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THE ROLE OF THE NON-JEW IN THE SYNAGOGUE

by

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January 16, 1995
Holy Blossom Temple
Toronto, Ontario

It is good to be here. This is a place endeared to me by memory and by affection. I am most admiring of your rabbis past and present. Gunther Plaut is a giant among us, the foremost religious guide of our generation. Rabbi Marmur, too, is relentless in his pursuit of the excellent. I am especially admiring of his insistence, exemplified by the manner in which he approaches his life's tasks, that a rabbi is, above all, a scholar and a teacher of Judaism and that all other duties are but secondary to this central mission.

Now, if it is true, as it manifestly is, that a congregation receives the kind of leadership which it deserves, the words of praise which I just spoke concerning Dow and Gunther apply to all the sons and daughters of this holy congregation. And indeed they do . . . for you have accomplished much in the years of your communal being. Your collective endeavors have set the course not just for Canadian Reform, but for Reform Jews everywhere.

You spawned the growth of Reform Judaism throughout Canada. No other congregation in our entire movement has been as instrumental as have you in assisting the development of so many new congregations. Your Religious School and your programs of Jewish education generally are second to none in our continent. And there has been a constant reaching out from this place to the larger community of which you are a part. Canadian Jewry would not be what it is without your leadership.

Since your very founding, you have been a most generous supporter of the UAHC, sustaining us not just materially, but by providing us with some of our finest lay leaders: Max Enkin, Norman Grant, Gordie Wolfe, Henrietta Chesnie, Jack Geller, and now Iris and Paul Vanek - - although these last two are really recent immigrants rather than home born.

In sum, then, Holy Blossom is a bright and shining star in the firmament of North American Reform Judaism. You have every reason to be proud of your manifold accomplishments and we have every reason to praise your name.

Now, Dow Marmur asked me to speak on the "Role of the Non-Jew In the Synagogue." His wish is my command of course, but I would like to cast my commentary in the context of Reform Judaism's wider Outreach Program. For the more specific subject of my lecture can best be understood within that larger framework. Indeed, in his original letter of invitation Dow asked me to address this wider topic - - as he put it then: "The Canadian Congregations are very much exercised by your call for a mission to non-Jews," and he enjoined me to enlarge on my views. And so let me do so.

Outreach, in its original conception, was meant primarily to be a response to and a coming to grips with the reality of intermarriage. It was our collective effort to contain the loss it threatens to our numerical strength and, if at all possible, to convert that loss into a gain. It suggested that we become more assertive in stating Judaism's claim to allegiance, that we become, in effect, missionaries for Judaism, beginning the effort with those non-Jews who are already bound to us by marriage but perhaps eventually reaching beyond to all who are seekers after truth.

This approach has been widely interpreted to import that Reform Judaism is somehow encouraging of intermarriage. People have heard about our Outreach Program, our manifold efforts to reach out to the intermarried and to integrate them into the life of our congregations and they conclude from all this that we actually welcome the fact of intermarriage as a means of our numeric enlargement.

Nothing could be further from the truth. When we reach out to the intermarried, even to those where no conversion of the non-Jewish partner to Judaism has taken place, we give no hechsher, no endorsement to such marriages. The outreach process begins bediavad, not l'hatchila - - it begins not before, but after the interfaith marriage has occurred. We do not encourage intermarriages, quite the opposite, we continue to resist and regret them.

We oppose such marriages on human grounds: because they are more likely to founder and end in divorce, as the statistics indeed attest. We oppose such marriages on Jewish religious grounds, because there is the ever present danger of our identity's attenuation. The full resources and programs of the Reform movement are devoted to building Jewish identity and literacy in the hope of forestalling intermarriage. We see ourselves as the cultivators, the guardians of Jewish identity and we must continue to deepen the spiritual content of synagogue and Jewish communal life, to strengthen the bonds of affiliation across the generations.

Just the same we must face the facts. And the facts are that all our efforts along these lines have not sufficed nor are they likely to suffice. We live in an open society, and intermarriage is the sting which comes to us with the honey of our freedom. Unless we are willing to withdraw from the advantages of the American way of life, we cannot hypocritically beat our breasts about the social consequences of that way of life. We cannot boast about our children's college and graduate degrees and meanwhile weep about the pluralistic educational system that enabled them to meet and fall in love with non-Jews in the student lounge. They will continue to meet non-Jews there, and they will continue to fall in love and marry them, not because

they want to escape from Judaism, but simply because they have fallen in love.

And thus it is that our best efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, the intermarriage rate keeps on rising. No streams of Judaism are immune to it - - and that includes the Orthodox - - excepting those few who have immured themselves in ghettos of their own making. Just as one example, the rate of intermarriage of Day School graduates rose from five to twenty-five percent between 1975 and 1985. And of course, the overall rate exceeds fifty percent now.

What can we do then about all these couples and their children? We have but one of two options: we can either exile our children or continue to embrace them, we can either do what our forbears did and sit shiva over them or we can draw them even closer to our hearts, in the hope of eventually retaining or regaining them.

The Reform Jewish community has determined to take the latter course. We refuse to alienate our children. We will not banish them. Quite the contrary, we intend to reach out to them, to embrace them, do everything we can to keep them a part of Jewish life. Their non-Jewish partners might then conceivably be inclined to initiate the process of conversion to Judaism. And at the very least, we will dramatically increase the probability that the children of such marriages will be reared as Jews and share the destiny of this people Israel.

We believe this is the wiser course. We believe, further that this course in no way violates the Jewish tradition, that it is in harmony at least with its more compassionate strain as exemplified in the Chassidic story of the father who came to his

rebbe with the plaint that his son is a wastrel. What should I do, asked the father in his despair, and the Rebbe enjoined: "Just love him all the more."

Now this Outreach program was projected about a decade and a half ago, and over the years some superb activities have been developed to achieve its goals:

- * Conversion standards were raised and the curricula of our Introduction to Judaism courses were revised to transmit Judaism in experiential ways and not just on an intellectual plane.

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

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

- * The children of such couples receive our special care. Summer study programs in Israel are made available to them and so are Jewish camping programs. They are offered two years of tuition free Religious School instruction following an imaginative pattern evolved by our colleague Steve Foster and his Denver congregation and presently extended to 14 other communities.

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

- * And this above all, healing has been brought to many bruised hearts: of would be converts who felt deeply hurt by the

rejection of born Jews; of parents who sought to bring to an end the bitterness wrought by their initial spurning of the non-Jewish spouse so that they could establish a relationship with their grandchildren; of adult children of interfaith marriages who felt Jewish in every way but were rebuffed by the community because one of their parents wasn't Jewish.

These and more were the painful stories that spurred us on. Only recently again did I receive such a communication, this time from a Holocaust survivor who was applauding our ongoing advocacy of patrilineality.

My correspondent was the daughter of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother. The father was killed in a concentration camp, and the daughter spent most of the Hitler years in hiding, and hungry, and hounded from place to place.

After the war, she survived the chaos in Europe by cleaning toilets in a hospital in Basle . . . it was the only job she could find. The local functionaries of the JDC refused to give her aid because she had no Jewish mother. She was anxious to learn about her father's religion, but no Jewish doors were open to her in Europe at the time. "What irony this," she writes, "Hitler persecuted people for having Jewish blood, but then Jews discriminate against people for having non-Jewish blood."

She continues: "But gradually I awakened to an understanding that it was not my lack but an abysmal lack in Jews who rejected me! Now I am over 70 . . . and they still squabble in Israel over children with only one Jewish parent . . . what could be more important than to lovingly accept children with Jewish blood?"

Through Outreach, we have enabled such people to make their way from the perimeter to the center. It is a process of mutual t'shuva: By easing the pain of the so called "half-Jew," the inter-married Jew or the Jew-by-choice, we are summoning them to return, to connect; and in their returning, through their connecting, they summon us to a fuller consciousness of our own Jewish identities.

The Outreach programs of the Reform movement have received the highest form of flattery: wide emulation. Just a month or two ago, the CJF issued a manual on the subject to guide their constituents along paths which we pioneered.

More notably perhaps, some years before his death, Rav Soloveitchik, the most respected voice of mainline Orthodoxy, in a published HADOAR interview, voiced what he himself described as an opinion of revolutionary significance, one that would surely draw the ire and fire of his own traditional colleagues . . . and this is what he said: "Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been saved, it is necessary to do what the Reform Jews are doing - - within, of course, an Orthodox context." Kol Hakavod . . .

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 the joyous success of Outreach has also raised some thorny issues for synagogues. Since so many interfaith couples join our

congregations, defining the role of the new-Jew in the Temple has become a critically pressing need.

Someone sent me a copy of Dow Marmur's column which appeared in a recent issue of your Temple Bulletin and in which he implies that he and I are fundamentally at odds on this issue. Perhaps he misunderstood something I said, or more likely, something I was "quoted" of saying. Perhaps his column was intended to stimulate attendance by suggesting that there will be a sharp debate here tonight - - in which case I will have to disappoint you. For while we surely have some difference in nuance, in shading between us, we are in full agreement on fundamentals. Certainly I know of no "current pressure in the American Reform movement" which, as Dow put it, would "grant non-Jews the same rights (and rites) in the synagogue as Jews" by birth or choice.

Indeed, there is a general consensus on guiding principles South of the border. Everyone is agreed that we should open our Temple doors wide to all who seek to enter, that we should welcome the stranger in our midst. But everyone also concurs that boundaries need to be drawn, that there will be no incentive to embrace Judaism if both Jew and non-Jew have the same entitlements, more serious still, that such a blurring of distinctions will lead to the attenuation of our faith.

Such boundaries do not offend non-Jews who make our Houses of Worship their own. They do not "raise barriers" for them, but rather do these boundaries "demonstrate a healthy pride in who we are." They will be accepted by non-Jews who join us, provided, of course, the lines are distinctly drawn, consistently applied, and clearly communicated.

But here's the rub: just where ought those lines be drawn? This is where opinions diverge, but on detail not basic principle.

As far as membership is concerned, nearly 90 percent of our congregations allow non-Jews to belong, with 62 percent granting them full voting rights. I hold with the majority here, all the more so because virtually all of our congregations count membership by households rather than individuals. Why divide families here, all the more so because in most instances, the non-Jewish spouse seeks to join the Temple because both agreed to rear their children as Jews.

To move from membership to governance, most of our congregations do not allow leadership roles to the non-Jewish spouses of members. I agree with that too. Temple governance, after all, means making decisions that will affect the communal lives of Jews and few non-Jews expect us to abrogate the principle of self determination so that they might feel more fully included. They understand that Temple leaders are exemplars of Judaism. Abram must become Abraham, Sarai must become Sarah in order to become leaders of our generations.

Likewise, I do not believe that non-Jews should be assigned a wider role in the worship realm. The reading of a psalm, now and then, the recital of a special prayer on a special occasion, why not? But to cast the non-Jew in the role of a sheliach tzibur is unquestionably inappropriate.

Now while non-Jews do not resent restrictions in the realm of governance or in the leading of worship, when it comes to the public celebration of life-cycle rites, they are more sensitive, infinitely more likely to feel hurt. Here the boundaries that we draw seem less an assertion of Jewish self determination, and more an invasion of personal space that is to say, the space of family, the space of personal spirituality.

After all, this Torah Scroll they are not allowed to touch - - is it not (in the case of Christians) part of their religious heritage? That cemetery plot denied to them - - is it not on the very hallowed ground where they go to pay respect to their in-laws, their Jewish friends and neighbors, in some cases to their own spouses and children?

Hence in this realm, my personal position is one of maximum openness: not the total abandonment of boundaries, but rather their enforcement through creative ritual.

Precisely what do I mean by that? One of our colleagues, Norman Cohen of Hopkins Minnesota, established a pattern which concretizes what I have in mind. When non-Jewish spouses are supportive of the Jewish upbringing of the children, he involves them in a number of ways in the Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Thus, while the non-Jewish father, say, does not actually pass the Torah, he nonetheless ascends the bimah, stands alongside the mother while the rabbi says to the celebrant, "The Torah is passed from your grandparents to your mother who with the loving support of your father, passes it along to you." Or when the Jewish father is invited to do the Torah blessing, the non-Jewish mother stands with him and speaks these words: "My prayer, standing at the Torah, is that you, my child, will always be worthy of your inheritance as a Jew. Know that you have my support. Take the Torah's teaching into your heart and in turn pass it on to your children. May you be a faithful Jew, searching for wisdom and truth, working for justice and peace."

What's wrong with that? Why should the Jewish child be made to feel different from other Jewish children at so meaningful a moment in their Jewish unfolding? Why should the non-Jewish parent be barred from the bimah on such an occasion when more

often as not that very non-Jewish parent did more to assure the Jewish rearing of the child than did the Jewish parent?

Our sense of evolutionary Judaism, you see, does not merely give us license to challenge the Orthodoxy of the past for the sake of the present. It also requires that we challenge our own orthodoxies for the sake of the future; most particularly for the sake of gaining and retaining the hearts of the children of interfaith marriages for Judaism.

Let me say in this context that I for one, and speaking for myself alone am puzzled by the very strong taboo which seems to exist against non-Jews handling the Torah scroll. Yet this zealousness has no traditional or halachic underpinning whatsoever, since a Torah scroll is not susceptible to ritual uncleanness, eyn m'kblin tumah, anyone may handle it.

Indeed, the doyen, the dean of Reform Judaism's decisors, the late great Rabbi Solomon Freehof, deemed it even fitting and proper to give non-Jews an aliyah, suggesting only that a special b'racha be provided, since the phrase "thou hast chosen us from amongst all peoples" would certainly sound strange from the lips of someone who has not yet embraced Judaism. Still, the Mishnah tells us, "you must appear justified before the people as well as before God." Perhaps even the purely emotional reactions of Jews deserve respect, rooted as they are in our tumultuous social history.

To be sure, now, truthfulness should never be violated by our desire to be inclusive. Nonetheless, we should ever strive to present our synagogue as a "house of Prayer for all peoples." If we choose to fence in that house, to create a hedgerow around our

Judaism, that is our right - - but let us be certain of our motivation and not use ritual exclusion to express our emotional grievances, conscious or unconscious, historical or contemporary.

Let me emphasize that much of what I have just said are my personal views. They are not the result of a collective decision by any arm of our movement, nor do I urge their universal adoption. What I am urging, however, is the adoption of a clear decision making process, a process that will enable a congregation to define its goals, express its heart, give tradition a vote, and build its own special community through its ritual life.

Crucial to this process is the voice of the congregational rabbi. He or she is most committed to defending the integrity of Judaism from the demand of fashion. He or she is the one who is best equipped to read the landscape boundaries. He or she is the one least likely to be ruled by subconscious forces. The rabbi's convictions, therefore, should hold sway on the bimah.

A related and pertinent question needs to be explored in this context: do these recent Reform Jewish innovations jeopardize the unity of the Jewish people?

I do not believe for one moment that they do. Quite the contrary is true. These changes, these innovations, have helped to gain and retain tens of thousands of individuals and families for Judaism and thereby strengthened Jewish unity and life.

Let us remember that the threat of such a sundering was invoked at every single stage of our unfoldment as a distinctive movement within Judaism when we introduced mixed seating, and created prayerbooks in the vernacular, and allowed instrumental music on

the Sabbath in the Sanctuary. In every instance we were told: you are shattering our oneness, but it never happened.

Even so it is today. Thus repeated studies show that even the patrilineal principle - an issue far more controversial than Outreach - is now accepted de facto if not de jure by the bulk of America's Jews, not just Reform, but also Conservative and even some Orthodox lay men and women as well as rabbis.

Fundamental ideological divergences obtain between the various streams of contemporary Judaism, but they will not tear us apart. Let us remember that feuding is hardly new to Jewish life. So much of the present day foreboding is predicated on the erroneous assumption that all was sweetness and light in the past, that before these latest altercations between Orthodoxy and Reform, harmony prevailed, that there was then in that golden and peaceful past a universal ideological consensus uniting the Jewish world.

That is a gross misreading of Jewish history, of course. At no time did such an ideological consensus obtain. In virtually every era of our people's past there were sharp ideological disputations setting Jews in opposition to one another, not just on political and social issues, but in the religious realm as well, - - especially in the latter - - yet the Jewish world did not fracture.

Remember the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, or the contentions between Saadya Gaon and Ben Meir when their respective followers celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Pesach on different dates.

Or think of the refusal of the Sephardim to heed the Cherem of Rabbenu Gershon on polygamy.

Or recall more recent times when the Chassidim opposed the Misnagdim. Both opposed the Maskilim, who split into Zionists left and right, secular and religious, as well as Bundists.

And in every age there were Halachic authorities who rejected each other. Despite all of these conflicts and many more the center of the Jewish world held.

Let it be noted, moreover, that some of these conflicts were infinitely more fierce and even violent than are today's argumentation. The strife between the Misnagdim and the Chassidim was the most brutal of all. These antagonists did not limit themselves to occasional rhetorical outbursts, as we do today. They attacked one another physically, denounced their opponents to the authorities and had them imprisoned.

Perhaps even more to the point, not a few times before our own time, did the extremists of one camp refuse to give their children permission to marry the sons and daughters of the opposing camp. But cooler heads prevailed, and the Jewish world remained intact.

None of this should astound us. After all, we Jews share a living history which is partner to the Torah in defining Jewish identity. In our own day, for instance, all but the most extreme forces of the right and left - - such as the Satmer Chassidim or the fading relics of the American Council for Judaism - - have adjusted their perspectives on Jewish life to admit to the influence of history. And thus the struggle to secure the safety of Israel, or in behalf of Soviet Jewry, or against anti-Semitism, continues to unite us.

The fact remains that the evolving historical identity of the

Jewish people will continue to grow, for Jewish history, like the Torah belongs to no one single person or movement, but to all Jews, to all who share the destiny of this people Israel.

No, ideological divergences do not undermine Jewish unity. More often than not, they energize and vitalize our inner life and lend us the strength we need in our struggling to conserve the creative continuity of the Jewish people.

By way of conclusion, allow me to explain briefly just why I made an reiterated a call for a Jewish mission to non-Jews which prompted Rabbi Marmur to invite me in the first instance and which, so he wrote, distressed Canadian congregations so greatly.

In the first instance, I really believe that Judaism obligates us to be its champions, that our faith has much to offer to the world and that therefore it can attract many who are not born Jews nonetheless to share our faith and fate. Surely I need not instruct you in this. You know that this is so, that we were a missionary faith from our beginnings and that it was only the brutally restrictive laws imposed by our enemies which restrained us from pursuing our mission.

But we live in a new world now. No repressive laws restrain us. The fear of persecution no longer inhibits us. There is no earthly reason now why we cannot resume our ancient vocation and open our arms wide to all newcomers.

I am scarcely the first Reform rabbi, or the first rabbi of any branch of Judaism who insisted that we resume our time honored tasks. Virtually every leader of prominence in the history of Reform trumpeted a like call and many leading Conservative and Orthodox rabbis joined their fray.

In 1938 the great Stephen Wise invited Aime Palliere, a priest who had embraced Judaism to come and lecture in this county.

