

Sermon by Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff, President

Mar. 27, 2000

Greensboro, North Carolina

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No greater honor has ever come to me than the one, which you bestowed upon me last May in Pittsburgh. The source of that honor certainly does not reside in me personally, nor in any rabbi who happens to occupy this office in any given year.

The source of the honor is in each of you. The *kavod* is in the membership, in the amazing quality of women and men serving congregations of every size, Hillel foundations, organizations, academic institutions, and military personnel, as well as those who minister in hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, and senior facilities, in suburbs, urban centers, and small towns, in North America, Europe, Medinat Yisrael, and throughout the globe.

Isaac Mayer Wise died 100 years ago yesterday. His Hebrew *yahrzeit* will be this Shabbat. As the founder of the Conference, Union, and College, he might not have given his *hechsher* to every one of our decisions since then. But I do believe that he would look with great favor on how we have enriched, energized, and taught so much Torah to *amcha*, well beyond his original vision of a conference of the "central states".

This is the 125th anniversary of the founding of our yeshiva, the Hebrew Union College. Too often we take the College for granted, failing to appreciate what a unique and indispensable institution Wise created. Most of us have become what we are today because of our rabbinic training. The College-Institute deserves our steady support, especially by our identifying and reaching out to attractive candidates for the rabbinate and encouraging them to join our sacred work. Experience demonstrates that it is rabbis like you and me -- far beyond any other factor -- which influences Jews to become rabbis. If we believe in what we do -- and I know we do -- each of us has a responsibility to insure that there will be enough gifted rabbis to build the future of Reform Judaism.

Lichvod meah esrim v'chamesh shana, I salute Isaac Mayer Wise, Shelly Zimmerman, and all the presidents between them -- Mielziner, Deutsch, Kohler, Morgenstern, Stephen S. Wise, Glueck, and Gottschalk -- and the distinguished faculty which is preparing rabbis for the 21st century. As a sign of our appreciation, I ask every College-Institute faculty person who is present today to rise so that we can recognize you.

The CCAR is blessed with an extraordinary staff. I have known and respected Paul Menitoff for more than 20 years. But this year we have all but lived together and what a joy it has been -- to work so closely with a colleague who not only loves rabbis, but has the ability to transform that love into programs and policies that strengthen us and all of *amcha*. In every conversation that I have with Paul -- and that can be eight or ten times a week -- I learn something new and insightful from him. You have no idea how much good he does for rabbis every day.

No colleague cares more about rabbis than Arnie Sher. Arnie sees the good in all of us and challenges us, through rabbinic *shadchanut*, to become the best we can be. Elliot Stevens is celebrating his 25th year with the Conference. At one time he was my Confirmation student and now is my colleague and adviser on many issues. Elliot is a gem in our CCAR crown. Shelley Limmer, whose nighttime and weekend job is being a congregational president, during the day serves as the CCAR's fine Administrative Director. Dale Panoff and our office staff support our efforts with great dedication. We are building on the outstanding achievements under Richard Levy's leadership and I have been supported so well by our Vice-president, Marty Wiener.

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But as we Reform Jews deepen our connections with our past and immerse our families in a fuller Jewish life, something else is happening. Our social conscience -- the moral legacy of Torah and the Hebrew prophets -- is getting mushy.

As the corporate profits mount up, the voices of the Hebrew prophets are barely heard. Most Americans -- including those we serve -- are doing better financially than they ever imagined possible. But millions of Americans are not participating in this economic boom. The gap between the haves and have-nots is widening. In the last 20 years, the richest 20% of this nation have seen their average earnings rise 43%, adjusted for inflation. The poorest fifth of our population has actually lost 21% in earnings. Most poor families are paying 60 to 70 percent of their income on rent.

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Some see study and worship on the one hand and social justice on the other as a matter of either/or. But you and I know that they have always functioned in Jewish tradition as partners. They are supposed to fuel each other. How can we study Amos, Isaiah, and Leviticus 19, and include their words in our *tefilah*, and still stand idly by the blood of our neighbor? Torah provides the intellectual resources for our commitment to *tikun olam*. *Tefilah* helps us to hear what God expects of us.

