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World Jewish Congress

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler



January 23, 1996  
Jerusalem, Israel



I am flattered to have been asked to share this platform with Rabbi Yehuda Amital and A.B. Yehoshua, the first a dauntless minister of state and the other a gifted author of world renown.

I am neither a scholar nor an artist, only a *proster yid* as it were, an ordinary Jew who seeks to do what he can, and to the best of his understanding to secure the creative continuity of the Jewish people.

Ahavat Yisrael is a *madrega* to which I aspire and that is why I am glad to be at these sessions of the World Jewish Congress where we can hear the music of Jewish life in its infinite variety and in all of its richness.

The tent of our Congress is overarching and all-embracing... And when we convene in Jerusalem we can hear not only all the voices of the present but also the voices of the past. For this is the land "where our people was born, where our prophets preached their imperishable message of justice and of truth and where our psalmists sang their deathless song of love for God and of God's love for us and all humanity."

Now Israel Singer, as is his wont, was not exactly precise in delineating my assignment. "The subject is Jewish Identity," he said, "say whatever you want." I suspect that 200 or more years ago, before the dawning of the Enlightenment, such a subject would not have been selected for public debate. For then being Jewish was an accepted state of being and not substantially a matter of individual choice. It was a condition, not an option.

But modernity has reversed that contrasting reality. It gives us the opportunity to opt in or out of the Jewish fold and thereby challenges us to define ourselves and to justify our struggling to survive.

This certainly is true on the North American scene with that wide and inviting openness of its society. It may also be true in Israel for, as the Shenhar report instructs us, an ever increasing number of Israeli teen-agers identify themselves as Israelis rather than as Jews. I, of course, define myself essentially as a Jew. The sense of our peoplehood is exceedingly strong within me. It is my core conviction, the mainspring of all my actions, the driving power of my life -- *ahavat yisrael*. A love for my fellow Jews which knows virtually no limits.

I strike a personal note here, for I have learned that our ideals inevitably are forged on the anvil of our lives. All beliefs have their history, their biography, if you will. This certainly is true for my core conviction, that *ahavat yisrael* to which I aspire, for you see, within my heart, within my identity, there live many different Jews.

There is the son of a Yiddish poet, the child of the Yiddish tongue. There is the German Jewish boy who studied in Munich's Orthodox day school but who also worshipped in that city's great Liberal Synagogue -- the first to be firebombed by the Nazis, months before *Kristallnacht*.

There is the refugee from that kind of Nazi terrorism who eventually joined the many Allied Jewish soldiers who helped demolish the Third Reich.

There is the child of the Old World who was pulled along by his father to catch a glimpse of Chaim Weizman on a mountain-walk of an Italian resort and, with an equal sense of excitement, to see Reb Arele, the Belzer Rebbe, presiding over his "table" at an Eastern European Spa.

There is the young man, barely Americanized, who accompanied his



father to Carnegie Hall to hear sermons preached by the great Stephen Wise and then down to the Lower East Side to meet Abraham Cahan, that firebrand socialist, anti-religious editor of the *Forverts*.

I am an American Jew, fully committed to nurturing our culture, our scholarship, our civilization in that golden land. But I am also a frequent flier to Israel, and a lover of that land where I was very nearly buried several years ago. The multi-colored coat that is my Jewish identity, as you can see, is not an emblem of pride or personal attainment. It is simply a product of the threads of my life experience, indeed, of the threads of recent Jewish history, a history of displacement and persecution and mutual dependence.

But whatever its source, this sense of the minyan-within-the self, the sense that I have of representing all Jews, is the force that defines my Jewishness and impels me ever to intensify our collective feeling of Jewish peoplehood.

I said that my love for Jews knows no limits. I had better qualify that boast, for I certainly have no truck with religious triumphalists though they call themselves Jews. I renounce those fanatics who presume to know with a certainty whose prayers are and are not acceptable to the *ribono shel olam*. And I certainly exclude from my Jewish embrace those religious extremists who, in Israel, as well as from within the safe haven of America's shores, still deify land over life and sanction the murder of peacemakers. What a perversion of Judaism, this! They defile our name!

But that does not mean that every Orthodox Jew is an extremist. Let's not demonize them, and hold all responsible for the lunacy of the few. Thus I am appalled by the recent wave of mindless discrimination assaulting Jews who wear *kipot* in the streets of

Tel Aviv or Brooklyn. My core feeling of at-one-ness continues to embrace Jews of every kind - and I hope that this sense of Jewish unity will persist among us. Though defining myself first and foremost as an *ohav yisrael*, as someone ardently enamored of the Jewish people, I recognize that Judaism is the very core of our collective being, that, in a very real sense, Judaism created the Jewish people not the other way around.

As Paul Johnson put it, in his perceptive analysis of our people's past:

"Jewish history is not only a record of physical facts, but also of metaphysical notions...Jews certainly believed themselves to have been created and commanded."

The Jewish people is a construct of memory and vision. Jews are the guardians of a tradition, the bearers of a message, the trustees of a mission. Our vast achievements are built upon that past. Without a continuing commitment to that tradition, without a dedication to its ethical and spiritual ideals Jews will eventually be indistinguishable from other peoples. Without a vibrant Judaism, that bond which binds us one to another and undergirds our sense of mutual responsibility will fray and ultimately dissolve. Without a thriving Judaism, Jews will simply disappear.

What are the elements necessary for such a vital Judaism? A serious and continuous study of our past and culture and of Judaism's classical texts surely is the first requirement. This matter applies not merely to Jews who live *chutz la-arets* but also to the home born, for Shenhar's probing three year inquiry found Jewish studies at secular schools to be bankrupt at a time when about three quarters of Israeli youth are enrolled there.



Observances too, in some form -- of Sabbaths and festivals and the life-cycle rites -- are another ingredient needed for a vital Judaism. For you see, to be a Jew in one's mind or heart is simply not enough. The pure idea can serve only a few rare individuals, theologians, philosophers, if you will. The truth -- to be felt by most of us - must put on a garb. There must be rite, legend, ceremony...visible form.

A vibrant Judaism also requires the understanding that the concept of *mitzva* is not limited to religious rite, that it encompasses the ethical deed as well. While it is true that *lo am ha-arets chassid*, that an ignorant Jew cannot be pious, it is equally true that not every learned Jew thereby leads an unblemished life. Judaism, in its mainstream, never yielded to the monastic impulse. Our teachers did not believe that holiness can be found in solitude or isolation alone. And so they insisted that while the quest for holiness may well begin with the self and within the self it must not end there. There is an equal if not greater need to turn outward to a broken world and to engage in the effort to repair it.

While Jewish ethical sensibility emerges from the soil of our tradition, it is universally applicable and regulates our conduct not just toward Jews but to all of human kind. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Baruch Goldsteins and the Yigal Amirs are the products of a more chauvinistic mindset which holds non Jewish life in somewhat lesser regard. They hold with the rabbinic dictum *kol ham'kayem nefesh achad m'yisrael v'gomer* and not with its revision *kol ham'kayem nefesh achad mibne adam ma-aleh alaf hakatuv k'ilu kiyam olam male.*"

They are the toxic harvest of an ideological extremism which absorbed the holocaust mentality into its world view, which insists that we live in an anti-Semitic world whose true intentions were unmasked at Auschwitz. "Everyone is against us,"

this ideology holds. All of non-Jewish humanity is divided into but two categories: those who actively try to destroy Jews and those who silently applaud these killers. And, in consequence, they are fair game, their lives are not inviolate. Nor are the lives of Jews who traffic with them.

How chauvinistic we were: The machine-gun fire of Baruch Goldstein in Hebron two years ago, and the applause and adulation with which this massacre was greeted in certain circles, failed to awaken us to the looming danger. We failed to grasp that whatever perverse mental process could prompt a person to view Muslim worshipers as deserving of slaughter would extend sooner or later to a Jewish peacemaker spattering his songsheet of peace with blood and swallowing his life into history.

And how naive we were, my friends: We disbelieved the capacity of demagoguery to translate into violence. We failed to understand that words are not wind, that they are but the shadow of deeds, that they can hold society together or incite a fanatic to slay.

As the Talmud Jerushalmi reminds us:

"those who speak in Syria can kill in Rome" (Peah 1:1) or, to update the metaphor, they rage in their academies and pistols spit their fatal fire in Tel Aviv.

As far as our Jewish educational endeavors in North America are concerned, let there be no doubt that our children find that above everything else the concept of Judaism as a pathway of action makes their Jewish identity plausible.

Two or three years ago, a Los Angeles Times nation wide survey of Jews asked:

"What is the key expression of your Jewish identity?"



17% said Israel...17% spoke of religious observances... and 50% of them said that they are attracted to Judaism principally because of Judaism's quest for justice. Repeated studies by Jewish sociologists confirm this finding.

How can it be otherwise...for being free to choose or not to choose Judaism in our era of voluntary Jewish identification they want to know just why they should choose to be Jews. And most of the other answers we give them apparently are not sufficiently persuasive.

We posit Judaism as an obligation, as a debt that has to be paid to the past: "Look at this stiff-necked people," we say, "and how generations struggled to survive...you must not be the one to break the chain of tradition...you owe it to the Jewish people to persevere."

Or we offer Judaism as an act of vengeance: "Look what happened in the shoah...the holocaust...we say, "The Jewish people was pulverized...six million of us turned into wisps of smoke and blackened ashes...you mustn't allow Hitler to have a posthumous victory..."

Then we invoke Israel and recall its near miraculous attainments in the face of almost constant peril and we insist that the new Jewish State requires a reservoir of Jews on which it can count for support. This argument too, along with the others, evokes but a meager response. Recall, if you will, that only 17% of America's young Jews see Israel as the key to their Jewish identity. Yes, we argue all this and more, but the only argument that carries the day with most of our youth is when we say: "We want you to be a Jew because we Jews have a special vocation and that is to pursue justice".

Leibel Fein, that wordsmith of enviable, extraordinary skill,

summarized these thoughts in never to be forgotten lines:

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

In sum then, we cannot, we dare not separate ethics, religious action, from Jewish education, for you see we teach our children Torah not only to know Torah, nor even to teach Torah, but this above all to BE Torah.

The Berditchever Rebbe taught:

"What does it amount to that they expound Torah!  
A man should see to it that all his actions are Torah  
and that he himself becomes so entirely Torah  
that one can learn from his habits and his motions,  
and even from his motionless clinging to God."

Which brings me full square to the final point I want to make, and that is the need for Jewish pluralism both in the diaspora communities as well as in the Jewish state.

You might expect such a note from a Reform rabbi but it is increasingly re-echoed by a more thoughtful leadership in this land. One of the main conclusions of the Shenhar report was that Jewish studies in general schools must become a way to develop options for a Jewish Israeli culture freed from Orthodox



limitations. And Donniel Hartman, an Orthodox rabbi, bemoaning the fact that last year 300 students at Hebrew University registered for Chinese studies whilst only one registered for Talmudic studies ascribed this oddity, this anomaly, to the fact that Orthodoxy constitutes the only legitimate Judaism in Israeli society.

Indeed, from its inception, the Shalom Hartman Institute has argued for a more relevant and pluralistic approach to Jewish studies. 300 students enrolled in Chinese studies at Hebrew University and one solitary student in Jewish studies! This statistic reveals a tragic truth: that the conscious exclusion of liberal Jewish alternatives -- and the increasing rightward shift of the ruling Orthodoxy -- is rendering Judaism into a museum piece, rarely visited and beyond the capacity of Israel's mainstream to own.

Sinai thus becomes an ancient myth, not a living landmark, in the lives of the majority. Jewish law becomes an oppressive authority rather than a path for righteous living in the lives of the majority. Faith becomes a burden from the past rather than a boon for the future in the lives of the majority.

"What is the example of a foolish religious person?" The Talmud Jerushalmi asks, and answers: "One who sees a child bobbing up and down in the river and says, 'Once I get my t'fillin off I will save him' -- by the time he removes his t'fillin, the child will have drowned"

My friends, Judaism is drowning in the Israeli mainstream, and only a plunge into the waters of religious pluralism will save it. But will not such a pluralistic approach to Judaism cause Jewish unity to fray, or even snap? The story of our people's past allays such fears. After all, disputations are hardly new to Jewish life. So much of the present-day foreboding is

predicated on the erroneous assumption that all was sweetness and light in the past that before the emergence of liberal Judaism harmony prevailed that there was then in that golden and peaceful past a universal ideological consensus uniting the Jewish world

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

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

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

Or recall more recent times when the *Chassidim* opposed the *Misnagdim*. Both opposed the *Maskilim*, who split into Zionists left and right, secular and religious, as well as Bundists. And in every age there were *Halachik* authorities who rejected one another.

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



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

Time and again through our long and stormy past we have seen the chasm stretch, in peaceful contemplation and violent conflict, over that most elusive definition of Jewishness: are we a religion? a people? a nation? do we constitute a national minority or perhaps a religious civilization? Without ever agreeing on one answer, we have nonetheless defined ourselves as one.

Moreover, we share a living history which is partner to the Torah in defining Jewish identity. In our own day, for instance, all but the most extreme forces of the right and left -- such as the Satmer Chassidim or the fading relics of the American Council for Judaism -- have adjusted their perspectives on Jewish life to admit to the influence of history.

And thus the struggle to secure the safety of Israel, or in behalf of embattled Jews, or against anti-Semitism, continues to unite us. Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews, yes even the very people who are most fierce in voicing their disagreements on the theological level, nonetheless stand shoulder to shoulder -- as brothers and sisters should -- when it comes to these and kindred issues. The fact remains that the evolving historical identity of the Jewish people will continue to grow, for Jewish history, like the Torah, belongs to no one single person or movement, but to all Jews, to all who share the destiny of this people Israel.

All this is not to minimize our differences, to discount those divergences of view which obtain between Orthodoxy and

non-Orthodoxy, in our day. These differences are real enough. They involve such pivotal issues as religious divorce and conversion and patrilineal descent. They cannot easily be resolved. Indeed, they are not likely ever to be resolved.

But if they cannot be resolved, we will simply have to live with them. And we can live with them as we have in the past, provided we accord each other mutual respect and refrain from questioning the integrity and intentions of those whose views we do not share.

The historic, passionate dialogue between the Houses of Hillel and Shammai provides us with a felicitous model of respectful Jewish conflict. Between these two schools a spirit of trust and respect prevailed. Each informed the other when practices contrary to the rulings of the other school were being enacted... And if, in all but three instances, the House of Hillel was entitled to have Jewish practice fixed in agreement with its rulings, that was due to the kindness and modesty of the House of Hillel. For the House of Hillel studied the arguments of its opponents and even mentioned the words of Shammai before its own."

It is in this spirit that I would have liked to discuss most briefly several recent Reform Jewish innovations -- such as Outreach and patrilineal descent -- which have been the cause of much misunderstanding between Orthodoxy and Reform. Alas, the time allotted for my formal remarks do not allow for it. Perhaps the question-and-answer period will permit me to do so.

Let me therefore end as I began with the assertion of our essential unity which has persisted and will continue to persist, please God, despite our divergences. We allowed for such a diversity even in times when we were endangered and embattled. Shall we not do so today when we are so very much more secure?



We have become a people who need not hunker down into conformity for survival's sake. We can afford to proliferate and to evolve. Indeed, we must, if we are to survive and grow in creative continuity.

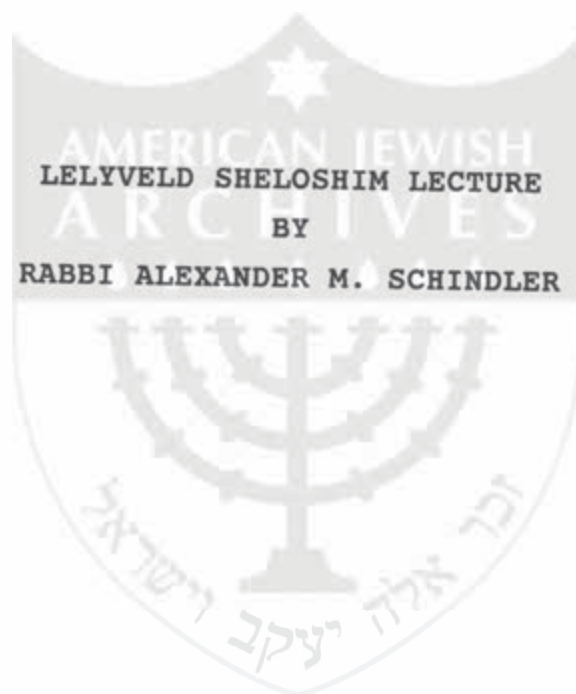
Let us therefore view those words which denote us in our many-splendored diversity -- words like Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, secular, Zionist and what not -- let us regard those qualifying words for what they really are: adjectives and not nouns. The noun is Jew. Woz mir zennen zennen mir...ober yiden zennen mir. Whatever we may be, we may be, but this above all, we are, we are Jews.

