



HIGH HOLY DAY SERMONS

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TESHUVAH: ANCHORING OUR FAITH

ROSH HASHANAH EVENING - 5766

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

The last few months have been “news intensive.” Everywhere we turn – radio, TV, newspaper, online – there is news that really matters. Mounting casualties in Iraq, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, the Supreme Court Round I – and now the Supreme Court Round II – have literally been the headlines of our lives for weeks.

To say the least, there has been a lot of news, a lot of heavy, consequential, important, “stop you in your tracks and listen” news. The news has been so constant, so intense, and so furious that at times it seems as if the headlines have become the content of our private lives. Usually, only news junkies and political activists are fully immersed in the news on a daily, if not hourly, basis. Not so today. Everyone, it seems, lives from newscast to newscast. It has been an extraordinary few months.

During the course of the holidays, both Rabbi Rigler and I will speak about the current state of events and how they are connected to Jewish life. Tomorrow I will talk about Israel’s remarkable disengagement from Gaza. At the Kol Nidrei service, I plan to talk about Iraq and its Jewish connection, and on Yom Kippur morning, Rabbi Rigler will talk about our synagogue’s incredible hurricane relief effort and other social action issues. There is simply no way to avoid the news and the issues of the day. For sure, we need to talk and reflect on them in this sacred place as a matter of civic and Jewish duty.

Tonight, however, as we usher in the New Year 5766, I want to try to reclaim something of the personal and the private in our lives, particularly with regard to Judaism – “what we believe” and “what we don’t believe” at the personal level. I want to do this because the holidays themselves mandate such reflection. Neither Rosh Hashanah nor Yom Kippur are historical in nature. That is, they are not tied to a story

like Passover or Hanukkah or Purim. Rather, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are about the individual, personal faith, personal doubts, self-evaluation and personal goal setting. They are about the individual repenting. They are about our universal condition as individuals and as Jews.

Surely, the High Holy Days are also about community and coming together for collective renewal. But at their core, Rosh Hashanah and, even more so, Yom Kippur are about you and me in our exclusiveness and uniqueness as individuals and how we stand before God all alone without the social barriers and emotional defenses of community and family. Given the invasiveness of the news in recent weeks, it is even more important than ever to return to the personal as we begin this new year. Indeed, if we are to participate in any of the great issues of our day, from debating the war in Iraq, to helping Israel, to providing hurricane relief, we need to know who we are, what we believe, what we want to do to help and how to renew ourselves in the process of rethinking our place in the world today.

This year the holidays are intensely public because of their intersection with the great issues of our day. For the same reason, it is critical that they also be intensely personal and self-centered but not narcissistic or overly self-absorbed. The distinctive feature of Rosh Hashanah is to listen personally to the sounds of the *shofar* and to do so in the midst of the congregation, a purposeful placement of the personal in the precincts of the public. Likewise, on Yom Kippur we confess our personal sins, but we do so inside the synagogue with other people, often strangers, all around us. The High Holy Days instruct us how to place the personal within the public.

If there is one great theme which informs the High Holy Days, it is *teshuvah*, which can be rendered in theological parlance in English as “repentance” or, more existentially, as “turning” or “returning.” *Teshuvah* is a specifically religious idea which has to do with returning spiritually to the Jewish fold. A *Baal Teshuvah*, or Jewish returnee, or even a kind of Jewish born-again, is a person who has reoriented him or herself back to Judaism from some other place.

Physically, everyone here tonight is on the path of *Teshuvah*, because you have returned to the synagogue on this sacred night. The power of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is immense in this regard. It is like a giant spiritual magnet. It calls us home with the great primal sounds of the *shofar*: *Tekiah, Teruah, Shevarim, Tekiah Gedolah*. They are the summons to the people of Israel to come home. They are the sounds of alarm. They are the sounds of return. They are the sounds of renewal.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are like a Jewish homecoming, a special set of days and convocation to gather the alumni of every age and renew our ties with our tradition, this institution and one another. On the field at our homecoming are two teams ready to do battle: the home team in the white yarmulkes is us and the visiting team in black yarmulkes is . . .us, too.

Being called home for the holidays is being called to challenge yourself, your own beliefs and faiths, your own level of Jewish commitment, to reconcile your own ledger of intentions and actual practices. On one bench is who we really are. On the other bench is who we want to become.