Al Vorspan mentioned the "I Have a Dream" project which our Temple is sponsoring. A generous benefactor, member of our Temple, is underwriting this program through which we will adopt an entire first-grade class in a public school in a nearby economically impacted city. We will provide extensive wrap-around services, including tutorial, field trips, and family enrichment. Our goal is to help every student graduate high school and pay their tuitions as they go on to college. There are 175 such programs across America. We hope to encourage you to identify benefactors in your synagogues across the country who will underwrite sponsorship of similar programs in your region.

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There are other issues of justice and fairness that are also on our agenda. One of them will occupy us on Wednesday afternoon: the resolution on same gender ceremonies. This year is the 10th anniversary of openly gay and lesbian rabbis being accepted for ordination by HUC-JIR and a 1990 CCAR affirmation of that acceptance.

Our tradition of autonomy is fundamental to this Conference and must be respected. The diverse opinions we express must be informed and principled.

I personally believe that this is a matter whose time has arrived. Further delay will add little, if anything, to the debate.

We Reform rabbis have a proud tradition -- both in the general community and among amcha -- of leading the way on moral issues. The language of the resolution is measured. It avoids the use of the term "*kiddushin*", yet emphasizes that there may be *kedushah* in these relationships. It leaves the decision up to each one of us. What it does is to officially grant to gay and lesbian Jews further dignity and respect in Jewish life as men and women created *btzelem Eloheem*.

As I wrote in last month's Newsletter, I have asked myself: what are the foundational principles which guide me as a Reform Jew and are they significant enough to override an *aveirah* which may have applied to certain circumstances in Biblical times, but perhaps not today?

After engaging in that intellectual exercise, and with the help of thoughtful colleagues, I have come to the conclusion -- and I hope that you will also -- that the relationship of Jewish, same-gender couples is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual and that the CCAR should endorse such a position.

In light of the modifications, such an affirmation need not be divisive. It can actually be unifying, if it is developed in the spirit proposed by my rav, Jack Stern, in 1975 in another context; if it is affirmed

"by a community of Reform Jews with such built-in mutual respect that the majority on any given issue will avoid the pitfall of *azut panim*, of tyranny and arrogance, and that the minority will avoid the pitfall of *hitpardut*, of separation and schism."

I hope that this will be the spirit of all of our deliberations -- including those in cyberspace. In that regard, I will appoint a committee to explore ways that we can improve on the use of *ravkav*.

CHANGING NATURE OF THE RABBINATE

In our parasha this week, Moses and Aaron enter the *ohel moed*. The Torah is silent about what occurred inside. However, when they emerged, they blessed the people and the Presence of Adonai appeared to all the people. *Vatayzay esh mi-lifnei Adonai*...then fire came forth from before Adonai and consumed the burnt offering.

Not so with Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu. They laid incense in their fire pan; then offered before Adonai *esh zarah*, alien or strange fire. *Vatayzay esh mi-lifnei Adonai v'tochal otam*...and fire came forth from *Adonai* and consumed them.

Both verses have the same formulation: *vatayzay esh mi-lifnei Adonai*...fire came forth from before Adonai. In the case of Moses and Aaron, the fire was a blessing. With Nadav and Avihu, the fire was without blessing and therefore described as alien. According to the rabbis, it was all consuming and self-destructive.

What can we learn from this bi-furcated experience of two leaders and two "wannabes"?

We rabbis bring our talents and passions, our joys and frustrations, our hopes and disappointments to the *ohel moed*. Most of us emerge from our daily rabbinic experiences in pretty good shape, able to bless our people and feel that we are God's partners in the ongoing work of creation.

But we all have some Nadav and Avihu within us and sometimes they get the best of us. According to the *Sifra* and *Leviticus Rabba*, they were arrogant and irreverent. Their egos were out of control. They could not wait until their seniors, Reb Moshe and Reb Aharon, would retire or better yet, die. They were too haughty to seek advice, even from their peers. They perceived themselves as God's answer for a people adrift in the desert of despair. And what they did was without blessing.

Today's convention program is devoted to "Rabbinic Wellness." My mantra this year has been "*Hishomer et nafshecha m'od.*" Take responsibility for your physical and spiritual well being.

We cannot expect anyone else to make that decision for us. Neither our spouse nor our partner, as much as he or she may care for our well being and without whom some of us would probably have brought "alien fire" a long time ago. My congregants cannot do it for me -- as much as most of them care about me. Nor can you, my colleagues, make that decision for me, although some of you have helped me more than you can ever imagine.

