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Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler -

A Thematic Biography

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

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Mikol m'lamdai hiskalti
"From all my teachers have I gained wisdom"
(Psalms 119:99)



DIGEST

This work examines several major spheres of activity of Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler and constitutes a thematic biography of this important and influential man.

Chapter one consists of a brief biography of Schindler, from his childhood in Europe and his formative years in the United States, through his initial involvement in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) and his ascension to its presidency in 1973. It continues with an overview of his work as president of the UAHC, a position which he held until 1996, and as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an office which he occupied from 1976 - 1978.

Chapters two, three, and four each deal with a different aspect of his work as president of the UAHC. Chapter two focuses on his endeavors in the field of Outreach to the non-Jewish partners of Jews and also the issue of patrilineal descent.

Chapter three examines his approach to outreach with regard to gay and lesbian Jews, revealing him to be a forceful proponent of the inclusion of gay and lesbian Jews into mainstream Jewish congregations. This chapter chronicles Schindler's involvement in and impact upon this important issue.

Chapter four examines his role as an international leader. It considers his contribution as a mediator between Israel and the United States. It also addresses his behind the scenes work concerning some of the activities of the United Nations relevant to the relationship between Israel and the United States.

Chapter five consists of a conclusion and a preliminary evaluation of the significance of Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler's work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Acknowledgements	1
Digest	2
Chapter One - Biography and Overview	5
Chapter Two - Redefining American Reform Judaism: Outreach and Patrilineal Descent	16
Chapter Three - Inclusion or Exclusion: Arguments Concerning Outreach to Gay and Lesbian Jews	41
Chapter Four - International Leadership	57
Chapter Five - Evaluation of Selected Areas of Schindler's Endeavors	67
Appendix 1 Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations - Affiliated Organizations - March 1976 - November 1978	78
Bibliography	79

CHAPTER 1

Biography and Overview

1. Brother, chaver	3. Have no fear
Do not tire!	Of fire, sword.
Your netzach song	Have no fear
Gives joy and fire.	Of foreign port.
2. With the Torah	4. With emunah,
In your hand,	Walk your ways
Brother, go	Till it comes:
From land to land.	The Day of Days.

This song, penned by Eliezer Schindler, and entitled *Netzach l'Yad*, could be construed as a formula for the life of his son, Alexander Moshe Schindler.

Alexander Schindler devoted his professional life to Jewish communal affairs. During his tenure as President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the number of congregations affiliated with the Union grew from 400 in 1973 to nearly 900 in 1996. He labored to strengthen the institutions of Reform Judaism in America and in Israel. During his long and vigorous career, he was active in the movement to free Soviet Jewry and was also instrumental in the mass rescues of Jews from Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia.

I have attempted in this thesis to begin the process of evaluating Schindler's work in a variety of areas. This includes his efforts in the fields of

Outreach, patrilineal descent, the ensuring of equal rights for gay and lesbian Jews in Reform Jewish life, and leadership in world Jewish affairs.

What first sparked my interest in Schindler? I heard Schindler speak when he delivered a sermon at Rockdale Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio, in late 1997. I found his words moving, inspiring and passionate.

Then, as I began my research for this thesis, I found that his ideas themselves held a great appeal for me. I became attracted to his leadership style and to the values which he espoused. In particular, his profoundly held value of inclusion rather than exclusion impressed me. I admired the manner in which he related to every person, no matter what his or her view, as simply that, a person.

Why examine the career of Alexander Schindler? He was one of a group of young Jews who emigrated from Germany before or during the Second World War and who eventually studied for the rabbinate. Many of these people did surprisingly well and their influence in both the United States and Canada was substantial. In the year 1983, the presidents of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the UAHC, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) were all German-born.¹

Schindler is perhaps emblematic of this broader group of German Jewish refugees. He developed from a quiet, awkward, refugee teenager into one of the

¹ They were Günther Plaut, Alexander Schindler, Alfred Gottschalk and Gerard Daniel respectively. For more information, see Walter Laqueur, Generation Exodus (Hanover and London:2000) p.285

leading Jewish figures of his age. From a position of little or no power, Schindler grew to wield great influence, affecting presidents, prime ministers and other important players on the global stage.

This thesis proposes to examine Alexander Schindler's career of service to American Judaism in general and to American Reform Judaism in particular.

Schindler traveled extensively, representing the UAHC or the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations (CPMAJO) which he served as chairman from February 1976 until June 30, 1978.

Schindler's trips were so numerous that he was forced to refuse many invitations. In all of his peregrinations, Schindler advocated the principle of the equality of all people loudly, clearly, and confidently. Quotations from Torah in its broadest sense peppered his speeches and his voluminous correspondence. He was a religious liberal and a liberal in his political views as well. Sometimes his views earned him detractors and critics, but he worked continuously to advance the values in which he believed.

Even after his retirement from the presidency of the UAHC in 1996, he worked on behalf of the issues which were important to him. Amongst all of his many and varied achievements, he was most proud of the Outreach initiative, a program aimed primarily at welcoming the non-Jewish spouses of Jews into *klal Yisrael*, the community of Israel.

Schindler's achievements and endeavors encompassed even more than those alluded to in *Netzach I'Yad*, his father's song. Schindler was a passionate and ardent Zionist whose opinions were sought by Israeli politicians at the

highest levels of government. His zeal for Israel - her religion, her land, her people - was evident throughout his career.

Background

Alexander Moshe Schindler was born on October 4, 1925 in Munich, Germany, to Sali Hoyda Schindler and Eliezer Schindler. Sali was a successful businesswoman and Eliezer was a teacher and a Yiddish poet of some note.

Schindler was seven when his childhood was disrupted with the accession to power in Germany of Adolph Hitler on January 30, 1933. Eliezer, an outspoken critic of the Nazis, escaped the Gestapo by fleeing to Switzerland in 1932. For the next five years, Sali supported herself and the children, Alex and Eva, with profits from her mail-order business. The young Schindler may have been aware that his mother was channeling monies into anti-Nazi activities while, at the same time, she was amassing funds to be used when the occasion for escape presented itself. What happened next in the life of the Schindler family is truly remarkable.

Sali entrusted her two children to a German noblewoman who subsequently ensured that they reached Switzerland. Sali dressed as a Carmelite nun, managed to enter Poland, and then traveled to Hungary where, alone and with no financial means, she attended an ecumenical conference. Attempting vainly to telephone her husband in Switzerland, Sali was approached by a man who had happened to overhear her fruitless conversation.

... he asked, "Did I hear you say Schindler? Eliezer

Schindler? I just left him in Switzerland. In fact, he gave me some money to attend my niece's wedding." The man insisted on giving Sali the money for her fare to Switzerland.

Thus was the Schindler family reunited.²

On July 30, 1938, at the age of twelve, Alexander Schindler, together with his parents, arrived in the United States of America, a few amongst the thousands of German Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. Like so many other refugees, Schindler knew hardly any English. He was shy and withdrawn, traumatized by the unpredictable terrors of having lived as a Jew under the Nazi regime.

Some four years after his arrival in the United States, he enrolled at the College of the City of New York (CCNY) where, with what later was to become characteristic application, he improved his English as he studied other disciplines. His eventual mastery of the English language is evidenced in his sermons, speeches, and addresses. He graduated from CCNY in 1950 earning a Bachelors' degree cum laude in history. It was a testament to his father's tutoring that, upon his graduation, he was awarded first prize in Jewish Studies.

In 1943 at the age of eighteen, Schindler enlisted in the United States Army. He became a ski trooper in the 10th Mountain Division. Perhaps his childhood in Munich had contributed to preparing him for this type of service. He was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in battle and the Bronze Star Medal for bravery in action. While in the army, Schindler overcame his shyness and exposed the outgoing, sociable, and amiable persona which would

² Albert Vorspan, "Schindler's Legacy" at <http://uahc.org.rjmag/396av.html>

characterize his rabbinate. These traits served him well in his future chosen career and in his leadership of the American Jewish community.³

According to Schindler's long-time friend and associate, Albert Vorspan, it was during his military service that Schindler examined and re-evaluated his life. The life and death situations which he confronted compelled him to assess in a brutally honest fashion his place in the world; in short, the meaning of his very existence.⁴

By the time of his discharge from the armed forces, Schindler had made up his mind to pursue a career in the rabbinate. He had long been, and would remain inspired by his father, considering him to be an *ohav Yisrael*, a lover of Israel, in all senses of the word - the religion, the land, and the people. Schindler too was an *ohav Yisrael*, as was evidenced throughout his lifetime.

His mother's aspirations for him also played a part in Schindler's decision to become a rabbi. Maybe the experiences endured by the Schindler family during the Second World War inspired Sali to harbor high hopes for the young Schindler. Perhaps the bigger picture of what had befallen the Jewish people and which she herself had lived through, imbued her with a sense of responsibility to the remnant of the Jewish people, a passion which she succeeded in transmitting to her son, Alexander Schindler.

Following the Second World War, Schindler attended the Hebrew Union College (HUC)⁵ in Cincinnati, Ohio, where his career was notable for its

³ Albert Vorspan, "Schindler's Legacy" at <http://uahc.org.rjmag/396av.html>

⁴ Albert Vorspan, "Schindler's Legacy" at <http://uahc.org.rjmag/396av.html>

⁵ It was not until 1950 that this institution became known as the Hebrew Union College -

academic accomplishments. In 1951 he was awarded the "Mother Hirsch" Memorial Prize for achieving the highest scholastic level in the competition for the degree of Bachelor of Hebrew Letters.

During his student days he served a variety of synagogues: West Point, Georgia (1949) and Logan, West Virginia (1950) for the High Holydays, Temple B'nai Israel, in Petoskey, Michigan for a summer and the High Holydays (1951), and Temple B'nai Israel, Williamson, West Virginia on a bi-weekly basis for a year (1952). He also served as Director of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at the University of Cincinnati on a bi-weekly basis for two years (1950, 1951). In addition, he served as the Jewish Chaplain at Longview West Virginia State Hospital for the Mentally Ill for three years.

In 1953 he was ordained as a rabbi and was subsequently appointed assistant rabbi and later associate rabbi of Temple Emanuel, Worcester, Massachusetts. He served there for six years with Rabbi Joseph Klein, the senior rabbi. During those years, he also directed the activities of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at Clark University, and at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

Schindler married Rhea Rosenblum on September 29, 1956 and together they had five children; Elisa Ruth, Debra Lee, Joshua Michael and twins Jonathan David and Judith Rachel.

From 1959 until 1963, Schindler served as regional director for the

Federation of Reform Temples in the New England area.⁶ From 1963 until 1967 he worked as the director of education of the Commission of Jewish Education of the UAHC and the CCAR. He was the literary editor of the *CCAR Journal* and he was the founding editor of *Dimensions in American Judaism*,⁷ a quarterly magazine produced by the UAHC.

In 1967 he was appointed vice president of the UAHC and in June 1972 he succeeded Maurice N. Eisendrath as president. On November 9, 1973, Eisendrath was preparing to deliver his Presidential Sermon to the Centennial Biennial.

Late that Friday afternoon, he (Schindler) had gone to Rabbi Eisendrath's room to bid him "Good Shabbos." They shook hands, and then Rabbi Eisendrath, perhaps with an unspoken premonition, said: "I'm so glad that the Union is in your hands. Carry on."⁸

That same day, a mere two hours before he was to have delivered his final Presidential Sermon to the Centennial Biennial, Maurice Eisendrath suffered a fatal coronary attack. 'Carry on' is precisely what Schindler did, insisting that Eisendrath's final address be delivered to the Biennial meeting in its entirety. Alexander Schindler was inducted as president of the UAHC on November 12, 1973, a position which he held until his retirement in June 1996.

In addition to this major responsibility, Schindler was chairman of the

⁶ This was later to become known as the UAHC New England region.

⁷ This publication is now known as *Reform Judaism*.

⁸ *Reform Judaism*, Volume 2, Number 4, December 1973

CPMAJO⁹ from February 1976 until June 30, 1978. Moreover, he held numerous other positions of leadership. He served as vice president of the World Jewish Congress and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, he was a member of the governing body of the Jewish Agency for Israel, a member of the Board of Trustees - United Jewish Appeal, a member of the Board of Governors of HUC-JIR, a member of the Board of Directors of the American Joint Distribution Committee, a member of the Board of Governors of the United Nations Association of the USA, a member of the governing boards of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, the CCAR and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

In 1978 he was awarded the Bublick Prize of the Hebrew University and 500,000 trees have been planted by the Jewish National Fund in the Schindler Forest in Israel in order to honor Schindler in perpetuity.¹⁰

Alexander Schindler died on 15 November 2000 at the age of 75 at his home in Westport, Connecticut. At his funeral, he was eulogized as a "prince of Israel," "one of the greatest Jewish leaders of our time," and "a legend for generations to come."¹¹

⁹ See Appendix 1 for a list of the member organizations during the period of Schindler's chairmanship.