Teshuvah is a tough game because it requires spiritual honesty and personal commitment. Our scores are kept in the Book of Life but not announced.

Jewish homecoming is the biggest and most important game of the year.

One verse, a familiar verse we sing every Shabbat, sums up what *Teshuvah* is all about. It is the last verse we sing at the Ark when returning the Torah. It follows the song, "Eitz Chaim." The verse begins, "*Hashiveinu Adonai eileicha v'na-shuva; hadesh aleinu k'kedim.*" "Turn us, Lord, to You, and we will be turned; renew us as we were in early times."

"Hashiveinu" can be sung in a number of different ways, all of them haunting, all of them penetrating, all of them stirring, all of them designed to put us on the road of return to *Teshuvah*.

The verse itself comes from the *Book of Lamentations*, the second to last verse in the tract, the penultimate thought of the saddest book in the Hebrew Canon. Attributed to the "doom and gloom prophet," Jeremiah, *Lamentations* is a dirge

bewailing the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The city is gone, everything is lost, the only shred of hope left is that God will show mercy to our people, "Return us, Lord, to you," cries the forlorn prophet, "and we will be turned."

Making *Teshuvah* is no easy matter. The traditional request to do so assumes the emotional realities of spiritual abandonment, estrangement, displacement and rejection. *Teshuvah* begins with the pleading of the spiritually forlorn.

"Bring us back, Lord," the prayer seems to be saying, "and we will return. You alone, God, can help us. We can't help ourselves. We are too far gone or too tired or too weak to seek you. Only You, God, can help us and bring us home to our heritage. Make us like we used to be: happy, complete and connected. Help us, Lord, and return us to a happier, better state of emotional and spiritual wellbeing."

The fact of the matter is that each of us begins our journey of *Teshuvah* from a different starting place. Each of us has different personal issues, different personal histories, different levels of theological education and different levels of belief.

The variety of personal situations which fill this room is as great as the number of people sitting here. We need to recognize our human diversity before we even begin to seek our Jewish commonalities and set out on the path of *Teshuvah*.

Some of us have suffered hard losses this year and are seeking solace in this sanctuary.

Some of us have suffered hard losses and need to vent our anger and hurt in this place.

Some of us feel much older than last year and are worried.

Some of us feel much better than last year and want to rejoice.

Some of us have been renewed by the arrival of new lives in our families.

Some of us have moved from familiar places and are unsure where to sink roots.

Some of us want to move but can't find a way to pull our roots up.

Some of us have started new jobs.

Some of us have lost old jobs.

Some of us have been coming here for years and feel at home.

Some of us have been coming here for years and no longer feel at home.
Some of us are new to this congregation and are unsure what to do here.
Some of us are alone and in need of friendship.
Some of us are stifled by too many relationships and lack of freedom.
Some of us feel content and loved.
Some of us are starving for love.
Some of us are eager to be here tonight.
Some of us are here under duress.
Some of us are here because it is the path of least resistance.
Some of us are here hoping to find a path.
Some of us are here to be renewed by the prayers, by the music, by the power of
the congregation.

As the new year begins, we need to recognize that each of us has a different starting position on the path of life and on the road to *Teshuvah*.

Just as we have different autobiographies and paths in life, so we also represent in this forum a vast spectrum of religious views and beliefs.

Indeed, some of us are atheists and find ritual insufferable.

Some of us are atheists but like ritual anyway.

Some of us are agnostic and are unsure why we are here.

Some of us are agnostic but love to be here.

Some of us have deep religious feelings but are unsure if this synagogue, or any synagogue, is the right venue to express them.

Some of us have deep ties to the synagogue but are unsure if our ties are truly religious.

Some of us want to be more active but don't know how to fit in.

Some of us feel over-involved and don't know how to get out.

Some of us are here for the music.

Some of us are here for the sermon.

Some of us are here despite the sermon.

Some of us read Hebrew and feel connected through the sacred language of the Jewish people.

Some of us do not know Hebrew and feel disconnected because of the sacred language of the Jewish people.

Some of us feel religious but not very Jewish.

Some of us feel very Jewish but not very religious.

Some of us pray every day.

Some of us cannot comprehend the idea of praying.

Some of us come to synagogue once a year and it is enough.