In the spirit of Moshe Rabbeinu, many of you are women and men of great vision. And just as Yitro taught his son-in-law "Spiritual Management 101", so many of us are discovering that bold vision and serious learning must be tempered with *tzimtzum* and self-discipline if we are going to be effective rabbis. One of you put it this way: "Just because I can do something, doesn't mean that I must do it."

A caveat: rabbinic wellness should not become a justification for doing less than we should. Hard work is not the issue. There are rabbis who work very hard and who have simultaneously developed a good quality of life. And there are rabbis who work as little as they can get away with, whose quality of life is hardly a model.

One wise colleague in his early forties, who works hard, told me recently: "I am just beginning to accept my limitations." This rabbi does not lack vision; his young rabbinate is replete with success stories and he is widely admired by his colleagues. But he knows that unless he has a sense of balance and personal *shleimut*, he too may find himself proffering some *esh zarah*, some offerings that are devoid of blessing.

INITIATIVES FOR RABBINIC WELLNESS

Rabbinic Wellness is one of the ways that we keep our lives in balance. I hope that this theme will be prominent in our CCAR agenda for years to come.

In *Talmud Bavli*, 127a, we read: *Eilu d'varim she-ayn lahem sheeur....v'talmud Torah k'neged kulam.* (2) There is no way we can achieve rabbinic *shleimut*, without a commitment to life-long learning.

Our program of sustaining rabbinic education, in partnership with the College is moving forward, with pilots projected for Chicago and Boston. We are also planning a Rabbinic Training Institute, which will include text study, professional development, and personal wellness programs. Modeled on the successful RTI of our Conservative colleagues, we will encourage colleagues to mark the 10th, 20th, and 30th anniversaries of their rabbinate at the Institute. A one-day RTI will take place immediately before or after our Monterrey convention with expanded ones to follow.

2/ *Meekol melamdai hiskalti* (3) Rabbinic wellness is learned as well as experienced. Every rabbi, of every age, can benefit from support and peer groups. Models of such groups will be available at kallot and conventions. Informal, voluntary peer review could help us take better care of ourselves and those we serve. Mentoring now starts while students are still at the College and ought to continue throughout our careers, even into retirement. We are never too old to mentor or to be mentored.

3/ *Tz'u ur'u*. Go out and see what some of our colleagues have been able to do. Why not take a few shabbatot off a year to visit other congregations and observe their form of worship. Can we expect others to nurture their *nefashot* if we don't care for our own and devote some shabbatot to our families and ourselves? Observe well the interconnection of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. I am a better rabbi after my swim than before, after private *tefilah* than before.

We are publicizing successful models of congregational and rabbinic wellness. Flextime and creative sabbatical arrangements are among the ideas already discussed. Warren Stone wrote in the Newsletter how a one-month sabbatical, every year in January, worked best for him and his family. His article inspired others to follow his model. One day last week I called four colleagues. Three were on sabbatical. Atta way to go! It's working!

None of this can be accomplished in isolation from those with whom we work. We will progress in these directions, only in close cooperation with lay leaders in our synagogues, at the UAHC, at our organizations, Hillels, and chaplaincies and with guidance when we are still at HUC.

We must be pro-active about rabbinic wellness; we must get beyond damage control and develop a well thought out plan for our personal and professional well being; we need to reach not for band-aids, but for *shleimut*. If we succeed in this effort, everyone gains: our families, our congregations and organizations -- even our insurance carriers. Our improved quality of life will be well noticed by those who are thinking about joining us in the rabbinate. They will see rabbis who figured out how to be great teachers of Torah and still take good care of themselves and those they love.

ISRAEL

One final question that I must share with you today: what is happening to our relationship to the State of Israel?

For me, to be alive as a Jew -- and even more, to be a *rav b'Yisrael* -- as Jewish national independence and self-determination are reborn and mature -- is one of the supreme blessings of my life. Sadly, too few American Jews feel similarly blessed and the bonds are rapidly weakening.

The number of US Jews who feel an "emotional attachment to Israel" is dropping every year. A 1998 survey revealed that only nine percent of Jews in the US felt "extremely attached to Israel", a drop of 50% in 10 years.

But there is some very good news. Progressive Judaism in Israel has made enormous strides. Thirty-one percent of the Israeli public identifies with our movement, while eleven percent identified with Conservatism and 24% with Orthodoxy. The majority of Israelis favor granting Reform and Conservative Jews equal legal status to Orthodoxy and a stunning 90% of secular Israelis want to end the Orthodox monopoly over marriage and divorce.

