Nachamu, Nachamu Ami: Be Comforted, Be Comforted My People; Sermonic Responses to National Disaster

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Digest

The purpose of this thesis is to examine rabbinic sermons delivered in response to national emergencies or specific national disasters. The American involvement in World War I and World War II, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were chosen as case studies. By examining these sermons, written by rabbis across the country and spanning almost a century, this thesis attempts to add to Marc Saperstein's thesis which asserts that the topical sermon is an invaluable resource that enriches our efforts to reconstruct the history of the Jewish people. These sermons reveal what rabbis were concerned about in the aftermath of a national crisis. They provide illustrations of the messages that rabbis were imparting to their congregants. These sermons shed light on what rabbis were advocating from the pulpit, how they guided their listeners to move on after the crisis, and how they provided comfort. Rabbis, through their words from the pulpit, helped their listeners to cope and understand the significance of the crisis at hand. These sermons serve as snapshots not only the American past, but also of the development of American history in that they provide a useful tool for understanding the role of religious life during times of national emergency in the American nation.

The thesis introduction explores the importance of the topical sermon and provides background as to the importance of the sermon to Jewish history as well as the contemporary need to preserve sermons for the future. It also examines the nature of the topical sermon as well as its role during times of national crisis.

Chapter one begins the exploration of sermons delivered from the period prior to America's entry into WWI and continues the discussion through WWII. It illustrates how rabbis advocated political positions from the pulpit. These sermons show how rabbis urged their congregation to affirm America's role in the international community and stressed the need for unity among all Americans. Finally, this chapter explores a problem that often plagues religious communities at a time of crisis: theodicy or the defense of the ultimate goodness and justice of God in the face of evil or disastrous events in the world.

Chapter two examines sermons written in the aftermath of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy was widely admired by the Jewish community and Jews participated in his administration at an unprecedented level. After Kennedy's assassination rabbis implored their congregants to rededicate themselves to the martyred president's vision and programs. In addition, rabbis compared JFK to different biblical prophets. The words of the prophets also served as a source of admonishment; rabbis insisted that every person must take responsibility for allowing society to so violent, that an event such as the assassination of a president could occur. Finally, chapter two concludes with an examination of how rabbis used the Jewish leximary (weekly Torah portion) to speak to, advice, and guide their congregants.

Chapter three investigates the most recent national tragedy: the terrorist attacks of 9-11. The sermons in this chapter are arranged chronologically. They begin on the Sabbath immediately following the attacks, and proceed through Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is interesting to note that, unlike the sermonic material previously analyzed many of the sermons cited in this chapter were delivered by both women and

men. These sermons serve as a valuable resource as to the issues many rabbis felt were facing Americans in the aftermath of the attacks.

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Introduction: The American Jewish Sermonic Response To Catastrophe and Crisis

Topical sermons are those that are concerned with the issues of the day. They often address current events and issues that are pertinent to contemporary life. According to historian Marc Saperstein, topical sermons are most often avoided in academic investigations of sermons because they tend to deal with what was 'urgent', 'pressing', or 'burning' at one particular time. For the average person, the problem of being able to relate to the sermon, its purpose, and the issues at hand is a great one. Saperstein even admits that the looming question of "Who will care about this anymore" seems to be the first one asked by many readers.[1]

Saperstein and other historians have asserted that topical sermons are an invaluable historical resource. He notes that topical sermons ". . .bring us back to a unique moment in the past and allow us to recover the complex dynamics, the agonizing dilemmas, the deep passions of a point in time that seems ever more elusive."[2] The purpose of this thesis is to examine Saperstein's assertion by looking at specific types of topical sermons: sermons written in response to national disasters in 20th century U.S. history, pivotal moments in the life of America and American Jews. This investigation of rabbinic sermons will provide information not only about the way that Jews responded to these crises as Americans, but also how they responded uniquely as Jews.

The uniqueness of the Jewish response is intimately connected with the nature of the sermon itself. Rabbi Robert Kahn observed that while the word 'sermon' originates in the Latin and can mean any kind of public discourse, the Jewish sermon is something

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[1] Saperstein, Marc. Witness from the Pulpit. (pg. 2)
[2] ibid. (pp. 2-3)

quite different.[3] In Hebrew, he writes, the sermon is called a *drashah* which refers not to a form of discourse, but rather, to a process. The *drashah* is a process of interpretation.[4] The text undergoing interpretation might be a biblical text, or in the case of this thesis, a current event. In a similar way to how a rabbi probes a biblical text to find the legal and moral implications of the text, rabbis also explore the meaning, implications, and lessons that can be gleaned from experiencing and surviving a national disaster.

By preserving and then studying topical sermons of rabbis, the historical record of the Jewish people is greatly enhanced. First, they record *what happened*. Not in the sense of facts and figures or data and statistics. Rather, they record that which is more difficult to calculate: human emotion and response. The words of topical sermons recover a sense of mood, of intimacy between preacher and congregation, and most importantly for the historian, a sense of what was being advocated from the pulpit.[5] Second, sermons provide the historian with a useful measure of how actively religious leaders (in this case American rabbis) dealt with issues of contemporary social concern from the pulpit. In the case of this particular investigation, topical sermons reflect the particular penchant of the Reform movement for social justice. As evidenced in the sermons explored in this thesis, rabbis who preached during times of national crisis were especially concerned with matters of justice, righteous, and peace. Reform rabbis, as Rabbi Kahn described it, ". . .poured forth the ideals of righteousness like a mighty stream."[6] Third, topical sermons enhance the historical document of the American Jewish experience by adding to an already rich and extensive literary tradition within Judaism.

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[3] Kahn, Robert. May the Words of My Mouth. xii
[4] Ibid, xii
[5] Saperstein, 3
[6] Kahn, xx

Saperstein comments that while sermons are literary compositions, they are, ironically, not great pieces of literature.[7] Topical sermons, particularly in the case of those in this thesis, were meant to be easily digestible and their messages, easily communicable. This adds to their historical value. Reading topical sermons is like stepping into a conversation, not a philosophical lecture. These sermons ". . .do not reveal a particularly elevated writing style, or a natural facility for witty formulations or memorable phrases."[8] Their purpose was not necessarily to impress upon the congregation the verbal and literary prowess of the preacher, but rather to convey a message of moral guidance or, in the case of the sermons in this thesis, a consoling response to communal calamities.

This genre, one that is and has been crucial to Judaism, provides something much more important than high level vocabulary or perfect sentence structure. "But for all its inadequacy, the sermon is the only vehicle for the Word made alive, aimed at the heart and mind."[9] Topical sermons record how rabbis "roused drooping spirits," served as 'clarion calls to conscience,' and perhaps most importantly, 'breathed the sacred into the lives of men and women.'[10] Without these valuable pieces of imperfect literature, the historical record of the Jewish people would be missing a highly informative component.

Beyond guidance and comfort, topical sermons constitute a record of what rabbis advocated from the pulpit. This was not always the case; preaching opinion or advocating for one position or another is a relatively new development in Reform Jewish preaching.

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[7] Saperstein, 4
[8] Ibid, 4
[9] Cohon, Beryl D. From Generation to Generation. 11-12
[10] Ibid, 12

"American Jewish preachers virtually never spoke about secular events."[11] For some time in America, Jewish preachers followed the model of Protestant preachers who did not discuss politics or challenge civil authority from the pulpit.[12] However, in the twentieth century, Reform rabbis began to bring the outside world into their congregations. In this thesis, rabbi's opinions about topics spanning from the American government to the condition of peace in the world are revealed. By including these sermons in the historical record of the Jewish people, a more complete picture of the Jewish community at specific moments in time emerges.

While timeless sermons offer universal messages that could apply to many situations or many kinds of people, topical sermons concentrate on the issue at hand. The sermons in this thesis deal with several crises that challenged America. throughout the twentieth century. They testify to a specific type of religious response. Even more so, they shed light on how Reform rabbis carried out the Reform movement's commitment to social justice. While timeless sermons might express a Reform rabbi's pacifist ideals and a general disbelief in the utility of war, a topical sermon expresses a rabbi's views about a particular war as well as specific issues of public concern. These particularities and specifics enhance our understanding of the Reform rabbinate's attitudes, opinions and responses to a crisis affecting the nation as a whole. Such facts are not found in newspapers. Information like this is difficult to record in statistics and charts. Information like this is best found in topical sermons, when ". . .the outside world imposes its

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[11] Friedenberg, Robert V. Hear O Israel *The History of American Jewish Preaching, 1654-1970*. (pg.6)
[12] Friedenberg, Robert V. Hear O Israel *The History of American Jewish Preaching 1654-1970*. Here, Friedenberg explains that most preachers did not involve themselves in civil matters. He mentions that in Europe, Protestant preachers (18th/19th century) remained quiet about political issues. Then, with the advent of the occasional sermon called for by the civil authorities, Jews and Protestants alike began preaching about current events and issues from the pulpit.

presence into the serenity of the synagogue service and demands to be addressed."[13] The sermons analyzed in this thesis illustrate this very process in action.

Rabbis were not always afforded the opportunity to speak out in accordance with their conscience and their tradition. At times, they were forced to cloak their message. For instance, during the Nazi era, rabbis used the holiday of Hannukah to speak out against Hitler. Antiochus Epiphanes' name was used in the place of Hitler's, and the story of Hanukkah provided rabbis with a useful analogy for drawing comparisons to Hitler. Similarly, during Purim, Haman's name was used as an analogy for the tyrant of the day. These sermons, though often written in code, used the historical record of the Jewish people to demonstrate the Jewish people's legacy of resistance, desire for justice, and commitment to speaking the truth from the pulpit. In all of these ways, the topical sermon adds a new dimension to the understanding of rabbi's sermonic creativity and determination to communicate important messages to their congregations.

While the sermons mentioned above might have been written in the 15th century (perhaps speaking about King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella) or in the 20th century (speaking out against Hitler or Stalin), the basic building blocks of sermon writing have remained much the same. Many sermons are built upon the four part foundation of *pardes; perush, remez, darash,* and *sod.* The *perush* is the simple, plain, straightforward meaning of the text. Nothing is hidden and the text is not probed for a deeper meaning. *Remez* is a tactic used by rabbis when they dive into the text and look for a deeper, more allegorical meaning. This is meaning that the text might possess, but on a secondary level. It is *hinted at* by the text, but the allegory must be found by the preacher. The third building block is *darash*, or interpretation. Many rabbis use this method in order to glean

[13] Saperstein, 16

a certain lesson from the text or to make the text speak the message they desire. And finally, *sod* is the hidden meaning of the text. It is these four building blocks that help rabbis create allegories not readily found in the text in order to send a particular message to their listeners.

Throughout the centuries, these four elements have served rabbis well as the foundation for their sermons. Concerning the sermons in this thesis, these building blocks helped rabbis navigate moments in time when it was evident that am event of historical significance was taking place. At the outbreak of WWII, one rabbi told his congregation, "We live in a moment of historic significance when the fate of our people, nay the fate of the entire world is in the balance."[14] When the world hung in the balance, Jews turned to the familiar faces and voices of their rabbis. "American Jews [are] members of synagogues and have much more direct and sustained contact with their rabbis then they did with any of the figures who were better known."[15] The same people who made meaning from four simple building blocks also provided information, comfort, and guidance.

The study of sermons is not new to the Jewish people. According to Israel Bettan, author of Studies in Jewish Preaching, a study of sermons has been a part of the curriculum of the Jews for centuries.[16] When Jews study the book of Deuteronomy, the sermon of Moses, they engage in this process. To read the *midrashim* that compliment the five books of the Torah is to step back in time thousands of years and hear the sermons of ancient rabbis preaching in ancient synagogues. The collections of those *midrashim* are

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[14] This is excerpted from Marc Saperstein's website called "Torah From Terror: The Rabbinic Response to September 11, 2001", 1. www.torahfromterror.com
[15] Ibid, 5
[16] Bettan, Israel. Studies in Jewish Preaching. (pg. vii)

still studied today and the sermons of contemporary rabbi's must be added to their ranks. Bettan argued that sermons constitute an important branch of Jewish literature and the homilies of ancient preachers as well as rabbis of today "give recreation, inspiration, and sustaining comfort" to the Jewish people.[17]

In the 19th century, Isaac Mayer Wise insisted that American Jews could no longer rely on European trained rabbis to lead their American congregations. So, in 1875 Wise opened Hebrew Union College. The College was a theological school that sought to train American rabbis to lead American born Jews. In order to lead effectively, however, Wise felt that his graduates were in need of homiletical training. The seminary, he decided, would provide that training in the context of its curriculum. Preaching a sermon in the vernacular was already a staple in Reform Jewish services in Germany by the 1820's, and Wise felt that sermons should play an equally important role in American synagogues.[18] Wise, who authored a prayer book entitled Minhag America, was emphatic that the Jewish people in America *be Americans.* His seminary, his prayer book, and his graduate's sermons, Wise felt, needed to be *American*: delivered in good English, based on a biblical text, well prepared and decorous.[19] He stressed three main points when writing a sermon: have something to say, believe in what you say, and say it clearly and without fear.[20]

These three points, are akin to the foundations upon which American freedom and liberty were built. American culture embraced the notion that people openly express their

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[17] Ibid, vii
[18] Friedenberg, Robert V. Hear O Israel 23. Interestingly, Wise did not wish for American synagogues to be lead by German Reform rabbis in the German language with German Reform prayer books, but he did not mind importing other elements, like the sermon in the vernacular.
[19] ibid. (pg. 71, 74)
[20] ibid. (pg. 100)

opinion, something that was often suppressed in other countries. In America, this was celebrated. And the third point, to 'say it clearly and without fear', is a unique gift given by the architects of the Bill of Rights to the citizens of the United States, regardless of religion. George Washington, in response to the various Jewish congregations who sent him congratulatory wishes to him upon his election, wrote that "the liberal sentiment towards each other which marks every political and religious denomination of men in this country stands unrivalled in the history of nations."[21] In 1798, Rabbi Gershom Mendez Seixas spoke on behalf of the members of the Jewish community in America when he described them as being "established in this country where we possess every advantage that other citizens of these states enjoy."[22] Wise empowered his students to speak their mind and their tradition, and in turn, strengthened these ideals and opportunities upon which America was built. By encouraging his students to sermonize boldly, Wise helped bolster the fulfillment of those ideals.

In fact, in the 1850's, Isaac Mayer Wise called for ". . .Jewish participation in literature. . . ."[23] At that time, novelists and journalists alike were writing *about* Jews, without being Jews themselves. Much of the time, non Jewish writers described the Jewish people in America simply as "the Jews." They lacked individuality.[24] Worse yet, in the 19th century, the Jewish people were targets of two forces that tended to darken their persona to non-Jews. The first force was a general sense of nativism that existed at the time and continued well into the 20th century. Nativism mixed with a general lack of knowledge about Jewish people and their customs, led to a stereotyped Jewish character.

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[21] Harap, Lewis. *The Image of the Jew in American Literature From Early Republic to Mass Immigration*. 20
[22] Ibid, 21
[23] Ibid, 453
[24] Ibid, 483

While some non-Jewish journalists and novelists began venturing into the East Side of New York, affectionately called 'Jewtown,' their writings still reflected an outsider's jaded perspective.[25] The Jewish people were without a literary voice of their own.

Stemming from the this problem as well as a lack of an answer to Wise's call of 1850 for a native Jewish literature, Dr. David Philipson made the same call in 1888. In a lecture delivered before the Literary Society in Philadelphia he argued,

> A native Jewish literature is a crying need in this country. . .It is high time we native born American Jews should contribute our proper portion to the literature of our race. It is time we should cease trading the literary capital which our brethren, born in other lands, provided for us.[26]

Philipson was not tossing away the glorious traditions of the *midrashim* and other century's old forms of Jewish literature. He was not denying that foreign born Jews contributed to Jewish literature. He was calling for a new, distinct, and unique form of literature that was *American*. While fiction writing falls into this category, sermonic writing does as well.

Rabbinic sermons are a form of Jewish literature intended primarily for a Jewish audience, by a Jewish preacher. The American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio recognizes the importance of this literary medium and has collected thousands of sermons written by hundreds of rabbis. Unfortunately, many of the sermons preached in the 19th century were not preserved and thus the collection at the AJA mainly consists of sermon from the 20th and 21st centuries. However, the point remains that these documents are crucial to the record of the *American* people as a whole as well as the *American Jewish*

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[25] Ibid, 441
[26] Ibid, 447

community. They provide an insider's view into a community that was misunderstood by the outside world, if not largely ignored, for centuries after its presence in America.

Connected to this issue and central to this thesis, is the notion that studying this treasury of literature is indispensable to a proper understanding of American history as well as American Jewish history. The reason for the former is because the Jewish people have been a part of the American Jewish experience since 1654. The reason for the latter is similar. The two are integrally bound together and the sermon is proof of that. This thesis demonstrates that in three different instances in the 20th and 21st century, when America was attacked, the Jewish community felt equally insulted. Jews, since the birth of America and her freedoms, have seen themselves as Americans. By studying the sermons of those Jewish Americans, we gain greater insight into their perspective.

In this thesis, specific moments in time are captured and explored. These moments in time provide us with a snapshot of the concerns, the convictions, and often the emotional upheaval that ensued following a national tragedy. By using these topical sermons as case studies, we hope to contribute to a greater understanding of how the they enhance our efforts to reconstruct the past.

Chapter One: First and Foremost An American; the American Jewish Sermon In the Era of the Great Wars

Often, after viewing a theater production, painting, or concert, the question is asked: is that art imitating life, or life imitating art? The core of the question is whether or not the content of the work of art directly reflects events, or whether the work of art contains some truth about the lives of individuals that is only revealed when expressed in a creative way. These questions can likewise be applied to the art of the sermon. An appropriate method of illustrating this application is by investigating rabbinic sermons delivered at times of national crisis. These sermons exemplify the power of a sermon to ". . . .educate, challenge, uplift, and inspire."[1] They not only reflect the issues of the day, but they carry modern readers back in time and "recreate the mood of Jews gathering for worship. . .when so much of the world around them seemed to be collapsing."[2] Rabbis used the sermon as a tool to fulfill their roles as leaders, shepherds, and spiritual healers.