Some of us come once a year and it is too much

Some of us come every week and it's not enough.

Some of us are here because of our families.

Some of our families are here because of us.

Some of us can't imagine being anywhere else at this moment.

Some of us can't imagine why we are not somewhere else at this moment.

As a congregation, we are so complex, so diverse, so different from one another and yet we are all here.

From many directions, from many angles, from many different sets of assumptions, we have arrived at this place, at this time and, together, have placed ourselves on the path of *Teshuvah*.

The first step on the path of *Teshuvah* is backwards, a consideration of whence we have come, individually and collectively. To begin, we need to turn ourselves around and think about the path that brought us here – our parents, our grandparents, our distant ancestors in Europe, our forebears in the era of the Talmud, the diverse and discontented Jews of the Second Temple, the Jews of the Exile, the ancient Israelites farming on the Land of our fathers and mothers, our progenitors wandering with Moses through the desert, the ancient nomadic clans of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and Leah. To begin *Teshuvah*, we need to reach way back, all the way to our origin as a people.

Long before we began our journey in life, others walked before us, sometimes in great peril, but they stayed on the Jewish path until they arrived in the land of our living memory, and now we, too, are on that path.

To stay on the path of *Teshuvah*, we also need to consider our “Jewish present” in all its dimensions. We can plug into the Jewish present like a three-prong plug: one prong connects us to the wider Jewish people; one prong connects us to this congregation; and, the last prong – the ground – connects us to our own spiritual life. It is not enough merely to be here. We are challenged to connect, to ground ourselves, to be conduits of the power of our tradition, to add to the power of that tradition, to help the Jewish spirit fill up this sanctuary with song and prayer.

Teshuvah today means connecting, reconnecting, reorienting, turning, buying in, dropping the emotional defenses, getting past the political obstacles, lowering the guard and leading with the heart.

Teshuvah today means offering spiritual amnesty where hurts prevail.

Teshuvah today means expressing spiritual gratitude where satisfaction prevails.

Teshuvah today means finding a way to want to continue on the path of Judaism together.

The final step of *Teshuvah* is turning to the future, of making a commitment beyond one’s personal spiritual and familial needs.

The final act of *Teshuvah* is an act of faith, a statement that this congregation, the Jewish community, the Jewish people must endure, and we can give something of ourselves to make that happen.

Why must the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition endure? Is longevity and tradition our only rationale for being and surviving? Are we no more than a community of sentiment and nostalgia? Do we have a higher purpose which demands our support? Are we only a community of memory or are we a community “of memory and of destiny?”

Judaism, maintained by the Jewish people, must endure because it has a unique message for humanity. Judaism represents a viable path to redemption for humanity.

Judaism is a path of righteousness. Judaism uniquely combines justice and mercy. Judaism places deed above creed. It values life. It is anchored in hope and tutored by despair. It is realistic and idealistic. It believes in diversity and the ultimate unity of humanity. It stands in awe of Creation and believes in partnership with the Creator. It is the path and the home of our people. It is a beacon of light to other peoples. It is a sane voice in an increasingly insane world.

In Judaism's classic rabbinic literature, the whole Jewish people were arrayed before God on the High Holy Days, from Abraham and Sarah to our own generation to the distant generation, when according to tradition the prophet Elijah will usher in the age of redemption – this is called “Keneseth Israel.”

We, the Jewish people, are Keneseth Israel.

We stand together on the path of *Teshuvah* at the beginning of this new year. Recognizing our differences and strengthening our commonalities, let us begin to move forward, step by step, with our sacred work. Let us open our hearts to the sounds of the *shofar*. Let us allow our souls to be stirred; let us determine to use our minds and our might in the work of redemption.

The world around us is swirling with great events. Let us not get lost in the vortex but instead seek and find new strength and higher purpose in our faith, in our tradition and in ourselves.

May the new year be a year of *Teshuvah*, of return and renewal, a year of rebuilding and unity, a year of sustenance and security, a year of restored hope, a year of safety and a year of peace for all God's children.

Amen. Shana Tova.

