

Yom Kippur 5768 -- Shabbat, September 22, 2007

CELEBRATING THE JOURNEY – ALOH NAALEH  
SEPTEMBER 22, 2007  
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A political pundit, George Will, in writing on turning 60 wrote: “When Harry Wright, star of the Cincinnati Red Stockings and then the Boston Red Stockings, pioneers of professional baseball, died in 1895, a floral arrangement at his funeral spelled out “Safe at home.” That delightful story would be more so, but for Wright’s age. He was 60 years old. Looking on the bright side,” Will continues, “I take comfort of sorts in the fact that by turning 60 I am freed from the fear of dying young. Unless 60 no longer counts as old. If so, that is, like blessings in general, a mixed one, because it extends one’s eligibility for premature death. Life is like that, always supplying thorns with the roses.”

When I was growing up the age of 60 was seen as the age of retirement or at least close to it. Now that I’m edging closer, ever closer, to that age, it doesn’t seem as old as it once did. And yet, reaching the age of 60, which I will do in a few years, does bring to mind a number of important concepts both in secular lore and in Jewish tradition as well. The symbol for the 60 year wedding anniversary is the diamond. The diamond is the hardest natural material known to man which contributes to its suitability as a gemstone. Because it can only be scratched by other diamonds, it maintains its polish extremely well, keeping its luster over long periods of time.

In Jewish tradition the number 60 has a number of interesting connotations. In Pirkei Avot the text informs us that there are significant milestones along the course of one’s journey in life. Yehudah Ben Tema in describing these milestones states: “Ben Shishim LeZiknah,” “At 60, one reaches old age.” There are some who may have felt that way back then but, as you well know, when one is blessed with long life the blessing is to live to the proverbial age of 120 just as Moses did in the Biblical story. If that is the case then 60 is merely reaching middle age. In fact, many Jewish commentators were none too thrilled with Yehudah Ben Tema’s description of this milestone. The sages interpreted the word “Ziknah” in a different fashion: “Ze Shekanah Chochmah” – “He who acquires wisdom.” This suggests that by the age of 60 one gains through the experience of life a certain amount of sagacity, an understanding of life, its dilemmas, its challenges and hopefully a manner of dealing with them. The Maharal of Prague states that by the age of 60 one’s physical abilities begin to decline somewhat, but one’s mental acuity, hopefully, can compensate for that diminishment of physical strength. He suggests that true scholars become wiser as they age making their contributions to the world even more significant.

This year 2007-2008, the Jewish year of 5768 is the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of North Suburban Synagogue Beth El. We are celebrating our Diamond Jubilee Year. Like the diamond, we believe that we are truly a gemstone which continuously needs to be polished but is able to withstand the forces of nature and of the world. At the same time, like Jewish tradition states, we believe we have acquired a certain amount of wisdom

along our journey in life and as we look forward to at least another 60 years we hope that we can use that wisdom to fashion a community of which we can all be proud and that will shine forth like the sun sparkling on a diamond for all to see.

What have we learned and where are we going? What lessons have come our way on our journey to this milestone and how do we use them in the years to come? It is truly a time for celebration but it is also a time to reflect upon the challenges that present themselves to us as we move forward to create a more vital, vibrant and exciting community for ourselves and those who follow us.

I would like to suggest that a proper understanding of our vision can be found in an essay by one of my teachers, Professor Moshe Greenberg. In a book entitled “Visions of Jewish Education” published by the Mandel Foundation, Dr. Greenberg, a profound Biblical Scholar and a Conservative Rabbi who taught for many years at the Hebrew University, wrote an essay entitled “An Agenda for an Ideal Jewish Education.” As I read the essay I noticed that his vision is not only one for a Jewish educational enterprise but also for an entire community basing itself on Jewish principles, Jewish ideals, and attempting to create a model community for those who inhabit its walls.

Greenberg suggests that everyone searches for meaning. He writes, “The soul knows no rest until it gains some comprehension of, and makes some order in, the realm of values. Jewish education worthy of the name will address the hunger of the learner to know ‘Whence he came and whither he is going.’ It will furnish him with value concepts by which to infuse raw experience with meaning and order.” He suggests four significant qualities that must be fostered for an ideal Jewish education which I would like to suggest should be the four pillars of the vision of North Suburban Synagogue Beth El well into the future.