If nothing else, the memory of the *shoah* should impel us to do so.

It is a memory that weighs heavy upon us. It constitutes a lasting, impelling mandate for unity. Let us never forget that those who sought to destroy us made no distinctions between us. They killed us all, whatever our "qualifying adjective," yea even those who were accepted as Jews by non-Orthodox rabbis, or whose fathers were Jewish though their mothers were not. Even as we were brothers and sisters in death, so must we ever remain brothers and sisters in life.

#### The Death of Jewish secularism

I say the death of secularism rather than secularity intending not merely the absence of a religious orientation but the explicit rejection of religion and its replacement by a considered Jewish alternative focused on history and culture. There are today many non-religious or secular Jews; There are very few secularist Jews. By now, moreover, religion having become more casual and personal, people who might once have thought of themselves as secular may easily, if they are so inclined, regard themselves as religious.



Cleveland

May 15, 1996

25 Iyar 5756

It is with a heavy heart that I stand before you this day. Holy halls that usually reverberate with festive songs of praise, today they are filled with the plaintive strains of sorrow, for this sanctuary has lost a jewel of its crown. Its very soul has been lacerated. Its heart aches with an unspeakable pain.

Unhappily, I was unable to be here a month ago when Arthur was laid to rest and final words of farewell were spoken. But I grieved along with you, as did so many others in our far-flung family of congregations. Certainly Arthur's influence extended far beyond these holy halls or even your wider community. No aspect of our doing, regionally or nationally, was untouched by his creative genius. He spoke at our conventions. He labored on countless committees and commissions. He served in our highest leadership councils. Indeed, he led our Youth movement in its formative years, and NFTY remains the jewel of our programmatic crown. And whatever he undertook to do, he did with all his might, ever offering those rich gifts of mind and spirit with which he was so amply endowed.

Arthur Lelyveld was a great teacher and preacher, a man of the strongest conviction and of uncommon courage. He never merely taught as books enable. He was what he wanted others to be. None of us who saw it will ever be able to erase from our mind's eye that blood spattered face of his, as it was pictured on the front pages of the nation's press, those savage gashes he sustained while marching for the freedom of blacks in Mississippi. No, Arthur did not just preach social justice, he practiced it. He did not just limn in words his vision of a better world. He resolutely went about the task of shaping that world, a better world, a world that is decent and good and pure.



Now David Gelfand wisely counseled me not to eulogize Arthur tonight, but rather to speak on a theme reflective of his ideals, to express concerns to which he would give voice could lips now silent speak. The subject on which I determined is of such a nature, for religious extremism, as it manifests itself both here and in Israel, surely evoked his intense concern and would have stirred his passionate response.

This is a matter which vexes us greatly, all of us who are concerned about the security of Israel and our fellow Jews who live there. Indeed, Rhea and I recently returned from Jerusalem, - - we were there twice since the beginning of the calendar years - - and the events transpiring there were harrowing and still sear our souls. Rockets raining on Northern Galilee . . . Israel's harsh response . . . and before that, those savage suicide bombings, ignited by the clerics of Hamass, that came in such abrupt succession and claimed too heavy a toll. Among the massacred, as you will recall, were those two very special young American Jews who were engaged to be married and who now lie buried next to one another in a Connecticut cemetery.

Terrorism is the single most dreadful weapon of the present day diplomacy. And I am most admiring of the friends and parents of these two victims and of many others in Israel as well who insist in the name and spirit of those who were killed, that the peace process continue, that the Israelis persist in the quest for it, undeterred by this new wave of devastation. That takes guts, does it not: to be deaf to the call for blood . . . to refuse to be led by rage when we most want to be . . . to insist that every time a bomb goes off, yes, and every time a baby is killed, and every other filthy thing that makes you sick with fury, nonetheless stubbornly continuing to say NO to blood.



In Israel, and understandably enough because more than 100 Israelis have been killed since Oslo I was signed two and a half years ago, opinion is sharply divided. There are those who are steadfast in the determination to resist terrorism and its central present aim to scuttle the peace. They remember that terrorism has been endemic to the Arab Israeli conflict with or without the peace process. Indeed, in the years between the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973, a time of heady confidence and security, over 2000 Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks and military raids. They also remember the fearsome price of death and destruction during the more recent years of the intifadah. And so they insist that their leaders refuse to give the terrorists precisely what they want by halting the peace process.

Other Israelis, of course, are of a different mind. They do not trust the Palestinians. They do not deem Arafat a reliable partner in the quest for peaceful coexistence. And so they want the peace process to be aborted forthwith if not reversed, with an immediate return to the status quo ante.

The view of the latter, those Israeli spoilers of the peace, are fueled and fired by a Jewish religious extremism, which is a mirror image of the Moslem variety. Think of the Baruch Goldsteins and the Yigal Amirs and the adulation with which their bloody deeds were accorded in some quarters. They are the toxic harvest of an ideology which has absorbed the holocaust mentality into its world view, which insists that we live in an anti-Semitic world whose true intentions were unmasked at Auschwitz. "Everyone is against us," this ideology holds. All of non-Jewish humanity is divided into but two categories: those who actively try to destroy Jews and those who silently applaud these killers. Let Jews take care of Jews, then, and forget about everyone else!

Now, Reform Judaism has never absorbed such a Weltanschauung. Quite the contrary. We reject Jewish separatism. We refuse to see ourselves as a permanently ghettoized people. We repudiate the notion that we have no friends in the world. We find them everywhere about us and are determined to forge alliances with them.

This is the Philosophy - - this ethical optimism of ours - - that has consistently defined our collective positions on issues of land, peace, occupation, and the appropriate use of military power as far as the modern Jewish state is concerned. A land whose bloody paths trace back to the barbed wire fences of Auschwitz, we have long argued, should not erect barbed wire boundaries of its own - - neither through the domination of two million Palestinians, nor through the hurling of barbed wire hatreds, Jew against Jew. Barbed wire as a military necessity, yes. Barbed wire as a security measure, of course. But barbed wire as a Jewish state of mind? That is inadmissible for it can yield only isolation and atrocity.

This is the conclusion which Yitzchak Rabin eventually reached - - Rabin the warrior, Rabin the unifier of Jerusalem - - when he declared peacemaking as the only alternative for Israel. For it was through raw experience, not sentiment, that Rabin had reached his conclusion. Guns against stones, bombs against homes, soldiers and civilians slaughtering one another - Rabin had witnessed it all, swallowing his revulsion in the name of necessity - until he realized that the necessity of the hour had not been served, for the necessity of the hour was peace.

Thus did the Prime Minister join the ranks - those pathetically thin ranks - of world leaders who truly convert swords into plowshares. Over and over the old warrior assured us: there is no other way. He knew the map, had scoured every corner of it. He could say with a certainty that while the road ahead is full



of fearsome dangers, the road back leads only to chaos, chaos of this terrorist variety which spattered his song sheet of peace with blood and swallowed his life into history.

Israel's momentum for peace, in my judgment, is irreversible. Indeed, its harvest is already ripening on the vine. Fifty-eight countries have established or renewed relations with Israel since the Oslo agreement was signed, including Jordan, with the longest joint border with Israel, and Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population in the world, and China and India, which together account for half of humanity. And think of the recent summit on terrorism held in Sharm el Sheikh. Over 27 Heads of State or Foreign Ministers participated including a swath of representatives from Arab States. That would have been unthinkable before Oslo I. The Vatican and Israel have exchanged emissaries and at the UN, Israel is a respected state and no longer a pariah, dramatically reviving Israel's economy. The remnant of Syria's ancient Jewish community has been freed. Military security has been heightened through multilateral talks with the Arab world.

In a word, the Arab-Israeli peace process, flawed and embryonic as it is, has normalized Israel's relations with the rest of the world, even as peace building policies are spawning bullish economics. These are facts that no assassin's bullet or terrorist bombs can undo.

Religious extremism, of course is not limited to Jews or Moslems. It has its counterpart in virtually every other faith. Nor is it limited to the Middle East. Indeed, en route to Israel, Rhea and I stopped in London for a week and while we were there two bombs exploded, one of them also on a bus, claiming a score of victims. Yes, terrorism, stoked by religious fanaticism, is ascendant throughout the world, and alas, it finds its counterpart even on these blessed shores where it is manifest in the garb of the radical Christian right.

The rhetorical violence of this now politically influential group is nigh to deafening. 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 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.

Marginally noted, Arthur Lelyveld, during his years as the head of the National Hillel Foundations, was victimized by the real McCarthy and his minions but fought back tenaciously and in the end prevailed.

Be that as it may, the rhetorical rantings of the present day religious right 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.

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 Reverend Kennedy opined:

"The People of the American Way are idiots . . . They always speak of tolerance. . . Tolerance of what? All of these people have their own churches where they preach their ungodly immoral vision . . . tolerance is the last virtue of an immoral society . . . "

Several years ago, in Fort Lauderdale's Presbyterian Church, then Vice President, Dan Quayle, joined 2000 of Kennedy's followers and facing a flag with a cross on it they recited in unison:

"I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag  
and to the Savors for whose Kingdom it stands . . .  
One Savior, crucified, risen and coming again, with  
life and liberty for all who believe . . . "

And the Reverend Pat Robertson has been known to say this:

The Constitution of the United States is a marvelous instrument for self-government by Christian people. But the minute you turn it into the hands of non Christian people . . . they can use it to destroy the very foundations of our society."

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

Maybe we Jews are being overly sensitive, after all that self-same Pat Robertson also declared equality for women to be:

"a feminist agenda that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians."

(What, no cannibalism?)



Overly 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? And what shall we make of the not so veiled racism and anti-Semitism of a Pat Buchanan? And what about the "Christian Identity Theory" affirmed by those militant anti-government Freemen of Montana, which holds that God created white gentiles as a superior race "descended directly from Adam and Eve, but that Jews descended from a sexual union between Eve and Satan?"

All of these happenings and more 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.

When it speaks with its vituperative rage, America's Christian right translates policy debate into a holy war. It denies the common interests and the common humanity of the whole community. It is a primal act of idolatry. It is monster making. The one who does so, as the Jerusalem Talmud tells us, "stands in Syria and kills in Rome" (Peah 1:1) -- or, to update the metaphor, they stand in the pulpit and kill in Oklahoma City even as pistols spit their fatal fire in Tel Aviv.

Now how are we American Jews to react to all these rantings? Too many among us, alas, are infected with the separatist virus. Re-echoing the sentiments of Israel's radical right, they say: "We are surrounded by enemies, so what's the use . . . let's dig in our own garden . . . let's go it alone . . . no one else will fend for us."

But this simply is not so. We Jews never achieved our freedoms alone. We broke out of the ghetto walls only because many other enlightened forces in Europe amplified and fought to realize our demands for equal status. We would not have achieved the high state we presently enjoy here in this land were it not for the Bill of Rights, which was neither crafted nor realized by Jews. And the State of Israel would not have been established had not a majority of the world's people recognized the moral rightness of our cause.

Separatism is bad for Jews. We need friends to prevail. This, at any rate, is the clarion call of Reform Judaism which ever bids us forge coalitions of decency with men and women of good will and they abound in our land and in the world.

Remember, just as one case in point, what happened in Billings, Montana two years ago. Yes the self same state where the Freemen are now ensconced. It was during the Christmas-Hanukkah season when the small Reform congregation, the only synagogue of that city was defaced, smeared with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans. The townspeople rose in defense of its tiny Jewish community. Not only did they help the Jews of Billings cleanse and rededicate their house of worship, come Hanukkah night, tens of thousands of Christian men and women kindled Hanukkah Menorahs and placed them on their window sills of their homes for all to see and to let those skin heads of America's northwest know that the citizenry of Billings would not suffer their spewing of hatred and wanton acts of vandalism.

Yes, we have many friends, and we will need them. Statistics tell us that soon we may be less than 2% of the population. Yet we have battles to wage - - on behalf of Israel, and embattled Jews, and the separation of church and state - - and to win these battles we need allies. But we will not gain and retain our allies if we continue to look out only for ourselves.

The Chassidic master, Moshe Leb Sassover taught:

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

If we do not feel the pain of others, they will not feel our pain. If we stand aloof from their causes and concerns, we can scarcely expect them to stand at our side and we will not survive without the help of others.

But far more important than this consideration of an enlightened self-interest, is the awareness of our solemn duty as Jews to care not just for our fellow Jews, but for all of human kind.

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

We Jews are not just another ethnic group or another pressure bloc. Our survival in the past has been for a higher purpose, and our survival must continue to have meaning today.

Al Vorspan once cleverly and movingly wrote:

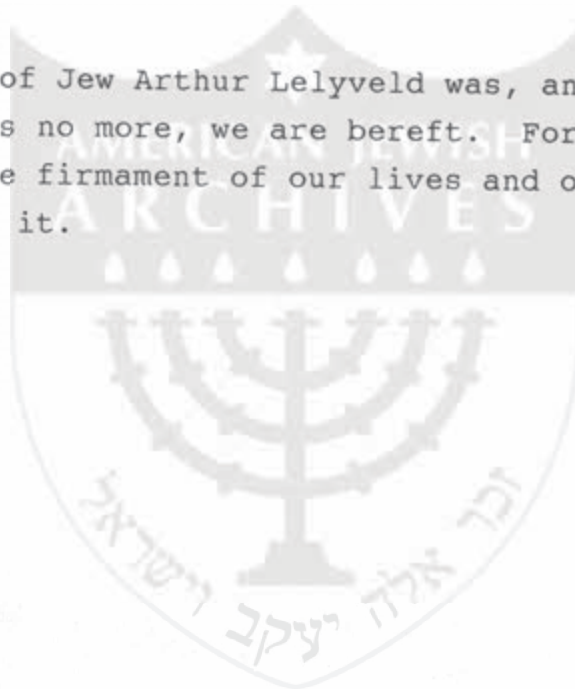
"If, in order to survive I must become a bald-headed Meir Kahane. . . If in order to survive I must kiss the world good-bye and separate myself from humankind . . . If I must emulate the violence, the callousness, the bigotry and narrowness of my opponents. . . then survival is not worth the candle for me."

He is absolutely right, and this, in essence, is the Reform



Jewish response to religious extremism of whatever kind. For we believe with full faith that to be a Jew is to be something more than a survived endangered species. To be a Jew is to be a goad to the conscience of humankind, to bear a heart of flesh and blood and not of stone. To be a Jew means to weep where there are tears and suffering. To be a Jew is to be part of the civilizing and humanizing force of the universe. To be a Jew is to defy despair though the Messiah tarry. To be a Jew, as God told Abraham thousands of years ago, is to be part of a great and enduring people, YES, but also to be a blessing to all human kind.

This is the kind of Jew Arthur Lelyveld was, and because he was what he was and is no more, we are bereft. For truly a star has been torn from the firmament of our lives and our lives are the darker because of it.



#5

R  
Lelyveld Sheloshim ~~Lesson~~  
Cleveland, May 15, 1996  
~~LESSON~~  
A.M. SCIT

R

It is with a heavy heart that I stand before you this day.  
Holy halls that usually reverberate with festive songs of praise,  
today they are filled with the plaintive strains of sorrow,  
for this sanctuary has lost a jewel of its crown.  
Its very soul has been lacerated.  
Its heart aches with an unspeakable pain

R

Unhappily, I was unable be here a month ago  
when Arthur was laid to rest  
and final words of farewell were spoken.  
But I grieved along with you, as did so many others in our  
far-flung family of congregations.  
~~IN THE TIME OF GRIEF ONLY COMFORT TO FEEL~~  
~~For you see,~~ Arthur's influence extended far beyond these holy halls  
~~CERTAINLY.~~  
or even your wider community.

No aspect of our doing, regionally or nationally,  
was untouched by his creative genius.

He spoke at our conventions.

He labored on countless committees and commissions.

He served in our highest leadership councils.