GAZA

ROSH HASHANAH MORNING - 5766

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

Without question, the biggest Jewish news story of the last year, a year filled with incredible headlines, was Israel's withdrawal from Gaza. The Jewish community the world over was braced for the worst possible outcome: Jew fighting Jew. Throughout the year, both international Jewish and local Israeli opposition to the withdrawal mobilized and stirred deep emotions. Orange became the Jewish color of discontent this summer. Orange shirts and banners were everywhere. Everyone was braced for the worst internecine Jewish violence since the last days of Jerusalem in the Roman period.

From their vantage point, the Palestinian community watched with great skepticism. "They will never leave," they said, and, "If they leave, what difference will it make? The Israelis will still control the sea, the sky and the economy."

For their part, many in the European community, obsessed with their hatred of Ariel Sharon, openly questioned Israeli motives and the probable outcome of the process. In much of Europe, Israel is viewed as a mega-colonial power, the most racist state on the planet and doggedly irredentist.

Except for the Israeli government and the Israeli army, which discreetly and unpretentiously rehearsed for the evacuation, no one knew what to expect, except something bad. Then, on August 15th at midnight, the borders of Gaza were sealed. Two days later, the army began removing settlers. Quietly, systematically, forcefully but with great sensitivity, the IDF dismantled 21 settlements, evacuated 9,000 settlers and, finally, withdrew its own forces.

All this was achieved with cameras rolling and the whole world watching.

All this was done without serious injury, except for self-inflicted wounds, and without deaths caused by violence.

All this was done ahead of schedule and with exceptional efficiency.

As far as I know, there is no historical parallel of a sovereign state giving up land it captured in war, land contiguous with its sovereign homeland, in the name of peace and justice.

There is no historical parallel of an army removing its own civilian population, against the will of that population, with such incredible discipline, precision and compassion.

There is no historical parallel of a unilateral action of land for peace.

In short, Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza was unprecedented, breathtaking and courageous. The withdrawal now stands with the Six Day War, the bombing of Iraq's nuclear power plants and the raid on Entebbe as one of the signature actions of the Jewish state.

We have much to be proud of today as Jews and supporters of the State of Israel. We can be proud of Israel's resolve, its democratic character, its Jewish values and its willingness to take reasonable risks and bold actions in the name of peace. We should be proud of its young people and its soldiers for their passion, discipline and devotion. If you ever doubted that the spirit of Israel is as strong today as it was 40 years ago, look at the pictures of the soldiers of Israel during the disengagement and how they discharged their duties. It was truly inspirational!

The story of the withdrawal from Gaza was essentially a modern day reenactment of this morning's Torah portion. Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac as a test of his devotion to God. Modern Israel felt commanded to sacrifice its hold on Gaza as a sign of its commitment to peace and its willingness to take bold actions to defend itself. Abraham was then ordered by God not to slay the child. Modern Israel also showed tremendous restraint by not hurting the settlers when they were removed from their homes. We can only hope that at the end of the day, Israel and the Gaza settlers will be able to walk together just as Abraham and Isaac walked off together toward Beersheba at the conclusion of the horrifying Akedah epic.

Like *Akedat Yitzchak*, the question of Gaza is complicated. Gaza is a small flat coastal territory. Only 135 square miles, 1/5 the size of Montgomery County,

Pennsylvania, it is home today for almost 1.5 million Arab residents, and until the third week of September, 2005, approximately 9,000 Jewish settlers. Some of it is very beautiful. Its land mostly supports light agriculture. It has resort-quality beaches but lacks a true natural port.

Gaza sits at the juncture of the world's two largest continents, Asia and Africa. It straddles what was called the Via Maris in the ancient world, the great caravan system connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia. Gaza has never been particularly rich, but it has almost always been unstable.

During the conquest of Canaan in Biblical times, the ancient Israelites failed to take control of Gaza even though it was promised to the tribe of Judah. Instead, it was taken over by the Philistines, an Aegean people displaced by the Trojan wars. Samson, a tragic figure and judge during the tribal period of ancient Israel, was deceived by Delilah and met his fateful end in a pagan temple in Gaza. David rose to prominence in ancient Israel when he slew the gigantic Philistine warrior, Goliath. The Hasmoneans, the successors of the Maccabees, were the only Jews to subdue Gaza in ancient times, but they held it for less than a century. In the year 635 CE, Gaza fell to the Arabs and was both Arabized and converted to Islam. In the ensuing centuries, only small pockets of Jews have lived there.

