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FOUNDERS' DAY ADDRESSES

1989

Robert L Katz
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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

CONTENTS

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FOUNDERS

Alfred Wolf

For me, the Hebrew Union College was founded on a shabbat afternoon in April of 1935, in Berlin. That was when, as a freshman student at the Berlin rabbinical seminary, the Lehranstalt, I learned that I could complete my studies at a place which I had never heard of before, the Hebrew Union College at Cincinnati, in America.

History books may give you a different date for the founding of the College; but I will stick to my story. For, had the College not come to life for me at that time, chances are that, within a few years, there would have been nothing left of me but ashes in the wind and a few bits of bleached bone in a Godforsaken place in Poland.

At any rate, what difference does a date make? I got the purpose of the College straight. Our College was established for the prime purpose of saving life, and not just the life of a few students from Hitler's Germany, but the life of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Indeed, for the two Founders we honor today -- Isaac Mayer Wise, born 170 years ago, and Stephen Samuel Wise, born 115 years ago -- the overarching concern was survival of the faith and the people which had their boundless loyalty and allegiance.

While we may think of the two Wises primarily as the architects of our alma mater, the schools to which they gave so much of their energy and love were never their ultimate goals, but rather sacred instruments to serve a more sacred task: building a Jewish future. Their efforts, in fact, enabled American Jewry to play a pivotal role in the 4000-year history of our people.

How can we talk of the two Wises agreeing on Jewish survival when Stephen was an ardent Zionist while Isaac fought Zionism tooth and nail?

Delivered at the Los Angeles School, March 13, 1989.

Their disagreement was due, above all, to the difference between their lifetimes. If Zionism had existed in Isaac's early years and if he had come under the sway of a Theodor Herzl -- as Stephen did -- he might have been a Zionist, too.

There was, however, total agreement between the two that America was to play a crucial role in saving the Jewish people.

A major effort of their respective rabbinates, Isaac's in the 19th, Stephen's in the 20th century, was to enlist American power to protect Jews from Russia's czars and commissars and from Germany's Nazis, as well as to open America for Jewish refugees.

Both men were exceedingly proud to call themselves Americans. Isaac wrote that he became an American in his native Bohemia by reading the words of the founders of our Republic. Stephen never wavered in his American patriotism from his youth to the end of his life. Soon after the founding of modern Israel, and shortly before his death, he wrote: "As a citizen I belong wholly to America. America is my country and I have no other." (Challenging Years, 79)

Both men spent their lives developing the American Jewish community's organizational strength. Isaac established the pattern eventually followed by Conservative and Orthodox institutions when he structured Reform's Union of Congregations, Seminary and Rabbinical Conference. Stephen worked unceasingly for the democratization of Jewish life by forming not only the Jewish Institute of Religion, but the American and World Jewish Congress.

Their first concern may have been to bring order out of chaos. In effect, they prepared the ground for American Jewry becoming guardians of the Jewish future during one of the most critical transition periods in world Jewish history.

Isaac Mayer Wise lived long enough to realize that U.S. Jewry would have to at least share responsibility for Jewish survival with Europe's Jews. He could not anticipate the horror which destroyed that center of Jewish life.

Stephen became one of the most involved witnesses to Europe's tragedy and also one of the architects of Israel's rebuilding as an independent state and as a reborn center for Judaism. Thus they did the groundwork

for our generation to take on the crucial role played first by Babylonian Jewry from the sixth pre-Christian century to about the year 1000 of our era.

As Babylon received the tradition from Israel, the U.S. obtained it from Europe.

As Babylon gave support to the remaining community in Israel, the U.S. is now giving encouragement and aid to Europe's remaining Jewries.

More than Babylon assisted the young Jewish communities in Spain and Italy and, less directly, in France and Germany, the U.S. is now backing the young State of Israel. For our support of Israel is not only financial, nor are we a major source for aliyah. We are living in an open society. We are the first major Jewish community ever to take the long-term test of survival in, what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel called, "the insecurity of freedom." Therefore, our pioneering experience in democracy should profit not only us and our descendants, but our people everywhere, especially in Israel and in the Soviet Union.