¹⁰ Information for this section taken from HUC-JIR Senior Placement Questionnaire, Press Release entitled Lakewood Student Rabbi wins top award at HUC (n.d.), UAHC Press Release (n.d.), Supplementary Data sheet (Form 1415) issued by HUC-JIR, and Albert Vorspan, "Schindler's Legacy" at <http://uahc.org.rjmag/396av.html>

¹¹ Albert Vorspan, "Adaptation of Schindler Eulogy" in *Reform Judaism* (Spring 2001)

Conclusion

Schindler was able to utilize his positions of prominence in the Reform Jewish world and in the wider general Jewish world as platforms from which to advocate for issues which were of importance to him, both within the Reform Jewish movement and beyond it. As president of the UAHC and later, when he was elected to the chairmanship of the CPMAJO, he was able to spearhead action on issues which were of concern to him.

This thesis does not purport to be a detailed biographical analysis of the life and works of Alexander Schindler. Rather, it aims at beginning the process of evaluating Schindler's work in a variety of areas. These include his efforts in the areas of Outreach to the non-Jewish spouses of born Jews, his work on the issue of patrilineal descent,¹² his labor towards the ensuring of equal rights for gay and lesbian Jews in Reform Jewish life, and his leadership in world Jewish affairs.

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives Manuscript Collection No. 630, which is the collection of papers and documents pertaining to Alexander M. Schindler, was the principal source utilized. The Alexander M. Schindler, CCAR, and CPMAJO nearprint files, housed at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives were also consulted by the author.

Schindler's presidential addresses, some of his sermons and eulogies,

¹² This is the thesis which asserts that persons can be Jews if they are born of a Jewish father (as opposed to being born of a Jewish mother), a thesis at odds with traditional *halacha* (Jewish law).

and his voluminous correspondence also served as source materials in the production of this thesis. Several UAHC resolutions and a number of resolutions by and reports to the CCAR were taken into account. The websites of these two bodies, ccarnet.org and uahc.org, were also useful resources in the preparation of this thesis.

The above were the main, but by no means the only sources utilized during the research and production of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

Redefining American Reform Judaism: Outreach and Patrilineal Descent

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the genesis and evolution of the Outreach program of the UAHC, to investigate Schindler's motivation regarding its promulgation, and to evaluate its impact on American Reform Judaism in particular and American Judaism in general. The related issue of patrilineal descent and the role which Schindler played in the ultimate adoption of the CCAR's resolution on this matter will also be discussed in this chapter.

Outreach

What were the circumstances of the broader American Jewish community which made the time ripe for what would become known as the "Outreach" initiative? What factors ensured that this seed of an idea would fall onto fertile ground, germinate and blossom into a movement-wide program?

In 1971, a major study revealed that the current Jewish intermarriage rate was over 31 percent.¹³ More specifically, between the years of 1966 and 1972, 31.7 percent of all marriages involving a Jew were marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew.

Many committed Jews view the phenomenon of a Jew marrying a non-Jew as a problem for *klal Yisrael*, for the Jewish people. The issue is not so much what will become of the parties to the marriage with regard to Judaism, but rather, what will become of their children?

¹³ Edward Shapiro, A Time for Healing (Baltimore and London:1992) p.235

This problem of an increasing number of Jews marrying people who were not Jewish, particularly affected the Reform movement, as it was only in that stream of Judaism that intermarriages could be performed at all, as Reform rabbis do not in principle accept as binding the force of traditional Jewish law (*halacha*). For Conservative and Orthodox rabbis, however, the performance of an intermarriage constitutes a violation of Jewish law and therefore, they could not be party to such an act.¹⁴

In the middle of the 1960s, in an article entitled "The Vanishing American Jew," Thomas B. Morgan alluded to the fact that once an intermarriage had occurred, the offspring of such a marriage were highly unlikely to be raised as Jews.¹⁵ It did not seem as though much thought was then being devoted to how best to deal with intermarriage, a phenomenon which was occurring with ever-increasing frequency. According to Alan Miller, who in 1964 was the rabbi of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York, American Jews were in a "crisis of freedom."¹⁶

What was the cause of this trend of increasingly frequent intermarriage? The root of the problem was attributed to the fact that the forces for Jewish group survival were on the wane. In particular, anti-Semitism was declining and Israel was then relatively self-sufficient.¹⁷ Additionally, Jews were increasingly associating with non-Jews in many facets of their lives. In their business lives, at educational institutions, at social venues, the majority of people were not Jewish

¹⁴ Edward Shapiro, *A Time for Healing* (Baltimore and London:1992) p.238

¹⁵ Thomas B. Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew" in *Look Magazine* (5 May 1964) p.43

¹⁶ Thomas B. Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew" in *Look Magazine* (5 May 1964) p.45

¹⁷ Thomas B. Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew" in *Look Magazine* (5 May 1964) p.45

and so there was far greater opportunity for Jews to encounter non-Jews than there had been previously. Therefore, young Jews were less inclined to marry someone from their own religio/cultural community than they might otherwise have been.

In the 1960s, when the rate of intermarriage began to accelerate, the initial response of the Reform movement was to establish conversion programs, presumably in the hope that it would be able to convert the majority of the non-Jewish partners of mixed marriages.¹⁸

So, what of the 1971 study? At first, the general reaction to the finding of this study was one of extreme disapproval amongst members of the general Jewish community and attempts were made to counter this alarming trend. By the 1980s, however, "... Jewish attitudes toward intermarriage had shifted", in Egon Mayer's words, "... from outrage to Outreach."¹⁹ This major shift in attitude towards the phenomenon of intermarriage set the stage for Schindler to introduce his Outreach initiative. In an extreme presentation of his ideas, he proposed that "... Jews abandon their traditional resistance towards conversions and embark on a vigorous missionary campaign."²⁰

The principle of *klal Yisrael*, a concern for the totality of the community of Israel, was an ideal that Schindler advocated repeatedly. Traditionally, it had been the case that if a Jew married out (i.e. married a non-Jew), he or she was in effect excluded or, in some instances, shunned by the community.

¹⁸ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.108

¹⁹ Edward Shapiro, A Time for Healing (Baltimore and London:1992) p.237

²⁰ Edward Shapiro, A Time for Healing (Baltimore and London:1992) p.239

Schindler opposed this approach and, whenever he could, he endeavored to include Jews and those who aspired to become Jews, rather than to exclude them. He based this attitude on the Biblical injunction directing Jews to welcome the stranger who is in their midst. But he was not content merely with Biblical Judaism. At times, he also invoked Rabbinic Judaism in order to bolster his vision.

The preponderance of rabbinic opinion clearly is on my side.

Not only are we to welcome converts, once they accept Judaism we ought to treat them as Jews, as sons of Abraham.²¹

He encouraged born Jews to embrace their heritage, and those interested in choosing Judaism to investigate fully its rich traditions.

Schindler first introduced what would eventually be known as his Outreach initiative in December of 1978, during his address to the Board of Trustees of the UAHC. Having presented to the Board the then shocking statistics from the 1971 study (referred to above), he commented pragmatically that these were the facts and that it was now up to the Jewish community to determine how best to deal with them. "It does not mean that we should prepare to sit *shiva* [Jewish mourning ritual] for the American Jewish community. On the contrary, facing and dealing with reality means confronting it, coming to grips with it, determining to

²¹ Letter, Alexander Schindler (in the footnotes hereafter referred to as Schindler) to Mr. B. Zeidman, 23 May 1979, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (hereafter referred to as AJA), Manuscript Collection 630 (hereafter this collection is indicated unless otherwise specified), Box 11 File 5 (hereafter this will be indicated as 11/5)

reshape it."²²

Schindler articulated the main goal of the Outreach initiative as being to increase the number of Jews in America and therefore, in the world. More specifically, the goals were:

... to make certain that the majority of the interfaith marriages will result in the conversion of the non-Jewish partner to Judaism; and that the majority of the children issuing from such marriages will, in fact, be reared as Jews.²³

This initiative did not proceed without challenges. In an address to the UAHC in 1981, three years following his call for an Outreach initiative, Schindler thanked the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation for challenging the last Outreach report. It is likely that its challenge consisted in maintaining that the Outreach initiative had gone too far, that it was too broad in its scope. In a November 1993 memo to the UAHC executive staff Schindler wrote:

My call for an Outreach to non-Jews beyond those who are bound to us by marriage evoked wide public debate I am glad that this is so Some of the critics are having their say now. That's all to the good. It gives us an opportunity to respond and to make the case for Outreach.²⁴

²² Schindler, Address to the Board of Trustees of the UAHC, Houston, Texas, 2 December 1978, AJA, 24/2

²³ Schindler, Presidential Address, 57th General Assembly, UAHC, Houston, Texas, 10-15 November 1983, AJA, 24/4

²⁴ Memo, Schindler to UAHC Executive Staff, 2 November 1993, AJA, 11/3

Far from seeking to avoid criticism of the Outreach initiative, be it public or private, Schindler seemed pleased to entertain it, using it to further his aim of ensuring that the Outreach program be disseminated as widely as possible throughout the UAHC. Public debate furthered his aim of exposing the initiative as widely as possible.

How did the CCAR leaders respond to this Outreach idea? Initially, they were opposed to it and indeed, spoke out against it at the November 1978 UAHC Board meeting. By 1993, however, Schindler claimed that "... by and large, when they (the leaders) began to see the effectiveness of this work, they changed their minds, although the reservations still continue."²⁵

What fuelled Schindler's passion for the work of Outreach? Several factors in his personal life may have played their parts in molding Schindler's zeal for this cause. His father had been, amongst other things, an accomplished story-teller, recounting tales of his own past and that of the Sabbatarians²⁶ of the Russian steppes. These were peasants who embraced Judaism without ever having seen a Jew.

As an escapee from a Siberian prison during World War I, my father sojourned for some time with these zealous Sabbath observers and he served as their Hebrew teacher. During his stay, news that a pogrom was being planned against the Jews of Saratof, the region's capital, came to the

²⁵ Letter, Schindler to Rabbi Stephen J. Weisman, 4 November 1993, AJA, 11/3
²⁶ These were Russian Orthodox peasants who had converted to Judaism. For more on the Sabbatarians, see S. M. Dubnow, History of the Jews of Russia and Poland (Philadelphia:1916) Volume 1, pp.401-403

attention of these Jews by choice. Immediately they took their farm implements in hand, marched to Saratof en masse and unsuccessfully defended their co-religionists.²⁷

These people had chosen to throw in their lot with their Jewish brothers and sisters even though they may not have been halachically Jewish as we would understand that term today. They understood the meaning of *klal Yisrael* and reflected that value in their own lives. This story had a profound impact on Schindler as he told the CCAR in 1996,²⁸ and it contributed to his passion for the inclusion of Jews and those who wished to become Jewish, as opposed to their exclusion.

Perhaps Schindler's wartime childhood experiences in Europe and his subsequent emigration to the United States also helped shape his convictions regarding *klal Yisrael*. Possibly the fact that so many Jews perished in the Holocaust caused him to determine that American Jewry in particular could not afford to lose any more. On the contrary, he believed that it was up to American Jewry to address the threat of intermarriage and the associated attrition of Jews from Jewry. Schindler went even further; he urged American Jewry to reach out to the 'unchurched':

... I want to reach the unchurched, those reared in non-religious homes or those who have become disillusioned with their taught beliefs I want especially to reach the rootless and the alienated who need the warmth and comfort

²⁷
²⁸

Schindler, Outreach Address, CCAR, Philadelphia, 27 March 1996, AJA, 26/3
Schindler, Outreach Address, CCAR, Philadelphia, 27 March 1996, AJA, 26/3

of a people known for its close family ties, a people of ancient and noble lineage.²⁹

Significantly, the first article which Schindler ever published was concerned with the topic of Outreach. In 1938, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise³⁰ (1874 - 1949) had invited Aime Palliere³¹ (1875 - 1949), an erstwhile Catholic priest who had converted to Judaism, to lecture in America. Schindler's article, written and published in the early 1940s, deals with Palliere's book, Le Sanctuaire Inconnu, which is an account of the author's spiritual journey from Catholicism to Judaism.