Stunning is the only way to describe the accomplishments of our synagogues and schools, the College, the UAHC Israel summer programs, and the Israel Religious Action Center. Tomorrow we will honor the combined 65 years of achievement of Dick Hirsch and Bob Samuels. Today, I want to recognize every member of MARAM who is here with us. You are on the front-line of our spiritual struggle to win the hearts and minds of secular Israelis. I invite you to stand now so that we can express our support for your efforts.

Kol hakavod to you, Rick Block, on your first year as the leader of our world movement. We have tremendous confidence in your ability and we promise you our support.

What is *our* responsibility? It is to be partners in fulfilling the dream -- to build a Jewish state based on the highest Jewish values of justice and fairness for all; a state that roots out corruption from places high and low; a state that respects every religious faith and all the streams of Judaism. Our responsibility is to spread our message: that Judaism does best when tradition and modernity are interwoven into a relevant religious philosophy and when Jews are free to practice their religion according to their beliefs, and not according to a politicized religious bureaucracy. That is the opportunity that history now offers us. If we turn our backs on this opportunity, we will probably not see it again in our lifetimes.

If Progressive Judaism is to be more than a blip in the long history of *amcha*, then we must be bound as only close family is bonded -- to the land, the people, and the State. Make no mistake about it: our destinies are intertwined.

That means we must send our people, including our teenagers, to visit Israel and lead them there ourselves. We need 100 Israeli Progressive rabbis and 100 synagogues *MeeMetula ad Eilat*. If we build them, they will come. Every place that we have put facts on the ground, they have come to pray, to study, and to make justice well up as waters. That means training teachers, and assembling a network of schools and community centers that will be a magnet for Israeli families.

This means that we will support IRAC as it wages our battle in the courts, in the Knesset, and in the arena of public opinion.

Listen to what Hirsh Goodman wrote in last week's Jerusalem Report: "This is the time to strike. If a serious investment is made now, not only would the progressive community in Israel flourish, but we would be creating new generations of Israelis who do not have to choose between Orthodoxy or nothing...As religious divisions in Israel grow, and as the divide between Israel and the Diaspora widens, progressive Jewry could be the bridge we need to keep Israelis Jews and Jews abroad identified with Israel." (4)

Our Israeli colleagues are exceedingly dedicated, but they cannot do the job by themselves. If we are serious, we will commit extraordinary resources to this effort. We build those bridges by every visit we make, every letter we write, every new member for ARZA/World Union we recruit, every dollar we contribute and raise, every synagogue we twin with, and every dialogue we enter. We have an opportunity that no generation of Reform rabbis has ever had.

At the same time, I hope that you will actively support the Prime Minister's peace initiatives. To be sure, Syria and other militant Arab camps present formidable obstacles to peace. But there are marginal and not-so-marginal Jewish groups that actively seek to block the peace. Some of our fellow Jews portray Barak as a "traitor". One of their so-called spiritual leaders, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, on his weekly Torah broadcast, demanded the death of Yossi Sarid, Minister of Education. We have heard these words before. We know where they can lead. We must describe them for what they are: obscene and despicable violations of the Torah, which the rabbi pretends to defend.

And yet, even as we support Barak's peace initiatives, we must vigorously keep the pressure on him and the government to win recognition and rights for progressive Judaism. This is no time to stand idly by. It is this generation which will determine whether we make the dream of Progressive Judaism in Israel a powerful reality.

Chevre, this Conference is unique among all the institutions of Jewish life. It is the envy of many clergy groups. This Conference has established priorities and standards which bring dignity and respect to the rabbinate. This Conference has created an environment which enables rabbis to bring blessing.

These past few years, we have struggled with some issues that have generated considerable passion. Most of the time that passion has remained well within the bounds of civility and mutual respect and we have all benefited.

If we are to be *klei kodesh*, we need to walk, not in the path of Nadav vAvihu, but rather, in the way of Moshe vAharon.

1/ CCAR Yearbook, 1975, pp. 189-190.

2/ Talmud Bavli 127a

3/ Psalm 119, v.99

4/ March 27, 2000

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Al Vorspan mentioned the "I Have a Dream" project which our Temple is sponsoring. A generous benefactor, member of our Temple, is underwriting this program through which we will adopt an entire first-grade class in a public school in a nearby economically impacted city. We will provide extensive wrap-around services, including tutorial, field trips, and family enrichment. Our goal is to help every student graduate high school and pay their tuitions as they go on to college. There are 175 such programs across America. We hope to encourage you to identify benefactors in your synagogues across the country who will underwrite sponsorship of similar programs in your region.