Both Wises showed us life patterns which ought to be helpful in this task. Let me mention three areas of concern to us which also were on their agendas: religious commitment, unity among Jews, and harmony with the non-Jewish world.

Religious commitment was basic to their lives. Neither of them could conceive of a Jewish people without a Jewish faith responsive to the realities of their time. For neither of them could Judaism be confined to the four cubits of halakha. They were not satisfied with a Judaism preserved in the forms it had attained by the 16th century.

Knowing history, they understood that the ability to change, to grow, was integral to the life of Judaism, that our religious civilization had become enriched by adapting to itself much of the cultures it encountered on its wanderings through the continents and through the ages.

To Isaac M. Wise, Reform Judaism was to be "an expression of the 'spirit of the age'...to be a continuation of the practice and tradition of the rabbis and Jewish sages...while holding that all laws are subject to change...It is to be an effort to rescue Judaism from indifferentism, desertion and ignorance, by inspiring Israelites with a love of Judaism." (James G. Heller: Isaac M. Wise, His Life, Work and Thought, U.A.H.C., 1965, pp. 78.)

Stephen S. Wise considered "undogmatic liberalism (to be) at the heart of the genius of Judaism." (Stephen S. Wise, Challenging Years, East and West Library, London, 1951, p.78.)

Today, once again, we need not be frightened by those who confuse Orthodoxy with authenticity, nor by aspersions cast on the "L-word." It is not the way of Reform Judaism to seek change for the sake of change; nor to undo change to curry favor with Orthodox critics. Reform is the constant search for the best way of expressing the timeless ideals of the Torah in terms of the clearest contemporary insights.

To implement this search, we have developed tools the Founders could not have foreseen, but would surely have welcomed: coordinated campuses of our College on two continents, youth camps in America, kibbutzim in Israel, education courses and materials for young and old, for congregation members and the not yet affiliated. If we would only use these extensive programs with the intensity of some of our Orthodox critics, the future of American Judaism would be assured.

Will our insistence on this first goal, religious commitment as Reform Jews, create a conflict with our second goal, Jewish unity?

Both Wises tried to balance the two.

Isaac Mayer Wise sincerely desired unity for American Jews. He wanted traditionalists both in his Union of Congregations and in his College. He was willing to make extensive concessions, but he failed to get cooperation.

Stephen S. Wise started JIR as a school for Orthodox and Conservative, as well as Reform, rabbis. His American and World Jewish Congress also were attempts at unity which ended up as two more names on the long list of Jewish organizations.

This generation is called on, once again, to strive for unity on many levels. We see ever more clearly that, if humanity is to survive, warfare must become unthinkable. This includes not only nuclear war between superpowers, civil war as in Lebanon and Ireland, but also the war of words between factions of the Jewish people.

In all these areas, the requirement is acceptance of pluralism, unity in diversity, and commitment to civil discourse. Compromise on procedure is not too heavy a price to pay. Renewed emphasis on meaningful cere-

monies and the judicious use of Hebrew are signals that we can use time-honored symbols as part of our thrust into the future. But there must be mutual respect for principle. Sometimes, of course, we need Solomon's wisdom to decide what is procedure and what is principle.

Our third topic, harmony with non-Jews, includes one element on which there is ready agreement among Jews of all places and times: we need protection against the endemic Gentile disease called anti-Semitism.

Both Wises were dedicated to that goal.

Their involvement in interreligious relations extended, however, beyond fighting anti-Semitism. They sought areas of active cooperation with neighbors of other faiths.

Both cherished personal friendships with Christian leaders.

Both were frequent speakers in Christian churches.

Both were forthright critics of politicians and churchmen who wanted to proclaim America a Christian country, introduce prayer in public schools or target Jews for conversion.

Today, we have an unusual opportunity. Most major church denominations have gone on record against anti-Semitism, against proselytizing of Jews, and in favor of dialogue. Locally, nationally, and internationally, we are involved in interreligious conferences as well as joint educational endeavors and social action. Frequently, churches now initiate the dialogue. Where resolutions for friendship with the Jews have remained only pieces of paper, it is up to us to take the first step toward action.