His first quality is “Love of learning Torah and love of the fulfillment of the commandments between man and G-d.” This is ultimately one of the purposes that we join together in this congregation – a love of learning and an ability to fulfill the commandments which allow us to be a covenanted people with the G-d of our ancestors. This love of learning is present in this institution from the youngest of tots to the most veteran of age. It is our task to create a center for Jewish learning, a model of the intellectual, emotional and the spiritual intertwined in a love of Torah in all of its various aspects. For us, as Conservative Jews, Jewish learning is not simply Torah and Talmud. It includes Jewish culture and the Hebrew language. It includes Jewish history and the folklore of our people. It is our task to create a community which expresses a love of Torah Lishmah, a love of learning for its own sake.

It is our challenge to emulate the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 119 who stated:

“Oh how I love Your Torah. It is my study all day long. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies; they always stand by me... How pleasing is Your word to my palate, sweeter than honey.” And yet, even if we can build into our own constituency an

ability to love Torah, to pine for its affect upon our souls and to grow with it in wisdom, that is not enough.

In a seminal discussion in the Talmud there is an argument as to what is more important „ÿ study or deeds. The Rabbis in the discussion go back and forth basing themselves on prooftexts of Biblical origin. In our day and age we would think that deeds are more important for we all think of Judaism as a religion of action and in our wider secular society you are only as good as your last good deed. Yet, the Rabbis surprise us. They tell us that study is more important than deeds for study will lead to the proper deeds. In this understanding they remind us that study for its own sake is not enough. It must be put into action, into our every day activities, impose upon us certain requirements, soften our souls, sweeten our tongues and ennoble our actions.

Greenberg suggests that the first thing we must do with this love of learning is express love of fulfillment of the commandments between man and G-d. It is our task to enhance the beauty, sanctity and observance of Shabbat; to strive for higher levels of Kashrut observance; to instill in ourselves a love of the Jewish Festivals and of daily prayer. It is our precious responsibility to teach the lesson that the ritual commandments between man and G-d are not antiquated nor outmoded but instead express an ever-renewing bond between us and our G-d. Wherever we are on our particular Jewish journey we should strive for greater learning and higher levels of observance.

It behooves all of us, therefore, during this coming year of our Diamond Jubilee to stimulate our children in their religious and day school studies, to enhance their Jewish lives by having them involved in our Youth Community, to send our children to Jewish summer camps and to encourage our college students to study Judaism as part of their studies and spend, at least, a semester studying in Israel. At the same time, we as adults must continue to study and learn of our tradition whether it be through our Gertrude Lederman Family Continuing Education Program here at the Synagogue or in other venues. All of this should push us to higher levels of observance and involvement in the commandments between man and G-d.

The second pillar of Greenberg’s vision is “Acceptance of the Torah as a moral guide, along with the recognition that its moral precepts have undergone constant revision and refinement.” The challenge of modernity is to recognize that ancient literature and values can have some significance. They are not fleeting nor ephemeral but constant and important. If we accept the moral values of Torah then we can learn values of respect, honor, and appropriate conduct both within the walls of the Synagogue and in our wider society. We will at the same time recognize that new challenges come to us on an every day basis. The answers may not be self-evident but the principles can be learned from our tradition. Again, Conservative Judaism teaches us that even moral precepts have undergone constant revision and refinement throughout the course of the history of humanity.

It is not enough that we simply accept these moral values, we must put them into action. We must be examples for our employees and students; for our children and our

grandchildren; even for our friends and business associates. The way we act and talk says a great deal about us. In fact, sometimes more than we even want to share.

The Jerusalem Talmud in the Tractate of Bava Metzia tells the story of Shimon Ben Shatah who traded in cotton. His students said to him: "Master, allow us to buy you a donkey so you will not have to labor so much." They bought him a donkey from a certain Syriac and found upon it a precious stone. They came to him and told him: "Now you need not labor ever again." He said: "Why so?" They replied: "We have bought you a donkey from a certain Syriac and found upon it a precious stone." He asked: "But does the owner know of it?" and they replied: "No." He told them: "Go and return it. What do you think that Shimon Ben Shatah is a barbarian? Shimon Ben Shatah prefers hearing 'Blessed be the G-d of the Jews' to all the riches of this world."