Schindler had thought long and hard about the issue of Outreach for several years before launching the initiative,³² and was acutely aware that this vexed issue might some day touch even his own family. In fact, that is exactly what did happen when, in 1986, one of his daughters, Debbie, chose to marry somebody who was not Jewish.³³ In a letter primarily concerned with the topic of intermarriage and his personal stance concerning the performing of intermarriages, Schindler wrote:

... I do not officiate at mixed marriages for a whole variety of reasons with which you are surely familiar. I heeded this principle even when my daughter was involved. I had a

²⁹ Schindler, Address to the Board of Trustees of the UAHC, Houston, Texas, 2 December 1978, AJA, 24/2
³⁰ For more on Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, see Melvin Urofsky, A Voice That Spoke for Justice: the Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise (Albany:c1982)
³¹ For more on Aime Palliere, see entry in Palliere, Aime entry in Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem:1971) Volume 13, p.43
³² Telephone interview, Edie Miller, Schindler's secretary, 8 November 2001
³³ Debbie Schindler married Bob Trautmann in 1986 according to an email from Edie Miller, Schindler's secretary, 12 November 2001

Justice of the Peace perform the ceremony and I said some words as did her father-in-law after the couple had been pronounced man and wife.³⁴

For Schindler, there was a clear and sharp distinction between the performance of an intermarriage, a marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew, and the process of Outreach following such a marriage. Even though he would not perform such a marriage, he would be among the first to welcome such a couple into the fold of Judaism and to encourage the pair to explore Judaism fully, for he was thoroughly convinced that Judaism had much to offer both born Jews and the 'unchurched,' those seeking spiritual fulfillment and meaning in their lives.³⁵ In fact, when Schindler's son-in-law did subsequently decide to convert to Judaism, spurred on largely by his children,³⁶ Schindler performed a Jewish wedding ceremony for his daughter and her husband.³⁷

Although Reform Judaism was the first denomination to accept and embrace the idea of Outreach in modern times, other American Jewish institutions such as federations and foundations have adopted the idea and recast it to suit their own organizational needs. There is now an umbrella

³⁴ Letter, Schindler to Carla J. Fachini, Temple Beth El, Fargo North Dakota, 11 March 1991, AJA, 10/11

³⁵ Interestingly, a research study pertaining to the conversion of the intermarried published in 1987, found that "Whether or not a rabbi was willing to officiate at one's marriage ceremony does not appear to have significantly encouraged or deterred the conversion of the non-Jewish partner." (Egon Mayer, Conversion Among the Intermarried, New York:1987 p.33)

³⁶ Schindler's son-in-law, who was the son of a minister, had been asked by his children "Daddy, how come we're all Jewish and you're not?" This was the catalyst which ultimately resulted in his conversion to Judaism, according to a telephone interview with Edie Miller, Schindler's secretary, 8 November 2001.

³⁷ Bob Trautmann converted to Judaism in 2000 and later that year, Schindler officiated at the Jewish wedding ceremony of Bob and Debbie, Schindler's daughter, according to an email from Judy, another of Schindler's daughters, 14 November 2001.

organization known as the Jewish Connection Partnership run by the Jewish Outreach Institute which is a coalition of major Jewish foundations, the raison d'être of which is to stimulate community-wide Outreach programs aimed at enriching the Judaism of interfaith couples and families as well as attracting unaffiliated Jews to the organized Jewish world.³⁸

By the second half of Schindler's presidency of the UAHC, the Outreach initiative had become self-propelling. Its continued existence gave rise to certain consequences, some foreshadowed, some unforeseen. By 1986, Schindler was able to report happily to the UAHC Board of Trustees that Outreach was no longer an outlawed subject within American Jewry. "We have transformed American Jewry's mindscape. The subject of intermarriage is no longer taboo, and the concept of Outreach, even conversionary Outreach, is no longer a heresy within the American Jewish community."³⁹

In addition to this positive development, an added consequent benefit to American Jewry was that as a corollary of Jews reaching out to other Jews and to those who sought to become Jews, they first had to examine their own Judaism and their knowledge thereof. Although there are no hard data available on this subject at present, "... sufficient evidence is available to suggest that converts bring an enthusiasm to Judaism that often encourages born Jews to take another, more positive look at their tradition."⁴⁰

³⁸ <http://jewishconnectionpartnership.org>. A list of the member Foundations and Funds of this coalition can be found at this website also.

³⁹ Schindler, President of the UAHC, Report to the Board of Trustees, White Plains, New York, 5 December 1986, AJA, 24/6

⁴⁰ Gabbay, Jews by Choice p. 52ff. as cited in Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New

Outreach has brought us one other boon - not anticipated at first. It has compelled us to look at ourselves: to ask ourselves as born Jews some very fundamental questions: Who are we ... what do we really believe ... what must we know and feel and do when we claim the name Jew? And once we grapple with such questions, an inner transformation takes place.⁴¹

The notion of Outreach was by no means an original one. Just as rabbis have done throughout the history of the Jewish people, Schindler took an idea, the roots of which can be found in the *Tanach*, and developed it to suit the time and place in which he was living. Schindler's milieu consisted of a population of Jews spread across the expanse of America in the second half of the twentieth century who were, on the whole, not very Jewishly literate.

In an address devoted to the topic of Outreach, Schindler used some examples of Biblical characters who, although they were born Jews, found themselves, for various reasons, living as acculturated or assimilated Jews, having chosen or been compelled to blend into their surrounding culture. They were subsequently called upon by God or by circumstance to acknowledge their Jewish origins and to work as agents on behalf of their fellow Jews. In a sense, they were like the Jewish partners of some intermarried couples.⁴²

York:1993) p.83

⁴¹ Schindler, Presidential Address, 60th General Assembly, UAHC, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2-6 November 1989, AJA, 25/1

⁴² In many cases, the Jewish partner was not particularly Jewishly literate. During the process of Outreach and ultimately, possibly, conversion of the non-Jewish partner in the

Moses was a contented and comfortable member of Egypt's royal family until he became a target of God's very own Outreach program and became the liberator of our people. Esther's Jewishness was unknown to her non-Jewish husband, Persia's King, until Mordechai reached out and summoned her to save her people.⁴³

By 1986, all non-Orthodox streams of Judaism had embraced the notion of Outreach in some form. In that year, the last bastion of opposition to it began to collapse.

Rav Soloveitchik ... voiced what he himself described as an opinion of revolutionary significance ... he said: "Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been saved, it is necessary to do what the Reform Jews are doing - with, of course, an Orthodox content."⁴⁴

By 1993, a somewhat thorny consequence of the Outreach proposal, unforeseen in 1978, had become apparent. As the non-Jewish spouses of born Jews were being welcomed into synagogues across the land, questions concerning the roles which these people could properly assume within the

marriage, the Jewish partner necessarily had to confront his or her own Judaism in a more profound manner than possibly ever before. The Jewish partner was compelled to come to terms with his or her Jewishness and, in many cases, to deepen and broaden his or her knowledge of Judaism.

⁴³ Schindler, Outreach Address, CCAR, Philadelphia, 27 March 1996, AJA, 26/3

⁴⁴ Schindler, Report to the Board of Trustees, White Plains, New York, 5 December 1986, AJA, 24/6

synagogue arose. These ranged from ritual concerns to whether non-Jews could serve on the managing boards of synagogues to whether they could teach in the synagogue religious schools. Differences of opinion on these matters ranged from the moderate to the extreme. There were those who maintained that non-Jews could have no part in any synagogue ritual and there were others who were prepared to let a non-Jew be called to the Torah. There were those who opposed non-Jews teaching in their religious schools at any level, while there were others who welcomed them.

There was immense variation on this issue across the spectrum of constituent synagogues of the UAHC and so, in his Presidential Address to the 62nd General Assembly of the UAHC, Schindler asserted that "... defining the role of the non-Jew in the temple has become a critically pressing need."⁴⁵

In his final years as president of the UAHC, Schindler gave voice to his aspirations for the future of his Outreach initiative.

... I don't think that Outreach has gone far enough. We should be infinitely more assertive in seeking the conversion to Judaism of the non-Jewish partner of intermarriages. I also believe that Judaism has something to offer to those seekers after truth who may not at present be married to a Jew or contemplate such a marriage.⁴⁶

Less than a year before his retirement from the presidency, his vision for

⁴⁵ Schindler, Presidential Address, 62nd General Assembly, UAHC, San Francisco, California, 21-25 October 1993, AJA, 25/5

⁴⁶ Letter, Schindler to Richard England, 30 March 1994, AJA, 10/2

Outreach had reached grandiose proportions. By October of 1995, he was convinced that, via Outreach activities, Reform Judaism possessed the potential to change the course of Jewish history.⁴⁷

Schindler promised himself to allow the incoming UAHC president, Eric Yoffie, unfettered reign. He did, however, submit one final request before relinquishing the presidency. It was that he be appointed to the Commission on Outreach. Schindler was utterly convinced that Outreach was the fitting response to the problem of intermarriage and that through it, the alarming trend of assimilation could be reversed.⁴⁸

Patrilineal Descent

According to traditional Jewish law, Jewish status is transmitted via the mother. If one is born of a Jewish mother, then one is Jewish. The Jewishness or otherwise of the father has nothing to do with Jewish status. However, this has not always been the case. A careful reading of the Hebrew Bible reveals that almost invariably a child's status followed that of the father, rarely that of the mother. In addition, the genealogical tables in the Bible are overwhelmingly patrilineal.⁴⁹

It was much later, albeit by the time that the *Mishna* was compiled in about the year 220CE, that the determination of Jewish status changed from being dependent on that of the father to being determined by that of the mother.

⁴⁷ Letter, Schindler to William M. Daniel, 18 October 1995, AJA, 10/2

⁴⁸ Letter, Schindler to William M. Daniel, 18 October 1995, AJA, 10/2

⁴⁹ Memo, Rabbi Phil Hiat and Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz to Schindler, 1 June 1982, AJA, 12/4

This change was effected by the rabbis in order to preserve the purity of the priestly class for, after all, one could always be sure who one's mother was, but one could not always be so certain of the identity of one's progenitor.

For the last 1800 years or so, matrilineality has been the mainstream Jewish method of determining Jewish status. Because the last 1800 years constitute the period closest to us temporally, the laws and customs which held during that time and which still hold possess the most binding force on us today. However, that does not mean that that is the way things must necessarily be. Clearly, within Jewish tradition, there is just as solid a precedent for Jewishness being determined by the status of the father as there is for it being determined by the status of the mother.⁵⁰

How does the notion of patrilineal descent bear on the issue of intermarriage and Schindler's Outreach initiative? "It was in the context of mixed marriage that the CCAR voted at its annual convention in 1983 to redefine Jewish identity."⁵¹ Coincidentally, by virtue of a quirk of alphabetization, the Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent on the Status of Children of Mixed Marriages and the resolution with which it concludes appears in the CCAR Yearbook of 1983 immediately following the Report of the Task Force on Outreach. This report states that "We want to reach out first and foremost to non-Jewish spouses and children of mixed marriages already in our congregations."⁵² In particular, it was important to the Reform rabbinate that

⁵⁰ Memo, Rabbi Phil Hiat and Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz to Schindler, 1 June 1982, AJA, 12/4
⁵¹ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.108
⁵² CCAR Yearbook Vol. XCIII (New York:1983) pp.143,144

these children not be lost to Judaism, but rather, welcomed into it.

Just as children born of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers were being recognized as Jews, contingent upon the fulfillment of certain conditions, the Outreach initiative was reaching out to their non-Jewish mothers, welcoming them into Reform synagogues and encouraging them to consider becoming Jewish themselves. Clearly, the matter of Outreach and the matter of patrilineal descent are closely connected.

The Outreach program gave rise to the 1983 UAHC resolution affirming the legitimacy of patrilineal descent. In the view of the UAHC, children born to Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers are Jews, provided they receive an appropriate amount of Jewish education during their formative years; in short, provided that they are raised as Jews.

In this context of relatively high rates of mixed marriage, the CCAR issued a similar resolution at its annual convention on March 15, 1983.⁵³ It argued that the extended family of the non-Jewish spouse plays an equally important part in the lives of children produced by mixed marriages as the family of the Jewish spouse. Indeed, the impact of the non-Jewish side of the child's family may be decisive in shaping the life of the child. Accordingly, it resolved that:

It can no longer be assumed a priori, therefore, that the child of a Jewish mother will be Jewish any more than that the child of a non-Jewish mother will not be. This leads us to the conclusion that the same requirements must be applied

⁵³ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.108

to establish the status of a child of a mixed marriage,
regardless of whether the mother or the father is Jewish

The CCAR declares that the child of one Jewish parent is
under the presumption of Jewish descent.⁵⁴

Outreach was busy welcoming non-Jewish spouses of Jews, but what of
the children of such unions? Surely, given the principle of equality of the sexes
for which the Reform movement stood, the status of these children should be
equal, whether it was their father or their mother who constituted the Jewish
party in the marriage.

In a 1987 letter to Rabbi Moshe Sherer, President of Agudath Israel of
America, Schindler wrote: "... Reform is more rigorous in its requirements of its
members than Jewish tradition, which automatically confers Jewishness on any
child of any Jewish mother, regardless of the mother's or child's adherence (or
lack of it) to our faith."⁵⁵ Schindler continued that Reform Judaism was
responding to its time and place and not allowing itself to become stuck in a
certain time or place (or both), something which other streams of Judaism
appear to have done.⁵⁶

Why was Schindler such an ardent supporter of the notion of patrilineal
descent? Perhaps the fact that Schindler had been fortunate enough to have
survived the Holocaust contributed to his passion for including Jews rather than
excluding them. He maintained that if a person had 'Jewish blood,' that is, he or

⁵⁴ Resolution adopted by the CCAR, "The Status of Children of Mixed Marriages" at
<http://www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=mm&year=1983>

⁵⁵ Letter, Schindler to Rabbi Moshe Sherer, 4 March 1987, AJA, 13/3

⁵⁶ Letter, Schindler to Rabbi Moshe Sherer, 4 March 1987, AJA, 13/3

she were Jewish by birth, or had chosen Judaism, then that individual should be included and welcomed with open arms.