Some Catholic and Protestant leaders and just a few rabbis are boldly addressing the issue of poverty and trying to make economic justice a local and national priority. As we sink deeper roots in our tradition, we should be doing more than we have about the 33 million Americans who live in poverty, one-third of whom are children.

There are other issues of justice and fairness that are also on our agenda. One of them will occupy us on Wednesday afternoon: the resolution on same gender ceremonies. This year is the 10th anniversary of openly gay and lesbian rabbis being accepted for ordination by HUC-JIR and a 1990 CCAR affirmation of that acceptance.

Our tradition of autonomy is fundamental to this Conference and must be respected. The diverse opinions we express must be informed and principled.

I personally believe that this is a matter whose time has arrived. Further delay will add little, if anything, to the debate.

We Reform rabbis have a proud tradition -- both in the general community and among amcha -- of leading the way on moral issues. The language of the resolution is measured. It avoids the use of the term "*kiddushin*", yet emphasizes that there may be *kedushah* in these relationships. It leaves the decision up to each one of us. What it does is to officially grant to gay and lesbian Jews further dignity and respect in Jewish life as men and women created *btzelem Eloheem*.

As I wrote in last month's Newsletter, I have asked myself: what are the foundational principles which guide me as a Reform Jew and are they significant enough to override an *aveirah* which may have applied to certain circumstances in Biblical times, but perhaps not today?

After engaging in that intellectual exercise, and with the help of thoughtful colleagues, I have come to the conclusion -- and I hope that you will also -- that the relationship of Jewish, same-gender couples is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual and that the CCAR should endorse such a position.

In light of the modifications, such an affirmation need not be divisive. It can actually be unifying, if it is developed in the spirit proposed by my rav, Jack Stern, in 1975 in another context; if it is affirmed

"by a community of Reform Jews with such built-in mutual respect that the majority on any given issue will avoid the pitfall of *azut panim*, of tyranny and arrogance, and that the minority will avoid the pitfall of *hitpardut*, of separation and schism."

I hope that this will be the spirit of all of our deliberations -- including those in cyberspace. In that regard, I will appoint a committee to explore ways that we can improve on the use of *ravkav*.

CHANGING NATURE OF THE RABBINATE

In our parasha this week, Moses and Aaron enter the *ohel moed*. The Torah is silent about what occurred inside. However, when they emerged, they blessed the people and the Presence of Adonai appeared to all the people. *Vatayzay esh mi-lifnei Adonai*...then fire came forth from before Adonai and consumed the burnt offering.

Not so with Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu. They laid incense in their fire pan; then offered before Adonai *esh zarah*, alien or strange fire. *Vatayzay esh mi-lifnei Adonai v'tochal otam*...and fire came forth from *Adonai* and consumed them.

Both verses have the same formulation: *vatayzay esh mi-lifnei Adonai*...fire came forth from before Adonai. In the case of Moses and Aaron, the fire was a blessing. With Nadav and Avihu, the fire was without blessing and therefore described as alien. According to the rabbis, it was all consuming and self-destructive.

What can we learn from this bi-furcated experience of two leaders and two "wannabes"?

We rabbis bring our talents and passions, our joys and frustrations, our hopes and disappointments to the *ohel moed*. Most of us emerge from our daily rabbinic experiences in pretty good shape, able to bless our people and feel that we are God's partners in the ongoing work of creation.

But we all have some Nadav and Avihu within us and sometimes they get the best of us. According to the *Sifra* and *Leviticus Rabba*, they were arrogant and irreverent. Their egos were out of control. They could not wait until their seniors, Reb Moshe and Reb Aharon, would retire or better yet, die. They were too haughty to seek advice, even from their peers. They perceived themselves as God's answer for a people adrift in the desert of despair. And what they did was without blessing.

Today's convention program is devoted to "Rabbinic Wellness." My mantra this year has been "*Hishomer et nafshecha m'od.*" Take responsibility for your physical and spiritual well being.

We cannot expect anyone else to make that decision for us. Neither our spouse nor our partner, as much as he or she may care for our well being and without whom some of us would probably have brought "alien fire" a long time ago. My congregants cannot do it for me -- as much as most of them care about me. Nor can you, my colleagues, make that decision for me, although some of you have helped me more than you can ever imagine.

