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Speeches, 1995.

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

- Once again, my friends we are gathered here at this turning hour of the year.
- Once again, the shrill sharp sounds of the shofar shake us from our complacency with their demand for a <a href="https://chesh.org/chesh
- Once again, we respond as did our forbears through countless generations
- The blowing of the shofar assuredly marks the climax of these morning services,

and it takes a rare detachment indeed,

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

There is something about the quality of the sound,

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

Little wonder that over the centuries,

our sages gave a variety of meanings to these sounds.

- Thus Rabbi Abbahu said that we blow the ram's horn to remind ourselves of the sacrifice of Isaac.
- Rabbi Joshuah ben Korchah taught that even as the ram's horn was sounded when the Torah was given to Israel,

so will it resound

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

- In a like vein, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa commented that one of the horns of the ram which Abraham sacrificed in Isaac's stead was the very horn blown at Sinai.
- And the other horn of that self-same ram will be blown again when the dispersed are gathered for the Great Return.
- [Thus indeed, when the builders and leaders of the modern Jewish state declared their independence,
  - Ben Gurion's proclamation was climaxed by the <u>tekiah g'dolah</u> that long, unbroken blast that crowns the shofar service]
- The great Maimonides penetrated the symbolic, inner meaning of these shoafar blasts when he interpreted them to sound this summons:

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

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

It is a time when we need the companionship

of kindred and aspiring souls...and we find it in this place.

I certainly do, and so it is good to be in your midst once again.

I really missed being here last year, and so did all the Schindlers.

After all, Union Temple is our communal home.

This is where we want to be, on these, the most holy of days.

And I am grateful to Linda Goodman, to all of you, for inviting us again

Since you are our extended family, as it were,

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

and is now serving as the assistant rabbi of WRT.

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

all of them stirring and squirming in their seats.

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

even as it helped direct the lives

of all our wonderful children.

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

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

wonderful to feel your presence...

Yet there is a sorrow intermingling with the joy of our renewed embrace. Too many who were with us two years ago are here no more.

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

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

But there is also the solace

-- feeble at first but growing stronger in time -- that comes with the gift of memory..

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

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

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

day sermons to communal rather than to personal concerns.

- My sermon today will be of such a kind, focusing essentially on events in Israel, the unfoldment of its efforts to achieve peace, and the impact of these events on American Jewish life.
- Let me begin with Israel, and the peace process, which has wrested and wrenched our emotions from hope to fear and back again with never ending, unremitting regularity.
- When I stood before you two years ago, a few days after that reluctant Arafat-Rabin handshake on the White House lawn,

the pendulum of our emotions tended, albeit timidly, toward hope.

Erstwhile bitter enemies had crossed the swollen rivers
of hatred and war in order to sow the seeds of peace...
thus holding forth the promise of a strategic turning point
in Arab Israeli politics.

But even then, two years ago,

our momentary rush of hope was tempered by realism.

We knew full well, then,

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

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

by acts of wanton terror, acts of dark butchery without a soul. We wept with the victims and our mood turned from hope to disenchanment.

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

- Enormous changes <u>have</u> taken place in the course of the past 24 months and we must not allow the gray day-to-day realities of peacemaking, nor even those fearsome acts of political extremism, to obscure them.
- These changes have been profound, cataclysimic, in fact, and what will remain in history books is not what is written in daily newspapers but rather what the various signing ceremonies do in fact represent and portend.
- Consider, for a moment, what rich rewards Israel reaped thanks, and only thanks to Oslo and all other peacemaking ventures.
- That tight grip of diplomatic isolation throttling Israel for the oast score years is finally has loosened.
- Fifty-eight countries have renewed or newly established relations with the Jewish State -- and only because of the peace process.
- Among these countries are Jordan

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

which together account for nearly half of humanity.