In 1949 at a Conference of the WUPJ, Leo Baeck had this to say: "Mankind is hungry and thirsts for that which Jews full of Judaism can say - - - Throughout our history many gentiles were attracted to Judaism and became proselytes - - - educated people, high minded people? Should we not begin anew? Should we not send our missionaries to Asia and other continents? We are in need for an expansion for our own sake?"

In 1955 World Union for the propagation of Judaism was organized by Dr. Israel ben Zeev, at the time a provost of Bar Ilan University. It was his particular goal to convert Arabs to Judaism and thereby to solve the problem of a significant non-Jewish minority in a Jewish state.

In 1958 Robert Gordis, surely the most prominent Conservative Rabbi of his generation convened a national conference of Jewish Organizations to discuss all aspects of Jewish missionary activity in order to compensate for Jews lost during the Shoah.

In 1959 he organized the Jewish Information Society and led it for 15 years. He opened Reading Rooms, published and widely distributed books and pamphlets. The roster of his Board and his supporters was impressive. They included no less a luminary than the distinguished senior scholar of Holy Blossom, my revered colleague, Gunther Plaut.

My effort is far less ambitious than theirs. I don't want to send missionaries to Japan. I don't want to open reading rooms or send kids to airports or adults emulating Seventh Day Adventists from door to door. All I want to do is to remove the

"not wanted" signs from our hearts and Temple doors and let people know that they are open to all who seek to enter.

My second reason for putting this matter further to the front of our burner relates to the undisputable fact that conversionary marriages are less prone to lead to the attenuation of Jewishness. Egon Mayer draws the following conclusion from his extensive studies. He writes: "most of the children of conversionary marriages consider themselves, Jewish, many children of mixed marriages are indifferent to their Jewishness, even when the non-Jewish parents agree to rear them as Jews and do so to the best of their ability." (Egon Mayer) These findings but confirm our intuitive perception. How could it be otherwise? And so we should do everything we humanly can to achieve a conversion of the non-Jewish partner to Judaism, before or after the marriage.

Very few people dispute the need to do so, but my friends, if you desire to effect the conversion of the non-Jewish partner to Judaism, you are, in effect, engaging in the missionary task, call it what you will.

But let me repeat in this context something that I said in San Francisco, to wit, that an Outreach program which limits its efforts to those who are bound to us by marriage is an affront to them. It casts doubt on their integrity, as if to say, you really didn't choose Judaism based on its merits, you must have done it to please your spouse. This is manifestly not so. For most Jews-by-choice, the Jewish spouse was the catalyst, but not the cause of their conversion.

Why is the percentage of conversionary marriages so low? I believe there are three reasons: (a) We don't ask. (b) The

Jewish partners lack the means to do so. (c) Or, saddest of all, the Jewish partners do not feel strongly enough about their Judaism to ask their spouses to convert.

Which brings me full square to the third and final reason, which motivates me to raise this issue over and again, and that is that it will increase the self assurance of those who take up this work.

Here, perhaps, is the ultimate goal of my striving in this realm: that it will bolster the self-worth of Jews, that it will enhance their appreciation of Judaism's essential value. Too many Jews still doubt that Judaism can attract adherents. They are hesitant about asserting their Jewishness. They think that choosing to be Jewish is a symptom of some kind of abnormality.

Some years ago, as some among you here will recall, it was our first venture into Outreach video programming, the Union taped an interview with several Jews-by-Choice. Among them was a couple, neither of whom was born a Jew and who chose Judaism together. When they were asked to relate what experience in the conversion process was most disturbing, most painful to them, John, the husband, answered: "I was most troubled when my Jewish friends said to me: Are you crazy? You needed this, to become a Jew?" And I began to wonder . . . if they don't know it's there, maybe it isn't there!"

"If they don't know it's there, maybe it isn't there." Here is the essential challenge, for in lacking a mission we are suspect of also lacking a message.

But we do have a message, my friends. Let us not doubt nor fail to proclaim it. We have so very much to offer. Judaism

celebrates life and not death. It insists on the freedom and the capacity of the individual to determine his fate. Judaism is a religion of hope and not of despair. It holds that society and humankind are perfectible. Moreover, we offer something more than a disembodied faith system. We are a people of faith, a caring community of Jews. In other words, we have an enormous amount of wisdom and experience, of warmth and love, to offer to this troubled world. And we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it, frankly, freely, and with dignity.

Let us therefore reach out.

Let us be guided by the law which teaches us that the mitzvah of self-preservation exceeds all others in its consequence!

Let us not be among those who, in their pain and confusion, respond to the fear of self-extinction by declaring casualties before the fact; who respond to the suffering of the past by living in the past; who react to the long-drawn isolation of our people with an isolationism of their own.

And let us above all recall and act on those lofty passages from the Tenach and the Chazal, from Bible and Commentary that define Jewish "choseness" not as exclusive, but as exemplary; not as separatist, but as representative; not as closed, but as open; not as rejecting, but as all embracing and compassionate.

NAKEL MIHEYODCHA LI EVED, LEHAKEEM ET SHIVTEI YAAKOV

"It is too light a thing that thou shouldst be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the offspring of Israel
I will also give thee for a light unto the nations.
That my salvation may be unto the ends of the earth."

WU for Progressive Judaism
Paris, France
July 1, 1995

H It is a privilege which I greatly appreciate to be here
and to participate on this panel.

This is my first attendance at a World Union function in nearly 20 years.
The many prior claims on my time made it impossible to be with you
more often..

This year, I made a special effort to be in Paris
essentially ^{for} two reasons:

P In the first instance, I knew this session marks the conclusion of
Don Day's tenure as WUPJ's President,
and I wanted to join you in recognizing his attainments.
He tenure as World Reform Judaism's foremost leader has been
altogether remarkable,
even as it was when he served as the much admired and beloved
Chairman of the UAHC for four full years.

P He nurtured our World Union with all his heart and soul and might,
He traveled to every continent and country and corner of our world
in his effort to extend and strengthen Reform Judaism.
He articulated the needs of our world movement with power
and with an irrefutable, irresistible clarity.
He extended the sphere of our influence by setting the foundations
of the Reform movement throughout Eastern Europe
and especially in the former Soviet Union.
And perhaps most important of all,
he reconceptualized, and reorganized and restructured the WUPJ
lifting it to a level of integrity it never enjoyed before.

In sum, Don is a leader sans peer, diligent and wise,
zealously devoted to our work.

And we have every reason to praise his name.

My second reason for coming here is because it gives me an opportunity
to share this platform with John Raynor.

I admire him greatly.

He is the kind of rabbi we dream to have,
fashioned in the image of Judaism's loftiest ideals.

He is learned, intelligent, gifted, able to articulate our needs
and to advocate our cause with a stately eloquence.

I am happy that he is sufficiently recovered from his recent illness
to be with us -- and so are we all.

Thus may it continue...Baruch Rofeh Choleem.

Now, as Cliff Kulwin will be able to tell you, I had some reservations
about the title of this symposium which marks the Shoah
as a transforming moment in the recent history of Reform.

It was scarcely that.

It merely sealed a process which began much earlier, in the mid-twenties
and then was confirmed by the adoption of the Columbus Platform
in the nineteen thirties:
after Hitler's ascension to power, to be sure,
but long before the Wannsee Conference,
longer still before the fuller consequences of its ghastly
decisions were made manifest or absorbed
-- that is, if they can ever be fully absorbed.

Still, I suppose, during this 50th Anniversary year of VE day,
we dare not omit mention of the Shoah, all the more so
because the ranks of those who lived through and outlived
this evil are thinning.

The generations come and go...memory fades...people forget.
And there are those who have determined to wipe its slate
to make it seem as if these things had never been.

And so I believe it to be one of the noteworthy recent accomplishments
of Reform
that we alone among the religious movements within Judaism
have embedded Yom Hashoah in our liturgy
even to the extent of including some passages in Yiddish,
that language which the modern Amalekites mocked
and also sought to expunge.

Marginally noted though, I have always thought it incongruous
that we resolved to mark Yom Hashoah in April.

I know the reason of course: because the Warsaw Ghetto revolt took place
in that month.

Still, this seems is a most unlikely time to mark
so somber and melancholy an occasion, does it not?

After all, April is the first full month of Spring,
and Spring is the time "when the air is calm and pleasant," so
Milton wrote, "and it were an injury and sullenness against nature
not to go out and see her riches and partake in her rejoicing."

P As individuals, we can well do that,

we can go out into the public gardens and rejoice,
roll up our sleeves to feel a little Springtime warmth;
but as Jews rolled-up sleeves all too quickly remind us
of those numbers tattooed on the arms of death camp inmates.

P As individuals we can rejoice in April showers

and breathtaking rainbows;
but as Jews we cannot hear of "showers" without shuddering,
nor view a rainbow without thinking of the Nazi killers
who shattered its radiance,
who took its colors and pinned them to our hearts:
yellow for Jews...red for communists,
brown for gypsies...pink for gays,
and on and on through the spectrum of murdered souls.

P As individuals we can hearken to the Song of Solomon:

"arise...my fair one, come away!"

But as Jews, we are mired in agonizing memories and cannot come away.
We cannot see a meadow without thinking of mass graves.
We cannot see a dancing butterfly without recalling the poem
of a 12-year-old Jewish girl inmate of Theresienstadt
who said of her captivity that she "never saw another butterfly."

P Oh, would that we could forget.

But quick forgetting is not the reality of a people who lost
one third of their number in half a decade;
who lost one and one half million of their children,
in that time, innocent, guiltless all!

Quick healing is not the reality of a people for whom nature itself
was defiled by the Nazi murderers
who sowed bones instead of seeds in the month of April!

R But whatever the season of the year, Reform Judaism did well to embed
the Shoah in its liturgy.

I hope that the other streams of Judaism will follow suit
for only if Yom Hashoah becomes a day of mourning or even
fasting in the religious calendar of all Jews,
will these events & their lessons be remembered forever & aye.

* * *

R Now, just what was that ideological process of transformation
which, as I have said, was merely speeded and sealed by the shoah?
Fundamentally, it was a turning from the exaltation of reason
as the saving grace of human kind.

The early Reformers -- products of the Age of Reason as they were --
were hyper-rational in their approach to religion.

They were convinced that the proper exercise of the intellect
would suffice to bring healing to a fractured world.

Nations ~~states~~ will vanish, so they were sure,
and men and women of every kind will be joined to one another
in a universal community of harmony and peace.

R It was the kind of vision limned, the kind of Zeitgeist reflected
by Schiller's poem and then immortalized by Beethoven's Ninth
"Seit umschlungen ihr Millionen, diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt."

P But then came that savage century through which most of us lived
-- two world wars in one generation with their fearsome
aftermaths: Auschwitz, Hiroshima,
the archipelagos of Stalin's Russia,
napalm scorched Vietnam,
the horrors of Cambodia,
Indochina's killing fields,

Slowly but surely, men and women everywhere came to recognize
that the future of humankind cannot be entrusted
to the mindscape of a scientific rationality alone,
that as the spirit within us withers,
so does everything we build about us.

P In harmony with this understanding, the leaders and ideologues of Reform
came to appreciate the emotive along with the rational
as a necessary component of the religious life.

They also saw that their quest for a disembodied universalism
was, in the words of Santayana,

"as foolhardy as the endeavor to speak a language in general
without speaking any language in particular..."

Or as Buber put it in his not so gender-sensitive language, that we Jews
"don't have to leave our father's house to speak to the world..."

P The consequence of all this was a greater valuing of ritual and Hebrew
and participatory liturgical song -- and above all the recognition
that we Reform Jews are not just another faith community
but a people of faith, who share with Klal Yisrael
not only the Torah but also a common history and destiny.

RP Since the theme of our session enjoins us to consider
not just what happened over the last 50 years
but also to consider what lies ahead,
and even though I generally eschew prognosticative enterprise
ever mindful of the Chinese proverb which cautions us that
"to prophesy is exceedingly difficult especially with respect
to the future..."
nonetheless I will venture to predict with assurance
that these tendencies which had their beginnings
even before the shoah
will not diminish but only intensify during the years ahead.

RP There will be a flowering of Reform Jewish literacy and spirituality
unfolding even at the grassroots:
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 will come to view our movement
not as a form of minimalism,
but as a Judaism that can satisfy the passionate heart.

* * *

RP Our present numeric enlargement will also continue.
I have little doubt of that, unless we squander our opportunities.
On the American Jewish scene we have already emerged
as the overwhelmingly predominant synagogue movement.
Indeed, and in the past two decades alone, our cumulative membership
rolls have burgeoned by better than 25%.

P When I first joined the staff of the Union, two score years ago
our membership was just short of 450 temples,
We are approaching nine hundred now.

And 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 America's Jews
inclines to identify itself almost exclusively with Reform.

P I have seen like projections for Canada.

There too, within one generation if not sooner,
we will out pace all other streams of Judaism.

In Australia we grew from ground zero to 30 per cent of the
total Jewish population since World War II.

And elsewhere in the Jewish world our religious community is steadily
though much more slowly gaining in strength
...and thus it will continue.

P To be sure now, much will depend on our collective ability to provide
the resources and to train the leadership required
for such a burgeoning. ✓

But the trends are unambiguous, and their continuance depends only on
our will, on our determination to seize the opportunities at hand.

* * *

P Reform's social activism has doubtlessly been, and must continue to be,
a fundamental source of our enlargement,
Enough has been said about this subject at our Conference
so that I do not need to multiply words.

Suffice it to say, that our commitments in this realms enabled us
to attract numerous idealists, young and old,
whose yearning for justice knew no Jewish expression.
who knew only the language of universalist activism.

R My own experience in the realm of youth work and Jewish education
has convinced me that our students find that above everything else
the concept of Judaism as a pathway of action
makes their Jewish identity plausible.

No other arguments seem to have equal sway:

not their slender ties to the modern Jewish state,
nor our plea that it is their duty to continue a tradition that
spans the millennia,
nor even our contention that we must not grant Hitler a posthumous
victory. —

The primary argument that carries the day with most of our children
is when we say:

"We want you to be Jews because we Jews have a special vocation
and that is to pursue justice..."

R Leib Fein, that wordsmith of enviable, extraordinary skill,
summarized these thoughts in never to be forgotten lines:

"The time of mourning passes...the Holocaust recedes...
we come increasingly to understand that Auschwitz was not, after all,
the most important thing that ever happened to our people...
that it is not the fires of the crematoria but the fire of the
burning bush that lights our way (or else we walk in darkness),
that our primordial experience was not the day we died at Auschwitz
but the day we were born at the Red Sea and went on to stand at Sinai.
And it was then that our real sojourn began -- not the years of
wandering in the desert, but the wanderings through the world,
ever preaching and now and then practicing justice."

1P Social Action is an integral element of Reform Jewish continuity.
It must and will remain a solid wedge holding open the door
of the Jewish conscience,
an amplifier through which the voices of the prophets
will continue to echo,
ever drowning out the ritualistic obsessions of the priests.

* * *

1P The word "outreach" comprises to some extent the most important source
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.
This all-embracing enterprise will also continue to mark and speed
our advance on the world Jewish scene.

1P But allow me to enlarge on this particular programmatic thrust for some
moments because it has been a subject of controversy
and misunderstanding even within our own ranks.
I speak in the first instance of our manifold efforts
to reach out to the intermarried
and to integrate them into the life of our congregations.
These undertakings have led many people to conclude that we are actually
encouraging of intermarriage as a means of our numeric enlargement.

1P Nothing could be further from the truth.
The bulk of our programmatic resources in American Reform
continue to be devoted to building Jewish identity and literacy.

We see ourselves as the cultivators, the guardians of Jewish identity and we continue to enlarge and deepen programs which help bring Jews together and help create Jewish marriages.

P But the reality is that our best efforts do not suffice, nor do those of the other branches of Judaism.

Just as one case in point, the intermarriage rate of day school alumni rose from 5% to 25% in the decade between 1975-1985.

P That should not surprise us, because we live in an open society. And unless we are willing to withdraw from that society, we cannot hypocritically beat our breasts about its social consequences.

We cannot boast about our children's college and graduate degrees and meanwhile weep about the pluralistic educational system that enabled them to meet and fall in love with non-Jews.

They will continue to meet non Jews there or in their places of work and choose them as life-mates not to escape from being Jews, but simply because they have fallen in love.

P Once they do, we have but two choices:
Either we do what our ^{de}forbears did and sit shiva over them or we endeavor to regain them.

P The American Reform Jewish community has determined to take the latter course.

We refuse ^{to} alienate our children.
We will not banish them.

Quite the contrary, we intend to reach out to them, to embrace them, do everything we can to keep them a part of Jewish life.

In this manner, so we fervently hope,

our children will be able to overcome their ambivalences
toward an active involvement in Jewish life.

Their non-Jewish partners might then conceivably be inclined to
initiate the process of conversion to Judaism.

And at the very least, we will dramatically increase the probability
that the children of such marriages will be reared as Jews
and share the destiny of this people Israel.

P To put the matter somewhat differently and more succinctly,
though persisting in our rejection of intermarriage,
we refuse to reject the intermarried.

P We have also undertaken some tender steps to reach out
to the religiously no^u-preferenced,
to propagate Judaism even beyond those who are already bound
to us and our children by love or marriage.

P This is not exactly a novum in Jewish life:
I am scarcely the first rabbi to insist that it is high time
that we resume our time honored tasks~~es~~ of being Judaism's champions.
Virtually every leader of prominence in the history of Reform trumpeted
a like call,
as did other prominent Conservative and Orthodox Rabbis.

P Indeed, from this very platform, at the 1949 World Union Conference
in London, Leo Baeck had this to say:

"Mankind is hungry and thirsts for that which Jews full of Judaism can
say...Throughout our history many gentiles were attracted to Judaism and
became proselytes -- educated people, high minded people? Should we not
begin anew? Should we not send our missionaries to Asia and other conti-
nents? We are in need of an expansion for our own sake!"

P In 1958 Robert Gordis, arguably the most prominent Conservative Rabbi of his generation, convened a national conference of Jewish organizations to discuss all aspects of Jewish missionary activity, in order to compensate for Jews lost during the Shoah.

A year later, Gordis founded the Jewish Information Society which opened reading rooms in major cities throughout the land and published books and pamphlets seeking converts to Judaism. The roster of this Society's board was impressive.

They included the most prominent rabbis of that generation Orthodox leaders like Leo Jung and Israel Miller, Yeshiva U's V.P. as well as a fistful of Reform rabbis, our own Gunther Plaut not the least among them.

P Unfortunately, this society did not outlive the life of its financial sponsor

-- a Chicago business man by the name of Maccabee, I believe.

A like fate befell several other privately funded efforts along these lines, as they inevitably must.

P But now, thanks in no small measure to such resolute lay leaders as David Belin and Mel Merians and those who followed them we have been able to institutionalize this effort, to weave it into the fabric of Reform Jewish life.

Thus Outreach has become and will remain

-- along with Education, Worship and Religious Action -- one of the four pillars on which the edifice of

Reform Judaism rests.

* * *

P Now, whenever the Reform Jewish community initiates changes there are dire warnings that these innovations will shatter the unity of the Jewish people. ✓

Indeed these fears were shared and are still shared

by some Reform rabbis, especially on the continent and in Israel. Yet such fears are illusory...they always proved false.

Invariably, the center of Jewry held...