In the spirit of Moshe Rabbeinu, many of you are women and men of great vision. And just as Yitro taught his son-in-law "Spiritual Management 101", so many of us are discovering that bold vision and serious learning must be tempered with *tzimtzum* and self-discipline if we are going to be effective rabbis. One of you put it this way: "Just because I can do something, doesn't mean that I must do it."

A caveat: rabbinic wellness should not become a justification for doing less than we should. Hard work is not the issue. There are rabbis who work very hard and who have simultaneously developed a good quality of life. And there are rabbis who work as little as they can get away with, whose quality of life is hardly a model.

One wise colleague in his early forties, who works hard, told me recently: "I am just beginning to accept my limitations." This rabbi does not lack vision; his young rabbinate is replete with success stories and he is widely admired by his colleagues. But he knows that unless he has a sense of balance and personal *shleimut*, he too may find himself proffering some *esh zarah*, some offerings that are devoid of blessing.

INITIATIVES FOR RABBINIC WELLNESS

Rabbinic Wellness is one of the ways that we keep our lives in balance. I hope that this theme will be prominent in our CCAR agenda for years to come.

In *Talmud Bavli*, 127a, we read: *Eilu d'varim she-ayn lahem sheeur....v'talmud Torah k'neged kulam.* (2) There is no way we can achieve rabbinic *shleimut*, without a commitment to life-long learning.

Our program of sustaining rabbinic education, in partnership with the College is moving forward, with pilots projected for Chicago and Boston. We are also planning a Rabbinic

Training Institute, which will include text study, professional development, and personal wellness programs. Modeled on the successful RTI of our Conservative colleagues, we will encourage colleagues to mark the 10th, 20th, and 30th anniversaries of their rabbinate at the Institute. A one-day RTI will take place immediately before or after our Monterrey convention with expanded ones to follow.

2/ *Meekol melamdai hiskalti* (3) Rabbinic wellness is learned as well as experienced. Every rabbi, of every age, can benefit from support and peer groups. Models of such groups will be available at kallot and conventions. Informal, voluntary peer review could help us take better care of ourselves and those we serve. Mentoring now starts while students are still at the College and ought to continue throughout our careers, even into retirement. We are never too old to mentor or to be mentored.

3/ *Tz'u ur'u*. Go out and see what some of our colleagues have been able to do. Why not take a few shabbatot off a year to visit other congregations and observe their form of worship. Can we expect others to nurture their *nefashot* if we don't care for our own and devote some shabbatot to our families and ourselves? Observe well the interconnection of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. I am a better rabbi after my swim than before, after private *tefilah* than before.

We are publicizing successful models of congregational and rabbinic wellness. Flextime and creative sabbatical arrangements are among the ideas already discussed. Warren Stone wrote in the Newsletter how a one-month sabbatical, every year in January, worked best for him and his family. His article inspired others to follow his model. One day last week I called four colleagues. Three were on sabbatical. Atta way to go! It's working!

None of this can be accomplished in isolation from those with whom we work. We will progress in these directions, only in close cooperation with lay leaders in our synagogues, at the UAHC, at our organizations, Hillels, and chaplaincies and with guidance when we are still at HUC.

We must be pro-active about rabbinic wellness; we must get beyond damage control and develop a well thought out plan for our personal and professional well being; we need to reach not for band-aids, but for *shleimut*. If we succeed in this effort, everyone gains: our families, our congregations and organizations -- even our insurance carriers. Our improved quality of life will be well noticed by those who are thinking about joining us in the rabbinate. They will see rabbis who figured out how to be great teachers of Torah and still take good care of themselves and those they love.

ISRAEL

One final question that I must share with you today: what is happening to our relationship to the State of Israel?

For me, to be alive as a Jew -- and even more, to be a *rav b'Yisrael* -- as Jewish national independence and self-determination are reborn and mature -- is one of the supreme blessings of my life. Sadly, too few American Jews feel similarly blessed and the bonds are rapidly weakening.

The number of US Jews who feel an "emotional attachment to Israel" is dropping every year. A 1998 survey revealed that only nine percent of Jews in the US felt "extremely attached to Israel", a drop of 50% in 10 years.