I met with US Ambassador Indyk last week who told us that Israel's principal artery is clogged almost daily

with entourage after entourage of foreign emissaries

wending their way from Ben Gurion Airport to Jerusalem

- Indeed, so he told us, Ezer Weizman pleaded with Peres and Rabin to stem this diplomatic flow on the ground that he simply had no spare time to meet and greet another prime or foreign minister.
- In a word, the Arab-Israel peace process, flawed and embryonic as it is, has wholly transformed and normalized Israel's relations with the rest of the world.
- There has even been a gradual normalization of Israel's relation with the Arab world.
- Most of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations which used to be held in Washington or some "fairy-tale castle" in Europe are now held in the Middle East, a good many within Israel itself
- The multilateral negotiating groups have made enormous and largely unheralded progress...
- Agreements have been reached on well over 100 region-wide projects ranging from transportation to energy to health services to education and even the joint development of housing facilities for refugees in Syria and Lebanon.
- And, of course the Arab boycott has collapsed,

  first <u>de facto</u> and now <u>de jure</u> what with the

  recent official decision of six Persian Gulf states

  to end their secondary and tertiary boycott of Israel.
- Peace with Jordan, hailed within Israel even by the political right, could not have been achieved wihtout a prior Israel-PLO pact.
- These negotiations were signed and celebrated on land once contested by both states...between Eilat and Aqaba...it was a glorious moment which both Rhea and I were privileged to witness.

- The Jordan agreement even brought security dividends to Israel, for it granted Israel the right to respond, to traverse Jordanian air and ground space,
  - should hostile forces cross Jordanian's Eastern frontier.
- In effect, Israel gained considerable strategic depth, extending its security lines by 200 miles
  - all the way to the border of Iraq, beyond which lies Iran.
- The release of Syria's 4000 was also won as the direct result of Israel's peacemaking efforts and America's ivovlement in it.
- The <u>economic</u> consequences of the peace process are altogether staggering.
- Two thirds of the world's markets heretofore closed to Israel are now wide open.
- Asian countries such as China, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan have dramatically increased their trade with Israel.
- Indeed it is likely that India will soon replace the U.S. and the European Union as Israel's number one agricultural export market.
- International companies that once shunned Israel
  - -- such as Bechtel and Amoco and Exxon and Italy's ENI -- are beginning to seize the commercial opportunities now available.
- Even Baharin, Kuwait and Qatar have indicated their desire for access to Israeli pipelines to ship their oil and natural gas to Europe, thus enabling them to utilize this far more direct and far less costly transit line than the circuitous route presently available and thereby of immense potential benefit to Israel no less than the Arab suppliers.

- Some of this is in the future, to be sure, but the <u>realized</u> dividends are striking even now.
- Israel's inflation rate is in single digits.
- Unemployment rests below 7%.
- Foreign currency reserves reached a record \$10 billion dollars several months ago
- And the GNP rose by over 8% this fiscal year, more than the combined GNP of Israel's neighbors with all of their reservoirs of oil.
- In sum, dovish politics succeeded in spawning bullish economics.
- Yes, the continued risks of peacemaking are undeniable.
- Suicidal terrorists will continue to stalk the negotiations every step of the way.
- But these fearsome events, however tragic in their consequence,
  must not be permitted to overshadow the very and priceless gifts
  that the process of peace has already brought
  and will doubtlessly continue to bring to Israel.
- Most Israelis recognize this, and that is why they want the negotiating process to continue.
- They may be ambivalent, concerned about the risks entailed, they may even oppose with a vehemence one or another provision of the agreements envisaged.
- Nonetheless, a preponderant majority of Israelis yearn for peace and continue to opt for hope over despair.
- To be sure, the strident voice of Israel's political opposition has not been stilled, nor has the furor of extremists among the settlers.