~~INDEED, HE LED OUR MOVEMENT SINCE ITS FORMATIVE YEARS - REMAINS~~  
And whatever he undertook to do, he did with all his might, ~~THE JEWEL~~  
ever offering those rich gifts of mind and spirit  
with which he was so amply endowed. ~~OF OUR~~  
~~PROBATIONAL~~  
~~CROWN~~  
~~CROWN~~

R

Arthur Lelyveld was a great teacher and preacher,  
a man of the strongest convictions and of uncommon courage.  
He never merely taught as books enable.

He was what he wanted others to be.

None of us who saw it will ever be able to erase from our mind's  
eye that blood spattered face of his,

as it was pictured on the front pages of the nation's press  
those savage gashes he sustained

while marching for the freedom of blacks in Mississippi

No, Arthur did not just preach social justice, he practiced it.

He did not just limn in words his vision of a better world.

He resolutely went about the task of shaping that world, a better world,  
a world that is decent and good and pure.

P Now David Gelfand wisely counseled me not to eulogize Arthur tonight,  
but rather to speak on a theme reflective of his ideals  
to express concerns to which he would give voice  
could lips now silent speak.

The subject on which I determined is of such a nature, for religious  
extremism as it manifests itself both here and in Israel  
surely evoked his intense concern  
and would have stirred his passionate response.

P This is a matter which vexes us greatly,  
all of us who are concerned about the security of Israel  
and our fellow Jews who live there.

Indeed, Rhea and I recently returned from Jerusalem,

- -we were there twice since the beginning of the calendar years --  
and the events transpiring there were harrowing  
and still sear our souls.

L



Rockets raining on Northern Gail...Israel's harsh response...

and before that those savage suicide bombings,

ignited by the clerics of Hams,

that came in such abrupt succession and claimed too heavy a toll.

Among the massacred, as you will recall,

were those two very special young American Jews

who were engaged to be married and who now lie buried

next to one another in a Connecticut cemetery.

P Terrorism is the single most dreadful weapon of present day diplomacy.

And I am most admiring of the friends and parents of these two victims

and of many others in Israel as well

who insist in the name and spirit of those who were killed

that the peace process continue,

that the Israelis persist in the quest for it,

undeterred by this new wave of devastation.

That takes guts, does it not: to be deaf to the call for blood...

to refuse to be led by rage when we most want to be...

to insist that every time a bomb goes off, yes,

and every time a baby is killed, and every other filthy thing that  
makes you sick with fury,

nonetheless stubbornly continuing to say NO to blood...

P In Israel, and understandably enough, because more than 100 Israelis

have been killed since Oslo I was signed two and a half years ago,

opinion is sharply divided.

There are those who are steadfast in their determination to resist

terrorism and its central present aim to scuttle the peace.

They remember that terrorism has been endemic to the Arab Israeli conflict with or without the peace process.

Indeed, in the years between the Six-Day War in 1967

and the Yom Kippur War in 1973 -- a time of heady confidence and security -- over 2000 Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks and military raids.

They also remember the fearsome price of death and destruction during the more recent years of the intifadah.

And so they insist that their leaders refuse to give the terrorists precisely what they want by halting the peace process.

Other Israelis, of course, are of a different mind.

They do not trust the Palestinians.

They do not deem Arafat a reliable partner in the quest for peaceful coexistence.

And so they want the peace process to be aborted forthwith if not reversed, with an immediate return to the status quo ante.

The view of the latter, those Israeli spoilers of the peace, are fueled and fired by a Jewish religious extremism, which is a mirror image the Moslem variety...

Think of the Baruch Goldsteins and the Yigal Amirs and the adulation with which their bloody deeds were accorded in some quarters.

They are the toxic harvest of an ideology which has absorbed the holocaust mentality into its world view, which insists that we live in an anti-Semitic world whose true intentions were unmasked at Auschwitz.

"Everyone is against us," this ideology holds.

All of non-Jewish humanity is divided into but two categories:

those who actively try to destroy Jews

and those who silently applaud these killers.

Let Jews take care of Jews, then, and forget about everyone else!

*P* Now, Reform Judaism has never absorbed such a Weltanschauung.  
Quite the contrary.

We reject Jewish separatism.

We refuse to see ourselves as a permanently ghettoized people.

We repudiate the notion that we have no friends in the world.

We find them everywhere about us

and are determined to forge alliances with them.

*P* This is the philosophy -- this ethical optimism of ours --  
that has consistently defined our collective positions  
on issues of land, peace, occupation,  
and the appropriate use of military power  
as far as the modern Jewish state is concerned.

A land whose bloody paths trace back to the barbed-wire fences  
of Auschwitz, we have long argued,

should not erect barbed-wire boundaries of its own

-- neither through the domination of two million Palestinians,

nor through the hurling of barbed-wire hatreds, Jew against Jew

*P* Barbed wire as a military necessity, yes.

Barbed wire as a security measure, of course.

But barbed wire as a Jewish state of mind?

That is inadmissible, for it can yield only isolation and atrocity.



P This is the conclusion which Yitzchak Rabin eventually reached  
-- Rabin the warrior, Rabin the unifier of Jerusalem --  
when he declared peacemaking as the only alternative for Israel  
For it was through raw experience, not sentiment,  
that Rabin had reached his conclusion.

Guns against stones, bombs against homes, soldiers and civilians  
slaughtering one another -- Rabin had witnessed it all,  
swallowing his revulsion in the name of necessity --  
until he realized that the necessity of the hour had not been  
served, for the necessity of the hour was peace.

P Thus did the Prime Minister join the ranks  
-- those pathetically thin ranks -  
of world leaders who truly convert swords into plowshares.  
Over and over the old warrior assured us: There is no other way.  
He knew the map, had scoured every corner of it.  
He could say with a certainty that while the road ahead is full of  
fearsome dangers, the road back leads only to chaos,  
chaos of this terrorist variety which spattered his song sheet of  
peace with blood and swallowed his life into history.

P Israel's momentum for peace, in my judgment, is irreversible.  
Indeed, its harvest is already ripening on the vine.  
Fifty-eight countries have established or renewed relations with Israel  
since the Oslo agreement was signed,  
including Jordan, with the longest joint border with Israel  
and Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population in the world,  
and China and India, which together account for half of humanity.

<sup>And</sup>  
~~Just~~ think of the recent summit on terrorism held in Sharm el Sheich...  
Over 27 heads of State of Foreign Ministers participated  
including a swath of representatives from Arab States...

that would have been unthinkable before Oslo 1.

The Vatican and Israel have exchanged emissaries, <sup>225</sup>

(and at the UN) Israel is a respected state and no longer a pariah.

At the same time, the Arab boycott has collapsed

dramatically reviving Israel's economy.

The remnant of Syria's ancient Jewish community has been freed.

Military security has been heightened through multilateral talks  
with the Arab world.

<sup>R</sup> In a word, the Arab-Israeli peace process, flawed and embryonic as it  
is, has normalized Israel's relations with the rest of the world,  
even as peace-building policies are spawning bullish economics.

These are facts that no assassin's bullet or terrorist bombs can undo.

[To be sure now, and this point requires emphasis, the supporters of the  
peace process, and I count myself among them, have been entirely  
too indulgent with Arafat and the Palestinian Authority.

The President of the incipient Palestinian State cannot have it 2 ways.

He cannot denounce terrorism one day, and the next eulogize the slain

Hamas bomb maker, Ayyash the Engineer,

as a martyr of the Palestinian cause.

He cannot loudly arrests militants in the morning

and then quietly release them in the afternoon.

He cannot denounce violence in speeches to the West

while lauding Jihad, Holy War for domestic consumption.

He must meet his responsibilities and keep his promises



For if he fails to do so, the compelling logic undergirding the peace process will have been shattered.]

\* \* \*

Religious extremism, of course is not limited to Jews or Moslems.

It has its counterpart in virtually every other faith.

Nor is it limited to the Middle East.

Indeed, en route to Israel, Rhea and I stopped in London for a week and while we were there two bombs exploded,

one of them also on a bus, claiming a score of victims.

Yes, terrorism, stoked by religious fanaticism,

is ascendant throughout the world,

and, alas, it finds its counterpart even on these blessed shores where it is manifest in the garb of the radical Christian right.

The rhetorical violence of this now politically influential group is nigh to deafening.

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 insists 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.

RP Marginally noted, Arthur Lellyveld, during his years as the head of the National Hillel Foundation, was victimized by the the real McCarthy and his minions but fought back tenaciously and in the end prevailed.

1P Be that as it may, the rhetorical rantings of the present-day religious right 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.

1P 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."

1P And the Reverend Kennedy opined:

"The People of the American Way are idiots...They always speak of tolerance...Tolerance of what? All of these people have their own churches where they preach their ungodly immoral vision... tolerance is the last virtue of an immoral society..."

1P Several years ago, in Fort Lauderdale's Presbyterian Church the Vice President Dan Quayle joined 2000 of Kennedy's followers and facing a flag with a cross on it they recited in unison:

"I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag  
and to the Saviors for whose Kingdom it stands...  
One Savior, crucified, risen and coming again,  
with life and liberty for all who believe..."

P 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."

P My friends, there are hundreds of religious traditions  
that coexist in wondrous harmony in this land.

When you call this a Christian nation,  
you deny the validity of these other traditions and you suggest to  
the adherents of those varying faiths  
that they are really not welcome here.

P Maybe we Jews are being overly sensitive, after all that self-same

Pat Robertson also declared equality for women to be

"a feminist agenda that encourages women to leave their husbands  
kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism,  
and become lesbians."

[What, no cannibalism?]

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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  
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And what shall we make of the not so veiled racism and anti-Semitism  
of a Pat Buchanan?



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-- or, to update the metaphor, they stand in the pulpit and kill in Oklahoma City even as pistols spit their fatal fire in Tel Aviv.

P Now And how are we American Jews to react to all these rantings?

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yes the self-same state where the Freeman are now in ensconced.

It was during the Christmas-Hanukkah season when the small Reform congregation, the only synagogue of that city was defaced, smeared with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans.

The townspeople rose in defense of its tiny Jewish community.

Not only did they help the Jews of Billings cleanse and rededicate their house of worship.



Come Chanukah night, tens of thousands of Christian men and women  
kindled Hanukkah Menorahs and placed them on their window sills  
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to care not just for our fellow Jews, but for all of human kind.



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P Al Vorspan once cleverly and movingly wrote:

"If, in order to survive I must become a bald-headed Meir Kahane... If in order to survive I must kiss the world good-bye and separate myself from humankind... If I must emulate the violence, the callousness the bigotry and narrowness of my opponents... then survival is not worth the candle for me."

He is absolutely right...and this, in essence, is the Reform Jewish response to religious extremism of whatever kind. For we believe with full faith that to be a Jew is to be something more than a survived endangered species. To be a Jew is to be a goad to the conscience of humankind, to bear a heart of flesh and blood and not of stone... To be a Jew means to weep where there are tears and suffering. To be a Jew is to be part of the civilizing and humanizing force of the universe... To be a Jew is to defy despair though the Messiah tarry... To be a Jew, as God told Abraham thousands of years ago, is to be part of a great and enduring people, YES, but also to be a blessing to all human kind.

This, <sup>KIND OF JEW</sup> ~~at any rate,~~ is the <sup>WAS</sup> ~~conception of Jewishness~~ which Arthur Lellyveld ~~preached and lived~~ <sup>FOLLOW HIS WAY</sup> and ~~if we reach for it,~~ <sup>AND BECAUSE HE WAS WHAT HE WAS</sup> ~~and is no more we need are blessed~~ — <sup>his memory will be for blessing.</sup> FOR TRULY A STAR HAS BEEN TORN FROM THE FIRMAMENT OF OUR LIVES + OUR LIVES ARE THE DARKER BECAUSE OF IT!

Address by

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER



Temple Beth Israel  
Longboat Key, Florida

January 12, 1996

One of the reasons why I am here is to bolster Jay Rudolph's endeavor to enlarge the Endowment Fund of the Congregation and thereby to help secure its future. This is a joint effort which the Union encourages. Indeed, we have established various instrumentalities, such as pooled income funds and annuity programs, which facilitate this undertaking, all on the presumption, the recognition that the strength of our national movement derives directly from the strength of each of its member congregations. I hope that you will be supportive of this effort. We American Jews are a generous lot. We provide an extraordinarily generous stream of funds to Israel and to communal agencies, as we properly should; the saving of life must be our first concern. But little or no priority is assigned to the needs of the synagogue.

Yet who is responsible for teaching our children to be Jews? The synagogue - - our financially pressed, over-burdened, short-staffed synagogues! Who will assure that there will be a Jewishly educated, Jewishly committed generation twenty years from now? Who will provide the teachers and the rabbis and the scholars for that generation? Who will assure those many other communal and national Jewish organizations a reservoir of Jews on which they will be able to draw for their membership a score years hence? Who will provide the State of Israel with a continuing corps of understanding Jews? The answer in every case, of course, is the synagogue. It has to be the synagogue - - the synagogue and those camps and seminaries and multitudinous educational efforts that they sustain. The synagogue is where Jews are made, where the individual soul and the community are joined. It is the place where modernity and eternity cross fertilize, where the seeds of Jewish identity are sown. All other institutions in Jewish life are created by Jews. Only the synagogue creates Jews - - child by child, family by family,



minyan by minyan. Let us therefore do everything possible to ensure the permanence and central status of the Reform synagogue in Jewish life, so that we can continue to be the guarantor of Jewish well-being and the inspiriting force of Jewish spirituality into the 21st Century.

Now let me turn to the major theme of my presentation: the "Reform Response to Religious Extremism." It is a subject made poignantly relevant by the assassination of Yitzchak Rabin, Israel's Prime Minister. The events of November 4th still sear our soul, do they not? How naive we were, my friends. We disbelieved the capacity of demagoguery to translate into violence. We disbelieved the ability of Jewish fundamentalists to act out their barbed wire faith system with the same inhuman obsession as Islamic suicide bombers. Perhaps we were even chauvinistic. The machine gun fire of Baruch Goldstein in Hebron two years ago, and the applause and adulation with which this massacre was greeted in certain circles, failed to awaken us to the looming danger. We failed to grasp that whatever perverse mental process could prompt a person to view Muslim worshipers as deserving of slaughter would extend sooner or later to Jewish peacemakers. Let there be no doubt about it. Both Dr. Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir are the toxic harvest of Jewish religious extremism which absorbed the holocaust mentality into its world view which insists that we live in an anti-Semitic world whose true intentions were unmasked at Auschwitz. "Everyone is against us," this ideology holds. All of non-Jewish humanity is divided into but two categories: those who actively try to destroy Jews, and those who silently applaud these killers.

Reform Judaism has never absorbed such a Weltanschauung. Quite the contrary, we reject Jewish separatism. We refuse to see ourselves as a permanently ghettoized people. We repudiate the notion that we have no friends in the world. We find them

everywhere about us and are determined to forge alliances with them. This is the philosophy - - this ethical optimism of ours that has consistently defined our collective positions on issues of land, peace, occupation and the appropriate use of military power as far as the modern Jewish state is concerned. A land whose bloody paths trace back to the barbed wire fences of Auschwitz, we have long argued, should not erect barbed wire hatreds, Jew against Jew. Barbed wire as a military necessity, yes. Barbed wire as a security measure, of course. But barbed wire as a Jewish state of mind? That is inadmissible, for it can yield only isolation and atrocity.

This is the conclusion which Yitzchak Rabin eventually reached - - Rabin the warrior, Rabin the unifier of Jerusalem - - when he declared peacemaking as the only alternative for Israel. For it was through raw experience, not sentiment, that Rabin had reached his conclusion. Guns against stones, bombs against homes, soldiers and civilians slaughtering one another; Rabin had witnessed it all. Swallowing his revulsion in the name of necessity, until he realized that the necessity of the hour had not been served, for the necessity of the hour was peace. Thus, did the Prime Minister join the ranks - - those pathetically thin ranks of world leaders who truly convert swords into plowshares. Over and over, the old warrior assured us; there is no other way. He knew the map, had scoured every corner of it. He could say with a certainty that while the road ahead is full of fearsome dangers, the road back leads only to chaos - - chaos of this terrorist variety which spattered his songsheet of peace with blood and swallowed his life into history.

