies - all have accepted our fundamental approach, each in its own way, nonetheless joined in a kind of Jewish patchwork quilt of outreach which has forever altered the landscape and the mindscape of American Jewry.

As for patrilineality . . . recent studies show that fully 80% to 85% of the American Jewish laity are accepting of this principle. They will be delighted to have their children choose to



marry mates who identify themselves as Jews and who live Jewish lives, even though their mothers aren't Jewish, though their fathers are.

Intriguingly enough, there has been interest in the patrilineal principle even in Israel, where it was once universally scorned. Because of the high intermarriage rate among Russian Jewish immigrants, where only the fathers are Jewish, whose children, numbering tens of thousands, though they will share the fate of the Jewish people: speaking Hebrew, attending Israeli schools, celebrating Jewish festivals, serving in the army, will, nonetheless, be deemed halachically unacceptable, barred from marrying within Israel by its rabbinic courts. And thus there is an awakening interest among Israelis in the approach which Reform pioneered.

Let us therefore proclaim without reticence, our conception of Judaism as an ever evolving faith.

Let us not think, even for a moment, that we are unauthentic in our Jewishness.

And this above all; let us not bend our convictions to appease our detractors. It will not avail us . . . only total surrender will please them. In any event, such change is alien to the spirit of Reform. It substitutes political for religious judgments and thus does violence to our essential nature.

Let us, once and for all, reject the concept of protective mimicry. Let us not become sycophants, truckling for favor by becoming what we are not - it will not avail us.

We will only demean ourselves and lose our distinctive character. Our forebearers did not forge Reform Judaism to have us trade it in for a tinsel imitation of Orthodoxy. We owe halacha a vote and not a veto. And we owe ourselves that self respect and integrity which holds fast to our finest values and our most cherished beliefs.

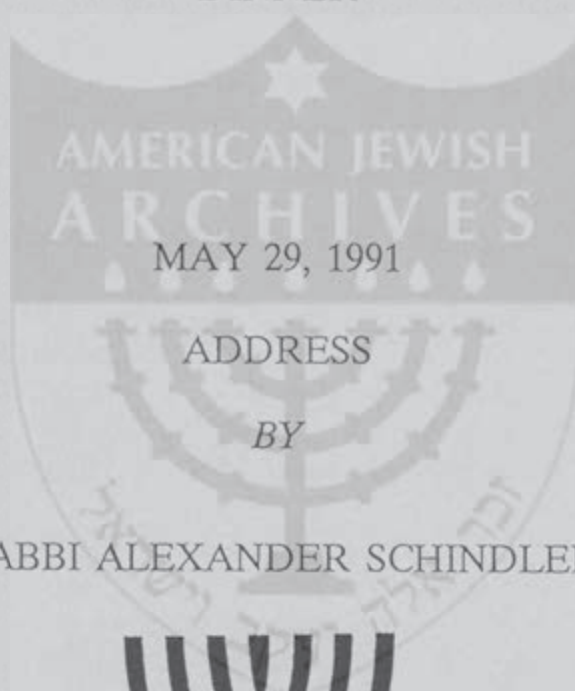
And let us stop romanticizing Orthodoxy, ever comparing their best with our worst. Yes, Orthodoxy is rich and beautiful and meaningful in many ways. But it has its excesses too. Where Orthodoxy alone prevails, stale repression, fossilized tradition and ethical corruption often hold sway. That is happening in Israel today, is it not?

But where Reform is free to challenge, to compel thought, to affirm the power of Jewish ethics, to throw change against the rusted fortresses of pilpulism and rigid convention, there do we find new energy, new drive, healthy competition and a renewed vitality.

Let us be true to our convictions, then, and as Reform Jews together create a Judaism that is a spur and a goad, aye, but also a free and a joyous spirit, an authentic source of pride and an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration.

NEW JERSEY-WEST HUDSON VALLEY COUNCIL  
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

PRESIDENTS/VICE PRESIDENTS  
DINNER



RABBI ALEXANDER SCHINDLER



איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

TEMPLE SINAI, TENAFLY, NJ



I am deeply grateful to Chuck Rothschild for his generous if overly extravagant introduction. Needless to say I reciprocate his regard and affection with a full and grateful heart. There is little that I can tell you about him that you do not know so much better yourself. After all, he was catapulted into national leadership from serving as the president of this region, which came on the heels of his presidency of near-by Temple Emeth of Teaneck. Suffice it to say, that when the history of our religious community is written, his name will emerge as one of the great lay leaders of our generation, a chairman of our movement sans peer.

I also want to salute the president of your region, Myra Ostroff, an altogether worthy successor of those who preceded her ... and Dan Freeland too. I like Danny very much. He is an extraordinarily gifted rabbi. Certainly whatever good happens in this region is due in large measure to him; to his boundless energy and his effectiveness. I am proud to have him on our staff and to know him as a friend.

I am delighted to be with you and especially to see so many of you. Based on Danny's original invitation, I expected no more than a minyan or two, as it were, the members of the regional executive, and perhaps one or two others. Your presence, in such large numbers, is really satisfying. It bespeaks the earnestness of your concern for the synagogue, and demonstrates the vitality of our religious community.

It has been too long since I have been in your midst. I have many good friends here and it is good to be reunited with them: my colleagues of the rabbinate, the lay leaders of the New Jersey-West Hudson Valley Council guided by its wise and able president, and those other members of our National Board who are with us this day: Selma Green and Sheila Thau. I am grateful for everything they do and for what they are.

Now, before I get into the substance of my commentary, I want to say just a word about the events of the day. They are too historic and we cannot really allow them to slip by unnoticed. I refer, of course, to the absorption, this past week-end, of the Ethiopian Jews. What a remarkable achievement that was. What a glorious moment in the history of the modern Jewish state. This is what the state of Israel was created for, and it has fulfilled these noblest of tasks over and again. We may have been disappointed over the years by this or that official policy decision or utterance or act. But the authentic purposes of the Jewish state have been realized. Israel has become a thriving state capable of defending Jewish lives and rights within and 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.

What other country would open its doors in such a manner and especially in such a time. It will cost upward of 60 billion dollars to absorb this immigration and the Russian immigration which preceded and will follow it. Israel hasn't the vaguest idea how it will manage this influx, this cost, but its ports are never closed to our fellow Jews who are



embattled--whatever be their national origin or race. What an operation ... 14,000 people evacuated in one day. Remember also and remember it well, that this is the first time in human history when blacks were taken from one continent to another, not in chains but in love. And so we have every reason to be supportive of Israel. Let us stand at her side--without reserve! Let us offer what we can, we American Jews, we haven't given nearly enough.

And let us buttress our synagogues, that source from which Jews always drew the strength required by the struggle for their continuity. Which brings me to my subject for tonight: the Reform Judaism of tomorrow. The principal challenges which our synagogues will face during the years ahead. I am glad to do so, of course, although I generally avoid prognostication, mindful of the Chinese proverb which holds "that to prophesy is exceedingly difficult especially with respect to the future." Yesterday forecasts invariably are mocked by today's events and there really is no telling what the future will bring.

Let me begin by talking about the state of Reform Judaism today, and here the news is exceedingly good--at least from a quantitative point of view. Our family of congregations now exceeds 850 temples, five more will be admitted at our Board meeting next week--and in the past two decades alone, our membership rolls have burgeoned by better than 25%. Obviously there are some contractions here and there, due to a shifting in the population from the north to the south, from the east to the west but the over-all increase is sturdy. Thousands of households have been added to our temple rosters in the past ten to fifteen years--well over one hundred and fifty, nearly two hundred thousand men, women and children. And if Jewish sociologists are to be believed, our growth rate will accelerate even more during the years ahead, for their studies show that the fifth generation of American Jews inclines to identify itself almost exclusively with Reform.

This enlargement of our ranks comes in the face of a general decline in religious affiliation within the American Jewish community. There has been a slow and steady erosion within Conservatism. And while there appears to be some gaining among the Orthodox in urban centers, this recovery must be seen against the virtual crumbling of Orthodoxy in mid America. Most sociological studies show that Orthodoxy holds at best no more than 12% of American's religiously identified Jews.

In the larger American community, fundamentalism is fueling our country's religious revival. In the American Jewish community the opposite holds true: liberalism rather than orthodoxy is leading the religious advance. We might do well to ponder the reasons for Reform Judaism's present-day growth, for in effect these reasons constitute the heart of the challenge for the Reform Synagogue of tomorrow. Those principles which assured our enlargement in the past, are likely to secure our future as well.

The first of these principles is inherent in the adjective Reform. I speak now of our capacity to change, of our conception of Judaism as a dynamic and not a static faith.



Reform has always been on the cutting edge of Jewish life, and we must continue to be so. Let us not be frightened by those who counsel us to retreat from some of our innovations lest we break Jewish unity. That alarm was sounded at every stage of our development as a movement within Judaism and always proved false. The truth of the matter is that our most recent innovations have become normative for the American Jewish community. Outreach is a novum no longer, as we will see in a moment. As for patrilineality, recent studies show that fully 80% to 85% of the American Jewish laity are accepting of this principle. They will be delighted to have their children choose to marry mates who identify themselves as Jews and who live Jewish lives, even though their mothers aren't Jewish, though their fathers are.

Intriguingly enough, there has been interest in the patrilineal principle even in Israel of late, yes, in Israel, where this idea was initially scorned. The reason is not far to seek. Israel expects to absorb 1,000,000 Russian Jews. At least 30% of these immigrants, including the children of intermarried couples in which the woman is not Jewish, are not considered Jews halachically. These children, numbering 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 size of the Soviet Jewish immigration in this predicament and their estrangement from ritual observance, the conversion option is as unfair as it is impractical. This is why there is an awakening interest among Israelis in the approach which Reform pioneered. This is why they too are urging that Israel must embrace all the children of the Soviet immigrants, matrilineal and patrilineal Jews alike. Be all this as it may, here we have the first challenge to the Reform synagogue: to uphold and to transmit Reform's unique and passionate recognition of Judaism as a living faith, never to bend our convictions to appease our detractors, never to think--even for one moment--that we are unauthentically Jewish. For us, Judaism is a flowering plant: not merely a tangle of roots but an organism that draws nourishment from those roots; not only a bare stem, but a firm and flexible stem full of sprouts and buds; not only a flower fast to wilt and fade, but a plant that flourishes anew in each generation.