- Only former Minister of Justice Dan Meridor and and Menachem Begin's son
  Ze'ev have had the integrity and political courage
  to condemn the dangerous rhetoric of Israel's radical right.
- Would that they had also succeeded in keeping partisan Israeli political pressures from spilling over America's Jewish landscape.
- If anything the rhetoric of the radical right is more strident here than it is in Israel.
- Some of you surely read that Abe Foxman, ADL's national director, recently resigned from his Orthodox synagogue because its rabbi accused Rabin of being a willful accomplice in the killing of Jews by Palestinian terrorists
- He even likened Israel's Prime Minister to those Jews who connived with the Nazis during those fearsome days of the <a href="mailto:shoah.">shoah.</a>

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

- Worse still, only last Thursday we saw the sorry spectacle of two Jewish organizations,
  the ZOA and the Union of Orthodox Congregations,
  testify in Congress in opposition to the stance taken
  by AIPAC and all other Jewish groupings.
- Don't these people know what the inevitable consequence of such divisive lobbying is?
- Do they not realize that their factious conduct and total lack of communal discipline is bound ultimately to undermine America's support for the modern Jewish State.

- As you know, I pride myself in being a liberal, in religion and politics alike.
- And as a liberal I am always inclined to avoid certainties and to see three sides of every issue.
- But in this case I simply do not understand what Israel's right and their American Jewish supporters seek to achieve...

Would they really prefer a return to the status quo ante?

Yet that status quo but sowed the seeds of endless conflict.

It corroded the Jewish and democratic character of the State.

It sapped the nation's morale and spent its moral capital.

Perhaps more to the point, the conceptions of the right have been tested over the years and always found wanting.

They did not stay the stones and bombs of terrorists or silence their rockets.

Those who would rely on force alone tried everything to quell the intifada:

repression, killings, war, the arbitrary seizure of lands mass deportations, collective punishment, even counter-terror. But nothing availed...

A restive population exceeding 1 million people cannot forever be held in check

-- not even with force and spies and the political power that comes from the barrel of a gun.

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

- No national movement including Zionism has ever been erased by military force.
- Reciprocal terror will only serve to plunge us into a downward spiral to eternal conflict and the loss of Israel's soul
- If Israel is to remain Israel there is no other way other than the relentless pursuit of peace.
- What ought we to do, then, what can we do, we Jews of America whose lot has fallen in such safe and pleasant places?

We can pray for that miracle to unfold.

- We can support the forces that work for peace, and counter those who don't, who are so vociferous in their opposition.
- Not long ago, I was in the office of Senator Dole accompanied by two colleagues to assure him that the preponderant majority of America's Jews do support the peace process and that they want America's active involvement in it to continue. He said to us:

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

This then is the least that we can do:

to let our voices be heard in Washington,

to speak up, loudly and clearly, now and throughout the unfolding of this remarkable, soul stirring process.

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

- Thy deserve, at the very least our fervent prayers, not muttered curses from those who within the safe haven of these shores, still deify land over life.
- This Jewish calendar year, as you all know, will mark 3000 years of Jewish life in the City of David...this wondrous city of our dreams whose spaces are filled with the voices of the past whose stones are the frozen echoes of eternity...
- Jerusalem of hope...where waiting for God was born, where the expectation of everlasting peace came into being.

Jerusalem is the capitol of the Jewish people.

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

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

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

Generation after generation of our people cried aloud:

L'shana haba biyerushalayim,

as they turned in their prayers to Jerusalem, even as Moslems ever turn East, from Jerusalem to Mecca.

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

Israel is the hope that was born out of suffering, the springs that came to the dry valley, the rose that blossomed in the desert.

May her leaders be granted wisdom and courage.

And may her people dwell in safety

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

# ARCHIVES

EULOGY FOR RUTH LESE
BY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### AMERICAN IEWISH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She has outsoared the shadow of our night Envy and calumny and hate and pain And that unrest which men miscall delight Can touch her not and torture not again.

T'hi nishmato tserurah bitsor hachayim
May her soul be bound up in the bond of lasting life.