Indeed it usually shifted in our direction

P Thus the outreach thrust was widely criticized, at first, But ultimately the broader Jewish community accorded us the tribute of emulation.

Look and see:

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

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


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

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

Thus we have counseled, and the Jewish community listened.




P Indeed, not too long ago, the last bastion of opposition to the Outreach idea began to topple.

HaRav Soloveitchik, the most respected voice of mainline US Orthodoxy, in an HADOAR interview, published not long before his death, voiced what he himself described as an opinion of revolutionary significance, one that would draw the ire of his own traditional colleagues.


 This is what Soloveitchik 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 -- of course, in an orthodox context."

 And so everybody is doing it

-- the onservatives, the econstructionists, liberal rthodox 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.

 The Patrilineal Resolution, spawned by Outreach was particularly controversial.

The Israeli religio-political establishment traduced us and gave it as reason, spurious reason let me say, for their ever recurring efforts to amend the Law of Return. And in America we were warned by Orthodox apologists that we are tearing the fabric of Jewish life that if we persist in clinging to our errant ways there will be not one but two Jewish people by the year 2000.

P Clearly, this proved to be a false prophecy.

Now, nearly 15 years after the resolution was adopted, and but 5 years shy of the millenniums' turning, we are very much intact.

Indeed, recent studies show that fully 85% of all America's Jews have come to accept the patrilineal approach, and so have over 45% of the Conservative rabbinate and even, mirabile dictu, 10% of the Orthodox rabbinate -- albeit on a de facto rather than de jure basis.

P Reform innovations have no deleterious effect on Jewish unity.

They haven't in the past, and they won't today.

Quite the contrary is true.

These changes, these innovations, have helped to gain and retain tens of thousands of individuals and families for Judaism and thereby strengthened Jewish unity and life.

Fundamental ideological divergences obtain

-- there is no denying it --

but they will not fray the Jewish fabric or harm Jewish life.

P So much of the present-day foreboding is predicated on the erroneous

assumption that all was sweetness and light in the past,

that before these latest altercations between Orthodoxy

and Reform, harmony prevailed,

that there was then in that golden and peaceful past

a universal ideological consensus uniting the Jewish world.

P That is a gross misreading of Jewish history, of course.

At no time did such an ideological consensus obtain.

In virtually every era of our people's past

there were sharp ideological disputations setting Jews

in opposition to one another

not just on political and social issues, but in the religious

realm as well -- especially in the latter --

yet the Jewish world did not fracture.

P The reason is not far to seek. —

After all, we Jews share a living history which is partner to the Torah in defining Jewish identity.

In our own day, for instance, all but the most extreme forces of the right and left -- such as the Satmer Chassidim or the fading relics of the American Council for Judaism -- have adjusted their perspectives on Jewish life to admit to the influence of history.

And thus the struggle to secure the safety of Israel, or in behalf of Jews wherever they may be embattled or against anti-Semitism continues to unite us.

P The fact remains that the evolving historical identity of the Jewish people will continue to grow, for Jewish history, like the Torah, belongs to no one single person or movement, but to all Jews, to all who share the destiny of this people Israel.

* * *

P I trust that none of us still harbor the fantasy that by resisting these changes, indeed by reversing them and thereby becoming halachically more conforming we will somehow gain the recognition of Orthodoxy.

P That is an empty dream, a vain illusion.

Just remember what Great Britain's Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sachs,
recently said about the Masorti movement...

Orthodox acceptance indeed!

Only total surrender will do in that arena.

P And so I fully agree with John Raynor that we should be bold
and uncompromising in our advances,
although I do not hold with him that we should proclaim ourselves
as the pioneers of a new Judaism --

but merely on tactical grounds:

what good will it serve to proclaim ourselves as the
branch severed from the trunk and its roots.

P Those spiritual giants who created what we now call rabbinic Judaism
were fully aware of the fact that they were innovators,
This surely is the meaning of that rabbinic legend which
we reformers are fond of citing:

of how when Moses visited the Academy of Rabbi Akiba
he did not recognize the newer Judaism as his own,
he failed to understand the teachings ~~that~~ Akiba

Yet in the end, though, so the Midrash records, Moses was reassured
when the master of the Academy concluded his teaching by saying:
"I rule this on the authority of the Torah which Moses
received on Sinai."

This midrash means to teach us that the rabbis of old understood Judaism
to be an evolving faith, an ever changing faith,
but note that they chose to emphasize the continuum
rather than the novel.

R At any rate, let us not be snared by the delusion
that a retreat on such issues as outreach or patrilineality
will gain us the acceptance of the more traditionally inclined
in Israel or anywhere else.

Only abject submission will have such an effect in that arena.

In any event, adaptive change is alien to the spirit of Reform.
It substitutes political for religious judgments and thus does violence
to our essential nature.

R Let us not become sycophants, trucking for favor by becoming
what we are not, it will not avail us.

We will only demean ourselves and lose our distinctive character.

Our forbears did not forge Reform Judaism to have us trade it in

~~for~~ 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.

U 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 holds ~~sway~~ sway.

That is the danger in Israel today, is it not?

P 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.

P Let us then be true to our convictions 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.

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE of RELIGION

ORDINATION SERMON

by

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

Congregation Emanu-El
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It is good to be here in this most magnificent of synagogues, its tones reverberating with 150 years of Reform Jewish life and worship - good especially to see the faces of these newly ordained rabbis and invested cantors. When I see their earnest, eager faces, their shining eyes, why then I catch a glimpse of the Jewish future and I like what I see.

Today, indeed, we declare the future to be inaugurated, for today is the day that we set the Levites apart, these servants of the House of God. Our Torah portion tells us that the Levites were not to be numbered as were all the other tribes when the census was taken. They are to go uncounted, Parshat Bamidbar tells us, for theirs is a responsibility requiring not a force of numbers but a force of dedication. From the tribes of Israel, they are netunim, netunim - - dedicated to stand between God and the people, as protector of both and as a bridge between them.

I refer now to that verse which appears elsewhere in the Book of Numbers which declares the Levites to be wholly dedicated to God:

ki netunim, netunim hema li mitoch b'nai yisrael.

'for they are given, given unto me from among the children of Israel.'

The rabbis of old took note of the double repetition netunim netunim by commenting that the Levites are thereby dedicated to a two-fold task:

"n'tunim hem l'masa," they are charged to carry the burden, "un'tunim hem l'shira," and they are obliged to sing the songs. Masa and shirah: these are our vocations and our dedications!

Yes, Masa. We are entrusted with the burden, are we not: the burden of building our synagogues and guarding their sacred objects; the burden of officiating on sabbaths and holidays and

festivals and attending to the life-cycle rites of our congregants; the burden of daily teaching, by precept and example, to transmit our heritage and make it come to life in the hearts of our people, aye, and that most painful burden of all, as we walk with our people when they suffer, yea even into the valley of death, and we endure their pains and sorrows, then our own hearts are lacerated, and the burden becomes nigh to unbearable.

Ah! But we are also free to sing the songs, the songs of our people's joys when life is reborn, when health is renewed and when vows of love are spoken. We sing other songs as well, for our tradition identifies song with inspiration, melody with vision. And so we sing songs of vision, songs of possibility, the song of dreams.

When we heal isolation with community; when we bind sorrow with comfort; rejection with acceptance; separation with inclusion; when we strive to awaken a sense of reverence towards Creation, toward this Tent of Meeting on which we live, lest we destroy ourselves by trampling holiness into dust, then do we sing songs, divinely inspired songs, the songs of hope, the songs of the reach beyond the grasp.

It is now my very own soul that you hear singing - - my soul that is repeating the shehecheyanu, over and over - - in gratitude to God for allowing me to reach this precious day. It is a song which reverberates in the heart of every parent here. Not all of them are here, alas. Some have reached their horizon and are gone out of sight. Would that they were here for then they too would sing. For we all of us share the truest reward of our parental labors: that of seeing our children creatively internalize the values we hold most dear and which they now have brought to the forefront of their lives through the choice of their profession. Behold, what we have wrought, it is very, very good.

The ceremonies of this day enlarge my pride as the President of our Union of Congregations, for most of you sprang from that matrix we constitute and nourish. You are our very own, the product of our synagogues and seminaries, the full sheaved harvest of our youth groups and camps.

As a leader of this burgeoning movement I can buttress your confidence in the future. You have the right to be filled with faith, to be radiant with hope. For you see, that message whose bearers we are has not outlived its usefulness. And that institution which we primarily serve, the synagogue, is still capable of that change which will secure its viability as an effective vehicle for the preservation and transmission of Judaism.

The synagogue always was and always will remain the bone marrow of Jewish life, the active place where the building block cells of the Jewish bloodstream are created, and you, my young colleagues and friends, are henceforth the beating heart of the Jewish body.

Know this too, and gain assurance in the knowledge, that we have in our constituency, in our congregations, people who really care, who are earnestly concerned about the synagogue and its future, men and women of high motive and of serious purpose, who are determined to bring about a veritable 'revolution of rising Judaic aspirations.' These people long for leaders who share their hopes, let no one tell you otherwise! They are prepared to respond to such leaders, giving their best whenever the best is sought.

True enough, the rabbi's role is changing, has changed. No longer is the rabbi in authority, as it were, given allegiance by virtue of his office. But the rabbi is freely offered such allegiance, when he or she becomes an authority, when rabbis teach and exemplify those ideals which their office presumably enshrines.

The modern mood calls for a rabbi who is also something of a 'rebbe,' in the ideal conception of that word, not just a teacher of Judaism, but also a fervent Jew who loves his people with an abounding love and who has the conviction and the courage to be a witness to God in a secular, post Auschwitz, post Hiroshima world. This is the kind of leadership to which our people respond. This is the kind of leadership for which they thirst, much like parched earth thirsts for the dew of heaven.

Now to my mind, this kind of leadership must be built on three virtues you are called upon to embody, through which we can bring godliness into our world. These virtues are da'at, rachameem, and tiferet. Jewish learning, compassion and radiance, that is to say, the beauty of holiness. This triad of virtues summarizes Judaism, at least for me. They are the divine manifestations through which we can bring godliness into our world.

The first of these virtues, da'at, knowledge, Jewish learning, is a quality that flows directly from your mastery of the Jewish tradition. It is this quality, above all others, which gives your work its authenticity which constitutes the primary source of your rabbinic authority.

I speak now especially of a continuing and ever heightening encounter with Jewish texts as you pursue your own studies, as well as when you strive to make Judaism come to life in the hearts of your students - - be they young or old.

Encountering a text can be a religious experience. Even so we read in Seder Eliyahu Rabba:

"Kol ham'chadesh divre torah al pif dome kfi shemashmi-im min hashomayim."

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

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

Contact with a rabbi should involve precisely that - a contact with a living Jewish text, a contact that is open, accessible and illuminated like a medieval manuscript. It should mean words of greeting and words of parting that are derived from Jewish texts. It should mean an outspoken dedication to life long study for you, as well as for the members of your congregation, for they too must be enabled to recover their roles as singers of songs and tellers of tales. Thus does a heightened encounter with Jewish texts testify to da'at, to study as a pathway to holiness.

The second divine manifestation you should embody is rachamim, compassion. The root of that word is rechem meaning "womb." Rachamim, therefore, literally speaks of the "womb" feeling that underlies and sanctifies our social activism. This deep-structured meaning of the Hebrew word reminds us of the intimate nature of tikkun olam, the mother love that we must extend not only to the world at large, not only to the Jewish people as a whole, nor even to our congregation collectively, but to each of its individual members.

It is indeed the nature of your relationship with individuals - - especially the solitary souls, the disenfranchised souls, the disabled in body or in spirit - - that will either wake you up in the middle of the night with remorse or deepen your sleep with fulfillment.

One of the most inspiriting and innovating teachings that I have learned in recent weeks speaks to this very matter. It was ascribed to an unknown Hasidic rebbe, who lived in early 19th century Poland. Yet how insightful he was, for you see, in grappling with the Torah's ferocious admonition never to forget

the Amelekites, always to remember their brutality for having attacked and murdered those Jews who straggled, who went astray in the wilderness, who fell behind because they were weary and weakened and ill. "The injunction to remember Amalek" this rabbi taught, is not a call for vengeance. It is rather a lesson in compassion. "Had the children of Israel not forgotten about the slower ones in back," this rebbe taught, "but instead brought them close, binding them to all of Israel, the Amalekites would not have succeeded in their attack. But because you allowed the slower ones to be acharecha, to lag behind you and you forgot about them, Amalek prevailed. Therefore does the Torah tell us to remember Amalek so that we will never forget to bring our brothers and sisters who need special care into our own midst."

Inclusion, as you can see is not merely about generosity and decency. It is about survival. At any rate "rachamim," compassion, is a virtue which sanctifies our work as Levites, as servants in the House of God.

Finally, I would bless you with the divine manifestation of tiferet. Here we are speaking about the realm of feeling, of infusing our world with sacredness. The tree of Judaism, after all, is far more than an intellectual trunk. It extends deep down into the humus and high into the atmosphere, blending the aesthetic and the spiritual and the ethical in a mysterious process of photosynthesis.

Poetry and music come into play in this realm, for they are the languages of religion. Sermons in prose are precisely that, prosaic, if they are merely didactic and utterly lack poesy. And a worship service without liturgical song and without participatory song, is ever dry-as-dust.

For me, at least, great music is a shattering experience, throwing my soul into an encounter with an aspect of reality

which my mind alone can never reach. Thus, I deem our cantors without peer in the realm of tiferet. They are the song birds of our spiritual treetops who repeatedly catch our attention. They open the gates of perception with song. They deliver the knowledge of God to the inner ear. They enable our spirits to soar.

Da'at, rachameem, tiferet: As you proceed to uncover the never-ending manifestations of God in this ever-transforming world, let these three virtues be your steady foundation.

"Who are the ministering angels?" the Talmud asks, answering: "The rabbis are." The Midrash extends this teaching to cantors as well: "The Holy One," we read in Genesis Rabbah, "creates a new choir of angels each day; they sing before God and depart." But Maimonides was most inclusive for thus taught the Rambam: "Everyone who is entrusted with a mission is an angel."

My children, my friends, my colleagues: Today you became angels, fashioned not with wings but with a laying on of hands. The symbolism is apt, for the work of the angels is not flightiness, the work of the angels is the work of our hands: at healing and molding, and delivering and receiving, and gathering the sparks that can be either newly scattered or newly united every time life calls to us.

Go forward now, in peace and strength, with extended hands and open hearts and may your humaneness and your Jewishness be a blessing to all you encounter.

Ken Yehi Ratzon Thus may it be God's will.



Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

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Reflections on the Life of Yitzhak Rabin

Carnegie Hall, New York

November 7, 1995

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

President, Union of American Hebrew Congregations

With heavy hearts we gather here today, still numbed by the tragedy that has befallen us, this act of senseless violence that once again has torn a man of peace from our midst.

We reach out to each other for comfort. We want to ameliorate the pain of our brothers and sisters grieving in Israel. We seek to assuage the anguish of the immediate bereaved, the Prime Minister's stricken family. Indeed, who among us watching yesterday's funeral ceremonies on TV, did not want to brush away the tears glistening on that beautiful, sensitive face of Noa, Yitzhak Rabin's grand-daughter when she spoke so movingly of her "personal hero."

Alas, there is no balm for Gilead. Words cannot sooth a hurt as grievous as is theirs. But at least we can offer them that chatzi nechama, that measure of consolation that comes with the knowledge that they do not lament alone. Look about you and see: countless others, an entire nation, the Jewish people, indeed all civilized humanity stands bereft.

As a man of war, as a man of state and above all, as a man of peace - - Yitzhak Rabin was one of the anointed sons of Israel. And we who stand in awe of his towering life attainments not only grieve, but also rage through our tears, like David upon hearing of the death of Saul:

"How dared you lift your hands to kill the Lord's anointed"

Your glory, O Israel
upon your high places lies slain
Oh, how the mighty are fallen
in the midst of battle.

Mighty he was, Yitzhak Rabin. The unification of Jerusalem and the catalyzing power of the Six-Day War for the Jewish consciousness throughout the world were the gifts of his military brilliance.

Mightier still was he when he became a flaming warrior for peace, when his essential humanity was made manifest, when the sanctity of life, beginning with the battered life of his own people, became his all-consuming passion.

Prime Minister Rabin learned through raw experience what the Bratzlaver Rebbe had long ago

foreseen: that "Jerusalem will be rebuilt only through peace." Guns against stones, clubs against bones, bombs against buses, missiles against homes, soldier and civilians slaughtering each other . . . Rabin had witnessed it all, swallowing his revulsion in the name of necessity until he saw, that the necessity of the hour had not been served, because the necessity of the hour was peace.

Thus did Israel's Prime Minister join the ranks - those pathetically tin ranks - of world leaders who truly convert swords into plowshares. Over and over the old warrior assured us: There is no other way! He knew the map. He had travelled its roads. He could say with a certainty that while the road ahead is full of fearsome dangers, the road back, the road to yesteryear, leads only to oblivion.

That foul deed, that cowardly, murderous assassination, undermines none of what Yitzhak Rabin taught us. It merely proves the truth of his avowal that there is no road back. That road has already vanished. Chaos is all that lurks there. And those who lie in ambush on the road ahead are but the children of chaos. The gods they invoke are idols sculpted in cold steel. The chaos to which they cling is not a justifiable hatred of real enemies; it is but the unwarranted and unthinkable hatred of Jews for their fellow Jew. Once upon a time, we are taught, such a sinat chinam, such a vain and futile hatred led to the destruction of the Holy Temple and our nationhood. We will not tolerate its emergence again!

This bitter lesson too we have relearned: that words are not wind, that they are the shadow of deeds, that they can hold society together or incite a fanatic to kill. Let us be heedful of our words, then all of us!

And so we express our own great sorrow over this loss. To our grieving brothers and sisters mourning in Israel we offer our comforting presence. To the Prime Minister's broken-hearted family we offer our deepfelt sympathy as well as our grateful thanks for the sacrifice they made to enable this man of history to make history.

His vision of peace remains his most precious legacy. It is a vision shared by soldiers weary of fighting, by mothers and fathers, and sons and daughters, weary of weeping, by Jews, by peoples everywhere, who want release from the shadow of fear into the sunshine of reconciliation. We will not squander this inheritance. We will guard it, nurture it, and grow it into a treasure for future generations.

And so it is that Yitzhak Rabin's death leaves us bereft. It has diminished our strength. Truly a star has been torn from the firmament of our lives, and our lives are darker because of it.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.

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*to Judy -
her house
over the*

Installation of Judy Schindler
Westchester Reform Temple
October 20th, 1995

Thank you for your warm introduction, Rick.

Your words are pleasing to the ear, but they embarrass me.

Kotonti mikol hachasadim -- I really do not merit so many praises.

But I am comforted by the knowledge that your congregants
are fully aware of the fact that rabbis are prone to hyperbole,
that they tend to exaggerate.

That is manifestly so and I can prove it to all of you,
for as we walked toward the bimah Rick turned to me and said:
"You know, we get this kind of crowd every Friday night!"

Your embellishments to the contrary notwithstanding, Rick,
I am deeply grateful for your warm words of welcome
manifesting your friendship
which -- so I hope - you know and feel
is reciprocated with a full and grateful heart.