The sermons examined in this chapter seem to have been imitating (or reflecting) life. During the era of WWI, WWII, and even the interwar period (approximately 1919-1945) rabbis were preaching on real issues directly affecting the future of the United States and the lives of their congregants. American entry into the world wars added one more challenge to the already challenging lives of American Jews. Though Jews were beginning to participate actively in local, state, and national government, as well as make their presence known on university campuses, they were still considered by some as 'unmeltables.'[3] Jews were already responding to the pressures of assimilation and the specter of anti-Semitism via the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish

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[1] Saperstein, Marc. *Witness from the Pulpit*. 17
[2] Saperstein, 17
[3] Sorin, Gerald. *Tradition Transformed*. 186

Congress.[4] Rabbis realized that they too must respond to the arising issues associated with the war. They did so through the words of their sermons.

The sermons sampled in this chapter fall into three main thematic areas. The first of those themes is that of individual responsibility and action during war. In other words, rabbis were addressing the need they perceived among their congregants: the need to *do something* themselves, to personally aid in the war effort. This theme also illustrates the high degree of knowledge and passion with which rabbis examined in this study approached the subject of war. The second theme is pacifism. At the time of both world conflicts pacifist movements were strong and gaining adherents. The rabbis in this study, perhaps surprisingly, spoke out against pacifism and the pacifist movement which the rabbis said was inherently incongruous with Judaism. The third and final theme is that of theology: where was God in times of world conflict? At a time of global turmoil, rabbis responded to the crisis of faith they perceived at home.

The sermons investigated in this chapter span not only these years but also these themes. They employ the words of presidents and the language of politicians. Rabbis draw upon the comfort of Jewish tradition while using its literary strength to empower their congregants to action. They display a high awareness of current events and the pressing issues directly affecting the lives of Americans, the Jewish community in America, and the global community at large. The sermons delivered at these times of great national and global conflict exemplify how the art of sermonizing can reflect the events of real life. They answer the question of "What were Jews in their congregations hearing?"[5] These sermons also serve as historical records for aspects of history that are

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[4] Sorin, Gerald. *A Time For Building. The Third Migration, 1880-1920*. 211-212
[5] Saperstein, 3

not usually recorded in terms of numbers and statistics. For instance, they relay information about the mood of the congregation and the rabbi; what rabbis chose to advocate and what they chose to warn against. Sermons delivered at times of global crisis "portray the hopes and fears, the triumphs and failures, of a rabbi and a [suburban] congregation from the Reform movement. . ."[6]

The individual's role in the war was a recurrent theme. On September 16, 1917 Rabbi Eugene Mannheimer delivered a sermon entitled "War and Peace."[7]By this time, America had been embroiled in WWI for about 5 months. For nearly three years prior to its entry into the war, America had succeeded in maintaining its neutrality. In fact, in 1916, Woodrow Wilson was re-elected on the campaign slogan, "He kept us out of war."[8]In a speech delivered on January 22, 1917, only three months before calling a special session of Congress to declare war on Germany, Wilson still spoke of peace. "Wilson firmly believed that the United States had a special calling to lead the world into a new age of peace and democracy."[9] In this speech, he spoke of a stable peace, a balance of powers, and a world united under a common purpose, that being peace. "Perhaps I am the only person in high authority among all the peoples of the world who is at liberty to speak and hold nothing back. . .and I feel confident that I have said what the people of the United States would wish me to say."[10]Wilson truly believed that Americans supported the peace that he spoke of. Once he declared war, he needed to reassure the American people that war was the best avenue to a long and sustained peace. Rabbis sensed this

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[6] Saperstein, 3
[7] Rabbi Eugene Mannheimer (1880-1952). This sermon can be found at the AJA in Cincinnati. Born Rochester, NY 11-3-1880, died 1952. University of Cincinnati, post-grad Chicago, Columbia. Rabbi in Sioux City. See UJE, AJYB, WWIAJ, BEOAJ.
[8] Kent, Zachary. *World War I "The War to End Wars"*. 45
[9] Lyons, Michael J. *World War II A Short History*. 14
[10] *The Annals Of America*. The Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. Vol. 14, 69

need for reassurance as well. Through their sermons, they aimed at accomplishing a renewed sense of faith in the president and his chosen course of action.

Rabbi Mannheimer perceived that his congregants' confidence was shaken. Not more than five lines into his sermon, he intoned the words of President Wilson who called for all Americans, regardless of racial differentiation, to disregard race and to now think only in terms of "American." He said that each and every person must view themselves first and foremost as Americans ". . .dedicated to his country's cause, consecrated to the task of making the world safe for democracy."[11]The rabbi's rhetoric is reminiscent of the words spoken by President Wilson on April 2, 1917 when he delivered his war message to congress. Wilson spoke of happily accepting the challenge, being glad to fight, and working towards the ultimate peace of the world.[12]Rabbi Mannheimer continued to echo these words and sentiments when he told his congregation "Ours is not to emphasize the immediate alone. . .but for the ending of all war."

Truly, the ending of all war was indeed Wilson's highest goal.[13] His method of achieving this goal, beyond the obvious objective of winning the war, was creating the institution of the League of Nations. It seems as though Rabbi Mannheimer anticipated Wilson's plan nearly four months before the president announced his "Fourteen Points" in January, 1918. Mannheimer reminded his congregants that the conflict must be fought not only "To the bitter end, until the danger has passed. But for a world federation." The rabbi also spoke of a world where ". . .we are all part of the same people." He exhorted his listeners to work for a world where the ". . .longing of the human heart for world

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[11] Sermon can be found in the AJA MSS collection 162, 9/5.
[12] Kent, 47
[13] For more information on Wilson's pursuit of peace and his push for neutrality during WWI, refer to Patrick Delvin's book *Too Proud To Fight*, Oxford Press, 1975.

peace" outweighed human being's capabilities for destruction. For both Wilson and Mannheimer, the path to such a peace lay in the unification of all peoples under the banner of peace and embedded in a league of nations. Mannheimer agreed with Wilson's plan. He was advising his congregants through the vehicle of his sermon to do the same.

But what was the average citizen, the average congregant to do? In 1917, Mannheimer endorsed the president's policies and urged his people to do what was necessary to show devotion to the cause. In his war declaration, Wilson admitted "There are, it may be, many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us."[14]Mannheimer similarly urged his congregants that by "consecrating and dedicating" themselves to the cause of peace in wartime, much could be learned about peace and applied to life in peacetime. "Our country needs just such devotion, such willingness to sacrifice" he said, ". . .to devote ourselves to a purpose in life which is worth the ambition the heart the and soul of every man and woman to whom the appeal to life is to live to the uttermost bound of human possibility."[15]

Mannheimer's sermon on WWI illustrates his high degree of knowledge about current events. He also demonstrated to his congregants that the right course of action was to support President Wilson in his efforts to win the war. This was not easy in a Jewish world where many people were of German descent. Especially in cities like Cincinnati where there was a considerable German-Jewish population, ". . .there was [an] emotional attachment to German culture and indirectly to German herself."[16] Mannheimer, like other rabbis, had to ". . .reckon with the German sympathies. . ." of

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[14] Whitney, David C. *The American Presidents*. 250
[15] An excerpt from Mannheimer's sermon.
[16] Dobbert, G.A. "The Ordeal of Gotthard Deutsch", American Jewish Archives. VOL. XX, NO. 2, Nov. 1968, 137

many of his congregants.[17] At the same time, he was clearly concerned that his congregants be perceived as patriotic Americans who stood behind their president. His words also reveal that he wished for his congregation to be part and parcel of the war effort and leaders in the formation of a unified America. He referred to all people as brothers and felt that every person belonged to the "human family." It was by this human family working together as one that an era of peace could begin.

After WWI, a League of Nations was created, but America did not join. Wilson, a Democrat, could not get the Republican majority in the Senate to satisfy his treaty plan for a world council of nations.[18] America's entry into the war did secure an allied victory, and the war to end all wars was over. While Wilson envisioned an era of peace as the ultimate outcome of the war, his vision was not realized. Though the states newly created in Central and Eastern Europe were given democratic constitutions (even Germany), the 1930's became the decade of dictatorships and the rise of totalitarianism.[19] For the Jewish people, the rise of Adolf Hitler meant not only the end of the Weimer Republic, a government tolerant of its Jewish population, but also the rise of a regime that would ultimately destroy over six million of its own European Jews. By 1936, Hitler's control over Germany was complete. From the police to the army, from the political party (Nazi) to the German state itself, his power was absolute.[20] Rabbi Baruch Treiger, in reaction to Hitler's new brand of Jew hatred, delivered a sermon sometime in the late 1930's entitled "The Challenge of Anti-Semitism."[21] He opened his sermon by declaring the issue at

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[17] Ibid, 138
[18] Beschloss, Michael, ed. *The Presidents*. 348
[19] Lyons, 29
[20] Lyons,38-46
[21] Rabbi Baruch Treiger. His collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 244 and this sermon can be found in 1/3. Born Demidovka, Volhynia 8-12-1895, died 1954. Came to US in 1914. BA Reed College,

hand, "Anti-Semitism is a new form of Jew hatred." He immediately addressed the fears of so many Jews at the time that from Hitler's perspective no level of Americanization, no amount of education, no measure of effort could eliminate the Jew's inherent inferiority and blot of Jewishness.

Treiger was dealing with the reality that with the rise of Hitler had come the rise of a new and even more dangerous form of anti-Semitism. After WWI, Germany was economically and psychologically depressed. "Germans in general reacted to the treaty [of Versailles] with hostility."[22] They felt degraded by the reparations they were forced to pay to the victors, their military and naval forces had been stripped down to the point of inferiority, and their territory was also pared down to the level of disgrace.[23] The people of Germany were vulnerable and were looking for relief. They found their relief in the violently anti-Semitic, hypochondriac, Austrian, Adolf Hitler.

Hitler believed that only Germanic peoples possessed Aryan blood. He subsequently believed that the Aryan race was superior, and thus the only race worthy of taking part in the new Germany that he planned on creating. Hitler's vision for the new world that would emerge once freed of Jews and other undesirables was a "New Order."[24] He envisioned a "thousand year Reich" in which Germanic, Aryan peoples would thrive and live out *their* 'chosenness' in glory and triumph. The Jews, on the other hand, were damned. This type of anti-Semitism was racial. It was inescapable. Above all, it was to become the mortal enemy of the Jews of Europe, and their brethren in the United States.

MA, PhD. candidate at Columbia. Ordained from JTS. Rabbi in Portland, Oregon and Tacoma, Washington. Officer of Zionist Organization of America. See WWIAJ, NY Times 11-14-54.

[22] Lyons, 21

[23] Lyons, 21

[24] Lyons, 125

In preaching to his congregation, Rabbi Treiger explicated this new and dangerous type of racial anti-Semitism. He warned his people that Hitler's ideology ". . .takes an entirely different attitude. The Jew is irredeemable it says. There is something wrong, inferior, with his very blood. His origin condemns him to inferiority which is unalterable." No doubt, these words were harsh on the ears of his congregants. They were frightening words because they condemned Jewish people to a second class citizenship and to a status that was less than human. They were also frightening because many Jews still had family living under Hitler's regime.

Treiger was cognizant not only of the anti-Semitism he saw around him, but also of the events unfolding in Europe. He spoke of the real issue every Jew of that day needed to be concerned with: "The anti-Semitism of Germany is the root of the trouble. It is Germany with the tendency to raise everything to a science and a philosophy, that has raised Jew hatred to a system of thought in the modern world, pushing it back to barbarism." Treiger indicted Germany for using patriotism as a smokescreen for what he called "hysterical nationalism." This type of hysteria, he feared, "threatens to explode modern civilization." He did not say that only Europe was in danger, that only those Jews who lived in Poland or Germany were in peril. Rabbi Treiger informed his congregants that this new type of anti-Semitism was happening in America. Though it might take on a different guise, its effects and potential was just as lethal. In order to combat this new anti-Semetism, Treiger advised that every Jew must ". . .begin to exhibit qualities of heroism unseen before."

Rabbi Treiger asserted that it was each and every congregant's responsibility to fight this new nationalism and "accept the challenge of anti-Semitism." He urged his

people not to hide behind apologetics. "In this very need to defend ourselves against anti-Semitism, we have the opportunity of defining a new group life, and nationalism, by insisting upon equality of groups as well as of individuals."[25]

Treiger based his message not only upon the successes of the Jewish community in America, but also its failures. He was reminding them that Jewish hospitals existed not because the Jews were being clannish, but because Jewish doctors were not welcome in mainstream hospitals. He emphasized the fact that somewhere in the process of immigration and Americanization, the ideal of equality had been forgotten and concessions had been made to anti-Semitism. Treiger insisted that similar concessions made in Europe led only one place: the gas chambers.[26] The 'poisonous gas' as Treiger called it was made up of more than just deadly toxins, it was also composed of "greed, arrogance, and sadism."

Rabbi Treiger's sermon focused on anti-Semitism, but it was also, on a fundamental level, about human rights. In Germany Jews were fighting for their right to live in security: physically, financially, and spiritually. In America, the basic rights being fought for- equality in professions, social equality in country clubs, and the like- were hardly on the level of those being abrogated in Europe. He was focused on the particular; what Jews must be concerned with and how Jews must take care of themselves. Rabbi Julian Morgenstern, President of Hebrew Union College during the second world war, had a slightly different take on the situation from Rabbi Treiger.[27] He saw the world not

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[25] Excerpt from Treiger's sermon.

[26] Although this sermon is undated, his mention of gas chambers and poisonous gas indicates that this sermon was delivered between 1943 and 1945 when such information was known. Use of gas chambers was not known (and if it was known it was not discussed) until this time.

[27] Rabbi Julian Morgenstern. MSS Collection 30. This sermon can be found in 15/1. It is undated but clearly written in the war period. Born St. Francisville, IL 3-18-1881, died Macon, GA 12-4-76. University of Cincinnat, HUC, University of Berlin, PhD from University of Heidelberg. President of HUC. Rabbi,

in terms of Jew and gentile, or Aryan and non-aryan. Rather, he viewed humanity as one integral body, ". . .a true unit, with a body, a soul, a conscience, a morality. . . ." So where Treiger saw the Jewish struggle as being apart from the general human struggle for equality, rights, and privileges, Morgenstern saw it as being the struggle of humanity as a whole. He saw the world more in terms of a unity and universalism. This vision is reflective of Reform Judaism's ideology of the mission of Israel at that time. The Jews, according to this ideology, were spread around the world in a providential diaspora. It was God's plan to have Jews in every corner of the globe in order to teach the world the beauty of ethical monotheism and the prophetic ideals of Judaism. In order for the Jews to participate in the world's events, they had to participate as citizens of a greater world bound together by a common good.

Stemming from this view, he felt that in the effort to win rights for some, the rights of all must be sacrificed. To Jewish ears, ears accustomed to hearing rabbis urging their congregants to fight for their rights as Americans and as Jews, this must have seemed contradictory. "Scarcely ever do we think of rights, and especially of individual rights, as something not to be preserved too stubbornly, but rather to be yielded up, to be sacrificed for the preservation of the greater right, for the achievement of the larger good." For Morgenstern, this was the "supreme" sacrifice and in the end was necessary to preserve humanity for it would bring about a victory ". . .which, means life, freedom, progress, happiness. . . ."[28]

Morgenstern knew all too well what happens when the "greater right" does not prevail. News about the killings and the deportations of Jews and other non-Aryan

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biblical scholar, semetic language scholar. Officer CCAR, American Oriental Society. See UJE, EJ, AJYB, WWIAJ, BEOAJ, WWWIA, NY Times 12-7-76.

[28] Excerpt from Morgenstern's sermon.

peoples was pouring in from Europe, and though met by some with disbelief, most met the news with terror.[29] Realizing the imminent danger German Jews were in, Morgenstern coordinated the rescue of many of Germany's greatest Jewish scholars; a project that was called "The Refugee Scholars Project."[30] This project arranged work for the scholars at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and convinced the State Department that they were in fact members of the teaching faculty. Even in the depression, Morgenstern made certain that his conscience overruled the tight budget.[31] Abraham Joshua Heschel was saved by Morgenstern's efforts.[32]

Through the vehicle of the sermon, Morgenstern was attempting to arouse similar passion in his congregants. He was trying to make them realize, as he did, that sometimes people must sacrifice rights in order to preserve rights. "If we all. . .will sacrifice our individual rights and our personal aspirations, if we will sacrifice them eagerly and whole-heartedly. . .then we will build our American team, and then we will win." Morgenstern ". . .was fiercely loyal to this country [America]. He recognized the unique freedoms afforded to Jews in this land, and went out of his way to publicly praise the United States as a kind of 'promised land' or Garden of Eden, the land for which our people had been hoping and praying."[33] Morgenstern was demonstrating the pride he felt

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[29] Lyons, 129

[30] This information is taken from Rabbi David Komerofsky's rabbinic thesis entitled, "Julian Morgenstern: A Personal and Intellectual Biography." (1999, HUC-JIR). Komerofsky is now the Dean of the rabbinical school at the Cincinnati campus.

[31] Komerofsky, 36-37

[32] For more information on the Refugee Scholars Project, see Michael Meyer's article "The Refugee Scholars Project of the Hebrew Union College" in *Judaism Within Modernity Essays on Jewish History and Religion*. Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 2001.

[33] Komerofsky, 62

in America, the need he felt for all his congregants to do what they must to ensure that freedom continued, and to plead with his congregation to unite.[34]

In the 1930's, some rabbis spoke to their congregants about Americanism and the Jewish people's role in the war as Americans. In 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor, America entered WWII. Though Roosevelt had been aiding the British for years at this point, America had not yet entered the because he recognized the desire of the country's isolationism.[35] Some Jews feared that Roosevelt was indifferent to the plight of the Jews because America did not enter the war until they were forced to do so by the Japanese. American rabbis responded to this fear in their sermons. Around the time of America's entry into the war, the tone of rabbi's sermons began to concentrate once again solely on Jewish concerns, rather than universal ones. Though rabbis often mixed the sacred with the secular by speaking of Judaism and democracy, the Jewish holidays as related to the war, and Jewish values during wartime, the thrust of the sermons was always a Jewish one. The Jews were members of the team, they were citizens of America, but they were also fighting for their right to be Jewish *and* American at the same time.