The second principle fueling our advance, a principle Reform Judaism affirmed from its very beginnings, is the unrestricted equality between women and men. We seek the full participation of women in religious life, and we stand ready for the transformation that participation will bring. We have made substantial progress in this realm, bringing our grasp ever closer to our reach. Currently, nearly one out of every two of our temple presidents is a woman. Women educators and administrators and cantors have gained full acceptance. For nearly a score years now, we have been ordaining women as well as men for the rabbinate. They have been well received and they serve us exceedingly well.

Obstacles to their advancement persist, however, old stereotypes don't die that fast. Some congregations--especially the larger congregations--still refuse even to interview women



rabbis, not for assistantships, to be sure, but for the senior post. This is a grievous wrong. Unless we open all our pulpits to women and remove all obstacles to their advancement, their ordination will remain but a symbolic recognition. This, then, is the second challenge to our religious community; to make certain that our family of congregations will be and remain an equal opportunity employer.

Social activism is another hallmark of Reform, our loyalty to the prophetic spirit of Judaism. Our Religious Action Commission and its Center in Washington have served to restore to the Jewish fold numerous idealists, young and old, whose prophetic yearnings had no Jewish expression, who knew only the language of universalist activism. It is a major source of our numerical growth, even as its attainments give substance to our reason for being. For you see, religious action lends a completeness, a wholeness to our total enterprise. Without it, we would be but a truncated faith. It helps us skirt a current self-contradiction, for we live in a time when the revival of religion has, paradoxically, led to a narrowing of ethical consciousness. Religious moralists peek into our bedroom windows without paying attention to the homeless who are huddled at their feet. Religious censors drive Anne Frank and E.L. Doctorow from library bookshelves, but fail to address the problems of illiteracy and the failure of public education in our country. Religious zealots decry abortion as "genocide" and equal rights for women as "anti-family," yet they oppose the reassigning of monies from the bloated military budget to meet the needs of desperate American families.

Amid all this compulsive narrowing of religious concerns, Reform Judaism's Social Action program is a solid wedge holding open the door of the Jewish conscience. It is an amplifier through which the voices of the prophets still echo, drowning out the ritualistic obsessions of the priests. Here then is the third challenge to the synagogue of today and tomorrow: to rear a generation of Jews for whom there is no schizophrenic division between the "real world" and the world of Jewish devotion; who understand and are motivated to act on the understanding that tikkun olam, the search for justice and mercy in this world, is indeed the quest of Judaism.

The word "outreach" comprises the last, and to some extent the most important of Reform Judaism present-day burgeoning. Rather than cloaking ourselves in an exclusive chosenness, we have declared ourselves open to those who would choose us. In this realm, our accomplishments have been incandescent. Our performance cannot be measured solely by the many innovative programs that we developed nor even by the number of individuals we have helped, and regained for our people. It must be measure by the impact which we have had on the larger American Jewish community. Indeed, our successes here have been stunning. We have transformed American Jewry's mindscape. The subject of intermarriage is no longer taboo, and the concept of outreach, even conversionary outreach, is no longer a heresy within the American Jewish community. We have taken the discussion of intermarriage out of the house of mourning and into the house of study--indeed, into the sanctuary itself. Indeed, not long ago, the last bastion of



opposition to the Outreach idea began to topple. Rav Soloveitchik, the most respected voice of mainline Orthodoxy, in an interview published in HADOAR, voiced what he himself described as an opinion of revolutionary significance, one that would surely draw the ire and fire of his own traditional colleagues. And this is what he said: "Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been saved, it is necessary to do what the Reform Jews are doing--with, of course, an orthodox content." And so everybody is doing it--the Conservatives, the Reconstructionists, liberal Orthodox groupings, communal organizations, fund raising agencies--all have accepted our fundamental approach, each in his own way, nonetheless joined in a kind of Jewish patchwork quilt of outreach which has forever altered the landscape and the mindscape of American Jewry.

But our task is not yet over, and the challenge to the Reform synagogue remains. Our present undertakings urgently demand extension and intensification. If the truth be told, we have barely scratched the surface. There is much soil beneath that remains to be tilled. Our many efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, the perception persists that the Jewish community is a closed society. Too many intermarried couples still feel abandoned by the Jewish community. Too many still feel the sting of rejection. Far too many of their children are reared in a manner in which two religious traditions are blurred together so that neither comes into focus. Conversionary marriages are pitifully small in number, no more than 20%. In some communities--as in Boston--only 7% of all intermarriages result in the conversion of the non-Jewish partner to Judaism. We must become much more affirmative in this; not just to invite the non-Jewish partners into our synagogue, but to do everything we can to gain their acceptance of Judaism.

Moreover, the Reform synagogue's outreach should not be limited to the intermarried, but to the many born Jews who are unaffiliated. We may well take pride in our numeric growth, but the bitter fact remains that there is one segment of the American Jewish community which is growing at an even faster rate than we are: the unaffiliated Jews those who are not identified with either Orthodoxy or Conservatism or Reform those who eschew even a communal identification with our people and who are Jews in name alone. Thus, for instance, recent studies suggest that of those dropping out of Conservatism--5% become Orthodox, 14% join Reform congregations while fully 81% opt out of Jewish life entirely. And so the need to go about the task of our enlargement with an even greater determination to seek new members, to build new congregations, to regain the unaffiliated for our synagogues and our cause. For instance, I would like to call on our congregations to suspend those rules which restrict religious school to the children of temple members and to admit the children of the unaffiliated, not for an open-ended free service, but for one or two years. Don't reject this proposal out of hand. Think about it if you will. It might be a change in our procedures that would reap profits more surely than any other investment.

Many of the families of these children will doubtless join the temple (as was proven in our Denver experiment for the free education of children issuing from mixed marriages). And



if they don't we still will not have lost. We will have provided a Jewish education to children who would never have received it and thus strengthened our future. These then are the reasons I perceive as having contributed to our numeric growth: the perception of Judaism as a living faith, our insistence on the full equality of men and women in the religious life, our social activism, and lastly our determination to be inclusive rather than exclusive, ever to reach out.

To all this I want to add only one other brief word, we must do everything in our power to make certain that our congregants will see and seize Reform as a serious religious enterprise and not just a name devoid of meaning and obligation. What purpose synagogue social action if its religious rootage is ignored? Why belong to a synagogue then? Why not then just join the ACLU or Amnesty International? What purpose outreach, pray tell, if those who enter find nothing within? But our Judaism is more than that, and only when we make it so, when we make of it a serious religious enterprise will we find our Judaism to be a sustaining faith. What does this mean specifically? It means, in the first instance, a renewed emphasis on Jewish education. And on both ends of the age-spectrum, a flowering of Jewish study for adults, as well as an intensification of Jewish study for our children, and that includes a steady increase in the number of Reform Jewish Day Schools and we have 23 of them now sustained by individual congregations, or by several Reform temples in concert. Look at the unvarnished reality and see: most of the young people whom we encounter in our schools and camps and youth groups are Jewishly disadvantaged. Their growth as Jews has been stunted by the assimilation of the past two generations of American Jews and its accompanying embarrassment and uncertainty. Their Jewish maturing has been stunted also by our own movement's readiness to develop a social conscience in our children and be content to call that "Jewish identity," our willingness to sum up the whole Torah, as did Hillel, with words about kindness to our neighbors, but without adding his injunction to "go and study."

These wounds to the spirit cannot be bound with the band-aid of a part-time Jewish education. That requires a more extensive and intensive educational effort. It demands the bracing cure of fulltime Jewish study, at the very least for those whom we intend to be our future leaders. Without it, without such an option for full-time Jewish study, the reality of injury and stunted Jewish identity will not change--and our movement will suffer because of it. But making Reform Judaism a serious religious enterprise demands even more than Jewish study. It demands also a spiritual intensification, and a greater heedfulness of Jewish observance in synagogue and home.

Here, too, we must face some harsh realities. Did you know that there are nearly twice as many conversions out of Judaism than into Judaism each and every year? I speak now only of conversions to Christianity (to Protestantism and Catholicism) never mind the thousands of Jewish youngsters who have been captured by the cults. And what reasons do our children give for their defection: that they failed to find the spiritual sustenance they needed in our synagogues and homes. And so they joined the cults and willingly



submitted themselves to those disciplines which we were so reluctant to impose on them.

Here then is the synagogue's ultimate challenge: to make certain Reform Jews will not view their movement as some form of Jewish minimalism that cannot satisfy a passionate heart. To deepen Jewish literacy and spiritual vision in our midst in order to bind us more securely one to another, to increase our sense of kinship with the past and to heighten our excitement regarding our future. In this manner we will strengthen our synagogues, that source of our strength to live as Jews. The synagogue was always that for our people, was it not? It is the only place where Jews are made, where the individual soul and the community are joined.

Consider this: 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 Jews? The answer in every case, of course is the synagogue--the synagogues and those camps and seminaries and multitudinous educational and outreach endeavors that they sustain.

We do well, then, to buttress the synagogue and our union of congregations. Our interaction, our working together as one family, has made us what we are: a burgeoning religious community, the overwhelmingly predominant synagogue movement on the North American Jewish scene and, thus, a primary guarantor of our people's future.

Frj Dinner in Honor of Sherman Baker  
Boston, MA, June 4, 1991

After such an introduction I can barely wait to hear what I have to say.  
(Beethoven story) (Jewish counterpart--Opera story)

Thank you for your warm introduction, ~~to~~ [Jerry]

Be assured that your sentiments of affection and regard are reciprocated  
with a full and grateful heart.

~~[You lead this regional with great skill,  
and we have every reason to be grateful to you]~~

I want to thank the many people who labored so zestfully  
to make this evening be,  
whose great skill and spirit led to its success.  
You have heard their names and they are listed in the program.  
Many made this superb dinner possible.  
Still I want to thank particularly

Audrey Wilson, the trusted and energetic Associate Director  
of this Council,

Jerry Somers, who led this region with distinction in the past,  
and now renders stellar service in our highest  
national leadership councils

and Maxine Weinstein who, so I have been told by one and all,  
was the master builder of this splendid event.

Heartfelt thanks also to Paul Menitoff,

that remarkably effective director of this Region.

