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Three times I have been honored to address the ordinees of the HUC-JIR. In the 20 years span of these three occasions, what sweeping changes we have witnessed in world events, Israel's history and American Jewry, where, above all, our Movement has grown to be the largest in American Jewish life. This was spurred by the dedication and skills of countless rabbis and lay leaders like those in this congregation by Rabbi Alex Schindler's vision of Outreach to the intermarried, of welcoming communities for gay and lesbian Jews, and of patrilineal descent; by Rabbi Eric Yoffie's vision of life-long Jewish education and diverse avenues for spiritual fulfillment that are transforming the programs and worship of our congregations and our Movement; and by an inspiring and eloquent new President of HUC who has led our College to new heights.

And how my own life changed. In those wondrous and bittersweet ensuing years, I married an extraordinary woman, and have known the joys and endless surprises of two wonderful children – while since my 2001 talk to NY ordinees, my mother, a passionate and effective organizer for social justice, my father Harold and his brother Sanford, after remarkable active congregational rabbinates stretching nearly 60 years each, – passed away. All three, gifted teachers of Judaism. Such joys and losses dramatize the most important lesson I can impart to you, as you balance your calling for Jewish service with your family – don't short-change your families. Make time for them. The more fulfilling your personal and family lives, the more fulfilled will be both your rabbinate and the lives of your loved ones.

My father loved the Hebrew essays of Ahad Ha'am, and especially his remarkable essay on Moses in which he notes that we know only three things about the adult Moses before God found him worthy to be called, at the burning bush, to the leadership of the Children of Israel.

First, after going to see the sufferings of his kinfolk

וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם, מַכָּה אִישׁ-עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו ;

And Moses intervenes to save the life of a Jew being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster;

Then,,

וַיֵּצֵא בַיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי, וְהָיָה שְׁנֵי-אֲנָשִׁים עִבְרִים נֹצְיִים ; וַיֹּאמֶר, לְרָשָׁע, לָמָּה תִּכָּה, רֵעֲךָ .

Second, he intervenes to stop a conflict between a Jew and a Jew, calling the wrong-doer to task .

And after fleeing Egypt, he goes to the well at Midian, where:

וַיָּבֹאוּ הָרְעִים, וַיִּגְרְשׁוּם ; וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹשַׁעַן

in a matter of injustice not involving Jews at all, he intervenes to protect the daughters of Jethro from the Midianite shepherds,

It was in this willingness to act decisively on behalf of the oppressed, the victim, the vulnerable, Jew and non-Jew alike, that Moses was found worthy of the call to leadership.

So too the challenges that you will face in your rabbinate. Like Moses, you will have leadership responsibilities for a community that faces crises in all three of these categories.

As Moses intervened when a Jew was endangered, so today we confront outside threats to Jewish rights, to Jewish well-being and survival.

One key threat: the worst overt anti-Semitism across the globe that we have seen since the end of World War Two. Jews attacked on the streets of France. Synagogues firebombed in Turkey, Antwerp, Brussels, and Marseilles. Cemeteries vandalized in Strasbourg, in Germany, and just this last week in Russia. Anti-semitic scapegoating once again heard in political discourse in Russia.

[Islamic religion, culture and politics, are embracing forms of anti-Semitism never seen before in the relatively tolerant history of Islamic-Jewish relations.]

Anti-Semitic motifs that were distinctive to Christian Europe, and unknown in the relatively tolerant history of Islamic-Jewish relations, especially the image of a subversive Jewish conspiracy to harm Gentiles and dominate the world, are now heard from the pulpits of mosques and thence to race instantly across the Islamic internet into too many areas of the Muslim world.

These attacks against Judaism, Jews generically, Jewish institutions and individuals send us reeling, repulsed by these blatant and brutal displays of ignorance and hatred. The two-pronged response -- of working to delegitimize each manifestation of anti-semitism, even while forging coalitions to create the moderate, tolerant political, cultural and religious context that allows such scapegoating and group hatred to flourish, must be central to our agenda as local and national leaders.