Rabbi Leo Franklin , delivered a sermon on December 14, 1941 entitled "Judaism and the Way of Democracy," delivered, illustrating this point.[36] He insisted that to work for victory in the war as an American was not enough. Though America might have been pushing for the 'melting pot,' "Unless [the Jew] is moved by the conscious pursuit of a religious ideal, the Jew, as a Jew, loses his identity." Just as Einstein and Freud rose to

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[34] Komerofsky, 62
[35] Lyons, 138
[36] Rabbi Leo Franklin delivered this sermon at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, Ontario. It can be found at the AJA in MSS collection 246, 6/3. Born Cambridge City, IN 3-5-1870, died Detroit 8-8-1948. University of Cincinnati, HUC, post-grad University of Michigan. Rabbi and author in Detroit, MI. Founder of Round Table of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews and Jewish Welfare Foundation. Board of HUC. Director of WUPJ. See UJE, EJ, AJYB, WWIAJ, BEOAJ, WWWIA, NY Times 8-9-48.

the greatest heights of intellectual pursuits helped by the motivation of the religious ideals of Judaism, so too would the Jewish people be and democracy itself be saved by similar ideals. Just as Hitler was condemning the Jewish people for being a "people without a land of their own," Franklin was blessing the Jew's dispersion as providential. "Had the Jews not been scattered everywhere, the plight of mankind might have been even more abject then it is in this doleful hour of world history. It was part of the Divine plan that the Jew should become the wandering Jew."[37] While Hitler believed that the Jews' dispersion meant the bastardization of other peoples and the denationalization of the world through interbreeding with Jews, Franklin saw their scattering as a way for Jewish ideals to be spread worldwide. He was attempting to offer his congregants an uplifting message and oppose Hitler's propaganda. He was acknowledging the great danger posed by Hitler and was educating his congregants about the beauty of being Jewish in America and worldwide.

Franklin used familiar imagery to impress his message of a providential diaspora upon his congregants when he called upon them to make certain that the fire of religious idealism ". . .continue to burn with undiminished flame." As synagogues were being desecrated and destroyed throughout Eastern Europe, Franklin insisted that "The perpetual flame must not be quenched upon the altars; the Torah [of the Jew] must continue to be a tree of life whose ways are ways of pleasantness and all paths are peace." While Hitler was on a crusade to convince the world that there was nothing inherently

[37] This too reflects Reform Jewish ideology of the time. In the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, the operative platform at the time, this is conveyed. In principle six, it states that Judaism has a mission to establish a 'reign of truth and righteousness among men'. All of this is to be done in the diaspora for this platform also makes clear that any return to Palestine is not desired or expected. (See Michael Meyer's The Reform Judaism Reader, UAHC Press, 2001)

valuable about the Jew, that his very existence was a 'mistake of history', Franklin was doing just the opposite; he used his pulpit as a weapon against Nazi propaganda.

Rabbi Abraham Feinberg delivered a sermon entitled "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition- The Message of Channukah in a World at War."[38] This message was a specifically Jewish one, like that of Rabbi Franklin. Since America had just entered the war, many people were still weary not only about the role America would play, but the morality of taking up arms at all. After Pearl Harbor and America's declaration of war against Germany, America was once again embroiled in war. This problem, according to Feinberg, has plagued the religious consciousness for a long time. "To praise the Lord and pass the ammunition seems- if not sacrilegious- a rank contradiction in living," he said. However, after posing such an unsolvable problem, Feinberg finds an answer in the history of the Jewish people and the current holiday of Channukah.

"Upon the problem of war and peace- it seems to me- that Judaism comes to grips with the issue in a very realistic way. . .to face the existence of evil- to resist evil with all our hearts, souls, and might." Such resistance, Feinberg asserted, was displayed by the Maccabees thousands of years before the present conflict. In order to preserve the holiness of the Temple and the lives of the Jewish people in 168 B.C., the Maccabees rose against the Romans and their leader, Antiochus Epiphones. Feinberg told his congregants that the battle cry of the Maccabees must be the same battle cry for the war at hand, "Who is ready to battle for God, follow me." In his sermon, Feinberg employed the courage and determination of the Maccabees as an allegory that would instill courage

[38] Rabbi Abraham Feinberg. This sermon is not dated but occurred after Pearl Harbor and during the season of Channukah. His collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 85, 2/9. Born Beaver Falls, PA 8-16-1907, died Youngstown 2-25-46. Rabbi Rockford, IL and Youngstown. Active in CCAR. See AJYB, WWIAJ.

in his congregants. He told them that the lesson of Channukah, more than the miracle of the eight lights for eight nights, was that each individual person *does* have the power to resist evil and ". . .dedicate [him/herself] to the service of God and humanity."

Rabbi Feinberg's sermon provides a bridge between the first and second themes examined within the sermons of this chapter. The first theme of the role of the individual at a time of war is addressed when Rabbi Feinberg outlines the spiritual courage and resistance required of every person in order to win the war. The second theme that of pacifism, is also addressed. Feinberg specifically says in his sermon that "We [Jews] gave the world the idea of peace- but we reject pacifism." Current movements of pacifism within America were prompting him to address this issue of not taking up arms against an aggressor. The same had been true in world war one.

Pacifism, though it has meant different things to different people at different times in world history, is at its most basic level a principled rejection of war or violence. It is an ideology that bases itself on a notion of personal morality.[39] Whether it manifests itself in conscientious objection to the draft or absolute pacifism to the point of not even condoning self defense, pacifism as a moral stance always poses a challenge to public opinion in wartime. During WWI, pacifists met at peace conferences at The Hague (April, 1915)[40], the Women's Peace Party was established, as well as the National Peace Federation.[41] While were always a minority of the American population, they made their views known through peace parades, anti-war campaigns, and by resisting any increase in military preparedness that might bring the United States into the war.[42]

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[39] Moorehead, Caroline. *Troublesome People*. xiii, xv
[40] Moorehead, 25
[41] Ibid.
[42] Chatfield, Charles. *The American Peace Movement*. 31-32

Many of the rabbis examined in this study were clearly aware of the pacifist movement and the power of its arguments against war. This led many to speak out against pacifism in their congregations. They felt the need to explain that while Jews prized peace, they did not do so at the price of democracy, equality, and freedom. Sometime after Wilson's 1918 delivery of the '14 Points', Rabbi Israel Bettan delivered a sermon entitled "A Peace Platform for Jewry."[43] His first sentence declared "Peace is a Jewish ideal; war is a world problem." He referred to the Jews as the "scattered members of the house of Israel," and described them as the "staunchest devotees" of peace. However, he quickly clarified that "pacifism, peace at any price, has never been a Jewish principle. It has never been a Jewish practice. It can never become a Jewish policy." He even went as far as to say that advocating pacifism in the name of Judaism is to commit a "pious fraud".

Bettan was trying to accomplish two objectives at once. First, he was using his sermon to prove to his congregants that Jews were not warmongers, but having said that, Jews did not believe in "sitting idly by and awaiting the end of days." He told his congregation that to dispense with America's aid to the countries engaged in the actual warfare would be "disloyal" and the "good will" shared by the United States and the Allies "would hardly hope to continue." The United States, he was trying to convey, as well as the Jewish people, had a legitimate place in the current war and should march steadily on the course it had chosen to pursue, i.e. that of engaging in the war.

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[43] Rabbi Israel Bettan. His collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 618, this sermon is in 1/43. Born Kovno 1-16-1889, died Cincinnati 1907. Came to US 1907. University of Cincinnati, ordained, DD HUC. Rabbi, scholar in Charlestown, West Virginia and Cincinnati. Faculty of HUC. Active in CCAR. Author and Chaplain. See UJE, Ej, AJYB, WWIAJ, BEOAJ, NY Times 8-6-57.

A second objective that Bettan was trying to accomplish was that of convincing his congregants of the importance of Wilson's League of Nations America's participation in it. "The League of Nations is our only light of hope in this world of darkness and disorder." Like his colleague Eugene Mannheimer, Rabbi Bettan was not only showing his support for Wilson's League of Nations, but also trying to buttress support for its creation within his congregation. He continued, "If peace is dear to out hearts, let us center our attention on the labors and achievements of the League." The foundation of Bettan's peace platform was the President's League of Nations. He was advocating that his congregants adopt this platform for their own benefit as well as for the welfare of their country.

At this time, the impression given by the sermons and letters from the period suggests that choosing war over peace was more than simply an intellectual choice; it was an emotional one as well. In 1933, intellectual giants like Freud and Einstein corresponded, discussing the issue of pacifism.[44] Both men declared themselves to be pacifists and both wondered, "How long have we to wait before the rest of men turn pacifist?" It was not merely their intellectual understanding of war and peace that brought them to such a decision. At their very cores, they simply could not accept the barbaric realities of war. As Freud wrote to Einstein, "With pacifists like us it is not merely an intellectual and affective repulsion [against war], but a constitutional intolerance, an idiosyncrasy in it most drastic form."[45]

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[44] Mayer, Peter. *The Pacifist Conscience.* 236-248
[45] Ibid, 248

Rabbi Julian Morgenstern, in a sermon entitled "What Price Pacifism?" delivered sometime between the two world wars, also declared his love for peace.[46] ". . .I too am a pacifist at heart, a true and ardent pacifist I think and like to believe." However, Morgenstern preached that with the outbreak of a world war it was the duty of all clergy to follow the soldiers into the battlefields to support their spiritual needs. "As I conceive it, the task of clergy or church or organized religion was not at all to desert the nation at the moment of crisis and refuse to answer its call when once it has entered upon the war. . . ." He could not accept that clergy could hold onto their pacifist ideals while men and women died in war. That would be sacrilege. Pacifist clergy would be akin to sending the soldiers to war without any emotional or spiritual support. He was appealing to his congregants not to adhere to such a pacifist program. Denying the reality of war was not, Rabbi Morgenstern believed, any way to help end war. At the same time, he was appealing to his president, FDR, to lead America, Jews, and clergy into the battle for freedom and peace. Neutrality was not an option, nor was pacifism.

In another undated sermon delivered by Morgenstern sometime in the late-1930's, he went as far as to preach specifically about why the ". . .Central Conference of American Rabbis can not make pacifism a Jewish doctrine." The sermon was entitled "Why I opposed the Conference Resolution on Pacifism."[47] He spoke out against the 1935 resolution committing American rabbis to "radical pacifism": opposition to all war and violence according to the membership guidelines of the conference. Luckily, he reported, the resolution never materialized. Morgenstern went on to declare his own love

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[46] Rabbi Julian Morgenstern's collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 30, this sermon in 15/1. This sermon is not dated.
[47] MSS collection 30, 15/1.

of peace. "I suppose it is almost supererogatory for me to say that I am not opposed to peace. On the contrary I am yearning for peace and abhor war. . . ." However, ". . .pacifism is certainly not Jewish." Despite the self professed longings of his own heart and the ". . .eternal heartfelt yearning for peace [Judaism] has never taught nor advocated in any way non-resistance to evil and aggression and oppression." Pacifism at the most, he insisted, could be a social principle for Jews, but never religiously sanctioned.

What Morgenstern *did* advocate was a pacifist way of life. Not merely in wartime should people love peace, but in peacetime too. "It is very easy to be vocal pacifists in times of peace." In the sermon "What Price Pacifism," he elaborated on this message by saying that living pacifism must be the ideal for all individuals in the world at all times. The pacifist movements he saw around him preached peace without giving credence to the realities of hostilities that were resurfacing in the 1930's. Pacifists accomplished nothing but martyrdom, he said, when they denied that war is a part of the modern world. Rather than turning a blind eye to the reality of war, Morgenstern preached that peace was an ideal that should be lived out at all times; "Pacifism must be a way of life. . .[it] must be lived as well as, and even more than, preached." Such a statement in such a sermon, however, needed some clarification.

It seems ironic (or perhaps confusing) that in a sermon preaching *against* pacifism, Morgenstern could advocate pacifism in the same breath. However, the kind of pacifism he advocated was not an absolute one, not a radical one, but one that promotes ". . .selflessness, devotion, well being and happiness." Morgenstern advocated supporting the government's policies during times of war through words and deed. Simultaneously, he called for the realization that though war might exist, and though it might interrupt

times of peace, the objective must always remain clear: the creation of a longstanding era of peace. Morgenstern urged his people to preach peace and live according to Hillel's words, "Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving all men and bringing them near to the law." Hillel did not add the caveat "but not in times of war" or "only in times of peace." Loving peace and pursuing it could be a goal during war, while still supporting the struggle of the day and accomplishing the task at hand.

Rabbinic sermons that focused on pacifism as an ideology were not only reactions to pacifist trends in the greater society and within the rabbinate. These sermons also functioned as a response to the policy of appeasement adopted by some Allied powers. Britain, for instance, had been appeasing Germany since the 1920's and in the 1930's, Neville Chamberlain was still maintaining that stance.[48] These countries (and others still recovering from WWI on the European continent) were simply not ready emotionally or militarily to enter another conflict.[49] Some of the rabbis in this study spoke against pacifism because it served to encourage a "peace at any cost" stance. They viewed it as a dangerous policy that would only allowe the menacing Axis powers the opportunity to march across Europe and spread totalitarianism.[50]

In late 1941 or early 1942, Rabbi Abraham Feinberg delivered a sermon entitled "War Bond Drive."[51] Rabbi Feinberg was clear in his support for America's declaration of war on Germany. "The struggle between two worlds can permit no compromise. Either we or they! Either their ideas or ours! Either our state or theirs!" Feinberg was also clear

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[48] Lyons, 61
[49] Miller, Donald L. *The Story of World War Two*. 22
[50] Miller speaks of the widespread knowledge about the intentions of the Axis powers and the greater risk of appeasement over the risk of war. 22-23
[51] Rabbi Abraham Feinberg. This sermon is undated, but speaks of Pearl Harbor as being in the very recent past. His collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 85 and this sermon in 4/9.

about what he thought the outcome would be: "It is going to be our world, our ideas, and our state!" For this rabbi, the conflict was viewed in black and white terms. There was no room for any gray area. He did not agree with a policy of "sleek neutrality." He was also strictly opposed to any policy of appeasement. "Appeasement was tried and failed. Yes, appeasement has been tried and failed. He was calling for America not to become a belligerent, but rather, for America to take her rightful place at the head of the Allied powers. America had to be the nation ". . .which is fighting to defend its liberty [and] fighting for the liberty of the world." The time for appeasement was over, according to Feinberg. The time had come to fight.

Whether preaching participation or peace, the rabbinic sermons examined in this study that were delivered during this era of war were anchored on two foundational elements: the social and political visions of national leaders, and the ideals and values of Judaism. When war occurs and young people are sent to battle to die, its natural that people begin to ask the question, "where is God?" In sermons examined here it is clear that rabbis were forced to deal with the difficult issue of theodicy. Theodicy, is "a defense of the justice or goodness of God in the face of doubts or objections arising from the phenomena of evil in the world."[52] In Judaism, the paradigmatic example of theodicy is the story of Job. Job experienced suffering, and his friends attempt to comfort him and explain why he suffers.[53] In the era of the great wars, rabbis attempted to comfort their congregants and explain that even in the face of evil, God and God's goodness still exist.

The main problem facing rabbis of the day was how to deal with the reality of suffering as juxtaposed with the two main beliefs: that God is absolutely good, and that

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[52] Audi, Robert, ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy.* 794
[53] Frank, Daniel H., Leaman, Oliver and Charles H. Manekin, eds. *The Jewish Philosophy Reader*. 66

God controls all that occurs in the world.[54] Many rabbis avoided the problem of theodicy altogether by placing the responsibility for the present day's conflict solely in the hands of man, not in the lap of God. Though this limits God's omnipotence, it also relieves God of any culpability for evil and the need for clergy to explain God's allowance for evil to exist.[55] God remains completely good. This question was especially poignant for Jews as the news of the Holocaust atrocities became known. How could God be good and Auschwitz exist simultaneously?[56]

While the two themes already explored in this chapter mainly deal with government policy, national goals, and world dilemmas, this final theme is far more personal. It deals with the individual's struggle to make sense of intangible issues like God, justice, and evil. From sermons, it is clear that rabbis perceived a need in their congregants: to reconcile the terrible catastrophe of world wide war with the belief in God who safeguards human existence. The sermons examined in this study reassure listeners that even during war, justice would ultimately prevail, and that evil would not overpower good. "To say that these were turbulent times seems almost trite. . . .These were not trivial events that could easily be ignored."[57] These sermons are testimony to the fact that their rabbis did *not* ignore the needs of their congregants during turbulent and deeply distressing times in history.

Between the periods of WWI and WWII, Rabbi Wolf Macht delivered a sermon entitled "Why is God Silent While Evil Rages?"[58] Macht opens his sermon with the

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[54] Eliade, 431
[55] Eliade, Mircea, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 14, 431
[56] Eliade, 430
[57] Saperstein, Marc, ed. *Witness from the Pulpit*. 3
[58] Rabbi Wolf Macht. His collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 404 and this sermon in 2/1. This sermon is not dated. Born Liverpool 9-5-1890, died 1952. University of Cincinnati, ordained HUC. Rabbi and Zionist in Waco, TX. Active in B'nai Brith. See WWIAJ, CCARYB.

ultimate reassurance to those who feel that they are weak for losing their faith in God. He asserts, "No thoughtful person can live through an era like this without asking searching questions about God." Immediately, he addresses the issue of guilt over shaken faith in God. He continues in this fashion when he calls upon the words of the Psalmist who pleaded, "O God, keep not Thou silent."[59] The imagery that ultimately pervades the sermon is that of Rosh Hashanah. On that high holy day, God is spoken of as "the still small voice". Though it is a positive image on that day, it is not taken positively at a time of war. "Why, in a world of turbulent evil," Macht asks, "can God the Almighty do no better than be a still, small, voice?" At the same time that he was attempting to answer that question, he was also trying to validate his congregant's doubts, confusion, and loss of faith- the issue of theodicy. The world seemed to be brimming with evil, and to many, God appeared to be silent.

Macht immediately refutes any notion that God is silent because God does not exist. "No one doubts the existence of God. [That] is the sovereign, basic, original, indubitable fact." However, he asks, if God is sovereign, "why does he not speak up?" Macht comes to the conclusion that God does not have to speak up loud enough for people to hear in order to prove that God is working in the world. He assured his congregants that ". . .these spiritual forces making no noise reach deeper, take hold harder, and last longer than any others." Though God may not make much noise while acting upon history, God does not "sit in heaven and do nothing." God, in reality is the power that can make the earth shake and the mountains tremble.

In fact, Macht asserts, "The least important and least valuable things are the noisiest and thus the most easily perceived and proved." The propaganda of the

[59] Psalm 83.

totalitarian regimes in Europe was noisy. Hitler's Nazi ideology drew large crowds. This was inconsequential according to Macht. "The most important and most valuable things are hardest to be absolutely sure about. . .the destiny of creation is in the hand of forces that make no noise." Macht was saying that even though the powers of evil were making the most noise and gaining the most attention, God, the "still, small, voice" would ultimately prevail. He ends his sermon with these powerful words- a final message to his people; "Be still, and know that I am God."