We see then that our Founders directed us toward the future on the paths of religious commitment, unity with our fellow Jews and harmony with the non-Jewish world. We are not yet near our goal, but we are on our way.

A seventeenth century Japanese sage taught:

"Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; seek what they sought." (Matsuo Basho - 1644-1694.)

Of course, we cannot follow in the footsteps of the Founders in any literal sense, for we tread on territory they never traversed. We can "seek what they sought," though we must trace our paths on maps they never saw.

The structures which they pioneered helped to shape -- and are still shaping -- our lives. As we continue the immense tasks which they began,

let us remember that even our Founders did not always achieve the goals which they set for themselves. Isaac M. Wise had several outright failures in his early attempts to organize American Jewry and start a seminary. When, at last, he did succeed, his Union of Congregations and his Union College embraced only a fraction of American Hebrews and his Conference of Rabbis was "Central" only to his Reform colleagues. Stephen Wise certainly did not plan at the outset to have his JIR hyphenated to HUC, nor did he expect that his all-embracing American Jewish Congress would some day be just another organization, even sharing its initials in the American Jewish alphabet soup with the very "Committee" he wanted to supplant.

Rabbi Magnin used to tell about his visit with Stephen Wise in the 1920's. Wise, who had turned down a call to the pulpit of New York's great Temple Emanu-El, and who had risked his rabbinic career in starting the Free Synagogue, then was attracting capacity crowds to Sunday services at Carnegie Hall.

After the service, Wise asked Magnin, "Edgar, what do you think of my Free Synagogue?"

Magnin replied, "You collect dues. So, it isn't free. You worship in Carnegie Hall. So, it isn't a synagogue."

The way Edgar told the story, he was sure that he had bested Stephen. I am not so sure. Edgar judged present evidence. Stephen saw visions of the future.

We may not be able to walk in the Founders' footsteps, but we can learn from them that in order to succeed, we must risk failure; that we should dare to dream, yet must make peace with reality.

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

Robert L. Katz

It is a pleasure to join in this celebration of Founders' Day. We honor the memory of the master builder, Isaac Mayer Wise. We also gather this morning to applaud the contributions of our alumni to the preservation and renewal of the Reform Jewish Movement. I am pleased, too, to keep Dr. Louis Jacobs company as we veterans in the battles of the Lord receive our doctorates. As for me, I have been given the third degree, but President Gottschalk has made the experience totally delightful.

It has been over 50 years since I descended from street car number 61 and walked across Clifton Avenue to this Camelot of Torah. I had made my way from an unlikely town in the improbable state of Iowa by way of Waukegan, Illinois. With brief interludes in congregational work and the chaplaincy, I have been in the HUC orbit almost continually. I am still awed and astonished by this College, by its lustrous past and its vital present. Had I known years ago that I would one day be awarded this honorary doctorate -- I doubt that I would have worked any harder than I did to deserve it! And now I turn to speak a few words to my fellow doctorees, a few words, as the late Dr. Jacob Mann used to say in passing out the examination questions -- please write briefly -- but in detail!

Twenty-five years of rabbinic leadership. How many sermons stretched end to end? How many bar mitzvahs, weddings, and eulogies, too? How many conferences and consultations? How many invocations and how many closing benedictions? How many moments in dialogue or were they really in monologue? Former students and present colleagues -- you have mastered so much that we could never have taught you here. And we, your teachers, perhaps we have learned a thing or two since you left. We are no more modest now than we were years ago when you sat in our classes, suffering not so silently as you wended your way

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Delivered at the Cincinnati School, March 15, 1989.

through the labyrinth of the old curriculum. You have mellowed as we have in our own way. You have stretched your minds. You have introduced your congregations to the passionate voice of Jeremiah. You have sung with the psalmist. You have pondered the fate of Job. You have checked in with Rashi and have alluded to the secret code of Maimonides. You have stood on Mt. Scopus and now you feel caught up in the history and destiny of our people in Israel. You have had more than a taste of leadership and by now you know how provocative -- amcha -- our fellow Jews can be. Here at your alma mater you can recall your youth, encounter yourselves as you were, reassess the meaning of your rabbinate. Whom do we serve as rabbis? What creative years lie ahead? Some of the old anxieties have receded. If new ones make themselves felt, here is a safe place to deal with them, for this school is your link with historic Judaism. It is the treasure house of your faith.