His mailes are many, his gifts of mind and spirit.

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



Thank you all for coming here this night.  
It is gracious of you to do so, to lend us your strength.  
In return, I can give you the assurance that the cause  
which your presence advances is exceedingly worthwhile.

As for the man we delight to honor, Sherman Baker  
what can I possibly tell you about him that you do not  
know so much better himself.

You are his family, his friends, his business associates.  
You know him well.

Your relationship spans the decades.

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

I count myself in this companionship as well.

After all, Worcester was the physical and spiritual matrix  
from which I too sprang.

It is a place endeared to me by memory and by affection.

When I arrived there, now nearly two score years ago,  
a fledgling rabbi, untested and uncertain,  
Sherman and Lois took me under their wings.

They counselled me, they encouraged me, they were my tutelary spirits.  
And since I was still single then,  
they even had to put up with my romantic moonings  
as well as to protect me from the onslaught of the many mothers  
with eligible daughters.

This is also when I learned to appreciate Sherm's essential worth,  
his energy, his enthusiasm, his dogged determination to make  
things happen and happen fast.

We were given the joint task of developing Temple Emanuel's  
Adult Education Forum

-- the first of what eventually became a rather remarkable  
annual series of lectures by prominent personalities.

We met on a Sunday afternoon, considered various themes and lecturers,  
and adjourned, I assuming that we would have to have several  
more meetings before things would be settled.

But no later than the Wednesday following, I had a call from Sherm  
informing me that all the dates and speakers were set.

No dilly-dallying for him.

It was all done -- in one fell swoop.

I watched him, from a somewhat greater distance,  
approaching his business ventures with a like verve.

There was but one J.Baker shoe store in town in those days,  
a factory outlet, rather smallish by present day standards,  
with Sherm's mother, Gertrude,  
guarding the lone cash register at the gate.

But pretty soon, under Sherm's dauntless direction,  
the one outlet became two, the two four,  
then grew in geometric proportion,  
until a formidable, nation-wide enterprise emerged.

Still, success never spoiled him.

He disdains the bluster of those who are convinced that their own  
superior wisdom enabled them to achieve what they did.

Sherm knows that luck is a necessary ingredient of attainment,  
and, above all, that it requires the counsel and help  
of many good people.



This is why he is so respectful of others

-- whatever be their station.

This is why he is heedful of them,

ever willing to test new ideas and ways.

This is why his human approach is so genuinely warm.

Whereever Sherm lived, he joined Reform synagogues

-- in Worcester, Hyannis, Boston and Palm Beach.

And wherever he lived he involved himself

in Jewish and general communal affairs.

Nor does he choose the easiest means of serving these

and other institutions of human love

-- by giving them material support while otherwise passive.

He chooses, rather, that most burdensome and yet quintessential

of all institutional tasks:

he raises money,

he scratches and scrapes together those material means

without which spiritual ends simply cannot be served.

But at the very core of Sherm's being, there is a caring for others.

He is essentially good and kind.

He really loves people...cares for them...

wants to help them in their need.

Witness, if you will, that social conscience with which he operates  
his business:

the openness of his management style...he is accessible to all

his emphasis on the employment of the disabled,

how he encourages his employes to help others by making corporate

contributions to those institutions which they serve.

Clearly, the greatest measure of his care is extended to those  
who stand closest to him,  
his friends, his children and their spouses,  
their children, his grand-children...  
they are the jewels of his crown.

And then there is Lois -- altogether lovely in countenance and deed --  
most precious to Sherm.

Together they walked the way of life these many years,  
drinking from its single cup,  
when it ran bitter, when it ran sweet,  
giving true meaning to the words: husband, wife, and marriage.

\* \* \*

Now, surely I need not tell you that Sherman did not seek  
this evening's tribute.

He neither craved nor relishes such open flattery.

And he responded favorably to our pleadings

only because he saw this evening as a means of furthering  
a cause that has been central to his life of public service:  
the nurturing of our people's spiritual life,  
the sustenance of the synagogue,  
the strengthening of its supportive institutions.

Before our dinner, Paul Menitoff talked about some of the

Union's many-varied programs which purpose to serve this very end:  
All these and the wider range of our activities are described  
in the brochure which you have received.

You can read about them at your leisure, and there is no need  
for me to multiply words.



But allow me to extend, just for a moment or two, his description of our social action program, and to set forth its rationale, because this aspect of our doing is of special interest Sherman given his well-refined social conscience.

From its very inception, Reform Judaism has been committed to the conception that the pursuit of justice for all is the quintessential task of Judaism.

And so the Union maintains a national Commission on Social Action, and a Religious Action Center concerning which Paul spoke.

In addition to some of the activities which Paul described, we also engage in the task of coalition building with other civic and religious groupings -- and on a plethora of pressing issues from world peace to national-health care from freedom of choice in abortion to human rights.

We nurture Black-Jewish relations in a variety of meaningful ways. We reach out to the Hispanic community, to Catholics and Protstants and Moslems, to men and women of divergent faiths and even conflicting theologies, ever forging coalitions of decency to reach common ends: to open the eyes of the blind, to loosen the fetters of the bound to bring light to those who live in darkness.

Why do we do all this?

To some extent, let it be confessed, we are moved by an enlightened  
self interest: if we don't feel the pain of others  
others are not likely to feel our pain  
and to stand by our side when we are in need.

More important, we do so in response to the dictates of our faith,  
which bids us be true to its prophetic spirit.  
Religious action lends a completeness, a wholeness to our enterprise.  
Without it, we would be but a truncated faith.

It helps us skirt a current self-contradiction,  
for we live in a time when the revival of religion has,  
paradoxically, led to a narrowing of ethical consciousness.  
Religious moralists peek into our bedroom windows without paying  
attention to the homeless who are huddled at their feet.  
Religious censors drive Anne Frank and E.L. Doctorow from library  
bookshelves, but fail to address the problems of illiteracy and  
the failure of public education in our country.  
Religious zealots decry abortion as "genocide" and equal rights for  
women as "anti-family,"  
yet they oppose the reassigning of monies from the bloated military  
budget to meet the needs of desperate American families.

Amid all this compulsive narrowing of religious concerns,  
Reform Judaism's Social Action program is a solid wedge  
holding open the door of the Jewish conscience.  
It is an amplifier through which the voices of the prophets still echo,  
drowning out the ritualistic obsessions of the priests.



Now, all of this does not import, that we neglect our own garden.  
The Union and its RAC, stands in the vanguard of the struggle  
to secure political and economic support for Israel,  
even as we spearheaded political action to increase US Government  
support for Soviet Jewish refugees both here and there.  
Even now, the Director of our Religious action center, David Saperstein,  
is working with representatives of the State Department and Congress  
to develop a contingency plan for an emergency airlift  
for Soviet Jews should the gates of their emmigration  
be slammed shut once again.

Only last week, we all all read with a wonder about the rescue  
of Ethiopian Jewry...14,500 black Jews evacuated in tow days.  
What an amazing achievement that was.  
Israel was the dominant player in this sphere...and deserves most of the  
credit...as does the Joint Distribution Committee  
[which Gene Ribikoff here so ably serves].  
But the Union can also claim some small role.  
Since 1984 we have sent doctors to Ethiopia  
volunteers from our congregations, several months at a stretch...  
to care for our fellow Jews...  
and one of our Center staff members spent this past year  
in Addis Abeba to help in the work of resucue.  
He was on the last plane leaving Ethiopia for Ben Gurion  
just a few days ago...

In all these diverse ways, then, Reform Religious Action  
has become a major aspect of our work,  
and it is also a significant source of our numeric growth.

It has returned to the Jewish fold numerous idealists, young and old,  
whose prophetic yearnings had no prior Jewish expression,  
who knew only the language of universalist activism.

It helped rear a generation of Jews for whom there is no  
schizophrenic division between the "real world" and the  
world of Jewish devotion;  
who understand and are motivated to act on the understanding  
that tikkun olam, the search for justice and mercy in  
this world, is indeed the quest of Judaism.

Why is this so important?

Can we not be good for the sake of goodness?

Can we not be moral for morality's sake?

Why must ethics be linked to Judaism, to any religion for that matter?

Why must we connect human behavior with divine command?

World history provides us with an answer, for it tells us  
of countless reform movements which themselves became corrupt;  
of revolutions that were supposed to free men,  
but enslaved them instead;  
of freedom that abused freedom.

Can we forget the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution  
or the farmers slaughtered in the Russian Revolution?

Intentions were good but results were bad

-- because men decided for themselves

what is right and what was wrong...



Ethics without religion is like a cut flower.  
Since it has no roots it has no staying power.  
Neither does it reproduce itself...

Only a prophetic religion transmits ethics from generation to generation  
One must become emotionally attached to ethical behavior.  
This is the meaning of Israel's clarion call:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might."  
The love of righteousness comes only with religion.  
It is, in fact, the love of God.  
To the truly believing Jew, ethics and religion are inseparable.

My friends, I have shown you only one surface  
of that many splendored prism that is our Union.  
It is but one of our countless efforts to strengthen the synagogue,  
that source of our strength to live as Jews.

The synagogue was always that for our people.  
It is the only place where Jews are made,  
where the individual soul and the community are joined.

Consider this:

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 under-  
standing Jews?

The answer in every case, of course is the synagogue

-- the synagogues and those camps and seminaries and multitudinous educational and outreach endeavors that they sustain.

We do well, then, to sustain the synagogue  
and our union of congregations.

We do well to celebrate the lives and achievements of its builders.  
Not the least among them is the man we acclaim tonight, Sherman Baker.  
We honor him not just with the service of the lips,  
but by sustaining that cause which is central to his  
life of communal service.

Sherman, on behalf of our far-flung constituency, those who are here  
and those who are not assembled with us this night,  
I present you with this first striking of our presidents medal.  
The inscription reads:

Since you don't have too much wall-space in your beautiful apartment  
and may not have room to put this medallion on permanent display  
I also present you with a gift:  
this beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ tseddaka box...

Fashioned

It is an altogether appropriate gift for you,  
a symbol of that communal service to which you devoted  
so much of your energies,  
It is a symbol of your life long quest for the righteous deed.

Come up here now Sherman  
and receive these gifts and the applause that is your ample due.