A similar lack of faith in God was perceived by Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman.[60] On Sunday, March 15, 1942 he delivered a radio address in St. Louis, MO on station KXOK. He titled his sermon "The Task of Religion in this World War." He, like Macht, began by stating the strong conviction that God is neither absent nor inactive during times of crisis. "The first job of religion in these critical days is to keep alive in the mind and soul of man faith in God." Isserman realized that the issue of theodicy was a real one and thus continued by saying that the commandment to love God with "all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might is not suspended in times of war." In essence he was saying that just because evil was occurring, the logical conclusion was *not* that God was allowing it or that God had somehow abrogated His power for the time being. "The same God who created [the world] is still in it." This included God's attributes of mercy, love, and justice. God was not missing or impotent and human beings were no less in need of their faith simply because there was turmoil in the world.

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[60] Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman. His collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 6, this sermon in 16/3. Born Antwerp 3-4-1898, died 3-1972. Came to US in 1906. University of Cincinnati, ordained HUC, MA University of Pennsylvania, post-grad University of Cincinnati, University of Toronto, and Dropsie. Rabbi, author, national and communal fundraiser in St. Louis. President of Jewish Student Federation. Chaplain of Republican National Convention. Board of HUC and UAHC. WW1 service. Active in interfaith and peace work. See EJ, AJYB, WWIAJ, BEOAJ, WWWIA, NY Times 3-10-72.

"One of the strange quirks in human nature" Isserman conceded, "is that men of little faith begin to doubt the reality and the power of God at the very time in their lives when they need a consciousness of God most." This was not a condition that need be permanent though. He emphasized that Judaism and its values and beliefs were "daring heroism." And, by the mandates of Judaism, "the believing Jew proceeded with his first breath to praise God, to acknowledge Him as the Creator, to affirm God as the governor of the universe, who governs in accordance with His righteous will, to hail the justice of God. . .and concludes with the faith in the establishment of His kingdom. . . ." Isserman urged his people to view Judaism as a source of strength and confidence. It was, he said, a bastion of hope and God was Judaism's foundation. Now was not the time to abandon faith and Judaism. To the contrary, it was time to revitalize faith and cling to Judaism.

Isserman also supported his claims of the power of God and religion not only on the basis of Judaism but also on the basis of the current political climate. He relied upon the president's sentiments to accomplish this task. "Our president has very well affirmed the fact that we are fighting for the same ideal for which our forefathers fought, that all men were made in the image of God." This is not the first example of a rabbi using the words of a politician or reporter to stress an important point. Here, the point to be stressed was that every man, stemming from that Divine image, was also given the power to choose. This war was not the doing of God or, conversely, the result of God's ignoring the world. This war was the result of man choosing evil, Isserman said. He was not limiting God's power by saying that God was not omnipotent. Rather, he was conveying to his congregants that the very power to choose was Divine, and that God resided in the

choices made by human beings. "Man has often chosen good. Man too has chosen the evil." In the present conflict, by his own God given choice, humankind chose evil.

Linked to this power to choose evil is the power to heal, also a power given by God who forgives. "If we have faith in the forgiving nature of God, we shall be able to understand what is transpiring in the world today. We shall not say that there is no evil, but we shall not abandon our faith in the capacity of man to abandon that evil and to be forgiven by God." This conflict was not eternal. Man and the world were not damned to destruction. "For God is a God of forgiveness and man still contains within himself the power to turn from his evil ways to choose the good and to live." It is through faith itself, through belief in God, not in doubt, that man can turn from evil and live. Belief in God can not be abandoned if people expect to arise from the war intact and live in a peaceful world. "By faith in him, men can rise, forgiven of their sins, achieve perfection, realize their divinity, be united, and by submitting to God's will fulfill the destiny and mission of humanity."

In Isaiah 57:19, it says, "Peace, peace be to him that is far and to him that is near." Rabbi Ephraim Frisch used this quote as the title for his sermon delivered on Yom Kippur, sometime around 1943 or 1944.[61] He too found it difficult to probe what he called "piles" of "vicious thought and unrighteous conduct" occurring during the war. Ironically, though, on that Yom Kippur day, he wished not to speak of peace between armies and navies, but rather of ". . .an inner peace maintained by individuals towards

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[61] Rabbi Ephraim Frisch. This sermon is not dated but the text leads the reader to believe that America has been in the war for at least two or three years. His collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 187, and this sermon in 2/11. Born Shubocz, Lithuania 10-1-1880, died NYC 12-24-57. Came to US in 1888. University of Cinicinnati, PhD from Columbia. Ordained HUC. Rabbi, author, editor in NYC and San Antonio. President of Jewish Chautauqua Society and The San Antonio Open Forum. Chairman of American Falasha Committee, CCAR, and Rabbis Social Justice Committee. Board of HUC, League of Industrial Democracy. Supporter of ACLU. See UJE, EJ, AJYB, WWIAJ, NY Times 12-26-57.

other persons. It deals with serenity of souls rather than repose of body." Frisch was concerned with the inner turbulence caused by the war. Mainly, he was concerned with how the war affected people's ". . .relation towards the moving yet abiding force of the universe, namely, God." He too was dealing with theodicy, with the ever present question of: where is God in all of this?

Frisch explored the need for love and fellowship between neighbors and the importance of inner peace. His central point was, however, the persistence of God in the lives of man and God's role in the present war. "Eternal is the lord of mercy and love, that does not afflict his children needlessly." Like his colleagues, Frisch believed that God was not punishing humanity with war, and conversely God was not withdrawing Himself from the conflict. Rather, it was within a human being's power to "distill the good out of the seeming evil seeking to discover the wonderful transforming and ennobling effects of suffering and sorrow." What he was suggesting is what Viktor Frankel would later call *logotherapy*, the making of meaning from unspeakable suffering.[62] Frisch adjures his congregants not to browbeat themselves over the causes for the present war, but rather to ". . .bear the trial meaningfully and hopefully, without murmur or defiance." Do not rebel against God or faith, he instructs. Rather, use the trial of war to find meaning in life and certainty in God. War is not a time to question God's existence, power, goodness, or love for human beings. War is a time to question *ourselves* and our own commitment, strength, courage, and love for other human beings. Yom Kippur and the present war brings this message and in the final analysis, "it pleads

[62] Viktor Frankel wrote a book about his experiences in the Holocaust and also about logotherapy. The book is entitled, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

with the individual to exhale a spirit of peace and good will- peace in his own heart, peace towards his fellowmen, and peace towards heaven."

In full agreement with Frisch is Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath.[63] In a sermon entitled "Where on Earth is God?," he asks the question, "But is it not God's fault that His good earth has been thus garnered by the few?" What he meant was that surely God was allowing the present conflict to take place, for the many Nazis to obliterate the few Jews. "To be sure, an all powerful deity might arbitrarily order it otherwise." Like others, he was also dealing with the two pronged issue: if God is good, how can this happen and if God is almighty, why are so many being allowed to perish? Quickly, he refutes the notion that God is arbitrary or absent. "God is here certainly enough," he said, "But because so stubbornly we have all of us refused to hearken to [his] voice, because we have stopped our ears from hearing God's word. . .we have made a hell out of this world of God's. . . ." It is the people who are to blame for the war and its carnage, not God. Here, Eisendrath *is* taking the position of limiting God's responsibility for the war. Philosophers refer to this as "denial of God's omnipotence" in order to remove God from the possibility of being responsible for allowing soldiers to die on the battlefield and Jews to die in the crematoria.[64] In this theory, according to Eisendrath, God is good and God teaches good, but man does not listen and man does not follow. It is by man's own will that the war happened. And the Jews are not innocent.

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[63] Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath. His collection can be found at the AJA MSS collection 143, and this sermon in 3/5. This sermon is undated but from the text, it can be surmised that it was delivered during the period of world war two. Born Chicago 7-10-02, died 11-9-73. University of Cincinnati, ordained HUC. Leading Reform rabbi and religious leader, and author in Toronto and NYC. President of UAHC. Officer of WUPJ. Board of HUC-JIR. See UJE, EJ, AJYB, WWIAJ, WWWIA, NY Times 11-10-73.

[64] The philosophers referred to here are those who authored the sections on theodicy in the The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy and The Encyclopedia of Religion.

Eisendrath believed that although the Jews were the targets of Hitler's wrath and his vehement hatred, they were not relieved of culpability for the world's condition. "Like all other peoples [the Jew] has wallowed in the broken cistern of material greed and political ambition. . .he has, in quivering concern for his own welfare and security, kept cowardly silence in the presence of shameful evil." Jews too, had to take their portion of the blame for the condition of the world. They could not blame God and say that God was "hiding his face" or that God was punishing the Jewish people in particular.[65] "No, I fear that the Jew must also confess [on this solemn day of atonement] that he too has sinned and done perversely if not always by acts of commission, then just as disastrously in the sight of Jewish law, by glaring trespass of omission, by the patent failure to speak the word of God to a world that so desperately required that word, and that word alone." Jews at that time of war were mandated to speak of God's law, God's justice, and God's love. There was simply no room for doubt, silence, or complacency.

Each of the three themes discussed in this chapter can be summed up in the some of the final words of Rabbi Eisendrath's sermon. "But God too is powerless to effect His will without men as His 'shutef elohim' as His co-workers." It was not *only* in the hands of human beings or *only* in the hands of God to end the war and its atrocities. It was a joint effort. "No heavenly harmony of song can He create unless some mortal devises the instrument and composes the score." With Divine guidance, human action could bring about peace.

In the following chapter, the world finds itself once again in turmoil, but turmoil of another kind. It was not a war that was brewing, but rather societal unrest. In America,

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[65] Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi and Geoffrey Wigoder, Eds. The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion. These are some of the views of Jewish theologians who charged themselves with the task of understanding the role of God in the Holocaust. (pp. 331-332)

this unrest manifested itself in tensions with the Soviet Union, in the form of the cold war, and in the struggle to eradicate racial discrimination as a way of life. On November 22, 1963 the nation's young, charismatic leader, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was murdered in an open plaza in the city of Dallas. His traumatic and violent death- a public spectacle- sent shock waves through the country. In the next chapter, the sermonic tributes delivered by rabbis in the aftermath of the assassination reveal not only the attempts of JFK to heal and calm the unrest, but also the love and affection of the Jewish people for the man who ushered in an era called Camelot.

Chapter Two: That Day in Dallas: The American Jewish Sermonic Response To the Assassination of John F. Kennedy

After World War II, new and different social and political issues arose. Communism and the Red Scare congealed in the early 1950's into a "Cold War." The civil rights movement gained momentum and increasing support during the last half of the 1950's. Science was revealing its destructive power in the form of atomic weaponry. All of this in a world that was supposed to have been made safe by the sacrifice of so many innocent lives.

These political and social movements impacted upon the Jewish community. After World War II, American Jewry had become not only the largest and most powerful Jewish community in the world, but also as one of the three great religious groups in America.[1] Some scholars even refer to the post-war era as a 'golden age' for Jews in America.[2] Many factors contributed to this efflorescence. One factor was the birth of the State of Israel in 1948. The baby boom helped fill synagogue nursery schools and sanctuaries. The rapidly expanding suburbs brimmed with single family homes in which new Jewish neighborhoods arose. American Jews, wealthier than ever, gave to charitable causes in record number and treated philanthropy as a 'sacred task'.[3] Many Jews were motivated by the lessons of the Holocaust and the realization that American Jewry might have been able to save more of their brethren in Europe. In effect, American Jewry was not only taking the lead in world Jewry, but it was taking responsibility for it as well.[4]

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[1] Shapiro, Edward. *A Time For Healing American Jewry Since WW2*. 28
[2] Shapiro, 28
[3] Sorin, Gerald. *Tradition Transformed*. 196
[4] Sorin, Gerald. *Tradition Transformed*. 196

This upward economic, social, and geographic mobility continued through the 1950's. While the fabulous fifties were years marked by new comforts and economic expansion, tensions were brewing. The war had left Americans proud of their victory, but all too aware of the threat of nuclear power and its ability to obliterate the entire human race. "The atom has forced us, as individuals and peoples to look into our hearts and souls, to inquire into what life means, in that solitude given us only by vast and unmistakable change, change in the foundations of our beliefs and in the structure of our world".[5]No one could have predicted the changes that would come about in the decade to come, in the psychedelic sixties.

The Soviet Union's almost evangelical devotion to communism created the infamous 'red scare' in America that began in the late 40's, lasted for most of the 1950's and early 1960's. Americans were ". . .frightened by, consumed with, and enveloped within the cold war, which hung like a storm cloud over the nation."[6] Like death and taxes, it was the one ongoing feature in American life at the time; it was a certainty.[7] Beyond the emotional turmoil it caused, the cold war put America on a constant state of alert not just at its borders, but in each and every American's backyard. It was a time when communists and their sympathizers needed to be purged from American soil and the world at large in order to once again, "make the world safe for democracy."[8]

Another current theme that emerged strongly in the 1950's was the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the 50's, King introduced his doctrine of nonviolence. He felt that since white supremacy movement had been based on violence,

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[5] Rorabaugh, W.J. *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties*. 38
[6] Rorabaugh, W.J. *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties*. 23
[7] Ibid, 23.
[8] Ibid, 23

the white man would be "baffled" because ". . .the bigoted white man. . .does not know how to cope with nonviolence."[9] King's aims were to unite blacks, eliminate white fear of black violence, and rebuild society as a whole on the basis of harmonious living. He preached on the power of nonviolence: "Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate; hope ends despair".[10]As Americans were rethinking religion, King was also forcing them to rethink race.

The American people also took a second look at their gas-guzzling cars, their ranch houses, and their poodle skirts and felt guilty. "Life was not supposed to be this fun."[11] The 'great BBQ' of the 50's was turning into the great restlessness of the 60's. "Underneath the unease about materialism lurked darker fears".[12] Even Kennedy himself was concerned with the state of affairs in America. "He shared a belief with most commentators and analysts that America had lost its sense of national purpose, that the material well being of the 1950's has translated into a 'bland, vapid, self satisfied, banal' society lacking the moral resolve to meet domestic and world problems."[13] America needed a leader that would move America forward into the 'new frontier' of the 1960's. JFK would be that leader.

On January 2, 1960 John F. Kennedy announced his candidacy for the Presidency of the United States. "He wanted to become president to ensure " 'a more vital life for our people and freedom for people's everywhere' ". [14] Hw wanted to fulfill the unfulfilled promises made to the Negroes (as they were called) during the early days of the civil

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[9] Ibid, 69.
[10] Ibid, 69
[11] Ibid, 5
[12] Ibid, 5
[13] Dallek, Robert. *An Unfinished Life John F. Kennedy 1917-1963*. (pg. 274)
[14] Ibid, 243

rights movement in the 1950's.[15] Though is youth and vigor enchanted the nation on television debates with the older and more tired Nixon, he needed to overcome Nixon's challenge that he was too inexperienced to lead the country. When Nixon said that "experience counts", Kennedy retorted with the hard fact that both he and Nixon came to Congress in the same year (1946) proving that their experience in government was, as he put it, 'comparable'. [16] Kennedy was determined, as he said in his candidacy speech, to ". . .rebuild the stature of American science and education. . .prevent the collapse of our farm economy and the decay of our cities."[17] He promised to 'rekindle economic growth' and 'give fresh direction to our traditional moral purpose.'[18] He was speaking words that he intuited the American public needed to hear.

The American public voted in this young, vivacious, unafraid leader by just a small margin. "The Presidential results had revealed a clear sectional pattern."[19] Kennedy won the East with ease, but some parts of the Midwest were a tougher victory. He won the South, but lost Florida, Virginia, and Kentucky. The Western states were not Kennedy's stronghold. Even there, though, the margins of victory were thin.[20] Yet, on January 20, 1961, JFK took the oath of office and uttered the famous words forever seared in the memory of all Americans, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."[21]

For most Americans, memories of the first three years of that decade are intertwined with memories of Kennedy. He was a television celebrity, the first among

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[15] Roseboom, Eugene H. *History of Presidential Elections*. 544
[16] Boller, Paul F., Jr. *Presidentail Campaigns*. 297-298
[17] Dallek, 244
[18] Ibid, 244
[19] Roseboom, 562
[20] Ibid, 562
[21] Boller, 301

political personalities, who kept the nation captivated from the moment of his historical inaugural address to that fateful moment on November 22, 1963. In fact, he was the most popular president since polling began in 1930.[22]While some doubted him for his youth (he was 43 years old at the time of his election, the second youngest president elect ever), most of the nation embraced him for his boyish good looks and the hope he held in the future. He and his wife Jackie were adored by the nation, ". . .he with his tousled hair and winning smile, she with her dark eyes and beautiful face."[23] He was truly gifted in lifting people's spirits and encouraging the nation to continue to work for a better world, even when the world around it seemed so turbulent and frightening.

Kennedy's first real political triumph that led him to the oval office was the 1960 Wisconsin primary. There, his winning proved that a primary election could lead to a presidential nomination for ". . .a candidate who had money, who could organize, who led in the polls, and who looked good on television in a new media age."[24] His campaign was grass roots, led by young men and women, and played by its own set of rules.[25]It attracted the highest percentage of adult voters ever, including 68% of black voters. Most importantly for communities like the blacks and the Jewish community, his vote broke all religious lines. While Kennedy's Catholic background hurt him in some places of the country (like the Northeast), he proved that a Catholic, or any other minority for that matter, *could* become president of the United States.[26] Just years before, on September

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[22] Rorabaugh, W.J. *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties*.24
[23] Dallek, 230
[24] Ibid, 14
[25] Ibid,15
[26] Ibid, 18

12, 1960, he had remarked, "I am not a Catholic candidate for president. I am a the Democratic party's candidate for President, who happens to be a Catholic."[27]

The Jewish community rejoiced when Kennedy was elected to the highest position of leadership in America. For the Jews, "the seal was set" on their achievements in the United States when Kennedy was elected.[28] In truth, he could not have been elected without the Jews. At that time, Jews were five times more likely to vote than any other American group. In the Kennedy election, Jews accounted for 5% of the votes cast.[29]In many swing states Jewish votes were composed the margin of victory. This was a tremendous source of pride for Jews. "Jews were proud that they had been so crucial to helping the first Catholic into the presidency and that they had thus helped reshape America".[30] Indeed, Kennedy's election was the beginning of an affectionate bond that linked American Jewry to the Kennedy administration.