You are tyros no longer. By now you have probably experienced every test the rabbinate has to offer. What are your priorities now? Discover the ways -- you are not fully free, to be sure -- but discover the ways you can change the course of your rabbinate, if indeed you want to change.

Genesis speaks of the first call -- ayecha -- spoken by God and addressed to Adam. Ayecha, where are you? Asked to explain the meaning of this question, the teacher commented, "God knows everything. Certainly he knew where Adam and Eve were hiding." The teacher explained, "God calls to every individual, 'Where are you? Where are you in your world?'." This question is addressed to each of us. Don't try to hide from it. Don't try to escape responsibility for your life. Ayecha -- where are you?

By now you have learned the outer limits of rabbinic authority. Most of us have given up our illusions about what rabbis may or may not consider their spiritual turf. We are more realistic and we spare ourselves the corrosive struggles in our communities among competing agencies. We are most realistic about the talents we have, our skills in leadership, our power to assess and resolve crises. What does the term kevod harav mean? It designates respect for the office of the rabbi. Reform Judaism

has wrought near miracles in shoring up the dignity of the rabbinate. We know that our people most often respect what we do and what we stand for. For the most part, our authority is not ascribed; it is not inherent in our position and it cannot be taken for granted. It is not supported -- as is the case with more traditional rabbis -- by the authority of the halakha. Our semicha adds honor to our name, but not constitutional power to pronounce binding judgments. People know us by what we do, by what we achieve, by the support freely offered to us by colleagues and friends. Our new doctorates will fortify us, more in our own eyes than elsewhere, but this is no mean contribution.

Do we really want to insist on kevod harav as the basic pillar of our identity? If we want to be taken seriously, as teachers, preachers, counselors, leaders -- if we want a serious response to our words when we teach Judaism, are we not obliged to address our people directly, appealing from mind to mind, conveying the best we have to offer, investing ourselves, our highest selves, in the causes and truths we would represent? Being a Reform rabbi can be a strenuous experience. Lacking the structure of the halakha, we must be all the more ingenious and persuasive, fully aware that what we teach and represent stands or falls by the vigor of our reasoning and the contagion of our personal commitments. Is the point made too sharply? Better to say that we engage in dialogue with our people, challenging them and being challenged by them. We are companions and guides to our people in a mutual search for meaning, for personal fulfillment, for sensitive conscience. All that we do must demonstrate respect for the critical intelligence of our people. We cannot command loyalty, even if we were tempted to ask for it out of desperation. We Reform rabbis can go the distance with reason that is persuasive and with passion that generates commitment.

Our people patiently wait to perceive the connection between what we rabbis teach and the issues they face in their individual lives or in their communities. We do not have captive congregants who attend worship services with any frequency. But when they do come, they are open to a healing word, to credible words that can make a difference in their lives. How can we engage them in a religious experience? They

are not empty vessels into which we decant measured doses of Jewish learning. They are not resistant to our liturgy, but the great passages that resonate in the heart of the rabbi rarely evoke appreciation by once-a-year worshippers. Is there consistent failure on our part to understand their needs? Are we so distant from them intellectually and spiritually that we cannot appreciate what dreams, what fears, what hopes they have? Or are we rabbis more like them than we care to imagine? And what would be the shape and form of our piety, were we not ordained, were we not religious professionals? Reform Judaism confronts us directly with these questions. The same freedom we find so congenial also requires us to address with honesty and clarity the inescapable issues of faith.

A common experience finds us rabbis taking part in life cycle ceremonies and then hearing words of appreciation, spontaneously given. At such moments our religious vocabulary fits. For our part we feel legitimated. We know that when family anxieties break through the surface of civility, we are often able to provide badly needed support.