Israel's momentum for peace is irreversible. Indeed, its harvest is already ripening on the vine. Fifty-eight countries have established or renewed relations with Israel since the Oslo agreement was signed, including Jordan, with the longest joint border with Israel; Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population



in the world, and China and India, which together account for half of humanity. At the U.N. Israel is a respected state and no longer a pariah. At the same time, the Arab boycott has collapsed, dramatically reviving Israel's economy. The remnant of Syria's ancient Jewish community has been freed to emigrate. Military security has been heightened through multilateral talks with the Arab world. In a word, the Arab-Israeli peace process, flawed and embryonic as it is, has normalized Israel's relations with the rest of the world, even as peace building policies are spawning bullish economics. These are realities that no assassin's bullets can undo. Religious extremism, of course, is not limited to Jews. It has its counterpart in virtually every other faith. Nor is it limited to the Middle East. It is ascendant throughout the world and finds its counterpart even on these shores. Here it is manifest in the garb of the radical Christian right. The rhetorical violence of this now politically influential group is nigh to deafening. 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." Those who insist on equal rights for homosexuals are called "perverts." 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 marketplace 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.

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 Reverend Kennedy opine:

"The People for the American Way are idiots . . . They always speak of tolerance. Tolerance of what? All of these people have their own churches where they preach their ungodly immoral vision. . . tolerance is the last virtue of an immoral society."

Several years ago, in Fort Lauderdale's Presbyterian Church, the Vice President, Dan Quayle, joined 2000 of Kennedy's followers and facing a flag with a cross on it, they recited in unison:

"I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag  
and to the Saviors for whose Kingdom it stands  
One Savior, crucified, risen and coming again,  
with life and liberty for all who believe . . ."

And the Rev. Pat Robertson has been known to say this:

"The Constitution of the United States is a marvelous instrument for self-government by Christian people. But the minute you turn it into the hands of non-Christian people, they can use it to destroy the very foundations of our society."

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

Maybe we Jews are being overly sensitive. After all, that self-same Pat Robertson also declared equality for women to be

"a feminist agenda that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians." (What, no cannibalism?)

Overly 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 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. When it speaks with its vituperative rage, America's Christian right translates policy debate into a holy war. It denies the common interests and the common humanity of the whole community. It is primal act of idolatry. It is monster making. The one who does so, as the Jerusalem Talmud tells us, "stands in Syria and kills in Rome." (Peah 1:1) Or, to update the metaphor, they stand in the pulpit and kill in Oklahoma City, even as pistols spit their fatal fire in Tel Aviv.

How are we American Jews to react to all these rantings? Too many among us, alas, are infected with the separatist virus. Re-echoing the sentiments of Israel's radical right, they say: "We are surrounded by enemies, so what's the use. Let's dig in our own garden. Let's go it alone - - no one else will fend for us." But this simply is not so. We did not achieve our freedoms alone. We broke out of the ghetto walls only because many other enlightened forces in Europe amplified and fought to realize our demands for equal status. We would not have achieved the high state we presently enjoy here in this land were it not for the Bill of Rights, which was neither crafted nor realized by Jews. And the State of Israel would not have been established had not a



majority of the world's people recognized the moral rightness of our cause.

Separatism is bad for Jews. We need friends to prevail. This, at any rate, is the clarion call of Reform Judaism which ever bids us forge coalitions of decency with men and women of good will, and they abound in our land and in the world.

Remember, just as one case in point, what happened in Billings, Montana two years ago. It was at this time of the year, the Christmas-Hanukkah season, when the small Reform congregation, the only synagogue of that city, was defaced - - smeared with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans. The townspeople rose in defense of its tiny Jewish community. Not only did they help the Jews of Billings cleanse and rededicate their house of worship, but come Hanukkah night, tens of thousands of Christian men and women kindled Hanukkah menorahs and placed them on the window sills of their homes for all to see, and let those skin heads of America's Northwest know that the citizenry of Billings would not suffer their spewing of hatred and wanton acts of vandalism.

Yes, we have many friends, and we will need them. Statistics tell us that soon we may be less than 2% of the population. Yet we have battles to wage on behalf of Israel and embattled Jews, and the separation of church and state. To win these battles, we need allies. But we will not gain and retain our allies if we continue to look out only for ourselves. The Chassidic master, Moshe Leb Sassover, taught:

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

If we do not feel the pain of others, they will not feel our



pain. If we stand aloof from their causes and concerns, we can scarcely expect them to stand at our side, and we will not survive without the help of others. But far more important than this consideration of an enlightened self-interest, is the awareness of our solemn duty as Jews to care not just for our fellow Jews, but for all of humankind.

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

We Jews are not just another ethnic group or another pressure bloc. Our survival in the past has been for a higher purpose, and our survival must continue to have meaning today.

Al Vorspan once cleverly and movingly wrote:

"If, in order to survive, I must become a bald-headed Meir Kahane. If, in order to survive, I must kiss the world good-bye and separate myself from humankind. If I must emulate the violence, the callousness, the bigotry and narrowness of my opponents, then survival is not worth the candle for me."

He is absolutely right, and this, in essence, is the Reform Jewish response to religious extremism of whatever kind. For we believe with full faith that to be a Jew is to be something more than a survived endangered species. To be a Jew is to be a goad to the conscience of humankind; to bear a heart of flesh and blood and not of stone. To be a Jew is to be part of the civilizing and humanizing force of the universe. To be a Jew is to defy despair though the Messiah tarry. To be a Jew, as God told Abraham thousands of years ago, is to be part of a great and enduring people, YES, but also to be a blessing to all humankind.

Once again, a sacred hour of remembrance summons us to these  
time-hallowed halls.  
Not that we really need such an occasion lest we forget  
We need no reminders.  
We remember too well.  
Memories come...to interrupt our sleep...to still our laughter...  
to fill our silence with the voices of the past.

Oh, would that we could forget.  
But quick forgetting is not the reality of a people who lost  
one third of their number in half a decade;  
who lost one and one half million of their children,  
during those tear-stained years.

No, we cannot, we will not, forget these martyrs  
all those who perished through the cruelty of the oppressor.  
Not punished for any individual guilt, but indiscriminately,  
men and women...  
young and old...  
the learned and the simple...  
were "driven in multitudes along the road of pain and  
pitiless death."

They lie in nameless graves.  
Their places of everlasting sleep are not known to us.  
Yet we will not forget them.  
We take them into our hearts and give them a place beside  
the treasured memories of our own beloved.

May their remembrance give us the strength  
to turn from death to life,  
to love where others hate,  
to hope where others despair,  
to retain our belief in humankind and in the conviction that,  
in spite of everything, there is meaning in life and in  
human history.

Thus will we give substance to the words of our tradition,  
those words which we repeat six million times -- and more.  
Yitgadal, v'yitkadash sh'mey rabba...  
Magnified and sanctified be thy Name of God.

Prayer offered by Rabbi Schindler  
Holocaust Commemoration  
Capitol Rotunda, Washington D.C.  
April 16, 1996

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EULOGY

for

ALFRED DANIELS



APRIL 19, 1996  
NEW YORK, NY



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

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

To be sure now, Al lived a long and full life. He was granted more than the four-score years that Scripture allots to the strong. Still, his dying is not easy to accept, is it? He was such a precious human being. The feeling persists that he had much more to give and we to receive. And so we mourn and stand bereft.

Our hearts go out to Stella, his ever faithful life-mate, to Mollie and Jim, his devoted children, their mother Ada, and to Al's grand-children, Justin and Katelyn, whom he loved so very much. They feel the loss most keenly, yet there is precious little that we can say to them. Words bring but scant comfort at a time like this. But perhaps the knowledge that there are others who share their sorrow will bring them at least a chatzi nechama, a half measure of consolation.

There are many such others who mourn today, all those whose lives were intertwined with Al's and hence were touched by its essential liveliness. I count myself in this companionship of sorrow. I too am bereft; I too will miss Al's presence and feel the want of his tireless care.

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

There is much to celebrate in Al's life, for he lived it fully, with a fierce intensity and zest. Other people may live longer, but more often than not they husband their energies and defer their pleasures. Not so Al. He luxuriated in just being. He allowed no moment of his existence to slip by unawares. He seized each golden moment of his life, with all his heart and soul and might.

This surely was at the core of his character: his vitality, his spriteliness, his exuberant embrace of life.

It was a life in which he achieved a rare blending of intellect and imagination.

His mind was keen, razor-sharp in its ability to reason. He articulated his thoughts with precision. Moreover, his was a restless mind, a constantly questing mind. No subject was beyond his ken, or at least his interest.

His academic record testifies to that. After all he was an honors Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Harvard. But he did not suspend the nurturing of his mind once he received his diploma,



but made it a life-time quest. Indeed, he lectured for a time at Harvard and Columbia. And to the end of his days, until illness ravished him, he continued to nourish his own literacy.

But Al also had a well-refined sense of the beautiful, of the harmonious fitness of things. Everything had to be just so, in the proper place, in perfect balance. He loved the theater. He enjoyed good music. He appreciated fine art. In this, as in so many other things, he did not take the well-trodden path but was always in the vanguard, recognizing the worth of artists long before they were accepted by a wider audience. Just think of those delightful, whimsical paintings and sculptures that adorned the walls and spaces of his and Stella's home.

His intellect, combined with his suffusing charm made Al that brilliant fashion merchant that he was. Indeed, he rose to the very pinnacle of his profession - - Chairman and President and CEO of giant enterprises.

Yes, he had the mind of a corporate executive. But he also and always nurtured the life of the soul, dreaming great dreams, ever reaching beyond the practical needs of the moment, building not only for use but also for beauty, not only for comfort, but also for delight.

Everyone who knew Al respected him, valued the soundness of his counsel and its wisdom. And this above all, they recognized his rectitude. They saw him to be a man of principle, someone who stood by his ideals, resolutely pledged to attain them, refusing to depart from them, either to please a friend or to appease an enemy.

But at the very core of Al's being was his compassion. He was essentially good and kind. He genuinely cared for people and was determined to help them in their need.



Just think about those many and diverse institutions which called forth his involvement and support:

The University of Miami

The United Fund

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These are just a few of the many institutions of human care that evoked his concern.

Let it be remembered moreover, that these public beneficences were equalled if not exceeded by many individual acts of human kindness known only to giver and receiver, and all the more precious for their tender privacy. Stella told me of the many letters he received from individuals whom he helped in a time of need, when they were downsidled out, enabling them to regain their dignity and strength. There certainly was no more faithful friend than Al. Once he embraced you as such, he shunned no pain to be of help, to stand at your side.

Al's delicious sense of humor was an aspect of this caring, for humor, at its finest, demonstrates a fellow feeling for humanity. There certainly was nothing pompous about Al. He carried his attainments lightly. He did not bloat with pride, or brook any pretense. There was always a smile playing about his lips, and a twinkle in his eyes, evincing that all-embracing love which stirred within him.

Obviously, the greatest measure of Al's care was given to those who stood nearest to him: His parents, his sisters, while they were alive, and especially his children, Mollie and Jim. Oh, how he loved them, how he gloried in their attainments. He always regretted that his duties took him so far from them, but only physically. He cared for them and thought of them constantly.

As for their children, his grandchildren, Justin and Katelyn, they were, of course, the very jewels of his crown.

And he loved his Stella, as she loved him. She was the true companion of his life and soul. Was there ever a wife more constant than was she? Together they walked the way of life, these thirty years drinking from its one cup - - when it ran bitter, when it ran sweet, giving true meaning to the words: husband, wife, and marriage.

In a word, Al Daniels lived the kind of life many of us only dream to live - - a life large and generous, bold and adventurous, a life great in the scope of its imagination, magnanimous in forgiveness, and courageous as an act of faith.

But now our laughter has turned to tears, our joy to a bitter sorrow, for his voice is stilled and his luminescent eyes are closed forever. We weep because a star has been torn from the firmament of our lives, and our lives are the darker because of it.

Walt Whitman put it this way: "the best is that which must be left unsaid." We shall take our leave now, knowing full well that each of us retains a sharp and full image of Al's abiding presence that will become ever more significant with the passage of time. The rabbis spoke for us when they taught: "The life given us by nature is short, but the memory of a well-spent life is eternal."

In truth, so long as we live, Al, too, will live,  
"for he is now a part of us as we remember him."



Al Daniels  
April 19, 1996  
New York. N.Y.

P With heavy hearts we gather in this place  
to say our <sup>final</sup> words of farewell to Alfred Daniels  
who meant so very much to all of us  
whose care sustained us  
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whose soul's sublime song filled our own lives with wondrous music.

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to those who stood nearest to him:

~~the members of his family~~ <sup>HIS PARENTS</sup> -- his sisters, WHILE THEY WERE ALIVE

and especially his children, Mollie and Jim.

Oh, how he loved them, and how he gloried in their attainments.

[HE ALWAYS REGRETTED THAT HIS DUTIES TOOK HIM SO FAR FROM THEM - PHYSICALLY BUT ONLY  
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# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 650-4227 FAX (212) 650-4169

## Reflections on the Life of Yitzhak Rabin

Carnegie Hall, New York

November 7, 1995

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

President, Union of American Hebrew Congregations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Jewish custom prescribes that Holocaust Remembrance day be marked in the month of April, for it was in April that the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto rose up against their oppressors with empty hands facing guns and tanks, the most lethal weapons of war.

Come to think of it, though, this is a most unlikely time to mark so somber and melancholy an occasion. After all, April is the first full month of Spring, and Spring is the time "when the air is calm and pleasant," so Milton wrote, "and it were an injury and sullenness against nature not to go out and see her riches and partake in her rejoicing."

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

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

As individuals we can hearken to the Song of Solomon: "arise . . my fair one, come away!" But as Jews, we are mired in agonizing memories and cannot come away. We cannot see a meadow without thinking of mass graves. We cannot see a dancing butterfly without recalling the poem of a 12-year-old Jewish girl inmate of Theresienstadt who said of her captivity that she "never saw another butterfly."

Oh, would that we could forget. But quick forgetting is not the reality of a people who lost one third of their number in half a decade; who lost one and one half million of their children in that time, innocent, guiltless all! Quick healing is not the reality of a people for whom nature itself was defiled by the Nazi murderers who sowed bones instead of seeds in the month of April!

And so we remember . . . memories continue to hurt and haunt us. They still make us stagger. The pavement sinks under the feet, the walls spin 'round, the world reels. We cannot stop it even if we would. We cannot pluck the remembrance of all this carnage from us, its anguish pierced too deep. The bitterness has eaten into our sinews, dissolved our flesh into festering sores, reduced the very spirit of our lives to sparkless, blackened ashes.

And our response to all these aching memories is silence. It must be that, it always will be that - - a silence. For our speech has been stifled by darkness and our suffering is of a kind that has no tongue. Our martyrology is one long stillness, an endless silent scream reaching to the heavens - - where God was silent too.

And yet we must speak, for we are the spokesmen of the dead. It is our duty to testify in their behalf. Ever to remind the world that it was not God, but brutal men who brought darkness to the human soul.

Those who lived through and outlived this evil do not need to speak; the yellow badge is burned on their flesh for all to see. But their ranks are thinning; the generations come and go. Memory fades. People forget. And there are those who have determined to wipe its slate, to make it seem as if these things had never been.

But these things have been. They really happened. Millions of God's children perished through the cruelty of the aggressor, victims of demonic hate; the aged and young, the learned and unlettered; all driven in multitudes along the road of pain and pitiless death.



So we must speak - - and meet, and write - - however faltering our tongue and unavailing our speech. And we begin this task as did our forebears, with words hallowed by centuries of our martyrdom:

"Yitgadal, veyitkadash sh'mey rabba . . . "

"Magnified and Sanctified be the name of God."

It has been ordained that this prayer be repeated six million times. People must never forget why this is so.

\* \* \* \* \*

Are there any lessons to be gleaned from all this sorrow and sadness?

In a way I find it loathsome even to ask such a question, to speak of the "lessons" of genocide, for to do so is to attribute purpose to acts that were grotesquely purposeless, acts of naked savagery, of twisted paranoia and grim bureaucratic inhumaneness. And yet it is that very purposelessness, that monstrous human capacity to butcher without need, to wade through rivers of blood without so much as a redeeming sense of destination or direction, which impels us to seek explanation, to scour us yet again with stinging memories.

Therefore we infer certain lessons from the suffering we have endured; and by so doing, we convert the mystery of suffering into a revelation.

First and foremost we have learned to resist, at earliest warning, any and all threats to our community, to our people. "If I am not for myself," taught the Hebrew sage Hillel, "who will be for me?"

Wherever there is a single Jew in danger, in whatever country or continent or the remotest corner of our far flung world, there are we determined to find him, to reach out to him, offering our hand, our heart, our life. Never more will it be said: that we had eyes but did not see, that we had ears but did not hear, that we had mouths but that we failed to speak.