We must be prepared to respond to extremism in our own local communities as well. Take the constancy of hate crimes in our nation. According to FBI statistics, Jews remain the most victimized religious group, with Muslims running second. But it does not matter who the victims are. We Jews will never be safe and secure so long as any group can be victimized by group hatred and discrimination.

Such hate crimes must always be repudiated because they are nothing less than attacks on the soul of our nation, on the promise of America's freedom and tolerance. Those who commit these crimes do so fully intending to tear at the too-oft frayed threads of diversity

that bind us together and make us strong. They seek to tear us apart from within, pitting American against American. [Such divisiveness can be particularly dangerous in America since sociologists tell us that this is the most religiously diverse nation in human history with 2,000 religions, denominations, sects and cults. *[Yes, I know what you are thinking: 1,900 of them are in California – but in this nation we cannot afford the sectarian competition and divisiveness and violence that have torn apart so many other nations.]* We have been spared that divisiveness precisely because of our separation of church and state and our growing cultural willingness to confront bigotry and hatred when its ugly head is raised.]

So too we must address the triumphalism of the Religious Right. The efforts of theocrats to reshape America threaten everything that made America unique for the Jew. You see, the problem with theocrats, is that they all want to be “theo.” The framers’ vision of America was different. *[Because of the unprecedented ban on religious tests for office, combined with the twin promises of free exercise and no establishment of religion, a revolutionary new political order evolved here that asserted, for the first time in our history, that our rights as citizens would no longer depend on our religious identity or religious practices.]*

And because of the expansion of both church-state separation and the rights of women and minorities by the Warren and Burger Courts and Congress, we have realized the promise of that vision. In those past 50 years, we have seen Jews move from the peripheries of American society to the very center of American public, academic, professional and political and economic life. *[How many of the founders of our remarkable American Jewish Archives, which we fete this week-end, could have ever envisioned a day when it would be recorded there that there was a minyan -- in the United States Senate – at least a Reform Jewish minyan.]* We Jews have known more freedom, more opportunities here than ever before in our history. Yet now, perhaps too secure in our success and tempted by government funding for our institutions, too many of us turn a blind eye to today’s sustained attacks on our most precious rights, on our judiciary that protects them, and on our Constitution in which they are enshrined.

To allow the right to tear down that wall now in the name of religion would be a devastating betrayal of the great American experiment in fundamental rights that has meant so much to the Jewish people. Like Moses, we too must protect Jews from the external threats of our own time.

David Ellenson, Michael Meyer and others here have written incisively on the history of conflict and tensions reflecting the second of Moses' interventions – that between Jew and Jew, -- between liberal and traditional Jews, and between different streams of the Orthodox community. These tensions are not new but once again we seem to be at a dangerous high point.

Our response? First to have confidence in the great experiment of Reform Judaism. We hold secure in our belief that our Judaism is an authentic expression of Judaism, that our sacred texts were not an immutable God-given set of specific laws but the reflections of men and women who entered into a covenantal relationship with the divine and sought to understand what God wanted of them – an enterprise that has continued through the centuries and continues today. Such an ongoing enterprise ennoble the Jew, indeed will ennoble you, making us partners with the Divine in shaping a Judaism that will always speak to the ages and will, in its call for us to be a holy people, ever remind us of our central destiny to be a light to and of the nations.

It is exactly that creativity, modernity, and the constancy of our passion for prophetic justice that has seen Reform Judaism emerge as the fastest growing and largest segment of American Jewry – not just in numbers but in the programs and services offered by our synagogues, which often are bursting at the seams. Indeed, in an era marked by the explosive growth of fundamentalist religious traditions in America and across the globe – the only theologically liberal denomination in America that been growing dramatically in the past three decades is Reform Judaism – something many of you gathered here have helped make possible. And it is precisely the synergy between local synagogues and American Jewry's most effective, robust, creative and inspiring national congregational Movement that has made this so. As new rabbis in Israel you now are the bridge between the local synagogue -- and the College and the Union. And I know with confidence, together, we will build an even brighter future for American Judaism.