But we rabbis are not content with crisis intervention. We aspire to teach Jewish history, Jewish ethics, Jewish theology, Bible, rabbinics, albeit in translation. We aim to involve our people in the experience of prayer. But we have yet to make a diagnosis of their spiritual needs. Would that we might capture the imagination of our people, of Jews who support and cultivate the arts, who visit galleries, museums and theatres, of Jews who are avid purchasers of books. We are a literate, informed, cultured, and religiously alienated people. We rabbis would do well to make common cause with artists and writers. But who will initiate the dialogue.

A Hillel director, Jonathan Omar-Man, has written of his experience in an outreach program. How is one to be a religious Jew in the 90's? He remembers discussing this with the parents of a young man whom he had assisted in returning from a powerful encounter with Christianity. He told the parents that he believed that their son was a deeply religious person. When the parents heard this, they responded in a way that revealed that for them, religious experience was esoteric, not for the average

Jew. They could respond only with the question, "Do you mean our son should now become a rabbi?"

We rabbis ought to be able to make a difference in the lives of our people, because of who we are and because of what we teach. For better or worse, we personify Judaism. But Jews do not need to choose between the rabbi and the teachings of Judaism. Israel Salanter, the founder of the Musar, or ethics, movement a century ago, once commented on the dilemma which separates two groups of Jews, the Chasidim, the mystics, and the Mitnagdim, the rationalists. The Chasidim were wont to say, we have the master -- the rebbe -- why do we need the Book? The more cerebral Mitnagdim said, we have the Book, what need have we for the master? Because we encounter people at the deepest levels of their experience, we require extraordinary strength. There are subtle and elusive nuances in communications which may slip by us, unless we have insight into our own needs, foibles, and blind spots. We are public figures, easily accessible to our people, vulnerable, and far from immune to self-delusion.

We can wound others and be wounded by them unless we tend almost daily to tikkun hanefesh, the repairing, the monitoring of our souls. How do we replenish our inner resources, shore up defenses against our own anxiety? We take the burdens of our people on our shoulders. Small wonder if we bend under the load, unaware of the toll sometimes taken by demands we presume must be met with total giving of ourselves. We are public leaders and private counselors. We have high visibility. We distort our leadership if we presume that we are public rescuers who can neglect their own needs. Other professions require close personal supervision before certifying candidates for practice. Do we know the limits of our spiritual energy? We extend love and caring. Not only when we are in the public eye but when we are alone or with our families, we still can feel involved in the dilemmas and predicaments of our people. Do we believe the resources we have are really inexhaustible?

How do rabbis preserve their self-respect when they feel overwhelmed, when they confront the limits of their own power to sustain, when they are pummeled by questions which psalmists and poets pose, but cannot answer? Martin Buber observed in the counseling or teaching relationship

that the one who gives help and the one who receives help are not equals. We can be taught and often are helped by our congregants, but we cannot expect reciprocity. We should not be dependent upon them for our nourishment.

Almost daily, we rabbis ask ourselves: Who are we? What is our life? What is our strength? We have spiritual needs we ignore at the risk of becoming nothing more than religious functionaries presiding at perfunctory and spiritless rites. We facilitate the religious experience for others, but do we know the consolations of faith and prayer for ourselves? To retain the wholeness and freshness of our own inner experience, we must allow for spiritual growth. Somehow we must gain for ourselves the quiet and the strength we tell our people can come from meditation and prayer. Like every Jew we are called upon to do teshubah, not less than every day. It is strenuous and we have no alternative. The philosopher/artist Max Ernst once said that there is no such thing as total revolution. There is only perpetual revolution, the unending process of growth, change, and refinement. His description of himself is very much to the point. He said that all his life he has tried to find himself and without success. "And this," he said, "may be my only achievement." Where are the spiritual tests the rabbi should apply? Israel Salanter's remedy of day-by-day heshbon hanefesh - the searching of the soul - addresses deeper levels of personality. Through it we can escape the trivial and renew our self-respect.

Ayecha -- where are you? Dismiss this question if you like. Forward it to your congregants, if you wish. But this call is addressed to us.

Thank you, Isaac Mayer Wise, for this school, for the grand structures you founded that Judaism may thrive in this great land. You have made it possible for us to learn and to teach.