Kennedy's administration was a meritocracy. Jews benefited from this way of appointing governmental positions. Among other appointments, Kenney appointed a Jew to the presidential cabinet.[31] Appointments such as this represented the arrival of Jews in America; the children of immigrants were not outsiders, but rather, part and parcel of the American story and American history. It also proved that the Kennedy administration was a meritocracy, and not controlled by favoritism. With a Catholic president, the Jews made their appearance on the national scene.

From this portrait of the sixties and the man who would lead the country through that amazing (and unfortunately short) period of struggle and change, it is not difficult to

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[27] Dallek, 226
[28] Hertzberg, Arthur. *The Jews in America*. 334
[29] Ibid, 334-335
[30] Ibid, 335
[31] Ibid, 336

understand the grief and anguish suffered by Americans and Jews when Kennedy was assassinated. His death symbolized the end of a promising and exciting presidency. For Jews, Kennedy was their prince just as much as FDR was their king. When asked by Massachusett's senator Henry Cabot Lodge if he felt that Jews and Italians had any right to live in the United States, Kennedy answered solidly, "As much right as your father or mine. It was only a difference of a few ships."[32]

When JFK was connected to his father Joseph Kennedy's anti-Semitic comments and alliances early in his political career, he went as far as to say to one Jewish audience before whom he was speaking, "Remember, *I* am running [for the Senate] and not my father."[33] He made certain to speak before many Jewish organizations and by doing so, gained the support of such beloved people as Elenor Roosevelt and former president and hero of the Jews, FDR. In fact, he admired FDR for opening the doors of high political positions to Jews and Catholics. His efforts not only won him the Jewish vote, it also won their admiration and enduring love. Through the evidence of sermons delivered after his death, it is clear that for the Jews, Kennedy was not just a president, he was a brother. Kennedy possessed all of the values held in high esteem by the Jewish community: love of one's neighbor, freedom, and peace. On November 22, 1963, a prince fell not only in the United States, but in Israel.

The sermons investigated in this chapter, like those of the previous chapter, can be divided into three main themes. The first theme is the need for rabbis (politicians as well) to memorialize JFK by helping to complete the projects he began. The second theme is that of memory: reminding people that only a violent society could beget such

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[32] Dallek, 10
[33] Ibid, 175

violence. The assassination, many rabbis conveyed, proved that American society is sick with the disease of violence. The final theme is the usage of biblical and rabbinic lessons to give perspective to the event.

The Kennedy assassination startled and jarred the American public. People were shocked. There was a great deal of disbelief. "The commercial free televised repetitions [of the assassination] imprinted the stark brutality of Kennedy's death on consciousness like no other event in American history".[34] The great grief caused two important things to happen: it elevated Kennedy to a legendary status, and it bound the nation together for four straight days.

The news rang out across the world with a quiet tear from Walter Cronkite's eye. He interrupted "'As the World Turns'" to announce that the president had died after being fatally shot in the head.[35] As the news spread around the globe, mourning soon followed. In Denmark, in France, and in Budapest, some countries which Kennedy never visited, national mourning was declared.[36] Behind the Iron Curtain, Nikita Khrushchev cried. Throughout the countries of Europe and the Soviet Union, "grief was immense".[37]

The pain of Kennedy's death was felt critically in Jerusalem, the fledgling country that JFK helped to protect by securing the hawk missile in 1962. While the sale was meant to be for defensive purposes only, Israel considered the sale to be a major victory. Now, the U.S. was an ally (though still neutral in the Arab-Israeli conflict) and Kennedy could be counted among its friends.[38] Abba Eban, in a personal tribute to Kennedy published in *The Jerusalem Post* (November 24, 1963) stated, "He was Israel's friend, as

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[34] Rorabaugh, W.J. *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties*. 215
[35] Garner, Joe. *We Interrupt this Broadcast*. 52
[36] Rorabaugh, W.J. *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties*. 220-221
[37] Ibid, 221
[38] Schiff, Zeev. *A History of the Israeli Army 1870-1974*. 257

he was a champion of all causes in which freedom was the central theme."[39] According to Eban, Kennedy felt a sense of "personal responsibility for the entire human condition"; he cared not about religion, about color, or about creed, only freedom, equality and democracy. Eban was referring not only to Kennedy's work for peace within America's borders (civil rights), but also his concern for peace on an international level (avoiding nuclear warfare).

Israel's President Levi Eshkol echoed Eban's words when he wrote in a similar article in *The Jerusalem Post* (November 24, 1963) that Kennedy was a ". . .staunch friend of Israel and of the Jewish people." He too was applauding Kennedy's military, financial, and friendly support of Israel.[40] "In 1962 President Kennedy assured Foreign Minister Meir that the United States and Israel were *de facto* allies."[41] In fact, in a correspondence with Eshkol himself, Kennedy gave a written assurance containing a virtual guarantee of Israel's territorial integrity.[42] Levi Eshkol mourned the loss of an ally and a friend.

David Ben Gurion in an article published alongside Eshkol's asks the question, "why?" For Ben Gurion, "Not only Americans- the whole free world has lost a great leader and a true friend." Not bad for a man that failed to impress Ben-Gurion upon their first meeting in 1961.[43] Ben-Gurion had even called some of Kennedy's political relations experiments "naïve."[44] When the United State's help was crucial in defending Israel against a new Syrian and Iraqi alliance in 1963, the U.S. responded with even more

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[39] All primary documents from this chapter are from the Kennedy Collection at the American Jewish Archives- SC 6258, Box 1533.
[40] Brecher, Michael. *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy*. 224
[41] Ibid, 322
[42] Ibid, 322
[43] Aronson, Shlomo. *Conflict and Bargaining in the Middle East*. 42
[44] Ibid, 43

assurance of support. Kennedy assured Ben-Gurion that Israel's existence was important to the United States.[45] To lose Kennedy, was to lose an ally, an assurance of support, and a shield for security. In that same November 24th issue, a memorial service was announced for the following day at the Yeshurun Synagogue in Jerusalem to be led by Israel's chief Rabbi Nissim. A similar service was also held on November 26 at St. Andrew's church in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, in America, Jews flooded their synagogues. There seemed to be no other place to turn to. Rabbi Bernard Bamberger of Congregation Shaaray Tefila in New York asked his congregants why they shut off their televisions and came to synagogue.[46] Surely, it was not for Sabbath delight. On that Sabbath, there was no delight to be had. What then were they seeking? Rabbi Bamberger answered that the synagogue ". . .offered two things: fellowship and prayer, a sharing of sorrow and a sharing of aspiration, of elevation and sanctification of sorrow." In his eyes, the solemn occasion of the president's death ". . .revealed to us the depth of our spiritual need- and the fact that we are more religious than perhaps we supposed ourselves to be." Rabbi Bamberger marveled at the appropriateness of many of the prayers found in the prayerbook. "In a time of great need, we turned to the Synagogue and to its prayers, old and new, and found a response." All of this, Rabbi Bamberger concluded, proved the importance of the synagogue in the personal lives of all Jews.

Rabbi Max A. Shapiro of Minneapolis agreed with Rabbi Bamberger. He began his sermon on that terrible evening bereft of *oneg*; "Though the Sabbath is our day of joy,

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[45] Ibid, 44

[46] Rabbi Bernard Bamberger. Born Baltimore, MD 5-30-04, died NYC 6-14-1980. Johns Hopkins University, ordained and DD HUC. Rabbi, scholar, author in Albany, NY and NYC. President CCAR. Member JPS Bible translation committee. See UJE, EJ, WWIAJ, WWWIA.

there is none this evening".[47] He addressed a congregation full of weeping mourners. Though that day began like all other Thursdays, with one shot, "everything became irrelevant". "And as the time for our evening service approached, there came to our Temple doors a vast outpouring of people, silently finding their places in the sanctuary." Why did they come? Rabbi Shapiro continued: "We sat in prayer, we sat by the hundreds, huddled together for comfort. . . .For where else can we turn? From where else can there be comfort?". For Rabbi Shapiro, like Rabbi Bamberger, the synagogue became the source of divine strength, of much needed "fortitude and understanding." Though we do not wholly understand His ways, Rabbi Shapiro admitted, "to Him we must turn, in Him must we trust." At the end of his message, Rabbi Shapiro turned to the words that JFK spoke in his Thanksgiving message:

> Let us gather in sanctuaries dedicated to worship, and let us earnestly and humbly pray that God may continue to guide and sustain us in the great unfinished tasks of achieving peace, justice, and understanding among all men and nations and of ending misery and suffering wherever they exist.

On this tragic occasion, Bamberger and Shapiro explain to those who have gathered that the sanctuary is the last bastion of hope, and a place of quiet and comfort in a time of great pain and national disaster.

Rededication, the first theme in this chapter, appeared in many if not most of the sermons delivered on that November 23, 1963 Sabbath and subsequent memorial services. Rabbi Frederick Eisenberg of Temple Sholom in Chicago told his congregants, "I believe that it is the moral duty for those of us, we 180 million who remain, to keep

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[47] Rabbi Max M. Shapiro. He was ordained from Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati campus in 1955. This sermon was delivered at Temple Israel in Minneaplis, MN. He also served as Director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Learning. He is married and had three children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

ourselves growing, to match the global vision of our late beloved president with our own."[48] For Rabbi Eisenberg, this moral duty comes from the sense that in effect, ". . .we who remain are his heirs. And as his heirs, we have a function, an obligation, and a precious inheritance. . . ." That inheritance is one of vision, of working for justice, and most of all, ". . .bringing to fruition the broad, new plans which he strove to implement, and to make them a concrete realization for tomorrow's world." This included a commitment to equality that Kennedy personified in his support of Dr. King and the civil rights movement. It was a promise to work towards peace through non-violent means and not through nuclear war as Kennedy had done in the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis.[49]

Rabbi Herman Snyder of Sinai Temple in Springfield, Massachusetts implored his congregants, "Here is the only meaningful tribute we may pay to the memory of John F. Kennedy- to bring to a successful realization the ideals for which he strove."[50] While the congregation was already aware of what those ideals were stemming from their commonalities with Jewish ideals, Rabbi Snyder took that opportunity to spell them out. "Those ideals are the identical ideals of democracy and religion: the equality of all men. . .elimination of bigotry, intolerance, and hatred." The sixties seemed to be infected with both the high ideals as well as the lowly disease of hatred and bigotry. Kennedy chose to

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[48] Rabbi Frederick Eisenberg. He was ordained at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati campus is 1958. This sermon was delivered at Temple Israel in Shaker Heights, OH. He is married and had three children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

[49] Summaries of both events can be found in Rorabaugh's book (pp. 28-44). In Rorabaugh's estimation of history, Kennedy was not praised by his choice of negotiation over annihilation. Kennedy's decision, however, sealed his legacy as a peacekeeper and peace pursuer; a characteristic cherished and admired by the Jewish people.

[50] Rabbi Herman Snyder. Born New Bedford, MA 1901. University of Cincinnati, University of Illinois, ordained HUC. Rabbi in Springfield, IL. Founder of Jewish Center and Central Illinois Religious Teachers Congregation. Fundraiser for the Joint Distribution Committee and The Girls and Boys Scouts. Chaplain. See WWIAJ.

capitalize on the former. Snyder urged his congregants to follow Kenndy's example. At that time of confusion and sorrow, rabbis felt their congregants needed to be reminded of the task at hand.

Speaking of Kennedy as a martyr, Rabbi Nathan Kollin of Rodef Shalom in Johnstown, Pennsylvania applauded him for bringing the world closer to the realization of the democratic and peaceful ideals than any other president.[51] His martyrdom ended his striving as well as his mission and dedication. Thus, he too gave his congregants a mission of their own: "Let us now rededicate ourselves to continue the liberal traditions of the American way of life." Kollin was insisting that the new testing of limits nurtured by the liberal atmosphere not end with Kennedy's death. He demanded that the remaking of individuals and the remaking of society continue even though that Kennedy would no longer be at the helm. Kennedy's presidency fostered a time of experimentation that, through liberalism, created beautiful folk music (Dylan), outrageous art (Warhol), the emergence of a strong women's movement (Friedan), and poetry that touched the soul (Ginsberg).[52] Kollin was trying to express that the tragedy of Kennedy's loss would be even more profound should people allow these new waves of creativity to die with him. A liberal environment was a positive environment and one that Kollin felt should remain even after JFK's assassination.

For Rabbi Sanford Shapero, these convictions for which JFK died served as calls to action.[53] "More than ever before" he declared, "[we must] make our voices, our

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[51] Rabbi Nathan Kollin. His collection can be found at the JTS archives. He was born in Cleveland, OH. He was ordained from JTS. He served congregations in Ontario, Ohio, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. For more information see the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Knowledge* and *The Five Books of Moses* where Kollin contributed articles.

[52] Rorabaugh, 154-159, 168-181

[53] Rabbi Sanford Shapero. He was ordained from Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati campus in 1955. The location of where he delivered this sermon is not known. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

desires, our power known in places of influence- that his death will not have been for naught." In essence, Rabbi Shapero was alerting his congregants that they were not fully exercising their precious freedoms. If people *were* doing so, they could truly effect change. "This was a president of unusual promise" he lamented, "whose task we must continue, each of us." In Rabbi Shapero's eyes, the task was this:

> Let us be one people, one, free, just, and enlightened;
> let us be the chosen people to perpetuate and promulgate
> liberty and righteousness. . .let us banish strife, discord, hatred,
> injustice, oppression from the domain of man, as far as our
> hands do reach.

Rabbi Shapero wanted to impress upon his congregants a sense of individual power and responsibility in carrying on the vision of their president.

Many rabbis did, in fact, invoke the prophets in order to memorialize and eulogize the president . It was irrelevant to them that the fallen president was Catholic. They spoke of him as they would have spoken of any Jew, any mensch. Rabbi Sigmund Kaufman of the Catskills used the beautiful words of Isaiah that were appropriate for an occasion when comfort was so hard to come by, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people of Israel in the name of the Lord- people permit not to stifle your national emotions."[54] It was as though Isaiah, through Rabbi Kaufman, was giving people permission to weep over their fallen prince. But someday, though it might seem impossible then, the weeping would end. "The wilderness is becoming a garden" the quote from Isaiah continues, "There is hope, there is light". Through the darkness, through the night, there is day, there is light. Isaiah promised that centuries ago and Rabbi Kaufman used his words to make the same

[54] Rabbi Sigmund Kaufman. This sermon can be found in the Kennedy collection at the AJA, SC 6258 box 1533. Further biographical information was not available.

promise. He used the words of the prophets to shape his own and make meaning out of the senseless violence witnessed by America just days before.

Other rabbis also looked to the prophets for words of comfort and consolation. Rabbi Joseph Asher of Temple Emanuel in Greensboro, North Carolina called upon the words of Amos.[55] He assured his congregants that "justice shall well up as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream. . .weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning." Like Rabbi Kaufman, Asher used the imagery of darkness and light gave people the tools to create a picture of a better day to come. Rabbi David Indich called upon the prophet Jeremiah when he was trying to depict a great national calamity, "For thy misfortune is great like the sea, who can heal you?"[56] He immediately applies this to the present state of the American people: "For thy misfortune, America, is as great as the sea, who can console you?" Like the former illusion, this is an image that the people could create in their minds. They could imagine the vastness of the sea and compare it to the greatness of their grief. It made their pain tangible.

While the words of the prophets used by the rabbis offered comfort, the prophets often served yet another function. The same is true of the rabbi. In these sermons, there are often words of admonishment by the rabbis and admissions of guilt and shame for the assassination of such a beloved man. Like all Americans, each Jew was forced to accept some measure of responsibility for the loss of the president. While these sermons (and those immediately preceding) employ elements of the third theme, namely usage of

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[55] Rabbi Joseph Asher. He served congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco, California. The congregation was dedicated in April, 1926. He taught in the Hochschule. He died in 1990. For more information, see www.emanuelsf.org or *The Jewish weekly of Northern California*, Friday, April 25, 1997.

[56] Rabbi David Indich. This sermon can be found in SC 6258 Box 1533. He served Golf Manor Shul in Cincinnati, Ohio. Further biographical information was not available.

biblical lessons and figures to make meaning, the following sermons focus more on the second theme: violence in American society.

While many of the rabbis who spoke after JFK's assassination equated his death with that of Lincoln, none accepted any responsibility for the death of Lincoln like they did for that of JFK. Rabbi Synder, who told his congregants that the most proper tribute to Kennedy would be to continue his work also said that we do so in order to ". . .redeem our own souls and our own integrity." Rabbi Eisenberg could not help but indict himself and his congregants with a similar sense of culpability for the day's events. "We, his countrymen, weep in sorrow and in anger, for his death is in no small measure our responsibility." Rabbi Kollin was daring enough to say that ". . .we confess to a sense of shame. . . ." In Detroit, Rabbi Richard Hertz admitted to his congregation at Temple Beth El; "We mourn for our own shame as well for our sorrow."[57] Perhaps the greatest admonishment came from Rabbi Herbert Freed of Temple Beth Shalom in Mahopac, New York.[58] He was brazen enough to tell his congregants that Jewish tradition teaches that tears are only worthwhile if they teach a lesson. In this case, the tears shed by the Jewish community over the death of Kennedy, according to Rabbi Freed, were only meaningful if they forced people to change their lives and forge ahead towards a better day.

Behind these admonishments was the true reason for the pain, all the sorrow, and the mourning that was occurring on November 22 and the four days that followed.

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[57] Rabbi Richard Hertz. He was ordained at HUC-JIR. He served Congregational Beth-El in Detroit for most of his career. He was very active in interfaith relations as well as serving as a chaplain. He served there until 1982. He died in 1999. His collection can be found in the Rabbi Leo M. Franklin archives at Temple Beth-El, 1MS.

[58] Rabbi Herbert Freed. This sermon can also be found at the AJA SC 6258 Box 1533. Biographical information was not available.

America, according to the rabbis, had become a violent place. The rabbis believed that people had forgotten to love their neighbors, to respect the property of others, and worst of all, had lost their passion for peace. Though the Central Conference of American Rabbis had been passing social justice resolutions since 1918 (and the Reform movement prided itself on working for peace), their efforts had come up short. America had become a place where civil rights leaders and presidents were assassinated (Medgar Evers, May 1963 and JFK, November 1963). Rabbi Freed continued his sermon by saying that the man who fired the bullets might have killed the president, but all people are responsible for spreading the "venom and the hatred and the bigotry" which inspires people to such gross acts of violence.