In his 1993 Presidential Address to the UAHC, he described the case of a Holocaust survivor who was the daughter of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother (a patrilineal Jew). This woman had written to Schindler, telling him that she had spent most of the Hitler years hungry and hounded from hiding place to hiding place. After the war, she was reduced to cleaning toilets in Basle in order to survive. The local Jewish aid agency would not help her because she was not born of a Jewish mother and, although she wanted to learn more about her father's religion, no Jewish doors were open to her in Europe at that time.

"What irony this," she writes. "Hitler persecuted people for having 'Jewish blood,' but then Jews discriminate against people for having 'non-Jewish' blood."⁵⁷

This woman, who in 1993 was over seventy years of age, concluded her letter by saying "... they still squabble in Israel over children with only one Jewish parent What could be more important than to lovingly accept children with Jewish blood?"⁵⁸ The words of this woman may very well reveal the source of Schindler's attachment to this development.

During the discussion prior to the adoption of the report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent on the Status of Children of Mixed Marriages, Schindler

⁵⁷ Schindler, Presidential Address, 62nd General Assembly, UAHC, San Francisco, California, 21-25 October 1993, AJA, 25/5

⁵⁸ Schindler, Presidential Address, 62nd General Assembly, UAHC, San Francisco, California, 21-25 October 1993, AJA, 25/5

was the first to speak in favor of the resolution.⁵⁹ He did so on three distinct grounds.

Firstly, he asserted that it was essential that Reform Jews not be ashamed to say what they do. "... so long as this practice [the tacit acceptance of people as Jews by virtue of patrilineality] is virtually universally accepted, let us say what we are and proclaim what we do."⁶⁰ Schindler had taken this same stance of full and public disclosure in relation to his Outreach initiative. Secondly, he stressed the importance of speaking up on behalf of Jewish fathers who wanted to ensure the Jewishness and the Jewish status of their offspring. Finally, he made what he considered his most important point which was the consideration of the children who had resulted from mixed marriages. Schindler stated that "... barring a forthright declaration on our part that they are fully Jewish ... [they] are bound to feel that somehow they are less than Jewish."⁶¹

Schindler was one of the key proponents of the change during the debate at the CCAR convention which preceded the vote on the resolution.⁶² He argued that the resolution merely affirmed practices which were going on de facto within the Reform movement.⁶³

Schindler was very proud of the UAHC's resolution on patrilineal descent, even though it was then, and still is controversial. He said of both Outreach and patrilineal descent that he was proud that the "... leaders of Reform Judaism

⁵⁹ CCAR Yearbook Vol XCIII (New York:1983) pp.148,149

⁶⁰ CCAR Yearbook Vol XCIII (New York:1983) p.149

⁶¹ CCAR Yearbook Vol XCIII (New York:1983) p.149

⁶² The full text of the resolution can be found in CCAR Yearbook Vol. XCIII (New York:1983) p.160

⁶³ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.108

(had) endorsed and institutionalized these ideas ... to make ourselves known, to make our faith known, to convert a situation of neglect into one of compassionate embrace."⁶⁴

Neither Conservative nor Orthodox Judaism has ever adopted the stance on patrilineality which Reform and, later, the Reconstructionist movement embraced.⁶⁵ Indeed, in 1991, the United Synagogues of America (USA)⁶⁶ stated that it:

... reaffirms its position against patrilineal descent as a standard of the Conservative Movement the USA urges the Reform and Reconstructionist Movements to reconsider their position on patrilineal descent in order to preserve the unity of *Klal Yisrael*.⁶⁷

When urged to change his views on the matter by the president of the United Synagogues of America, Schindler reacted in the following manner:

I will respond to your appeal by appealing to you to move your religious community in the direction which you urge us to reverse, and to do this for the sake of the greater good of the Jewish people as a whole.⁶⁸

This response fits into a broader pattern of dialogue and debate which

⁶⁴ Schindler, President of the UAHC, Report to the Board of Trustees, White Plains, New York, 5 December 1986, AJA, 24/6

⁶⁵ Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided* (New York:1993) p.158

⁶⁶ The Conservative movement's counterpart to the UAHC

⁶⁷ Letter, Schindler to Alan J. Tichnor, President, United Synagogues of America, 6 December 1991, AJA, 12/4. This letter quotes from the United Synagogues of America's resolution on Patrilineal Descent, 1991.

⁶⁸ Letter, Schindler to Alan J. Tichnor, President, United Synagogues of America, 6 December 1991, AJA, 12/4

characterized Schindler's style. Engaging in deliberation, discussion and genuine argument were overwhelmingly Schindler's methods of choice with respect to dealing with issues. Additionally, it exemplifies Schindler's courage, even brashness when it came to defending Reform Judaism and its principles.

Schindler placed this issue of patrilineal descent into a broader, more all-encompassing context when in 1992, as chairman of the CPMAJO, he was called upon to reflect on the life and achievements of Menachem Begin.

Remember that it was he who defied the Orthodox establishment by insisting on the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry "they consider themselves Jews, they live as Jews, they share the fate of our people ... that is all that matters - let us free them and bring them home." These are the Jews, mind you, who trace their lineage by their paternal line, who are considered Jews because their fathers are Jewish though their mothers might not be.⁶⁹

Despite Begin's view concerning Ethiopian Jews, not all of organized Jewry agreed with him. In 1988, a survey of Orthodox Jews of the United States revealed that the vast majority of them would be upset if their children married a 'patrilinear' Jew. Yet only a third of Conservative Jews and a tenth of Reform Jews would have a similar reaction.⁷⁰ This survey concludes that "... perhaps no more than one-quarter of American Jewry rejects the new definition ... of Jewish

⁶⁹ Schindler, "Hazkarah" for Menachem Begin, CPMAJO, 11 March 1992, AJA, 23/9
⁷⁰ Steven M. Cohen, "Unity and Polarization in Judaism Today: The Attitudes of American and Israeli Jews," (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1988), p.5. as quoted in Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.176

identity put forward by Reform and Reconstructionism."⁷¹

Given this trend, it is reasonable to assume that by the end of Schindler's presidency of the UAHC in 1996, fewer than a quarter of all American Jews rejected the patrilineal definition of Jewish identity.

On the one hand, more people are being accepted as Jews by some denominations of Judaism in the United States, while on the other hand, other denominations of Judaism are becoming less compromising [if that is possible] concerning whom they deem to be Jewish. In stark contrast to the views of Schindler and, indeed, the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, they are becoming more exclusive, rather than more inclusive.

This issue is paramount because it goes to the question of "who is a Jew"?, a question which has split the Jewish community into two distinct camps, constituting a "... critical fault line running through the Jewish community [separating] Orthodox from non-Orthodox Jews."⁷²

This controversy rests on a deeper, underlying disagreement concerning the nature of rabbinic law. The Orthodox regard rabbinic law as absolutely binding and so the notion of a patrilineal Jew is absurd. Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism, non-Orthodox movements, reject rabbinic law as normative and so there is no legal impediment to adopting patrilineality when determining the Jewish status of an individual.

The Conservative movement which takes somewhat of a middle ground

⁷¹ Steven M. Cohen, "Unity and Polarization in Judaism Today: The Attitudes of American and Israeli Jews," (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1988), p.5. as quoted in Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.176

⁷² Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.177

on this issue of personal status "... agrees with Orthodoxy that Jewish identity must conform to rabbinic law, but it sides with Reform on the need to break the Orthodox monopoly on interpreting Jewish law."⁷³

Schindler's ideal of inclusion has certainly ensured that many more people are included into Judaism - into Reform Judaism anyway. This is all well and good so long as those people stay within the folds of Reform Judaism. Things become problematic, however, when these people want to marry Orthodox Jews or wish to emigrate to Israel. Then the matter of their Jewish status becomes questionable and, in some cases, they must undergo an Orthodox conversion.

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, a respected Orthodox rabbi, warned in 1993 that by the end of the year 2000, there would be "... perhaps as many as half a million children, born to mothers converted by Reform rabbis or accepted as Jewish under the patrilineal definition, whose Jewishness will not be accepted by other Jews."⁷⁴

Conclusion

According to the Jewish Outreach Institute,⁷⁵ "... there are approximately 1 million intermarried Jewish households in the United States, and more children

⁷³ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.176

⁷⁴ Exchange between Irving Greenberg and Steven M. Cohen in Greenberg, "The One in 2000 Controversy" as cited in Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.176

⁷⁵ The primary mission of the Jewish Outreach Institute (www.JOI.org), originally founded in 1988, is to "reach out and welcome in" the intermarried, and to promote inclusiveness in the Jewish community for intermarried families and disconnected Jews. It also serves as a think tank and research facility devoted to the study of intermarriage, provides advocacy, trains research professionals and sponsors innovative outreach programs throughout North America as part of its Jewish Connection Partnership program. See <http://www.jewishconnectionpartnership.org> for further details.

now have one Jewish parent than two Jewish parents."⁷⁶ Schindler foresaw this reality when he spearheaded the Outreach initiative, although he may never have envisaged the tremendous growth in the phenomenon of intermarriage in such a relatively short period of time. He did, however, foresee that the Jewish community would be compelled to deal with this matter in one way or another.

One consequence of the ambitious Outreach initiative was the great amount of people who would go on to choose Judaism for themselves. In the 1970s, for the first time since the Roman era, large numbers of people were choosing Judaism.⁷⁷ "With their numbers greatly increasing in the past two decades, it is entirely possible that Jews-by-choice will comprise between 7-10% of the American Jewish population by 2010."⁷⁸

What have been the long-term results of Schindler's Outreach initiative? A recent study by the Jewish Outreach Institute⁷⁹ examined 735 participants in 11 outreach programs throughout North America. These included groups for intermarried families with young children to Jewish holiday activities in shopping malls. The study determined that there was a compelling case to be made for Outreach which it defined as the welcoming of intermarried families and uninvolved Jews into the community. The study concluded that Outreach was "... the best way to ensure Jewish continuity in the face of widespread

⁷⁶ <http://www.jta.org/story.asp?story=8811>

⁷⁷ Charles Silberman, A Certain People (New York:1985) as quoted in Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.81

⁷⁸ Egon Mayer ed., The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach (New York:1991) p.42

⁷⁹ The study is based on mail-in surveys completed in 2000 by participants in programs that took place in 1998 and 1999. The study had a 23% response rate. It is not clear whether the survey is representative of all people who participated in the outreach programs or whether people with positive experiences were more likely to fill out a voluntary survey.

intermarriage and assimilation.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ <http://www.jta.org/story.asp?story=8811>

CHAPTER 3

Inclusion or Exclusion:

Arguments Concerning Outreach to Gay and Lesbian Jews

The objective of this chapter is to examine the history of the treatment of homosexuals by some of the institutions of Reform Judaism (the UAHC and the CCAR) from the 1970s until the end of Schindler's presidency of the UAHC, and in particular, to investigate and evaluate Schindler's motivation and role with regard to this changing treatment.

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s were a period of great upheaval and tumult in the United States and, consequently or coincidentally, in many other countries also. It was a period which spawned many social and political movements. In the wake of the Vietnam War, it was a time of societal reflection, reevaluation and reinvigoration. "The gay and lesbian revolution was the stepchild of all the radical social and political movements of the decade [the 1970s] - the student movement and the New Left, the anti-Vietnam movement, radical feminism, the Black Panthers, hippies and yippies."⁸¹

The seventh decade of the twentieth century saw a great proliferation of gay and lesbian activities across the United States, designed to achieve greater acceptance by the general, predominantly heterosexual, population. There was political activity, there were educational pursuits including political theater, as well as activities designed to increase the average heterosexual person's exposure to the gay and lesbian community. Gay pride parades are a good

⁸¹ Neil Miller, Out of the Past (New York:1995) pp.368,369

example of this type of activity.⁸² "The drive to pass gay rights legislation (was) a way of gaining legal protections *and* rallying the gay community"⁸³ Tellingly, it was during this period that the well-known expression 'to come out of the closet'⁸⁴ was coined and widely utilized.

The homosexual religious movement also emerged during this turbulent period. The genesis of its development can be pinpointed to 1968 with the establishment of the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles by the Reverend Troy Perry.⁸⁵

A number of different explanations have been advanced to explain the homosexual religious movement, ranging from "... a search for societal respectability"⁸⁶ to the need for homosexuals to provide for themselves "... ultimate meaning for the human condition."⁸⁷ Homosexuals wanted the same rights and privileges as all other members of society, including religious rights and privileges. In particular, they wanted to establish their own houses of worship if they chose to do so.

Just as in Christianity homosexuals were demanding equality, so too in Judaism, and in particular in Reform Judaism. In March 1972, four Jewish homosexuals attended a meeting of the Metropolitan Community Church and shortly thereafter they decided to establish the first synagogue specifically and

⁸² The first Gay Pride Parade took place in New York City on June 28, 1970. (Neil Miller, Out of the Past (New York:1995) p.383)

⁸³ Neil Miller, Out of the Past (New York:1995) p.382

⁸⁴ Meaning to publicly proclaim one's homosexuality; not to attempt to hide it any more.