Thank you, too, Alfred Gottschalk, shetibadael l'chaim aruchim. May you be blessed with length of days. Wise would have approved of your relentlessly innovative leadership. On this Founders' Day we, my colleagues and I, thank you and the faculty for honoring us in this way.

IN PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Hyman Bookbinder

I am, of course, personally most gratified at receiving this great honor today from this distinguished institution -- and to be in the company of such distinguished co-honorees. If my work over these many years does indeed warrant this personal recognition, I do feel proud. But I see this primarily as a recognition of the kind of work I have been associated with -- public advocate, public critic, public defender -- or, if you please, yes, public interest lobbyist. If my particular responsibilities -- in the labor movement, in the American Jewish Committee, from time to time in the government itself -- have brought me more public exposure than others, I have the responsibility and the satisfaction in telling you that there are many effective and tireless workers in this field of public interest advocacy -- in the Jewish community and in the general community -- most of whom have been and will probably always be unidentified and unrecognized.

I have always been a public policy junkie. I really mean always. Born into a world that soon exposed me to depression, to war, and to the Holocaust, and born into a family headed by parents who had fled from lands that threatened pogroms, I early acquired a compulsive interest in public affairs. Why could society not do better to avoid the pain and injustice and hopelessness I saw in so many ways and so many places? It was my good fortune, all my life, to be able to combine career development with furtherance of what I thought was sound public policy. Today, to have that good fortune recognized is most heartwarming, but it is also sobering. Sobering because it compels me to ask how much this world -- and this country in particular -- has really moved during my lifetime to significantly reduce that pain and injustice and hopelessness I sensed more than 60 years ago.

Surely this audience today does not need my help in drawing up a balance sheet. Of course there have been victories, there have been improvements for people generally and for Jews in particular. But, the

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Delivered at the New York School, March 22, 1989.

list of problems still unsolved, plus the many new ones, is tragically long -- terrorism, anti-Semitism, apartheid, crime, hunger, homelessness, drugs, AIDS, skinheads, teen-age pregnancies, family disarray -- and so much more.

Public policy -- i.e., governmental action -- is not necessarily responsible for the persistence of these problems. Nor is it the certain reliever of these problems. But the role of government is critical -- and what that role should be has always been the subject of sharp controversy. That's what politics is all about; that's what elections are all about. But in the United States -- more than in any other country, including other great democracies -- public policy and government actions have been importantly affected by the power of public opinion and public advocacy throughout the life of an administration and of a Congress, not only on election day.

Five words in the very first of the Constitution's Bill of Rights - "right to petition the government" - provide the mandate for this powerful aspect of American democracy. In our pluralist society, each group is permitted to advocate and even press its own agenda; but, in the final analysis, it must be able to demonstrate that its interests are compatible with, and dependent upon, the general interest. No groups in America have understood this better than the Jewish community and the labor movement; it has been my privilege to serve both groups in the promotion of their particular interests as well as what they deemed to be in the general interest.

It has become a political cliche these days to refer to the "powerful Jewish lobby" -- too often carelessly called the "Israel lobby." I have often said that the Jewish lobby is not as strong as some think, but not nearly as weak as some would like. Jews have interests. We intend to defend them. We do not apologize for whatever strength and influence we have. Tragically, there were times when our strength -- our ability to affect government action -- was not effective enough. We had not yet learned how to use the precious right of advocacy; our people suffered dire consequences as a result. We are determined not to let that happen again. Let me give you a poignant illustration.

Last month, the National Archives in Washington opened a major exhibit on this right to petition, called "American Voices:200 Years of Speaking Out." The exhibit gives prominent display to the letter

written on December 2, 1942, by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise to President Roosevelt informing him of new, conclusive proof of the "overwhelming disaster" that was befalling the Jews of Europe, of whom two million had already been killed. We now know that this and other appeals to the White House did not bring the actions that were required. Four million more Jewish lives were to be lost. The Jewish community in America suffered a major failure. Not a failure of not caring. Rabbi Wise and many other Jewish leaders cared deeply, and they did much to urge action on the immigration front, the diplomatic front, and the military front itself. Their actions, however, were basically in the "shtatlanes mode -- working quietly behind the scenes, trying to persuade top political leaders on the basis of reason and compassion. There is nothing wrong in shtatlanes tactics; we use them still. But what we had not yet learned in those years was the use of political and advocacy and coalitional tools to compel attention to our community's needs.