One who follows this line of thinking of Shimon Ben Shatah recognizes that we are always being observed by others. We know how we feel when the media reports a misdeed or a transgression by a person with a Jewish sounding name. We also know how we feel when a person of our tribe does well. We curse the former and take pride in the latter. Shimon Ben Shatah recognized that one must live up to the highest standards of moral character for we are always being watched. He could have easily taken the jewel and made his life more comfortable, but he taught his students an important lesson. Riches alone are not important, a good name is much more precious. And the Syriac who received the returned stone extolled the G-d of the Jews through the actions of Shimon Ben Shatah.

It is our task to teach the responsibility of upholding the highest standards of moral conduct not only in our facilities but outside of them, as well, in our businesses and in our schools, in our homes and in our community. Being a good person is being a good Jew and being a good Jew is being a good person. It is a lesson we must teach to our children by deed, by speech and by living a moral life.

The third element of Greenberg's vision is that "A way of life creates a community." The last few years a number of books have been published in this country describing the isolation of people. From Robert Putnum's "Bowling Alone," to Robert Bellah's "Habits of the Heart," and to Steven Cohen's and the new Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Arnie Eisen's, "The Jew Within," studies have shown that the sovereign self has created a nation where individual desire, need and want is the be all and end all of our society. Judaism rebels against this notion. A minyan of 10 people is required for a prayer quorum. A community is necessary for hospitality to the wayfarer, for visiting the sick and for comforting the mourner. Friendship is necessary to create bonds of comradeship and to alleviate the feeling of aloneness and isolation in our society.

We need to create a community of meaning to which others will attach themselves, a welcoming community, in the words of Ron Wolfson, which will open its doors to all who wish to join us. Yes, we all want to be part of a community where "everyone knows your name," where as an individual I am valued and my opinion is heard. Yet, we must

also recognize that there is sometimes a greater good to which my personal desires, needs and wishes have to be subservient.

We need to create that great good place where all of us feel comfortable not only within the walls of the Synagogue but in our community at large. We need to create a Kehillah Kedosha, a sacred community, wherein all of us will feel part of a larger family, a sense of at-homeness with one another and a sense of caring for our community members.

We do so when we join together not only at Shabbat worship but also for the Kiddush which follows. We do so when we extend ourselves to those in need by visiting the sick and comforting the mourner. We do so when we create Shabbat communities where our children are comfortable spending time with friends and neighbors. We do so when we recognize that we are only as strong as the next person as we join together to create a community. It was not by happenstance that the Torah told us that in order to be counted in Biblical times and later during the time of the Temple one had to give a half a shekel. You were only completed and counted when another person gave the other half.

We have to create social capital whereby we can all join together, feel comfortable with one another and in Robert Putnam's adage in another book "Become Better Together."

Finally the fourth pillar of Greenberg's vision is that we have a "Relationship with the Jewish people in all the lands of their dispersion." We are much more than a faith, we are also a people and it is critical that we see one another as members of a larger mishpacha. We must be concerned with Jews throughout the world, both in our own backyard and all across the globe. Our attention must be given to those who need our assistance at home as well as those who rely upon us in the State of Israel. We must be sensitive to the real needs of Jews in the former Soviet Union and in France, in places where anti-Semitism is still all too real. We must be ready to help financially and otherwise wherever a Jew lives and is in need. This is not an easy task to teach the next generation growing up in this country.

For many of us this is simply part of the very sinews of our being. We were raised on that responsibility – to help support the State of Israel and to be sensitive to the needs of Jews throughout the world. But with the present generation, that is a much more difficult lesson to teach. In the same realm that it is difficult to create local communities, it is even more difficult to create global communities. Sitting at a computer and instant messaging people around the world does not create a real community. There is a human need to feel the physical presence of another person. We need to create those types of communities.

We must teach our children through the social action components of our educational system that they see this as an ongoing responsibility of theirs throughout the course of their lives. We must make sure that all of our children visit Israel and sense that feeling of commonality with the Jewish presence in the State which is also celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. We must create bonds to Jews around the world wherever they may reside so that our children will recognize the importance of their mishpacha. I don't have to tell those of you who travel that wherever you are you tend to seek out a Jewish community in a Synagogue, a community center or a kosher

restaurant. Will the next generation do so as well? Not if we don't make the effort to teach them the importance of the bonds that unite them with other Jews.