⁸⁵ Moshe Shokeid, A Gay Synagogue in New York (New York:1995) p.16

⁸⁶ Kosmin and Lachman (1993:231) cited in Moshe Shokeid, A Gay Synagogue in New York (New York:1995) p.16

⁸⁷ Irle (1979) cited in Moshe Shokeid, A Gay Synagogue in New York (New York:1995) p.17

openly catering to the homosexual community. With the assistance of Reverend Troy Perry and the Pacific Southwest Council of the UAHC,⁸⁸ Beth Chayim Chadashim (House of New Life) was founded in Los Angeles, in 1972. The following year, Congregation Beth Simchat Torah opened in New York City. From that time, the homosexual Jewish movement has expanded to establish some twenty institutions in cities across the United States.⁸⁹

The concerns and interests of the homosexual community are now a familiar facet of the public domain in the United States, in stark contrast to earlier decades. Initially, the heterosexual community ignored homosexual communal concerns. Eventually however, the general community was compelled to deal with them. "Homosexuality [had] emerged as a central issue in organized religion in America, and most religious bodies have needed to examine their position toward it - often heatedly."⁹⁰

What was the attitude of Reform Judaism to this 'liberation movement,' as it were? How did it react to gay and lesbian Reform Jews coming out of the closet? In particular, what were Schindler's views concerning gay and lesbian Jews?

The issue of whether or not to welcome congregations which openly catered to a homosexual membership first arose within the UAHC in the early 1970s. Schindler approached Solomon Freehof, an esteemed adjudicator of

⁸⁸ Erwin L. Herman, "Judaism and Homosexuality," *CCAR Journal* (New York: Summer 1973) p.33,34

⁸⁹ Moshe Shokeid, *A Gay Synagogue in New York* (New York:1995) p.16

⁹⁰ Moshe Shokeid, *A Gay Synagogue in New York* (New York:1995) p.16

Reform Jewish law⁹¹ for a Reform ruling on this perplexing question⁹² asking "Is it in accordance with the spirit of Jewish tradition to encourage the establishment of a congregation of homosexuals?"⁹³ Freehof begins his responsum by pointing out that Jewish tradition views homosexuality to be a sin. He then argues that we should not encourage sinners to congregate as this would increase the likelihood of them sinning. He concludes that we should not exclude such people from mainstream congregations and that "... it would be in direct contradiction to Jewish law to keep sinners out of the congregation."⁹⁴ Reform congregations ought, as it were, to take pity on these 'poor unfortunate sinners' and integrate them into mainstream synagogues.

Despite this ruling, congregations made up primarily of gay and lesbian Jews continued to appear and in 1977, the UAHC "... resolved to support and welcome homosexual congregations as affiliates."⁹⁵

As demonstrated, open-door Judaism was the Reform Judaism which Schindler had consistently espoused. He preached inclusion of gay and lesbian Jews in whatever capacity they wished to be included in the synagogues and communities of Reform Judaism, thereby obviating the need or compulsion which such people felt to form their own congregations. In an address marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the acceptance by the UAHC of Beth Chayim

⁹¹ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.105

⁹² Freehof's responsum on this question appears in the CCAR 84th Annual Convention (June 18 - 21) Yearbook Vol. LXXIII, 1973 pp.115-119

⁹³ Solomon B. Freehof, Vol. LXXIII, 1973, pp.115-119 as cited in Walter Jacob, American Reform Responsa (New York:1983), p.49

⁹⁴ Solomon B. Freehof, Vol. LXXIII, 1973, pp.115-119 as cited in Walter Jacob, American Reform Responsa (New York:1983), p.49

⁹⁵ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.106

Chadashim, he stated:

The UAHC's acceptance ... of BCC (Beth Chayim Chadashim) marked a reaffirmation of one of our Reform movement's most authentic and prophetic beliefs: the belief in an open-door Judaism that carries a universalist message of the profoundest import for all peoples. We understand that a closed-door Judaism will serve only to narrow the boundaries of our Goshen, our Pale of Settlement. We recognize that it is only an open-door Judaism that will allow us all to make the Exodus from *Mitzrayim* [Egypt] to Sinai.⁹⁶

Once again, Schindler had shown himself to be a strong proponent of inclusion, just as he had been (and continued to be) in the matters of Outreach and of patrilineal descent.

An excerpt from a letter he wrote in 1992 summed up his position regarding gay and lesbian Jews. "... they are not foreign creatures! They are our own, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, they are our brothers and sisters, our sons and our daughters and they do not deserve to be excluded. We have no right to make them invisible."⁹⁷

Schindler's views were by no means universal within the ranks of Reform Judaism. The 1973 acceptance of Beth Chayim Chadashim by the UAHC was certainly not welcomed by all Reform Jews. Rabbi Jakob Petuchowski, in a letter

⁹⁶ Schindler, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Address, Leo Baeck Temple, 29 March 1998
⁹⁷ Letter, Schindler to Dr. Samuel I. Cohen, 4 March 1992, AJA, 6/8

to the editor of the *Journal of Reform Judaism*, referred to the synagogue for homosexual Jews as "Beth Gneva Chadasha," "House of the New Theft."⁹⁸ Petuchowski's letter was satirical in nature, comparing homosexuals to thieves and drawing analogies between the two 'sins,' that of being a homosexual (a sin according to Freehof's responsum on this issue⁹⁹) and that of stealing. The nub of his argument was that one certainly wouldn't dream of establishing a synagogue especially for thieves, so therefore by analogy, one ought not consider founding a congregation specifically for homosexuals.

There was possibly another way of interpreting Petuchowski's letter. Perhaps the theft to which Petuchowski was referring was that of the space of the synagogue. Up until 1973, the synagogue space had been exclusively reserved for heterosexual Jews, or at least that was what had been tacitly assumed. Now, that sacred space was being co-opted by homosexual Jews in an open and proud fashion.¹⁰⁰

By way of analogy, the Gay Pride Parade, which is the second largest annual parade in New York City, marches down many of that great city's busiest blocks, usually without incident. This is allowed to occur because "... the occupation of the abandoned Fifth Avenue on a Sunday afternoon does not impinge on the territorial and symbolic turf of particular constituencies."¹⁰¹ Were this parade to take place in the middle of a strongly ethnic neighborhood,

⁹⁸ Jakob Petuchowski, Letter in *Journal of Reform Judaism* (New York: Summer, 1985), p.125-127

⁹⁹ Solomon B. Freehof, Vol. LXXIII, 1973, pp.115-119 as cited in Walter Jacob, *American Reform Responsa* (New York:1983), p.49

¹⁰⁰ Moshe Shokeid, *A Gay Synagogue in New York* (New York:1995) p.28

¹⁰¹ Moshe Shokeid, *A Gay Synagogue in New York* (New York:1995) p.28

perhaps it would be perceived differently and not in such a generally tolerant manner. In Petuchowski's terms, this would probably be viewed as a theft of the specific space of that particular community, a violation of its private domain, as it were.

Schindler answered Petuchowski's letter expressing his regret that the letter had been published at all. Although he asserted that the author was indeed "clever and certainly learned,"¹⁰² Schindler described his letter as a "sorry diatribe."¹⁰³ He and several others objected strongly to Petuchowski's perspective and expressed disappointment that he had seen fit to publicize his views concerning the matter of homosexual congregations framed, as they were, in such a negative fashion.

Schindler and Solomon Freehof represented two diametrically opposed positions on the matter of homosexual congregations. Schindler's view was that if a group of people, in this case homosexual people, wanted to form their own congregation, then they should be encouraged and supported to do so. They should be included into *klal Yisrael* in the way in which they wanted to be included, not in the manner dictated by the mainstream heterosexual community. Given the level of homophobia, it seems likely that the general community, along with Freehof and those who agreed with him, would have preferred homosexuals to be integrated into already existent heterosexual congregations.

On what grounds did each of these two men base their opinions? Clearly,

¹⁰² Letter, Schindler in *Journal of Reform Judaism* (New York: Winter, 1986) pp.92-93

¹⁰³ Letter, Schindler in *Journal of Reform Judaism* (New York: Winter, 1986) pp.92-93

Freehof based his opinion on *halacha*, Jewish law. Taking the form of a syllogism, his argument was as follows: Homosexuals were sinners. One shouldn't encourage sinners to congregate. Therefore, one shouldn't encourage the formation of congregations primarily for homosexuals.

Schindler based his opinion on the Jewish ethical mandate to be as inclusive as possible, just as he did with Outreach. He rooted his position in the dictum that *kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba'zeh*, all Israel is responsible for each other.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, for Schindler it followed that Jews should be incorporated whenever and wherever possible, in the manner in which they wished to be included.

What was the process by which the UAHC adopted its position(s) regarding the rights and status of homosexual Jews within its congregations and therefore, under its jurisdiction?

In November 1977 in San Francisco, California, the UAHC adopted a resolution entitled "Human Rights of Homosexuals." This was the first UAHC resolution concerning homosexual people. The resolution opposed discrimination against homosexuals in areas of opportunity, including employment and housing. It also affirmed that private sexual acts between consenting adults were matters which properly belonged in the private domain and that government and law enforcement agencies should have nothing to do with such acts or their protagonists.¹⁰⁵ In addition, it advocated introducing into

¹⁰⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a

¹⁰⁵ Paraphrase, Resolution, 54th General Assembly, UAHC, San Francisco, November 1977

the general synagogue education programs an element to foster a "... greater understanding of the relation of Jewish values to the range of human sexuality."¹⁰⁶

By 1987, the UAHC's position on this issue had become much more welcoming than it had been ten years previously. In a resolution adopted by the 59th General Assembly, the UAHC urged its congregations and affiliates to encourage lesbian and gay Jews to participate fully in congregational life and to develop educational programs for synagogues aimed at fostering understanding of and respect for gay and lesbian people.¹⁰⁷ Now the UAHC was reaching out to lesbian and gay Jews rather than merely waiting until they approached it. On paper, at least, progress was being made on this issue of reaching out to those Jews whose sexuality was perceived to be different or 'other' than that of the majority.

Although the rationale undergirding this development was vastly different from that cited by Freehof fourteen years earlier,¹⁰⁸ the ultimate outcome ended up constituting what Freehof had advocated in his 1973 responsum; that is, inclusion of homosexuals into mainstream congregations as opposed to separate congregations.

In November 1989 in New Orleans, the UAHC adopted a resolution entitled "Gay and Lesbian Jews," which summarized the achievements of the Union in this area, called for an education program within the movement, and

¹⁰⁶ Resolution, 54th General Assembly, UAHC, San Francisco, November 1977
¹⁰⁷ Resolution, 59th General Assembly, UAHC, Chicago, October-November 1987
¹⁰⁸ That homosexuals were 'sinners'

encouraged all member congregations to welcome gay and lesbian members. The resolution also urged the CCAR to "... pursue its own mandate with vigor and complete its tasks as soon as possible in order to respond to the communal and spiritual aspirations of gay and lesbian Jews."¹⁰⁹ These aspirations included those of becoming rabbis, cantors, Jewish educators, etc.

1989 marked the centenary anniversary of the establishment of the CCAR. There were many amongst the membership of the CCAR who did not want to disturb the harmony of the celebration. They urged postponement of the vexed issue of the ordination of openly gay or lesbian candidates as rabbis. These were the circumstances which underpinned a section of the preamble to the resolution on gay and lesbian Jews adopted by the UAHC in New Orleans in November 1989.¹¹⁰

Addressing the failure of the UAHC congregations in a general sense vis-à-vis their approach to gay and lesbian Jews, the resolution stated that "... we have yet to shed the destructive anti-gay and anti-lesbian prejudices and stereotypes that preclude a genuine embrace of the heart."¹¹¹ The preamble of this resolution addressed the spirit of the problem, whereas the resolution itself addressed the mechanics which, it was hoped, would lead to its ultimate solution.

In 1993 the UAHC passed a resolution regarding benefits offered to partners of staff members and employees living in committed lesbian or gay

¹⁰⁹ Resolution, 60th General Assembly, UAHC, New Orleans, November 1989
¹¹⁰ Resolution, 60th General Assembly, UAHC, New Orleans, November 1989
¹¹¹ Resolution, 60th General Assembly, UAHC, New Orleans, November 1989

partnerships. These people would be offered the same benefits which were offered to the spouses of married staff members and employees of the UAHC, the CCAR and HUC-JIR.

Then in 1995 the UAHC resolved "Not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation in matters relating to the employment of rabbis, cantors, educators, executives, administrators or other staff, or in matters relating to the appointment of lay leaders."¹¹² In addition, it urged all of its affiliates and its member congregations to pursue the same policy.¹¹³

What was Schindler's role and influence in this spirited and, at times, divisive debate throughout the UAHC, the CCAR, and in individual congregations?