I am most admiring of your rabbi and those many fine qualities
of mind and spirit he brings to his endeavors:
his intelligence, his industry, his learning,
and, above all, the essential warmth of his human approach.

But you know all this much better than do I.

After all, your relationship now spans the years
and plumbs the depths of being,
cemented as it is by tears of joy and sorrow alike.

You are fortunate to have Rabbi Jacobs as your spiritual leader.

But then, he is fortunate to have you as his congregants,
for this synagogue, Westchester Reform Temple,
is one of the bright and shining stars
in the firmament of our religious community.
If you promise not to tell it in Gath or in the streets of Ashkelon,
when the roster of currently available positions was published
I told my daughter that this would be my first choice
-- because of the excellence of your communal striving
and because your senior rabbi is so creative and caring.
And so I am glad that you chose each other, as it were,
and I am grateful for the warmth
with which you have already embraced our Judy.
Needless to say this is a moment of great meaning to me,
an occasion which makes the spirit soar.
There are two lines intoned in the final scene of Beethoven's Fidelio
which give words to the feeling stirring within me now.
My cousin Roberta Peters is familiar with this passage since she sang
the role of Marzeline many a time and with surpassing beauty:
O Gott, welch ein Augenblick!
O unaussprechlich suesses Glueck!
Oh God what a moment,
of inexpressible, sweet happiness!
Consider, if you will, the threads of that tapestry interwoven here:
After my sermon, Roberta Peters, will sing a poem
authored by my father of blessed memory.
The Sidra adorning this Sabbath is Bereshit, Genesis,
the very Torah portion I chanted on my Bar Mitzvah...
-- as did Judy and her twin brother Jonathan thereafter.

And today she is installed as your assistant rabbi.

Thus do the elements of three generations

interweave to form the pattern of Jewish continuity.

Now, a rabbi's life is demanding.

Of course the task of the assistant rabbi is first and foremost

to lend support to her senior colleague, to help him in his work,
to extend his ability to serve his congregation.

But the demands made on both rabbis, indeed on all rabbis,
are endless and exacting.

Many and diverse are the roles they are called upon to fulfill,

They must be philosophers who can answer life's ultimate questions.

They must be theologians asked to explain the "why" of human suffering.

They are expected to be master-teachers

who can reveal and illumine the drama of Jewish history
and the glory of Jewish literature

and relate them both to contemporary life.

They are counted on to lead and infuse worship services
with religious fervor.

They must be counselors capable of listening to their congregants
with an inner ear and an understanding heart.

They must even be artists, artists of the spirit,
able to fashion beauty not in silver nor in gold
but in the living soul of their students.

And tis above all, they must be faithful friends to their temple members
ready to share their sorrows no less than their joys
prepared to walk with them when they suffer,
yea even into the valley of death.

When they do, their own hearts are lacerated,
and the burden becomes nigh to unbearable.

By no means are these the only functions rabbis are expected to fulfill.

There are many more, thus prompting one of our colleagues,

the late and widely revered Jacob Shankman to say:

"in order to discharge (their manifold duties) rabbis must possess not only highmindedness, dedication, and superlative gifts of mind and heart, but also the physical energiees that would tax perfectly conditioned athlete, as well as the psychic equilibrium of saints."

The embodiment of so many diverse virtues is virtually impossible.

And so if my installation sermon must have its cohortative aspect

then let it be this:

Relax Judy...you can't do it all...no one can!

Just continue to be what you are, caring and committed,

and strive to do your best.

Never be timid as you approach your tasks

for fear that you will falter, that you will make mistakes.

Don't ever be afraid of that.

A rabbi who never makes mistakes is not fit to lead a congregation.

A rabbi who never makes mistakes is is a rabbi who lives in mediocrity.

So be daring in your quest -- and all will be well.

* * *

Now Rick Jacobs has suggested that I devote some portion

of my commentary this evening to the subject of Reform Judaism

its present state and likely future.

His counsel is sound, for it is to the furtherance of Judaism's ideas

and ideals, and our particular understanding of them, that this

evening, and the strivings of this congregation are all about.

Let me begin with the present and the good news:

We are flourishing as a religious community.

We have gained a following of significant dimensions.

Indeed, Reform Judaism has emerged as the fastest-growing synagogue movement on the North American Jewish scene.

When I first joined the staff of the Union, now two score years ago, our total membership barely exceeded 400 temples,

We are approaching nine hundred now.

In the past two decades alone, our cumulative membership rolls have burgeoned by better than 25%.

And 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.

The reasons for this numeric burgeoning are four fold and they bear careful examination, for surely those principles which helped us flourish in th past can also serve to secure our future.

In the first instance, we have maintained an understanding of Judaism as a dynamic rather than a static faith, a faith that is never in the process of being, but always in the process of becoming, of a relentless flowing on.

We mustered the wisdom to change when changing circumstance required alteration

prepared to move forward whenever necessary, or even backward for a step, when an honest self-searching summoned us to do so.

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.

A second source of our continuing strength is our insistence on the
full participation of women in the religious life.

By seeking and achieving their empowerment within Judaism,
we have brought new creative energy to our people, to the rabbinate
and thereby redoubled our leadership resources for the future.

We have invited the shechinah into our spiritual lives,
and felt her revitalizing touch.

Social activism is still another source of our communal strength,
our loyalty to the prophetic spirit of Judaism.

It has assured us of relevance and of wholeness in our
changing and fractured world.

It has enabled us to attract numerous idealists, young and old,
whose yearning for justice knew no prior Jewish expression.
who now understand that there is no schizophrenic division
between the "real world" and the world of Jewish devotion.

The word "outreach" comprises the last and to some extent the most important source 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 Torah we are taught that when Moses sought 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 received God's inspiration and "spoke in ecstasy" in the camp. Joshua asks Moses to jail the two, but Moses replies: "Would that all God's people were prophets."

All God's people -- aye, says Reform Judaism!

All God's people including women.

All God's people including gay and lesbian Jews.

All God's people, including families in all of their new constellations.

All God'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.

* * *

But something more than a numeric growth has marked 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.

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,
and that includes Judy and Rick Jacobs too.

They are 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.

* * *

If I have a concern for the future of our religious community
it is only this

that too many Reform Jews still question the authenticity of Reform.
They believe that the phrase "a religious Reform Jew"
is really an oxymoron, .

They think that "piety" and "Reform" are mutually exclusive
states of being, .

Let us admit it, too many of us suffer from such a self-deprecating 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.

But that is a gross misreading of Judaism's truer nature, for from its
very beginnings ours was an evolving and never a static faith.

Do you think that the orthodox synagogues of today are the unchanged
replica of the shtible of the shtetl,

or that that the prayer rooms of the shtetl are but a clone
of the synagogues in which a Maimonides worshipped?

Nothing could be further from the truth!

In every period of our people's history Judaism responded to the demands
of a changing world -- and survived because it did.

According to a well-known Talmudic legend, when God enabled Moses
to visit the Academy of Rabbi Akiba

who lived and functioned over a millenium later
our great Lawgiver was helplessly confounded,
for he did not recognize the newer Judaism as his own.

He failed to understand the teachings that Akiba attributed to him,
to Moses himself.

This midrash teaches 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 is not frozen like ice but
a soluble substance to be mixed with human tears.

From this perspective, it is modern orthodox statism and literalism
that is inauthentic,
that represents a fundamental break with the Jewish tradition.
Reform Judaism, in its ideal conception,
is palpably truer to that tradition.

* * *

Now, I am distressed by the self-deprecating mindset
which afflicts many among us not only with regard to Orthodoxy,
but with Judaism itself and in its entirety.

Thus when I suggested over the years that we Jews ought to be more
assertive in proselytizing non Jews beginning with those
who were already bound to us by love or marriage
and even going beyond them to the many of our fellow Americans
who seek a meaningful faith for their lives,
-- whenever I suggested that I was jeered:

Too many Jews of all stripes said: absurd...who would want to do that?
as they said to Sammy Davis: don't you have enough troubles being black?

When several years ago, our colleague, Chuck Sherman of Tulsa Oklohamo,
and on Yom Kippur, no less, invited the non-Jewish spouses of
interfaith couples to embrace Judaism
-- and mind you, many of them had been members of his Temple
for many years --

not a few of these couples responded during the following weeks.
When asked why they had not converted before, they told him:

"Because nobody ever asked us to become Jewish."

Why don't we ask? Why are we so hesitant? Are we ashamed?

Must one really be a madman to choose Judaism?

Let us shuffle off our insecurities!

Let us recapture our self-esteem!

Let us demonstrate our confidence in those worths which our faith
enshrines!

Some years ago, the Union prepared a video-fil recording an interview
with several Jews-by-Choice.

Among them was a couple, neither of whom was born a Jew
and who chose Judaism together.

When they were asked to relate what experience in the conversion process
was most disturbing, most painful to them,
John, the husband, answered:

"I was most troubled when my Jewish friends said to me:
Are you crazy? You needed this, to become a Jew?
And I began to wonder...if they don't know it's there,
maybe it isn't there!"

"If they don't know it's there, maybe it isn't there."

Here is the essential challenge, for in lacking a mission
we are suspect of also lacking the message.

But we do have a message, my friends.

Let us not doubt nor fault to proclaim it.

We have so very much to offer.

Judaism celebrates life and not death.

It insists on the freedom and the capacity of the individual
to determine his fate.

Judaism is a religion of hope and not of despair.

It holds that society and humankind are perfectible.

Moreover, we offer something more than a disembodied faith system.

We are a people of faith, a caring community of Jews.

In other words, we have an enormous amount of wisdom and experience,
of warmth and of love, to offer to this troubled world.

And we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it,
frankly, freely, and with dignity.

* * *

This is the precious heritage which is ours to preserve
and which we entrust this night especially to Judy.

In doing so, I can find no better words than those included
in last year's HUC ordination service,
so lovingly prepared by the new ordinees.

Therein a beautiful, well-crafted liturgical passage was included...
Its words can well serve as my prayer of investiture:

"I call on God to bless you, Judy,
to bless you as our teachers once blessed us,
and their teachers once blessed them;
for you and we and they are linked in an unbroken chain
from Sinai until now.

Know then with what love we charge you:
to go forth into the world,
to sing the the Jewish song of centuries,
and to tell the endless tale of an endless people called to service

Love the people whom you meet no less than you love God,
for every single soul reflects the glory of its Maker,
and every man and woman may be someone you can touch,
with the healing hand of wisdom,
or an aged prophetic echo of our past.

Build a life that is a mirror in which others see reflected
the will to reach heaven, and be what God intended.
Assume your new tasks, then, and raise up students in Torah,
the Torah that is God's blueprint for creation."

A rare and noble legacy has been entrusted to you, Judy.
May God who is enthroned above our people's praises
grant you the wisdom and the strength to preserve and transmit it.

(Ask congregation to stand and Judy to approach the Ark)

Yom Kippur Sermon...Union Temple 5756...October 4th, 1995

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

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

Again, we are gathered here, "presumably" to slake ^{OUR} ~~that~~ thirst for the sacred, to satisfy that hunger for the holy that has come to mark our days.

I say "persumably" because I suspect that many of us are here
impelled by an admixture other reasons: 1
to feel a part of the Jewish community...
to be stirred by the liturgical music...
to glean those insights contained in our prayerbook...

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

Now, none of these reasons are flawed.

All of them are altogether worthy...they fully justify our coming here.

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

In the synagogue we meet as Jews...

and Jews have human as well as spiritual needs.

x All of them warrant to be served.

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

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

We invoke God as the master of our destiny, and ask
that He will inscribe us ^{+ SEAL VS} in the book of life for blessing. /

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

that we yearn to be at one ~~again~~ with God,

that we need to feel His nearness.

that we are utterly lost without Him at our center.

(M42)
"This is the day of God... (so we pray)
what are we as we stand in your presence...
a leaf in the storm...
a fleeting moment in the tide of time...
a whisper lost in the vastness of creation...
Help us to find you, God...
Renew our spirit...
Rekindle within us the faith
that will dispel the darkness of our doubt and confusion."

SO DO WE PRAY OVER + AGAIN
4 If this be the quintessential theme of our day,

why, then, I had best address it in my sermon

even though I know that my words will fall short of the need. //

Indeed, / believing in God does not mean talking about God.

BELIEVING
It does not mean CONCEPTUALIZING thinking about God.

It is not a matter of intellectual persuasion, for God is not a theory,
a formula, that can be contained in a cold detached statement. /

Believing in God means something else entirely.

It is a transformation of the human personality

a tremendous inner conviction involving all human faculties
heart and mind and will and spirit too

all of these touched into living communion with the divine: /

-- that / is believing in God //

Happy the man or woman who truly attains such a faith,

for such a person evinces an inner peace ^{+ I THINK THAT PEACE} and ~~it~~ is genuine.

It is the peace of God...it is the calm of joyous attainment.

Attainment of ~~what?~~

Not of outer rewards...not of riches...not of security and ease.

But of spiritual adjustment, of inner harmony,

of an ineffable at-one-ness with ^{the} World-Soul which we call God.

Not even tragedy, however terrible, seems capable of unsettling the spiritual serenity of the true believer.

Somehow there is the blending of grief into the laughter of the world until the river of tears clap their hands.

God gives, God takes, blessed be the name of God.

o/t Wonderful it is thus to believe in God, is it not

yet there are few among us alas, myself included,

who consistently attain such an all consuming faith

The sense of the sacred just doesn't seem reach us very often

(in the rough and tumble of our modern lives...

~~not often enough, at any rate...~~

The great contemporary Jewish philosopher Martin Buber

perceived this inability ^{when he wrote}

"Certainty of faith is not accessible to modern man," ^{if he said} ~~he wrote~~.

But then he quickly added, that nevertheless we moderns

"are not denied the possibility of holding ourselves open to faith"

- ^{+ FURTHER} moreover that ^{AS JEWS} ~~as Jews~~ it is our peculiar mission to do so, ^{AS JEWS}

ever to hold ourselves open to faith though,

though certainty of faith is not assured.

To hold ourselves open to faith...that's how it all began, did it not?
For when Moses saw his vision of the burning bush he was not alone.
Presumably there were other shepherds there who must have seen
the self same bush -- but they ignored it.

Moses did not...he was open to faith

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

The experience of the holy begins with a readiness to perceive it.
You cannot sense the grandeur of nature if you look at a sunrise
through sleepy eyes.

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

There is a prior need for kavanah, for an openness of heart,
for intent,

for a conscious determination to be so stirred.

Does the Jewish tradition offer further guidance for our quest?

It suggests several means to that end ^{AND IT} bids us begin with limud torah
with study of the Torah in the broader meaning of the term
as encompassing the entire body of our sacred lore.

^{AFER ALL} Judaism affirms that God is revealed through words.

We can glimpse the divine elsewhere, to be sure

in other human beings,

or in the miracles of nature,

or in the depths of our own soul.

But what gave shape Jewish history was first and foremost a book.

AND SO WE MUST TURN TO THAT BOOK & BOOKS
Encountering a text itself can be a religious experience.

Even so we read in the seder ~~and~~ eliyahu RABBI

Kol ham'chadesh divre torah al pif
dome kfi shemashmi-im min hashomayim
Whosoever interprets a text in a new way
it is as if it were revealed to him from heaven.

Reading a text can be a transforming experience.

We approach the text, and soon the text begins to reach out to us,
to envelop us, until we almost become the text.

Altogether, I am afraid that our movement has taken too literally
the rabbinic teaching lo hamidrash ha-ikar elo ha-maaseh,
that the essential thing is not study but deeds.

True enough, study without action is denounced as a vanity, /
yet deeds, however good, when detached from Torah study
are trivialized and denied their Jewish moorings.

Without such a mooring, deeds become entirely non-obligatory.

They can be ~~can be~~ accepted or rejected capriciously. //

I know that we Reform Jews are easily deterred by that word 'obligatory'

But I do not speak of the coercion of religious authority. now.

I speak rather of the coercive power of truth itself:

the truth that our patriarchs and matriarchs discovered in lonely
places and in encounters that forever changed their lives;
the truth that generations of commentators, in safety and in peril,
in exile and in Jerusalem, debated and expounded
and applied to the details of daily life;
the truth that only life itself can ultimately teach
and which Judaism posits as a core spiritual perception:
that life is a holy unity, a single web of meaning.

The Talmud proclaims that each day God regrets the creation
of this world of ours, and each day a destroying angel
is set forth to revert it all to chaos.

But when God sees young children studying the Torah,
when God sees would-be-sages studying with their masters,
the heavenly rage transforms to compassion,
and the world once again, is spared.

This reprieve is earned not by prayer, mind you, not by deed,
but by study, by the encounter with the text.

* * *

But Torah study alone does not suffice for the need, ^{so} our tradition avers
While it may be true that an ignorant person,
a person unwilling to study, ^{IS LESS LIKELY TO} ~~cannot~~ attain to the sacred,
it is equally true that not every knowledgeable Jew
is ipso facto pious.

Thought and deed must be conjoined...

Somehow we must acquire the capacity to bridge the distance between
midrash and ma'aseh, between the mind and the hand. /

Indeed, Judaism deems the performance of mitzvot
to be the most effective means to attain to ruchaniyut,
to spirituality. /

Judaism runs counter to conventional wisdom here.

Most people believe that faith is the necessary precedent of action,
that only when we accept the God-belief as a rational postulate
can we be moved to religious observance. /

Not so, teaches our religion.

The faith-deed relationship is not fixed eternally in one direction.
the former is not of necessity the pre-condition of the latter.

Often, so teaches Judaism, the deed is father to the thought;
In going out to meet the commandment, we may find the One who commands.

Paul Tillich considered this emphasis to be Judaism's most
significant contribution to religious thought
delineating the continuing distinctive mission of the Jew.

"For the prophets of Israel" -- Tillich wrote -- "and for all
their followers among rabbis and theologians, obedience to
the law of justice is the way of reaching God. It is the final
criterion of the sincerity of man's quest for the divine.
The 'ought to be' is the ultimate test of 'being.'"

Tillich adjudged us right.

Naaseh v'nishma our forbears proclaimed 'round Sinai,

"first we will do, then we will hear"

A clear knowledge of God, so Judaism maintains, is possible to no one.

but the acceptable worship of God is possible for all.

Let each Jew therefore observe the mitzvot

and the goal he seeks will be his:

a sense of communion with the divine.

"The mitzvah is the place where God and man meet,"

taught Abraham Joshua Heschel.

And before him, Leo Baeck wrote:

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

It is important to remember in this context

that the concept of mitzva is not ~~not~~ limited to religious rite,
that it encompasses the ethical deed as well.

Judaism, in its mainstream, never yielded to the monastic impulse.
Our teachers did not believe that holiness can be found in
solitude or isolation alone

And so they insisted that while the quest for holiness may well
begin with the self and within the self it must not end there.
There is an equal if not greater need to turn outward
to a broken world and to engage in the effort to repair it.

Modern Jewish existentialists take up a like refrain when they bid us
take a 'leap of action' rather than a 'leap of faith.'

Israel's clarion call naaseh v'nishma is interpreted to mean:
in doing we perceive.

What is the Jewish way to God, they ask.

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

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

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

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

We do not have faith in deeds.

We attain faith by means of deeds.