Amen



EULOGY FOR ROBERT L. ADLER

delivered by

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

Temple Sholom July 7, 1995 Chicago, Illinois With heavy hearts we gather in this place to speak words of final farewell to Bob Adler whose care sustained us, whose zest for life inspired us, whose soul's sublime song filled our own lives with a wondrous harmony

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AMERICAN IEWISH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

't'hi nishmato tzrurah bitzror ha-chayim'

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

## JEWISH MUSLIM CONVOCATION

### **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

by

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler



March 26, 1995 Chicago, Illinois It is a privilege which I greatly appreciate to be here and to help initiate this Jewish/Muslim Convocation, and to share this platform with the Imam Mohammed, the universally recognized spiritual leader of America's Moslem community.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

we call God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As for the African American among you, your vulnerability in America is an existential state. Racist oppression knows no boundaries either at your cradle or grave, or at the threshold of your home, or even at the portals of your soul. You are an endangered species in America, a caged and mistreated species, and you have been so for nearly four centuries, nearly as long as the Bible tells us that the Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt. We know full well, moreover, that the contemporary Pharaohs' new contract with America is first and foremost a contract on you and on you children.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### LEVENTHAL LECTURE

- By

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER



Wittenberg College Springfield, Ohio April 26, 1995 Thank you, Dr. Kinnison for your warm introduction, albeit it was entirely too flattering. I am embarrassed - - at least the better part of me is . . . and I am glad that my wife is along. She has a way of putting me in my proper place. Although the best put-down I ever received occurred in Jerusalem, near the Western Wall - - perhaps some among you were there. It is an impressive place, that wall, each of its stones heavy with precious memories.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## AMERICAN JEWISH

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

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

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

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

Sadly, however, all to few Americans know or even care about such faith-based perspectives on the nature of human suffering.

Religion, you see, is no longer the "opiate" of our time, the chosen response to pain. It is rather politics that has come to express "the sigh of the afflicted creature." Politics has become the binding secular religion of our nation. Politics has become the embodiment and expression of spiritual discontent in America. This is a fact that populists and demagogues fully recognize and exploit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## AMERICAN IEWISH

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

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

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

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

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

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

## \*AMERICAN\*JEV\*ISH\* ARCHIVES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\* \* \* \* \* \*

My friends, we live - - together - - in a breathtaking era.

Daily we gasp in wonder at the potential of our inventiveness;

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

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

AMERICAN IEWISH

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

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

As a religious leader, I should not have to waste precious time struggling to protect or prove the integrity of my faith and the faith of my children. I should be spending that time holding council with other religious leaders, each from beneath his own vine and fig tree in full security and full humility.

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

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

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

Comments py

AMS - Response FRJ Function '95

I am greatly flattered by the words of praise that have been spoken by you, John, and by you Alan, the leaders, lay and professional, of the NYFRS...

I am profoundly grateful to you,

and I hope that you know and feel that I reciprocate your sentiments of regard and affection with a full heart.

You work exceedingly hard for our religious community and we all of us have reason to be beholden to you

Flattery, it is said, corrupts the receiver,

but let me confess that there is a part of me

that delights in all of this adulation,

that is ready to be persuaded that I am what I am not.

But there is another part of me that knows better,

knows that honor cannot be gained without the toil of a more

genuine merit.

kotonti mikol hahassodim.

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

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

He called me an "aging liberal lion." - THAT WAS THE UNKINDEST CUT OF HLL AGING INDEST CUT OF HLL I will never be an old man.

To me, old age is always 15 years older than I am, AT BAY GIVEN MOHENT,

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

it isn't easy to be liberal these days, in politics or in religion.

I suppose it never was easy, for you see, the certainty of one's

knowledge decreases in proportion to thought and experience.

The moment you have time to intellectualize your perceptions, established certainties begin to crumble

and the "other side" of any controversy will beckon appealingly.

The ultimate result is that one's liberalism

become stretched to the point of absurdity.

It is a Hamlet-like torture to be truly liberal.

Everything becomes susceptible to contradictory interpretations.

bias is impossible, opinions wobbly,

and immortal words are out of the questions.

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

I have few regrets on an institutional level,

having accepted early on that I can't do everything and that therefore some things will not get done,

or at any rate that they will not get done as well as they should.

In fact, ever since I became President of the Union I sleep like a baby that is to say I sleep for two hours and then wake up crying...

(so be prepared Eric)

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

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

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

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

Too many times I was not there when they really needed me.

They have become as wonderful as they are,

thanks due in no small measure to their mother.

As for Rhea, she is my soul's far better part.

