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**THE ROLE OF THE NON-JEW IN THE SYNAGOGUE**

by

**Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler**



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 complaint 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 zealotry 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

*A* 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 <sup>for</sup> 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.

R 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.

R 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.

R 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."

P 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.

\* \* \*

P 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.

P 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.

P 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 <sup>or</sup>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 <sup>to</sup>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-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 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.

*[Handwritten mark]* 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."

*[Handwritten mark]* 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.

*[Handwritten mark]* 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 of 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 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.

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



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 home  
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 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)



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 <sup>OUR</sup> ~~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: <sup>— =</sup>  
to feel a part of the Jewish community...  
to be stirred by the liturgical music...  
to glean those insights contained in our prayerbook...

Others <sup>may be</sup> ~~are~~ here to honor their parents' wish or memory <sup>to Fellow Jews</sup>  
<sup>PERHAPS</sup> or to abate their terrible loneliness by reaching out to others <sup>or it helps</sup>  
<sup>some</sup> ~~Still other~~ <sup>even</sup> may be here determined to do what Jews have always done, <sup>for others</sup>  
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 <sup>COME TO NAUGHT</sup> ~~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 <sup>+ SEAL vs</sup> 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 <sup>CONCEPTUALIZING</sup>  
~~It~~ does not mean ~~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 <sup>+ I THINK THAT PEACE</sup> 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 <sup>the</sup> 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 <sup>when he wrote</sup>

"Certainty of faith is not accessible to modern man," <sup>if he said</sup> ~~he wrote~~.

But then he quickly added, that nevertheless we moderns

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

- <sup>+ FURTHER</sup> ~~moreover~~ that <sup>AS JEWS</sup> ~~as Jews~~ it is our peculiar mission to do so, <sup>AS JEWS</sup>  
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 <sup>offer further</sup> guidance for our quest?

It suggests several means to that end <sup>AND IT</sup> but 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.

<sup>AFREIL AN</sup>  
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.

<sup>AND SO WE MUST TURN TO THAT BOOK - BOOKS</sup>  
Encountering a text itself can be a religious experience.

Even so we read in the seder ~~and~~ <sup>RAABIN</sup> eliyahu



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, <sup>so</sup> our tradition avers  
While it may be true that an ignorant person,  
a person unwilling to study, <sup>IS LESS LIKELY TO</sup> 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:

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, <sup>serenity</sup> rest, <sup>^</sup> the attainment of inner peace,  
for when it comes to to the striving for justice  
<sup>passive</sup> just the opposite is so.

Then believing in God means <sup>NOT REST - BUT</sup> unrest, exile, strangerhood,  
<sup>EVEN WAR</sup> ~~even struggle and strife.~~

The <sup>WAR</sup> 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? //

<sup>all</sup>  
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 <sup>ourselves</sup> 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.