In a CCAR resolution in 1955, the rabbis proclaimed "We Jews are challenged by our religion to support the basic human rights of everyone."[59] In the words of Rabbi Maurice Davis of Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation, "It is not the 'who' that killed our president. It is the 'what' and that 'what' is hatred; hatred permitted, hatred endorsed, hatred encouraged." Rabbi David Panitz of Temple Emanuel of Paterson, New Jersey agreed when he said "I am deeply distressed, as everyone is, by his death, but I am no less distraught by an unwholesome mood that is prevalent and malevolent in widespread segments of our national community."[60] Just under the surface of the desire for freedom lurked a dangerous, seething, current of hate. The assassination of Kennedy was an example of that hatred brimming to the surface. Each and every person, these rabbis were trying to convey, was responsible for allowing that hate to exist and beyond its existence, for allowing it to come to a boiling point.

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[59] Meyer, Michael A. and Gunther Plaut. The Reform Judaism Reader. (pg. 148)
[60] Rabbi David Panitz. This sermon can be found at the AJA SC 6258 Box 1533. Biographical information was not available.

The violence and hatred spoken of by the rabbis reflects a general disregard for the law. JFK's murder bespoke the breakdown of law and order and the dissolution of civilized behavior. Rabbi Joseph Herzog of Temple Beth Israel in Sharon Pennsylvania remarked that "we pay the price for tolerating the cancer of hate."[61] Beyond just tolerating hate, he said, "As long as men are taught to despise and defy the law, there will be no law in America, there will be no justice in America, there will be no freedom for any man". For the rabbis, the assassination of Kennedy was a sign that civilization was on shaky ground and law and order at its most basic level was endangered. How was such a danger allowed to become a reality? Rabbi Herzog explained that it was because people were silent when they should have been in the streets " 'marching for America.' " By remaining silent, he said, all people were really only one step away from pulling the trigger themselves. Rabbi Richard Hertz was equally disturbed by the violence he saw in America. He saw the succession of assassinations- that of JFK and then his killer- as ". . .the supreme blot on our country that compounded national tragedy into monstrous outrage. What a price America must pay for fanaticism and lawlessness." Rabbi Jerome Folkman of Temple Israel in Columbus, Ohio warned that "lawlessness breeds lawlessness. When it is encouraged or tolerated, seeds of the whirlwind are sown." Rabbi Maurice Davis feared also that "when evil is unleashed in the land, it is not easily harnessed up again".[62] People have many paths they can choose to follow, Rabbi Davis

[61] Rabbi Joseph Herzog. He was ordained from Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati campus in 1953. While this sermon was marked as having been delivered in Sharon, PA, he also served a congregation in Amherst, NY. He is that congregation's emeritus. He is married and has two children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

[62] Rabbi Maurice Davis. He served Congregation Adat Israel in Lexington, KY. He is the Founder of the American Family Foundation, an educational organization that deals with cults and cult related experiences. He was the pioneer in the field and the director of the AFF.

said, and hatred is one of them. Through the assassination of the president, the country learned where that path leads: death.

Perhaps the most moving sermons delivered in the aftermath of JFK's death were those that made a connection between the event of the day and a portion of the Torah. This introduces the third and final theme of the chapter. Often, Kennedy was compared to Judah the Maccabee. "President Kennedy," Rabbi Myron Meyer of Temple Adath Joseph in St. Joseph, Missouri said, "was like the Macabees of old- fearless, dedicated, battling for freedom and human rights".[63] Like other martyrs, Rabbi Meyer described Kennedy as a man who "labored for the freedom of all mankind." According to Rabbi Robert Layman of Providence, Rhode Island, Kennedy was a "hero."[64] Like the Macabees, "President Kennedy, too, was dedicated to the preservation of the unfettered spirits of all mankind, but especially in our own country where the goal of equality for all citizens is yet to be obtained." And like the Macabees, JFK died ". . .fighting for the cause in which [he] believed. . .and was despised for the ideals for which he stood. . . ."

A beautiful and creative message came from the pulpit of Rabbi Herbert Rose of Temple Or Elohim of Jericho, New York.[65] He invoked the image of Jacob's ladder. "Like Jacob of old, [Kennedy] dared dream of a ladder rooted on earth and reaching up to heaven." Rose was referring to Genesis 27 where the text tells the incredible story of

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[63] Rabbi Myron Meyer. Biographical information available: President Rotary Club of St. Louis, MO 1931-32. Rabbi of Temple Adat Joseph, St. Louis, MO.

[64] Rabbi Robert Layman. Author of many books (*The Book of Jeremiah, The Book of Job,* etc.). He also wrote a book entitled *A Rabbi's Guide to the Special Person.* He sits on the board of The Association for the Preservation of Abandoned Jewish Cemeteries. He is a member of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and sits on their accessibility and education committee. He also is the educational director of the Delaware Valley region. He served Congregation Beth Tikvah B'nai Jeshurun in Philadelphia.

[65] Rabbi Herbert Rose. He was ordained from Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati campus in 1955. While this sermon was labeled as being delivered in New York, he also served congregation Temple Beth El in Anniston, AL. He is married with three children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

Jacob dreaming that a ladder reached down to the earth. On that ladder, angels of heaven were ascending and descending. That ladder, Rose said, was a ladder of "goodness and righteousness and compassion." Like Jacob of old, [Kennedy] made of his life a gateway to heaven by opening his heart to every honest call to assist the downtrodden, the dispossessed, the forgotten men of our country and our world." Perhaps the most remarkable comparison Rabbi Rose made between Jacob and JFK came when he recalled the moment when Jacob's name was changed to Israel and he became a "champion of God on earth." Kennedy, too, was a champion of God on earth, ". . .courageously standing in the forefront of our country's struggle for world peace."

In Chevy Chase, Maryland, Rabbi Edwin Friedman brought home the notion that John Fitzgerald Kennedy was a giant of his times.[66] He reminded his congregants of the story in Numbers about the spies' report of the giants.[67] When the rabbis read the comment of the spies, that the spies thought the Israelites appeared as grasshoppers in the eyes of the giants, they asked the question: "How do you know how you appeared in their eyes; maybe you appeared as giants?" Rabbi Friedman told his congregants that they should view Kennedy as a giant, "For he saw the gigantic all about him continually and yet he never said, 'therefore I am a grasshopper'. His dignity was gigantic, as was his legacy. He was a giant when he 'approached life unafraid, with courage, with determination, with conviction'. JFK, according to Rabbi Friedman, was a giant when it came to progress, and the inheritance he left the American people matched the magnitude

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[66] Rabbi Edwin Friedman. He served as a congregational rabbi for 25 years before becoming a family therapist and a counselor to clergy. He was involved in the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute (www.mindspirit.org). He wrote *Generation to Generation- Family Process in Church and Synagogue.* He was born in 1932 and died in 1996.

[67] Numbers 14:33

of his own life. Kennedy lived as a giant because of his sense of history. That sense of history, he told his congregants, gave Kennedy the power to believe in what man can do.

One sermon in particular sets itself apart from the others in its beautiful message and its tying together of the themes discussed in this chapter. Rabbi Robert S. Port of Beth Jacob Synagogue in Norwich, Connecticut seemed to put feeling into words and meaning into motion in a way unique among other rabbis.[68] He began his sermon by listing all the reasons why the congregation gathered to mourn. They came to memorialize a "loving husband and a devoted father." Camelot was comprised of not only the handsome president, but his graceful wife Jackie, and their adorable children John Jr. and Carolyn. They came to memorialize a 'dutiful son' and a "loyal brother." The Kennedy family suffered JFK's just as the rest of America. Only once JFK's familial relationships were highlighted were his personal and professional achievements. "We are gathered to memorialize a man rich in things of the spirit. . .the President of the United States". Rabbi Port captured the essence of the Kennedy administration in his opening paragraph: family first; *shlom bayit* and then the goal of *shalom olam.*

Rabbi Port then ties Kennedy's death to the death of Moses. Both leaders were the leaders of great nations. Moses' burial site is unknown. Kennedy's burial site would be a shrine for the generations. So where is the connection? "Moses," Rabbi Port said, "built his memorial in the lives of people. His monument of the spirit assuring his deathlessness was erected in the hearts of men everywhere." Kennedy, though laid to rest in Arlington Cemetery, truly needs no burial site to visit. Like Moses, he lives in the hearts and spirits of those he left behind, and in the legacy he bequeathed to all peoples. Rabbi Port

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[68] Rabbi Robert S. Port. He was the rabbi of Ohav Shalom of Sayreville, New Jersey. He was born in the Bronx, NY. He earned a B.A. at NYU and was a member of MENSA. He was a Conservative Rabbi.

commented that Jews keep the spirit of Moses alive by living out his teachings and keeping alive the faith that was so beloved to him. As Americans, though, Jews also have the responsibility to keep alive the spirit of JFK ". . .our secular leader, by keeping faith with his teachings and his ideals." As long as people live and work according to those teachings and ideals, "John Fitzgerald Kennedy will live on." Two leaders, Moses and JFK, two national heroes, the memories of two men forever emblazoned upon the hearts of men.

To the outsider's eye, it would have appeared as though each and every member of each and every congregation on November 22, 1963 had lost a very close family member. Every sermon referred to the dead president with words such as "beloved", and "brother." Many rabbis mentioned in their sermons that the congregation recited the *El Maleh Rachamim* prayer despite the Sabbath regulation and the fact that the beloved dead was not a Jew. Many congregations erected special and permanent plaques in honor of their beloved departed like Congregation Beth Shalom of Clearwater, Florida. Most rabbis, like Rabbi Max Mintz of Talmud Torah of Flatbush, New York, choked back tears throughout their sermons.[69] They simply "could not prevent their tears from flowing." Nearly all rabbis declared that Kennedy's spirit was immortal, as Rabbi Sigmund Kaufman said, "For we have a hope, and a certain faith in immortality." Congregations dutifully said *kaddish* over their brother JFK and some even wrote the First Lady letters telling her about this prayer. "In deepest respect, I do recite the hallowed *kaddish* prayer" said Rabbi Mendel Lefkowitz of New York, "the greatest

[69] Rabbi Max Mintz. This sermon can be found at the AJA SC6258 Box 1533. Biographical information not available.

prayer of the Jewish faith, every night in his everlasting, blessed memory."[70] Every tribute, every sermon, every prayer uttered in those days of November, 1963 were uttered in the utmost respect and love for the late President. Perhaps Rabbi Julian Feibelman of New Orleans said it most eloquently in the final stanza to the poem "I Weep," a special tribute to his beloved JFK:

> A kindled flame, eternal, burning,
> Shall keep this light.
> I weep, the life light snuffed out,
> This flame, for him, must burn so bright.[71]

Like FDR, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was loved by the Jewish people, and the sermons delivered after his death are a living testimony to that love.

In the next chapter, the tragedy of September 11, 2001 will be explored. While it was just as unexpected as Kennedy's assassination, its affect was vastly different. It crushed America's sense of security while at the same time it brought America together under a flag of patriotism rivaled only by the era of the great wars. Its proximity to the high holidays added an emotional component to the days of awe that was quite literally breathtaking. The sermons delivered on the Sabbath immediately before Rosh Hashanah and those on the holiday itself reveal the rabbis' attempts to console their congregants at a time of great confusion and overwhelming sorrow.

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[70] Rabbi Mendel Lefkowitz. This sermon can be found at the AJA SC 6258 Box 1533. Biographical information not available.

[71] Rabbi Julian Feibelman. Born Jackson, MS 3-23-1897, died 10-10-1980. Millsap College, ordained HUC. MA and PhD University of Pennsylvania. Rabbi in Philadelphia and New Orleans. President of LA Society for Social Hygiene. Board HUC. Active in interfaith work. WW1 service. See EJ, WWWIA.

Chapter Three: America Under Attack; "Our nation has been cast into deep mourning: American Jewish Sermons responding to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001

"It was like the Kennedy assassination, forever marking the place that we were when we first learned of its horror. It was like Pearl Harbor, surprising our nation, and in turn waking the sleeping giant." These are the words of Rabbi Norman Cohen at Bet Shalom Congregation on Rosh Hashanah morning, 2001.[1] Cohen was describing the emotional distress felt by all Americans after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. On that day, planes became missiles aimed at New York City's renowned World Trade Center; the bastion of American industry and democracy. Within minutes of the attack, the Twin Towers, the Twin Towers were reduced to ash. The Pentagon, the source of America's security and intelligence systems had also been attacked. In an act of great courage, men and women died in a field in rural Pennsylvania by overtaking a hijacked plane. They changed its course from Washington D.C. and the White House, to an uninhabited field. That Tuesday morning, though it began like any other Tuesday in September, became the first national tragedy of the 21st century.

American Jews experienced 9-11 (as it became known) like all other Americans. As revealed in the sermons investigated in this chapter, rabbis spoke of the ordinary nature of that day. The sun was shining, the day was beginning and there was work to be done. People left their homes and headed to offices, schools, and businesses. Rabbis were busy completing their high holiday sermons and preparing themselves to lead their congregations through the days of awe. Nothing was special about that day; nothing was

[1] Rabbi Norman Cohen. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674, box 1 folder 2.

different. Then, all of a sudden, Americans was changed and included among them, American Jews.

At that point, the name Osama bin Laden was relatively unknown to the American public. Al-Qaeda was a terror organization that had been identified as a threat by security officials in the government, but was yet unfamiliar to ordinary citizens. Terrorist attacks were events that occurred in far away places like Israel and Africa. The U.S., in the opinion of most citizens, was impenetrable. These and other beliefs about the United States were revealed in the newspapers and magazines that followed the tragedy, as well as the sermons delivered by rabbis around the country.

Unlike the other chapters that were divided according to theme, this chapter is divided according to time. The reason for this is twofold. The first is because many of the same themes run throughout the sermons. When read as a collection, one would surmise that the sermons investigated in this chapter were written by rabbis sitting in the same room. They share themes, images, and often convey many of the same messages. Secondly, rabbis preached about the tragedy of 9-11 repeatedly over the course of about three weeks. They delivered sermons at special services arranged either for that day or the day after the attacks. They continued to comfort and instruct their congregants through their sermons on the following Sabbath and high holidays observances. Thus, in this chapter, the sermons are arranged by occasion: special services, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur.

On September 11, 2001 many Americans turned to their houses of worship for support and consolation. Rabbi Michael Cahana commented on Rosh Hashanah that "During these dark days, many of us have returned to our synagogues, churches, and

mosques, seeking answers."[2] Jews were among those who went to their sanctuaries to find solace in the aftermath of the day's events. In Danbury, Connecticut, Rabbi Bradd Boxman addressed his congregation, The United Jewish Center of Danbury, Connecticut.[3] He began by quoting Nachman of Bratzlav,[4] "The whole world is a very narrow bridge, but the main thing, the essential thing, is not to be afraid." Immediately, in the first words of his sermon, Rabbi Boxman touched upon of the main aftershock of the 9-11 attacks: fear. People were afraid of flying, afraid of high rise buildings, afraid of going to work and leaving their families. Why? Rabbi Boxman explains, "Never in the history of humankind has the civilized world witnessed so horrific a crime played out before our very eyes." The images of men and women jumping out of windows ninety stories high, the images of fires burning in Manhattan, and the reality of the immense loss of life became ". . .seared into our memories like a hot iron pressed on human flesh and have drained the heart of human feeling leaving us numb with disbelief." In the very beginning of his sermon, Boxman addressed many human concerns that other rabbis will echo: fear, horror, shock, and numbness.

Rabbi Boxman then told his congregants a story. It was a story about God fighting with the angels about whether or not he should create man. The angel "Love" wished for man to be created in order to bring love into the world. The angel "Truth" argued against man's creation because man holds the power to bring falsehood into the world. And perhaps most poignant of them all, the angel "Peace" feared that should man be created,

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[2] Rabbi Michael Cahana. This sermon is entitled "Religion Matters". It was delivered on Rosh Hashanah morning, 2001. This sermon can be found at the AJA in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 2. Rabbi Cahana's personal information can be found in a note later in this chapter.

[3] Rabbi Bradd Boxman. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 1. Ordained 1986, HUC-JIR Cincinnati.

[4] Nachman of Bratslav was Chasidic leader in the 19th century. He was a mystic, a storyteller, a writer, and a charismatic leader.

man will only bring violence into the world. Boxman concluded that by creating man, God took a gamble. "God knows what we are capable of- we have seen it all too plainly in these past few days. But God knows that we are capable of love and righteous deeds. . ." If this is true, if God gambled on human kind because God knows the *good* humans are capable of, what now of God's gamble? "We are the ones who can redeem God's gamble" he answered, "We can respond to evil by doing good. . .by doing miztvot." Boxman was attempting not only to make meaning from enormous tragedy, but also to convince his congregation that the human being's potential for good far outweighed its potential for evil. Beyond even that, he was arguing that people have the choice to perform miztvot and the choice to perform acts of terror. It is up to each and every person to make the right choices.

Boxman then provided his congregants with some positive responses to make in the face of this tragedy. First, ". . .as Americans united by this tragedy, we must raise the banner of unity. . .we must recognize our duty to support our government and its leaders in times of crisis." Much like the rabbis who preached during WWI and WWII, Boxman was urging his congregants to unite with all other Americans, regardless of religion or race, under the banner of patriotism and unity. He was urging them to be good citizens by supporting the president in his difficult task of choosing a course of action in the aftermath of the attacks. "Stand as one with your fellow Americans of all faiths and cultural backgrounds. . .therein affirming our common humanity and our utmost respect for human dignity and diversity."[5]

Another banner Boxman urged his congregants to raise was "the banner of *rachmanut* and *tzedakah*." Jews at that time, though grouped together with all other

[5] Excerpt from Boxman's sermon.

Americans by a common tragedy, were mandated by their tradition to return to the Jewish values of mercy and charity. Their country needed them and they were bound by their patriotism and their Jewish values to respond. Another Jewish value they were forced to rely on, according to Boxman, was that of restraint. "Israel has resisted the urge for wholesale punishment and retaliation. I pray America too will resist the urge to act upon her machismo and give into uncontrolled fury." Boxman was addressing those who called for a military annihilation of Muslim countries and any person or nation responsible for the attack on America. "Rather, let us Americans heed the words of the Talmud that urge: who is truly strong? He who can restrain his passion." Boxman called for justice tempered by mercy, not unrestrained retaliation. He was reminding his congregants not to lose sight of the fact that by attacking an enemy without compassion for human life is to become like the enemy.