She served this movement well, and in her own right.

The warmth with which I am often credited really radiates from her.

In truth, were it not for her, I would not be here,

I would not be alive.

In her face I have seen the eternal.

Let me thank Debbie Friedman for coming here to join in this honor.

She is realy an extra-ordinary asset to America's Jewish community,

one of its spiritual giants.

This is no rabbinic hyberbole, no extravagant exaggeration.

When all is said and done, music and poetry

are the languages of religion.

D28812'5

Her words and songs make the spirit soar.

I am grateful to all of you for coming,

grateful to the many others who could not be here,

who wrote me and who contributed to the Fund for Reform Judaism that cause which led me to yield

to the blandishments of your leadership to suffer

the discomfort of excessive praise.

The work of Janet Neuberger and Ernest Gruenebaum clearly bore

rich fruit -- AND WE HOVE GOOD REASON TO PRAISE THEIR NAME

BY THE BY, NEUGR HERES YOU HOW DID EARNEST BECOME A MIKE -

ALLOF ,

I can give you the thanks which comes from the knowledge that the cause which brings you here is preeminently worth while.

It is the cause of Reform Judaism,

It is the cause of our people's creative continuity.

It is a cause which is flourishing, at last in our reigious community.

We have emerged as the fastest-growing synagogue movement on the North American Jewish scene.

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

When I joined the staff of the Union, our membership
was just short of 450 temples,
now we are approaching nine humdred, as I have said.

And our cumulative membership rolls now exceeds a million and a half men, women and children.

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

In Torah we are taught that when Moses sought relief

from his leadership burdens and is instructed to gather seventy

of Israel's elders to help him govern

Two of them, Eldad and Medad, though not of the seventy, nonetheless receive God's inspiration and "speak in ecstacy" in the camp.

Joshua asks Moses to jail the two, but Moses replies:

"Would that all the Lord's people were prophets."

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

- All the Lord's people including women.
- All the Lord's people including gay and lesbian Jews.
- All the Lord's people, including families in all of their new constellations.
- All the Lord's people, including the intermarried, and Jews-by-choice, yes, and the hearing-impaired and the wheelchair bound and the disabled in body and spirit.

But more than a numeric growth has marked our advance.

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

  but as a Judaism that can satisfy the passionate heart.
- Most significant of all, our movement has been able to raise up a vigorous new generation.
- Our rabbis and teachers, our scholars and leaders are our very own, the graduates of our religious schools and seminaries, the full-sheaved harvest of our youth groups and camps.
- Our detractors say that Reform Judaism has become brittle, that it is devoid of spirit, utterly lacking in vitality.

What nonsense, this!

A movement that has the inner strength to generate its own leadership is not brittle but lives.

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

Quite the contrary, I am filled with hope.

I have confidence in the professional leadership of our Union...

It is a remarkeably talented and devoted staff, CAPABLE OF GUIDING US INTO THE UNCERSAIN FUTURE

My confidence is given further substance by the knowledge that we have in our constituency, in our congregations, people who care,

who are earnestly concerned about the synagogue and its future, men and women of high motive and of serious purpose,

who are determined to bring about a veritable `revolution of rising Judaic aspirations.'

-Indeed, we have those ingredients which are essential to our continuity a message which is needful, people who care, and leaders who mean to lead them.

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

I speak now of all who are assembled here today, the leaers of today and of tomorrow.

What we do, and more important, what we are will make the ultimate difference.

For you see, where there is will and where there is purpose, the future is not something which is discovered by happenstance around the corner.

It is created, it is fashioned, it is given shape by men and women of will.

Aye, what we <u>do</u> and what we <u>are</u> eill make the ultimate difference.

If we despair, despair will be the harvest.

But if we stand by our tasks,

resolutely pledged to attain them, why, then, we will have that future all of dream to have.



