

Sermon by Rabbi Charles A. Krolloff, President

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In this week's parasha, God says to Moses and Aaron:

"Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of bnai Yisrael, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them." (Nu. 20.12)

For years, we have all grappled with the question: what was the sin of Moses and Aaron that was **so great** that they should be denied entrance into the Promised Land?

Our teacher Nechama Leibowitz explored the plethora of explanations, both well-known and obscure, and favored Luzzato's: that Moses should have **spoken** to the rock, instead of striking it so that "**the name of God would have been sanctified to a great extent.**"

We too are plagued by that nagging feeling that we have fallen short, that, just as Moses could have done it differently, we could have done more "*lihakdeeshaynee b'aynay b'nei Yisrael* -- to sanctify God in the sight of the people Israel.

I feel that way about my pulpit rabbinate, from which I shall retire in 368 days, just as I feel about my Conference presidency with a mere 57 hours to go. I could always have done more.

It has been a rare privilege to connect with so many of you *panim el panim*, or by email and telephone, to share your struggles and to celebrate your achievements. This office presented some challenges which I had anticipated, and a few that were beyond my imagination. If I failed to respond to a letter or returned your call belatedly, I ask your forgiveness. They may have arrived during that week of five funerals.

My wife, Terry, is no doubt correct that two full-time jobs are a little much -- even for an over-active rabbi like myself. I want to express publicly my deep gratitude to Terry for insisting that we bring the perspective of *kedushah* into our lives (especially when we are stressed), for her wise advice, and for her excellent editing skills, without which this address would be much longer -- all of which she has lovingly provided during our 46-year sacred partnership.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE

The purpose of the CCAR is to help us "sanctify God's name." Like each of us as individuals, so the Conference as an institution is imperfect, always in need of change.

But imperfections notwithstanding, I never fail to be amazed at the scope of our work and the quality of our leaders.

The RPB provides us with what is likely the finest clergy pension program in North America, with thanks to Ron Cohen, Joe Goldman, Bob Koppel, and Paul Rockfeld. Our joint placement system, operating under the pressure of severe rabbinic shortage, is directed so well by my friend of 42 years, the unflappable and talented Arnie Sher and ably chaired by Don Berlin. The Conference strengthens our bonds with MARAM and our Israeli colleagues through *Rav l'rav* and missions, even as we hold joint board meetings with our colleagues who serve world-wide. We assist aging rabbis and widows, while our mentoring program, in partnership with the College, will help us grow professionally and personally. Our siddur committee, led by chairman Peter Knobel and editors Elyse Frishman and Judith Abrams, will share with us today and tomorrow the early fruits of its efforts. We can be proud of the lead we have taken with same-gender officiation, rabbinic wellness, and the Principles of Reform Judaism.

None of this would have been possible without Paul Menitoff. My respect for Paul's judgment grows every day. I especially admire Paul's concern for his colleagues, just one example of which are the countless telephone calls he makes to rabbis at precisely the time that they need to hear from him. During his travels, he meets hundreds of colleagues and represents our interests so well. He nurtures our relationships with the RA and the RCA, and, most of all, possesses a prophetic vision and the courage of his convictions.

Elliott Stevens oversees our publications and a multitude of projects with amazing dedication. Debbie Pipe joined us during my tenure and has provided helpful support to many rabbis and their families. I have only praise for Shelley Limmer, our outstanding administrative director, for Dale Panoff, and for each member of the office staff.

The responsibilities of our Committee on Ethics and Appeals have become more complex and challenging than ever before. That is because you, the members of our Conference -- have consistently voted over the last decade to strengthen our Ethics Code. The process of review of the Code is ongoing. For more than a year now, it has been critiqued by the Committee on Review of the Ethics Code chaired by Jack Stern. Their proposals, which substantially improve the Code once again, will be the focus of discussion tomorrow.

The Committee on Ethics and Appeals has fulfilled its responsibilities with integrity, consistency, and self-sacrifice. We should be proud of their service to the Conference. Sandy Ragins, whose term as chair ends with this meeting, deserves our appreciation for taking on what is arguably the most difficult job in our Conference, always maintaining the highest standards. To you, Sandy, and to each member of your committee, goes our gratitude. I have nominated as new chair our respected colleague, Harry Danziger.

If anyone was ever been prepared by experience and temperament to lead the Conference, it is certainly my friend, Martin Weiner. Marty has represented us brilliantly on the RPB and the Placement Commission. He has sound judgment, broad knowledge, a passionate commitment to the solidarity of our rabbinate and our movement. He has been an outstanding mentor to younger rabbis and has inspired more than a few to enter the rabbinate, including his son, Dan. Karen and Marty, congratulations on this richly deserved honor as well as on the *chupah* of your daughter, Elizabeth, two weeks ago.