Sometimes emotions concerning the issue of homosexuality and the rabbinate ran so high that congregants resigned their temple memberships in order to protest the decisions being made by their 'parent' body, the UAHC, on this issue. In January 1981, the Becker family of Temple Israel, West Palm Beach, Florida,¹¹⁴ explained why it had decided to resign from Reform Judaism by way of resigning from Temple Israel. Although the family had no disagreement with the temple per se, as the Beckers saw it, "... there is no other way to resign from Reform Judaism."¹¹⁵ The family voiced its objection to the UAHC's position in the following way: "Quite simply, it is not up to UAHC to

¹¹² UAHC Resolutions at <http://uahc.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=glemp&year=1995>

¹¹³ UAHC Resolutions at <http://uahc.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=glemp&year=1995>

¹¹⁴ The rabbi of Temple Israel was Rabbi Howard Shapiro.

¹¹⁵ Letter, Becker family to Schindler, 7 January 1991, AJA, 4/9

rewrite Leviticus."¹¹⁶

The Becker family letter was not the only one in this vein Schindler received during that period. Although some of the letters were bitter and filled with hatred, Schindler answered each one, thanking the author for sharing his or her views with him. Schindler's policy of answering all the correspondence he received, reflected his view of inclusion. By responding to those who disagreed with him, Schindler sought to include them somehow, rather than ignoring their remarks and thereby tacitly excluding them.

Schindler also addressed other matters surrounding this issue during this period. In response to the concern about the suitability of gay and lesbian rabbis as role models, Schindler noted that it was not possible for any given rabbi to embody all the various ideals which Judaism deems desirable for rabbis to transmit to their congregants and others with whom they come into contact. Given the fact that the ideal of the family is one which Judaism holds in high regard, Schindler questioned rhetorically whether this necessarily implied that the divorced rabbi or the widowed rabbi was to be shunned and excluded. Answering his own pseudo-question, Schindler asserted: "Obviously not. Rabbis whose own lives, for one reason or another are circumscribed, nonetheless can function effectively as teachers of the wider view."¹¹⁷

With regard to the issue of how gay or lesbian rabbis could or may affect children, Schindler, in response to a letter from Solomon H. Friend, stated forcefully:

¹¹⁶ Letter, Becker family to Schindler, 7 January 1991, AJA, 4/9

¹¹⁷ Letter, Schindler to Dr. Abram Hodes, 9 December 1991, AJA 4/9

I reject the notion that homosexuality is volitional and therefore I reject the idea that children can be persuaded to follow a homosexual lifestyle. Why is it that most of the children adopted by homosexual partners, be they male or female, turn out to be heterosexual in their orientation?¹¹⁸

Clearly, Schindler gave no credence to the view held by those wishing to discredit gays or lesbians by asserting that homosexuality or lesbianism somehow 'rubs off' or is able to be transmitted to those people who surround them, in particular, to children.

In July 1992, A. James Sniderman wrote to Rabbi David Hachen expressing his concern that homosexuals within the movement might also be pedophiles. Hachen shared his letter with Schindler who responded that to his knowledge no incident of pedophilia had been brought to the attention of the UAHC or the attention of the CCAR's Ethics Committee. In contrast, however, he noted that "... there have been scores of incidents of sexual harassment and violations of trust by heterosexual rabbis"¹¹⁹ Schindler went on to observe astutely: "Homosexuality is not a sickness. Homosexuals can be sick, but so can heterosexuals."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Letter, Schindler to Solomon H. Friend, 24 September 1990, AJA 4/8

¹¹⁹ Letter, Schindler to David Hachen, 14 July 1992, AJA, 4/10

¹²⁰ Letter, Schindler to David Hachen, 14 July 1992, AJA, 4/10.

The Board of Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association in December 1973 modified DSM-II (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), removing homosexuality from the general category of sexual deviation and placing homosexuality into the category of sexual orientation disturbance. Dr. Jon Meyer notes in the Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry, 4th ed., eds. Kaplan & Sadock, that "this change reflected the point of view that homosexuality was to be considered a mental disorder only if it was subjectively disturbing to the individual."

Schindler's commitment to a policy of inclusion manifested itself in his presidential address of 1989 when, for the first time, he included Outreach to lesbian and gay Jews as part of his agenda for the UAHC.¹²¹

Schindler's personal correspondence on this topic of homosexual inclusion contains several letters from gay or lesbian Jews who applauded the efforts of the UAHC in this area. In 1993, Faith Haaz, a 22 year old Jewish lesbian, wrote:

I was sent to Chicago for the UAHC Biennial Convention where a resolution was passed concerning the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian Jews in Reform synagogues. Though I had not come out of the closet, the proactive support of my sexual orientation was uplifting and made me feel secure in my tradition.¹²²

This type of letter afforded Schindler great satisfaction as it served to affirm his work in this area. Schindler responded to Faith Haaz that there was no need for her to thank him for his work in this sphere, for "I only did what was right and that hardly merits gratitude."¹²³ This modest outlook characterized Schindler's work in the area of gay and lesbian rights. He was engaged in this work because he believed that it was the right thing to do.

In that same year (1993), Schindler was instrumental in ensuring that

¹²¹ This information taken from <http://mhsource.com/expert/exp1052101c.html>
Margaret Moers Wenig, "Truly Welcoming Lesbian and Gay Jews" in The Jewish Condition, Essays in Contemporary Judaism Honoring Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, Hirt-Mannheimer ed., (New York:1995) p.332

¹²² Letter, Faith Haaz to Schindler, 12 April 1993, AJA, 4/9

¹²³ Letter, Schindler to Faith Haaz, 20 April 1993, AJA, 4/9

Congregation Beth Simchat Torah was allowed to participate in the annual Salute to Israel Parade. The congregation had applied to the American Zionist Youth Foundation (AZYF), the organizer of the parade, in plenty of time to be included in the annual parade but two months later, it had not even been afforded the courtesy of a reply. The rabbi of the congregation, Sharon Kleinbaum, preached a sermon on the matter, thereby making it public.

Schindler went to the aid of the congregation at this point, writing to the executive vice chairman of the AZYF, "Certainly I ... want all this resolved amicably. But it cannot be resolved if you consign your fellow Jews to invisibility."¹²⁴ At almost the same time, Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, Executive Director of the American Reform Zionist Association (ARZA), informed the AZYF that ARZA intended to invite Congregation Beth Simchat Torah to march with its delegation under a banner bearing the words "... ARZA proudly marches with Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in salute to Israel."¹²⁵

This controversy was widely covered in the media, both in New York and in Israel. Ultimately, Congregation Beth Simchat Torah did not march in the Annual Salute to Israel Parade, but held its own separate celebration at a synagogue a few blocks from where the parade was scheduled to pass.¹²⁶

Although he and his associates had been unsuccessful in gaining inclusion for this openly homosexual congregation, Schindler continued to fight for the rights of the homosexual minority. He had endeavored to win for them

¹²⁴ Letter, Schindler to Don Adelman, 7 April 1993, AJA, 2/3

¹²⁵ Letter, Ammiel Hirsch to Don Adelman, 31 March 1993, AJA, 2/3

¹²⁶ Moshe Shokeid, A Gay Synagogue in New York (New York:1995) pp.3,4

one of their basic human rights, the right to demonstrate publicly, a right which is afforded all other citizens of the United States.

Conclusion

For Schindler, the issue of including Jews was of great importance. He devoted much of his presidency of the UAHC to this mission, in particular by pursuing with great passion and vigor inclusion of gay and lesbian Jews as well as intermarried couples and converts to Judaism. This, to him, was one of the central ideals of Judaism and of Reform Judaism in particular.

Perhaps Schindler's efforts in this area can best be highlighted by the testimony of one individual whose life he touched in a profound way. With reference to the 1989 Biennial Convention in New Orleans, she stated, "It was here ... that I was present for the CCAR decision regarding gay and lesbian rabbinical school applicants¹²⁷ and I listened with a growing sense of pride to your support of this resolution. I came out of the closet three months later."¹²⁸ This person went on to thank Schindler for supporting the inclusion of gay and lesbian Jews, adding "You have set the tone for the Reform movement and in your compassion I am a stronger Jew."¹²⁹

¹²⁷ The CCAR voted in favor of admitting students who were openly gay or lesbian to HUC-JIR. Previously, such students had been rejected by the institution.

¹²⁸ Letter, Faith Haaz to Schindler, 12 April 1993, AJA, 4/9

¹²⁹ Letter, Faith Haaz to Schindler, 12 April 1993, AJA, 4/9

CHAPTER 4

International Leadership

The purpose of this chapter is to explore a number of spheres in which Schindler was involved, regarding Israel and the wider international stage. His efforts on behalf of Israel constituted a prominent part of his professional work. He played a pivotal role in politics, diplomacy and public relations.

How did Schindler's qualities of leadership manifest themselves? Schindler's influence extended throughout the UAHC, but it also reached beyond Reform Judaism's institutional boundaries. He forged connections with political leaders and heads of governments in the United States, in Israel and around the world. His opinions and comments were taken seriously and respected by a wide range of individuals.

Schindler served as the chairman of the CPMAJO from January 1976 until June of 1978,¹³⁰ thereby becoming, in his capacity as president of the UAHC, the first Reform religious leader to head this organization, "... the most representative body of American Jewry."¹³¹ It is true that Dr. Joachim Prinz, a Reform rabbi, had served as chairman of the CPMAJO previous to Schindler's term,¹³² but he had served in his capacity as head of the American Jewish Congress and not in his capacity as a Reform rabbi representing a national organization.

¹³⁰ See Appendix 1 for a list of the member organizations during the period of Schindler's chairmanship

¹³¹ Meyer, Michael A., Response to Modernity (New York:1988) p.383

¹³² Dr. Joachim Prinz was chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations (as the CPMAJO was then called) from February 1965 until December 1967. He was president of the American Jewish Congress from 1958 - 1966. This information from Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem:1971) vol. 13, p.1116

Schindler's election to this significant position of chairman of the CPMAJO in January 1976 could be interpreted as testament to his fellow presidents' faith in his capacity to ably carry out the responsibilities which the position entailed.

Schindler's work on behalf of Israel was both political and diplomatic. He was involved with the furthering of the peace process, he was opposed to the sale of arms to Egypt, the United Nations resolutions which equated Zionism with racism, and in attempts to combat the legitimization of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

He was occupied with public relations work, both internally within American Jewry and externally, between Israel and America. Schindler played a public relations role following the election of Menachem Begin as Prime Minister of Israel, and he also worked behind the scenes with regard to the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the events at Sabra and Chatilla later that same year. In 1987, he was vocal with respect to the *intifada* (the uprising by Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza strip). Schindler worked hard to represent Israel to American Jewry and vice versa.

Schindler was in contact with members of the highest levels of government in both the United States and Israel during this period. These included two American presidents, President Jimmy Carter and President Gerald Ford, and two Israeli prime ministers, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

He was involved to some degree behind the scenes with regard to the United States' provision of arms to both Egypt and Israel. In 1978, he publicized

a statement calling upon President Jimmy Carter to "... bring Egypt back to the negotiating table and to win the public support of Saudi Arabia for the renewal of the peace process"¹³³ and also to honor the United States' commitment to provide a full complement of arms to Israel.¹³⁴

As chairman of the CPMAJO, he called on all those member nations of the United Nations which had voted for Resolution 3379 in 1975, a resolution equating Zionism with racism, to reconsider the positions of their countries on this issue. He pointed out the irony and self-contradiction which their votes constituted. "The resolution defining Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination had the effect of sanctioning anti-Semitism and, thereby, opening the floodgates of hatred and bigotry which the U.N. had been called into existence to prevent."¹³⁵

In addition, he wrote to the ambassadors of all countries who were then members of the United Nations, explaining to them the nature of the State of Israel and her right to exist.¹³⁶

One year later, he implored President Jimmy Carter to "... use the occasion of your forthcoming appearance before the United Nations to call upon that body to expunge the infamous Zionism-racism resolution which has done so much to contaminate the moral authority of the U.N."¹³⁷

In December 1976, Schindler received a letter from Chaim Herzog, the

¹³³ Statement, Schindler, 16 May 1978, AJA, 21/1

¹³⁴ Statement, Schindler, 16 May 1978, AJA, 21/1

¹³⁵ Letters, Schindler to various ambassadors, September 1976, AJA, 23/5

¹³⁶ Letters, Schindler to various ambassadors, September 1976, AJA, 23/5

¹³⁷ Letter, Schindler to President Jimmy Carter, 15 September 1977, AJA, 20/10

Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, thanking him for his involvement in a United Nations Task Force established in order to attempt to counteract the Zionism-racism resolution and all its ramifications. In the letter, Herzog calls for the support of the Jewish people. "I recall too your immediate reaction and decision to set up the United Nations Task Force. This Task Force ... has filled a most needed want and has been successful."¹³⁸

The PLO emerged as a recognized world body in 1974, just one year after the Yom Kippur War had taken place. Meeting in Rabat, all countries which held a claim to the West Bank ceded them to the PLO.¹³⁹ In addition, the PLO "... gained acceptance as the legitimate expression of Palestine national aspirations in the world at large."¹⁴⁰

Schindler was vocal in his opposition of the PLO. In 1977, his words to President Jimmy Carter concerning the American government's position with regard to the PLO were unequivocal. He urged the Carter administration, in the strongest possible terms, to reconsider the position which it had adopted.