But there is some very good news. Progressive Judaism in Israel has made enormous strides. Thirty-one percent of the Israeli public identifies with our movement, while eleven percent identified with Conservatism and 24% with Orthodoxy. The majority of Israelis favor granting Reform and Conservative Jews equal legal status to Orthodoxy and a stunning 90% of secular Israelis want to end the Orthodox monopoly over marriage and divorce.

Stunning is the only way to describe the accomplishments of our synagogues and schools, the College, the UAHC Israel summer programs, and the Israel Religious Action Center. Tomorrow we will honor the combined 65 years of achievement of Dick Hirsch and Bob Samuels. Today, I want to recognize every member of MARAM who is here with us. You are on the front-line of our spiritual struggle to win the hearts and minds of secular Israelis. I invite you to stand now so that we can express our support for your efforts.

Kol hakavod to you, Rick Block, on your first year as the leader of our world movement. We have tremendous confidence in your ability and we promise you our support.

What is *our* responsibility? It is to be partners in fulfilling the dream -- to build a Jewish state based on the highest Jewish values of justice and fairness for all; a state that roots out corruption from places high and low; a state that respects every religious faith and all the streams of Judaism. Our responsibility is to spread our message: that Judaism does best when tradition and modernity are interwoven into a relevant religious philosophy and when Jews are free to practice their religion according to their beliefs, and not according to a politicized religious bureaucracy. That is the opportunity that history now offers us. If we turn our backs on this opportunity, we will probably not see it again in our lifetimes.

If Progressive Judaism is to be more than a blip in the long history of *amcha*, then we must be bound as only close family is bonded -- to the land, the people, and the State. Make no mistake about it: our destinies are intertwined.

That means we must send our people, including our teenagers, to visit Israel and lead them there ourselves. We need 100 Israeli Progressive rabbis and 100 synagogues *MeeMetula ad Eilat*. If we build them, they will come. Every place that we have put facts on the ground, they have come to pray, to study, and to make justice well

up as waters. That means training teachers, and assembling a network of schools and community centers that will be a magnet for Israeli families.

This means that we will support IRAC as it wages our battle in the courts, in the Knesset, and in the arena of public opinion.

Listen to what Hirsh Goodman wrote in last week's Jerusalem Report: "This is the time to strike. If a serious investment is made now, not only would the progressive community in Israel flourish, but we would be creating new generations of Israelis who do not have to choose between Orthodoxy or nothing...As religious divisions in Israel grow, and as the divide between Israel and the Diaspora widens, progressive Jewry could be the bridge we need to keep Israelis Jews and Jews abroad identified with Israel." (4)

Our Israeli colleagues are exceedingly dedicated, but they cannot do the job by themselves. If we are serious, we will commit extraordinary resources to this effort. We build those bridges by every visit we make, every letter we write, every new member for ARZA/World Union we recruit, every dollar we contribute and raise, every synagogue we twin with, and every dialogue we enter. We have an opportunity that no generation of Reform rabbis has ever had.

At the same time, I hope that you will actively support the Prime Minister's peace initiatives. To be sure, Syria and other militant Arab camps present formidable obstacles to peace. But there are marginal and not-so-marginal Jewish groups that actively seek to block the peace. Some of our fellow Jews portray Barak as a "traitor". One of their so-called spiritual leaders, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, on his weekly Torah broadcast, demanded the death of Yossi Sarid, Minister of Education. We have heard these words before. We know where they can lead. We must describe them for what they are: obscene and despicable violations of the Torah, which the rabbi pretends to defend.

And yet, even as we support Barak's peace initiatives, we must vigorously keep the pressure on him and the government to win recognition and rights for progressive Judaism. This is no time to stand idly by. It is this generation which will determine whether we make the dream of Progressive Judaism in Israel a powerful reality.

Chevre, this Conference is unique among all the institutions of Jewish life. It is the envy of many clergy groups. This Conference has established priorities and standards which bring dignity and respect to the rabbinate. This Conference has created an environment which enables rabbis to bring blessing.

These past few years, we have struggled with some issues that have generated considerable passion. Most of the time that passion has remained well within the bounds of civility and mutual respect and we have all benefited.

If we are to be *klei kodesh*, we need to walk, not in the path of Nadav vAvihu, but rather, in the way of Moshe vAharon.

1/ CCAR Yearbook, 1975, pp. 189-190.

2/ Talmud Bavli 127a

3/ Psalm 119, v.99

4/ March 27, 2000