TRIBUTE TO PEACHY AND MARK LEVY

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST COUNCIL  
AMERICAN JEWISH  
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
ARCHIVES



Century Plaza Hotel  
Los Angeles

May 23, 1991  
10 Sivan 5751

Thank you for your gracious introduction, Lenny, but alas, like most of your colleagues you are prone to hyperbole, you tend to exaggerate. Extravagantly laudatory introductions discomfit me, they really do. Well, at least a part of me is discomfited, and I am inclined to refute them. Unfortunately, I know that such assertions of humility are often perceived as sham, as but a camouflage hiding an inner pride.

Your exaggerations to the contrary notwithstanding, Lennard, I thank you for your warm words. Surely you know that your sentiments of regard and affection are reciprocated with a full and grateful heart. I really love this guy - - and his family too. Certainly, it is true that whatever good happens in this region is due in large measure to him, his energy and talents, to the essential warmth of his human approach and to the manner in which he leads and inspires his splendid staff, Janet Marder not the least among them.

Special thanks are due to that well-matched team of lay leaders who co-chaired this function. Alan Belinkoff, capable, proficient, doggedly perseverant in the pursuit of his tasks. Harry Helft, loyal friend, champion of rabbis, unswervingly devoted to the synagogue and its supportive institutions. We salute them both, as well as the two honorary chairmen - - Bruce Corwin and Allan Goldman - - who broke the ground before them. They did not labor in vain. Their harvest is rich indeed, more full-sheaved with every passing year. Thus may it continue!

Thank you all for coming here this night. It is gracious of you to do so, to lend us your strength. In return, I can give you the assurance that the cause which your presence advances is exceedingly worthwhile.

As for the couple we delight to honor tonight, Mark and Peachy Levy, what can I possibly tell you about them that you do not know so much better yourselves. After all, they are members of this community. Your relationship with them spans the years. It is cemented by tears of joy and sorrow alike. You know them exceedingly well. Moreover, we just saw and heard a magnificent multi-media presentation which portrayed the gamut of their interests in all its fullness.

There is little that I can add to all that excepting only this: that their influence is felt far beyond the boundaries of this city and that there are many throughout this land of ours who share your appreciation of their essential worth.



Mark and Peachy are Reform Jews in the ideal conception of that designation. Their lives proclaim for all to see that the phrase "a devout Reform Jew" is not an oxymoron, that piety and Reform are not mutually exclusive states of being, that one can be a learned Reform Jew, an observant Reform Jew, an ardently believing Reform Jew.

They have a respect for intellect and learning, and they are yodei sefer, knowledgeable Jews themselves. Both have made study a regular part of their own lives, and they promote Jewish literacy and competence among their fellow Jews.

Not only do they know Jewish things, but they also do Jewishly. They are compassionate and giving. They serve countless causes of human care. But they also understand that Judaism is not a disembodied force for good but that it also requires visible form. And so observance and worship have become dominant threads in the pattern of their lives, and their home has become a mikdash me'at, a place of spiritual as well as physical beauty.

Their primary synagogue affiliation is Reform, but their definition of Jewishness is scarcely narrow. Their clasp embraces Jews of every kind and stripe. They reach out to them, feel bound to them, whatever be their self-definition and wherever they may live.

In so many ways, then, Mark and Peachy are Reform Judaism's image ideal. They represent Reform Judaism at its best, as it aspires to be, exemplifying the kind of activism and commitment that exalt our religious community.

All this is not to say that they are otherworldly, that they are saints, or even angels walking about in human form. They are not. They are very much human, even earthy at times, especially Mark, baseball nut that he is, and raconteur, the talented teller of not so saintly stories. They are open, aware, full of laughter, they are a delight to be with because they delight so in life. And they are devoted to each other, mutually respectful and admiring, thus giving true meaning to the words: husband, wife, and friend.

Now, surely I need not tell you, that they did not seek this public tribute. They neither craved nor relish such open flattery. They responded favorably to our pleadings only because they saw this evening as a means of furthering a cause that has been central to their life of public service: the nurturing of our people's spiritual being, the sustaining of the synagogue, the strengthening of its supportive institutions.



Those of you who were here last year, and the year before that, heard me talk about the Union's many-varied programs that propose to serve this very end:

- \* our extensive and uniquely responsible Social Action commitments
- \* our Department of Synagogue Management and its amplitude of resources to facilitate the temples' administrative and fiscal tasks
- \* our innovative and nurturing Outreach ventures which have transformed the mindscape of the American Jewry and brought the issue of intermarriage out of the house of mourning and into the house of study - - indeed, into the house of prayer itself.

All these and the wider range of our activities are described in the brochure which you have received. You can read about them at your leisure, and there is no need for me to multiply words.

Allow me, nonetheless, to focus for just a few moments on our extensive program of formal and informal education and to set forth its rationale, to articulate its premises, for this aspect of the Union's doing goes to the very core of Mark and Peachy's commitments, as it does to ours.

Now, education is what you call an "easy" issue; surely there are none who are against it. But in Jewish life, no less than in our society at large, "easy" too often translates to "expendable" when it comes to the hard choices of resource appropriation. There is too much else, we hear it said, too much that is of immediate and pressing concern - - anti-Semitism, Soviet Jewish absorption, the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry, and, first and foremost, Israel's ongoing struggle for stability. How can we spend our resources, they say, on books and teachers and the alef-beit, when Scud missiles, real and metaphorical, are poised to strike?

Mark and Peachy know the answer: How can we not? how can we not fulfill the commandment of the Sh'ma, which bids us "teach [the words of the Torah] diligently to our children," if we expect that prayer to endure? How can we cultivate a future without a memory of the past? What is the use of protecting the borders if we fail to nourish the core.

Alas, Judaism is not an inborn reflex. Nor is it, outside of Israel, so pervasive in the atmosphere, so strikingly present in the culture, that children might breathe it in and learn it as they learn language.



True, Hillel did manage to sum up the whole Torah while standing on one foot, with words about kindness to our neighbors - - but he did not fail to add his injunction to "go and study" before setting down that upraised foot. He knew, and by means of his injunction taught, that feelings of compassion and menshlichkeit are not enough, that humanism and universalism are not enough, that every garden, even the garden of Eden, has to have its boundaries, lest our rootlessness eventually lead to fruitlessness.

Indeed, our children do not suffer from a lack of universalism, a lack of social awareness, a lack of precocious knowledge about the world! What our children suffer is precisely such a rootlessness, a lack of Jewish literacy, a lack of affirmative Jewish identity, a lack of Jewish substance. This is why it is our foremost task as Jewish parents, as Jewish teachers to repair this inadequacy. We need and want to give them the nurturing strength of our faith to buoy and shelter them in this merciless world. We want to provide them with a Jewish calendar and internal clock as an alternative to the rat race.

We want to give them the gift of the Shabbat, as a constant reminder that there is more to life than things and activities - - that there is a here-and-now as well as a tomorrow, a contentment to enjoy as well as an ambition relentlessly to pursue.

We want to provide a Judaic context for their sense of goodness, and justice, and the sacredness of life - - so that when they experience those moments of acute consciousness of passion, of reverence, of moral challenge, they will feel not alone, but will think, "Oh, yes, I remember . . . ." They will experience those moments as their share of an ancient tradition that strives to find holiness in every corner, every crust. They will experience their own divine madness not in anguished isolation, but as part and parcel of a collective will for redemption.

This is what we mean to provide for our children by means of all of our multitudinous education endeavors. And so the Union has created a treasure trove of curricular resources and consultations, teacher training materials, early childhood and parenting programs, educational video tapes and magazines. We have developed Reform Jewish day schools, adult education programs, and summer study institutes. We are publishing Jewish books of lasting worth. We provide educational materials and programs for special needs learners autistic, learning disabled, retarded, blind, hearing impaired - - those forgotten ones, the disabled in body and spirit.

We also sustain a vital, vibrant youth and camping program involving thousands of young people each year and thus securing our leadership for tomorrow: our rabbis and scholars and cantors and teachers and lay leaders too.

These are some of the activities which Mark and Peachy Levy seek to advance by allowing us to give them public recognition. We honor them best not with the service of the lips, but by sustaining that cause which is central to their lives of communal service. We will honor them even more, when we ourselves, each of us, will turn to the Torah.

In a sense we make a covenant with them tonight, resembling that marriage proposal that Rabbi Akiva's wife made to him upon falling in love: "If I let you marry me," she said, "will you go and study Torah?" To which Akiva replied: "Yes." He began his Torah studies at age 40 in a class for children. Tonight, in effect, Mark and Peachy have made a similar proposal: "If we let you honor us," they say, "will you go and study Torah?" To which we reply: "Yes," and clasp the hands of our children, and step forward to commune with the ages.

This is our resolve, Mark and Peachy, and as a symbol of this our covenant, we present you with a gift - it is too heavy for me, and so I can only unveil it and not hold it aloft. It is a challah board crafted by the Lorelei and Alex Gruss, exquisitely made of fine woods and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Affixed underneath the cutting board surface is a plaque which appropriately reads - - it is a quotation from Kohelet:

Eat your bread with joy,  
for God is pleased with your works.

Presented to Peachy and Mark Levy  
by the  
UAHC Pacific Southwest Council  
May 23, 1991

Come, my friends, and receive the applause which you so richly deserve.



Banquet of Celebration, Century Plaza Hotel, May 23, 1991

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and I am inclined to refute them.

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as sham, as but a camouflage hiding an inner pride.

~~(Freud, Einstein, Wise)(two faced...you really have to know him  
to depreciate him...keep it short)~~

II  
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is due in large measure to him, his energy and talents,  
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that one can be <sup>a</sup>learned Reform Jew, an observant Reform Jew,  
an ardently believing Reform Jew.

They have a respect for intellect and learning,  
and they are yodei sefer, knowledgable Jews themselves.  
Both have made study a regular part of their own lives,  
and they promote Jewish literacy and competence  
among their fellow Jews.

Not only do they know Jewish things, but they also do Jewishly.  
They are compassionate and giving.

They serve countless causes of human care.

But they also understand that Judaism is not a disembodied force for good  
but that it also requires visible form.

And so observance and worship have become dominant threads in the  
pattern of their lives,  
and their home has become a mikdash me'at,  
a place of spiritual as well as physical beauty.