I cannot believe that a brutal band of killers who boast of slaughtering school children and Olympic athletes - and who insist on their right to do so - can be a partner for talks with our government or with decent people anywhere.¹⁴¹

He went on to express his grave concern that the American administration's actions and words with regard to the recognition of the PLO

¹³⁸ Letter, Chaim Herzog to Schindler, 23 December 1976, AJA, 23/5

¹³⁹ Steven T. Rosenthal, Irreconcilable Differences (Hanover and London:2001) p.35

¹⁴⁰ Steven T. Rosenthal, Irreconcilable Differences (Hanover and London:2001) p.35

¹⁴¹ Letter, Schindler to President Jimmy Carter, 26 August 1977, AJA, 20/10

were dangerous, not only for America and Israel, but also for peace in general.¹⁴²

In April of that year, Schindler wrote to Andrew Young who was at that time America's permanent representative to the United Nations, reminding him of the tangible results of Arab hatred which had been wreaked upon the Jewish people since the birth of the State of Israel in 1948. Following a succinct historical synopsis, he expressed the view that Arab hatred of Israel as the Jewish State remained the one stumbling block to peace in the Middle East.¹⁴³ "The Arab League's current efforts to distinguish between Judaism and Zionism recall the hypocrisy of those who love humanity but hate people. It is deceit - and it is dangerous."¹⁴⁴

In November of that same year, 1977, he wrote to Dr. Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of the United Nations, expressing the profound unease of the CPMAJO concerning the decision of the United Nations to invite the PLO to address its forum. Schindler contended that this decision would bring an incendiary element into a diplomatic body established to pursue peace and, consequently, would undercut UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.¹⁴⁵ These resolutions, issued on November 22, 1967 and October 22, 1973 respectively, called for a cessation to all fighting and military activity in the Middle East and for the establishment of a just and lasting peace in that region.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Letter, Schindler to President Jimmy Carter, 26 August 1977, AJA, 20/10

¹⁴³ Letter, Schindler to His Excellency Andrew Young, 20 April 1977, AJA, CPMAJO Nearprint file

¹⁴⁴ Letter, Schindler to His Excellency Andrew Young, 20 April 1977, AJA, CPMAJO Nearprint file

¹⁴⁵ Letter, Schindler to Dr. Kurt Waldheim, 30 November 1977, AJA, 23/5

¹⁴⁶ The full texts of these resolutions can be found at:
<http://www.israel.org/mfa/go.asp?MFAH00p50> (Resolution 338) and at:

In the same month, Schindler sent a telegram to President Jimmy Carter urging him to accept the invitation issued by Egypt's President Anwar Sadat to attend a conference in Geneva, the purpose of which was to discuss Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.¹⁴⁷ A year before that, Schindler had expressed support for Egypt's moral right to extensive economic aid from the United States, but he vigorously opposed the sale of arms. "What Egypt needs are tractors and not tanks; what its people desperately need and want is bread and not more bullets."¹⁴⁸

Schindler's ultimate purpose in all of these communications was to attempt, wherever and whenever possible, to safeguard Israel's right to exist. Schindler was an avowed Zionist, loving the land of Israel, the people of Israel, and the state of Israel. It is fitting that in Israel, the Schindler Forest, consisting of 500,000 trees planted by the Jewish National Fund stands as living testimony to the life's work of this lover of Zion. In addition, he received the Hebrew University's Solomon Dubick Prize given to the person "... who, during the two years preceding the award has made the most significant contribution to the progress and development of Eretz Yisrael."¹⁴⁹

Schindler enjoyed close relations over many years with members of the government of Israel, from both the left and right sides of its political spectrum. By his own admission, he was closer to the Likud, the right side of the

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.israel.org/mfa/go.asp?MFAH00p40> (Resolution 242)
¹⁴⁸ Telegram, Schindler to President Jimmy Carter, 28 November 1977, AJA, 20/10
¹⁴⁹ Letter, Schindler to President Gerald Ford, 12 February 1976, AJA, 21/1
Letter, Schindler to UAHC Board Members, 2 August 1978, AJA, Alexander M. Schindler Nearprint file (hereinafter referred to as Schindler Nearprint file)

spectrum, than to those on the left. He attributed this to the fact that, as he put it, "I swung the American Jewish community in support of Begin when he was elected to high office."¹⁵⁰ In the election of 1977, Begin became the first non-Labor Israeli chief of state in twenty years,¹⁵¹ a phenomenon which took a little adjusting to on the part of the American Jewish community. Schindler emphasized to the American Jewish community that Israel was, after all, a democracy and that Begin had been duly elected prime minister of a democratic nation. "He is a duly elected Prime Minister of a democratic Israel, and we have no right to delegitimize him or pre-judge him."¹⁵² In Schindler's view, it would have been 'un-American' to reject Begin without even having afforded him an opportunity to establish his credentials.

In June of 1977, in a confidential letter to Rabbi David Polish, Schindler expressed one of his personal views concerning Menachem Begin. "... (I) returned from him (Begin) rather optimistic concerning his willingness to listen to the Jewish people as a whole. There is a much greater sense of peoplehood which emanates from him than ever did from Rabin."¹⁵³ He stipulated to Rabbi Polish that this information was "for your eyes only."¹⁵⁴

Philip Klutznick wrote to Schindler that Prime Minister Begin was so enamored of Schindler that he was one of his "true chassidim."¹⁵⁵ Clearly,

¹⁵⁰ Letter, Schindler to Leon Horowitz, 11 November 1987, AJA, 8/7

¹⁵¹ John Hohenberg, Israel at 50 (New York:1998) p.151

¹⁵² Schindler, as quoted in Eulogy for Schindler by Albert Vorspan, 17 November 2000. In personal possession of thesis author.

¹⁵³ Letter, Schindler to Rabbi David Polish, 6 June 1977, AJA, 21/7

¹⁵⁴ Letter, Schindler to Rabbi David Polish, 6 June 1977, AJA, 21/7

¹⁵⁵ Letter, Philip M. Klutznick to Schindler, 30 November 1977, AJA, 21/8

Begin thought very favorably of Schindler to have spoken of him in such a manner to Klutznick. Philip Klutznick was a highly influential national Jewish leader. Amongst many other positions, he served as the Secretary of Commerce and the Federal Housing Commissioner.¹⁵⁶ He was also the international president of B'nai B'rith (1953 - 1959) and the general chairman of the United Jewish Appeal.¹⁵⁷

This mutual admiration between the two men, Begin and Schindler however, certainly did not imply that they agreed on all matters. On the contrary, Schindler was proud of the fact that the American Jewish community, under his stewardship of the CPMAJO, had a voice independent of that of the Israeli government. He even went so far as to say that it was "indefensible and wrong"¹⁵⁸ for the American Jewish community to agree slavishly with the policies of a "... democratically elected government of Israel."¹⁵⁹ Rather, the American Jewish community had a responsibility to come to its own decisions regarding the stances of the Israeli government and if it disagreed with any of them, to let its position be made known to the relevant parties in Israel, but to do this in a manner "... independent but supportive of Israel."¹⁶⁰

Following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the massacre of innocent civilians by Phalangist troops at Sabra and Chatilla on September 16 of that year, Schindler, even though he was no longer chairman of the CPMAJO,

¹⁵⁶ Jacob Rader Marcus ed., The Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography (New York:1994) p.333

¹⁵⁷ Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem:1971) vol. 10, pp.1111,2

¹⁵⁸ Letter, Schindler to Charles S. Liebman, 13 June 1977, AJA, 21/8

¹⁵⁹ Letter, Schindler to Charles S. Liebman, 13 June 1977, AJA, 21/8

¹⁶⁰ Letter, Schindler to Charles S. Liebman, 13 June 1977, AJA, 21/8

flew to Jerusalem to implore Prime Minister Begin to launch an investigation into the massacre.¹⁶¹ As debate raged in Israel, America and indeed, throughout the world, concerning the tragic events which had taken place at Sabra and Chatilla, Schindler forcefully admonished that "... dissent should never be equated with disloyalty."¹⁶²

In 1987, an American Jewish Committee poll found "... that a majority of American Jews (63% vs. 22%) felt it was permissible to criticize Israel."¹⁶³ Schindler reflected this outlook. In December 1987, he said concerning the *intifada* that "... the status quo sows the seeds of endless conflict ... and it is a time bomb ticking away at Israel's vital center."¹⁶⁴ Again, Schindler was not afraid to voice his dissent from the prevailing Israeli position.

Conclusion

In short, Schindler was a staunch defender of the rights of individuals, individual communities, and individual nations to reach their own conclusions regarding matters which affected them. That is not to say, however, that Schindler shunned disagreement. On the contrary, he did not shy away from it, for by airing disagreements and working together to solve problems, more people's views and opinions could be considered and incorporated. Once again, a broad-ranging policy of inclusion underlay Schindler's endeavors. "... anyone

¹⁶¹ Steven T. Rosenthal, Irreconcilable Differences (Hanover and London:2001) p.72
¹⁶² Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Dec 6, 1982, as quoted in Steven T. Rosenthal, Irreconcilable Differences (Hanover and London:2001) p.74
¹⁶³ Steven T. Rosenthal, Irreconcilable Differences (Hanover and London:2001) pp.93, 94
¹⁶⁴ *Washington Post*, Dec. 23, 1987, as quoted in Steven T. Rosenthal, Irreconcilable Differences (Hanover and London:2001) p.96

who knows me knows that I am dedicated to a policy of inclusion rather than exclusion."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Letter, Schindler to Leon Horowitz, 11 November 1987, AJA, 8/7

CHAPTER 5

Evaluation of Selected Areas of Schindler's Endeavors

This chapter purports to serve as a preliminary analysis of certain aspects of Schindler's professional career. It is far too soon after Schindler's death in November 2000 for this analysis to be either authoritative or exhaustive. It will focus on what we are able to discern from the major, dominant themes of his life's work.

"It is too early to assess the long-term consequences of present trends within Reform, but no one can gainsay that it has reformed itself considerably in recent decades."¹⁶⁸ Schindler's efforts in the four major areas of Outreach, patrilineal descent, equal rights for gay and lesbian Jews in Reform Jewish life, and human rights all left an impact on American Reform Judaism in particular, and on American Judaism in general.

Common threads manifest themselves repeatedly in Schindler's work. The value of inclusion was of paramount importance to him and he strove to include people wherever and whenever possible. This is evidenced by his initiation of Outreach and in his approach to gay and lesbian Jews.

His compassion for the alien or the stranger often impelled him to act on behalf of those who, for one reason or another, did not fit in. Whether the outsider was the closeted homosexual congregant or the deaf child who was not being adequately catered for at day camp, Schindler's undifferentiated compassion spurred him to act on their behalf and to convince others to act on

¹⁶⁸ Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided (New York:1993) p.113

their behalf also. Unlike so many of us, Schindler was not afraid of 'the other.' He did not try to pretend that people who were somehow different from himself did not exist. Rather, he endeavored to help such people, and to encourage others to share his view and to act similarly.

Schindler adopted an American brand of liberalism and it informed all of his endeavors. Perhaps this is most clearly illustrated by the manner in which he portrayed Begin to the American Jewish community. In true liberal spirit, he reminded the Jewish community that even though it may not agree with the views of this new prime minister of Israel and even though some American Jews may not hold Begin in high personal regard, still he was the democratically elected prime minister of the State of Israel and because of that, he deserved the respect and the support of the American Jewish community.

Schindler was a pragmatist. His primary concern was the 'what is?' rather than the 'what might be?' He looked out at the world and saw the problems which surrounded him. Then he attempted to deal with them. Instead of closing his eyes to difficulties, pretending that they did not exist, Schindler devised solutions to the problems which he perceived and then worked to implement them.

Schindler saw intermarriage as a potentially grave problem for the future of American Jewry. He used the Outreach initiative as a means by which to address this major concern. He saw the reality of children with Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, and he concluded that with some help from the Jewish community, they could be Jews too. He saw the pain of gay and lesbian Jews

wanting to participate openly in Jewish life and he helped them to achieve that objective.

Schindler was both a particularist and a universalist. As a rabbi, he cared passionately about *klal Yisrael*, working tirelessly for the good of the Jewish people as a whole, both in the United States and, albeit somewhat indirectly, in Israel. Much of his life's work was committed to strengthening Judaism and the Jewish people. That was his motivation for Outreach and why he reached out to Jews who dwelt on the fringes of Judaism.

At the same time, he was a proud American, involved in the politics of his country and having fought valiantly on its behalf during the Second World War. In 1983, the UAHC marched in the 20th year anniversary of the Martin Luther King March. Many other Jewish organizations had decided not to march because the event was scheduled to take place on a Shabbat. Schindler represented the UAHC's position by stating "... we want to remain part of the struggle for racial equality in the spirit of coalition and cooperation forged by Dr. King."¹⁶⁷

Schindler strove to protect the particularistic interests of Judaism by ensuring that Jews were seen to be advocating universalistic causes. On that occasion, it seemed that Schindler chose to sacrifice the particularistic interest in favor of the universalistic. However, Schindler was very clear that the motivation behind the UAHC's decision to march on that historic occasion was to protect Jewish interests. Responding to one of the critics of the UAHC's controversial

¹⁶⁷ Schindler, "Why We're Marching - report on 23 August 1983 March - 20 year anniversary of 1963 March," 18 August 1983, AJA, 3/3

decision, Schindler put it this way:

... which policy advances Jewish interests more? The easy road of ranting against the March, or the more serious effort to protect Jewish interests by staying in?¹⁶⁸

Schindler was deeply committed to Jewish survival. It was the motivation for all of his work.

