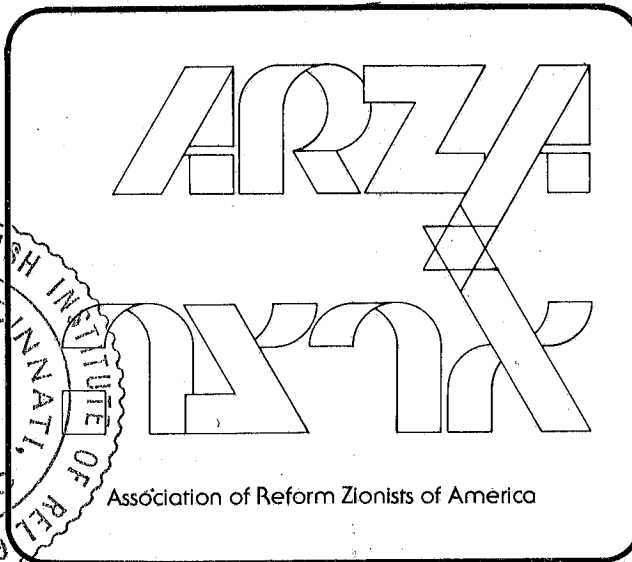
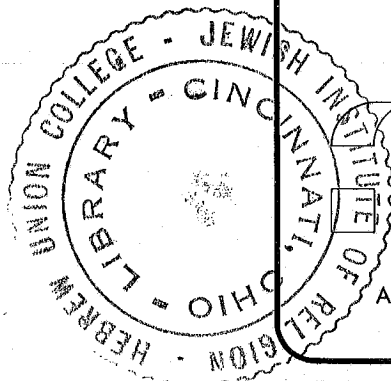


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A SPEECH REPRINT

ARZA AND THE UAHC

- *Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler*
- *Albert Vorspan*

first national assembly

Shoreham Hotel
September 15-17, 1978

Washington, D.C.
13-17 Elul, 5738

ARZA AND THE UAHC

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER

ARZA First National Assembly

Washington, D.C.
September 17, 1978

It is, of course, an honor which I greatly appreciate, to be here at this founding convention of ARZA. This is a dream fulfilled and I'm glad that its fulfillment was such a pleasant experience for each and every one of you.

To change the matter for a bit and to invoke an image with which I as the father of five children am a little bit more familiar---the image of a coming to be, of the birth, the delivery of ARZA was relatively painless and the sense of exhilaration which fills us now far outweighs whatever pangs were suffered. The baby is healthy and it is altogether beautiful to see. And all of those relatives who constitute the Reform Jewish community---those who are here and the many thousands, hundreds of thousands who are not here, have a right to say: "Behold what we did. It is very very good." The labor preceding birth, as I well know, not through personal experience, thank God, invariably takes longer than the delivery and in this too, in this instance too, the labor was extensive and fruitful.

Many people worked diligently and well and some, even though I run the risk of excluding as I specify, do merit special mention. First and foremost, a man whom you have chosen as the president of ARZA, Roland Gittelsohn, who championed the cause of ARZA in the national councils of our Union, who steered our committee through its temporary stages, who gave that committee and your constituency, your delegation such brilliant leadership at our first World Zionist Congress. Ira Youdovin who worked closely with Roland and who is the spoke of ARZA's wheel, attending to all of its tasks, whether great or small, whether imaginative or pedestrian. He very much reminds me of that Jew who oiled the wheels of his wagon even while he wore his *tefillin* on his head and arm. Ted Broido who stood by Roland's side, who handles the relationship aspects of ARZA to the Union, the constitutional aspects with Don Day, and who first conceived the idea of handling our intent of having the voice of Reform Zionism heard through the instrumentality of an affiliate.

The leadership of the Union---they merit special mention---Don Day and Tracy Ferguson who did pioneering work on our Israel Commission and not just here on the Constitution and By-Laws Committee. Ken Rosett and, of course, Nat Hess---and I'm so glad you honored him---who was our goad these many many years. I remember many hours spent at his home in Port Washington near his pool where we first dreamed this dream which now came to be. The leaders of the World Union as represented by Norma Levitt. The leaders of the Central Conference of American Rabbis---Joe and Ely and Arthur and, of course, David Polish who was and I hope for many many years will continue to remain our idealogue.

And *aharon*, *acharon*, *chaviv*, two men who built Reform Judaism in Israel and without whom we could not possibly function. I refer to Dick Hirsch who is our guiding spirit in Israel, who built so many of its congregations, who has repaired the stereotype of Reform through his excellent leadership on the Executive of the World Zionist Organization and finally also Steve Schafer who added that most precious jewel of our work in Israel, our youth movement there. Without him, without his driving force, his boundless energy, we would not exist; our youth institutions would not exist. I refer particularly to the genesis of a Reform Jewish youth movement in Israel and also of course the kibbutzim and all of the Union's youth activi-

ties in Israel and who, incidentally, in many ways is responsible for the idea of ARZA. Although Dick and I talked about it for many years, it was Steve who stormed into my office last March and said: "Now is the time to do it, now, before the next Congress." And so to all of these people, we all of us owe a great deal of thanks---to them and countless others.