100th Anniversary Congregation Children of Israel Augusta, Georgia - January 20, 1995 - Rabbi Alexander Schindler



- As I said, I am grateful for your warm intoduction, Jordan, and I hope you know and feel that I reciprocate your sentiments of affection with a full and grateful heart.
- I like your rabbi, like everything that I have heard concerning him. Those who know him best speak of his boundless enthusiasm and energy.
- They admire those rich gifts of mind and spirit he brings to his intelligence, imagination, industry,
  - and above all his menshlichkeit, his essential humanity, the great warmth of his human approach.
- And those few precious hours that I have had in his company leads me affirm their judgment.
- Rabbi Parr, together with his lovely and equally energetic Cynthia are truly a joy to be with.
- And you are fortunate, indeed, to have him as your spiritual leader.
- Now Jordan, knowing that I would be a keynote speaker at the Biennial Convention of the Union's Smaller congregation which you are hosting just a few weeks hence, was kind enough to give me an out,
  - that is to say that even though he invited me to deliver your sesquicentennial address
  - he felt that my having to come to Augusta twice in so brief a time, I might want to beg off.
- I didn't, of course, as you can see.
- I like the Augusta's of our world.

- It's not just that I began my rabbinic career in Georgia in West Point, in the Chatahoochee valley, at the other end of the state...
- But I like to be in smaller congregation generally.
- There is a warmth, a fervor in such congregations that simply cannot be found elsewhere.
- It is a so much easier to be Jewish in larger centers of Jewish life.
  is it not?
- The resources there are extensive...

  professionals are ready at hand

  and the burden is shared by many...
- Not everyone is really needed, and too many, alas, choose to be passive participants in temple life
- But in smaller communities everyone is needed to bend the shoulder to the wheel...and everyone usually does.
- Members of small congregations know how to make spiritual the most humble meeting house.
- They understand that it is prayer and not architecture that makes a place holy.
- They affirm in practice the Talmudic teaching that

  "it is not the place that honors the person, but rather the
  person that honors the place."
- They understand the meaning of a "congregation" as a community of individuals,
  - each of whom can vitally enrich and enlarge the whole.

- This certainly is true and has always been true for Augusta's Congregation Children of Israel.
- All one need do, as did I, is to read Jack Steinberg's history of your synagogue.
- I was fascinated to read it...it's every line testifies

  to the earnestness with which you approached your sacred tasks,

  the enormous energy you and your forbears expended year in

  year out to keep your community alive

  the unyielding tenacity evinced by every generation

  to maintain Jewish life in this place.

But you did much more than that.

You created a meaningful program here,

And there was a continuous reaching out from this place to the larger community of which you are a part.

It began 150 years ago did it not, when one of your founders,

Samuel Levy, became the first Jew to be elected to public office.

Ever since that time, the leaders of this congregation were also among the leaders of the entire community.

You fought for this land.

You wore the gray uniforms of the confederacy with pride, and spilled the blood of your sons in its cause.

You fought for America in many a war for freedom:
World Wars I & II, the Korean conflict, Vietnam...

All in the effort to demonstrate your loyalty to this blessed land which has given us so much,

which has enabled us to stretch ourselves to the very limit of our abilities.

- You were also among the founders of our religious community, the pioneers of Reform Judaism in this land.
- You were the fourth to synagogue to join our union of congregations, the very first from the State of Georgia....
- Indeed, some of the earliest stirrings of the Reform movement emanated from this place.
- After all, your very first worship service 150 years ago
  was conducted not just in Hebrew, but in the vernacular. in English
- Thus it is altogether fitting and proper that I,

  as President of the Union of Anmerican Hebrew Congregations
  be here tonight to help you celebrate your sesquicnetennial.
- After all, the founding President of the Union,

  that masterbuilder of Reform Judaism in this land, Isaac M. Wise

  was here to lay the conrnerstone of your first House of Worship

  And Maurice Eisendrath, my predecessor,

helped you celebrate your Centennial.

- Now I am here to thank you, not just myself,

  but for that larger family of congregations of which you are

  so precious a part.
- When you were founded, we were but a small religious community a handful of congregations, several thousand families, scattered throughout the land.
- Today we are a mighty movement, nearly 900 temples strong

  a million and one half members men and women, young and old a vital, vibrant religious community

  whose strength ultimately derived from this very place.