Outreach is not merely about generosity, or neighborliness or broad-mindedness. It is about survival. It is a key thread of the *tallit* of welcoming embrace that I have during my tenure in office, held out to women, to gay and lesbian Jews, to marginalized Jews of every kind in the name of Jewish unity and in order to buttress our collective strength.¹⁶⁹

In addition to his work in the four major areas mentioned above and dealt with in greater detail in the preceding chapters of this thesis, Schindler also played an important role in many other areas of change that affected the Reform movement during the latter half of the twentieth century.

He was dedicated to Jewish education, including the movement to develop Jewish day schools. His vision was that Jewish children would be educated in Reform Jewish schools, being exposed to advanced technology in the field of education while simultaneously "... discovering the rich wisdom and soul-satisfying beauty of our faith."¹⁷⁰ He insisted that ultimately, Jewish children

¹⁶⁸ Schindler, Letter to Sidney Brown, 22 August 1983, AJA, 3/3
¹⁶⁹ Schindler, Outreach Address, CCAR, Philadelphia, 27 March 1996, AJA, 26/3
¹⁷⁰ Schindler, Presidential Address, UAHC, 4 December 1981, AJA, 24/4

who had been educated in day schools would contribute to their communities by
"... demonstrating what it means to be a Jew."¹⁷¹

Schindler was an ardent Zionist who guided the Reform movement toward deeper involvement in Zionist issues by means of the American Reform Zionist movement (ARZA). ARZA was established in order to ensure that the voice of American Reform Zionists was heard in the various debates which took place in the World Zionist Organization. His passion and love for Israel were evident throughout his career. Schindler encouraged the Reform movement to act on behalf of a thriving Jewish commonwealth which would work hand in hand with its neighbors in the Middle East.

I see an Israel flourishing in the true fulfillment of the Zionist dream, at peace with its neighbors, blending its skills and intellect with the talents and capabilities of other peoples living in the cradle of civilization, so that all can be nourished by the wealth of God's good earth.¹⁷²

In addition to these areas of influence, Schindler was simultaneously one of the driving forces behind the first Torah commentary written from a Reform Jewish perspective. This venture began in 1963 when Schindler was appointed to the directorship of the UAHC's Commission on Jewish Education. In 1981, while delivering his Presidential Address to the UAHC, he proudly held the new commentary aloft as he announced its publication to the biennial convention.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Schindler, Presidential Address, UAHC, 4 December 1981, AJA, 24/4
¹⁷² Schindler, Presidential Address, UAHC, 4 December 1981, AJA, 24/4
¹⁷³ Schindler, Presidential Address, UAHC, 4 December 1981, AJA, 24/4

Schindler was an ardent protagonist of the inclusion of Jewish women into their heritage, encouraging and assisting them to take on greater roles within Judaism. He was a fervent proponent of not only allowing women to study for the rabbinate, but actively encouraging them to do so. "It is our task ... to be a prod, a goad to American Jews ... in the struggle to gain full equality for women in the religious life."¹⁷⁴

He was also a strong advocate of including the handicapped in all activities conducted by the Jewish community. In 1984, in a letter to the Chairman of the UAHC Task Force on the Disabled, he challenged the Union to examine its efforts on behalf of minority groups. He questioned the Union's level of involvement in the lives of the deaf, the blind, the learning disabled, and the mentally handicapped. "Are we doing enough for them in our religious schools and camps and what should we consider doing?"¹⁷⁵

By 1990, Schindler was even more forceful in his conviction concerning what needed to be done for these physically and emotionally disadvantaged children. Acknowledging that the Jewish community had been remiss concerning this diverse group, Schindler presented a visionary idea. "... it is my goal ultimately to establish a permanent special needs camp program to serve these youngsters."¹⁷⁶

Schindler had been raised and educated in a learned home. The Judaism which he encountered during his years at HUC however, was a 1950s style of

¹⁷⁴ Schindler, Report to the UAHC Board of Trustees, 5 December 1986, AJA, 24/6
¹⁷⁵ Letter, Schindler to Mrs. William Yoffie, 26 April 1984, AJA, 4/2
¹⁷⁶ Letter, Schindler to Arthur Kokot, 3 May 1990, AJA, 4/3

Reform Judaism, an approach which emphasized the universal nature of Judaism and the importance of fitting in with the surrounding culture. Thanks to his upbringing, Schindler saw the great value of ritual observance and how this could play an important role in strengthening the religious and cultural identities of Reform Jews and thereby, fortifying the Reform movement itself. For Schindler, the return to more ritual observance within the movement was perhaps, a little like coming home.

Schindler was committed to the ideal of Jews practicing Judaism and this commitment spurred him to encourage his constituents and their congregants to practice more Jewish traditions, both within their synagogues and in their homes. "The most significant trend within the Reform movement in the past two decades, spurred by ... Rabbi Alexander Schindler, was a swing back towards more traditional observance in many key areas (accompanied by a new support for Zionism, once low on the Reform agenda)."¹⁷⁷

Throughout Schindler's career, he and the Reform movement remained committed to social action. Schindler was one of many who spoke out and acted against the discriminatory system of apartheid in South Africa and he was involved in the National Association for Advancement of Colored People. He added his voice to those who opposed the proliferation of nuclear arms and he supported the right of a woman to decide whether or not to have an abortion. For Schindler, social action, which he once called 'applied Judaism,' enabled

¹⁷⁷ George Robinson, Essential Judaism (New York:2000) p.58

Jews to live out their Jewish values.¹⁷⁸

What was the nature of the legacy which Schindler left to the next generation? On one level, Schindler's heritage will and does live on through the work of some of his own family members.

Judith, one of Schindler's daughters, was ordained a Reform rabbi in 1995. Clearly, his work had had a profound impact on her and it is likely that she had been inspired to follow in his footsteps.

In 1970, Elisa, another of Schindler's daughters who was then 12, wrote a letter to the President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, concerning the plight of her grandmother, Sali Schindler, who had been amongst a group of people held hostage aboard a Swiss Air aircraft by a group of Arab guerillas.¹⁷⁹ Expressing her father's value of inclusion and the sanctity of all human life, Elisa wrote "Even though we pray to see our grandmother, we pray to see ALL! We want her safe but only if all are safe with her."¹⁸⁰ Just as her father might have done had he been writing the letter, she inserted a Biblical allusion into her communication when she implored the President to "Let ALL our people go!"¹⁸¹ Fortunately, the hostage crisis was resolved favorably and Sali Schindler returned to her home safely.

It seems certain that Elisa had been affected by the experiences of her

¹⁷⁸ Robert M. Heller, the recently elected Chair of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, as quoted in the press release publicized by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Washington, 14 January 2002 at <http://www.rac.org/news/011402b.html>

¹⁷⁹ *The Westport News*, 16 September 1970, AJA, Schindler Nearprint file

¹⁸⁰ *The Westport News*, 16 September 1970, AJA, Schindler Nearprint file

¹⁸¹ *The Westport News*, 16 September 1970, AJA, Schindler Nearprint file

father during the Holocaust. Her letter to the president ends with the following words: "I realize you're doing an adequate amount, but was it enough while 6 million?"[sic]¹⁸² The fact that her grandfather, Eliezer, had lost many members of his family in Auschwitz during the Holocaust had had a profound effect upon Elisa and her development up until the time that she composed that letter.

Exemplifying another of her father's values, Elisa was not afraid to speak out when she saw a wrong being perpetrated, in an effort to try to rectify it. Schindler had done this on numerous occasions. Once Schindler adopted an idea or a value, he was not easily deterred or persuaded to let go of it. He fought hard for that which he believed to be right and just.

Schindler's legacy is felt way beyond the confines of his own family, however. The values and concerns of Schindler's father and mother, through him, have had an impact on the broader Jewish and general communities.

Many of Schindler's experiments became successful innovations. Although some of the causes for which Schindler strove may have seemed radical or far-fetched at the time at which he championed them, most have now become largely mainstream and have gained widespread acceptance and adoption.

Schindler was both a man of his time and one who helped shape the time in which he lived.

What was it about Schindler's personality and leadership style which

¹⁸² *The Westport News*, 16 September 1970, AJA, Schindler Nearprint file

enabled him to influence so many people and to reach such heights of achievement?

In one sense, Schindler had not been groomed for greatness. He came to the United States not knowing its language or its culture. The Judaism of his childhood was very different from the Reform Judaism he found in America. It was by no means a foregone conclusion that Schindler would rise to national, even international prominence. His accented English marked him as an immigrant, yet the sheer force of his personality provided him with the wherewithal to transcend what may have become liabilities for others, and he achieved enormous prominence and influence.

Schindler was fiercely competitive, tenacious, outspoken, but also gentle, compassionate, and affectionate. He did not stifle dissent and difference, rather he welcomed it and grew from it. He loved the Jewish people, cherishing and nurturing its solidarity, endeavoring doggedly to weave together its at times fractious and disparate strands. In return, Schindler was loved by many of the Jewish people. From a shy, introverted boy who had escaped the Nazis, he became "... an international Jewish servant, wearing 1,000 kipot."¹⁸³

In addition to the activities which made an impact on American Judaism, Schindler was also active on the global stage. "Schindler played two major roles in American Jewish life, one religious, the other secular; either would have made him one of the most influential American Jewish leaders of the latter half of the

¹⁸³ Albert Vorspan, "Eulogy for Schindler," 17 November 2000. In personal possession of thesis author.

20th century."¹⁸⁴ In his role as Chairman of the CPMAJO, he was able to exert influence on people in positions of power in Israel, as well as upon leaders of various other countries, in order to help ensure that the rights of human beings the world over were enhanced.

As Schindler said in his final address, which he presented at the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation just three days before his sudden death, "... to be a Jew is to be a goad to the conscience of humankind. To be a Jew, as God told Abraham thousands of years ago, is to be part of a great and enduring people, but also to be a blessing to all humankind."¹⁸⁵

A lifelong friend and co-worker at the UAHC, Albert Vorspan, movingly summarized the way in which Schindler's personality affected his work when he stated that Alexander Schindler was loved

... because of a rare combination - outspoken, often unpopular views, combined with personal warmth, grace, and self-deprecating humor, which took the edge off controversy, especially when marinated in a Chasidic tale, a Yiddish joke, and a big hug.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Jacques Steinberg, "Rabbi Alexander Schindler, Reform Leader and Major Jewish Voice, Dies at 75," *New York Times* at <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/16/national/16SCH1.html>
¹⁸⁵ Schindler, as quoted by Barbara Pash, "A giant's final words: Alexander Schindler's final address," *Baltimore Jewish Times* at [wysiwyg://8/http://www.jta.org/index](http://www.jta.org/index)
¹⁸⁶ Albert Vorspan, "Eulogy for Schindler," 17 November 2000. In personal possession of thesis author.

Appendix 1

Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Affiliated Organizations - March 1976 - November 1978

American Israeli Public Affairs Committee
American Jewish Congress
American Mizrahi Women
American Zionist Federation
Anti-Defamation League
B'nai B'rith
B'nai B'rith Women
Bnai Zion
Central Conference of American Rabbis
* Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds
Hadassah
Jewish Labor Committee
Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation
Jewish War Veterans of USA
Labor Zionist Alliance
Mizrachi-Hapoel Hamizrachi
National Committee for Labor Israel, Inc.
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Young Israel
National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods
National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council
National Jewish Welfare Board
North American Jewish Youth Council
Pioneer Women
Rabbinical Assembly
Rabbinical Council of America
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America
United Synagogue of America
Women's American ORT **
Women's League for Conservative Judaism
World Zionist Organization American Section, Inc.
Young Israel
Zionist Organization of America

(34 orgs. including observer)

* Observer

** In 1880, the name 'ORT' was coined from the acronym of the Russian words *Obschestvo Remeslenovo i zemledelcheskovo Trouda*, meaning The Society for Trades and Agricultural Labor

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March 29, 1998

CCAR Collection

Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Nearprint file

UAHC Collection

WRJ Collection

Printed

CCAR Journals

CCAR Yearbooks

Reports to the CCAR appearing in CCAR Yearbooks

Resolutions of the CCAR

UAHC Resolutions:

Resolution adopted by the 54th General Assembly, UAHC, San
Francisco, California, November 1977

Resolution adopted by the 55th General Assembly, UAHC, Toronto,
Ontario, Canada, 7-11 December 1979

Resolution adopted by the 59th General Assembly, UAHC, Chicago,
Illinois, October-November 1987

Resolution adopted by the 60th General Assembly, UAHC, New Orleans,
Louisiana, November 1989

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www.ccarnet.org

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