JP  
Their primary synagogue affiliation is Reform,  
but their definition of Jewishness is scarcely narrow.  
Their clasp embraces Jews of every kind and stripe.  
They reach out to them, feel bound to them,  
whatever be their self-definition and wherever they may live.

R  
In so many ways, then, Mark and Peachy are Reform Judaism's image ideal.  
They represent Reform Judaism at its best,  
as it aspires to be,  
exemplifying the kind of activism and commitment that exalt  
our religious community.

R  
All this is not to say that they are otherworldly,  
that they saints, or even <sup>also</sup> angels walking about in human form.  
They are not.  
They are very much human, even earthy at times,  
especially Mark, baseball nut that he is, and raconteur,  
the talented teller of not so saintly stories.  
They are open, aware, full of laughter,  
They are a delight to be with, because they delight so in life.  
And they are devoted to each other, mutually respectful and admiring,  
thus giving true meaning to the words: husband, wife, and friend.

R  
Now, surely I need not tell you, that they did not seek  
this public tribute.  
They neither craved nor relish such open flattery.



They responded favorably to our pleadings

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

Those of you who were here last year, and the year before that,  
heard me talk about the Union's many-varied programs  
that purpose to serve this very end:

- \* our extensive and uniquely responsible ~~social~~ <sup>Social</sup> action commitments...
- \* our ~~Department of Synagogue Management~~ <sup>Department of Synagogue Management</sup> and its amplitude of resources  
to facilitate the temples' administrative and fiscal tasks.
- \* our innovative and nurturing ~~Outreach~~ <sup>Outreach</sup> ventures  
which have transformed the mindscape of the American Jewry  
and brought the issue of intermarriage out of the house  
of mourning and into the house of study  
-- indeed, into the house of prayer itself.

All these and the wider range of our activities are described  
in the brochure which you have received.

You can read about them at your leisure, and there is no need  
for me to multiply words.

Allow me, nonetheless, to focus for just a few moments on our extensive  
program of formal and informal education and to set forth its  
rationale, to articulate its premises,  
for this aspect of the Union's doing goes to the very  
core of Mark and Peachy's commitments, as it does to ours.

P Now, education is what you call an "easy" issue;  
surely there are none who are against it.

But in Jewish life, no less than in our society at large,  
"easy" too often translates to "expendable" when it comes  
to the hard choices of resource appropriation.

There is too much else, we hear it said,  
too much that is of immediate and pressing concern  
-- anti-Semitism, Soviet Jewish absorption, the res<sup>cue</sup> of  
Ethiopian Jewry,  
and, first and foremost, Istra<sup>el</sup>'s ongoing struggle for stability.  
How can we spend our resources, they say, on books and teachers  
and the alef-beit,  
when Scud missiles, real and metaphorical, are poised to strike?

P Marc and Peachy know the answer:

How can we not?

How can we not fulfill the commandment of the Sh'ma,  
which bids us "teach [the words of the Torah] diligently to our  
children," if we expect that prayer to endure?

How can we cultivate a future without a memory of the past?

What is the use of protecting the borders if we fail to nourish the core,

P Alas, Judaism is not an inborn reflex.

Nor is it, outside of Israel, so pervasive in the atmosphere,  
so strikingly present in the culture,  
that children might breathe it in and learn it  
as they learn language.



True, Hillel did manage to sum up the whole Torah while standing on one foot, with words about kindness to our neighbors -- but he did not fail to add his injunction to "go and study" before setting down that upraised foot.

He knew, and by means of his injunction taught, that feelings of compassion and menshlichkeit are not enough, that humanism and universalism are not enough, that every garden, even the garden of Eden, has to have its boundaries, lest our rootlessness eventually lead to fruitlessness.

Indeed, our children do not suffer from a lack of universalism, a lack of social awareness, a lack of precocious knowledge about the world! What our children suffer is precisely such a rootlessness, a lack of Jewish literacy, a lack of affirmative Jewish identity, a lack of Jewish substance.

This is why it is our foremost task as Jewish parents, as Jewish teachers to repair this inadequacy.

We need and want to give them the nurturing strength of our faith to buoy and shelter them in this merciless world.

We want to provide them with a Jewish calendar and internal clock as an alternative to the rat race.

*H* We want to give them the gift of the Shabbat, as a constant reminder  
that there is more to life than things and activities  
-- that there is a here-and-now as well as a tomorrow,  
a contentment to enjoy as well as an ambition relentlessly to pursue.

*P* We want to provide a Judaic context for their sense of goodness,  
and justice, and the sacredness of life  
-- so that when they experience those moments of acute consciousness  
of passion, of reverence, of moral challenge,  
they will feel not alone, but will think, "Oh, yes, I remember..."

*T* they will experience those moments as their share of an ancient  
tradition  
that strives to find holiness in every corner, every crust.

*O* they will experience their own divine madness<sup>not</sup> in anguished isolation<sup>y</sup>  
but as part and parcel of a collective will for redemption.

*P* This is what we mean to provide for our children by means<sup>d</sup> of all of our  
multitudinous educational endeavors.

And so the Union has ~~have~~ created a treasure trove of curricular resources<sup>es</sup>  
and consultations, teacher training materials, early childhood and  
parenting programs, educational video<sup>el</sup>-tapes and magazines.

We have developed Reform Jewish day schools, adult education programs,  
and summer study institutes.

We are publishing Jewish books of lasting worth.

We provide educational materials and programs for special needs learners  
autistic, learning disabled, retarded, blind, hearing impaired  
-- those forgotten ones, the disabled in body and spirit.



*P* We also sustain a vital, vibrant youth and camping program involving thousands of young people each year and thus securing our leadership for tomorrow: our rabbis and scholars and cantors and teachers and lay leaders too.

*P* These are some of the activities which ~~the~~ Mark and Peachy Levy seek to advance by allowing us to give ~~them~~ public recognition.

*A* We honor them best, not with the service of the lips, but by sustaining ~~but by sustaining~~ that cause which is central to their lives of communal service.

We will honor them even more, when we ourselves, each of us, will turn to the Torah.

*P* In a sense we make a covenant with them tonight, resembling that marriage proposal that Rabbi Akiva's wife made to him upon falling in love:

"If I let you marry me," she said, "will you go and study Torah?" To which Akiva replied: "Yes," He began his Torah studies at age 40 in a class for children.

Tonight, in effect, Mark and Peachy have made a similar proposal: "If we let you honor us," they say, "will you go and study Torah?" To which we reply: "Yes," and clasp the hands of our children, and step forward to commune with the ages.

AD This is our resolve, Mark and Peachy,

and as a symbol of this our covenant, we present you with  
a gift. —

It is too heavy for me, and so I can only unveil it and not hold it aloft,

It is a challah board crafted by the Lorelei and Alex Gruss,

exquisitely made of fine woods and inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

*affixed*  
~~Fixed~~ underneath the cutting board surface is a plaque which

appropriately reads -- it is a quotation from Kohelet:

→ Eat your bread with joy,  
for God is pleased with your works. ←

*center*  
Presented to Peachy and Mark Levy  
by the UAHC Pacific Southwest Council  
May 23, 1991 ←

④ Come, my friends, and receive the applause which you so richly deserve.



# SMALL CONGREGATIONS CONFERENCE

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

ADDRESS

AMERICAN JEWISH  
*by*  
ARCHIVES

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER



איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

APRIL 5, 1991

# SMALL CONGREGATIONS CONFERENCE

Address  
*by*  
**Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler**



איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה



**I**t is a privilege which I greatly appreciate to be here and to participate in this, the Union's first convention for small congregations. It is a meeting long overdue. We should have had gatherings of this sort decades ago. To be sure, now, at our national and regional conventions, delegates are usually divided into groupings according to the size of their congregations. But it is far better to have a convention of this nature, which allows for a more focused and hence a fuller exploration of shared concerns and problems.

I want to congratulate all those who recognized this critical need and responded to it. Foremost among these is B.J. Tanenbaum who championed the cause of our smaller congregations throughout his many years of service in Reform Judaism's highest leadership circles—as a Board member and Officer of the Union's Board of Trustees—as well as our representative on the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Though he served us in many varied ways, this—the well-being of our smaller congregations—was the issue which dominated his doing; this is the leitmotif of his mission as a leader of our religious community.

The second person who merits to be mentioned and honored in this context is Rabbi Norman Kahan. He is a cherished colleague, a rabbi who has crowned his successful career in the rabbinate by devoting his energies to minister to the special needs of our smaller congregations. And what a remarkable job he has done. He is tireless and talented, and his love for the congregations entrusted to his care, that love knows no bounds. B.J. may have limned the dream, but Norman gave it its substance, transforming thought into deed.

The theme of this convention is well-chosen, for it speaks of our small congregations as the heart of the Union—and that they are! Let no one think or say otherwise.

A young journalist friend of mine who recently undertook to write about our Reform movement told me of a telephone call he had placed to one of our Canadian congregations. He had picked it at random from our directory in the hope of making contact with a typical small congregation—a congregation far from the Union's headquarters in New York and presumably without a rabbi. To his surprise the number he reached was that of a nursing home. The woman listed as congregational president was a resident of that home, with most of her members not much younger than she. "Not a very typical congregation," my friend said to me in the course of our interview. "To the contrary," I told him.

To the contrary, because 58% of the Union's member congregations are small—100 families or less—and they comprise nearly 20% of our nation-wide membership. They exist within nursing homes, yes, where elderly Jews know how truly life-giving the smallest mitzvot can be. And they also exist in community center basements where busy young Jews strive to create an ever larger Jewish space for themselves and for their children.

Small congregations are found in large and moderate-sized cities, but as often are they found in places where the sight of a traffic light let alone an eternal light is a surprise to the passing stranger.

Jews in small congregations are the fingertips and toes, the most sensitive receptors and most active organs of outreach of the Reform Jewish body. They are the ones who clasp hands for us, for American Jewry as a whole, with their neighbors, so-called Middle-America. They are, moreover, helping to lead the Reform movement in its quest for a heightened spirituality and a more intense Jewish sensibility, and this, primarily because of their fundamental self-reliance.