It is painful, it is mind-boggling, to ask this question: If in 1942, or '43, or '44, we had already developed the strength we have today -- to round up 80 to 90 Senators, or 350 to 400 Congressmen -- or to bring 250,000 American Jews to the Mall in Washington, as we did 15 months ago on behalf of Soviet Jews -- if in the '40's we had had that strength, to demand of Roosevelt that he make available one single war plane to bomb the railroad tracks to Auschwitz, what might have happened? Remember, in Auschwitz alone, that death factory was consuming Jews at the rate of 10,000 a day. If those tracks had been knocked out for even a week, some 70,000 Jews might have been saved. A month of disarray might have saved 300,000.

Is it wrong for me to wonder whether some, or all, of the 80 members of my mother's and father's families in Poland -- grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins I never got to know -- might thus have survived the Holocaust? I assume that many of you are in a position to ask the same question.

So American Jews have developed the skills for mobilizing our community and the general community on behalf of the security of our people -- in Israel, in the Soviet Union, in our own country. But we have never forgotten that we are only six million Jews -- less than three percent of all Americans. We must be able to persuade at least another 48 percent that our case is just, our concerns real, and that

America's own ideals and interests are in harmony with ours. Getting this support, I am convinced, is not the job alone of the professional Washington-based Jewish lobby. In a very real sense we must think of the entire Jewish community as that lobby -- the totality of Jewish influence in the country exercised by a wide range of secular and religious institutions, and by individuals publicly recognized as Jewish leaders and spokespersons. And in the larger sense we must think of the allies and the friends the Jewish community has acquired across the land -- the churches, women, labor, civil rights, education, urban affairs and so many other groups in our society. We have won these allies, these friends, in two ways: by educating and appealing to them on the merits of our case, and by demonstrating our interest and commitment to the broader community's agenda.

By and large, we have grounds for satisfaction in having done our work effectively in the two major areas affecting the security of our people. The American people and the American government, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, have been overwhelmingly supportive of a secure Israel and of the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate or to live as proud Jews in the Soviet Union. But we cannot ever take that support for granted. And surely not today. Only last month, an ominous warning came to friends of Israel in an unprecedented opinion poll finding that 53 percent of Americans expressed <u>disapproval</u> of Israel's current policies.

How should American Jews react to such a warning? As an advocate, I ask myself two sets of questions: First, are we doing everything we should to help American officials and the American public understand the problems and the fears and the needs of Israel? Are we reminding them that Israel is a genuine democracy now involved in an historic debate about how best to achieve security for Israel and justice for the Palestinians? But, second, I feel compelled to ask myself also: Has something of significance happened to challenge the merit of the pro-Israel case? What kind of advice, or guidance, can we offer Israel to prevent or minimize erosion of American support?

This is not the occasion for me to address this last question. But I do assert the right -- nay, the obligation -- of Jews to ask such questions, and to find appropriate ways to discuss them with our Israeli friends.

But we are Americans, and our efforts must be directed primarily at our own American government, to help shape American public policies on a wide range of issues, foreign and domestic. These efforts, for reasons that are unfortunately too obvious, have been largely dominated by the US-Israel relationship. As a result, the "Jewish lobby" is seen by too many Americans as being concerned solely with Israel. There is no need to apologize for giving the highest priority to that issue. But it is not our only priority. I can give personal testimony to how active and effective the Jewish community has been in the pursuit of social justice for all people. We have resisted attempts to breach the wall of separation between church and state, not for our sake alone, but for a pluralism that serves the needs of all Americans. Despite some strains, Jews have remained faithful to the cause of civil rights. Jews have remained champions of generous, but responsible, immigration policy. Education, housing, health care, women's rights, environment -- there is no monolithic view among Jews on how best to address these issues. But there is interest, and there is energy expended on them.