Kol Hakavod to Janet Marder, the first woman to be nominated vice-president since Isaac Meyer Wise and 36 other men first convened this august body in 1889. Janet's historic nomination is testimony, first and foremost, to her exceptional ability, and, after that, to the magnificent transformative qualities that our female colleagues have brought to the rabbinate, a transformation sparked by the courage and vision of Sally Priesand.

We all want to welcome to this convention our new *rosh yeshiva*, David Ellenson, and David's wife, also our colleague, Jacqueline Koch Ellenson. The College has made a brilliant choice. David is a recognized scholar, a revered teacher, and an *ohav Yisrael*. Most of all, David is a warm, deeply caring, and authentic rabbi and friend.

ISRAEL

This is a momentous and profoundly challenging time in Jewish history.

The bombing in Tel Aviv on June 1 represented a kind of turning point. For reasons I am still trying to understand, it touched many of us deep within our Jewish psyches. Young Jewish immigrants, who had left the FSU for a better life, were blown apart by that blast of hate.

It came after eight months of deep disappointment that Yasir Arafat, the man whom we thought might have been our partner for peace, turned out to be a feckless, cowardly instigator of violence. He bears most of the responsibility for the hundreds of Palestinian and Israeli dead in the last year.

Of this we should be certain: if ever Israel required our support, our partnership, our sense of shared mission, it is now. Our Israeli brothers and sisters are on the front line. They stand in the advance guard of the Jewish people, whether they serve in the IDF, walk the Ben Yehuda Mall, or gather in a Progressive synagogue in Nahariyah.

We have no choice, *elah l'hakdeeshaynee b'aynay bnai Yisrael*, to sanctify God's name by performing concrete deeds in partnership with our family in Israel.

We rabbis have an historic role to play in this drama of the Jewish people. Each of us will determine what that mandate is and how we will fulfill it. But we must all find a concrete way to be involved. *Kol hakavod* to our colleagues and their families who have

made *aliyah* and whose feet are firmly planted on the soil of *eretz Yisrael*. By your *aliyah*, you sanctify God's name

For those of us who remain *bechutz la-aretz*, we can support Israel on three levels.

The first is political. Knowing full well that Arafat torpedoed President Clinton's peace efforts, the Bush Administration is reluctant to become an active facilitator in the Middle East. We rabbis must keep urging the Administration to renew and sustain their efforts for cease-fire, along with European governments like Germany who have been helpful.

Once violence has terminated for a period of time, the next step will be confidence-building measures. The Palestinians, for example, must finally halt the vicious calumnies and appeals for "death to the Jews" which spew forth daily from Arab speakers, radio, television, and classrooms. As long as the number one song on Egyptian radio is: "I Hate Israel," there can be little confidence in Arab leadership.

From the Israeli side, once we are at that second phase of confidence-building phase, a freeze on the expansion of settlements would be a helpful move. Meir Shalev reminded us last month in *The New York Times* that (quote) "ever since the splendid victory in the Six Day War, the State of Israel has been preoccupied with nothing but the territories -- with them, their metastases and their consequences...Our strength is running out because of them." (quote) I hope that we will add our voices to the significant number of Israelis who are convinced that freezing the settlements and eventually reducing the occupation of territories is "not a gift we give to our enemies", but is in the moral, political, and military interests of the Jewish State. Nor can Israel continue to pay so little attention to its Arab citizens who number almost a million or 19 percent of Israel's population. To ignore this burning issue is to do so at Israel's peril.

Once the violence subsides and confidence-building measures take hold, might we then dare to hope that the parties would return to the peace table? At this moment we have no reliable partner. But I cannot believe that God wants the Jewish people to give up on peace.

The second level of support is our physical presence. American Jews need to go to Israel in large numbers. The concerned presence of Reform Jews -- especially through congregational trips -- must be felt *meeDan v'ad Eilat. L'hakdeeshaynee b'aynay bnei Yisrael*. The CCAR has initiated, with the UAHC, and other arms of the movement, *Aliyat Nefesh* -- A Spiritual Pilgrimage, a major solidarity mission that will depart July 29 I urge you to join that mission and to bring three or four lay leaders with you.

The decision of the UAHC to postpone this year's NFTY trips was sad and painful. Painful for Eric Yoffie and his colleagues to make the decision and distressing for us to hear it. But I do respect Eric's decision. You and I can never know what we would have done were we in his shoes. My best guess is that I would have done the same. These are children, not adults. I have always sold NFTY trips to my kids and their families on

the basis that they can be counted on to be of the highest quality in terms of program, leaders, and security. If security could not be assured, then postponement until next year was probably correct decision.