I would argue that part of the reason Ariel Sharon determined he could leave Gaza is that it has never really been part of the Jewish homeland. Although some revisionist maps might include it in Greater Israel, it does not have definitive Halachic status as such. It is neither truly *Eretz Yisrael*, the land of Israel, or *Chutz La'aretz*, outside the land. Ultimately, its Jewishness is debatable and, therefore, its disposition was negotiable by an Israeli government.

In 1947, Gaza, with a total population of less than 60,000, was promised by the UN to the Palestinians as a region in their national homeland. But during the War of Independence, it came under Egyptian control. Although Egypt never formally annexed Gaza, it did retain administrative control over it until the 1967 War.

Israel began to place settlers into Gaza by the end of 1967. It also retained control of Gaza in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and Anwar Sadat, perhaps with clairvoyant powers, decided not to take Gaza back under Egyptian control as part of his peace agreement with Menachem Begin. It was as if a time bomb with a long fuse was now set and burning down to an inevitable explosion. Hamas, a radical Palestinian Islamic resistance movement, was founded in Gaza in 1987, the same year which saw the beginning of the first Palestinian Intifada. Inspired by Iranian-style terrorists, Hamas quickly gained massive backing on the Arab street in Gaza and linked itself with international anti-American terrorism. Lest we forget, Hamas was also linked to the first bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in 1993. Despite the radicalization of Gaza's Arab population and, perhaps, because of it, Israel continued to build and expand its infrastructure in Gaza until two years ago.

What led Ariel Sharon, an architect of the settler movement, an opponent of Labor's "land for peace" policy and a tough military commander, to change his mind about Gaza? The main factor was demographic. Although the numbers are disputed by the Zionist Organization of America and other right-wing pro-Israel groups, common wisdom in Israel today is that the Palestinian birthrate greatly exceeds the Jewish birthrate. It is only a matter of time, save another huge influx of Jewish immigrants from abroad, until Israel, combined with the territories, will have a majority Arab population. In the not too distant future, every reasonable demographic projection suggests, the combined Arab population of Arab Israelis, Arabs in Gaza and Arabs in the West Bank and Jerusalem will constitute a clear majority in the Land of Israel west of the Jordan river.

By ceding Gaza, Sharon helped preserve the Jewish character of Israel. Not so remarkably, throughout England and Europe, Sharon was taken to task for this so-called racist goal. They even dared to call the disengagement "ethnic cleansing." In fact, the opposite is true. Arabs were not removed from their homes. Jews were. Arabs were not denied their rights; their autonomy was actually augmented. Only those

irrefutably opposed to the existence of a Jewish state in the first place could have opposed Sharon's decision.

In a certain sense, Sharon actually saved the settlers from the consequences of their own miscalculations about the State of Israel, the Land of Israel and Jewish sovereignty. Israel actually has a number of internal demographic issues to deal with, including the population profile of the Galilee, Jerusalem and sectors of the Negev. To some extent, the relocation of Gaza's 9,000 settlers will help in some of these equations.

Sharon was also motivated by security concerns. Fighting Arab terrorists and protecting Jewish settlers in Gaza was no easy task. Force and restraint needed to be combined at all times. Border crossings needed careful monitoring. Internal roads needed to be protected. Meanwhile, the Israeli military and civilian presence, as Sharon himself pointed out, only made the situation with the Arabs worse.

In 2004, at the Herzliya Conference sponsored by Israel's Institute for Policy and Strategy, Sharon unveiled his disengagement plan. He met with tremendous resistance from within his Likud party and from the religious right. The majority of his own coalition was threatened. The Prime Minister hopscotched back and forth, keeping both himself in power and the disengagement plan alive. Meanwhile the army began to figure out how it would organize itself internally with the object of removing the settlers while at the same time assuring that it would not be split apart by insubordination. As late as December, 2004, a new coalition with Labor was formed to keep the disengagement plan alive.

It doesn't take a great deal of insight at a purely human level to understand the huge display of emotion which accompanied the eviction of the settlers from their homes. "Home" is more than a physical place. It is a web of many networks. It is a place of being which takes years to develop. To uproot an entire community is difficult even if you are hostile or neutral to the population being affected. Imagine what it must be like to evict your own countrymen, people you either respect or know. Imagine closing schools and synagogues and post offices and doctors' offices and every nook and cranny of what we call daily life.