This vision for Jewish education that Professor Moshe Greenberg has is also the vision of this synagogue as we celebrate our Diamond Jubilee. Our logo reads "Celebrating our Journey," and it is indeed appropriate for we have come a long way. But there is a long way to go. The second element of the logo is "Aloh Naaleh" – we shall surely go up. Emanating from the story of the spies and the great faith of Joshua and Caleb in their mission's success, we must recognize that we must continue to go up, to be stronger in action, deed, and vision. We must learn more Torah and put it into practice. We must become better human beings and better Jews. We must strive for a stronger community and a more meaningful relationship to it. We must stress both the commandments between man and G-d and between man and his fellow human beings. We must always be moving forward and moving upward creating a community of meaning for us all and a Kehilla Kadasha for all of our families and extended relationships.

An author when contemplating her 60<sup>th</sup> year wrote the following poem:

Twenty eight or fifty nine?  
Age is only a place in time  
where we live our lives from day to day  
never thinking about the way  
we use the hours, the days the years  
as we float alone within the sphere  
of time and space with birth and death  
to mark the boundaries of our quest.

Who we are, or were, or wish to be  
is not connected to age, you see,  
but more attached to what we've learned  
along the way between the turns  
of truths and trials and traumas past  
that helped to form the final cast  
of who we are at journey's end –

then have the chance to begin again.

We are not close to the end of our journey. According to Jewish tradition we have only come upon middle age. As we celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary may we relish the journey, may we celebrate our accomplishments and may we challenge ourselves to go ever higher, as we move from strength to strength.

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Vigilance and Peace:  
Fighting Anti-Semitism and Anti Zionism in Today's World

September 22, 2007  
Rabbi Michael Schwab

A couple years ago I read Phillip Roth's darkly imaginative novel, *The Plot Against America*, which imagined what would have happened had Charles Lindberg become President of the United States in the 1940's, instead of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. According to Roth's fictitious version of history, Lindberg leads America deeper into isolationism and consequently he *refuses* to involve the United States in the war against the Nazis. Instead, he creates strong diplomatic ties to Hitler and engages in a campaign to "Americanize" the Jewish citizens of the US. As a result, Hitler dominates Europe and Roth depicts an American society teetering on the edge of outright state-sanctioned anti-Semitism and an American culture that is saturated with prejudice against its Jewish population.

Frankly, Roth's book, while fascinating, was a scary read. In the abstract, to those of you who have not read the book, the outline of his plot may seem highly unrealistic. However, I assure you that the uneasiness the reader feels while engaged in the book is actually due to how *plausible* he makes this imagined version of history appear to be. The way in which he crafted the story truly makes it seem as if history really *could* have happened that way. Chillingly the book reminded me of the lesson I was always taught in my Holocaust studies classes, both at Solomon Schechter and in USY and at Ramah, that mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Germany was also a democratic, modern and civilized society, just like the US is now, and look what happened there.

The sad fact is that for whatever reason, we Jews have always had to maintain our vigilance in whatever society we have found our home. Unfortunately, we can never completely take our security, and our perceived acceptance by the larger society, for granted. Sadly, there is always at least someone, and usually many more than one someone, that desires our destruction for one reason or another. Our history is riddled with such examples, ranging from Egyptian slavery to the destruction of the Temples, to multiple expulsions from numerous countries and most notoriously, of course, the Holocaust.

However, particularly now, I have noticed that the Jewish community's awareness of, and anxiety about, anti-Semitism has grown in our country, reversing a trend of a feeling of continued cultural acceptance of Jews in this country and within the world community at large. Whether it be evidenced by Roth's novel, which I just mentioned, or by David Mamet's new book *The Wicked Son*, which I know some of you have read, or any number of speeches, e-mails and essays written by various authors and scholars sent to us by our watch organizations, like the local JCRC, the ADL, or AJC, all point to rising world, and even local, anti-Semitism. This phenomenon is alarming and has created a great deal of apprehension in the world Jewish community.

And truthfully you need little prompting from others to notice signs for concern. All one has to do is pay attention to the world news to see evidence of anti-Semitism. After 9-11 the theory was promulgated that Jews and Zionists were behind the terrorism. In our

native Chicago, demonstrations have been held with protesters blatantly brandishing anti-Semitic and anti-American placards that blame us for all sorts of things. In France and in other European countries there has been an alarming amount of violence against Jews, Jewish cemeteries and Jewish institutions. The list unfortunately goes on and on.