* * *

We attain such a faith when our deeds

-- our observances, and our strivings for justice --
are driven by the desire to find God.

For the true meaning of religion is ~~this~~^{this}:

not simply morality, but morality touched by emotion,
not simply ethics, but ethics propelled by passion.

There is a paradox here, with what I said earlier that believing in
God means, ^{serenity} rest, [^] the attainment of inner peace,
for when it comes to the striving for justice
^{passive} just the opposite is so.

Then believing in God means ^{NOT REST - BUT} unrest, exile, strangerhood,
^{EVERY WAR} ~~even struggle and strife.~~

The ^{WAR} struggle for righteousness...the strife against inequity...
the burning sense of indignation.

The inner hell of the soul that seeks to burn up with its own fire
all the wretched wrongs of this world
in order to turn the whole earth into heaven.

Such an inner fire burned in the belly of all God's chosen ones:
prophets, seers, martyrs, all dreamers of a better world...

* * *

There is a another paradox of which I want to speak now
and which often impedes our quest for the holy in life.
I speak now of that paadox in Jewish theological thought
which holds that God, though unknowable,
nonetheless makes Himself known.

God is wholly other -- we are taught.

He is completely different from us.

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

We cannot, should not even conjure up His image.

We must not describe Him, or, following Maimonides,

we can describe Him only by means of negations,

by saying what He is not.

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

But at the same time we are taught that though unknowable,

God reveals Himself in countless ways.

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

"Thou canst not see My face,

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

Even so can we behold God's goodness "in the realm of nature

and in the varied experiences of our lives."

You remember those heaven soaring words of our liturgy:

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

Unknowable, yet known...how enigmatic...how paradoxical...

Yet strangely enough, modern science of whose teachings we accept

with greater ease than we do the teachings of faith,

nonetheless confronts us with a like seeming paradox.

Thus physicists, in their endeavor to study the nature of matter,

developed a device called a cloud chamber.

Cloud chambers allow the observer to see paths traced by particles

resulting from nuclear reactions.

The actual particles, however, remain unobservable.

They have never been seen, might never be seen,

with naked eye or instruments however well-refined.

Here too then, a leap of faith is required, a scientific leap of faith,

if you will: to acknowledge the existence of a particle that can be

known only through its traces.

Unknowable, yet known through its traces.

Invisible, but real, nonetheless.

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

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

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

But the invisible world has a reality all its own.

It is very real to those who seek to see with ~~with~~ an inner eye.

As a contemporary Jewish thinker puts it:

"The invisible reality permeates the material world.
Trying to separate the two is impossible."

Consider the world of the invisible, if you will.

Ideas, for example...they are impalpable...no one can see or seize them.
Yet ideas can seize us and they hold the power to transform our lives.

Ideals too are of such a kind.

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

You add love to a house and you have a home...

You add righteousness to a city and you have a community.

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

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

You add justice to the far flung round of human endeavor,

and then and then only do you have a civilization.

Music is such invisible force, ultimately every form of art is that:
They may be discernible in outer form but not in their innermost essence
The sources and nature of art are a mystery even to those who create it.
Yet art has the power to heal us.

It can make the spirit soar,

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

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

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

But no one has ever seen love itself.

It certainly cannot be anatomized, or schematized,

or reduced to clearly identifiable elements.

Yet how powerful a force love is!

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

Aye, the invisible world permeates the material world,

and unravelling the two is impossible.

* * *

My friends, there is a great yearning for spirituality in our day.

a pervasive hunger for the holy.

An ever increasing number of people are experiencing a void in their

inner lives and are longing for something of more during worth

We all of us can feel it, can we not? //

^{all}
We have come to recognize the wisdom of Chesterton's counsel who said:

^
"The trouble when people stop believing in God
is not that they thereafter believe in nothing;
It is because thereafter they believe in everything."

"The realm of the absolute is never empty,"

so taught our teacher Eugene Mihaly

a void is too easily filled with false Gods

of an unbridled ethnocentrism,,

of racial chauvenism,

of antropotheism, that arrogant assumption that ^{SUPPOSEDLY} we are God,

that we humans are all powerful. /

"Only God is God," we proclaim seven times over at the conclusion
of our Yom Kippur liturgy.

`Adnonai Hu Haelohim -- God is God, there is none else"

This is the historic witness of the Jew

^{JUDAISM}

which rejects every form of idolatry

and commits us -- and our synagogues -- to the eternal quest.

Service on
Israel -
May help
see pp 4 & 11

Rosh Hashana Morning Service
Union Temple, Brooklyn, N.Y.
September 25, 1995

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

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

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

The blowing of the shofar assuredly marks the climax

of these morning services,

and it takes a rare detachment indeed,

not to be moved by these blasts of the ram's horn.

There is something about the quality of the sound,

about the shape and structure of the calls, that penetrate
our innermost being and veritably sears our souls.

Little wonder that over the centuries,

our sages gave a variety of meanings to these sounds.

Thus Rabbi Abbahu said that we blow the ram's horn to remind ourselves
of the sacrifice of Isaac.

Rabbi Joshua ben Korchah taught that even as the ram's horn was sounded
when the Torah was given to Israel,

so will it resound

to herald the return of the exiles to the Promised Land.

In a like vein, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa commented that one of the horns of the ram which Abraham sacrificed in Isaac's stead was the very horn blown at Sinai.

And the other horn of that self-same ram will be blown again when the dispersed are gathered for the Great Return.

[Thus indeed, when the builders and leaders of the modern Jewish state declared their independence,

Ben Gurion's proclamation was climaxed by the tekiah g'dolah that long, unbroken blast that crowns the shofar service]

The great Maimonides penetrated the symbolic, inner meaning of these shoafar blasts when he interpreted them to sound this summons:

"Awake ye sleepers from your sleep!
Rouse yourselves, you slumberers, out of your slumber!
Examine your deeds, you who are wasting your years
in vain pursuits that neither profit nor save!
Abandon your deceitful ways and return to God."

Thus did Maimonides understand the sounds of the shofar --
and so do we understand them
as we rehearse our days and deeds of the past year
and tremblingly prepare to lift the curtain of the future
beyond whose impenthrable veil lies all that tomorrow will bring.

It is a time when we need the companionship
of kindred and aspiring souls...and we find it in this place.
I certainly do, and so it is good to be in your midst once again.
I really missed being here last year, and so did all the Schindlers.
After all, Union Temple is our communal home.
This is where we want to be, on these, the most holy of days.
And I am grateful to Linda Goodman, to all of you, for inviting us again

Since you are our extended family, as it were,

you will be pleased to learn that one of our five children, Judy,
was ordained a rabbi earlier this year

and is now serving as the assistant rabbi of WRT.

You first encountered her as a four year old, sitting in the front row
along with her four siblings,

all of them stirring and squirming in their seats.

Still, I am convinced that the majestic beauty of Union Temple's
high holiday worship services was a factor, if only subconscious,
in swaying Judy to make the rabbinate her life career.

even as it helped direct the lives

of all our wonderful children.

And since you are our family, you have a right to shep naches too.

It is good to be here, then, as I have said...

wonderful to feel your presence...

Yet there is a sorrow intermingling with the joy of our renewed embrace.

Too many who were with us two years ago are here no more.

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

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

But there is also the solace

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

that comes with the gift of memory..

"So long as we live they too shall live,

for they are now a part of us as we remember them."

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

I have made it my habit to devote at least one of my two high holy
day sermons to communal rather than to personal concerns.

My sermon today will be of such a kind, focusing essentially on events
in Israel, the unfoldment of its efforts to achieve peace,
and the impact of these events on American Jewish life.

Let me begin with Israel, and the peace process, which has wrested
and wrenched our emotions from hope to fear and back again
with never ending, unremitting regularity.

When I stood before you two years ago, a few days after that reluctant
Arafat-Rabin handshake on the White House lawn,
the pendulum of our emotions tended, albeit timidly, toward hope.
Erstwhile bitter enemies had crossed the swollen rivers
of hatred and war in order to sow the seeds of peace...
thus holding forth the promise of a strategic turning point
in Arab Israeli politics.

But even then, two years ago,

our momentary rush of hope was tempered by realism.

We knew full well, then,

that this was but the beginning of a long and painful journey
whose successful conclusion was far from assured.

Such a journey it proved to be, drawn-out and arduous,
and accentuated too often, alas,

by acts of wanton terror, acts of dark butchery without a soul.

We wept with the victims and our mood turned from hope to disenchantment.

But the perspective provided by this holy season's backward glance
gives us manifold reasons to let the balance of our emotions
reshift from disillusion back to a greater confidence.

Enormous changes have taken place in the course of the past 24 months
and we must not allow the gray day-to-day realities of peacemaking,
nor even those fearsome acts of political extremism,
to obscure them.

These changes have been profound, cataclysmic, in fact,
and what will remain in history books is not
what is written in daily newspapers
but rather what the various signing ceremonies
do in fact represent and portend.

Consider, for a moment, what rich rewards Israel reaped
thanks, and only thanks to Oslo and all other peacemaking ventures.

That tight grip of diplomatic isolation throttling Israel
for the past score years is finally has loosened.

Fifty-eight countries have renewed or newly established relations
with the Jewish State -- and only because of the peace process.

Among these countries are Jordan

which has the longest joint border with Israel,
and Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population in the world
and China and India

which together account for nearly half of humanity.

I met with US Ambassador Indyk last week who told us that Israel's
principal artery is clogged almost daily
with entourage after entourage of foreign emissaries
wending their way from Ben Gurion Airport to Jerusalem

Indeed, so he told us, Ezer Weizman pleaded with Peres and Rabin to stem this diplomatic flow on the ground that he simply had no spare time to meet and greet another prime or foreign minister.

In a word, the Arab-Israel peace process, flawed and embryonic as it is, has wholly transformed and normalized Israel's relations with the rest of the world.

There has even been a gradual normalization of Israel's relation with the Arab world.

Most of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations which used to be held in Washington or some "fairy-tale castle" in Europe are now held in the Middle East, a good many within Israel itself. The multilateral negotiating groups have made enormous and largely unheralded progress...

Agreements have been reached on well over 100 region-wide projects ranging from transportation to energy to health services to education and even the joint development of housing facilities for refugees in Syria and Lebanon.

And, of course the Arab boycott has collapsed, first de facto and now de jure what with the recent official decision of six Persian Gulf states to end their secondary and tertiary boycott of Israel.

Peace with Jordan, hailed within Israel even by the political right, could not have been achieved without a prior Israel-PLO pact. These negotiations were signed and celebrated on land once contested by both states...between Eilat and Aqaba...it was a glorious moment which both Rhea and I were privileged to witness.

The Jordan agreement even brought security dividends to Israel,
for it granted Israel the right to respond,
to traverse Jordanian air and ground space,
should hostile forces cross Jordanian's Eastern frontier.
In effect, Israel gained considerable strategic depth,
extending its security lines by 200 miles
all the way to the border of Iraq, beyond which lies Iran.

The release of Syria's 4000 was also won as the direct result of
Israel's peacemaking efforts and America's involvement in it.

The economic consequences of the peace process
are altogether staggering.

Two thirds of the world's markets heretofore closed to Israel
are now wide open.

Asian countries such as China, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan
have dramatically increased their trade with Israel.

Indeed it is likely that India will soon replace the U.S. and the
European Union as Israel's number one agricultural export market.

International companies that once shunned Israel

-- such as Bechtel and Amoco and Exxon and Italy's ENI --
are beginning to seize the commercial opportunities now available.
Even Baharin, Kuwait and Qatar have indicated their desire for access
to Israeli pipelines to ship their oil and natural gas to Europe,
thus enabling them to utilize this far more direct and far less
costly transit line than the circuitous route presently available
and thereby of immense potential benefit to Israel
no less than the Arab suppliers.

Some of this is in the future, to be sure,

but the realized dividends are striking even now.

Israel's inflation rate is in single digits.

Unemployment rests below 7%.

Foreign currency reserves reached a record \$10 billion dollars
several months ago

And the GNP rose by over 8% this fiscal year, more than the combined GNP
of Israel's neighbors with all of their reservoirs of oil.

In sum, dovish politics succeeded in spawning bullish economics.

Yes, the continued risks of peacemaking are undeniable.

Suicidal terrorists will continue to stalk the negotiations
every step of the way.

But these fearsome events, however tragic in their consequence,
must not be permitted to overshadow the very and priceless gifts
that the process of peace has already brought
and will doubtlessly continue to bring to Israel.

Most Israelis recognize this, and that is why they want
the negotiating process to continue.

They may be ambivalent, concerned about the risks entailed,
they may even oppose with a vehemence one or another
provision of the agreements envisaged.

Nonetheless, a preponderant majority of Israelis yearn for peace and
continue to opt for hope over despair.

To be sure, the strident voice of Israel's political opposition has not
been stilled, nor has the furor of extremists among the settlers.

Only former Minister of Justice Dan Meridor and and Menachem Begin's son Ze'ev have had the integrity and political courage to condemn the dangerous rhetoric of Israel's radical right.

Would that they had also succeeded in keeping partisan Israeli political pressures from spilling over America's Jewish landscape.

If anything the rhetoric of the radical right is more strident here than it is in Israel.

Some of you surely read that Abe Foxman, ADL's national director, recently resigned from his Orthodox synagogue because its rabbi accused Rabin of being a willful accomplice in the killing of Jews by Palestinian terrorists

He even likened Israel's Prime Minister to those Jews who connived with the Nazis during those fearsome days of the shoah.

Nor is he the only Orthodox rabbi to be guilty of such imprecations. What an obscenity this! What unmitigated gall!

Worse still, only last Thursday we saw the sorry spectacle of two Jewish organizations, the ZOA and the Union of Orthodox Congregations, testify in Congress in opposition to the stance taken by AIPAC and all other Jewish groupings.

Don't these people know what the inevitable consequence of such divisive lobbying is?

Do they not realize that their factious conduct and total lack of communal discipline is bound ultimately to undermine America's support for the modern Jewish State.

As you know, I pride myself in being a liberal,
in religion and politics alike.

And as a liberal I am always inclined to avoid certainties
and to see three sides of every issue.

But in this case I simply do not understand what Israel's right
and their American Jewish supporters seek to achieve...

Would they really prefer a return to the status quo ante?
Yet that status quo but sowed the seeds of endless conflict.
It corroded the Jewish and democratic character of the State.
It sapped the nation's morale and spent its moral capital.

Perhaps more to the point, the conceptions of the right
have been tested over the years and always found wanting.
They did not stay the stones and bombs of terrorists
or silence their rockets.

Those who would rely on force alone tried everything to quell the
intifada:
repression, killings, war, the arbitrary seizure of lands
mass deportations, collective punishment, even counter-terror.
But nothing availed...

A restive population exceeding 1 million people
cannot forever be held in check
-- not even with force and spies and the political power
that comes from the barrel of a gun.

No one can guarantee that the peace effort will ultimately succeed.
But this much we do know: the contrary way is foredoomed to failure.

No national movement including Zionism

has ever been erased by military force.

Reciprocal terror will only serve to plunge us into a downward spiral
to eternal conflict and the loss of Israel's soul

If Israel is to remain Israel there is no other way other than
the relentless pursuit of peace.

What ought we to do, then, what can we do, we Jews of America
whose lot has fallen in such safe and pleasant places?

We can pray for that miracle to unfold.

We can support the forces that work for peace, and counter those who
don't, who are so vociferous in their opposition.

Not long ago, I was in the office of Senator Dole accompanied
by two colleagues to assure him that the preponderant majority
of America's Jews do support the peace process
and that they want America's active involvement in it to continue.

He said to us:

"Here you are, three liberals rabbis, giving me your views.
But how can I believe you when last week I received a
delegation of fifteen bearded rabbis who expressed a
contrary view. And I receive scores of letters from
opponents of our peace making efforts and none from those
who encourage it."

This then is the least that we can do:

to let our voices be heard in Washington,
to speak up, loudly and clearly, now and throughout the unfolding
of this remarkable, soul stirring process.

The democratically elected and courageous leaders of Israel
deserve our support.

Thy deserve, at the very least our fervent prayers, not muttered curses
from those who within the safe haven of these shores,
still deify land over life.

This Jewish calendar year, as you all know, will mark 3000 years of
Jewish life in the City of David...this wondrous city of our dreams
whose spaces are filled with the voices of the past
whose stones are the frozen echoes of eternity...

Jerusalem of hope...where waiting for God was born,
where the expectation of everlasting peace came into being.

Jerusalem is the capitol of the Jewish people.

It was designated as such long before the six-day war,

a score years earlier, when the modern Jewish state was born.

Indeed, it became the spiritual capital of the Jewish people earlier
still, in the time of our millennia-long wanderings.

Generation after generation of our people cried aloud:

L'shana haba biyerushalayim,

as they turned in their prayers to Jerusalem,

even as Moslems ever turn East, from Jerusalem to Mecca.

We reaffirm our devotion to this holy city and pray for its peace,
pray for the well-being of her people and their land.

Israel is the hope that was born out of suffering,

the springs that came to the dry valley,

the rose that blossomed in the desert.

May her leaders be granted wisdom and courage.

And may her people dwell in safety

and live in friendship with all their neighbors. ken yehi ratson

EULOGY FOR RUTH LESE
BY
RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

With heavy hearts we gather in this place to say words of final farewell to Ruth Lese who meant so very much to all of us; whose friendship sheltered us; whose zest for life inspired us; whose buoyancy and spiritedness filled our own days and lives with laughter and with love.

The agonizing "why" of suffering remains unanswered, does it not? Why? Why did it have to happen? Why this relentless law of life that exacts the price of sorrow for each of its joys, the penalty of loss for each of its gifts? A woman vigorous, vital one day, then crumbling like a castle of sand built by children 'long the shore when the tides of destiny roll in. Oh, I suppose, in the end death came as a deliverance from fear, from ever increasing, relentless pain. But why the illness, this dread disease that so ravages a human being, that death can only be seen as a merciful release?

Ruth was too young when she was torn from us. She was so vital, so energetic, so life affirming virtually to the very end. The feeling persists that she had so much more to give and we to receive. And so we weep not just for the loss of her life, but also for the loss of all that might have been.

There is precious little that we can say by way of comfort to Bill and Peter, to Serena and Lauren. They feel the loss most keenly and our words provide but scant balm for wounds of heart as grievous as are theirs. But at least we can offer them that 'chatzi nechama', that half measure of consolation that comes with the knowledge that they do not sorrow alone. Many others feel an aching emptiness this day.

Indeed, your rabbis, too, count themselves in this companionship of sorrow. We do more today than give voice to the complaints of others. We, too, are sorrow-stricken; our friend is no more. We, too, will miss her presence and feel the want of her tireless care.

My instinct tells me not to be overly mournful in my comments today, not to evoke sorrow here, but rather happier memories; not to make this a solemn service of remembrance, but rather a celebration of Ruthie's life. I feel that this is precisely what she would want her final tribute to be. She was too life affirming to have this hour dampened and darkened by dirge, by somber strains of sorrow. In the final analysis, funerals, memorial services, such as this are really for the living. They cause us to come together in a way we otherwise never do; to lean on one another; to feel the commonality of emotions; and, yes, to rejoice together; to rejoice in the one who has caused this coming together.