On top of that, add a long, tragic history of Jewish evictions and evacuations, of Jews fleeing from Poland and being chased out of Morocco and Iraq. Imagine being on the other side of the evacuation.

Think about the centrality of land in the Zionist dream, of living on the land of Israel as a free and independent people. Think about the contraction of that dream and the loss of land, the redemptive agent in the life of your people.

Think about your own families, most of whom live only 30 or 40 miles away from the action. They look like the settlers. Talk like the settlers. Eat like the settlers. Pray like the settlers. In their faces, you see your face.

Some of the settlers misbehaved horribly. Some are in jail for their actions. Throwing chemicals on your own soldiers is a crime. Placing Jewish stars on the clothing of little children so they look like they are Holocaust victims is morally repugnant. No one was being shot or gassed. The government was and is willing to spend vast sums of money to help the Gaza settlers rebuild their lives. Too many of the protests were “over the line” and harmful to the wellbeing of the State of Israel.

No one knows what the long-term benefits of the disengagement will be. In the short term, Israel’s demographic challenge was solved. Israel was supported by the United States, numerous European countries (much to their own surprise) and even the United Nations. The disengagement was an immense political success, at least in the short run.

By contrast, the initial Palestinian reaction was truly ugly. Various terrorist groups tried to get a jump on some first class real estate. Israeli hot houses and other business were instantly looted. Palestinians poured over the Egyptian border. Worst of all, the abandoned synagogues of Gaza were razed to the ground by angry mobs. The world was completely silent as these atrocities were carried out. When Jewish mobs attacked mosques in the North of Israel recently, we know what happened. The authorities jumped in and took action. Perpetrators were arrested. Law and order were restored, yet Israel was nevertheless criticized!

We know the Palestinian situation is complex. The Palestine Authority is uneven in its performance and determination to control terrorism. Hamas and Islamic Jihad continue to push the envelope. Civil war on the Arab street in Gaza is a real possibility. Assassinations and political murders are rampant. The shelling of Israel from within Gaza has resumed and, most worrisome, the prospect of an influx of a huge number of Palestinians from Lebanon and perhaps Jordan is possible. Talk of vast economic development in Gaza seems empty with the PA still largely not in control and the various factions and gangs within Abbas' own organization still out of control.

In his speech of May 18, 2005, Sharon correctly declared that "now the Palestinians bear the burden of proof. They must fight terror organizations, dismantle its infrastructure and show sincere intentions of peace in order to sit with us at the negotiating table." The Prime Minister continued, "The world awaits the Palestinian response – a hand offered in peace or continued terrorist fire. To a hand offered in peace, we will respond with an olive branch. But if they choose fire, we will respond with fire, more severe than ever."

Israel's response to renewed Kasam rocket attacks have shown that Sharon will keep his word and, hopefully, will also show that Israel can use its superior fire power in the air and even on the ground against Hamas in Gaza if they need too. It won't exactly be the equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel, but we can all be assured Israel will not suffer terrorism lightly.

What can we do to help? Israel is a strong, independent democracy but it still needs our support. Israel enjoys a special political relationship with our country but we must continue to advocate for that relationship.

We can also invest in Israel, directly through business, or through bonds or through charitable conduits like Federation.

We can go to Israel as tourists. Tourism continues to rebound and American Jews need to be part of that trend. Hopefully, within the next year or so, we will be able to reestablish the tradition of Confirmation and High School trips to Israel, once a regular part of our educational program prior to the two Arab intifadas.

We can strengthen pro-Israel programming here at KI. We have an Israel Committee and it needs your help and involvement. As many of you know, our synagogue was recently maligned in the *Exponent*, and the ghosts of 60 years ago were resurrected despite decades of pro-Israel advocacy at KI. Help us, help Israel and help us keep KI identified with Israel.

You can also vote for ARZA and the Reform Movement in the upcoming international World Zionist Organization vote. You can help strengthen Israel by broadening its Jewish religious spectrum and giving Israelis the choices they need and want in spiritual matters.

Finally and most importantly, make Israel part of the life of your children and grandchildren. Make your families "Israel-in-the-news aware." Display Israeli art in your homes. Hang a picture of Jerusalem in a prominent spot where you live.