No part of the American Jewish community has been more actively and passionately involved in pursuit of social justice than its rabbinate. I've seen it at first-hand in the civil rights struggles, in the war on poverty, in the critical area of safeguarding the wall of separation between church and state. And I am particularly proud -- with all due respect to the other denominations -- of the Reform rabbinate. Reform rabbis have been in the front ranks of every battle for social justice.

There are some in our community who argue against involvement in these broader public issues, believing that our immediate Jewish problems require all of our attention and energies and resources. My response has always been that I am proud that over the years we have defined our Jewishness, our Judaism, as a commitment to justice for all people, to peace for all people, to freedom for all people. Such a commitment to universal justice does not short-change our Jewish interest; it is, in fact, the only way to protect such interests. There is no conflict between our great love and great hopes for this blessed land and our deep feelings for Israel and for our Jewishness; not only are such feelings compatible, they are mutually reinforcing.

. But as a pragmatic lobbyist, if you please, I see this broader activity also as a necessary strategy to establish credibility, to make friends, to win trust. "How can Zionism equal racism," we want Congressmen and black leaders and journalists to ask themselves, "when Jewish representatives we work with or observe day after day are promoting fair housing and fair employment and fair immigration policies?"

The Jewish community cannot, of course, engage in every struggle for social justice. But some things cry out for our understanding, our compassion, and our enlightened self-interest. For example, 25 years ago, this nation declared war on poverty. But we gave up too soon. Several years of progress were followed by too many years of deterioration.

There are 13 million poor children in America today. Each day, thousands of babies are born who, unless we take the necessary steps, both public and private, to help them, will be poor until the day they die. Can society be indifferent to today's babies becoming the parents of another generation of poor children? In Proverbs we read, "He that giveth to the poor shall not lack, but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse." Yes, a society that closes its eyes to poverty and its causes will surely be cursed with tensions and turmoil and disruptions. These children of poverty have no lobby of their own. We must be one of their voices.

I cannot conclude my remarks here today without noting a very special and relevant anniversary. There are many, many truly distinguished earlier honorees of this great institution who make me so proud to be added to their numbers -- but no one more than the giant of Yiddish literature whom you honored 31 years ago. Later this week I will be returning to Washington with my dear Ida to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of her father-in-law, H. Leivick, of blessed memory. Whenever I think of Leivick, I recall that magical moment several years ago during a Yom Hashoah ceremony held in the East Room of the White House. In the presence of the President, Secretary of State, Congressional leaders and other high government officials -- and with TV cameras recording the scene for all America to see -- Elie Wiesel spoke, as only he can speak. He concluded his remarks by reciting a few short lines from one of Leivick's greatest poems -- Eybik (Forever) -- lines that say all that has to be said about

the agony of the Jewish people, but also of their determination, their confidence, their strength. The very idea of a Holocaust survivor speaking Yiddish lines in the house of the President of the world's greatest nation was enough to bring tears to most of us. But what lines!

Die velt nemt mich arum mit shtechiker hent,
Un trugt mir zum feier, un trugt mir zum sheiteh;
Ich bren un ich bren, un ich ver nit verbrent;
Ich haib zich oif vieder, un shpan avec veiter.

The world surrounds me with its thorny hands,
And carries me to the fire, to the flames;
I burn and I burn, but am not consumed;
I rise once again, and go on my way.

The flames of 45 years ago no longer consume our people. But the pain and the fears they caused are with us still. No shouting flames anywhere today -- but the quiet smoldering embers of those flames come to life from time to time, in one place or another. Could those embers be stoked again into full flames? Today's skinheads perhaps can be ignored; but how can they fail to remind us of the Nazi crewcuts? So we need to be vigilant. But vigilance alone will not be enough. Only if we conscientiously and effectively heed both parts of Hillel's most familiar admonition ...only if we continue to be for ourselves, but not only for ourselves, will we not have to fear the question, "Who will be for us?".

What a privilege it has been for me to participate these many years, along with so many of you, in the pursuit of Jewish security and Jewish fulfillment in harmony with the pursuit of social peace and social justice for all people.