This ideal of mercy and compassion extended to Arab Americans. Boxman admonished those who ". . .speak vilely and hurtfully of Arabs and Arab Americans." Throughout history, Jews were the victim of such blind and baseless prejudice. Such behavior, according to Boxman, was akin to "moral degeneracy." The Jewish themselves should know better, according to Boxman, because of their past experiences. "We are a people who have known untold human suffering and have witnessed wondrous redemption." It was the Jewish people's responsibility, as it was the responsibility of all Americans, to work against those who cause suffering and work towards redemption. According to Rabbi Boxman, they were to proceed as "One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

The following day, September 12, Rabbi Michael Z. Cahana of Temple Israel in New Rochelle, New York delivered a sermon entitled "A Service of Comfort and Solidarity."[6] Like Boxman, he addressed the issue of fear in his opening paragraphs. "Something has been taken from us this day, perhaps our innocence, perhaps the simple faith that we will come home at the end of the day. We fear that there is no safety, that there is no stability." He perceived a need in his congregation for giving a voice to the fears that seemed so all consuming at that time. Though Cahana admitted that he and his congregation were experiencing each of these fears, he also assured them that "soon enough we will bring order and justice to this chaos. But not yet. Not yet. We have not yet begun to mourn." Stemming from the shock and the shear disbelief associated with the events of 9-11, the realization also had to be made that the mourning process, once begun, would be a long and arduous one.

Cahana remarked that coming together in the sanctuary to find solace was a natural Jewish response. Similar to the events described in the previous chapter, the attacks on September 11 seemed almost to compel people to their houses of worship. "We seek comfort today when the world has lost its meaning, from the company of our people. . .today, all America stands, as we Jews have stood in the aftermath of many a disaster, and express our gratitude to God for the survivors." For Cahana, the response of so many Americans of going to church was a Jewish response. On that day, the entire country did as the Jewish people were accustomed to doing: returning to their house of prayer for words of comfort and an attempt at making meaning. Hope was another response that Jews understood from historical experience. "Hope has been the Jewish

[6] Rabbi Michael Z. Cahana. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 2. Ordained HUC-JIR New York. 1994. Rabbi at Temple Israel in New Rochelle, New York. Born in Houston, TX 11-17-59. He is married to a cantor and has four children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

refrain- we know it well." As his congregation mourned and hoped, they also "[reached] out in comfort and [stood] in solidarity. . ." with those who suffered loss at the hands of terrorists. As Cahana recited the *birkat ha'gomel*, he thanked God for those who survived, for those who were still working to save lives, and for the hope that every person needed to hold onto during those dark days. "Oh God" he prayed, "in these hours of darkness, may we see the light of your presence." Even amidst the crisis, Cahana led his congregation in a prayer that prayed for a day when they once again would see light.

Rabbi Michael B. Eisenstat told his congregants that in the darkness of 9-11, something was still visible and it was the face of hatred.[7] At Temple Beth Israel of Longboat Key, Florida on September 12, he delivered a sermon entitled "In Memory of the Victims of Terror." He did not mince words. "Hatred showed its face yesterday. It was a face few of us have seen, a visage we never want to see again." That face could be seen in the pillars of smoke at the Towers, the Pentagon, and in a field in Pennsylvania. "Hatred showed its human face in the smiling faces of the cheering Palestinian crowds on the West Bank." Eisenstat wanted to empower his congregants to look hatred in the face, recognize it, and know it well in order that they will be empowered to fight back.

Eisenstat's sermon continued with a reminiscence of other attacks on America. "Not since Pearl Harbor has our country been attacked in this way. Not since the war of 1812 have foreign enemies wreaked havoc on our shores and never with such viciousness; never with such devastating results." Even those attacks, however, did not truly compare to those of 9-11 in his estimation. Those attacks, he commented, were attacks on the military, not on civilians. "[9-11] was an attack on you and me and on all

[7] Rabbi Michael B. Eisenstat. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 2. Ordained HUC-JIR 1967, Cincinnati. He serves Temple Beth Israel in Longboat Key, Florida. Born in Brooklyn, New York 7-30-40. He is married with two children. He is member of the CCAR and the RAA.

our countrymen, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, and yes, Moslem." Beyond the lack of discrimination concerning those who might be killed, the terrorists who wore the masks of hate were aiming at destroying the American way of life. This, according to Eisenstat, was a "cowardly act." The terrorists targeted defenseless civilians and because they died in the attacks, they did not even have to face the possibility of judgement. The faces of hate that carried out the attacks were lost in the attacks, and now, the United States was left to pursue those who assisted them in their plan.

The only route to pursue, Eisenstat told his congregants, was ". . .worldwide resistence to terror. When no government will tolerate the presence of terrorists on their land. . .when terrorists have no place to train. . .when they become international pariahs instead of heroes, only then will we end the scourge of terrorism." For Eisenstat, the attacks were not simply a problem for America to solve, but a worldwide problem that would take something akin to Wilson's League of Nations to solve. By calling for a worldwide alliance against terror, he was intoning President Bush's sentiment conveyed in his State of the Union Address following the attacks that "if you were not with us, you are with the terrorists." There was not to be any gray area in the fight against terror.

Eisenstat also spoke about the power of unity, in the power of people coming together to fight a common enemy. He prayed with his congregation that the prayers they spoke that day ". . .will bind all Americans together in solidarity against hate and bigotry. . ." All Americans had been brutalized that day. All Americans needed to respond. He prayed that the prayers of that day ". . .will bind us into a unity which hate and tragedy can never destroy: a unified and united American people whose hope and optimism will overcome the blackness of mourning." Like other rabbis, he spoke of blackness and of

hope, of hate and of optimism. He acknowledged the evil, but urged his congregants to embrace the good.

At congregation Rodef Shalom in Philadelphia, not too far from where the 9-11 attacks occurred, Rabbi Aaron B. Bisno addressed his congregants the next day.[8] His sermon was entitled "Repairing A World Torn Asunder: A Response to the World Trade Center Bombings." Bisno began by reminding his congregation of why Jews tear their clothing when a death occurs. "By ripping. . .we acknowledge through a physical act of tearing, the emotional and psychic sundering death brings." This is done before a funeral, when one person has died, and the immediate family is preparing to say their final goodbyes. "But what shall we do when it is the fabric of our society and world that is rent?" Rabbi Bisno asked. In the case of 9-11, Bisno told his congregants that the traditional order of things had been switched. In this case, the rending of society was the cause of grief, rather than the *response* to the grief. In essence he was asking: what do Jews do when their traditional modes of mourning and response to grief are no longer operative?

Bisno's answer to this question is similar to that of other rabbis who delivered sermons that day. "And so we turn to one another" he said, "for comfort and support. For camaraderie and human connection." As if for a shivah minyan, Jewish people come together to find comfort in numbers and in common experience. By doing so, Bisno asserted, they could ". . .fully experience their feelings and share them. . . ." Also, he told his congregants that the task at hand could be better handled if people were working together towards the common goal of "bringing healing" and 'repairing our fractured

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[8] Rabbi Aaron B. Bisno. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 1. Ordained HUC-JIR 1996, Cincinnati. He serves congregation Rodef Shalom of Philadelphia. Born St. Louis, MO 10-21-68. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

world one person at a time.' By the power of coming together, a natural inclination for Jews, the tear in the world could slowly be healed.

The healing process continued through the celebration of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year, a week later. These discourses compose the second grouping of sermons investigated in this chapter. By the time Rosh Hashanah had arrived, enough days and time had passed for people to really begin to realize the enormity of what had occurred on September 11th. Rabbi Steven Engel of Congregation of Liberal Judaism in Orlando, Florida said it this way: "At first shock and disbelief- maybe we could wake up and it would all be a bad dream. But soon reality set in and what a reality it was."[9] The reality of which he spoke included thousands of casualties, many people still missing and, on a national level, the loss of ". . .a degree of American well being and innocence. . . ." How did American Jews and Americans in their entirety respond to such an enormous and overwhelming loss? Engel answered this question by insisting that, "Over these past seven days we in American have been making an effort to observe shivah. We have been sitting shivah by watching and praying, by talking and grieving, by reaching out and coming together as a nation." Engel, likened the watching of a seemingly endless array of newscasts to a religious experience. They learned of new information about the terrorists, updates on the casualties and those listed as missing, and most importantly for the relief effort, where to send money, food, and clothes. Sending relief to firefighters and families who were grieving became a form of prayer, as did talking through the events with loved ones and sharing in their pain. "Our national shivah- bringing food to rescuers. . .taking care of the physical and material needs of victims and survivors. . .canceling festivals and

[9] Rabbi Steven Engel. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 2. Ordained HUC-JIR Cincinnati in 1988. Born in Brooklyn, NY 11/10/58. He is married with three children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

sporting events. . .[these are] all forms of shivah." Engel helped his congregants understand the secular, national events of the day in terms that were close to the home and heart: Jewish terms.

Rabbi Barry H. Block of San Antonio's Temple Beth El expressed this response as well.[10] On Rosh Hashanah he told his congregants, "Our nation has been cast into deep mourning. . . .Today, we seek God's embrace." In a time of mourning and despair, he chose to turn to God for love and affection. Like Engel, Block did not accuse God of being absent or being neglectful of humanity. Both rabbis agreed that God was not in the evil, ". . .but God was in the response. And in that response we find blessing."[11] Rabbi Block elaborated on this point by saying, "Where was God last Tuesday? God was present in each moment of suffering; God was in every act of salvation. . .God was in the stairwell with the firefighter, desperately striving to save life." Similar to the problem of theodicy we noted in chapter 2, it would have been easy to lose faith in God or to blame God for the horrible attacks on America. However, Rabbis like Engel and Block chose to testify to God's eternal vigilance, protection, care, and embrace. "Where is God today?" Block asked, "*Avinu* is here with us, and with every person of faith, throughout America and around the world, shedding a tear, grieving at our side." They perceived a crisis of faith in their congregants after experiencing the horror of 9-11, and responded in their sermons. They used their words to disprove the feared impotence of God or perhaps worse, God's indifference to human suffering. Instead of ignoring those fears and putting aside the potential crisis of faith, on one of the holiest days of the Jewish year, rabbis

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[10] Rabbi Barry H. Block. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 1. Ordained HUC-JIR in 1991. He serves Temple Beth El in San Antonio, Texas. He was born in Houston, Texas 06/27/63. He is married with one child. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

[11] Rabbi Steven Engel's sermon.

reaffirmed God as *avinu*, our Father, and *malkeinu,* our Ruler. There was still an order in the universe, and that order was ordained by and maintained by God.

God also assumed another role and title on Rosh Hashanah; it is the title of *dayan*, or Judge. Block warned his congregants, "Today, as on every other Rosh Hashanah of our lives, each of us has a good reason to fear God's judgment." He asserted himself in such an accusatory manner because he was trying to safeguard his congregants against the temptation of blaming all Arab Americans for the 9-11 attacks. He admitted to his congregation, ". . .we may have been tempted to treat every Arab, every person of the Moslem faith, as a criminal." This type of behavior, he conveyed, was totally unacceptable. There is no time of year when such thoughts or behaviors are permissible, but Rosh Hashanah is a time when such a mindset is intolerable. Rabbi Block then prayed, "For actions and thoughts against our Arab and Moslem neighbors, we seek forgiveness today."

Rabbi Jerry Brown of Temple Ahavat Shalom in Northridge, California agreed wholeheartedly with Rabbi Block.[12] He, too, rebuked his congregation for entertaining the notion that all Arabs were responsible for the attacks. "Make no mistake: there can be no excuse for stereotyping all Arabs or Moslems as supporters of terror, nor justification for any act of hate or violence against individuals simply because they are Arab or Moslem." For Brown, stereotyping was a dangerous mechanism that endangered innocent people. Stereotyping was also an experience all too familiar to the Jewish people. "We Jews, of all people, should understand the monstrous evil such a response represents." He was speaking of anti-Semitism and its negative stereotyping.

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[12] Rabbi Jerry Brown. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 1. He was ordained from HUC-JIR in 1976. He was born in Chicago, Illinois on 02/20/40. He is married with four children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

In Great Neck, New York, just miles from the Twin Towers, Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson expanded upon the same important lesson.[13] It is not the entirety of the Arab people that is the enemy, he told his congregants, but rather, those who "pray to the God of hate." Davidson opined that before entering any type of conflict that "We Americans have to know who the enemy is and who it is not. It is not the religion of Islam, nor Arabs in general, nor for the most part, the states in which Arabs live." Davidson also argued that it was tempting to be angry and thirst for revenge when the country is suffering so bitterly. "As the anger within Americans seethes into rage and hate, we dare not become blinded by our vengeful feelings." Like Rabbi Block, he insisted that Jewish history testifed to the fact that blind violence and hatred are wrong: "It is scapegoating. It violates a preeminent lesson of Jewish history, the danger of group hatred, of imputing to a group the actions of a few individuals." Davidson was recalling to the violence of the Crusades, the Spanish expulsion, the generations of pogroms in the former Soviet Union, and of course, the Holocaust. He assured his listeners that Arab Americans are also weeping, and mourning, and suffering. "They, too, are horrified by the violence and terrorism."

Speaking to her congregation in Port Washington, New York, Rabbi Beth D. Davidson confessed openly to her feelings of anger: "I am angry because terrorists were able to turn our streets into scenes of carnage. . .because I can't believe our government wasn't able to protect its citizens. . .and I am angry that at this time of the year, when forgiveness is part of what makes the Holy Days, I cannot forgive those who so injured

[13] Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 2. He was ordained from HUC-JIR in 1958, Cincinnati. He was born in Kansas City, Missouri on 10/02/32. He is the Rabbi of Temple Beth El in Great Neck. He is married with two children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

us." She admitted that she *can not* forgive the terrorists. However, she also insisted that ". . .my anger means that I will support our government when it takes action to punish those who planned, carried out, or harbored those who instigated Tuesday's terror." By saying this, she accomplished two goals. First, she told her congregants that she stands by her government in its decisions vis 'a vis retaliation and by doing so, encouraged them to do the same. Rabbi Beth Davidson was urging unity and solidarity with the President and his governance of the country. Secondly, she was instructing her congregants that taking revenge on individual Arabs or Moslems was *not* the appropriate action to be taken. The *only* body responsible for and with the permission to act was the government and Americans should have faith that the government will find and punish the terrorists. She concluded that section of her sermon by saying, "I don't think its vengeance that drives me—rather it's resignation and determination, that something like this should never be able to happen again. . .I will support President Bush and the course of action he decides upon."[14]

What Rabbi Beth Davidson was touching upon was the Jewish value of justice. Our tradition tells us *tzedek, tzedek, tirdof*; justice, justice shall you pursue. The very core theme of Rosh Hashanah is justice. On that day, God sits on a throne and judges all the people of Israel. Our liturgy confirms, "In truth You are Judge and Arbiter, Counsel and Witness."[15] Davidson, as well as many of her colleagues, took advantage of the fact that justice was a core theme of Rosh Hashanah. Rabbi Neil Comess-Daniels of Beth Shir

[14] Other rabbis, like Rabbi Barry Block also told his congregation that he too fully supported the President in whatever course of action he chose.
[15] Stern, Chaim ed. The Gates of Repentance, (pg. 176)

Shalom of Santa Monica, California told his congregation just that.[16] "Let us show the world that America knows the difference between justice and revenge." Comess-Daniels was asking his congregation, and the Jewish people at large to be leaders. He told them they should be examples of how belief in justice and working towards a just world far outweighs both the benefit and satisfaction provided by revenge. This approach to terrorism, he relayed, was already being employed by the state of Israel. As we will see below, rabbis used the state of Israel's experiences with terrorism as examples in their sermons. "There is great wisdom" Comess-Daniels said, "that Israelis have gained unwillingly and from which we, unwillingly as well, must learn." He quoted Abraham Lincoln who said in yet another hour of national peril, that ". . .we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country." Comess-Daniels, through his use of Lincoln's words, was telling his congregation that by reassessing the situation and learning from those who have set a positive example, America would proceed on a new, positive, and just course. While Rabbi Norman M. Cohen agreed that there was much that could be learned from Israel's experience, he also lamented to his congregation that "While I appreciate the fact that more Americans may now understand and be sympathetic to Israel, it was far too great a price to pay to gain that perspective."[17]

The ultimate question that arose for many rabbis after reviewing the events of the week and their aftereffects was: where do we go from here? Rabbi Ellen Wienberg Dreyfus asked that question from her pulpit at Congregation Beth Jehudah Beth Shalom

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[16] Rabbi Neil Comess-Daniels. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 2. He was ordained from HUC-JIR in 1979, New York. He was born in Brooklyn, NY on 04/26/51. He is married with two children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

[17] Rabbi Norman M. Cohen. See note on the first page of this chapter.

in Homewood, IL.[18] She told her listeners that Jews should respond as Jews have responded throughout the generations, especially on Rosh Hashanah: with 'repentance, prayer, and charity.' These three things, Jewish tradition teaches, will 'temper judgment's severe decree." By saying this, she reminded her congregants that though there is no way to have control over others, ". . .we do have control over how we live. And if we live in a way defined by *teshuvah, tefilah,* and *tzedakah*, our lives will have ultimate worth and meaning. . . ." These three pillars of Jewish tradition allow every single Jew to ". . .define the quality and value of our life." Dreyfuss was giving her congregants a plan of action and the confidence to pursue that plan. The building blocks of her plan were culled from Jewish tradition and thus were familiar to her congregants. In essence she was telling them: you have the tools, go and use them. All the while, Dreyfuss was imploring her listeners that in order to help American, they must act as Jews; they must "*aseh tov*, do good. . . actively pursue peace."

Rabbi Henry Bamberger also dealt with the question of "Where *can* we go from here?" when he spoke to his congregation.[19] He suggested that in order to begin the healing process and move back into life, people should "first, do something good. This is the key response to evil." He told his listeners that in order to combat the wrong in the world, people must do what is right. "Each act of kindness, of love, of generosity, of care that we perform is an affirmation that good is no less real than evil." Bamberger suggested that people give other people hugs, that they do something Jewish, that they

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[18] Rabbi Ellen Wienberg Dreyfuss. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 2. She was ordained from HUC-JIR in 1979, New York. She was born in Chicago, Illinois on 02/15/52. She is married and has three children. She is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

[19] Rabbi Henry Bamberger. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 1. He was ordained from HUC-JIR in 1961, New York. He was born in Albany, New York 06/01/35. He is the Rabbi Emeritus at Temple Emanu-El in Utica, NY. He is married with two children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

recite kaddish. He told them to do something ordinary like filling the bird feeder or defrosting the freezer. "Still" he said, "life must go on." Bamberger reminded his congregants that it was still the beginning of a new year; there was still an aura of freshness and excitement that should be celebrated.