It is a self-sufficiency born of their relative isolation. It is so much easier to be Jewish in larger centers of Jewish life. The resources there are extensive, professionals are ready at hand and the burden is shared by many. Not everyone is really needed and too many, alas, choose to be passive participants in temple life. Not so in smaller communities. There everyone is needed to bend the shoulder to the wheel...and everyone usually does. Members of small congregations know how to make spiritual the most humble meeting house. They understand that it is prayer and not architecture that makes a place holy. They affirm in practice the Talmudic teaching that "it is not the place that honors the person, but rather the person that honors the place." They understand the meaning of a "congregation" as a community of individuals, each of whom can vitally enrich and enlarge the whole.

In these congregations we usually find no professionals—except on special occasions—to serve as surrogate Jews. Every member is a rabbi. Every member is a cantor, or at least prepared to lead the congregation in worship. Every member is a teacher of Judaism.

Now teachers — artists of the soul, I call them — must have a vision of what they want to create. They must see in their mind's eye the kind of Jew they mean to make, even as a Michelangelo saw those shapes buried in the marble before he chipped away the restraining stones.

Since a keynote must have its message... and since this message must be of meaning not just to the delegates to this convention, but also to the members of this host congregation—which is far from small and rich in resources—let me focus on this vision for a while, a vision which all of us share, be we small or large, the vision of the kind of Jew we seek to fashion by means of our congregational endeavor, a limning of the elements which go into the making of the Jew.

Now, the first of these elements, assuredly, is knowledge. We want our congregants to have a respect for intellect and learning and to become *jod'ei sefer*, to be knowledgeable Jews themselves. Jewish education is the primary purpose of a congregation's striving. The Sh'ma is the cornerstone of its liturgy, is it not? The very word "sh'ma" means "listen...learn." And at the core of this prayer is the commandment to take the "words which I command thee this day" and "to teach them diligently unto your children." *Talmud Torah*, the study and the teaching of the Torah, is the transcendent ideal which the synagogue enshrines.

Thus, every aspect of the congregational program must be bent to serve this end, the bulk of its resources applied to it. Only then will its center hold. Jewish education is not limited to the classroom by any manner or means. It must penetrate every other room and activity of the Temple's life. In the sanctuary, prayer and study must be intertwined. Conversionary programs are of scant value if they involve merely the imparting of labels lacking substance. Social action loses all force, if its religious rootage is not probed, its religious motivations left unexplored. In a word, all Temple activities: from committee meetings to conversation within its halls, from social events to the letters and bulletins we send out, all should be seen and seized as means to further the Jewish educative process. Torah, Jewish knowledge, is critical in the making of a Jew. It is an essential element of our vision of what being Jewish is all about.

Yet something more is required, for we seek not merely to impart knowledge, but also to impel action, to find a way of bridging the distance between *midrash* and *ma-aseh*, between the mind and the hand. We want our congregants not only to know Jewish things, but also to *do* Jewishly.

To do Jewishly means, in the first instance, to lead a moral life, to develop a daily discipline so



high, that those who see us will say: "the legacy of the prophets lives on in this people."

Reform has always acknowledged the primacy of the ethical in the Jewish way of Life. But the ethical life alone is not enough to mark one a Jew. It must be reinforced and beautified by the performance of mitzvot, by the observance of the Sabbath and the Festivals and the life cycle rites of Judaism. And these, alas, too often, are neglected in our midst.

I come here upon a theme which has been my leitmotif for some years now, but which I intend to rehearse in Cato-like manner until it becomes commonplace, accepted as the norm in our thought and in deed. Reform Judaism is not just a label with which we adorn ourselves. If we are to wear this name with pride, we must give our religious community authenticating substance.

True enough, as Reform Jews, we take pride in our openness, our determination to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Just the same, we are not so open that anything goes. Reform Judaism has its definitions and not just in the negative sense of what we do not do but also in the positive sense of what we are obliged to do when we claim the name of Reform Jew.

Too many in our midst either do not know or refuse to act upon the knowledge that this is so. As liberal Jews, we assert our autonomy, we insist on the right to choose. But all too often we choose nothing at all, or choosing something we observe it only haphazardly. We saunter in, we saunter through, we saunter out.

Moreover, as synagogue leaders we make few demands on our constituents beyond the financial. And because we don't, we give substance to the perception that Reform Judaism is but a religion of convenience, that in Reform anything goes, that this is a place where easy answers are given and few if any questions asked, that we need do little if anything at all and we can still call ourselves Jews. But that is a perversion of our ideals, a caricature of our faith as drawn by our detractors. Reform Judaism may give the individual a wide range of choices. But it does not give the individual the latitude to choose nothing whatsoever.

To be a Jew in one's heart is simply not enough. The pure idea, in and of itself, can serve only a few rare individuals: theologians, philosophers, if you will. The truth, to be felt by most of us, must put on a garb. There must be rite, legend, ceremony—visible form.

To *do* Jewishly, then, is the second element which goes into the making of the Jew, into our vision of what Jewishness is all about.

But there is a third required element, and some say it is the most important. And that is to *feel* Jewishly, to experience one's Jewishness fully. I speak now of something other than sense of identification with other Jews—that is a given. We must feel bound to our people and help our fellow Jews wherever they may be in need. I speak, now rather, of the numinous, of a consciousness of the holy, which our faith enjoins us to refine: *kedoshim tiheyu ki kadosh ani adonai eloechem* Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

"Where wast Thou when the foundations of the earth were laid,  
When the morning stars sang together  
And the hosts of heaven shouted for joy?  
Hast Thou commanded the light?  
Hast thou entered the springs of the sea?

Have the portals of death been opened unto thee?  
Take off thy shoes from off thy feet,  
for the place whereon thou standest, it is holy!"

This, above all, this feeling of awe, of the sheer wonder of life, is what we must endeavor to instill and nurture in our congregants, what we must internalize and nurture within ourselves.

Alas, the voice from out of the whirlwind or from the burning bush finds but few listening ears in our time. By and large in our day we are not given to amazement and to wonder as blandly we walk the way of life untouched by its essential magic.

The temper of our times does not allow us to hear... our proneness to consider as real only things perceived by the physical sense, things that can be touched and felt and measured and weighed, and our tendency to ascribe a worth only to things that are of use, that can be bought and sold, and are of practical worth.

But there is a world of reality which cannot be perceived by the physical senses alone, and some among us are blessed with the capacity to perceive that realm.

To one man, for instance, "a primrose by a river's brim, a yellow primrose is to him and it is nothing more." Another man has a clearer vision and so he finds "tongues in trees, books in running brooks, and God in everything." For the physicist, water is composed of 2 parts of hydrogen and 1 part of oxygen. That is a scientific fact. But is this all that we can say about water? Is this the sum and substance of its essence? Shakespeare, as we just heard, read 'books in brooks,' and Israel's sweet singer found firm faith 'by still and stilling waters'; Surely *their* discoveries are as real as are the scientific formulae of the laboratory.

Aye, there *is* a world of reality beyond those worlds perceived by the physical sense alone. And altogether multitudinous are life's gifts that have no practical worth but nonetheless are altogether wond'rous:

"The earth's green covering of grass.  
The blue serenity of sea and sky.  
The song of day, the silent wonder of the night.  
Petals on the grass and wings in the air."

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

Then do the words of prophecy apply to us:

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

No, the human story simply cannot be told without reference to that mystery and majesty that transcends all logic and reason. Only those who open themselves to such a mystery can transcend



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

These then are the aspects of our vision of what being Jewish is all about, these the elements that go into the making of the Jew: the quest for knowledge, the leading of a disciplined Jewish life and a never-ending search for the sacred, for the godly, for the holy in life. This is what we seek to create in our congregations whatever their size.

And in this mutual sacred quest, we, as a family of congregations have a special obligation to those among us who are less strong—*numerically* less strong, though they are surely equally strong in spirit.

Some among these smaller congregations are our institutional progenitors, the founders of our movement, our communal grandparents as it were. We must guarantee the proper inheritance of their resources, the custodianship of their cemeteries, the appropriate and everlasting use of their *klei kodesh* their torah scrolls, and eternal lights, and other holy vessels... so that their memory will never be-forgotten in our midst.

As for those small, but growing younger congregations, they are the Union's future. We must supply them with those educational and religious resources, for which their dues cannot yet pay, so that they may flourish and ultimately add their strength to ours.

In the Shulchan Aruch, we are taught:

"If a person has made his house higher than a synagogue, there are those who say he may be forced to lower it."

Likewise should our movement, our corporate person, have no higher priority than the protection and expansion of its synagogues, whatever be their size.

The Holy One Blessed be He, in whose image we all of us are made, is the great equalizer. No matter whether we are standing within a minyan of 10, within a congregation of 100, within a mighty temple of 3,000 or among the 600,000 at the foot of Mount Sinai,—God hears each individual heartbeat. As a family of congregations, we should strive to do no less.

DVAR TORAH

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler



United Jewish Appeal  
Board of Trustees

New York, New York  
September 4, 1991



We are on the eve of our holiest days, and our tradition enjoins us to prepare for them by beginning the process of self-reckoning even now, though Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are still some days away.

There is a paradox of life that merits being brought to our awareness at such a time . . . I speak of life's self-contradictory demand which enjoins us to cling to its many gifts even while it ordains their eventual relinquishment. The rabbis of old put it this way: "A man comes into this world with his fist clenched, but when he dies, his hand is open." We begin by grasping, ultimately we must renounce, and the art of living is to know when to hold fast and when to let go.

Surely we ought to hold fast to life, for it is wondrous, full of a grandeur and a worth, full of a beauty that breaks through every pore of God's own earth. We know that this is so, that life is passing wonderful, but all too often we recognize this truth only in our backward glance when we remember what was and then suddenly realize that it is no more. We remember a beauty that faded, a love that waned. But we remember with far greater pain that we did not see that beauty when it flowered, that we failed to respond with love to love when it was tendered.

Thornton Wilder makes this pertinent point in his immortal "Our Town." In this play, as many of you will recall, a young woman who died in childbirth is allowed to return to earth for just one day. She chooses her sixteenth birthday as the day she would like to re-live. But as she comes upon the scene so familiar to her, She finds that everyone is far too busy to relish the day's wonder. And so she cries out: "Mamma, Poppa, lets look at one another while yet we may." But nobody looks and nobody listens and all of the business of life goes on.

Saddened by it all, she begs to be taken back and these are her words of farewell: "Good-bye Momma, good-bye Poppa, good-bye Grovers Corners. Good-bye to clocks ticking, and hot coffee and newly ironed dresses . . . and lying down and getting up again. On earth you are far too wonderful for anyone to realize you."