In Israel particularly, the tensions between liberal and Orthodox Judaism are intense (I believe in no small measure born of the growing realization of, according to the polls, how much Israel wants and needs liberal Judaism). This requires significantly expanding efforts to build our Movement and secure our rights. Can it be that the great enterprise of the ingathering of exiles will be reduced to the squalid arrogation of political power by Orthodox rabbis who would deny the majority of world Jewry fundamental religious rights and make of them in the Jewish state second class citizens? We will not allow anyone to make us strangers in our own land. *[And led by our World Union of Progressive Judaism and Israel Religious Action Center and a determined Israel Reform Movement of which the HUC campus plays a vital role, with your help and support, someday soon, in our time, we will know full equality in Eretz Yisrael.]*

Today's Israel raises other acute tensions between Jews as well. *[As the possibility for a renewed peace process emerges, as the disengagement in Gaza approaches, tensions between doves and hawks are escalating. The right in Israel and among American Jewry, -- like the extremists in the Palestinian world -- will do everything to undermine a*

viable peace process. If the efforts to peace are to succeed, there must be a sustained political and vocal groundswell of support among Israel's friends here in the United States that drowns out those who would take us on the paths of either ethnic cleansing or of maintaining a status quo that will inevitably lead to a day when the majority of those under Israel's control will not be Jewish – paths that Yitzhak Rabin saw so clearly were guaranteed to lead to violence and disaster. [And the Reform Movement, with its presence in every state and its long tradition of support for efforts at a negotiated settlement, must be at the forefront of such a groundswell.]

[MOST] [Equally] alarming, today, Israeli military and intelligence officials tell us that right wing extremists who live in settlements in the territories, and have served in the army have been stockpiling their weapons, raising the prospect of civil war. Responsible human rights groups talk of gangs of settlers running amok terrorizing Palestinians. Press accounts tell of extremist rabbis like Rabbi Yosef Dayan from the West Bank settlement of Psagot, whose enactment of a *pulsa denura* – Aramaic for lashes of fire – death curse against Yitzhak Rabin shortly before his assassination helped legitimize that violence and who has now received a green light from kabbalistic rabbis to place the same curse on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. So too their efforts to attack Conservative and Reform Judaism often in hate-filled and spiteful terms.

We are quick to call rightfully on moderate Muslims to stand up, often at a real risk to their lives, and delegitimize extreme Islamist interpretations of their faith that advocate violence and persecution, In America, we call on mainline Protestant and Catholic leaders to stand up and denounce the extremist voices of the Religious Right. Can we do any less when the future of Judaism is implicated? Yes, powerful rabbinic voices like Rabbi Yoffie's and Rabbi Ellenson's have been sounded. But where at the local levels throughout North America is the persistent din of an outraged Jewish community whose voices combine to say we will settle for nothing less than the absolute repudiation and delegitimization of extremist Judaism – expressed in an unremitting campaign to win the hearts and minds of all Jews. In the dispute between the two Jews, Moses was willing to confront the rasha, the Jewish wrongdoer; can we afford to do less in our own time?

3. And as Moses intervened to protect the weak and vulnerable daughters of Jethro, so too God's undying call for justice for all humanity claims our efforts to speak to the great moral issues of our day.

The simple truth is that it may not be possible for us to create a world where no innocent people are hurt; but we can certainly create a world where far fewer innocents are hurt. Yet, we are not doing that. Why?

It is not from want of resources or the ability to build shelters and homes that a million men, women, and children, our nation's untouchables, live on our streets, bodies broken, spirits equally disfigured.