150 years ago, then, this congregation was founded
 its physical and spiritual foundations laid.
150 years ago...

In the stillness of the night one can almost hear
the rushing of the waves of time,
their relentless pounding against eternity's shores.

150 years ago...

We can imagine how they felt, your fathers and your mothers the doubts that seized them the dreams that stirred them on.

Well, they conquered doubt and built and they built well, with wisdom and with strength and so did those who followed after them,

their children and their childrens children even unto this day.

These holy halls are their memorial

even as they are a tribute to those who continue their work. Blessed be their memory,

altogether blessed be the work of yourf hands.

But an anniversary is not just a time for the backward glance. It is a time, also, to look ahead.

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

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

These purposes are familiar to you.

Your rabbis have articulated them over the years.

and you have demonstrated your understanding of them.

The first of these ideals assuredly is the moral mandate.

It is a foremost task of the synagogue to remind us of those values which the world makes us forget.

- Within these sacred walls we must always be confronted with the ideal and summoned to measure ourselves against it.
- Its doors must always be open wide, so that those who require sanctuary will feel free to enter.
- Its windows must never be shut so tight that humanity's weeping will go unheard.
- Indeed, the Talmud prohibits us from praying in any room which has no windows,

lest qwe be oblivious to what is going on out there ion the world.

Our age does need the reminder of religion's moral mandate does it not? Consider our demeanor as a nation:

Here we are, the wealthiest country on earth,

yet thirty four million of fellow Americans

are living in debasing poverty,

fully one-sixth of all children,

nearly half of all African-American children

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

gives a damn for them.

Here we are, with medical technology and savvy that brings the ailing to our hospitals from all over the world yet fully one-third of our own peple are without medical insurance without the ability to receive care from the hospital and medical professionals of their choice.

Here we are, able to project military force to the farthest reaches of the globe

and yet we are unable to safeguard our own city streets.

We are only the 11th among the developed countries in per capita giving of foreign aid

-- and apart from military aid, we are dead last.

And then we look at those pictures from underdevloped lands which flash on our TV screens,

look with pity and despair on swollen bellies, and shrunken limbs, on hopeless poverty and senseless violence

-- look with pity and despair, rather than with a sense of deep personal responsibility and

t`shuva, with soul-felt repentance.

Yes, consider our demeanor as a nation.

And consider also, if you will, how we live in relation to the world, to this planet earth,

how we take God's handiwork and despoil it:
the sweet air He gave us to breathe
and the fresh water with which he blessed us
the fertile green which delights the eye.

- Instead of scknowledging and making proper use of all these gifts,
  we poison them
  "we tear apart the ozone
  we carbonize the oxygen
  we acidify the refreshing rain."
- And thus it is that the synagogue must continue to be a moral force in our personal and communal lives.
- It must consistently remind us of those values which the world makes us forget.
- For only if we emerge from this place as better human beings, as better people will our prayers have been answered.
- But there is a second great purpose for which this sanctuary was built.

  and it is really a counterpoint to the first.
- The synagogue is meant to be a communal home for the Jewish people, the source of our strength to live as Jews.
- Perhaps your forbears had this purpose primarily in mind when they named this place "the Children of Israel."
- Yes even from your beginnings you were conscious of this purpose.
- Recall, iof you will that just a few years after your founding,
  when your congregatrional resources were severly strained,
  you nonetheless sent the then munificent sum of \$25.00 to New York
  to help the poor of Palestine.

Helping fellow Jews a purpose which this synagogue must continue to fulfill, for while our state as a people is dramatically improved when compared what it was a half century ago, we are certainly not out of danger.

The security of Israel, will continue to preoccupy us for a long time to come.

The peace process has been a boon to the modern Jewish State, to be sure...

Its diplomatic isolation has been broken.

Since that reluctant Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House Lawn a year ago, over 22 nations have normalized their relations with Israel.

The Arab boycott has successfully been broken, de facto, if not de jure

There isn't a week that goes by Israeli and Arab leaders do not meet

in Cyprus, or London, or even in the Middle East itself

to make plans for common ventures.