In light of the accusations of Ehud Olmert, the Orthodox establishment, and others, I want to emphasize that our movement's commitment to Israel is not to be judged by a single decision about a single summer's program for teenagers. Our commitment is to be judged by decades of programs in which tens of thousands of youngsters -- more than any other organization -- travel, study, and flourish in the Jewish State. It is to be judged by HUC's extraordinary Jerusalem campus and its year-in-Israel program. It will be judged by increased support for our rabbis in Israel through the CCAR's *Rav /rav* program and by our presence next March in Jerusalem for the CCAR convention.

If Israel is not in your convention budget, I urge you to persuade your leadership that a new set of circumstances has arisen that requires your presence in Israel in March. I also urge you to lead a mission from your synagogue or agency immediately before and after that convention.

The third level of support concerns the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism. Let me state the situation bluntly and without equivocation: Despite our efforts, what we are doing -- you, I, and our entire movement -- to support our Progressive colleagues and institutions in Israel is woefully inadequate. Here, my friends, *chatanu v'ashamnu*.

Israel's Progressive rabbis and their synagogue leaders are on the front-line of Jewish history -- physically and spiritually. They live in a region with 20 million hostile neighbors; they struggle to break through to secular Israelis who seem to have been immunized against religious life at birth; and they confront an entrenched religious establishment that lives in the 17th century, but enjoys 21st century government hand-outs of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Vayakdeeshaynee b'ayanay b'nei Yisrael -- are we going to sanctify God's name primarily in North America? Do we really believe that Progressive Judaism speaks to all Jews, not only to upper-middle class Western Jews? Do we believe that Progressive Judaism has a mission to fulfill for the Jews of Israel (and the FSU) who are searching for meaning, community, and faith? What I find missing among too many of our people is a conviction that we Reform Jews have a mission beyond the walls of our own synagogues and communities.

Christian churches have always impressed me with their overseas mission work. The Presbyterian Church in my community is the largest contributor to that denomination's worldwide activities. I asked the pastor of that church what drives his members to support these efforts. His answer was enlightening. It wasn't about recognition. It was about God and what God expected of them: to share their good fortune with people in need. He said that his members believed that Christians in other lands should have a decent church to pray in, an educated pastor to guide them, and a hospital to treat

them. And they have developed a strong, personal connection with the projects they support.

There is good news. Interest among Israelis in Progressive Judaism has never been greater. Couples are flocking to our rabbis for weddings; families are flooding into our synagogues for bnai mitzvah. Youngsters are filling our pre-school programs to overflowing. We are building and expanding synagogues in Mevaseret Tzyion, Raanana, Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Modi'in.....

HUC's Jerusalem campus has welcomed twenty bright and committed Israelis currently studying to become rabbis. Twenty is equal to the total number of Israelis ordained by us in Jerusalem in the last two decades.

We will either seize this opportunity or have to answer to the next generations for our failure. The big question is: will there be congregations for these new rabbis to serve and money to pay their salaries? These future rabbis and those already leading our movement cannot live on good intentions. Either they will be supported -- or they will go elsewhere to serve. And that would be a tragedy.

In the last WZO elections, five years ago, your unprecedented effort enabled us to win an enormous victory -- 48 percent of the vote. Our competitors have already developed their strategy to wrench that victory away from us. That would cost us political influence and most of all financial support for our Israel Movement. We rabbis must once again get out the vote.

But there is a wider issue: our Israel Movement requires an annual infusion of several million dollars more than we currently provide. That is not a lot of money for our movement of our size and resources. But without those funds, our efforts in Israel will at best limp along and at worst collapse. Paul, Marty, and I have had preliminary discussions with the leadership of the Union, the College, and ARZA/World Union about a revitalized financial effort for our Israel Movement. We have not yet developed a detailed plan. But we in the CCAR -- and that includes our Israel chair, Don Rossoff -- are committed to a brave, new effort that will be done right: with vision, with true cooperation among all our partners, and with assurance that the funds will be used wisely and effectively. Once and for all, we must provide the funds needed to build Israeli Progressive Judaism into a force to be reckoned with.

We need to know -- and that includes Eric Yoffie and Russell Silverman, UAHC chairman, whom I warmly welcome to this gathering -- we need to know whether you want this to happen. Most of all, we need an early indication of whether you are ready to become a pro-active partner in a vigorous effort to expand Progressive Judaism in the Jewish State. Let us know at this convention -- because only with an assurance of your support, will it be possible to move forward.