Nor do I believe that the past should be forgotten. In the final analysis, we all of us stand on the shoulders of those who preceded us and I think now not so much of the giants of the past who worked within the councils of Zionism. Though they were Reform Jews, they served essentially as individuals---the Silvers and Wises and Hellers. But I think now particularly of one man who surely more than anyone else impelled our movement to devote at least some of its energies to Israel and I refer to Jay Kaufman ל"י. It was he who pressed the World Union to make Israel an important component of its concern. It was he who singlehandedly raised the funds to pay for the rabbis and the needs of the congregations there and to pay for our property which we now hold, where Har El, where many of our youth activities are centered. It was he who first took me up to Jerusalem and said: "Come, let me show you my city." Indeed, it was he who was one of two Reform rabbis---Ezra Spicehandler was the other---who were the only two Reform rabbis who were in Israel during its most trying period, during its siege. Tomorrow, by curious coincidence or not so curious coincidence because the ways of God are difficult to discern, tomorrow would have been his 60th birthday. So I'm glad that Aviva and some of his children are with us today.

A very meaningful passage from the Book of Psalms comes to my mind: "I will dwell in Thy tent forever." Now the Hebrew word *olamim*, which I just translated as forever and which is usually translated as forever, literally means not world which is really in the singular---*olam*---but rather worlds---*olamim*. It is the plural. Literally translated, therefore, the passage should read "I will dwell with Thee in two worlds." And so a rabbi once asked: can one really expect to live in two worlds? At the very same time in this world and in the world beyond? Then the rabbi himself gave this most beautiful answer: "Yes, when a teacher departs from this world and some of his surviving students repeat one of his teachings at that very moment---the teacher's lips speak from the grave, and they say: I am living in two worlds---in the world in which I am now, the world of the grave, and in that world which I left." As Jay's survivors and students, we have been and will be repeating many of his teachings---teachings which he gave not only by precept but by the example of his life.

So what we have done we have done not by ourselves alone. What we have done we have done because there were generations before us who had visions and who had the courage to act when others were filled with doubt and with despair. Now what you have heard, you have heard a great deal I suppose about what the role of ARZA is, what it should be, what we dream it to be, and since I have had many conversations with those who addressed you and with those who lead you, I am fully familiar with them and I'm not going to dwell at great length on what I conceive the role of ARZA to be. Let me just make four brief comments:

(1) In the first instance, I am impelled by the conviction that as a Reform Jewish community, we have to be bound to Israel, and we cannot be bound only by the bonds of economic and political support. We require a much more profound linkage; that linkage which rises out of a common community of faith. And this is the ultimate motivation which impels us to establish a link between the Reform Jewish community here and our brothers in Israel.

(2) We will succeed only if you, each and every one of you, succeed on a grass roots level within your communities and within your congregations. If you come to

life only when we have national conventions and only when there is an international congress to summon us, we will continue to be what we have unhappily been in the past, a head without a body. We need the strength of that body. There is no such thing as a leader without a people. Moses however talented he was, however imaginative and visionary he was, as great a genius as he was, inspired by God, would not have succeeded if our fathers had not dared to venture into the desert with him. Yochanan Ben Zakkai would not have been able to forge the school as a vital source for the preservation of Judaism had not the fathers and mothers of his generation been willing to bring their children to his school and to those schools which came from his central efforts. We must have the muscle and the blood and the strength which flows from a total body and which only you can provide within your communities and congregations.

(3) On a national level, I envisage ARZA to be something more than just an affiliate. I don't mean to denigrate the affiliates by any manner or means. They are vital aspects of our work. But I want ARZA to become very much more of a department of the Union as an intrinsic aspect of its work so that our work will continuously be heightened and deepened and stimulated by the existence of ARZA on a national level. I want ARZA to be something more than a meteor which flashes through the sky. I want it to be a little more than the earth which is bound to the sun around which we revolve.

(4) And last but not least on an international level, I do not believe that we will fulfill our tasks only if we succeed in fending for our more colloquial interests. We should do that. We should become the spokesmen and the defenders of the rights of the Reform Jewish community. We must resist every effort to lead us out of the Jewish fold, to make us something apart from the body Jewish because we are Jewish in the full sense of the term. But fighting for those rights should not encompass everything we do. We must take our place in the leadership ranks of world Jewry as Reform Jews because we are a part of the body Jewish and we have a responsibility for the total Jewish people which we can express in the councils which will be available to us, and those tables around which we will sit, because of our existence as a political party.

We must take our place as Jews and be concerned with the needs of the total people, with the quality of Jewish life in Israel and, to be just a little bit more specific, I want ARZA to be in the forefront of those who will strengthen that one viable bridge which binds Israel to the communities of our dispersion. I refer now specifically to the World Zionist Organization which urgently, desperately, requires a cleansing, a reconstitution, a reforming. We must devote our energy to breaking the stranglehold of party loyalty which now chokes this movement and we must enable it to become what it was meant to be, an agency which will make one people out of two communities.