It is not from lack of doctors and hospitals that over 40 million people in the United States are not covered by any health insurance plan, that one in four children have no health insurance at all

It is not from lack of hard work and determination that in our nation, where the poverty rate for a family of four is \$18,000 a year, a parent working for minimum wage 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, 52 weeks a year, (often without health care benefits) will take home only \$10,800 a year.

No it is from want of moral vision and political will to secure those rights that sustain the divine image of humanity.

So too the international scene.

It is not from lack of the existence of medications that 8,500 people across the globe will die today --and tomorrow --and the next, from AIDS – a tsunami every month – that 40% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa will lose a parent to AIDS if nothing changes

It is not from lack of compelling scientific warning that we despoil God's creation: [by our own hands, by our selfishness, and by our indifference, affecting all of us, indiscriminately:] global warming, ozone depletion, the escalating eradication of entire species of life, destruction of our rain forests, runaway world population.

It is not from want of American historical lessons that we are trapped in a boondoggle of torture, insurgency, occupation in Iraq that must be deeply troubling to all, whether we were supporters or opponents of the war initially.

It is not from lack of awareness across the globe that nearly 100,000 innocents have been butchered in the genocide in Darfur, countless thousands of women raped as a weapon of war, nearly a million displaced; -- or that the horrific gulags of North Korea, the world's most oppressive regime, can flourish.

No it is from that same lack of moral vision and political will.

[Nor is it from lack of Jewish historical lessons that we sit by as the real danger facing humanity from Weapons of Mass Destruction intensifies: the proliferation of nuclear and other non-conventional weapons.

As Samuel Pizar, the eloquent Holocaust survivor said in his extraordinary speech before the Israeli Knesset at the Second Gathering of Holocaust Survivors:

To us, the Holocaust is not only an indelible memory of horror; it is a permanent warning. For we have seen the end of creation. In the shadow of permanently flaming gas chambers, where Eichman's reality eclipsed Dante's vision of hell, we have witnessed a pilot project of the destruction of humanity, the death rattle of the entire species on the eve of the atomic age, of thermonuclear proliferation - the final solution.

Here, with the authority of the numbers engraved on our arms, we cry out the commandments of six million innocent souls, children, of whom I used to be one: never

again! From where, if not from us, will come the warning that a new combination of technology and brutality can transform the planet into a crematorium? From where, if not from the bloodiest killing ground of all time, will come the hope that coexistence between so called “hereditary enemies” is possible – between Germans and Frenchmen, Chinese and Japanese, Americans and Russians; above all, coexistence between Arabs and Jews?]

On all these, we know we must act before it is too late. One day, perhaps, we will be fortunate enough to have children or grandchildren who will with puzzled expressions ask: did you not know? Or, may God help us: is it that you did not care? What would Amos and Isaiah say to the Jewish people at such a time? What will you say? Will you challenge your congregants to act with what Dr. King called “the fierce urgency of now,” *warning us that “over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of countless civilizations is the most pathetic of all epitaphs: the words: Too late!”*

Can you make a difference by what you do in your local synagogues and organizations, in your personal actions? Yes you can! Yet, I have found repeatedly that rabbis underestimate the cumulative impact of synagogue efforts across the nation and underestimate the respect, access, and influence of rabbis among political leaders.

So as you face these challenges, keep in mind the words of Robert F. Kennedy:

Few will have the greatness to bend history; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation ... It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is thus shaped. Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Indeed it is through that cumulative impact of millions of committed people, who you can help inspire, that you will build the Jewish world of tomorrow just as you build the world of justice and hope. For this is the only true immortality of your rabbinate: to keep burning brightly for all generations to come a way of life that has endured in grandeur through all the trauma that history has hurled at our people -- the Jews, whose unique tale winds through all the recorded history of human kind, imbued with the incandescent belief that God’s people will be an instrument for the redemption of humanity, that we are not the prisoners of a bitter and unremitting past but can and will be the shapers of a better and more hopeful future for the Jewish people and all humankind.

May that be the journey of your lives and the blessing of your rabbinates.

Amen.