Still, we cannot fully repress our sadness and only radiate cheer. Our sense of loss is too great - - deepened as it is by the greatness of that gift that was taken from us. Tears, too, are a fitting tribute to Ruth; for what are tears, when all is said and done, if not remembered smiles.

It is altogether fitting and proper that Ruth's final tribute be held right here in this place. After all, this is the matrix from which she sprang. This synagogue was her spiritual womb. Her father, Jack Goldfarb, was an honored member of Temple Emanu-El. Ruthie, herself, wore the badge of her Jewishness with pride. She valued her heritage greatly and always manifested the ideals of giving and caring which this sanctuary enshrines.

Though Ruth's life was brief, she lived it fully, with a fierce intensity and zest. Her years were tragically short, but she gulped life down with an unquenchable thirst. Many people live much longer, husbanding their energies, deferring their pleasures. Not so, Ruth. She allowed no moment of existence to slip by unawares.

She certainly had a love of adventure, and travelled the world to quench it. No ordinary tourist she! When she went to France, she went ballooning. When she journeyed to Africa she went on a safari. When she travelled to Israel, she participated in an archeological dig.

Outdoor activities were her special delight. She went camping and trekking and rafting and climbing. Skiing and hiking were her favorite sports. The more challenging and strenuous the activity, the better she liked it. And she always sought places renowned for their grandeur, for their surpassing natural beauty.

Indeed, Ruth was blessed with a well refined sense of the beautiful, of the harmonious fitness of things. This is probably why she was so happy and effective when she served as the cultural affairs reporter of WNYC. She loved great music, exciting theater. She appreciated fine art. Museums were her favorite haunts whose displays enraptured her.

She certainly had a keen mind, and was always eager to engage others in thoughtful conversation. Hers was a constantly questing mind. No subject was beyond her ken, or at least her interest. Questions tumbled from her lips like a cascade. Often she seemed not to wait for an answer before posing another query, so eager was she to nourish her literacy.

But this inquisitiveness was never dispassionate. She bridged the gap between mind and hand, between thought and deed. She shunned isolation. She involved herself in the political life, in communal affairs. For a time, she served as the Special Assistant of Mayor Lindsay. In San Francisco she helped to organize the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. In Westchester county she spearheaded a successful campaign to outlaw duckhunting in order to protect people and wildlife from the misuse of firearms. And everything she undertook to do was done with intensity, with all her heart and soul and might.

Ruth was a gutsy lady. Oh yes, oftentimes she seemed timid, uncertain, vulnerable. But ultimately she found the strength to face her doubts and to conquer them. Think of the way in which she dealt with her final illness. She faced adversity with courage, with determination, even with a gentle humor. And thus she taught us, not only how to live, but how to suffer and, finally, how to die.

This above all, Ruthie was a caring person. In talking about her, as we often did these past few months, Rhea, my wife, commented that Ruthie reminded her of a story we used to read to our children when they were small. It was entitled "The Giving Tree." Indeed, that was Ruthie. She was giving to a fault, generous beyond measure even to those who stood at a greater distance. She genuinely loved people, was ready to help them; was always eager to enlarge the circle of her friends.

Obviously the greatest measure of her care was given to those who stood closest to her, her children, Bill and Peter, Serena and

Lauren, and of course Jason, her grandson, who was the very jewel of her crown. If she wept during those long days and nights of her final illness, surely many of her tears were evoked by the awareness that she would no longer be permitted to share the joyous passage moments of Jason's life.

Indeed, just a few months ago, some weeks after her operation, she wrote the following lines to her grandson:

"Dear Jason: You sent me the nicest card to the hospital and your pictures really cheered me up. You are a very special little boy. Your mommy and daddy, and your uncle and aunt, have been incredible. I have no words to describe how wonderful they were to me. They are doing everything possible for Savtah, for your grandmother, and I appreciate it from the bottom of my heart. When I feel better dear Jason, we are all going out West. You will see God's country, pretty horses, great big mountains covered with flowers. I can't wait for that to happen. With all my love, your Savta."

This love letter, from the grave as it were, was intended not just for Jason, but for Ruthie's four children too, for her sons and their spouses. It was her way of saying to them that she appreciated all they did, the ends to which they went to bring her healing and to ease her pain.

I suppose some day they will all of them take that trip out West, as soon as Jason is old enough to understand. And when they see those flower covered mountains in God's country, they will tell Jason about his Savta and how wonderful she was. And that remembrance will help them bridge the fearsome chasm that separates the living from the dead.

That is true for all of us, is it not, for "as long as we live she, too, will live, for she is now a part of us as we remember her." As for Ruthie herself, hopefully she has now found her rest among the sheltering wings of God's presence.

She has outsoared the shadow of our night

Envy and calumny and hate and pain

And that unrest which men miscall delight

Can touch her not and torture not again.

T'hi nishmato tserurah bitsor hachayim

May her soul be bound up in the bond of lasting life.

Amen

EULOGY FOR ROBERT L. ADLER

delivered by

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

**Temple Sholom
July 7, 1995
Chicago, Illinois**

With heavy hearts we gather in this place to speak words of final farewell to Bob Adler whose care sustained us, whose zest for life inspired us, whose soul's sublime song filled our own lives with a wondrous harmony

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

To be sure, now, Bob nearly reached those four score years that Scripture allots to the strong. Still, he was so vital, so energetic, so life-affirming to the very end. And so we mourn not only the loss of his life, but also the loss of all that yet might have been.

There is precious little that we can say by way of comfort to Jean and Steven and Sandy and Ruth, to their spouses and children. Words provide but scant balm for wounds as grievous as is theirs, but at least we can offer them that 'chatzi nechama,' that measure of consolation that comes with the knowledge that they do not sorrow alone.

Many others feel an aching emptiness this day. Indeed, though I have been in the rabbinate now better than two score years, I remember few other occasions that have summoned the presence of so very many people - among them the foremost leaders of our nationwide community. Their presence here manifests that Bob Adler's death is widely felt, that it blights the whole of the House of Israel.

Your rabbis count themselves in this companionship of sorrow. We do more today than give voice to the complaints of others. We, too,

are sorrow stricken. Our friend is no more. We, too, will miss his presence and feel the want of his tireless care.

My instinct tells me not to be overly mournful in my comments now, not to deepen sorrow here but to recall happier moments, not to make this a solemn service of remembrance, but rather a celebration of Bob's life. I feel that this is precisely what Bob would want his final tribute to be. He was too life-affirming to have this hour dampened and darkened by dirge, by somber strains of sorrow.

Still, we cannot fully repress our sadness. Our sense of loss is too great - deepened as it is by the greatness of the gift that was ours. Tears too are a fitting tribute to Bob, for what are tears when all is said and done if not remembered smiles.

It is altogether fitting and proper that Bob's final tribute be held in this place. After all, this is the matrix from which he sprang. The synagogue was his spiritual womb.

He loved his congregation, Beth Am, which Temple Sholom now enshrines. He served as its president, as did Jeanie's father before him. He gloried in its past and ceaselessly strove to secure its future. He did everything he humanly could to add to his Temple's outer strength and inner beauty.

But more than institutional pride was involved in all this. It touched rather on Bob's commitments, on his deep rooted beliefs. He was the son of the synagogue in the sense that his actions were motivated largely by the awareness of his Jewishness and its demands. Judaism was his vital force. It was the force that gave his life its vibrancy and essential direction.

Now, an inspiring force as strong as was Bob's needed a more extensive arena for expression.

First, he found that wider sphere of service in this city and its Jewish community.

Later, he reached out to serve American Jewry as a whole through several of its central organizations, the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations, the Jewish Welfare Board (now the JCC) whose peers made him first among equals by choosing him as their national president.

I certainly can attest to his manifold services to the UAHC, the congregational arm of North American Reform Jewry. Countless were the ways in which he advanced our work. Locally, regionally and nationally. And whatever he undertook to do, he did with all his might.

But the most worthy, the most precious of his services to us was his stewardship of the Rabbinic Pension Board. He was its architect, its long-time guiding spirit. He travelled the length and breadth of this land to extend its sway. Generations of Rabbis and Cantors and Educators and Administrators are now enabled to live out their lives in security and dignity thanks largely to Bob's vision and to his perseverance.

His guardianship of our religious community was intelligent and forceful. Though small in height, once Bob ascended to leadership, he was in full command. Then he towered over the tumultuous masses like a giant, that giant of the spirit that he was.

Ultimately, Bob's helping hand reached out to embrace the Jewish people throughout the world, when he worked to strengthen AIPAC and especially as a Governor of the Jewish Agency for Israel. He held several key positions on its Board, most notably the chairmanship of the Budget and Finance Committee on Aliyah and K'litah which enabled the ingathering and absorption of Jews from

every corner of our far-flung world. The initial surging wave of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union took place on his watch as did the miraculous rescue over one short weekend of 17,000 Ethiopian Jews. That was the first time in human history that blacks were taken from one continent to another not in chains but in love.

He travelled to and fro across this globe of our, not just back and forth to Israel, four or five times a year, but to many other lands and continents as well, never husbanding his strength, ever ready to respond when help was needed. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Bob might well have lived longer had he spared himself more. But that was not his way. He simply could not say NO. He was as one obsessed whenever and wherever help was required.

Let this, then, be that measure of consolation we offer to Jean and Steve and Sandy and Ruth, to all the immediate bereaved: that they do not mourn alone. The entire Jewish people has lost a jewel of its crown. Its very soul has been lacerated. Its heart aches with an unspeakable pain.

Truly a bright and shining star has been torn from the firmament of our lives, and our lives are darker because of it. Yet the remembrance of Bob Adler can brighten our way as did his life.

't'hi nishmato tizrur ha-chayim'

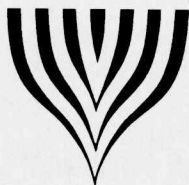
May his soul be bound up in the bond of lasting life.

JEWISH MUSLIM CONVOCATION

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

by

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler



March 26, 1995
Chicago, Illinois

It is a privilege which I greatly appreciate to be here and to help initiate this Jewish/Muslim Convocation, and to share this platform with the Imam Mohammed, the universally recognized spiritual leader of America's Moslem community.

There is a verse in the Torah that inspires me in relation to this remarkable gathering. It is in the Book of Genesis which tells us that when our father Hazrat, our father Abraham, breathed his last, his sons Isaac and Ishmael "buried him in the Cave of Machpelah . . ."

Isaac and Ishmael, mourning together at their father's tomb . . . Is it not ever thus, a common tragedy that draws erstwhile foes together . . .

Isaac and Ishmael, mourning together over their father's tomb. Elsewhere in Scripture we encounter these brothers in opposition to one another — as antagonists, as sibling rivals, yet at the same time as co-victims of their father's complex psyche. Ishmael, especially, is subject in the Jewish tradition to a diminution of his character. Centuries before the founding of Islam, rabbinic literature sought to deflect the blame for his expulsion from Abraham and Sarah to Ishmael and Hagar themselves. Ishmael is described as an "idolater," or as an avaricious son "craving to inherit his father's entire estate." Yet here, the Torah itself reports, in its typically spare manner, a reconciliation between the brothers. Here the Torah itself reminds us in its great wisdom, of their shared paternity, and of the values that both men inherited.

It is those values that bring us together, and which we embody in our coming together this day: first and foremost, the value of hospitality. The tent of our father Abraham, so the Jewish tradition tells us, was open on all four sides, so that all the weary and hungry sojourners would feel free to enter. "This teaches us," so say the rabbis of the Talmud, "that the practice of hospitality, the welcom-

ing of strangers, is more important even than is the welcoming of God.” Indeed, both to the Jew and to the Muslim, hospitality is very much the equivalent of “inviting God into one’s home,” for we never know when our visitors will prove to be not ordinary nomads but angel messengers.

Scripture also shows us that the site of hospitality, the place of encounter is crucial to the outcome, for in different places we are different beings, different in our measure of power, different in our measure of security. Thus was Abraham our father commanded to leave the safety and familiarity of his home and to journey to a strange land before his vision of the One God and his mission to his fellow human beings would become clear. And thus perhaps, we in America, as Muslim and Jew, are better able to reclaim our common heritage and to engage in fruitful dialogue than we are in our father’s house. Aye, it is the great tragedy of contemporary life, is it not, that at the Cave of Machpelah, there in ancient Hebron, Muslim and Jew are still incapable of dialogue, or even of peaceful silence. I therefore pray — and I would ask all of us to pray — that the process of reconciliation that at long last is dawning in the land of our forefathers and foremothers will continue to brighten to a full and high noon.

But here in America, the possibilities of dialogue are spread before us like a midday feast on the table. For here we are both religious minorities, united in our awareness of the democratic grants and freedoms that protect us from the homogenizing desires of a dominant majority. Here the great principle of the separation of church and state secures the sanctity of our religious autonomy. Here we will not become victims of a Crusader’s sword or an Inquisitor’s rack, not as long as we work together to buttress that protective wall of separation.

We are the heirs of still another patrimony bequeathed to us by Abraham. We are both communities of committed God-seekers, inheritors of traditions whose essential mission is to actualize, in our every endeavor, the redeeming force that

we call God.

Here in America, we are engaged not in a debate about one another's truth, but in a common struggle against a materialistic culture that declares truth to be but another commodity, something that can be used, that can be bought, or sold to the highest bidder. Here the struggle against moral relativism, can unite us. The struggle against the worship of the Almighty dollar, against the idolatrous Cult of the Individual, against the daylily, as the Koran calls it, the "misguidedness," the "false path" of modern secularism — this is the struggle that can cause us to come together in our activities and in our prayers.

In short, America both facilitates and makes necessary our dialogue. The effectiveness of that dialogue, however, will be due to something more than a receptive environment or a political imperative.

It will be due in the first instance to our willingness to be honest with ourselves, to engage in what the Jewish tradition calls a cheshban hanefesh, a self-reckoning of the soul. Every journey to our fellow men and women is first a painful journey inward to our own existence: a confrontation with our own past and present imperfections, a wrestling match with the demons in our own soul.

Second, the effectiveness of our dialogue will depend on our willingness to be honest each within our own communities. The wounds inflicted by the fulminations of a Farrakhan or a Meir Kahane cannot be assuaged by caution or polite silence. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue," the Bible instructs us. And the Talmud adds the teaching that "silence is tantamount to confession to an admission of guilt." Jews, alas, do not need Scripture to understand the importance of speaking out against hatred, whatever and wherever its source. It is a knowledge that centuries of persecution have engraved on our hearts.

Third, and finally, the effectiveness of our dialogue will depend on our willingness to be honest with one another, on the resolve not to feed each other pabulum, not to say only what we think will please the other to hear, but always to tell the truth as we perceive it, to assert our convictions with passion even as we remain respectful of our disagreements.

* * * * *

I would enter into this dialogue, therefore, by confessing to a feeling of vulnerability.

Mine is a feeling so typically Jewish, and yet it would probably appear to be to many American Muslims as a neurosis at best, or a deception at worst. Nevertheless, the truth is that I experience myself on this podium not as president of a multi-million member religious community, but as an aging member of a tiny, tiny people — only 18 million strong throughout the world and barely one generation recovered from a genocide that wiped one out of every three Jewish men, women and children. I stand here less as a secure citizen of our powerful United States, and more as a German Jewish refugee from Hitlerism, a Jewish survivor on the banks of that long river of European anti-Semitism. I stand here less as a liberal, peace oriented ally of a militarily strong Israel, and more as a desperately concerned lover of Zion whose devotion to Israel can barely be contained within that tiny nation's ever-threatened borders.

To be sure, now, there is a difference between perception and reality. I fully recognize the difference between my feelings of personal vulnerability as a Jew and my knowledge of that actual if tenuous historical empowerment that Jews have experienced in both Israel and America during the past four decades. No longer are we the meek of the earth, as we were for millennia. We have gained a degree of temporal power, enough, we pray, to prevent our "meekness" from ever again

leading to victimization; power, as well, to test the conscience of the Jewish people and to test our mettle as peacemakers.

Still, as a Jew, I approach you with that sense of personal and communal vulnerability. I am in awe of your numbers and your resurgence as a force in the world — one billion followers of the Islamic faith worldwide. I am overawed by your geographic scope and resources, and by your racial, national and ethnic diversity.

On the other hand, as an American who is steeped in the consciousness of multiculturalism, and alert to all signs of prejudice, I am aware of how you, as American Muslims, might indeed experience your own particular sense of vulnerability. For all of your growing numbers worldwide, you are only 4 1/2 million strong across this continent — and with fewer mosques throughout this nation than are sometimes Christian churches in a single city! And notwithstanding your religious unity, your diversity of ethnic and national-origin serves as a counterweight to your becoming the kind of a political 'block' that has, for example, made the highly organized evangelic Christian movement so effective and powerful. The Arab-American majority among you suffers exceedingly from stereotyping . . . from ascribing to all the guilt of some. . . . from associating all Arab-Americans with loathsome Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. Your media image is one of parody and xenophobia. Your "foreignness" is causally assumed regardless of the extent of your assimilation. Never mind that a vital Muslim presence is as longstanding in America as that of Jews or Catholics. Never mind whether you are an American Moslem with roots in Africa or in Asia or in the Middle East, in Iran or in Eastern Europe, yet one hears only of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but one never hears of a "Judeo-Christian-Islamic" continuum.

As for the African American among you, your vulnerability in America is an existential state. Racist oppression knows no boundaries either at your cradle or

grave, or at the threshold of your home, or even at the portals of your soul. You are an endangered species in America, a caged and mistreated species, and you have been so for nearly four centuries, nearly as long as the Bible tells us that the Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt. We know full well, moreover, that the contemporary Pharaohs' new contract with America is first and foremost a contract on you and on you children.

These are the flashes of pain that I glimpse, my friends, when I look into your eyes. These are the flashes of fear that I ask you to recognize when you look into mine. From that glance, from that recognition of our complex fluid identities — identities of pride and fear, of empowerment and vulnerability — our dialogue can proceed. It can proceed in a uniquely American voice, for it is here, in this multicultural stew, that fanaticism cannot, must not harden. It is here that Ishmael and Isaac can look into each other's eyes, and see the essential bond of humanness and brotherhood that exceeds all differences.

It is here, too, that our prayers can resonate in a healing harmony—a harmony that might quell some of the discordance that marks our troubled times. For the truth is that, for all our multicultural “difference” in America, spiritual malaise and emptiness is our common lot. We see it manifest in the violence that erupts in every corner, daily. We see it manifest in the angry politics that brings the spirit of meanness and scapegoating to Washington D.C. rather than a sense of compassion and justice. We see that malaise and emptiness in the statistics of vast wealth and widespread poverty that are the shame of our nation — statistics that testify to dehumanization and isolation, to a society that has spurned its sense of social responsibility, that has lost its ability to respond.

* * * * *

There is a great hunger that has seized our age, my friends, a hunger for val-

ues, a hunger for community, a hunger for pathways to a higher consciousness, a hunger to serve something and someone besides the fragmented Self. The prophet, Amos, spoke of such a hunger when he said:

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

This is the hunger that we begin to satisfy by breaking bread together this day.

Perhaps it is more than coincidence that yesterday's Torah portion Shemini enunciates the laws of kashrut, the laws of what we may and may not eat, that also forms a part of the shared values and shared perceptions of our respective tradition. May it be God's will that the morsels of religious dialogue that we are sharing today be multiplied miraculously until the Great Hunger that has seized our age will be transmuted into a Feast of Thanksgiving throughout America and throughout the world.