And what is even more nefarious is that the old symbols of anti-Semitism, those false accusations we had thought could not possibly continue in today's rational and sophisticated world, are being resurrected in the form of anti-Zionism, even by people we feel should know better. While it is unrealistic to expect the world community to refrain from *ever* criticizing Israel, for as with any country some of its actions will *always* be controversial even to its own citizens, much of the current anti-Israel sentiment is really masked anti-Semitism, conscious or unconscious, taking this particular form in order to be more politically palatable in the current world climate. As Thomas Freidman wrote, "Criticizing Israel is not anti-Semitic, and saying so is vile. But singling out Israel for opprobrium and international sanction out of *all* proportion to *any* other party in the Middle East *is* anti-Semitic, and not saying so is dishonest". Issues related to Israel engender deep emotions in people throughout the world and therefore the Jews in Israel become an easy target for anti-Semitic propaganda.

Statements of the like against Israel play into long-held stereotypes of Jewish power, as in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which insist that Jews run the world in an attempt to control it and therefore we are the source of much of the evil on this earth. To see the similarity between current statements and these long-held stereotypes, just look at the rhetoric of the *jihadist* Islamic extremists and those who, knowingly or unknowingly, support them. *They* claim that Israel, the tiny nation of the Jewish people, is the goliath of the region and is to blame for *all* of the instability in the Middle East. According to *their* fantasy, if Israel didn't exist, stability and peace would flow into the region like a river in springtime. It is the presence of the Jews, they say, that has created *all* of the turmoil.

Unfortunately this ridiculous and patently false theory seems to be accepted on different levels by members of the media, by various countries and political figures around the world and has been publicly supported by none other than our former President Jimmy Carter, who's recently published book not only unfairly labels Zionism as apartheid but through the use of skewed and often *demonstrably* false facts essentially blames Israel for the unrest in the region. And then there is the new book by professors Miesheimer and Walt, from such prominent universities as University of Chicago and Harvard, entitled *The Israel Lobby*. This one feeds on the previously mentioned age-old stereotype of Jewish power by claiming that we Jews in America are so powerful that we have somehow managed, through our lobby, to direct US policy in the Middle East over the last decade, *against* the greater interests of the US and the world, in order to benefit our homeland, Israel. According to their worldview, it seems that the tiny Jewish population in America controls the Congress *and* the White House. Both of these books, knowingly or unknowingly, play on age-old anti-Semitic stereotypes and both threaten the welfare of the Jewish people.

Yet, these claims, and all similar ones, are born of prejudice, both conscious and unconscious, and therefore are by definition irrational. Israel is, of course, *not* at fault for all of the instability in the Middle East and our lobby efforts, while effective, do not *control* the United State's policies and certainly not *against* our national interest. Anyone who really knows the facts can see how complicated the Middle East is. There is no one event or party that is the sole cause for the unrest. And it is counter-productive to say so. And further, it is clear that Israel has tried in so many ways and at many different times to avoid bloodshed and attempt peace. Israel has signed treaties with Egypt and Jordan, both nations that have attacked it on more than one occasion. Israel pulled out of Lebanon in the 80's and then again recently, only to be besieged by *katusha* rockets in return. Israel left the Gaza strip and has dismantled many settlements in the West Bank, only to have Hamas win the elections in Gaza from where Qassam rockets continue to be launched against Israeli towns and from where kidnapping attempts and terrorist raids continue to be staged. Israel, during Barak's administration was willing to agree to a comprehensive peace plan with the Palestinians that at the *very least* was a sincere proposal worth their serious consideration. This was rejected. Israel has certainly not been perfect, but the fact is there have been few times when Israel has had a true partner in pursuing peace and stability in the region.

Further, *at a minimum*, there are countless events and tragedies in the Middle East that contribute to the unrest there that have *nothing to do with Israel*. For example, the million people who died in the Iran-Iraq war, had nothing to do with Israel. The mass murder that is occurring in Darfur, Sudan, where the current regime is massacring much of its own population is not connected to Israel. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the butchery of his people are not related to Israel. Assad's killing of thousands of Syrian citizens in the city of El Hamah was not caused by Israel. The Taliban control of Afghanistan in their civil war has nothing to do with Israel. The devious activities of Al Quieda against the West were not caused by Israel. And the current violence in Iraq is not connected to Israel. Sadly, Israel exists in a region that is plagued by unrest and instability that cannot claim Israel as their source. To hold otherwise feeds into the hateful anti-Zionist propaganda that extremists are using to further their cause.