She turns to the stage manager and asks: "Tell me, does anyone on earth ever realize life while he lives it . . . every, every minute?" "No," replies he, "maybe the poets and the saints, maybe they do some." And then she speaks her final words: "That's all human beings are, blind people . . . ."

Is not this the malady that afflicts us. We are blind, blind to so much of the beauty which abounds in our world. We walk about in a cloud of ignorance. We trample on the feelings of those who love us. We spend and waste time as though we had a million years to live, always at the mercy of one self-centered passion after another.

How heedless we often are of our good until it is too late. Like birds whose beauty is concealed until their plumes are spread against the sky, our blessings brighten only as they take their flight.

Here, then, is the first pole of life's paradoxical demands on us: Life is precious, it is ineffably dear. Never be too busy for the wonder and the awe of it. Be reverent before each dawning day. Embrace each hour. Seize each golden minute. Cling to life with all your soul and might while yet ye may.

Hold fast to life . . . but not so fast that you cannot let go. This is the second side of life's coin, the opposite pole of its paradox: we must accept our losses, we must learn how to renounce, how to let go.



This is not as easy a lesson to learn and to internalize, especially when we are young, for when we are young we think that the world is ours to command, that whatever we desire with the full force of our passionate being can, nay will be ours. Ah, but then life moves along to confront us with its grim realities and slowly but surely this second truth dawns upon us: Life not only offers us gifts, it also makes us suffer losses and we must learn to accept them.

At every stage of our life we sustain losses - - and grow in the process. We even begin our independent lives only once we emerge from the womb and lose its protective shelter. We enter a progression of schools, and then we leave our mothers and fathers and our childhood homes. We get married and have children and then have to let them go. We confront the death of our parents and our spouses. We must face the gradual or not so gradual waning of our own strength. And ultimately, as the parable of the open and closed hand suggests, we must confront the inevitability of our own demise, losing ourselves as it were, all that we were or dreamed to be.

Life is never just a being. It is always a becoming, a relentless flowing on. We move through the various stages of life, as Shakespeare had it, each with its entrances and its exits, the infant becomes the boy, the boy the man, and there simply is no turning back.

Life's paradox is puzzling, is it not? First we were enjoined to cling to life, to appreciate its every gift. Then we are told: learn how to renounce these gifts, yea, each and every one of them. How can we do both, and at the very same time? More important, why should we do it. Why fashion things of beauty when beauty is evanescent. Why give our hearts in love when those we love will ultimately be torn from our grasp.

In order to resolve this paradox, we must gain the wider perspective afforded by our High Holydays that bid us to reach beyond ourselves in time both past and future, viewing our lives as through windows that open on eternity. Once we do that, we realize that though our lives are finite, our deeds on earth do weave a pattern that is timeless. Our parents live on through us, and we will live on through our children. The institutions we build endure, and we will endure through them.

Shakespeare was wrong. The good is not interred with our lives. The beauty that we fashion cannot be dimmed by death. The love we give in life lives on long after we are gone, to bless the lives of others.

When Chanayō ben Teradyon, noblest of Jewish martyrs, was burned at the stake wrapped in a Scroll of the Law, his pupils who witnessed his terrible agony cried out: "Our master, our teacher, what seest thou?" And he replied: "I see the parchment burning, but the letters of the Law, they soar on high." Even so it is with us. Our flesh may perish, our hands will wither, but that which they create in beauty and goodness and truth, lives on for all time to come.

Don't spend and waste your lives accumulating objects that will only turn to dust and ashes. Pursue not so much the material as the ideal, for ideals alone invest life with meaning and are of enduring worth.

Add love to a house and you have a home. Add righteousness to a city and you have a community. Add truth to a pile of red brick and you have a school. Add religion to the humblest of edifices and you have a sanctuary. Add justice to the far flung round of human endeavor and then only do you have a civilization.



This, then, is our prayer as our High Holydays approach . . . Not only that we and our loved ones be inscribed for a long life, but that our lives will be filled with much that is of enduring worth: with truth and beauty and loving kindness.



CONFIDENTIAL  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
LAWYER  
NFTY Convention 1991  
E. Brunswick, N. J.  
February 9. 1991

It is good to be here and to participate in this convention.

+ MARK GLICKMAN  
Rabbi Smith did not have to twist my arm to be here.  
He can tell you that I assented at once.

Reasons not far to seek.

I love being with the youth of Reform Judaism.

To begin with it reminds me of my early years in the rabbinate  
when I spent the better part of my time  
running from camp to conclave to concalvette.  
Those were the happiest days of my career, and it is good  
to be reminded of them.  
These memories are sweet, indeed.

Secondly, when I am with you, when I see your smiling faces and eyes,  
I catch a glimpse of our future and I like what I see.

And so I salute you and those who lead you,  
your youth directors, both local, regional and national  
and I hope that the beautiful promise inherent in these days  
will be fulfilled during the year and years ahead.

Now, as keynote it is my task to focus on your theme:  
"Yad b'Yad -- Fulfilling the Vision"

Let me focus on that initial phrase for a moment...  
"Yad b'Yad -- Hand in Hand"

It is good to join hands, is it not.

There is a strength which comes from joining in this companionship...

from being together with fellow Jews...

young men and young women who come from many communities

from virtually every corner of our far-flung world,

but who are united by a common faith.

It is one thing to recite the shema as an individual...

It is quite another when you hear it a thousand voices strong.

There is an inner force which flows only

from the companionship of kindred and aspiring souls.



This, surely is why we are assembled here in such large numbers.

It's pretty grim and cold out there in the cruel world

and we are huddling together for warmth.

We do need the bolstering of spirit which comes from others.

In the final analysis, we are very much like tiny droplets of

water that combine their weakness to attain to strength.

Consider such a droplet of water, if you will.

What is weaker, less potent for any effect.

It is mist, invisible.

It floats through the invisible ethers of the air, and hangs in the air

until cold strikes and it congeals into a cloud

whence it drops in the form of gentle rain upon the earth beneath.

Sinking through the earth, the tiny droplet of water

reaches the line of the rocks from whose side

it oozes forth and trickles down until it meets other

droplets as weak as itself.

These combine their weakness to form the rivulet which flows on

making music while it flows, until it meets counter-streams.

These combine their force to make the river.

The river becomes the estuary,

the estuary the ocean itself.

And once God has marshalled the sum of the weakness of myriads of  
tiny droplets together,

they then they lift mighty ships as if they were a feather

and they play with the winds as if they were mere instruments  
of sport.

Thus it is with us.

Alone we are as weak as droplets of water and less potent for any effect  
But once we are hand in hand,

once we join with one another and make common cause,  
why, then we attain to a might that makes our lives  
not insignificant, but sublime.

As far as the second part of your theme is concerned, "fulfilling the  
vision" <sup>MALE</sup> Smitty gave <sup>ME</sup> for more <sup>4</sup> concrete topics for discussion:

the Crisis in the Gulf,  
Soviet Jewish immigration  
World Hunger Homelessness and Diseases,  
and Arab Israel Relations

All this, and in 3\4 of an hour, including the Q and A period.

He's out of his mind.

I haven't even started and one third of that time is gone.

I want to contract the four to two,

by way of underscoring that we have a two fold vision for you:

We want you to be good Jews...

And we want you to be good human beings,

to recognize that as Jews we have an obligation

to serve our people,  
to help in the struggle for our collective continuity,  
but that it is our concomitant obligation to serve  
world,  
to seek the peace of the community in which we live.

Let me begin with the problems of the Middle East.

What else could we conceivably talk about tonight excepting this.

The events of the day press heavy on us.

They consume our thinking and our feeling,

and we simply have to give them voice.



A veritable eddy of emotions swirled within us these many weeks and months.

The dawning of last year was suffused with hope:  
walls had just crumbled...

the deadly clutch in which the superpowers were locked had loosened  
and the threat of a nuclear holocaust seemed to recede.

But only for a time.

The guns of August changed all that.

Their thunder reminded us that aggression still menaces humankind  
and that free nations must be ready to resist it.

The initial successes of the allied armies may well bring us a  
measure of relief, a brief lifting of the spirit, no more.  
War is like opening a door beyond which lies deep darkness and  
unforeseeable danger.

As the sage of Bronx put it: It isn't over until its over.

And so we do not rejoice.

We could not even if victory were assured.

We Jews are forbidden to do so even then,

for war is a butchery without a soul.

Human lives are at risk -- on both sides of the conflict.

God's children are drowning in a crimson sea.

It is a time to mourn and we may never jubilate.

All this is not to say, that the cause for which we struggle is not  
worthy.

It is a just cause and force was required to advance it.

The cost of war is immense, that is true.

But at times the cost of compromise is greater still.

All of us who lived through the thirties and forties

learned that bitter lesson all too well.

I was a soldier in WWII....3 campaigns...wounded twice...

1/3rd of division wiped out in one campaign...

saw buddies torn to shreds by my side...stood over dead Germans

knew then, and know today even better.

Had Hitler been leashed when he forged his weapons of war,

or when he invaded the Rhineland,

or when he annexed the Sudetenland,

there would have been no World War II with its 50 million victims

and one third of our people, six million Jews,

would not have gone up in wisps of smoke

or turned to blackened ashes.

Even so are we fighting now,

to avert an infinitely greater bloodshed in the future.

Let there be no doubt about that!

Saddam Hussein began his climb to power

as a chillingly professional assassin

He never flinched from violence. indeed, he seems to thirst for it.

How else explain his conduct over the years and now.

Had he remained unchecked...his arsenal intact,

his aggression unanswered,

Iraq would have been certified as the superpower of the Middle East

free to blackmail the entire region, to radicalize it,

and thus to plunge the whole world into chaos.



We have good reason, then, to thank President Bush for his effective leadership, and we give him our fullest support

We are grateful also to our armed forces

among them not a few Jewish men and women, let it be noted for their courage and perseverance.

We pray for their safe and early return and for the success of their mission.

Israel, of course, that land to which our lives as Jews are pledged is at special risk.

We feared this always...we know it now.

Grim reality has given substance to our dread.