"Never will we allow this to happen again!" This is the vital force which propelled the creation of the modern Jewish state, and which impels the Jews of the world to do everything humanly possible to secure its safety. This the vital force which spurred the Israelis to legendary acts of heroism like Entebbe, or to the recent rescue, over one short week end, of nearly 15,000 endangered Ethiopian Jews. And remember, this was the first time in human history when blacks were taken from one continent to another not in chains but in love. "Never again!" has become our motto, though that motto was stained by a racist in our own midst.

I suppose we Jews are overly sensitive, even paranoid, on the subject of our safety. Yet where will we find reassurance?

How can we feel at ease when recent studies report a global rise in anti-Semitism; denials of the Holocaust; the refurbished iconization of erstwhile Hitler puppets such as Antonescu in Romania and Tiso in Slovakia; the proliferation of neo-facist parties and extremist right wing groups in many places, 400 of them in the CIS alone; Jewish cemeteries desecrated; synagogues defaced; acts of violence, even murder, several such incidents recorded every single day now, and all this only one generation after Auschwitz.

How can we feel secure when a recent poll showed that over 30% of the Germans of today believe that Jews and not the Nazis are largely to blame for the Holocaust, that the victims and not the murderers are guilty after all.

How are our fears allayed when even in our own country anti-Semitic incidents have seen an alarming rise during the year just past . . . when a David Duke who wears a swastika as a halo if not a breastplate, nonetheless gathers a majority of the white votes in Louisiana's senatorial election. Or when a Pat Buchanan, whom even Bill Buckley has assessed to have indulged in anti-Semitic rhetoric, stumps our economically troubled America inciting passions of xenophobia and selfishness, and yet nets one-third of the Republican Primary vote.



Nor are our fears allayed by the trauma of having the public classrooms and college campuses become a combat zone for competing interests battling over multi-culturalism, by having the Martin Luther Kings and Bayard Rustins supplanted by purveyors of hate like Sharpton and Jeffries. Or by the fact that our country's failure to fully implement the civil rights revolution, particularly in the economic sphere, is producing an explosive African/American nihilism, with no small portion of anti-Semitism for fuel.

No, alas, our wounds are not merely of another era. Our wounds bleed anew. And so we are not likely to forget the first lesson of the Holocaust: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" We intend to deny Hitler a posthumous victory. We are, and we will continue to be. Survival: it is the best defense, the sole revenge, the only worthy response to those who seek our destruction.

There is a second truth which emerges from the experience of our anguish, and it is this: that we are not alone to have been afflicted, that other peoples too have suffered grievous wrong; that we are bound to one another, all humans are, in an unbroken unity of pain.

We cannot deny this reality. True, the Holocaust is sui generis, unprecedented and unmatched in its evil. Nonetheless, it is but

one of the many man-made roads that have led into the abyss of human iniquity. Our age has many pathways sinking into this hell: the archipelagos of Stalin's Russia, napalm scorched Vietnam, death squads in Latin America, and perhaps most damning of all, the pathway of hunger, of neglect and apathy, upon which 40,000 more corpses are strewn every single day of our lives.

I have been told that an international human rights association has determined that since the end of World War II, there have been eleven other instances of race extermination which can properly be labeled as genocide. Think of the horrors of Cambodia, of Indochina's killing fields. Think of Afghanistan and Ethiopia - - and on and on. Numerous indeed are the roads that lead into the hell of human depravity.

A Yiddish proverb encapsulates this truth: "A velt brent brider nit nor unzer shtetl." An entire world is aflame, not just our villages. What is needed, therefore, is a bucket brigade to save the world, and not just to douse the blazing roofs of our own hamlets.

This second lesson is infinitely more difficult to internalize than is the first. When a people is beset by fear, the likely consequence is a reactive isolationism, and it is precisely this

malady that has afflicted too many of our fellow Jews. "We are surrounded by enemies," they say, "so what's the use? Let's dig in our own garden. Let's go it alone. No one else will fend for us."

But this simply is not so. We did not achieve our freedoms alone. We broke out of the ghetto walls only because many other enlightened forces in Europe amplified and fought to realize our demands for equal status. We would not have achieved the high state we presently enjoy here in this land were it not for the Bill of Rights, which was neither crafted nor realized by Jews. And the State of Israel would not have been established had not a majority of the world's peoples recognized the moral rightness of our cause.

Separatism is bad for Jews. We need allies to prevail. But we will not find and retain them if we care only for ourselves.

The Chassidic master, Moshe Leb Sassover taught:

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

If we do not feel the pain of others, they will not feel our



pain. If we stand aloof from their causes and concerns, we can scarcely expect them to stand at our side and we will not survive without the help of others.

But far more important than this consideration of an enlightened self-interest, is the awareness of our solemn duty as Jews to care not just for our fellow Jews, but for all of human kind.

Even thus we read in Scripture:

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

We Jews are not just another ethnic group or another pressure bloc. Our survival in the past has been for a higher purpose, and our survival must continue to have meaning today.

Al Vorspan once cleverly and movingly wrote:

"If, in order to survive I must become a bald-headed Meir Kahane, . . . if, in order to survive I must kiss the world good-bye and separate myself from humankind, . . . if I must emulate the violence, the callousness, the bigotry and narrowness of my opponents, then survival is not worth the candle for me."

But all this is true not just for Jews, but for all groupings in our society, and indeed for all the peoples of the earth. None

of us lives alone, we interact with others, depend on others always. The Jewish sage Hillel may have counselled: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" But then he quickly added: "But if I am only for myself, what am I?"

We simply dare not define our group identities in parochial terms alone. Was it not that very nearsightedness, and the arrogance that it bred, that led Germany to its feverish fantasies of a master race? Was it not precisely this parochialism run amok that led dictatorships to their barbaric sense of "national security"?

The philosopher George Santayana taught: "When you believe in absurdities, you can commit atrocities." Surely, the commonest absurdity that human beings have believed is that of the superiority of individuals or groups over others. Surely, it is that absurdity which has led us into a century of savagery. Surely, that selfsame absurdity now threatens to turn the whole globe into the charnel houses of Auschwitz.

Our survival depends upon our ability to develop an alternative understanding: the understanding that we are, each of us, and all of us, like the sons and daughters of Noah emerging from the ark on Mount Ararat. We are, each of us and all of us, anxiously scanning the sky for the rainbow sign, the reassurance that a life of peace and growth and meaning can be ours. We are, each

of us and all of us, confronting the challenge of God's rainbow: a challenge to recognize and act upon the awareness of our common humanity, to work together to ease the suffering of all peoples, to open the eyes of the blind, to bind the wounds of the afflicted, to loosen the fetters of the bound wherever they might be imprisoned.

For what is the rainbow, after all? It is every color of the earth combined into one great spectrum. It is mist, invisible, until light and liquid fashion it into visible, iridescent shape - - an arch that binds the world from horizon to horizon. It is a metaphor made physical. It is the earth's arbor. it is the arch of God.

All peoples of the earth are witness to what happens when the rainbow buckles and pieces of the sky collapse. All of us are primary color bands in the spectrum of suffering humanity.

We must, therefore, hold our heads high, wear our colors, speak our languages, let ourselves be seen by all.

And when the gaze of humanity is upon is, we must bid them look back in time and see the monstrosities that gave birth to our modernity.



We must bid them to look into their own hearts and see the internal bleeding that is draining us of our very humanity.

We must bid them look at one another, whatever be their nationality or color or creed, and say: "You are the bone of my bone, the flesh of my flesh, for one God has created us all."

The universal and the particular are inextricably intertwined within us; we dare not deny the claims of either. If we repudiate our particular heritage for the sake of a greater humanity, we will inevitably betray humanity in the end. But if we repudiate humanity and serve only ourselves, we will betray those ideas and ideals which alone give meaning to our people's survival.

\* \* \* \* \*

This, then, is the two-fold truth forged on the anvil of Jewish suffering, these the thoughts that stir within us as we recall with loving remembrance our martyrs, all those who perished through the cruelty of the oppressor. Not punished for any individual guilt, but indiscriminately, men and women, the aged and the young, the learned and the simple, were driven in multitudes along the road of pain and pitiless death. They lie in nameless graves. Their places of everlasting sleep are not known to us. Yet we will not forget them. We take them into our

hearts and give them a place beside the treasured memories of our own beloved.

May their remembrance give us the strength to turn from death to life, to love where others hate, to hope where others despair, to bring beauty to chaos and reason to the madness of our days. In a word, to speed the fulfillment of that promise of lasting life made by God to humankind when He arched His wondrous rainbow over Noah's ark in the Springtime of human history.



Outreach Address  
CCAR Philadelphia  
Mar 27, 1996

My heartfelt thanks to you, Shim, for your flattering words of praise.  
My thanks to all of you for joining him in this tribute.

The approbation of colleagues is especially sweet

for we are rigidly exacting in our demands of one another.

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.

Indeed, it is I who should be honoring you, for my own process

of creation would have been thwarted daily were it not for

the men and women of this Conference and their devoted labors.

You took the brunt of the criticism whenever I took stances

deemed too radical.

Likewise, you were the ones who made real those programmatic directions

which I merely projected.

With full heart, therefore, I give thanks to each and every one of you

You have been not only my co-workers and interpreters.

you have also been my masters and teachers

I am proud to be a part of this companionship,

and I value the title of "rabbi" more than any other designation

that marked the several stages of my career.

To be called "rabbi" is honor enough for me,

an honor to be earned and re-earned over the years

less by dint of knowledge than by force of soul,

and at times by a sheer stubborn optimism that refuses to despair



of hope, of God, of the Covenant  
even in this century of ceaseless bloodshed and violence.  
Indeed, stubborn optimism has become a fundamental rabbinic skill,  
has it not?

The Talmud might idealize us as "ministering angels" (Nedarim 20b)  
but we know that our ministering has less to do with angelology  
and more to do with very down-to-earth realities -- such as picking  
up the pieces of broken lives in our congregations  
or picking up the pieces of Jewish bodies on Dizengoff Street  
in Tel Aviv.

At times even that stubborn clinging to hope flags.  
The month just past has been such a time,  
as we have watched our fierce expectation of peace for Israel,  
already punctured by a Jewish assassin's bullet,  
now wholly assaulted by the Hamas.

These events seared our souls and consumed our thinking  
to the exclusion of almost everything else.  
Indeed, it feels almost sacrilegious to speak of seemingly parochial  
concerns such as Outreach -- my given topic for today --  
when our brothers and sisters in Israel are once again at war.

In preparing for this gathering, however,  
I was reminded of a very rare and precious commentary  
by an early Chassidic master, whose name, alas, I have forgotten  
though his teaching is unforgettable.

It is a teaching that coincidentally, makes a vital link  
between the present backdrop of horror and our topic of Outreach.

The Chassidic Rebbe was wrestling with the Torah passages about Amalek,  
the Hebrew people's eternal enemy  
whose insidious forms of warfare do chillingly resemble  
the current terrorism of Hamas following Rabin's murder.  
Recall, if you will, how the Midrash describes the treachery  
of the Amalekites immediately following the death of Aaron,  
the High-Priest:

"Concealing their weapons in their garments, the Amalekites  
appeared in Israel's camp as if they meant to condole them  
for Aaron's death. Not content with this, the Amalekites  
disguised themselves in Canaanite costumes and spoke the  
speech of the latter, so that the Israelites might not be able  
to tell if they had before them Amalekites...or Canaanites."

Deuteronomy further portrays Amalek's tactics:

"He surprised you on the march when you were famished and weary  
and cut down all the stragglers in the rear."

And here is where our Hassidic Rebbe had a sudden and profound insight  
almost as if the Divine light turned on for him. He observed:

"Had the children of Israel not forgotten about the slower ones  
in back, but instead had brought them close, binding them to  
all of Israel, the Amalekites would not have succeeded in their  
attack. Because you left them behind and forgot about them,  
Amalek prevailed. Therefore does the Torah tell us to remember  
Amalek -- to remember not his evil but our failure to  
care for those who fell behind and to bring them closer to us."

Remember Amalek that you will not forget those who lag behind you!

Remember Amalek so that you will not hunker down in fear of your foes  
or isolate yourself with fences of exclusivity!

Remember Amalek so that you will always maximize your community's  
solidarity and power through the politics of inclusion.

This, indeed, has been the ultimate goal of my striving in this realm:  
that our community and people gain that strength  
which flows only from a policy of maximal inclusion.

Yes, Outreach is not merely about generosity, or neighborliness  
or broad mindedness.

It is about survival.

It is a key thread of the tallit of welcoming embrace that I have  
during my tenure in office, held out to women,  
to gay and lesbian Jews,  
to marginalized Jews of very kind  
in the name of Jewish unity  
and in order to buttress our collective strength.

Always did I remember and was I inspired by the tales my father told me  
of those Subbotnikis of the Russian steppes, those peasants  
who had embraced Judaism without ever having seen a Jew.  
As an escapee from a Siberian prison during World War I, my father  
sojourned for some time with these zealous Sabbath observers  
and he served as their Hebrew teacher.  
During his stay, news that a pogrom was being planned against  
the Jews of Saratof, the region's capital,  
came to the attention of these Jews by choice.  
Immediately they took their farm implements in hand,  
marched to Saratof en masse  
and successfully defended their co-religionists.

Outreach as a form of Jewish self-defense.

Outreach as a tool of Jewish survival:

Such has been central to my concept since I introduced it 18 years ago.  
And it has been an uncommonly successful venture:



Many varied programs were designed and refined to reach out to the intermarried:

Times and Seasons, Stepping Stones, A Taste of Judaism, many more and all of them devised to draw the intermarried

back into the synagogue,

to break the sense of isolation and alienation that is spurred by the absence of a more genuine communal support.

And this above all, healing has been brought to many hearts bruised by the misbelief that insofar as intermarriage is concerned the love of family and the love of people are mutually exclusive.

Though reviled at first, Outreach ultimately received the recognition of wide emulation on the American Jewish scene.

Most segments of our community now recognize the compelling logic of our approach to the problem of intermarriage, and that includes those who most disparaged our efforts initially. Indeed, some years before his death, Rav Soloveitchik, our generation's most respected voice of mainline Orthodoxy, had this to say:

"Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been spared, it is necessary to do what the Reform Jews are doing -- within, of course, an orthodox context."

And so everybody is doing it

-- the Conservatives, the Reconstructionists, liberal Orthodox groupings, various communal organizations, Federations -- all have accepted our fundamental approach, each in his own way, nonetheless joined in a kind of Jewish patchwork quilt of outreach that has forever altered the landscape and the mindscape of American Jewry.

But that accomplishment, as I said before, is scarcely mine.  
Quite the contrary it is you who have translated this policy,  
into human relationships.

It is you who have wrestled with the questions of congregational  
membership and ritual procedure  
facing and surmounting the many passions and prejudices  
that attend upon our Outreach efforts.

Without your labors, your applied insights,  
your sensitivity to the challenges that arise from every corner,  
Outreach would have amounted to no more than wishful thinking  
on my part.

Instead it has become a program with revolutionary impact on Jewish life  
and Jewish self-perception.

Outreach does have its detractors, to be sure,  
though these nay-sayers are but a fractious if vociferous minority.  
The thrust of their fretful grievances  
is essentially three-pronged.

The first common misreading of Outreach involves the conceptual error  
of seeing it as counteractive rather than restitutive.

Our critics thus hold Reform Jewish Outreach to be a failure  
because the intermarriage rate continues to surge.

This, my friends is like calling the Salvation Army a failure,  
because homelessness is on the increase.

It is like blaming the prophet Elijah, and urging that we spill out his  
cup and close our open doors come next Passover,  
because the systemic causes of injustice in our world persist.

But our purpose all along has been restorative rather than preventive.  
Our aim is to draw the intermarried back into Jewish life in the hope  
that the non-Jewish partners will ultimately opt for Judaism,  
-- above all that the children of these marriages will be reared as  
Jews and share the destiny of the Jewish people.

Our realism about the trends of intermarriage,  
not an inflated sense of power to deter it,  
inspired our outreach programming from the beginning.

If this realism first dawned within the Reform movement,  
let that be a tribute to our perspicacity,  
not a sign of our indifference.

Happily, as we have seen, such realism about intermarriage  
has now spread to every corner of the Jewish world.

With even Jewish Day School graduates now intermarrying at a 25% rate,  
how can it be otherwise?

The acculturation of American Jewry, with its attendant high rate of  
intermarriage, is simply an ineluctable fact,  
in the face of which only a gesture of welcoming love,  
rather than a stern reproach, can make the difference.