The anti-Semitic nature of such misinformation becomes more apparent when you realize that in many countries outside of the United States, and particularly in Iran, the rhetoric against Israel is not really about specific criticism of the State's policies or particular demands that Israel can rationally meet. For these radical groups, much of the time, specific complaints are just a smokescreen. What many extremist leaders have revealed is that they are actually against the very right of Israel, a legitimate member of the UN, to have a place on the world map. For them it is not really a matter of what Israel *does* but *who* Israel is. Such a stance is not in the spirit of legitimate criticism; it is simply veiled anti-Semitism. In fact, Iran's head of state, Mamoud Ahmadinejad has openly threatened to *obliterate* Israel completely. He said publicly and I quote: "Our dear Imam said that the occupying regime must be *wiped off the map* and this was a very *wise* statement. We cannot compromise over the issue of Palestine. . . This would be a defeat and *whoever accepts the legitimacy of this regime has in fact, signed the defeat of the Islamic*

*world...*” And if that wasn’t clear enough, he then blatantly and infamously stated, that Israel has “no right to exist”.

And Hamas, who rules Gaza, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, are no different. Their leaders sometimes deceptively complain to the world media about specific grievances they have with Israel (many of which in a legitimate context would have some merit) but then scarcely hiding it they in turn make speeches to their own people, and teach in their very schools, that the Jews should be pushed into the sea and that Israel should be wiped off the map. Their societies are unfortunately ripe with state-sponsored or state condoned programs of prejudice that only cultivate these hateful ideas. Be it, Mamoud Amadinejad of Iran, Hassan Nasrallah of Hezbollah, Ismail Haniya of Hamas or Osama bin Laden of Al Qaeda, all of these people and their followers have declared a real war against the state of Israel, against the people of Israel and in turn against every Jew, which I believe *they* intend to see through until the end. And unfortunately their numbers are not shrinking.

And make no mistake Ahmadinejad, and the others, threaten America as well. Bin Laden has already left his mark. And at a summit Ahmadinejad hosted called, The World Without Zionism Conference held this past year, he said: “Such people are using words like ‘it’s not possible’. They say how could we have a world without America and Zionism? But you know well that this slogan and goal can be achieved and can definitely be realized.” If that is not incitement to violence against America, Israel and Jews in general, I do not know what is. What is even more disturbing is that the people making these comments are not outcasts or marginalized figures in their spheres of influence. Rather, they are people with real power who have been, and who continue to be given, opportunities to act and to speak on the world stage.

Unfortunately the direct solution cannot be rational debate. Such discourse with these figures will have no effect. We need, however, to engage those who may be *influenced* by the promulgation of their hateful views, in the media and within our own communities, but direct dialogue with those whose hate us irrational will not be effective. Jews, unfortunately, have been subjected to such irrational bigotry for thousands of years and we have learned our lessons. To those overcome with hatred for our people, it matters little what we actually say or do. Thus, don’t be fooled, the issue before us is not foremost a matter of oil, or borders, or territory -- it is an existential battle for Israel’s survival. As Rabbi Harold Schulweis so passionately remarked during the conflict with Lebanon a little over a year ago:

We are simultaneously called capitalists and communists; we are called deracinated, rootless cosmopolitans and parochial, provincial, tribal people. We are condemned for allowing ourselves to go passively like sheep to the slaughter, and today — when we respond to kidnapping and missiles —[we are termed] "aggressive." We are caught in a perennial crossfire. There is no escape. . .

There is no way to please or to appease a hater. If Israel retreats from Lebanon, Israel is called "weak". And if we remain in Lebanon, Israel is called "occupier." If we destroy the infrastructure of Hezbollah, Israel is called "ruthless", and if we don't destroy the infrastructure of Hezbollah, we are "losers" and "cowards". If we throw leaflets from

airplanes, telling those . . . who are hiding Hezbollah killers, to leave their homes, we foolishly tip off the enemy and tell them where and when we will strike. But if we do not drop leaflets we are callous killers. If, as in Jenin, we send Israeli soldiers in house-to-house battle, we place them in danger of being booby-trapped. But if, instead, we bomb their hidden places, we are condemned as indiscriminate murderers.