LEVENTHAL LECTURE

By

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

**Wittenberg College
Springfield, Ohio
April 26, 1995**

Thank you, Dr. Kinnison for your warm introduction, albeit it was entirely too flattering. I am embarrassed - - at least the better part of me is . . . and I am glad that my wife is along. She has a way of putting me in my proper place. Although the best put-down I ever received occurred in Jerusalem, near the Western Wall - - perhaps some among you were there. It is an impressive place, that wall, each of its stones heavy with precious memories.

I was standing to the rear of the Plaza, away from the wall itself and therefore did not wear a skull-cap, that little black head covering which we call a yarmulke. Suddenly a little Chassidic boy, from a deeply Orthodox home where yarmulkes are worn all the time, not just in prayer, turned to me and asked in Yiddish: Farvos hot a yid nit a yarmulke, why aren't you wearing a yarmulke? I don't know what made me preen so, but I replied: "I don't need to wear a yarmulke; the heavens in their expanse, they are my yarmulke." Without a second's hesitation came back the reply: "So big a skull cap for so small a head."

Nonetheless, I am deeply grateful to you, Dr. Kinnison, and I reciprocate your sentiments of regard with a full heart.

All of you ought to know that I have a good deal of respect for university presidents; their lot is not easy at all. A friend of mine, an ex-confirment, in fact, who now heads Williams College, told me that ever since he became a college President he sleeps like a baby, "he sleeps for two hours and then wakes up crying."

Dwight Eisenhower, on leaving the army and assuming the Presidency of Columbia University, had this to say after six months in that new office: "What kind of place is this? I give a order and nothing happens. People pay no attention to what I

have to say . . . or reply that they will take it under advisement. I ask for an opinion on how to proceed and I get 50 different answers. I propose what I think is a capital idea and it produces a faculty squabble. How does a man get things done in a place like this? Why it's like standing in a cemetery . . . there are lots of people under you but nobody is listening."

That's why I have the highest regard for College Presidents, Dr. Kinniston not the least among them. He and I have something in common: both of us are approaching our retirement and our successors are about to be named. Both of us are eagerly looking forward to entering those newer areas of endeavor - more personal by far - which lie before us.

I am greatly flattered to have my name associated with that of the Leventhals in whose honor this lectureship was established. It is a name which has become synonymous with pioneering and creative philanthropy. Fred is a member of Reform Judaism's highest governing body. We appreciate his manifold contributions toward the advancement of our work. Indeed, he is an enabling force for countless worthy causes, this lectureship and university only one, but not the least among them. Moreover, I know of many of his hidden deeds of human kindness, known only to giver and receiver, yet all the more precious for their tender privacy.

Now, when I accepted the invitation to speak here, I had absolutely no idea that I would be receiving an honorary degree. That came as a complete and as a delightful surprise. I am exceedingly proud of this award, proud that in this manner I become one of your fellow alumni, as it were.

This is a great university whose goals I fully share. I speak now especially of your endeavor to foster not just the intellectual, but also the aesthetic and above all the spiritual

qualities of your students. Your emphasis on the study of religion is particularly praiseworthy. And the fact that I am a Jew and you are affiliated with a Christian denomination does not diminish my admirations in the slightest. Quite the contrary, it enhances them!

In the final analysis, our commonalities exceed our differences by far. After all, here in America we do not require full ideological or even theological congruence in order to join with others in those struggles which unite us. I speak now of the struggle against moral relativism, the struggle against the idolatrous Cult of the Individual, against the "misguidedness," the "false path" of modern secularism. These are the strugglings that can cause us to come together in our activities and in our prayers be we Lutheran or Jew.

It is a coming together which was greatly facilitated by the forthright statement addressed to the Jewish community by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America but a year ago which renounced and offered apology for the late-in-life anti-Semitism of Martin Luther and some of his spiritual descendants. We are deeply grateful for that courageous statement. It meets the foremost requirement for an effective dialogue and that is our readiness to be honest with ourselves, to understand that every journey to our fellow human beings is a first a painful journey inward to our own existence: a confrontation with our own past and present imperfections, a wrestling match with the demons in our own soul.

The unabashed apology by the ELCA was a shining example of the evolutionary, self-correcting, humane religious consciousness which will prove to be the true reforming force on this globe today. All honor to you! I embrace you as soul mates, as mates of the spirit!

Now, the subject before us, as you know, is "Religion and Politics, the Separation of Church and State" and I was asked to address this theme from the perspective of the American Jewish community. Let me forward you: Some of you may disagree, perhaps even intensely, with what I have to say. But there is a second requirement for an effective dialogue: not only must we be honest with ourselves, but we must be honest with one another. Nothing will be achieved if we feed each other pabulum, if we tell each only what we think the other would like to hear. That serves no purpose whatsoever. Even so, I intend to be frank in my presentation.

* * * * *

Let me open my remarks on this topic by quoting from Marx - - not Groucho, but the other Marx, the humorless Karl, whose outlook on politics and religion has been a bane to both our communities. In one of the most repeated of his phrases, the Jewish born, Lutheran baptized Marx described religion as "the opiate of the masses, the opiate of the people." This phrase, however, was preceded by words that are quite poetic: "Religion is the sigh of the afflicted creature, the soul of the heartless world, as it is also the spirit of spiritless conditions."

The afflicted creature in a heartless world of spiritless conditions. Marx was sharp in his social critique even if, as noted by Reinhold Niebuhr, he ultimately subordinated his humanism to "create a new religion" with its own canon and catechism. Be that as it may, the blunt truth is that we see in modern America that same afflicted creature in that same heartless world of spiritless conditions. We see individual and family pain, convulsing violence, frantic hedonism and corrosive

materialism. We see racial and religious hatred, poverty and ill health, greed and short-sightedness - what the prophet Isaiah called "the festering sores" of our fractured unhappy world.

Some of us see human affliction and malaise as the inevitable consequences of our fallen spiritual state and its healing is not deemed a matter to be left in human hands. From a Jewish perspective, the redemption of the world is a covenantal project, a task of partnership between human beings and God.

Sadly, however, all too few Americans know or even care about such faith-based perspectives on the nature of human suffering. Religion, you see, is no longer the "opiate" of our time, the chosen response to pain. It is rather politics that has come to express "the sigh of the afflicted creature." Politics has become the binding secular religion of our nation. Politics has become the embodiment and expression of spiritual discontent in America. This is a fact that populists and demagogues fully recognize and exploit.

In a very evocative sense, therefore, we stand together at a juncture similar to that which prompted Martin Luther to nail his 95 theses to the castle church door 475 years ago. His protest, though essentially theological in intent, was nonetheless directed against the secular power and concomitant corruption of the Roman Catholic Church - a church whose dictates, at that time, were enforced less through the persuasive powers of religious truth than they were through the purse, and sword and the rack, those primary sculpting tools of naked political power.

In our own day, the picture is inverted. If the Church of Luther's day built its power through political tools, so are the political forces today building their power through appeals that are essentially religious.

How else to understand the new catechism of the Conservative movement: family values, sexual preference, reproductive rights, prayer in the schools. These issues now weigh in as heavily in mobilizing the passions of the voters as do the material issues of economics, of constitutional rights, or war and peace, and of those other more classical political concerns.

The yearnings and the fears of the people, the vast anger and the frustrations of the people, these are the factors to which the truly savvy politicians now speak - - while ironically enough, we of the clergy and our flocks strive in vain to meet some of the material needs that have been multiplied by political neglect and economic decline. And so even as Martin Luther called for a religious revolution in order to lessen the political power of the priests, we are now summoned to an ongoing political activism in order to lessen the religious power of our politicians, fueled as they are by a politicized radical Christian Right.

It is the canon of that politicized Christian Right - in the Falwell-Robertson tradition, in the tradition of the moral majority reborn as the Christian Coalition - that I want to use as foil for my further ruminations, principally because the contrast with its political agenda will enable me to bring the Jewish perspective into sharper focus.

* * * * *

I suppose I ought to begin by reminding you that American Jewry is scarcely a monistic grouping whose adherents are of one mind ideologically and politically. We are a pluralistic community holding a wide variety of views. Indeed, we are well known for our disputatiousness. We argue with one another passionately. We even dare argue with God. Still, on the issue of Church and State, a broad consensus obtains. It unites us a few other

subjects do, evoking a response as earnest as is, say, our concern for Israel's security or our determination to rescue Jews wherever they might be embattled.

Let there be no doubt about it: the separation of church and state clause is a "gut issue" for American Jews, and the reason is not far to seek. We hold this principle to be our fundamental protection, the ultimate ground of that unique freedom which we have experienced here. Everywhere else in our wanderings we suffered persecution - never here. In all other countries there was an established faith; here there was none, and here, in this blessed America, we were able to stretch ourselves to the very limit of our talent and aspiration. That is why we prize the First Amendment as the very cornerstone of our liberties in this land.

To some limited degree, a segment of Lutherans had a like experience. True, the ties between Lutheranism and the political life were close and in Scandinavian countries it is the established church. Yet historians are agreed that Heinrich Melchior Muehlenberg and especially those Lutherans who joined him later, came to the New World in no small measure to be freed from the religion-homogenizing efforts of their native Saxony.

Be that as it may, we Jews reverence the Bill of Rights because of our historic experience, but not only for that reason, but also because of our love for Judaism and its value system. Our celebration of the separation principle does not stem, as some have falsely charged, from a secular humanist antipathy to religion. On the contrary, we regard our faith as too precious to be trivialized and vulgarized as a plaything of politicians. We believe that strict separation has protected the integrity, the independence, the vitality of all religions in America even as it left them free to criticize the government and to speak truth to power.

* * * * *

Which brings me full square to the very first point I want to make concerning our attitude to the radical Christian Right, and it is a note of concurrence, for we uphold the right of Fundamentalist preachers to speak out on public policy.

We do not see the First Amendment as precluding a political involvement by the religious community. Indeed, the right to such an involvement is secured by the Free Exercise clause of that Amendment itself. The Constitution may require a high degree of separation between church and state. But at the same time, it presumes a high degree of interaction between religious values and the values undergirding American society.

As Jefferson so felicitously put it, "The liberties of a nation cannot be secured when we have removed their only firm basis - a connection in the minds of the people that their liberties are the gift of God." This connection should not be crushed beneath the wall of First Amendment separation; rather our borders should be more like the fringes of the Jewish prayer shawl which bind together, even while they mark borders of separation.

We Jews certainly claim the right to speak up on issues of public concern, and we do so with a passion. We therefore cannot, and will not deny that right to others, however divergent their views. If rabbis can hold forth on nuclear proliferation and economic justice, why then Pat Robertson has every right to take the stump for prayer in the public schools, even as John Cardinal O'Connor has the right to inveigh against abortion and homosexuality.

The public debate is enriched when different groups bring their divergent moral perspectives to bear on the issues of the day. Even so has the Christian Right refocused our attention on

concerns we had neglected: the deterioration of the family, the debasement of sex and the indiscriminate permissiveness of our society. None of these issues has ever evoked an appropriate moral response by the Liberal Jewish community and we might as well admit it.

* * * * *

If this be so, then what is our problem with the politically involved Christian Right?

To begin with, we find the scope of its agenda to be entirely too narrow, ethically inadequate, unfaithful to the fullness of religious witness.

Maybe my own conception of religion is at fault, but I cannot understand how an agenda that calls itself religious could have opposed our government's ratification of the Genocide Convention to the very last breath.

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

I cannot understand how a religious agenda can identify itself with a particular economic theory - clearly secular in its essential nature - which leaves it up to God to take care of toxic waste dumps and rent gouging, and unemployment, and equal pay for women, and all those other scarcely self-correcting by-products of the rigid laissez-faire approach, the very approach that the religious right has elevated into an article of faith.

And finally, while I will yield to no one in my love for this land for which I fought and bled, I cannot understand how those

who speak in the name of a religion that claims adherents in every corner of our world can nonetheless be so narrowly nationalistic as to attain to a blatant chauvinism.

The embrace of the Christian Right is scarcely global. Its preachments opposing disarmament and favoring the enlargement of America's military might make it almost impossible for me to believe that the more traditional Christian quest for peace emerged from the same Holy Scriptures in worship of the same Lord. Forgotten the injunction about 'turning the other cheek' to one's enemies. No inspiration derived from God's promise to Noah sealed by the rainbow sign that He would never again destroy the earth.

* * * * *

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

We Jews are exceedingly sensitive on this subject and the reason is not far to seek. We see the public classroom as the basic element of our democracy, the prime instrument for making one nation out of many. It is the public school that has forged those values of self-respect and respect for others that has made our country great and our people strong. And that is so because every child in that classroom is equal, because no student is separated from his fellow because he worships a different God or prays in a different tongue.

Even the slightest chip in that wall separating church and state in public education evokes our anxious concern, and properly so.

For instance, what could have been more innocuous sounding than the "equal access" program adopted by Congress in the mid 80's?? It seemed so harmless! America's secondary schools were to be opened to a wide variety of religious activities. Everything was to be voluntary, nothing required.

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

Thus it is that the American public school system, already assaulted by budget cuts and drug problems and ethnic and racial polarization, has additionally been burdened to be the battleground for competing sectarian interests. And this is why we American Jews will continue most vigorously to resist every effort to breach the separating wall especially in the realm of public education.

We are certainly opposed to the granting of federal aid to parochial schools, though we ourselves might benefit, in the narrowest sense, from such an aid. We believe with Jefferson that, "To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical." We believe with Madison that taxation for religious purposes would, "destroy that moderation and harmony which the forbearance of our laws to intermeddle with religion has produced among its several sects." and we believe with John F. Kennedy,

"in an America where - - - no church school is granted any public funds or political preference."

These basic principles of American freedom are imperiled today by Fundamentalist groups and some government officials whose aim is nothing less than advance their sectarian purposes by re-writing the laws of this land.

We will counter these aims relentlessly, even as we are opposed to the teaching of "creationism" and to the censorship of texts, and to the display of religious symbols on school property, and to the introduction of prayer in the schools in any of its endless legislative variations. We will counter such efforts, lest the separating wall crumble and turn into a moat where the sharks of religious hatred thrash about and sharpen their teeth for victims.

* * * * *

Abortion is another centerpiece on the table of the Christian Right, and on this issue it has made significant progress over the years. Yet on this matter too, the American Jewish community finds itself substantially on the opposite side of this soul-searing debate. Most American Jews hold to the proposition that women or their families have the right to terminate pregnancy.

Mind you, it is a right that is not granted casually by our tradition. Reverence for life is central to Judaism no less than it is to Christianity. And so Judaism regrets abortion in most circumstances, but by no means in all. It does not demand that the fertilized egg be protected in every case, even when, for example, it is the result of rape or incest.

Jewish theology, moreover, does not regard the fetus as being apart from the mother, but rather as fully a part of her.

Judaism also affirms a kind of principle of development that assigns a greater worth to that which is actualized over that which is merely latent or potential. In other words, the life and health of the mother takes precedence over the potential life of the fetus.

If I am not mistaken, traces of a like doctrine can be perceived in Christian theology, from St. Augustine to Teilhard de Chardin. They, too, saw reality in terms of a becoming, assigning an ever greater worth to that which is more fully realized.

Certainly no believing Jew, given Judaism's solemn commitment to life's sanctity, can take comfort in the knowledge that we live in a society in which better than a million abortions take place each year. Nonetheless, the preponderant majority of America's Jews wants ours to be a society in which issues of pregnancy and childbirth, of a woman's participation in the miracle of life, are determined not by state edict, but by individuals each in accordance with the dictates of that still small voice within.

* * * * *

Now the fact that we are opposed to this or that aspect of the radical Christian Right's catechism does not really go to the root cause of American Jewry's alarm about the rising influence of the radical Christian Right. After all, we oppose many other groupings on a variety of issues yet we don't hold these groupings suspect. We don't fret and fume about them as we do with the religious right.

Our alarm is incited not by the substance, but rather by the manner in which those who seek to inject sectarian values into the public sector advance their agenda. There is entirely too much hyperbole. Everything is cast in apocalyptic terms, as a

struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, between the forces of light and of darkness.

Thus those who favor the Equal Rights Amendment for Women are labeled "anti-family." And those who insist on equal rights for homosexuals are called "perverts." And those who oppose school prayer are denounced as "anti-Christ." And those who believe in abortion are designated "murderers, the Nazi like perpetrators of another holocaust."

This kind of language smacks of a McCarthyism reborn, now wearing clerical robes. This kind of language also violates the bounds of a reasonable democratic discourse. In effect, it forecloses such a discourse, for if a political opponent is misguided or even stupid, he can be dealt with in the market place of ideas. But when he is labeled immoral and a sinner, the case can be made that he does not deserve to be in the debate at all.

* * * * *

There is also too great a tendency among these groupings to invoke the name of God in order to sanctify their positions. This troubles me on theological grounds.

I realize, of course, that Christian ministers draw on Scripture for inspiration, that they believe the Bible to be the revealed word of God. I respect these beliefs, and I admire the steadfastness with which they turn to the Bible for guidance to make their life decisions.

But can we really know God's will on all the issues facing our nation? Can any being of flesh and blood know with a certainty what God Almighty wills on a particular policy matter? Surely that is a knowledge which neither Christian nor Jew, however learned or pious, has the right to claim!

Some years ago, Senator Kennedy made a similar point when he asked respect "for the independent judgment of conscience." He said: "Those who proclaim moral and religious values can offer moral counsel, but they should not casually treat a position on a public issue as a test of fealty to faith."

Illustrating the problem, the Senator quoted Jerry Falwell's statement to the effect that, "to stand against Israel is to stand against God." Said Kennedy: "There is no one in the Senate who has stood more firmly for Israel than I have. Yet I do not doubt the faith of those on the other side. Their error is not one of religion, but of policy."

The Senator's example is well chosen. Many congressional leaders who received extremely high marks on the "morality index" published by the Christian Voice in those years because of their conservative position on such "holy" subjects as gun control had only mediocre if not poor voting records on Israel. Were they saints on some issues and sinners on others? Did their religion lapse, say, on arms sales to Arab states so many of whom were, and still are, pledged to Israel's destruction?

Surely not. Surely they had other considerations that came into play, such as the extension of US influence in the Middle East and the dampening of Iraqi power, and the need to recapture petro-dollars.

But if this be so, it is a confession that the sale of sophisticated weaponry is a complicated matter that involved many considerations all at once. And if that confession is made, it must apply as well to domestic gun control, and the censorship of books, and the curbing of the arts and all of those many other issues which the Christian Right crowns with the halo of divine approval. The hazard - indeed the blasphemy - of proclaiming

"God's will" on specific issues is well demonstrated by Senator Kennedy's illustrative example.

* * * * *

Intentionally or not, triumphalist proclamations by the Christian Right tend emphatically to exclude Jews from the political process.

Perhaps we are overly sensitive on that score, but how would you react, given our history, when you heard Randall Terry of Operation Rescue proclaim: " . . . let a wave of intolerance wash over you . . . yes, hate is good . . . our goal is a Christian nation . . . we are called by God to conquer this country . . . we don't want pluralism." And the Rev. Pat Robertson has been known to say this: "The Constitution of the United States is a marvelous instrument for self-government by Christian people. But the minute you turn it into the hands of non-Christian people . . . they can use it to destroy the very foundations of our society."