You can sternly say "no" and be successful with conscripts.

With volunteers, you must generously say "yes"

-- and voluntarism is the very essence of post-modern Judaism.

Still, our critics continue to cavil, the conversion rate within  
intermarriages is under 30%

and the percentage of Jewishly reared children issuing from such  
marriages is pitifully small!

Where, then, is the success of Outreach?



The success of Outreach?

I dare say that each member of this rabbinical conference can testify to the fact that the Jewish conversion and upbringing rate among those who are touched by our Outreach programming is substantially higher than the norm.

Certainly the preponderant majority of interfaith couples who do belong to our congregations

rear their children as Jews and only as Jews.

Yet even these, were it not for the Outreach revolution, might never have found a home in our sanctuaries.

The fact is that the bleak statistics cited in criticism of Outreach applies to all who are intermarried, most of whom don't even know that the Jewish community is prepared to re-embrace them.

They know nothing about outreach programs of any kind, -- as a recent nation-wide study attests, and they are convinced that the Jewish community has rejected them.

There is no failure of Outreach here -- there is merely a need for adequate funding and creative effort to get the word out.

I returned from Seattle just a week ago.

When our "Times and Seasons" program was recently announced with a week of advertising in the Seattle Times,

over 500 queries and an oversubscribed program was the result.

The only "failure of outreach" has been our inability to generate the resources required for the task.

Only 3 1/2% of the Union's budget is devoted to Outreach.

And if you add the Union's extra-budgetary expenses spent  
for our camping and Israel experience programming,  
less than 2% is devoted to Outreach  
-- scarcely disproportionate, indeed a pathetically small  
share of our available resources.

Withal that we have gained such successes as the Stepping Stones  
program, pioneered by our colleague Steve Foster,  
which has maintained an affiliation rate of 60%.

first in Denver and now in 14 other communities.

Withal that we have won the hearts of thousands of Jews and their  
spouses, many of them becoming Jews by Choice  
and many of them in the vanguard of those who seek to  
make Reform Judaism a meaningful Religious enterprise.

Which brings me full square to the second prong of our critics  
excoriating fork:

to wit, that all of these strangers in our midst  
tend to dilute Judaism, to water it down.

Such critiques constitute bowdlerization of Outreach.

They are but a specific aspect of the "anything goes"

stereotype of Reform that is tenacious enough to have

withstood all evidence to the contrary these past 25 years.

Such a misreading Outreach confuses tolerance with indifference.

It mistakes the openness of our boundaries as a sign of amorphism,  
of shapelessness.

It treats our entire enterprise of wrestling with the Jewish tradition  
and the values of modernity as a kind of fakery, a hollow pretense.

In response to these distortions, we must continue to delineate our boundaries, both individually and as a movement.

The resolution passed at the Atlanta Biennial regarding our unwillingness to accept in regular religious schools children who simultaneously receive formal training in another religion is one such example of boundary delineation.

Such also was the basis of the Union Board's refusal to admit Temple Beth Adam into our congregational family.

Come to think of it, this Conference's decision on Patrilineal descent was also a boundary delineation, for it placed religious affiliation, and education, and affirmation on a par with genealogy in defining just who is a Jew.

Yes, it is up to us to set the standards in our religious community and in our congregations.

And if our standards are high, and our programs substantive, those who come from the periphery to the center, from the outside to the inside will likely be among the first to laud and cultivate an enrichment of our Jewish life.

More often than not -- and who among us has not experienced this -- the non-Jewish partner draws the Jewish partner closer to the core.

Outreach has compelled us to look at ourselves:

to ask ourselves as born Jews some very fundamental questions:

Who are we...what do we really believe...what must we know and feel and do when we claim the name Jew?



And once we grapple with such questions,  
an inner transformation takes place.

Harold Shulweis was the first to foresee this.

Almost immediately after I projected the Outreach concept Harold  
endorsed it precisely on these grounds:

"Something happens to the student who is called upon to teach," he wrote. "Something happens to the Jew who is asked to explain the character of his tradition to one outside the inner circle... knowing how to answer is as important to the Jewish responder as to the non-Jewish questioner."

Here is the outreach-inreach dynamic at its quintessence:

a renewal of commitment following the process of rediscovery.

Invariably, when we succeed in touching the non-Jewish partner of an  
intermarriage,

we bring the Jewish partner of that marriage closer to the core.

By engaging in the process we transform ourselves.

We, in consequence, become better Jews.

Moreover, Reform Judaism's Outreach program is not limited

to the intermarried and their non-Jewish spouses.

It also seeks to bring marginalized Jews

from the periphery to the center...

and over the years such ba'aley t'shuva have also made their  
mark on Jewish life.

Moses was a contented and comfortable member of Egypt's royal family

until he became target of God's very own Outreach program

and became the liberator of our people.

Esther's Jewishness was unknown to her non-Jewish husband, Persia's

King, until Mordechai reached out and summoned her to save her people.

In more recent times, the assimilated playwright Theodor Herzl  
redeemed the holy land for us.

And the alienated philosopher Franz Rosenzweig redeemed the very spirit  
of God for modern Jewry.

Outreach is therefore not merely a construct for the post-modern moment  
It reflects our tradition's most ancient sensibilities.

What does it mean, after all, that our t'nach named the Moabite woman  
Ruth to become mother to the messianic line of David?

What does it mean that the Torah designates the Midianite Zipporah,  
wife of Moses, to serve as mohelet for their son?

What does it mean that we offer our children shabbat blessings  
in the name of Ephraim and Menasseh, whose mother was Asenath,  
the daughter of a heathen priest?

It means that our Jewish boundaries should be erected  
not as fences but as fringes when it comes to the ingathering of  
our people and their loved ones  
-- just as the fringes of the tallit which Jews gather  
together so lovingly and kiss when they recite the sh'ma.

Which brings me to the third most common argument against Outreach  
which might be called that of "quality vs. quantity."

It holds that we should concentrate our resources and strengths  
on a core of committed Jews,  
and not on the intermarried and unaffiliated.

This critique was voiced in its classic form in a recent Commentary  
article by Jack Wertheimer, Charles Liebman and Steven Cohen  
-- three heavyweights of Jewish intellectual life and sociology.

Their critique sets up Outreach as being in opposition to inreach. They demand that the Jewish community focus all its available means on the saving remnant, and not on what they see as "lowest common denominator programs" that strip Jewish identity of its particularity.

There is a kind of elitism written all over this "quality-versus-quantity" critique.

It is the patronizing belief that only the few deserve to be counted in because of their perceived superiority in learning and commitment. Likewise their critique expresses a defeatism, an acute pessimism: It sees the glowing sparks of Jewish identity in America as dying embers rather than as combustible goals. It sees the battle for Jewish souls already lost with but a surviving remnant to be guarded, Ezra like, from foreign encroachment.

Marginally noted, two of the three authors of the Commentary article are American academicians who recently moved to Israel, and now, having internalizing the Israeli mindset they suddenly see Diaspora Jewry as doomed.

Only six or so years ago, when Steven Cohen taught at Queens College, he maintained that the vast majority of American Jews "feel committed to Jewish continuity and to their identity."

Today, from his chair at Hebrew University, that statistic now rings hollow for him.

How very quickly his interpretations of the self-same numbers change with his changing venue.



Back in his SUNY days, Steven Cohen taught us that while synagogue affiliation substantially diminished over the years, nonetheless alternative forms of Jewish identification abound in our community and we ought not to underestimate their worth as vehicles for Jewish survival.

Brandeis Professor Bernard Reisman framed it this way:

"The presumed assimilators (are) receptive to finding a connection with their Jewishness, albeit not in the same way as their parents or grandparents...Being turned off (from the synagogue) does not mean a loss of Jewish religious interests....The thirst and fourth generation of American Jewish baby boomers are so acculturated that they have come to recognize the voids and limitations of the contemporary American lifestyle; it is to fill these voids and and limitations that leads them to seek a closer connection to their Jewish identity."

I am not going to pretend, of course, that the majority of unaffiliated or intermarried Jews are Jewishly identified in a firm yet "alternate" fashion.

I am only affirming that there is a powerful yearning for Jewish identification, notwithstanding the equally powerful alienation from organized Jewish life that presents so major a stumbling block to affiliation. The "stragglers in the desert," as it were, are not headed back to Egypt but are simply without the footwear to keep up the pace.

I, for one, will not surrender them to Amalek's raids.

Rather, I will linger, and carry them on my back, if need be, to keep our collective appointment with God.

The notion that Outreach results in a "lowest common denominator"

Judaism has been most vigorously disproved by our own collective experience...

Eighteen years of Outreach have brought into our ranks thousands of morally earnest, religiously compelled and communally alive Jews, their partners and their children.

During those same eighteen years 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.

In a word, our own collective experience gives compelling answer to the question which entitles this evening's program:

Inreach and outreach are not incompatible.

They stand in symbiotic relationship, the one reinforcing the other, thereby the whole gaining in strength.

And by engaging in this two-fold process, we transform ourselves and become better Jews.

\* \* \*

Let us, therefore reach out, impelled by the teaching that the mitzva of self-preservation exceeds all others in its consequence!

Let us always press for non-tribal, non-racial, all-enfolding Judaism.

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

Let us recall and act on those lofty passages  
from the Tenach and the Chazal, from Bible and Commentary  
that define Jewish "chosenness"

not as exclusive but as exemplary  
not as separatist but as representative  
not as closed but as open  
not as rejecting but as all-embracing and compassionate.

NAKEL MIHEYODCHA LI EVED, LEHAKEEM ET SHIVTEI YAAKOV

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



Not By Birth Alone  
An Introductory Essay  
Alexander M. Schindler

Judaism is not an exclusive club for born Jews. We welcome all who choose to enter. We do not cloak ourselves in an exclusive chosenness but declare ourselves open to all those who would choose us.

The notion that Judaism is not a propagating faith is far from the truth. It has been the practiced truth for the last four centuries, but it was not true for the four millennia before. Abraham was a convert and our tradition lauds his missionary zeal. Isaiah enjoined us to be a "light unto the nations" and insisted that God's house be a "house of prayer for all peoples." Ruth of Moab, a heathen by birth, became the ancestress of King David. Zechariah foresaw the time when men and women of every tongue would grasp a Jew by the corner of his garment and say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

During the Maccabean period, Jewish proselytizing activity reached its zenith; schools for missionaries were established, and by the beginning of the Christian era they had succeeded in converting ten percent of the population of the Roman empire -- roughly four million people.

It is true that there were countervailing pressures even in Biblical times. Thus, Ezra insisted that all foreign born wives be sent back to their homes lest their continued presence among Jews lead to the attenuation of Judaism, but the dominant motif was otherwise. Likewise, the Talmud insists that we test the sincerity of the convert's motivations by discouraging him, by warning

him of the hardships he will have to endure as a Jew. But then, in the self-same passage, the Talmud adds that while we are "to push converts away with the left hand" we ought to "draw them near with the right."

After Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, and later, again, when Islam conquered the world, Jews were forbidden to seek converts or to accept them. The death penalty was fixed for gentiles who became a Jews and for the Jews who welcomed them. Many were actually burned at the stake for this 'crime,' and -- to mix a metaphor -- the heat of their flaming pyres cooled our conversionist ardor. Even so, it was not until the 16th century that we abandoned all proselytizing efforts. Only then did the rabbis begin their systematic rejection of those who sought to join our faith community.

Once the Enlightenment brought freedom to Jews and such repressive laws were lifted, the century-ingrained inhibition to Jewish missionary activity nonetheless persisted. Still, over the years, individual rabbis -- cutting across all streams of modern Judaism, though mostly Reform -- called on us to shuck off our insecurities, to resume our ancient vocation and Abraham-like bid the world to enter our tent.

Thus, in 1938, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise sought to brace the self confidence of Jews and to rekindle their missionary zeal. To that end he invited Aime Palliere, who had abandoned the Catholic Priesthood for Judaism, to lecture in America. Wise even published and gave wide distribution to Palliere's *Le Sanctuaire Inconnu* which charts his spiritual journey from Rome to Jerusalem.

A decade later, the preeminent Rabbi Leo Baeck, having survived the horrors of Terezin and moved by the knowledge that one-third of the Jewish people had been decimated by the Nazis, exhorted delegates attending the 1949 Conference of the World Union for Progressive Judaism with the following words: "Mankind is hungry and thirsts for that which Jews have to offer... throughout our history many gentiles were attracted to Judaism and became proselytes -- educated people, high minded people -- should we not begin anew? Should we not send our missionaries to Asia and other continents? We are in need of expansion for our own sake!"

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

Three years later, Robert Gordis, arguably the most prominent Conservative rabbi of his generation, convened a national conference of American Jewish organizations to discuss all aspects of Jewish missionary activity. With the financial support of a Chicago engineer and refugee from Nazi Germany, Ben Macca-bee, Gordis subsequently launched the Jewish Information Society, which opened Reading Rooms throughout the land, and was stocked with books and pamphlets disseminating information about Judaism. The roster of this Society's trustees included some of the foremost American Rabbis of the time, among them Rabbis Leo Jung, Israel Miller, and W. Gunther Plaut. Unhappily, these and several



like organizations failed to survive the lives of their founders or funders.

In the late 1970's, however, the North-American Reform movement launched an Outreach effort which eventually became a well-entrenched element of its programmatic thrust. This undertaking was inaugurated at my behest and in response to the demographic crisis besetting American Jewry. Statistics, at that time, revealed that the hostile attitude of the Jewish community toward interfaith marriages was not discouraging its rising incidence and was alienating those Jews who were being forced to choose between their religious heritage and their heart-song of love and partnership. Why not render the crisis into an opportunity, I argued, by offering programs that would help ease the burden of intermarried families while cultivating the Jewish identities of their children and, where appropriate, attaining the conversion of the non-Jewish partners?

Worsening figures over the past decades confirmed the need for such an approach. The rate of intermarriage continued to soar. Even the most intensive Jewish upbringing failed to check its rise. (Jewish day school graduates are currently intermarrying at a 25 percent rate). These realities cry for an all-out outreach effort by the Jewish community -- the effort to retain the intermarried Jews for Judaism, to gather and keep them within the fold, to staunch the bleeding and infuse new blood into the Jewish body through conversion and Jewish education. A clenched fist and excommunication, I earnestly believe, will not alter the statistics of intermarriage, but a beckoning hand and increased communication may attenuate their impact.

In truth, however, it was not only the statistics that moved me to action in this matter. It was also the painful stories I heard over and over in my travels: from the would be converts who felt deeply hurt by the rejection of born Jews; from the grandparents who yearned to put an end to the bitterness wrought by their negative response to a son's or daughter's interfaith marriage in order to establish a relationship with their grandchildren; from the adult children of interfaith families who felt Jewish in all but their "accreditation" yet were being denied their rightful place on the *bimah*; from the interfaith couples who had raised their children *parve* -- neither fish nor fowl, neither Jewish nor Christian -- only to lose them to the totalism of a religious cult.

These are the people to whom the Jewish community must offer meaningful connections and meaningful solutions if we are to flourish. These are the ones with whom Judaism must establish a meaningful covenant, a flexible yet unbreakable bond.

\* \* \*

Under the banner of Outreach, many varied programs were designed and refined to reach out to the intermarried, all of them devised to draw them back into the synagogue, to break the sense of isolation and alienation that is spurred by the absence of a more genuine communal support. And healing has been brought to many hearts bruised by the misbelief that insofar as intermarriage is concerned the love of family and the love of people are mutually exclusive.

Though reviled at first, Outreach ultimately received the

recognition of wide emulation on the North American Jewish scene. Most segments of this community now recognize the compelling logic of Reform's approach to the thorny problem of intermarriage, and that includes those who most disparaged these efforts initially. Indeed, some years before his death, Ha-Rav Soloveitchik, our generation's most respected voice of mainline Orthodoxy, had this to say: "Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been spared, it is necessary to do what the Reformers are doing -- within, of course, an Orthodox context." Today, then, Conservatives, Reconstructionists and even liberal Orthodox groups, as well as communal organizations and federations, have undertaken outreach activities, though each in its own way, nonetheless joined in a kind of Jewish patchwork quilt of outreach that has forever altered the landscape and the mindscape of American Jewry.

Outreach does have its critics, to be sure, though these nay-sayers are but a fractious if vociferous minority. The thrust of their fretful grievances is essentially three-pronged.