Ten days later, on Yom Kippur, rabbis continued to preach about 9-11. Rabbi Jerry Brown felt that fourteen days after the attack, some perspective had been gained.[20]

> In the two weeks and two days since that day a great many answers have become clear. We now know who could have done such a thing. . .with every passing day we're learning more and more about how they do such things, and are taking appropriate measures to close off every possible pathway to the working of their terror.

Brown's address testifies to the fact that some of the confusion that clouded those two about the events of 9-11 was beginning to evaporate. The names of the perpetrators were known. The organization behind the attacks was known. The course of action to retaliate was not complete, but was taking shape. In the two weeks since that Tuesday morning, something else was also becoming clear. "And we are learning to appreciate once again the strength, the resiliency, the decency of the American people, demonstrated again and again since the day of tragedy." It was not just the negative aspects of the day that were emergeing, but the positive stories of heroes and saviors that were being highlighted as well.

Brown also insisted that the 9-11 events were not the works of God. He quoted Bishop T.D. Jakes, Pastor of Potter's House Church in Dallas, Texas; "I do not believe that this is the work of God. And I am upset that anyone would suggest that the God that I

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[20] Rabbi Jerry Brown. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674, box 1 folder 1. He was ordained at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati in 1976. He was born in Chicago, Illinois on 07/03/49. He is married with four children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

serve would do such a thing. This is not the God that I serve." After quoting the Bishop, Brown asked his congregation to say "Amen." He wanted to convey to his congregants that God does not determine every action taken by man. If that were true, Brown said, one of the most precious gifts given to humans by God would be stolen from them: ". . .our ability to think and feel and struggle, and then to make our own freely chosen decisions." This freedom, Brown argued, was abused by the highjackers and planners of the 9-11 attacks. "These terrorists chose evil, and thereby brought death, not only to themselves, but to their innocent victims as well." *They chose*. God did not decree that the lives of so many people were cut short. The victims of 9-11 died, according to Rabbi Brown, because evil people *chose* to *do evil*.

If God did not cause the attacks, the obvious question becomes, "where was God." To answer this query, Brown quoted Harold Kushner's bestselling volume, *Who Needs God?* He quoted Kushner wrote,

> God is found in the incredible resiliency of the human soul,
> in our willingness to love though we understand how vulnerable
> love makes us, in our determination to affirm the value of
> life even when events in the world would seen to teach us that life
> is cheap.

By quoting Kushner, Brown emphasized to his congregants that the human spirit *can* recover from the pain of the day, that love persists even among the mourning, and that life has eternal and enduring meaning.Thus, human beings can reaffirm their power and also affirm the existence of a loving and providential God. Brown quoted Kushner once again, "Our responding to life's unfairness with sympathy and righteous indignation, God's compassion and God's answer working through us, may be the surest proof of all of God's reality."

The passage of time seemed to be on the minds of many rabbis on Yom Kippur. On Kol Nidre, Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson of Temple Beth-El of Great Neck, New York commented that though time had passed since 9-11, the pain felt all too fresh.[21] "Psalm 23 speaks of walking 'through the valley of the shadow of death.' We haven't made it very far along the way. . . .ask almost anyone, 'how are you doing?' no one says 'great.' We feel the pain still." Davidson was validating that even though time is supposed to heal all wounds, not enough time had passed for the healing process to even begin. The enormity of the event was simply too overwhelming. Even though President Bush told the country to 'go back to normalcy,' Rabbi Davidson reinforced the reality that "It is difficult for us to put America's tragedy behind us. When hundreds are suffering in pain and thousands grieving in despair, it is hard to follow the advice, to go to a Broadway show, go shopping or dine out."

In the case of WW1 and WW2, the pain came to an end with the enemy punished. After Kennedy was assassination a new President was inaugurated and the country moved on. In the case of 9-11 however, the enemy was unknown, and the course of action not only concerning retaliation but also concerning the course of the nation itself, was also unknown. Many people, Davidson perceived, felt as though the future was no longer something that could be envisioned. What would the history books say about 9-11 and how America fared after being attacked? He asked this question from the pulpit: "What about the new era, the different world in which we are told we are now going to live?"

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[21] Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 2. He was ordained from HUC-JIR in Cincinnati in 1958. He was born in Kansas City, Missouri on 10/02/32. He is married with two children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

Davidson was hoping that the new era would follow the lead of the theme of the high holidays: *tshevuah,* or return. He wanted a return to "personal values and responsibility to family." He dreamt of a "new sense of community" and a "need for spiritual renewal." The decades of materialism, self indulgence and the need for *more*, he hoped, were over. "We feel we want to become involved in what is worthwhile, something that truly matters: to volunteer, to give to share in the tasks of the community." Parents, he felt, needed to take the lead in this task. They an teachers too, needed to ". . .rethink the message we are sending to our children about responsibility." They needed to be good role models more than ever before. "What has happened in America should inspire us to help our boys and girls grow into this new era with new ideals and values." Through a good example, children can model good behavior and learn the values of 'responsibility, community service, philanthropy, and caring.' On Yom Kippur, Davidson led his congregants in a prayer for God's help upon entering this new era, ". . .Hashevenu, Turn us around, O God, and we shall be renewed. We shall smile again."

Rabbi Herbert Bronstein of North Shore Congregation Israel in Glencoe, Illinois believed that God would answer the prayer for help.[22] God would answer because all of humanity is bound up with God in an eternal covenant; ". . .a partnership, an alliance with God to live a better life and to build a better world." Bronstein elaborated on his concept of covenant. The covenant to which he referred did not mean that Jews celebrate the holidays and Shabbat and that gentiles attend church on Sundays.

[And] covenant implies that we have the responsibility

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[22] Rabbi Herbert Bronstein. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 1. He was ordained from HUC-JIR in 1957 in Cincinnati. He was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on 03/01/30. He is married and has three children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

> for what happens in this world in out relations with one another;
> that human beings are responsible for the perpetration of evil
> and that human beings must repair the damage done to the world
> and improve the human condition.

Bronstein insisted that when people live in a covenantal relationship with God, they live with a set of expectations, with a standard of decency and righteousness that must be upheld. Bronstein was teaching his congregation that with the sacredness of covenant comes the seriousness of obligation, to self, to others, and to the world.

This led Bronstein to identify a second level of covenant. He told his listeners that all human beings became bound together in a "covenant of nations" by the events of 9-11. Unlike what the enemy expected, Bronstein declared, ". . .there has been a remarkable gathering of nations to face up to the issue of terrorism which the nations have so long neglected in great part due to. . .their own particular self interest." This covenant of nations is a biblical vision, Bronstein explained. It is a unity that Judaism has preached for centuries. Bronstein elaborated on this unity and this vision of humanity by saying, "just as there is one God, so there is one humankind." Through the terrible horrors of September 11th, the world was beginning to take notice of that fact.

In the final analysis, Bronstein explained, ". . .we have no option but to hope." Quoting from the prophet Jeremiah, he urged his listeners to embrace a hopeful stance as they looked toward the future; "Keep up your hope. Build houses, raise your children, plant gardens, eat the fruits thereof." Not to have hope, not to build and plant and harvest, would be akin to handing over a victory to the enemy. Perhaps even more critical, Bronstein told his congregation that by not giving up hope, they would be giving confidence to their children that the world they will inherit will be one of peace and

prosperity. It was not a time for defeat, Bronstein insisted, but rather, "Now is our generations' opportunity for greatness, to rise up on wings as eagles, to run and not to grow weary, to walk and not be afraid." This was a great challenge, indeed. And though the challenges of Yom Kippur are weighty in and of themselves, Rabbi Bronstein felt that the challenges of 9-11 were just as important and if not more so. Thus, he ended his sermon with a plea to God, much like Rabbi Davidson: "This day strengthen us! This day make us great! O God, this day bless us!"

Rabbi David E. Stern of Temple Emanuel of Dallas, Texas told his congregation that two weeks after the attacks, they must find within themselves a "patriotic patience" while waiting for "patient justice."[23] On that sacred day of Yom Kippur, he did not preach about the Torah portion, rather, he preached on the subject of carrying the Torah into war. The Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 3:1, where it reads: "When [the king] goes to war, [the Torah] must be with him; when he comes back from war, it must be with him."

To carry the Torah into war meant to ". . .carry with us every ethical imperative, every insistence on regard for human life, every reminder that God will not welcome song at the suffering of our enemies." To carry the Torah into a conflict meant to maintain the ethics prized by Judaism. It meant to honor and preserve human life at all costs. It meant to practice compassion and not to rejoice at the death of part of God's creation. "It is to pursue a just cause justly, and to honor the memory of our innocent by honoring the lives of all innocents." Killing blindly was not the answer nor was it a tribute to those who died on 9-11, Stern insisted. To go to war with Torah metaphorically

[23] Rabbi David E. Stern. This sermon can be found in MSS Collection 674 box 1 folder 1. He was ordained from HUC-JIR in New York in 1989. He was born in Summit, New Jersey on 08/08/61. He is married with three children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

in hand, he said, was to go to war only to pursue justice, and create peace. There was no place for revenge, blind killing, and the loss of more innocent lives.

Continuing with his lesson, Stern noted that the Mishnah also taught that when the king comes back from war, the Torah must be with him then, too. To carry the Torah at home meant for Stern to be "vigilant about the rights of Arab Americans." Abusing the rights of any American, particularly those of Arab decent, would be an abomination not only of the Constitution, but also of the ethics found in the Torah. It would also be an affront to the legacy and continued work of Jews to protect the civil rights of all human beings. To hold the Torah at home, Stern continued, also meant to "begin that tshuvah work right now." It meant to be "careful about laying blame" on people like the Rev. Jerry Falwell was so quick to do. It meant to return to the Torah to understand the meaning of justice and fairness, to understand the difference between right and wrong. The Torah, Stern believed, must be the guiding force both at war and on the homefront.

Throughout the period of the high holy days in 2001, the attacks of September 11th were an obvious theme. Different rabbis chose different aspects of the tragedy in order to teach many of the same lessons. There seemed to be much to be learned from the events of the day, and much to be done in the days immediately following. Throughout the period of the days of awe, American Jews were urged to take hold of their Jewish values in order to be better citizens of the United States. They were told to pursue justice, not revenge. They were told to protect freedom, not to abuse rights of Arab Americans. They were told to hope, not to despair in the face of tragedy. Unlike the other national disasters examined in this thesis, the historical record of the decades after the crisis has yet to be written. This thesis was intended as a beginning point for the American Jewish

community to begin to come to terms with tragedy and crisis and to make meaning out of such events.

Epilogue

The primary goal of this thesis, as set out in the introduction, was to test Marc Saperstein's assertion that by studying topical sermons that pertain to significant events in American history, it is possible to shed new light on the historical record of the Jewish people in this nation. In order to achieve this goal, topical sermons written after national disasters were used as case studies. As Saperstein had predicted, the outcome of the investigation revealed significant information about how the American Jewish community leaders responded to periods of national crisis.

As the title of Saperstein's book (*Witness from the Pulpit*) suggests rabbinic sermons embody a unique kind of documentary evidence. Though rabbis experienced historical moments in time as all people did, they had the added responsibility of interpreting those moments and making meaning from them. It was the rabbi's responsibility to filter life-changing historical events through Judaism, and to make intelligible for their congregants what Judaism had to say about these occurrences. Upon the rabbis shoulders rested the burden of choosing what was significant about an event, what was remarkable about its impact, and how that event would impact the American people and, presently, the American Jew. Rabbis were witnesses, active participants in the drama of life and history.

Though the title of this thesis may suggest that the only thing rabbis did in the aftermath of a national crisis was comfort their congregants, this investigation has revealed that rabbinic sermons did much more. American rabbis advocated political positions from the pulpit and encouraged their congregants to do likewise. Rabbis admonished their congregants for allowing society to deteriorate to the point that national

crises could even occur. Rabbi Frederick Eisenberg of Temple Shalom in Chicago sent that exact message to his congregants on November 25, 1963; "The preachers of hate and disunity who have traversed our country from coast to coast, have made possible the climate of hysteria which culminated in this monstrous act of assassination."[1] He was conveying to his listeners that each and every person has the potential to either be a "preacher of hate" or a defender against hate. It was every person's responsibility to make the right choice. Some rabbis sent out warnings from the pulpit against such things as racism and bigotry. Rabbi Richard Hertz of Temple Beth El in Detroit told his congregants that all Americans were guilty in JFK's death because of their refusal to raise their voices against the hatred that was seething in America at the time. He told them "violence begets violence, where does it all end?"[2] Comforting words were woven throughout the sermons, but they were not the only kinds of words by any means.

One of the themes that recurred from the very first sermons in chapter 1 through the sermons in chapter 3 was theodicy. Many of the sermons investigated in chapter 1 wrestle with the question of "where is God" in this world crisis? One rabbi, Wolf Macht, titled his sermon, "Why is God Silent While Evil Rages?" The question of God's silence in the middle of a tragedy was one that rabbis perceived that their congregants were asking themselves and rabbis felt such a question deserved an answer. Many rabbis recognized that shocking crises caused congregants to doubt God's existence and this was a problem that could not go unaddressed. Rabbis did not accuse their congregants of lack

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[1] Rabbi Frederick Eisenberg. This sermon can be found in the AJA in MSS Collection SC 6258 box 1533. He was ordained from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati campus in 1958. He was also a rabbi in Mayfield Heights, OH. He was born in Boston, MA 01/26/31. He is married with three children. He is a member of the CCAR and the RAA.

[2] Rabbi Richard Hertz. This sermon can be found in the same collection as the above. For more information about Rabbi Hertz, see Rabbi Pamela Silk's rabbinic thesis which is a biography of Hertz. It can be found at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

of faith or weakness of belief, in fact, they did the opposite. Many argued that times of crisis are the times when belief is most crucial, and that national tragedies *are* times when God's silence seems unbearable, but they are the very times when the Jew must look for God in the silence. In the midst of the nation's entanglement in war, Rabbi Macht comforted his congregants by telling them that God is in the still, small, voice within all people. Rabbis, through their sermons, helped their listeners hear that voice once again.

Nearly a century after Macht's sermon was delivered, Rabbi Jerold Brown dealt with the same question in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11th, 2001. The brutal attack on the towers was akin to losing the security that America took for granted. This national calamity brought with it a loss of insularity, financial prowess, and two grand symbols of capitalism. Most of all, there was a random and shocking loss of life. For many Americans, the attacks took away not only a loved one, but also the country as they knew it.

Brown told his congregants that the horror they witnessed was not the work of God. God was not responsible for the actions of the pilots aboard the highjacked planes. God was not the mastermind behind the plan for the attacks. He argued that God gave people the ability to think and feel and struggle, and in the end, make freely chosen decisions. Those men who piloted the planes that killed so many thousands of people chose to perform that evil act. It was not God allowing them to act or God not stopping them from acting. According to Brown, it was evil people choosing to do evil. Quoting another rabbinic colleague and best selling author, Harold Kushner, Brown assured his congregants that God was in the resiliency of the human soul and in the affirmation that life is precious, even in the face of great evil.

Another recurring theme over this period of history is that of civil rights. After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, rabbis preached about the importance of continuing Kennedy's vision for peace and equality. Rabbi Herman Snyder, as well as so many of his colleagues, preached equality from the pulpit. In order to successfully realize Kennedy's visions, he said, the ideals which Kennedy stood for must be implemented. Those ideals Snyder listed were (a) equality of all men and (b) elimination of bigotry, intolerance and hatred. Other rabbis, like Frederick Eisenberg, called the continuation of Kennedy's fight for civil rights a 'moral duty.' Rabbis wanted to impress this idea upon their congregants not only to give meaning to JFK's martyrdom, but also because it is directly in line with the teachings of Judaism.

Following the attacks of 9-11, a new generation of rabbis was preaching about civil rights and equality for all Americans. After the attacks, it was feared that many Americans would place blame upon all Arab Americans and their homelands. This indiscriminate type of hatred and bigotry was dangerous, argued many rabbis, and like the issue of theodicy, could not go unaddressed. Rabbis identified their congregants feelings of anger and their desire for revenge, and then addressed those feelings with lessons from Jewish history. Rabbi Barry Block admitted that many people at the time were "tempted" to treat every Arab or person of the Muslim faith as a criminal. However, he told his congregants that this was no time for such accusations. Block told his listeners that Jews, of all people, know the horrible evils that stereotypes can produce.

Rabbi Jerome Davidson observed that it is very normal to be angry and be thirsty for revenge. But these emotions, he argued, were blinding. They close people's eyes to the truth that a few mean spirited people were responsible for the enormous tragedy that

occurred on 9-11. Davidson, like Block, agreed that danger of blind hatred is a lesson that Jews have learned from their own history, and it is a lesson that they should know well. In turn, Jews should remember that to hate an entire people for the actions of some, or to hate an entire people based on blanket beliefs, was a wrong that had frequently and unfairly been perpetrated on the Jews. For this reason, he noted, Jews must eschew stereotyping.

What do these sermons delivered so many years apart and speaking addressing different events have in common? One answer is that history repeats itself. Witnesses to life changing events and national crises in one generation experience many of the same emotions that subsequent generations confront when encountering national tragedies. While lessons might be learned in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy, these instructions are quickly forgotten and lost in the annals of history. People move on with their lives without the benefit of having learned by experience.

A second possibility is that human nature does not change as the years pass. One generation might learn through the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that hatred and prejudice are wrong, but the next generation, without the luxury of hearing King speak, doesn't take that lesson to heart. The power of the message dies with the experience, and future generations are left to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors, until someone else comes along to make what is wrong right again.

A third possibility is that while historians events record the facts and figures, speeches and scripts of great historical events, other material that does fit into black or white categories is not given as much attention. Sermons are neither fact nor figure, black or white. Sermons are so valuable, though, for just that reason. They live in the gray areas

that history can not calculate. They tackle the emotional side of the statistics and the personal side of the event at hand. Sermons, through their analytical processes, make sense of history for a reader, and gives them a perspective that is perhaps more digestible than the latest high school textbook. Sermons reveal what regular people were thinking and feeling, rather than what scholars and intellectuals were analyzing and writing.

This thesis, in its exploration of topical sermons, built upon Marc Saperstein's thesis by showing how the topical sermon contributes to our understanding of past events. Sermons also answer the question of 'who will care about this' in the future. They answer that question by providing important lessons for contemporary readers, values from Jewish tradition, and enduring messages that will guide generations to come.

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