THE SHORTAGE OF RABBIS

The shortage of rabbis and other Jewish professionals has become the most critical problem in our Reform movement today. It effects rabbinic standards, HUC's mission, and the Union's ability to serve its congregations. It effects our outreach to the unaffiliated, to hospitals and the military, and to the larger the Jewish community.

It effects you and me and our ability to function at a high level. As long as congregations and agencies cannot find qualified rabbis, many will turn to the unqualified, to those who received rapid private ordination or attended sub-standard institutes. This will lower rabbinic standards, ill-serve *amcha*, besmirch our rabbinic *shem tov*, and assure us of a cadre of rabbis who will be willing to work for a fraction of the compensation and benefits that we receive.

At a recent kallah of southeastern Reform rabbis, I asked: if you could make one change to improve your personal or professional lives, what would it be? The most frequent response was: more staff. Barry Schrage, president of Boston's Jewish Federation, CJP, at a meeting of the Reform Leadership Council, described the synagogue as "the most understaffed institution in Jewish life today." Does anyone know that better than you and I?" I can no longer keep track of the number of colleagues who have been unable to find a cantor, Jewish educator, or assistant rabbi and that's not good for us or for our people. Every one of us needs to become an active recruiter of rabbis and to shout from the mountain top that the rabbinate is fulfilling as a life's work. The College-Institute, which has intensified its recruitment, should develop a more student-friendly pathway for men and women who are considering the rabbinate as a second career. They can become an enormous source for new rabbis.

Two years ago, when I introduced the themes of rabbinic wellness and quality of life, they were well received by you, my colleagues, but viewed with considerable skepticism by lay leaders who suspected that they smacked of self-serving and a desire for the "cushy life."

All that has changed in two years. Today, growing numbers of synagogue leaders understand that they must be our partners in developing new models -- models by which rabbis can experience some shabbatot with family, some evenings at home, more time to study and grow, additional staff, and flex-time and part-time as respected and effective options.

In my travels these last two years, I discovered that most of us feel very fulfilled in what we do. But I also learned that there is pain for all of us and that the sacrifice we make in order to serve *amcha* is sometimes more than we or our families are willing to bear. Just because rabbis have functioned in a certain way for the last 50 years does not mean that it must continue that way for the next 50.

The Task Force on the Shortage of Jewish Professionals, chaired by UAHC leader Robert Heller, has placed quality of life, wellness, and the professional-friendly environment at the forefront of its agenda. "Professional-friendly environment" is their

wording, not mine, and it is now at the top of our movement's agenda -- with no apologies and no guilt.

But lay leaders will not make it happen without us. We are 50% partners in this radical transformation -- and that's what it is, a radical transformation of attitude and priorities about how we are going to get our important jobs done and still take good care of ourselves and our families and "get a life". The CCAR is dedicated to helping you make that happen.

DIVERSITY IS OUR TRADEMARK

Our Conference looks very different today than it did 20 years ago. I thought that I knew our membership. How wrong I was. Being president permitted me to get to know you, my colleagues, in a broadly encompassing, yet personal way.

When I realized the extent of our rabbinic diversity, I was inspired that we had found so many ways *l'hakdeeshaynee baynay bnei Yisrael*. Most of us serve as full-time pulpit rabbis -- and that role remains critical to the future of American Jewry. But a sizeable minority of us, perhaps 40% or more, experience a different kind of rabbinate. We are academicians and hospital chaplains, counselors and federation execs, military chaplains and teachers, prison chaplains and part-time pulpit rabbis, organization and Hillel rabbis, foundation officials, teachers, and educators. Most of us function in North America, but we also serve in Israel, Europe, South America, South Africa, Australia, and the FSU. We are retired, active, and semi-active, first career, second career, and even third. We were ordained as young as 24 and as senior as 68. Whether our rabbinic career is brief or lengthy, we are transforming Jewish life *letovah*. Every day, we sanctify God's name when we touch the *neschama* of the Jew -- in the classroom with *divrei Torah*, under the chupah *bivrachot*, and at the end of life with *n'chemta*.

Never underestimate how pivotal we are to Jewish life. The quality, character, and future of Jewish life depend on what we accomplish and, even more, on who we are.

Once, Mahatma Gandhi was leaving on a train trip and a number of journalists and photographers gathered to interview him and see him off. One journalist shouted out: "Gandhi, what is your message to the people?" The train was already pulling away. Gandhi grabbed a paper bag, scribbled an answer, and threw the bag to the reporter. He had written: "My life is my message."

That's the way it was with *Avraham avinu, Rivka eemanu, Moshe rabbeinu, D'vorah, Yermeyahu*, Leo Baeck, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Chanah Senesch, Yitzchak Rabin. And when all is said and done, that is how it will be for each of us.

Your life will be your message.
Amen