Why do they hate us? Envy, xenophobia, New Testament stereotypes, Fagin, Shylock, elders of the protocol of Zion. It is an old question, which is unanswerable. Because hate is insane, causeless contempt. The anti-Semites ask: "Who began the war?" "Which war?" - "Any war?" The answer: "The Jews and the bicycles. "Why the bicycles!?" "Why the Jews?"

Schulweis was saying that the antagonism towards Israel by such people is not logical and cannot rationally be appeased. We, as Jews, will be targeted by these people no matter what we do and no matter what we profess. And we must face this reality and be ready to confront it.

However, God forbid, on this holy day of Yom Kippur I bring you a singular message of gloom and doom. This is not to say that because of this, things for the Jewish people are hopeless, for there is every reason to be extremely hopeful and positive. Thank God, those who hold such active anti-Semitic beliefs are not of the majority. Some are powerful but they are at least a minority. Most Muslims in the world do *not* have as their mission the destruction of the Jews. To say so is to participate in a damaging false stereotype. And there are indeed a few moderate Arab leaders who are willing to talk and make decisions based on the practical needs of peace and stability, whatever their personal beliefs about Jews and Israel. And we do have friends in the world, countries that have demonstrated that they will stand by Israel and fight discrimination, like the United States. And we, as Jews, are incredibly organized and have wonderful institutions that help us to manage world opinion, rally us around important causes and combat those who irrationally wish to destroy us.

Most important of all, however, we have the State of Israel itself. As it's national Anthem, *Hatikvah*, proclaims, Israel truly does represent our greatest source of hope and security. And, according to the Hebrew calendar, this Rosh Hashanah marked the 60<sup>th</sup> year since the creation of the State of Israel. This special event reminds us that we do indeed have much to be thankful for.

For starters, look around you, at this packed synagogue. Hitler tried to destroy us only 70 years ago and look at the Jewish people now. I have been given statistics that say there are more Jewish studies programs in existence and more books on Jewish subjects being published now than at any other time in history. Through Birthright, USY, Ramah and so many other organizations, our kids are traveling to Israel in greater numbers than their parents ever did. There is an endless list, which only continues to grow, of Jewish organizations that have helped to create an unprecedented vibrancy in Jewish life in this country. And as I said, we have a flourishing Jewish State, that despite the threats that abound, is producing scientific innovations that defy its small size, that has an economy

that is the envy of every country around it and which possesses a cultural and academic life that is rich and impressive. This, we must appreciate. About this we can feel wonderful.

For inspiration, though, in light of the political climate of the world vis a vis the Jewish State I think it is appropriate to remember the lessons taught to us by the builders of the State of Israel, the *halutzim* -- the pioneers. These brave young men and women were part of a generation of idealists who left families behind in Europe, and often a very comfortable lifestyle, to embark on an extremely hazardous journey to create a place for Jews to call home at a time when violence against Jews was climbing to a peak. They were the generation who drained the swamps, who built cities and who revived Jewish life in that region. They risked a great deal to bring their dream into existence; they did it for us.

As for me, the State of Israel was created well before *I* was born. And it was created before many of you sitting here today were born as well. *We* cannot remember what it would be like to live as a Jew before the existence of a Jewish State. But many of you here today *can* remember such a time. You may have even listened on the radio in 1947 as the United Nation's voted to partition the land allowing for the creation of Israel. You may even remember Ben Gurion's proclamation on May 14, 1948 that officially established the State of Israel after we had been forced to fight for our independence. You, who were alive at the time, know better than the rest, especially those who are survivors, the seminal importance of establishing a country of our own where Jews can always go. Where Jewish culture can always flourish. A State that would always advocate for our people no matter which way the tides of Anti-Semitism were to turn.

Especially now, it is important to remember that Israel and its people are still on the front lines of the struggle against those who wish to subjugate us. Make no mistake, the fate of the Jewish people is firmly linked to the fate of the State of Israel. We may not like everything that the leaders there say and do, but we cannot tolerate those who question Israel's right to exist. The one has nothing to do with the other. And whether they realize it or not, questioning Israel's existential right is not only anti-Israel but also anti-Semitic. And when we buy into such rhetoric or remain passive in its face, we do a great disservice to our own people.