Israel's economy, in consequence, is flourishing.

Still, the spoilers of the peace abound

They will continue to do everything in their power to interdict the peace process

-- including the slaughter of innocents..

But not just the safety of Israel will require our strength and support Jews in many places are still embattled.

From the Urals to the Ozarks the toxic waters of racism are rising ethno-centricism is running amok, and anti-Semitism remains the most common and virulent manifestation of that unreasoned hatred which finds so many expressions in our world.

Remnember what happened in Argentina but a months or two ago when a terrorist Bomb destroyed the Jewish Community Headquarters in Buenos Aires.

There were over a hundred victims in that attack,

never mind the valuable archival materials and records which were demolished.

Yes, the Jews of Argentina are afraid

I met with them in Mexico City some weeks ago.

They are afraid to go to synagogue

afraid to send their children to religious school

Even their non Jewish neighbors are apprehensive lest they inadvertently become terrorist targets because of their proximity to Jewish institutions.

But it's not just elsewhere...

Even here in the United States, only a week or so ago,

an FBI study disclosed that Jews are the most frequent victims
of crimes based on religious prejudice.

And so we will need the synagogue as a source of our continuing collective strength

But the synagogue must serve one more purpose still: It must evoke a sense of the sacred.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But there is a world of reality which cannot be perceived by the physical senses alone

It is an invisible world if you will, but its force is often more intense than is the force of the world that is seen.

Consider this world of the invisible, if you will.

Ideas, for example.

They are impalpable.

No one can see or seize them.

Yet ideas can seize us and they hold the power to transform our lives. Ideals too are of such a kind.

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

Take truth from a school and you reduce it to a rubble of red bricks.

Take religion from a sanctuary, and it becomes an ordinary auditorium.

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

Music is such invisible force, every form of art is that: dance, sculpture, painting, architecture,

-- "music in space." Schelling called them.

They may be discernible in outer form but not in their innermost essence The sources and nature of art are a mystery even to those who create it. Yet art has the power to heal us.

It can make the spirit soar,

for art <u>is</u> spirit from the realm of the unseen, conveyed by means of matter.

Ah, and then there is love which is also an invisible force.

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

But no one has ever seen love itself.

It certainly cannot be anatomized, or schematzied,

or reduced to clearly identifiable elements.

Yet how powerful a force love is!

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

Aye, there is a world of reality

beyond those worlds perceived by the physical sense alone.

And altogether multitudinous are life's gifts that have no practical worth but nonetheless are altogether wond'rous:

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

Oh, how flat, how narrow our world is,
when we measure its gifts by their usefulness alone,

when, in Rilke's happy simile

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

Then do the words of prophecy apply to us:

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

No, the human story simply cannot be told without reference to that mystery and majesty that transcends all logic and reason.

Only those who open themselves to such a mystery
can transcend the grandeur and terror of their lives
without being blinded by life's grandeur
or crushed by its terror.

Only when we open ourselves to such a mystery,
will we find our Judaism to be a sustaining faith and not a
dry-as-dust religion.

And it is precisely this kind of faith that we so desperately need.

for while routine religion suffices to sustain our lighter hours,

once life runs out into its dephths

why, then, we need a different faith.

When death takes those we love,
when our children slip through our arms,
when dread disease makes waste our strength,
when we think or even say
now I have reached the bottom of the morass
now I can sink no deeper...and yet we sink deeper

Why, then, we need a deeper faith.

Then we need the kind of faith that led the Psalmist to exclaim gami ki elech begey tsalmoves lo iro ro ki ato imodi
"Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou, Thou art with me."

These, then, are the purposes for which this sanctuary was built and whose pursuit alone justifies the effort to assure its survival. This synagogue must be a force for good in human life, a source of strength for the Jewish people.

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

Pursue these purposes, these dreams, this quest!

Then will the future of Congregation The Children of Israel be as glorious as was its past.

Then also will the celebrations of this anniversary year be not for present use nor for present delight alone, but they will be forever.

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

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

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

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