The first common misreading of Outreach involves the conceptual error of seeing these programs as counteractive rather than restitutive. They adjudge Outreach to be a failure because the intermarriage rate shows no sign of abatement, and because the conversion rate to Judaism and the percentage of Jewishly-reared children continues to be alarmingly low. This is like calling the Salvation Army a failure, because homelessness is on the increase. It is like blaming the prophet Elijah, and urging that we spill out his cup and close our open doors come next Passover, because the systemic causes of injustice in our world persist.



The goal of Outreach programming all along has been restorative rather than preventive. Its aim is to draw the intermarried back into Jewish life in the hope that the non-Jewish partners will ultimately opt for Judaism, and above all, that the children of these marriages will be reared as Jews and share the destiny of the Jewish people. Realism about the trends of intermarriage, not an inflated sense of power to deter it, inspires Outreach.

Moreover, such objections are based on the convenient distortion of the data. The statistics they cite apply to all the intermarried, including the vast majority who have not yet been touched by Outreach programs. Yet any rabbi whose congregation is engaged in such activities can testify that Jewish conversion and child-upbringing rates among affiliated interfaith families are substantially higher than the norm. The preponderant majority of interfaith couples who belong to a synagogue rear their children as Jews and only as Jews. But most of these might never have found a home in the Jewish community, were it not for the outreach revolution.

A second critique holds Outreach responsible for the further attenuation of Judaism. It avers that the presence of too many strangers in our midst inevitable will serve to dilute Judaism, to water it down.

Experience teaches otherwise. Substantive outreach activities that adhere to high standards serve to strengthen Jewish life. More often than not it is the non-Jewish spouse in an intermarriage who sees our religion through fresh eyes and revives the Jewish partner's interest in his Judaism. Moreover,

Outreach compels those of us who are *born* Jews to ask ourselves some very fundamental questions: What are we? What do we really believe? What must we know, feel, and do in order to claim to be Jewish? And once we grapple with such questions, an inner transformation takes place.

Harold Shulweis, that most widely acclaimed Conservative rabbi of our generation, endorsed Outreach precisely on these grounds: "Something happens to the student who is called upon to teach," he wrote, "something happens to the Jew who is asked to explain the character of his tradition to one outside the inner circle...knowing how to answer is as important to the Jewish responder as to the non-Jewish questioner."

Here is the outreach-inreach dynamic at its quintessence: a renewal of commitment following the process of rediscovery. Invariably, when we succeed in touching the non-Jewish partner of an intermarriage, we bring the Jewish partner of that marriage closer to the core. By engaging in the process we transform ourselves. We, in consequence, become better Jews.

Which brings me to the third most common argument against Outreach, that of "quality-versus-quantity." These opponent charge that such programs are a waste of scarce communal resources which would be better spent on advanced educational and other programs for the committed -- those already strongly involved in Jewish life. They demand that the Jewish community focus all its available means on this saving remnant, and not on what they see as "lowest common denominator programs" that strip Jewish identity of its particularity.

There is a kind of elitism written all over this "quality-

versus-quantity" critique. It is the patronizing belief that only the few deserve to be counted in because of their perceived superiority in learning and commitment. Likewise this critique expresses a defeatism, an acute pessimism. It sees the glowing sparks of Jewish identity in America as dying embers rather than as combustible coals. It sees the battle for Jewish souls already lost with but a surviving remnant to be guarded, Ezra like, from foreign encroachment.

The notion that Outreach results in a "lowest common denominator" Judaism has been most vigorously disproved by our own collective experience. Eighteen years of Outreach have brought into our ranks thousands of morally earnest, religiously compelled and communally alive Jews, their partners and their children. During those same eighteen years there has also been a flowering of 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.

To be sure, these eighteen years have also seen synagogue affiliation diminish here in America. Nonetheless, alternative forms of Jewish identification abound in our community and we ought not to underestimate their worth as vehicles for Jewish survival. Brandeis Professor Bernard Reisman framed it this way:

"The presumed assimilators (are) receptive to finding a connection with their Jewishness, albeit not in the same way as their parents or grandparents...Being turned off (from the synagogue) does not mean a loss of Jewish religious interests....The third and fourth generation of American Jewish baby boomers are so acculturated that they have come to recognize the voids and limitations of the contemporary American lifestyle; it is to fill these voids and and limitations that leads them to seek a closer connection to their Jewish identity."



I am not going to pretend, of course, that the majority of unaffiliated or intermarried Jews are Jewishly identified in a firm yet "alternate" fashion. I am only affirming that there is a powerful yearning for Jewish identification, notwithstanding the equally powerful alienation from organized Jewish life that presents so major a stumbling block to affiliation. The "stragglers in the desert," as it were, are not headed back to Egypt but are simply without the footwear to keep up the pace. I, for one, will not surrender them to Amalek's raids. Rather, will I linger, and carry them on my back, if need be, to keep our collective appointment with God.

\* \* \* AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

In projecting Outreach a score years ago, I envisaged it not merely as a response to the issue of intermarriage. Indeed, an outreach program that limits its efforts to those who are bound to us by marriage is an affront to them. It cast doubt on their integrity, as if to say, you really didn't choose Judaism based on its merits, you must have done it to please your spouse. This is manifestly not so. For most Jews-by-choice, the Jewish spouse was the catalyst, but not the cause of their conversion.

No, I envisaged the outreach program not as an emergency to repair the holes in our tent, but as a long range effort to "enlarge the site" of our tents, to "extend the size of our dwellings." My dream was to see our Judaism unleashed as a resource for a world in need: not as the exclusive inheritance of the few, but as a renewable resource for the many; not as a religious stream too small to be seen on the map of the world,

but as a deep flowing river, hidden by the overgrown confusion of modern times, that could nourish humanity's highest aspirations.

This is what Outreach was meant to be from its beginning. It calls for more than a passive acceptance but requires an active pursuit. It means something more than welcoming the strangers who choose to live in our midst. It bids us seek them out and invite them in -- like the prototype of the proselytizing Jew, Abraham, whose tent was continually open on all four sides for fear that he would miss a wandering nomad and fail to bid him enter.

Why do we continue to resist the notion of an assertive Judaism? Are we ashamed? Is it that our self-image still mirrors the contempt of our traducers? Or do we, perhaps, think that Judaism has little if anything to offer to our world?

Well, look about you and see: Look at this planet earth, riven as it is by conflicts of every conceivable kind? Would not Judaism's insistence that every human being is created in God's image provide healing for such a fractured world?

Consider the fear that shuts doors to the hungry and borders to the persecuted. Mightn't Judaism's emphasis on loving the stranger -- and the Jewish experience of being the stranger -- help to wedge open the doors of the world's conscience?

And what of the immorality, the unethical business practices, born of greed that have come to mark our age. Might not the Judaic understanding of wealth as a stewardship, help to restore the integrity of our own people and restore trust in our larger society?

Consider, finally, the yearning in our lands for a deeper life rhythm than the rat race, a richer reward than the accumula-

tion of wealth, a fuller purpose than just "making it." Mightn't Judaism's sanctification of time and space and of the daily things of life satisfy that hunger?

Yes, Judaism has an enormous amount of wisdom and experience to offer to our troubled world, and we Jews ought to be proud to proclaim it with fervor and with pride.

Albert Einstein epitomized this thesis when he declared: "I am sorry that I was born a Jew, because it kept me from choosing to be a Jew."

Let us therefore be champions of Judaism.

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

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



**ABBA HILLEL SILVER SYMPOSIUM**  
**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**  
**BY**  
**RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER**



**Brandeis University**  
**June 26, 1996**

It is a privilege which I greatly appreciate to have been asked to keynote this symposium and to address so distinguished an audience graced as it is by the presence of this great university's president and by many other scholars of the first rank whose teachings and writing have taught me much. Indeed, I look forward to learning from them again all day tomorrow.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first scholarly symposium ever convened to probe the life and work of Abba Hillel Silver. Yet he was one of the giants of his generation, was he not, endowed with a commanding personality, with rare oratorical talent, with a wide-ranging intellect and uncommon political skills. He towered above everyone else as a powerfully persuasive lobbyist for Zionism in Washington and at the United Nations. In the 1930's, others may have challenged his pre-eminence. During the fateful forties, however, no one else on the American Jewish scene exceeded him in stature.

In a way, Abba Hillel Silver shared the fate of Stephen S. Wise, his arch-rival and that other rabbinical titan of his time. For you see, their greatness was eclipsed by their successes. They strove to redeem the Jewish people from the genocidal crimes of Nazism by assuring the establishment of modern Israel. They succeeded gloriously, but then they were quickly replaced in the historical spotlight by the leaders of the new-born Jewish state. They sought to reorganize the American Jewish community and to mobilize its latent political power. They prevailed in this arena as well; but here, too, they were soon replaced by the leaders of Federations and lay organizations who ultimately became the main wielders of American Jewish communal influence.

Not a few modern Jewish historians also served to diminish the stature of these rabbis and their allies among lay leaders. At best, their heroism is obscured for us by depictions of those

raw, rude and contentious politics in which they participated as midwives to the diplomatic birthing of Israel. At worst, American Jewish leaders of the period are portrayed as impotent, or even as criminally culpable, in their inability to halt or slacken the genocidal onslaught. Indeed, some charge the American Zionist leadership of ignoring or even sacrificing rescue efforts in order to focus on building the Yishuv and transforming it into a state. The American Jewish Commission on the Holocaust, formed in September of 1981 with Arthur Goldberg as chair was riven by internal dissension within the year and did little to modify this perception.

Thus it was that the greatness of Silver and Wise was eclipsed not only by their successes, but also by their perceived failures. Yet both occurred in a dramatically different historical context than our own, which, once taken into account, considerably softens the harsh judgment of their failures even as it amplifies our appreciation of their successes.

Consider this context if you will: how, during the years of the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism had cast a global penumbra of anti-Semitism. In the late 1930's an American Jewish Committee study found that over one third of Americans believed that Jews were "too powerful." This proportion actually grew to a majority during the war. Over sixty percent of all Americans at the time believed that the "persecution of Jews in Europe had been their own fault." And of this hostile sector, twenty percent said that they would "drive Jews out of the U.S." naming them as a "menace to America," not unlike the Germans and the Japanese who resided here.

Equipped with far less than its present capacity for self defense, American Jews and their leadership faced an environment bristling with anti-Semitic organizations and rabble rousers: The German-American Bund, the Silver Shirts, Father Caughlin,



Gerald L.K. Smith, the American aviator hero, Charles Lindbergh, and numerous others. Discrimination against Jews consistently revealed itself in housing, employment and education.

Add to this a thirty percent unemployment rate, and an anti-immigration fervor that resulted in the introduction of 60, yes, 60 anti-immigration bills in one year, 1939, alone! So extreme was opposition to immigration, that in a survey taken that very year, more than two thirds of the American public opposed a one time exception to quota limits that would have allowed 10,000 refugee children to enter the U.S.

Conceivably a true mass movement in favor of rescue might have moved FDR to override the Congress, the State Department, the War Department and all the many other forces which obstinately opposed the opening of America's shut doors even one tiny bit further. But the Jewish community on its own had no such ability. We were alone, in a hostile environment. We had few, if any, allies. We received virtually no support from the trade union movement (of which Rabbi Silver, it should be noted, was a champion, resigning from Cleveland's Chamber of Commerce in 1921 to protest its open shop policies). There was no active civil rights movement to mobilize, nor any of the many other liberal alliances that have been key to Jewish advancement in the post war era. Altogether, we were helplessly isolated.

Moreover, the genocidal reality of Nazi anti-Semitism had loomed up too suddenly out of the historical continuum. It was too unprecedented, even given our martyrology spanning the millennia. It was too much of a horror, a crime before God, to be fully grasped.

Searching the horizon for even a glimmer of light, Abba Hillel Silver found hope and purpose in the possibility of establishing a Jewish national presence in Palestine. It was a conviction

which had already been forged in his youth, but which hardened to steel by the revelation that Europe had become a killing field for Jews.

The fulfillment of the Zionist vision, said Silver, was the "inescapable logic of events." Listen to his expressive, powerful words:

"From the infested, typhus-ridden Ghetto of Warsaw, from the death-block of Nazi occupied lands, where millions of our people are awaiting execution by the slow or the quick method, from a hundred concentration camps which befoul the map of Europe, over the entire face of the earth, comes the cry: 'enough; there must be a final end to all this, a sure and certain end'."

First among the obstacles to that "sure and certain end" was the British White Paper of 1939, which limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 over five years. It was a policy that squeezed Jews into Hitler's death trap. Yet at the 21st World Zionist Congress in Geneva, Chaim Weizmann advocated a policy of cautious compromise with Great Britain in order to preserve unity against the Nazis. Abba Hillel Silver, in one of his first appearances on the World Zionist scene, spoke in support of Weizmann's approach.

But this was the last time that Silver would advocate Zionist dependency upon the powers-that-be. He thundered: "The tragic problems of the Jewish people in the world cannot be solved by chiefs of government or prominent officials sending us Rosh Hashanah greetings!" Silver quickly became a dynamo of militant Zionism. Within three years he would electrify the Biltmore Conference with a historic speech urging - - and winning under the leadership of Ben-Gurion - - an unequivocal demand for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. By 1943, he had full control of the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs and turned it into a powerhouse for lobbying and agitation.



Throughout, Silver's strategy was to mobilize the Jewish rank-and-file and to build wide-spread popular support for the Zionist cause. Distrustful of the Roosevelt administration, he insisted on political independence for himself and for Zionism. He registered as a Republican, but supported candidates of both major parties for public office. This militant, self-assertive strategy brought Silver into a head on collision with Nahum Goldmann and especially with Stephen Wise, who advocated use of the channels of influence that he himself had established over a forty year span of public service and Zionist activism.

Their furious factional fights have been the object of retrospective criticism, as I have said. But here, too, our judgment must be leavened by the historical context. During much of the pre-war period, Zionism was still a minority movement rejected by mainstream Jews of every stripe as too "ideological." Silver's own Central Conference of American Rabbis was on the record as anti-Zionist, at least de jure though not de facto, until 1937.

Likewise were the Conservative and Orthodox streams of Judaism, including virtually all the Hasidic dynasties, opposed to what they regarded as pseudo-Messianic, dangerously secular pipe dream. The then influential American Jewish Committee was also vigorously opposed to Zionism. So was the not-to-be-discounted Jewish Left of the day; socialists and communists both preferred other political destinies for the Jewish people.

History overruled them all, as the Zionist cause was pushed to the fore, morally and politically, in the name of Jewish survival. It was too late, Silver argued, "to wage anew those interesting ideological battles of a generation ago . . . the vast ghostly company (of murdered Jews), give us no rest . . . it is their innocent blood which will not be covered up, until out



of their martyrdom a new life is born - - the free and redeemed life of their people."

In their lifelong and visionary Zionism, Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver were exceptional and united. Perhaps it would be more accurate to view their rivalry as a functional partnership. Together, they hitched their dream to the great draft horse America. Silver, the militant, swept Great Britain and other obstacles out of its path. Wise, the diplomat, fed and groomed the beast, thereby helping non-Zionist Jews to hop onto the wagon. Eventually, the mighty horse did its labor. Then other Jewish leaders took over the reins.

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Some words about Rabbi Silver's role within the movement of Reform Judaism are in order.

I realize that a segment of tomorrow's discussion will be devoted specifically to this subject. Indeed, I look forward to hearing Mike Meyer's more extended and learned analysis then. I certainly have no intention of treading on a good friend's lines. But a keynote address is much like the overture of an opera in which major themes are preluded. Silver's work in this arena assuredly was a dominant and recurrent theme of his life's work, and cannot be ignored in this initial overview.

Reform was still anti-Zionist during the early years of Silver's career. And even during his mid-years - - when he had many kindred spirits in our rabbinic Conference - - the leaders of the CCAR and the Hebrew Union College were steadfast in their conviction, as articulated by Plank Five of the radical 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, that we Jews are "not a nation but a religious community and therefore expect no return to Palestine." Certainly the predominant majority of Reform's lay men and women

at that time were of such a mind. They were still captive of Reform's past, of its revolutionary period of anti-Orthodox rationalism and rejectionism. They affirmed, rather, that Reform is a missionary, "universal" faith, fundamentally incompatible with national aspirations.