ARZA: AN HISTORIC SYNTHESIS

ALBERT VORSPAN

ARZA First National Assembly

Washington, D.C.

September 17, 1978

I want to say something that I know 10 or 15 or 20 other speakers have said, but I am afraid it is true and we are all right. And that is that we have touched some sense of history this weekend at this conference. We have made history within this Reform Jewish movement. And I want to say as somebody who was not altogether sure that we would fly this weekend that I believe we may have set the stage for a revolutionary ferment of change in our Reform Jewish movement, in the Zionist movement and perhaps even in the State of Israel itself.

Why? Because we have certain extraordinary things going for us which I will tick off very, very briefly. And they are things which I think we take for granted. First of all, we adopted a basic Platform which absolutely astounds me in its grandeur, in its clarity and in its brilliance. We could have decided to join the World Zionist Organization and adopt a Platform which pasted together and painted over two unlike and once alien systems of Jewish thought. What we instead adopted is a profound synthesis of the values of Reform and the values of modern Zionism. Avoiding the slogans and shibboleths which have befogged Zionism since the creation of the state, we have developed our concepts of Reform Zionism which respects the Diaspora, which has the self-respect to demand rights, equity, and pluralism, which harnesses the power of the ethical and religious traditions of Judaism, which expresses our profound love and commitment to the land and the people without making the state our new divinity and without making us ornamental amen-sayers at the throne of power.

This Platform reflects and will intensify a revolution already underway in this Reform Jewish movement and I predict it will revolutionize Zionism itself. For post-state Zionism has been, in my judgment, intellectually and spiritually moribund, an actor in search of a play. And the Polish committee has made a creative breakthrough whose ripples of influence over the years will I believe help to shape the future of the entire Jewish people.

In addition to the ideas set down in honesty and clarity, in the resonance of an enduring religious faith, we also have the horses to do the job. We have the men and women of stature and dynamism to articulate these ideas and to do for modern Zionism what Pope John did for the Church---throw open the windows to let out the stale cliches of dead era, to revitalize, to renew a Zionist movement, and to renew the Jewish people.

I want to make another prediction---what Alex Schindler has become on the American scene, our leaders of ARZA and Reform Judaism will become in world Zionist circles. Where midgets of malice have been spinning the wheels of bureaucracy, we will send the religious and spiritual giants of this movement---Gittelsohn, Polish, Plaut, Lelyveld, Schindler, Hirsch, Pilchik and hosts of others---rabbis and laymen---to give a powerful resonance to the ideals we have stood for. In a vacuum of mediocrity, the voices of people of stature will ring and our ideas will no longer be placed on the back burner of Jewish history. We are in that Zionist movement, not to be a cog in an elephantine wheel, or to stand at the trough, although we will demand our share of equity, or to put a Reform Jewish *hechsher*, our own Seal of Good Housekeeping, on a world Zionist movement. We are there to be *chutzpadik* enough to seek to lead---to

lead the Zionist world and the Jewish people to new and fresh and daring destiny. New directions---to be something different under the sun, to be a light unto our own people and to the peoples of the world.

We have ideas, we have spokespersons, and we have builders. Alex Schindler ticked off the people without whom we would not be sitting at this meeting and I am not going to repeat all of their names. But somebody had to build the machinery, somebody had to arrange for delegates, for by-laws, for Platform, for meetings. Somebody had to put muscle and flesh on this vision and I salute Ira and Ted and Roland, even in this context, and Ken Rosett and Tracy Ferguson, Donald Day and all the others who did what we said we had to do and they did it with the work of their hands. And in Israel, as Alex pointed out but I can't fail to affirm it, we have built institutions and programs, some of them embryonic, of such extraordinary promise, through the work of people like Dick Hirsch and Steve Schafer and we have perhaps more than anything else, something else going for us---the youth who see visions and put their bodies and souls on the line to be living laboratories of a new synthesis of faith, the very best qualities of Reform Judaism and the very best qualities of modern Zionism harmonized and tested in the exigencies of a passion of real daily life. Yahel and all the Yahels to come will change us as a movement, will change them---the young people involved---and I believe will change Israel itself. I envy these young people and so do all of us. I envy you your spirit and your challenge. You go from this place with our fondest hopes and our firmest support and fervent blessings. Go in peace and help to build peace in a truly Jewish state. *L'hitraot.*

And lastly and briefly we have us, the members. We have tasted a bit of history. I have felt for the last two days a little of that sense of exaltation that I felt in this city during the march on Washington. Something was created here, something was built. And I do not take facetiously the seriousness with which we signed that document in the other room. That document will be framed in our homes and offices, that document will be a part of the literature of this movement, that document will be a moment of which we will be proud for the rest of our lives.

And now we go to work, We go back to our communities to build chapters. To build an ARZA of 100,000 members which has muscle and voice and power. To raise the \$5.00 a year per family, to educate in our congregations and to reach out beyond our congregations to revitalize not only our Israel program but the whole range of Reform Judaism in the synagogue, and we remember at all times our overarching admonition to build so that we may be a blessing, a blessing unto our own people and a blessing unto all mankind.