That is why we must become educated about the issues and act on Israel's behalf. There are many ways to do this through our synagogue, JUF and countless other organizations. You can also act individually. You can check your investments to ensure they do not support energy companies that are helping the Iranians, for example. If major investment companies hear from enough people they might take these issues seriously which will affect the Iranian economy. You can write to your members of congress or call their offices and make sure that they know that you are concerned about Iran, Hamas, Syria and Hezbollah. Do whatever you are comfortable with. And when you do these things, let everyone you can know that you are doing these things and why you are doing them. Teach as many as you can that books like *The Israel Lobby*, that criticize

American Jews for exercising their democratically guaranteed rights, are hurtful and full of prejudice. Go to rallies, like the one tomorrow in New York City, which is protesting Ahmadinejad's speaking engagement at the United Nations. Many from Chicago and around the country will be there too.

However most importantly you can support Israel in whatever way you are able. Visit: it is a fun and personally meaningful way to support the Jewish State. We have two trips leaving from Beth El this year, a family trip over Winter Break and one that is a part of JUF's Chicago Community Mission in May during the official 60<sup>th</sup> celebrations. If not these trips then go on others, or on your own. Walk the streets, talk to the people and experience the amazing place our pioneers created there. Show our Israeli brethren that we support them. Unveil for yourself *your* connection to Israel and its people. And most importantly be an ambassador for Israel with whomever you speak.

There is, as many of you know, a discothèque in Israel called "The Dolphinarium," where a suicide bomber killed 21 Jewish teenagers. Outside the disco, there is now a hand-written sign that reads: ***"Lo nafsik lirkod. Lo nafsik lashir. Lo nafsik litzchok."*** -- ***"We will not stop dancing. We will not stop singing. We will not stop laughing."*** Rabbi Schulweis says, [Nor will] ***"we stop hoping"***. And then he adds, ***"There is an anger in me and in you. And our Jewish ethic mandates us not to give anger the last word. You can't close the . . . parshah on a note of despair. . . The Yom Kippur fast ends with a Tekiah Gedolah -- the long, piercing sound of hope. We must search to meet causeless hate with causeless love. We must be wary of anti-Semitism. But we must not allow anti-Semitism to dominate our lives. I am a Zionist. I am a Jew. I am not an anti, anti-Semite. We must continue to work for peace."*** We will not stop dancing. We will not stop singing. We will not stop laughing." Rabbi Schulweis says, [Nor will] "we stop hoping". And then he adds, "There is an anger in me and in you. And our Jewish ethic mandates us to give anger the last word. You can't close the . . . on a note of despair. . . The Yom Kippur fast ends with a -- the long, piercing sound of hope. We must search to meet causeless hate with causeless love. We must be wary of anti-Semitism. But we must not allow anti-Semitism to our lives. I am a Zionist. I am a Jew. I am not an anti-Semite. We must continue to work for peace."

One final story: In September 2002, a suicide bomber on a Tel Aviv bus murdered 6 Israeli passengers, including Yoni Jesner, a 19-year-old religious youngster from B'nai Akiva. His parents donated one of Yoni's kidneys to a boy named Yasmin Abu Ramilah, a 17-year-old Palestinian child who had been waiting 2 years for a compatible kidney. When asked why this boy, Yoni's parents explained, "The important principle is that life was given to another human being."

In 2005, Israel, through a mistake, killed Ahmed Al Katib, a 12-year-old Palestinian boy who was playing with his toy gun, which the police thought was real. Ahmed's father, Ismael Al Katib, had Ahmed's organs transplanted into the bodies of 5 *Jewish* Israeli children. The father explained: "I have taken this decision because I have a message to the world: *"We want, we need, we must have peace."*

Tonight, we must remember the legacy of these two families as well. We *shall* be vigilant to ensure our survival, which is our right. We *will* fight anti-Semitism wherever it arises and in whatever form it appears, for it is born of prejudice and often hatred. But we must also never lose sight of the goal of peace, *shalom*, which we pray for every day, three times a day, in our prayers. We must always remember that the reason for our struggle is not to destroy, rather it is to one day bring peace and tranquility for all.

*Gmar Hatimah Tovah* and *Shanah Tova* – May you and the entire Jewish people be written and sealed for a wonderful year -- A year of happiness, hope, security and peace. Amen.