Silver not only remained impervious to the anti-Zionism within Reform. He indelibly impressed his Zionist faith upon the movement as a whole. The process took three decades, and many played a role in it, not least the almost three million Eastern European Jews who immigrated to these shores between 1881 and 1920. These new immigrants defined their Jewishness in ethnic rather than in universal terms. They sensed themselves to be a "national minority," a people within peoples - - and once their sons entered the Reform rabbinate, as did the Lithuanian born Silver, the balance of power within Reform began to shift. The Eastern European Jews moved away from the strictures of Orthodoxy, and Reform moved away from its rather cold intellectualism born in the Age of Reason. These mutually reinforcing developments served to pave the road to Reform's acceptance of Zionism.

Abba Hillel Silver gave elegant voice to these historical forces. He did so most effectively in a 1935 debate with the venerated Rabbi Samuel Shulman before the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Their subject: the anti-Zionist Fifth Plank of the Pittsburgh Platform, still standing, de jure, as the mission statement of Reform.

"It is idle," said Silver, "to talk of our people as no longer a nation but a religious community, in the face of the fact that millions of Jews are today recognized by the law of nations as national minorities, (in many Eastern European countries) millions more as a distinct nationality in Soviet Russia, and hundreds of thousands in Palestine where a Jewish homeland is



being created under the terms of a mandate of the League of Nations which recognizes not only the national existence of the Jewish people, but also its historic claim to a national home."

Note that Silver did not reject the messianic universalism or missionary purpose of Reform. He only refused to see either as a substitute for Jewish nationalism. Rather, he urged "the sense of classic harmony in Jewish life, the total program of Jewish life and destiny . . . the religious and moral values, the universal concepts, the concept of mission, as well as the Jewish people itself."

This was indeed the Zionism of the Eastern European immigrants, the folk from whom the Lithuanian born Silver drew his personal and political strength. Most of them would never make aliyah to Israel, even as Silver. But all of them would come to see Israel as their spiritual homeland, the main repository of Jewish values and the main preserver of their Jewish identities.

In their breadth of understanding about the meaning of Judaism, and Jewish peoplehood in the modern world, Shulman and Silver did not stand at polar opposites. Silver did not uphold the strict secular nationalism that dominated in Palestine, but rather affirmed a "spiritual Zionism," thus retaining Classical Reform's commitments to the concept of Israel's world-wide mission. And Shulman, on his part, was no exponent of a pure, undiluted Classical Reform. Indeed, in his passionate presentation, he acknowledged Reform's excessive "self-satisfied rationalistic pride" and called for greater Jewish distinctiveness and ritual observances in the movement.

Still, the two incarnated by virtue of their age, descent and demeanor, opposing tendencies within Reform Judaism: the one, a noble conservatism that feared Zionism's potential to diminish permanently the prophetic, universal character of Judaism, the



other, a militant realism that viewed the flesh-and-blood fact of Jewish suffering as alterable only through a restoration of Jewish nationhood.

Two years later, at its 1937 conference in Columbus, Ohio, the CCAR adopted the Guiding Principles. Plank Five now declared Judaism to be "the soul of which Israel is the body." And it went on to affirm "the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes," as a "center of Jewish culture and spiritual life."

The declaration was hardly Zionist. It carefully declared Palestine a center, not the center. But it ended the isolation of Reform Judaism from the mainstream of American Jews who were, in large part under Silver's leadership, becoming increasingly devoted to Jewish efforts in Palestine.

As the Columbus debate came to its conclusion, Rabbi David Philipson, who fifty years before had attended the convocation adopting the Pittsburgh Platform, declared: "If the younger men of the Central Conference want this revision, I will move its adoption."

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Just as he spoke within the Reform movement as a Zionist, so did Abba Hillel Silver speak within the Zionist movement as a rabbi.

I diverge here from the views held by Silver's only English biographer, Marc Raphael, who portrayed his protagonist as a Zionist, first and foremost, judging his rabbinic vocation only of subordinate weight. He considered Silver a cultural rather

than a religious Zionist. Not so! Abba Hillel Silver was a deeply religious Jew. As a teacher and preacher, he was committed to the synagogue as the central institution of Jewish life, and to Judaism as the bedrock of Jewish life.

In a 1948 address delivered at a UAHC Assembly, he declared:

"There are no substitutes in Jewish life for religion. Neither philanthropy nor culture nor nationalism is adequate for the stress and challenge of our lives. All these interests can and must find their rightful place within the general pattern of Judaism. But the pattern must be of Judaism, the Judaism of the priest, the prophet, the saint, the mystic and the rabbi; the Judaism which speaks of God and the worship of God, and the commandments of God and the quest for God . . . "

Silver did not assert these views only to the members of a synagogue movement. He spoke in like manner to the Zionists, infusing their movement with religious fervor, even as he advocated the centrality of religion in the larger Jewish community.

Thus, in the mid-twenties, when the Menorah Journal, the most influential publication of its day, ran a series of articles highly critical of organized Judaism and belittling religion "as but a small part of the total fullness of Jewish life," Silver launched an angry counter-attack. "Why do the heathen rage?" He roared, defending the modern rabbinate and the synagogue against those intellectuals who sought to supplant religious institutions with secular alternatives. He insisted that Reform Judaism's concept of mission alone could prompt Jews to global action.

This holistic, religiously rooted sense of Jewish life has become the hallmark of Reform Judaism in the post war years, as we take on the challenge of being both broad and deep, flexible and



rooted, as a modern religious movement. For Abba Hillel Silver, such an approach was the hallmark of his career. His famed eloquence was augmented, no doubt, by his charisma, his penetrating basso voice, his height and stature, even his bushy hair reaching to the heavens. But most of all, it was the product of his religious depth, of his fiery faith.

Silver literally steeped himself in the t'nach, so much so that biblical passages became an integral part of his internal vocabulary and patterns of communication. He didn't merely cite verses in his speeches; the Torah spoke through him. He wasn't merely rabbinical in his political style; his politics arose from his identity as a rabbi.

In the schismatic world in which Abba Hillel Silver wielded his tremendous influence, he was often regarded as ruthless and militant, an avid polemicist, a general who thrived on the battlefield and defined his compatriots in reductionist terms, either as valued allies or as implacable foes. Perhaps this was a reaction to his patrician manner, his evident pride, his impermeable privacy. But perhaps too, there is among his detractors an element of "murmuring against Moses," the Biblical figure to whom Rabbi Silver bore striking resemblance and about whom he wrote in his last published book.

Like Moses he was revered more than loved - - a leader aloof from the people, yet embodying their most precious hopes.

Like Moses he undertook a multiplicity of roles that demanded incredible endurance and spiritual discipline.

Like Moses he helped make tangible the dream of land for the people of Israel, and then surrendered the mantle of leadership to practical men - to administrators and warriors.



And like the great liberator and teacher of the Torah, Abba Hillel Silver possessed a panoramic, inclusive vision of Judaism and the Jewish people that was unique among too many of his more nearsighted Zionist contemporaries. While the theories and plans of others were being swept away by the storm winds of history that so radically altered the Jewish landscape of our time, Silver stood upon the rock of 35 centuries of Jewish reality and saw through the tempest to the future.

"There is clearly visible in Judaism," he wrote in his most enduring book, Where Judaism Differed, "a steady and dominant coherence, a self-consistency, which links together all its stages of change and development and gives it structure and unity of tone and character. It possesses a unity not of a system, but of a symphony - - unity, freedom, and compassion - - came to be sufficiently distinctive and impressive as to be unmistakable."

Let his words, as ever, speak for themselves. Abba Hillel Silver's own life could be better described.

It is a privilege which I greatly appreciate to have been asked to keynote this symposium and to address so distinguished an audience graced as it is by the presence of this great university's president and by many other scholars of the first rank whose teachings and writing have taught me much. Indeed, I look forward to learning from them again all day tomorrow.

As you can sense, there is a measure of awe which fills me here. After all, I am no scholar, only a preacher, and preachers are better advised to stick to the pulpit than to venture into the academic world, devoted, as it is, to canons of objectivity and value-free research. As those among you who have studied or taught at HUC/JIR or JTS well know, even in seminaries the art of preaching is disdained and homileticians and theologians are on the bottom of the pecking order.

My beloved Midrash Professor, Dr. Israel Bettan of blessed memory, put the matter this way: "The key to our seminary's curriculum," he said, "is the verb 'to happen'." This simple verb is the "open-sesame to all the courses that are taught."

The teachers of history are clearly the most advantaged, <sup>he</sup> we felt,   
→ For history simply says "it happened," and no student will "demur from such a positive statement, legibly spelled out, black on white."

Teachers of social and personal ethics fare almost as well. When they raise their eyes heavenward and exclaim: "Ah, if it would only happen!" The students somehow "partake of their ecstasy and feel content."

Other departments encounter a somewhat greater difficulty. <sup>Thus,</sup> When   
Philosophy tells the students "what seems to have happened could not really have happened," students appear perplexed, but

nonetheless "they are profoundly impressed." And when the Sociologists and statisticians set out to prove that "what happens all of the time may happen again" the students are too absorbed in "sifting the facts to betray anything more than a mild stupor."

But theologians and homiletics teachers are the "real thorns in the academic flesh." When theology claims that "it happened when no one was looking," then a "nervous titter runs through the classroom leaving the Queen of the Sciences with disarrayed laurels on her brow." And when the preacher adds: "It never happened, but I can make it happen," why then the students "thunder in a mighty chorus: 'Oh, yeah?'" and the spell of the spinner of sermons is broken. ~~Well~~ Well, my friends, I'm a preacher, for better or for worse, but at any rate not for much more than the forty or so minutes I was allotted.

Now, ~~To~~ to the best of my knowledge this is the first scholarly symposium ever convened to probe the life and work of Abba Hillel Silver. Yet he was one of the giants of his generation, was he not, endowed with a commanding personality, with rare oratorical talent, with a wide-ranging intellect and uncommon political skills. He towered above everyone else as a powerfully persuasive lobbyist for Zionism in Washington and at the United Nations. In the 1930's, others may have challenged his pre-eminence. During the fateful forties, however, no one else on the American Jewish scene exceeded him in stature.

→ In a way, Abba Hillel Silver shared the fate of Stephen S. Wise, his arch-rival, <sup>and</sup> that other rabbinical titan of his time. For you see, their greatness was eclipsed by their successes. They strove to redeem the Jewish people from the genocidal crimes of

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Nazism by assuring the establishment of modern Israel. They succeeded gloriously, but then they were quickly replaced in the historical spotlight by the leaders of the new-born Jewish state. They sought to reorganize the American Jewish community and to mobilize its latent political power. They prevailed in this arena as well; but here, too, they were soon replaced by *the leaders of* Federations and lay organizations <sup>who</sup> ~~which~~ ultimately became the main wielders of American Jewish communal influence.

Not a few modern Jewish historians also served to diminish the stature of these rabbis and their allies among lay leaders. At best, their heroism is obscured for us by depictions of those raw, rude and contentious politics in which they participated as midwives to the diplomatic birthing of Israel. At worst, American Jewish leaders of the period are portrayed as impotent, or even as criminally culpable, in their inability to halt or slacken the genocidal onslaught. Indeed, some charge the American Zionist leadership of ignoring or even sacrificing rescue efforts in order to focus on building the Yishuv and transforming it into a state. The American Jewish Commission on the Holocaust, formed in September of 1981 with Arthur Goldberg as chair was riven by internal dissension within the year and did little to modify this perception.

Thus it was that the greatness of Silver and Wise was eclipsed not only by their successes, but also by their perceived failures. Yet both occurred in a dramatically different historical context than our own, which, once taken into account, considerably softens the harsh judgment of their failures even as it amplifies our appreciation of their successes.

Consider this context if you will: how, during the years of the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism had cast a global penumbra of anti-Semitism. In the late 1930's an American Jewish

Committee study found that over one third of Americans believed that Jews were "too powerful." This proportion actually grew to a majority during the war. Over sixty percent of all Americans at the time believed that the "persecution of Jews in Europe had been their own fault." And of this hostile sector, twenty percent said that they would "drive Jews out of the U.S." naming them as a "menace to America," not unlike the Germans and the Japanese who resided here.

Equipped with far less than its present capacity for self defense, American Jews and their leadership faced an environment bristling with anti-Semitic organizations and rabble rousers: The German-American Bund, the Silver Shirts, Father Caughlin, Gerald L.K. Smith, the American aviator hero, Charles Lindbergh, and numerous others. Discrimination against Jews consistently revealed itself in housing, employment and education.

Add to this a thirty percent unemployment rate, and an anti-immigration fervor that resulted in the introduction of 60, yes, 60 anti-immigration bills in one year, 1939, alone! So extreme was opposition to immigration, that in a survey taken that very year, more than two thirds of the American public opposed a one time exception to quota limits that would have allowed 10,000 refugee children to enter the U.S.

Conceivably a true mass movement in favor of rescue might have moved FDR to override the Congress, the State Department, the War Department and all the many other forces <sup>which</sup> who obstinately opposed the opening of America's shut doors even one tiny bit further. But the Jewish community on its own had no such ability. We were alone, in a hostile environment. We had few, if any, allies. We received virtually no support from the trade union movement (of which Rabbi Silver, it should be noted, was a champion, resigning from Cleveland's Chamber of Commerce in 1921 to protest its open



shop policies). There was no active civil rights movement to mobilize, nor any of the many other liberal alliances that have been key to Jewish advancement in the post war era. Altogether, we were helplessly isolated.

Moreover, the genocidal reality of Nazi anti-Semitism had loomed up too suddenly out of the historical continuum. It was too unprecedented, even given our martyrology spanning the millennia. It was too much of a horror, a crime before God, to be fully grasped.

Searching the horizon for even a glimmer of light, Abba Hillel Silver found hope and purpose in the possibility of establishing a Jewish national presence in Palestine. It was a conviction which had already been forged in his youth, but which hardened to steel by the revelation that Europe had become a killing field for Jews.

The fulfillment of the Zionist vision, said Silver, was the "inescapable logic of events." Listen to his expressive, powerful words:

"From the infested, typhus-ridden Ghetto of Warsaw, from the death-block of Nazi occupied lands, where millions of our people are awaiting execution by the slow or the quick method, from a hundred concentration camps which befoul the map of Europe, over the entire face of the earth, comes the cry: 'enough; there must be a final end to all this, a sure and certain end'."

First among the obstacles to that "sure and certain end" was the British White Paper of 1939, which limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 over five years. It was a policy that squeezed Jews into Hitler's death trap. Yet at the 21st World Zionist Congress in Geneva, Chaim Weizmann advocated a policy of cautious compromise



with Great Britain in order to preserve unity against the Nazis. Abba Hillel Silver, in one of his first appearances on the World Zionist scene, spoke in support of Weizmann's approach.

But this was the last time that Silver would advocate Zionist dependency upon the powers-that-be. He thundered: "The tragic problems of the Jewish people in the world cannot be solved by chiefs of government or prominent officials sending us Rosh Hashanah greetings!" Silver quickly became a dynamo of militant Zionism. Within three years he would electrify the Biltmore Conference with a historic speech urging -- and winning under the leadership of Ben-Gurion -- an unequivocal demand for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. By 1943, he had full control of the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs and turned it into a powerhouse for lobbying and agitation.

Throughout, Silver's strategy was to mobilize the Jewish rank-and-file and to build wide-spread popular support for the Zionist cause. Distrustful of the Roosevelt administration, he insisted on political independence for himself and for Zionism. He registered as a Republican, but supported candidates of both major parties for ~~his~~ public office. This militant, self-assertive strategy brought Silver into a head on collision with Nahum Goldmann and especially with Stephen Wise, who advocated use of the channels of influence that he himself had established over a forty year span of public service and Zionist activism. ←

Their furious factional fights have been the object of retrospective criticism, as I have said. But here, too, our judgment must be leavened by the historical context. During much of the pre-war period, Zionism was still a minority movement rejected by mainstream Jews of every stripe as too "ideological." Silver's own Central Conference of American Rabbis was on the record as anti-Zionist, at least de jure though not de facto, until 1937.

Likewise were the Conservative and Orthodox streams of Judaism, including virtually all the Hasidic dynasties, opposed to what they regarded as pseudo-Messianic, dangerously secular pipe dream. The then influential American Jewish Committee was also vigorously opposed to Zionism. So was the not-to-be-discounted Jewish Left of the day; socialists and communists both preferred other political destinies for the Jewish people.

History overruled them all, as the Zionist cause was pushed to the fore, morally and politically, in the name of Jewish survival. It was too late, Silver argued, "to wage anew those interesting ideological battles of a generation ago . . . the vast ghostly company (of murdered Jews), give us no rest . . . it is their innocent blood which will not be covered up, until out of their martyrdom a new life is born -- the free and redeemed life of their people."

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