My friends, there are hundreds of religious traditions that coexist in wondrous harmony in this land. When you call this a Christian nation, you deny the validity of these other traditions and you suggest to the adherents of those varying faiths that they are really not welcome here.

Maybe we Jews are being overly sensitive, after all that self-same Pat Robertson also declared equality for women to be, "a feminist agenda that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians."

Over sensitive we are, no doubt. But what would you have us make of recent disclosures about the Rev. Pat Robertson's worldwide

conspiracy theories which necessitated apologetic disclaimers from Robertson and an appearance by Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition before the Anti-Defamation League? These happenings and their like merely deepen the Jewish intuition that those who indulge in simplistic Manichean perspectives on our complex human condition, are the very ones who will reinvent the Protocols of the Elders of Zion in every generation. Or if they themselves do not engage in anti-Semitism, their preachments serve to feed its underground current.

It is in this context that I commented some years ago, in words that were later misinterpreted to imply that I deem the Christian Right to be anti-Semitic. I said no such thing. What I did say, and repeat, is this: that the extreme and absolutist language of the Christian Right "creates a climate of opinion which is hostile to religious tolerance. Such a climate is bad for civil liberties, for human rights, for interfaith understanding, and for mutual respect among Americans. Therefore, it is also bad for Jews."

That's what I said and I stand by every word. The health of the American process demands civility, temperateness, and a genuine respect for divergent views, even if these views involve a divergent interpretation of Scripture. The American people cannot afford leaders who pander like harlots to our more destructive desires. We have combusive pressures enough, given our diversity and our unruly democracy. Rather give us leaders, and especially religious leaders, who overcome the idolatry of dehumanization and instead encourage each person as if she or he were the image of God.

* * * * *

My friends, we live - - together - - in a breathtaking era.
Daily we gasp in wonder at the potential of our inventiveness;

daily we hold our breath for fear of our extinction. Daily we are elated by the wondrous liberation of whole peoples around the world - in South Africa, in Eastern Europe - blowing their trumpets and bringing down the walls. And daily we are appalled by the horrors that loom behind these historical wonders and threaten to devour them, at times with genocidal force.

Probing ethical questions press for an answer. Daily, we are compelled to judge whether this or that technological invention is a Tower of Babel or a Jacob's ladder, whether swords or plowshares should be used to break the chains of human misery around the world; whether to risk peace or to risk war; whether to bolster or take apart the boundaries and walls that both divide and protect us.

The millennium is approaching and we are each holding a stop watch. The five billionth human being was born on earth last summer according to computer estimates - and we are each its parent. Our earth is struggling with environmental illness and we are each a cell that must be mobilized to our common defense. This is the religious truth, common to all faiths, that confronts us at this crossroad of human history: that we are all one. This is the truth that we must recognize in life, lest it be imposed upon us in a grim and total holocaust.

It is, therefore, less church and state that we need to unite today, than church and church and state and state. It is not Scripture set in stone that we need to wheelbarrow from church to office to school to home. It is the living, breathing word of God, with echoes and overtones and constant simultaneous translation, that we need to be carrying in our hearts and minds.

As a religious leader, I should not have to waste precious time struggling to protect or prove the integrity of my faith and the faith of my children. I should be spending that time holding

council with other religious leaders, each from beneath his own vine and fig tree in full security and full humility.

Let us acknowledge that we are all petitioners to rather than spokespeople for the Almighty. Let us attribute our religious differences to the unknowability of God's essence. Or, if that evades our common consent, let us attribute our differences to human fallibility, and then embrace that fallibility as the seed bed of creativity.

We approach the millennium. Our country already has one foot in the 21st Century. It must be a century of survival and renewal if it is to be a human century. We must be brave now and secure enough to walk humbly with our God into the future, not to stumble awkwardly back towards an improbable past while smashing the institutions of democracy on our way.

If the roof that arches over these United States of America has been battered by the elements, if the past three decades of social modernization have produced a few leaks, then let us repair the roof with all our sundry tools and skills. But let us leave the keystones of the house intact. Let us buttress those foundations - - our Constitution and our Bill of Rights - - for there is no firmer foundation for social progress and social harmony in the modern world.

Comments

FRJ NY

AMS - Response
FRJ Function '95 *file*

I am greatly flattered by the words of praise that have been spoken
by you, John, and by you Alan,
the leaders, lay and professional, of the NYFRS...
I am profoundly grateful to you,
and I hope that you know and feel that I reciprocate
your sentiments of regard and affection with a full heart.
You work exceedingly hard for our religious community
and we all of us have reason to be beholden to you

Flattery, it is said, corrupts the receiver,
but let me confess that there is a part of me
that delights in all of this adulation,
that is ready to be persuaded that I am what I am not.
But there is another part of me that knows better,
knows that honor cannot be gained without the toil of a more
genuine merit.

~~ketonti mikol hahassodim.~~

A recent newspaper article described me as the "liberal Lion of Reform
Judaism."

I am proud of that designation, although I wasn't exactly
overjoyed with the added adjective which the pundist
felt constrained to include.

He called me an "aging liberal lion." — THAT WAS THE UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL
AGING INDZED!
I will never be an old man.

To me, old age is always 15 years older than I am, AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT,

The "liberal" part of it I like, all the more so because

it isn't easy to be liberal these days, in politics or in religion.
I suppose it never was easy, for you see, the certainty of one's
knowledge decreases in proportion to thought and experience.

The moment you have time to intellectualize your perceptions,
established certainties begin to crumble
and the "other side" of any controversy will beckon appealingly.

The ultimate result is that one's liberalism
become stretched to the point of absurdity.

It is a Hamlet-like torture to be truly liberal.
Everything becomes susceptible to contradictory interpretations.
bias is impossible, opinions wobbly,
and immortal words are out of the questions.

Now older people
(and I accept my age intellectually though not emotionally)
older people are supposed to be filled with regrets about their past
even as they ^{are} said to be despairing of the future...

I have few regrets on an institutional level,
having accepted early on that I can't do everything
and that therefore some things will not get done,
or at any rate that they will not get done as well as they should.
In fact, ^{when} ~~ever~~ since I became President of the Union, ^{+ 2 WEEK SLEEP} I sleep like a baby
that is to say I sleep for two hours and then wake up crying...
(so be prepared Eric)

Let me confess, though, that on a more personal level

I do have regrets which sadden me, and foremost among them is
that as a father I was something of an absentee landlord,
neither seen no heard nor heeded.

[I can prove it to you...story of Josh...scared...]

Thus, my children paid the heaviest penalty for my success,
such as it is.

Too many times I was not there when they really needed me.
They have become as wonderful as they are,
thanks due in no small measure to their mother.

As for Rhea, she is my soul's far better part.
She served this movement well, and in her own right.
The warmth with which I am often credited really radiates from her.
In truth, were it not for her, I would not be here,
I would ^{EVER} not be alive.
In ^{RHEA'S} ~~her~~ face I have seen the eternal.

Let me thank Debbie Friedman for coming here to join in this honor.
She is really an extra-ordinary asset to America's Jewish community,
one of its spiritual giants.

This is no rabbinic hyberbole, no extravagant exaggeration.
When all is said and done, music and poetry
are the languages of religion.

^{DEBBIE'S}
~~Her~~ words and songs make the spirit soar.

I am grateful to all of you for coming,
grateful to the many others who could not be here,
who wrote me and who contributed to the Fund for Reform Judaism
that cause which led me to yield
to the blandishments of your leadership to suffer
the discomfort of excessive praise.

The work of Janet Neuberger and ^{MIKE} ~~Ernest~~ Gruenebaum clearly bore
rich fruit - AND WE HAVE GOOD REASON TO PRAISE THEIR NAME

[BY THE BY, ^{MIKE} NEUBERGER ASKED YOU HOW DID ~~ERNEST~~ BECOME A MIKE -]
3 OSCAR WILCOX

^{ALL OF}
I can give you the thanks which comes from the knowledge
that the cause which brings you here is preeminently worth while.
It is the cause of Reform Judaism,
~~It is the cause~~ of our people's creative continuity.

It is a cause which is ^{ADVANCING} ~~flourishing~~, at ^{least as far as we are concerned} ~~last in our religious community~~.
We have emerged as the fastest-growing synagogue movement
on the North American Jewish scene.

In the past two decades alone, our cumulative membership rolls
have burgeoned by better than 25%.

When I joined the staff of the Union, our membership
was just short of 450 temples,
now we are approaching nine hundred, ~~as I have said~~.
And our ~~cumulative membership rolls now exceed~~ a million and a half men,
women and children.

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

In Torah we are taught that when Moses sought 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. }

But more than a numeric growth has marked 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.

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.

So you see, even as I have few regrets about the past, I do not despair of the future...

Quite the contrary, I am ^{RADIANT} filled with hope.

I have confidence in the ^{YOUNGER} professional leadership of our Union...

It is a remarkably talented and devoted staff, ^{CAPABLE OF GUIDING US INTO THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE}

My confidence is given further substance by the knowledge that we have in our constituency, in our congregations, people who care, who are earnestly concerned about the synagogue and its future, men and women of high motive and of serious purpose, who are determined to bring about a veritable 'revolution of rising Judaic aspirations.'

^{AND SO} -Indeed, we have those ingredients which are essential to ^{JEWISH} ~~our~~ continuity a message which is needful, people who care, and leaders who mean to lead them. //

When all is said and done, the future of the synagigue depends in no small measure on the quality of its leadership.

I speak now of all who are assembled here today, the leaers of today and of tomorrow.

What we do, and more important, what we are will make the ultimate difference.

For you see, where there is will and where there is purpose, the future is not something which is discovered by happenstance around the corner.

It is created, it is fashioned,

it is given shape by men and women of will.

Aye, what we do and what we are eill make the ultimate difference.

If we despair, despair will be the harvest.

But if we stand by our tasks,

resolutely pledged to attain them,

why, then, we will have that future all of dream to have.

100th Anniversary
Congregation Children of Israel
Augusta, Georgia - January 20, 1995
- Rabbi Alexander Schindler

As I said, I am grateful for your warm introduction, Jordan,
and I hope you know and feel that I reciprocate your
sentiments of affection with a full and grateful heart.

I like your rabbi, like everything that I have heard concerning him.
Those who know him best speak of his boundless enthusiasm and
energy.

They admire those rich gifts of mind and spirit he brings to his
intelligence, imagination, industry,

and above all his menschlichkeit, his essential humanity,
the great warmth of his human approach.

And those few precious hours that I have had in his company
leads me affirm their judgment.

Rabbi Parr, together with his lovely and equally energetic Cynthia
are truly a joy to be with.

And you are fortunate, indeed, to have him as your spiritual leader.

Now Jordan, knowing that I would be a keynote speaker at the
Biennial Convention of the Union's Smaller congregation
which you are hosting just a few weeks hence,
was kind enough to give me an out,

that is to say that even though he invited me to deliver
your sesquicentennial address

he felt that my having to come to Augusta twice in so
brief a time, I might want to beg off.

I didn't, of course, as you can see.

I like the Augusta's of our world.

It's not just that I began my rabbinic career in Georgia
in West Point, in the Chatahoochee valley,
at the other end of the state...

But I like to be in smaller congregation generally.
There is a warmth, a fervor in such congregations
that simply cannot be found elsewhere.

It is a so much easier to be Jewish in larger centers of Jewish life.
is it not?

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

But in smaller communities 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.

This certainly is true and has always been true for

Augusta's Congregation Children of Israel.

All one need do, as did I, is to read Jack Steinberg's history of
your synagogue.

I was fascinated to read it...it's every line testifies
to the earnestness with which you approached your sacred tasks,
the enormous energy you and your forbears expended year in
year out to keep your community alive
the unyielding tenacity evinced by every generation
to maintain Jewish life in this place.

But you did much more than that.

You created a meaningful program here,

And there was a continuous reaching out from this place
to the larger community of which you are a part.

It began 150 years ago did it not, when one of your founders,

Samuel Levy, became the first Jew to be elected to public office.

Ever since that time, the leaders of this congregation were also
among the leaders of the entire community.

You fought for this land.

You wore the gray uniforms of the confederacy with pride,
and spilled the blood of your sons in its cause.

You fought for America in many a war for freedom:

World Wars I & II, the Korean conflict, Vietnam...

All in the effort to demonstrate your loyalty to this blessed land
which has given us so much,
which has enabled us to stretch ourselves to the very
limit of our abilities.

You were also among the founders of our religious community,
the pioneers of Reform Judaism in this land.
You were the fourth to synagogue to join our union of congregations,
the very first from the State of Georgia....

Indeed, some of the earliest stirrings of the Reform movement
emanated from this place.

After all, your very first worship service 150 years ago
was conducted not just in Hebrew, but in the vernacular. in English

Thus it is altogether fitting and proper that I,
as President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations
be here tonight to help you celebrate your sesquicentennial.

After all, the founding President of the Union,
that masterbuilder of Reform Judaism in this land, Isaac M. Wise
was here to lay the cornerstone of your first House of Worship
And Maurice Eisendrath, my predecessor,
helped you celebrate your Centennial.

Now I am here to thank you, not just myself,
but for that larger family of congregations of which you are
so precious a part.

When you were founded, we were but a small religious community
a handful of congregations, several thousand families,
scattered throughout the land.

Today we are a mighty movement, nearly 900 temples strong
a million and one half members - men and women, young and old -
a vital, vibrant religious community
whose strength ultimately derived from this very place.

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

150 years ago...

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

150 years ago...

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

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

These holy halls are their memorial
even as they are a tribute to those who continue their work.
Blessed be their memory,
altogether blessed be the work of yourf hands.

But an anniversary is not just a time for the backward glance.
It is a time, also, to look ahead.

It is not just a time for recollection,
but also a time for rededication,
for a refocusing on those ideas and ideals for which this
sanctuary was build and which it presumably enshrines.

These purposes are familiar to you.

Your rabbis have articulated them over the years.

and you have demonstrated your understanding of them.

The first of these ideals assuredly is the moral mandate.

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

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

Its doors must always be open wide, so that those who require sanctuary
will feel free to enter.

Its windows must never be shut so tight that humanity's weeping
will go unheard.

Indeed, the Talmud prohibits us from praying in any room
which has no windows,

lest we be oblivious to what is going on out there in the world.

Our age does need the reminder of religion's moral mandate does it not?
Consider 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.

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 at those pictures from underdeveloped lands which flash
on our TV screens,

look with pity and despair on swollen bellies, and shrunken limbs,
on hopeless poverty and 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."

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

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

For only if we emerge from this place as better human beings,
as better people
will our prayers have been answered.

* * *

But there is a second great purpose for which this sanctuary was built.
and it is really a counterpoint to the first.

The synagogue is meant to be a communal home for the Jewish people,
the source of our strength to live as Jews.

Perhaps your forbears had this purpose primarily in mind
when they named this place "the Children of Israel."

Yes even from your beginnings you were conscious of this purpose.

Recall, iof you will that just a few years after your founding,
when your congregatrional resources were severly strained,
you nonetheless sent the then munificent sum of \$25.00 to New York
to help the poor of Palestine.

Helping fellow Jews a purpose which this synagogue must continue
to fulfill, for while our state as a people
is dramatically improved when compared what it was
a half century ago,
we are certainly not out of danger.

The security of Israel, will continue to preoccupy us
for a long time to come.

The peace process has been a boon to the modern Jewish State,
to be sure...

Its diplomatic isolation has been broken.

Since that reluctant Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House Lawn
a year ago, over 22 nations have normalized their
relations with Israel.

The Arab boycott has successfully been broken, de facto, if not de jure
There isn't a week that goes by Israeli and Arab leaders do not meet
in Cyprus, or London, or even in the Middle East itself
to make plans for common ventures.

Israel's economy, in consequence, is flourishing.

Still, the spoilers of the peace abound

They will continue to do everything in their power
to interdict the peace process

-- including the slaughter of innocents..

But not just the safety of Israel will require our strength and support
Jews in many places are still embattled.

From the Urals to the Ozarks the toxic waters of racism are rising
ethno-centricism is running amok,
and anti-Semitism remains the most common and virulent
manifestation of that unreasoned hatred
which finds so many expressions in our world.

Remember what happened in Argentina but a months or two ago
when a terrorist Bomb destroyed
the Jewish Community Headquarters in Buenos Aires.
There were over a hundred victims in that attack,
never mind the valuable archival materials and records
which were demolished.

Yes, the Jews of Argentina are afraid
I met with them in Mexico City some weeks ago.
They are afraid to go to synagogue
afraid to send their children to religious school
Even their non Jewish neighbors are apprehensive lest they inadvertently
become terrorist targets because of their proximity to
Jewish institutions.

But it's not just elsewhere...

Even here in the United States, only a week or so ago,
an FBI study disclosed that Jews are the most frequent victims
of crimes based on religious prejudice.

And so we will need the synagogue as a source of our continuing
collective strength

* * *

But the synagogue must serve one more purpose still:
It must evoke a sense of the sacred.
It must enhance our capacity to respond with wonderment
to the essential mystery of life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But there is a world of reality which cannot be perceived
by the physical senses alone

It is an invisible world if you will, but its force is often
more intense than is the force of the world that is seen.

Consider this world of the invisible, if you will.

Ideas, for example.

They are impalpable.

No one can see or seize them.

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

Ideals too are of such a kind.

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

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

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

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

and civilization reverts into a jungle.

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

dance, sculpture, painting, architecture,

-- "music in space." Schelling called them.

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

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

Yet art has the power to heal us.

It can make the spirit soar,

for art is spirit from the realm of the unseen,

conveyed by means of matter.

Ah, and then there is love which is also an invisible force.

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

But no one has ever seen love itself.

It certainly cannot be anatomized, or schematized,

or reduced to clearly identifiable elements.

Yet how powerful a force love is!

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

Aye, there is a world of reality

beyond those worlds perceived by the physical sense alone.

And altogether multitudinous are life's gifts that have no

practical worth but nonetheless are altogether wond'rous:

The earth's green covering of grass.

The blue serenity of sea and sky.

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

Petals on the grass and wings in the air.

Oh, how flat, how narrow our world is,

when we measure its gifts by their usefulness alone,

when, in Rilke's happy simile

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

Then do the words of prophecy apply to us:

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

No, the human story simply cannot be told

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

Only those who open themselves to such a mystery

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

Only when we open ourselves to such a mystery,

will we find our Judaism to be a sustaining faith and not a
dry-as-dust religion.

And it is precisely this kind of faith that we so desperately need.
for while routine religion suffices to sustain our lighter hours,
once life runs out into its depths
why, then, we need a different faith.

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

now I have reached the bottom of the morass

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

Why, then, we need a deeper faith.

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

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

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

and whose pursuit alone justifies the effort to assure its survival

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

a source of strength for the Jewish people.

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

Pursue these purposes, these dreams, this quest!

Then will the future of Congregation The Children of Israel
be as glorious as was its past.

Then also will the celebrations of this anniversary year be
not for present use nor for present delight alone,
but they will be forever.

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

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

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

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