The survival of the Jewish people over the centuries remains a mystery. Although our survival is essentially miraculous, it is also based on solidarity and loyalty. Israel is the greatest experiment in Jewish life in modern times. It is an incredible country which has done more to rebuild the Jewish people and the Jewish spirit than any other agency in our collective life.

Before we sing the *Birkat HaMazon*, our grace after eating, we sing a Psalm of *shivat tzion*, of returning to Zion.

When we end our seders on Passover, we say, "Next year in Jerusalem!" And when we conclude a wedding, we pray may that "there will ever be heard the sounds of children at play in the holy city."

As we begin this new year, keep Israel and Jerusalem in your prayers just as our people have done for centuries.

May the one who makes peace in the heavens above, make peace for us and for all Israel and, we say, Amen and Shana Tova.

IRAQ: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

YOM KIPPUR EVENING – KOL NIDRE 5766

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

Her name was Lori. She was from Arizona. She was 23. She was a divorced mother of two children, ages 4 and 3. She served in the 507th Army Maintenance Unit. Her grandfather served in WWII. Her father served in Vietnam. Her unit, including a better known soldier, Jessica Lynch, was ambushed in Iraq. Lori stood her ground and died firing her weapon. She was the first Native American woman to die in combat in service to the United States. She is buried on the Indian reservation near where she grew up.

His name was Nolan. He was 20. He was an average kid who faced a number of personal challenges growing up near Spartansburg, South Carolina. He dreamed of being a Marine. He served in the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment. His unit came under enemy fire near the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriya. Air cover was ordered but was miscalculated. Nolan was killed by so-called friendly fire.

Wednesday, September 28, 2005. Two weeks ago exactly. What were you doing? I was in New York City. Every Wednesday, I teach at my rabbinic school, HUC. I remember getting out of the subway one stop early so I could walk through the open air market in Union Square. It was sunny. People were relaxed, even for New York. I don't recall seeing a single political button or T-shirt or student handing out leaflets. Another great day to be alive, to be enjoying one's work, to be traveling around the country on trains and subways with relative ease and modest expense.

Wednesday, September 28, 2005. Somewhere near Ramadi, Iraq. A Bradley Fighting Vehicle staffed with soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, found itself in a deadly fire fight. It was a bad day for our Commonwealth and its soldiers. Staff Sgt. George, 39, of Carbondale, Daniel, 27, a Staff Sgt from Montrose; Sgt. Eric, 21, of Township; Specialist

Lee, 20, of Hallstead; and PFC Oliver, 19, also of Carbondale, were all KIA, killed in action.

We have a lot to think about tonight as a nation and as a people. Although not many of us feel it directly and few of us have been compelled to sacrifice for it, we are at war, a war that is staggering in its cost in human lives and materiel. No one really knows how many people have died in the second Iraq war. The official American number of casualties is 1,956 dead and nearly 14,000 wounded. Add to that coalition losses, civilian contractors, Iraqi security forces, Iraqi citizens and insurgents killed in action, the total number is staggering. Maybe 100,000. Maybe 200,000. Maybe 600,000.

The material costs of the war are mounting. Congress is now allocating in the hundreds of billions. We have no timeline for an exit of coalition forces. We have no plan for the rebuilding of the country of Iraq and no final dollar amount to attach to it. We are urged to “stay the course.” From one point of view, I think we can all understand why “staying the course” is a necessary political and military option. Simply put, we have soldiers in the field and we can’t cut them off from behind. But from another point of view, I imagine most of us can also understand why “staying the course” is not a feasible strategy for the United States because of lack of goals and the enormity of the potential cost in lives and materiel.

We have a lot to think about tonight as a nation and a people, as Americans and as Jews. Yom Kippur is meant for serious reflection. One way or another, by assent or silence or opposition, we are all part of the story of America’s war in Iraq. We can play the role of the ostrich and pretend that we have no connection to the fighting. But that is a dangerous delusion. Indeed, whether we are a military family, Republican enthusiasts or card-carrying Democrats, we are part of the history of our times. We can even choose to be bystanders, but that is a position too, and it is far from morally or politically neutral.

On this night of ultimate self-assessments, I would urge you to dig deep into your consciences and “personal news data bases” and consider where we are as a nation in Iraq, where we are headed, what the goals are and how we can conclude our

business there. It is confusing. There are other issues at hand. But Iraq is now central to who we are as a nation and a people.