I was in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem but a week ago, and I heard sounds and saw sights which I can never forget:

Sirens howling in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

An old Jew off to services wrapped in a tallit

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

Babies screaming in terror at sight of their parents

"made monster by these masks" (NYTimes)

It is a nightmare come true.

Incidentally, damage far greater than reported in the media.

People usually speak of fur Israelis killed and several score wounded

yet 900 people had to be pulled out of the rubble

and there are nearly four thousand homeless...they dwelling places too damaged to allow them to return, at least for a time.

LAK 12/16/44 AW

Hussein's intent is transparent:

Just as anti-Semitism was the cement that bound the Nazi conspiracy  
so does the Iraqi leader seek to bestir an Arab world,  
riven by fratricide,  
to unite in a holy war against Israel.

The Israelis know this, hence their forbearance, their rare restraint.  
Still, could anyone really blame Israel were it to respond?  
How many shocks must it absorb before reacting?  
How many dead and wounded must there be before a retaliation  
is sanctioned?

The head says "no," don't fall into his snare...  
but the heart cries otherwise.  
If you prick us, do we not bleed?

Aye, Israel is at risk militarily...it is also at risk diplomatically.  
Not now, to be sure.

Our government has done everything in its power to prevent  
the attack against Israel.

The first air-strikes were against the Western part of Iraq,  
in an effort, alas abortive, to neutralize the missiles  
aimed at the Jewish state.

America also sent additional Patriot batteries to Israel,  
together with American crews  
to man them or at least to train them in their use.

I visited those sites and saw them operate.

Hopefully, the weapons systems will succeed in warding off  
further onslaughts.



We have no reason then to cavil now.

We have every reason to be grateful to our administration.

Still, the danger persists that when all this is over,

our administration may well conclude

that it now has other allies in the Middle East,

that it might be able to do without Israel.

This is no mere paranoia...

Just look at what happened in the United Nations

during those frantic weeks before Operation Desert Shield

turned into Operation Desert Storm

The United States no longer vetoed resolutions condemning Israel;

it endorsed them

-- and all in the effort to appease our new-won friends.

Some friends -- 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."

Hopefully, the leaders of our nation will remember

that there is but one democracy in the Middle East

-- however feeble that democracy might be.

Hopefully they will recognize that when all is said and done

we have but one faithful ally in the Middle East

and that is Israel.

The quest of an Arab-Israeli peace has also been greatly complicated

by the outrages perpetrated upon Kuwait by Iraq.

The reeds on which Israel's peace movement relied proved to be

exceedingly weak.

Jordan quickly leaned toward Iraq and likely would have even if the

the Jordanian solution had been embraced by Israel.

And King Hussein announced that he would not countenance

the trespass of Jordanian airspace by Israeli planes.

His reason: he wants to preserve Jordan's neutrality,

by keeping his airspace inviolate.

But were Jordan's skies sacrosanct for Iraqi missiles directed

against Israeli civilians.

Apparently these skies are a one-way street: open only for flights

East to West and only if directed against the Jewish State.

What hypocrisy this! What a sham!

And then, of course, there was Arafat's eagerness to embrace

the murderous Saddam Hussein as a would-be liberator.

Saddam Hussein, a liberator indeed!

For the PLO, it seems, Zionism is a greater demon than chemical warfare.

For the PLO, maximalist dreams have greater currency than

maximalist body-counts among Kurds and Iranians and Kuwaitis...



Obviously, I reject the concept of a linkage, a nexus between the the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Israel's occupation of the Westbank..

This is an outrageous, an obscene analogy.

The two situations are not at all alike.

Iraq invaded and raped Kuwait in a naked act of aggression.

*Israel did not invade the West Bank in 1967...*  
Israel ~~did not invade~~ the Westbank in 1967...Quite the contrary.

~~As we all know,~~ Israel's cabinet then pleaded with King Hussein

to stay his hand, promising him not to cross his borders.

But duped by Nasser, Jordan's legions invaded Israel and lost the Westbank in consequence.

And has Israel plundered the territories, as did Hussein Kuwait?

True, Israel's conduct is not above reproach, alas...

No military occupation will ever be benign or acceptable to the occupied.

But can anyone objectively accuse Israel of stealing incubators from hospitals?

Of raping, and ravaging and robbing, as Iraq has done in Kuwait?

Of torturing and murdering thousands of men women and children without cause?

I would venture to say that there are but few Kuwaitis victims of Saddam Hussein's invasion of their country who would not gladly exchange places with West Bank Palestinians at this juncture in Middle East history.

How facile, also, the analysis 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 be seeking to devour its neighbors.

All this is not to say that I have suddenly turned hawk.

I remain a dovish critic of Israel's occupation.

I believe that there is a Palestinian people and that this people  
deserves political dignity.

I believe that the occupation of the Westbank with its million Arabs  
is a continuing threat to Israel's security.

It is draining vital resources -- most especially the precious  
resource of moral strength.

The best course for Israel and Palestinians alike would be an early  
resumption of the peace process.

It will come anyway...sequential linkage is a given.

Then why not seize the initiative.

To all this I need only add that if there ever was a time for us  
to stand at Israel's side that time is now.

Moreover, Israel deserves that support.



We may have been disappointed by this or that official policy decision  
or utterance or act.

But the authentic purposes of the Jewish state have been realized.

Israel has become become a thriving state capable of defending

Jewish lives and rights within without its boundaries:

remember Entebbe, if you will!

But not only Entebbe, in many other lands as well --

most of them unknown.

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.

Right now, the Russian Jews are coming in, planeload after planeload,

today, yesterday, the day before, and the day before that,

even when war erupted and the missiles flew.

(Dinitz Story)

The Israelis are there to greet them as they disembark at Ben Gurion,

providing them with gas mask, alas, but also with every other need

What other country would open its doors in such a manner

and especially in such a tinme.

America's ceiling of 50, 000 refugees from Eastern Europe has

long since been reached...there is no other place fpr them1

It will cost 60 Billion dollars to absorb this immigration.

Israel hasn't the vagues idea how it will manage this influx, this cost

but its ports are never closed to our fellow Jews who are

embattled -- whatever be their national origin or race.

Yes, think of Operation Moses, the recent absorption of the Falashas,  
the ingathering of the persecuted Jews of Ethiopia.

It continues even now.

During the months 1,000 Ethiopian Jewish refugees came to Israel.

The story of their rescue is heroic.

Members of the Mossad stole into that Marxist dictatorship and  
little carried our Jewish brethren and sisters to safety.

They are there in Addis Abeba even now to care for these huddled  
masses...a school for 4,000 Jewish kinds is being operated  
there by the Israelis and JDC

Remember also and remember it well,  
that this is the first time in human history  
when blacks were taken from one continent to another  
not in chains but in love.

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!

Let us offer what we can, we American Jews,  
we haven't given nearly enough.

Yes, let us be Jews...that is the first and foremost component  
of that vision we have for you...

But let us also remember that we live in this world,  
and that we have the sacred obligation to seek its betterment.

Judaism demands that we do so:

Justice, justice shall you pursue...

this is Israel's clarion call...

and it summons us to respond.

Our age demands that we do so.

Consider if you will our demeanor as a nation:

Here we are, the wealthiest country on earth,

yet thirty four million of fellow Americans

are living in debasing poverty,

fully one-sixth of all children,

nearly half of all African-American children

-- and they have lost the faith that this is a society which  
gives a damn for them.

Here we are, with medical technology and savvy that brings the ailing  
to our hospitals from all over the world

yet fully one-third of our own people are without medical insurance  
without the ability to receive care from the hospital

and medical professionals of their choice.

Here we are, able to project military force to the farthest reaches  
of the globe  
and yet we are unable to safeguard our own city streets.

Here we are, built to the pinnacle of power and substance by the  
joined labors of countless immigrants  
and yet without the morally committed leadership who could  
lead us beyond the racism and bigotry that disturb the  
American dream.

As citizens of the world, moreover, the American record is worse than  
negligent.

We participate unthinkingly or callously in what Father Theodore  
Hesburg calls our "Systemic Geographical Discrimination."

Our population, comprising less than 5% of the world population,  
consumes 25% of its daily calories and energy.

Our children confront the frightening prospect of a glutted  
market for college graduates, even Ph.D.'s,  
while Southeast Asian children too often never step foot in  
a school room.

Our people are overfed and overweight,  
but in South America systemic malnutrition is causing mental  
retardation on a wholesale scale across a generation of  
newborns.

We are only the 11th among the developed countries in per capita giving  
of foreign aid  
-- and apart from military aid, we are dead last.



And then we look with pity and despair upon swollen bellies,  
the shrunken limbs, the hopeless poverty,  
and the senseless violence  
-- look with pity and despair, rather than with a sense of  
deep personal responsibility and  
t'shuva, with soul-felt repentance.

Yes, consider our demeanor as a nation.

And consider also, if you will, how we live in relation to the world,  
to this planet earth,  
how we take God's handiwork and despoil it:  
the sweet air He gave us to breathe  
and the fresh water with which he blessed us  
the fertile green which delights the eye.

Instead of scknowledging and making proper use of all these gifts,  
we poison them  
"we tear apart the ozone  
we carbonize the oxygen  
we acidify the refreshing rain."

No, it isn't carelessness or callousness which makes us do all this!  
It is greed, that corrosive materialism of our time which  
we too must join hands to 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 food 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 of 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.

Such so-called "political" or "economic" matters are religious in their essence -- and in their solution.

The dichotomy between the "secular" and the "religious" between "activism," and "commandment" is diminishing to the point of irrelevance in our world.

And it is our task as Jews to stand together with men and women of every color and creed and together with them to join the struggle to integrate politics and the spirit as we turn this century.

This then is a two fold mandate which gives substance to our vision for your future:



To be Jews, to strengthen Jewish life wherever we live...  
in our synagogues and homes  
to serve the Jewish people wherever they are in need...  
in Israel...in every other corner of this far-flung world

But also to remember that we are citizens of this world,  
and that if we allow it to be destroyed by human greed or hate  
our visions too will fail to materialize...  
they will never flame but turn to blackened ashes..

And this above all, let us recapture our own faith,  
faith that supreme creative function of the human mind  
faith which cries YES in defiance of a thousand voices  
crying NO  
which sustains love where others hate  
which hopes where others despair  
which upholds human decency where others yield  
to an untamed savagery,  
yes, that 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.

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