The list of questions about the war in Iraq is long, growing and increasingly complex and painful:

- Was Saddam Hussein a direct threat to the United States?
- Was he tied to 9/11? Was he tied to international terrorism? Did he possess weapons of mass destruction? Did he violate one too many UN Security Council resolutions?
- Were we obliged to come to rescue of victims of human rights' abuses in Iraq? How important is Iraqi oil to our national interests?
- Are we spreading democracy in the Middle East by fighting in Iraq? Can we fight democracy by fighting Baathists and Jihadists but not corrupt monarchies, the historic target of most democratic revolutions?
- Did we need to fight a big war? Do we need to continue to maintain an army of occupation?
- Did we understand the three-part sharing of power in Iraq – Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite – before we destroyed the regime of Saddam Hussein?
- Do we support the concept of American unilateralism? How important is our relationship with our allies, especially in Europe, on this matter?
- Is the war justified because of the absolute necessity of a victorious outcome in both the military and the political arenas in Iraq and beyond?
- What are the consequences of not challenging Islamic terror and Baathist Fascism in Iraq?
- Is this a war which was launched with good reason but not pursued with adequate force or post-invasion planning?
- How are we going to pay for the war in Iraq, rebuild the American Gulf Coast, keep vital services intact in this country and keep a cap on taxes?
- Are military enlistment levels falling to dangerously low levels? Is a backdoor draft fair? What is the international role of our National Guard?

- And probably the most emotional of all questions in the post-Vietnam era: how can we criticize the war in Iraq and not undermine our soldiers in harm's way?

These are just some of the banner questions we need to consider about America's involvement in Iraq. But that is not the end of the matter for us as American Jews. As American Jews, whether we like it or not, and independent of how we prioritize our own personal Jewishness and American-ness, we are also involved in the general discussion about the war in Iraq in yet another set of dimensions which are specific to our group within American society.

Almost exactly one year ago, the great American Jewish novelist, Philip Roth, published his counterfactual story, *The Plot Against America*. Many people understood it as something more than a "what if" scenario which landed Charles Lindbergh and not a third term FDR in the White House. They understood it as more than even an insightful exploration of Jewish insecurities and American anti-Semitism in the late 1930s and early 1940s in the United States. Many people understood Roth's work as an historical parable about the Bush administration and the war in Iraq and specifically about a so-called "Jewish motivation" for the war. In the years prior to America's entrance into World War II, many isolationists and "American First" types led by Charles Lindbergh argued that Jews were leading America into war against Germany for their own interests but not in the best interests of this country. In the end, of course, Roth's *Plot Against America* affirms that we fought World War II for the best interests of the United States and the free world, not because of Jewish interests.

Do not delude yourselves – there are dangerous voices both on the right and the left of the political spectrum today, both opposed to the war in Iraq, who view Jewish involvement in the launching of the Iraq War in the most nefarious of terms. On the left are the Cindy Sheehans and others, who explicitly complain that America is fighting the Iraq War for the benefit of Israel. Outside the United States, those voices are even louder and are generally tied to radical anti-Israel groups and causes.

Not unlike in the late 1960s and early 1970s when parts of the Civil Rights Movement were morphing into Black Nationalism and some anti-Vietnam

organizations were not just protesting the war but advocating extreme anti-American, anti-Israel viewpoints, many American Jews critical of the war in Vietnam found themselves essentially political orphans in the peace movement. How do you hold hands with someone who hates someone you love? Do you compartmentalize in the name of a higher morality, or do you stop holding hands with the enemy of your friends?

I am convinced that tens of thousands of American Jews are ready to speak up against the war in Iraq. But with whom can they partner? People who are calling for the destruction of Israel on the flip side of their anti-Iraq protest signs? The former radical SDS leader, Rabbi Arthur Waskow, might be willing to march with 100,000 anti-war activists on a Shabbat in Washington, DC, and Ismar Shorsch, the retiring Chancellor of the Conservative Movement's New York-based Jewish Theological Seminary, might be willing to come out and openly call the war a mistake, but they are rare exceptions in today's American Jewish community.

The result has been a painful self-stifling of many voices in the American Jewish community. Remarkably, I can't even find a single major statement by our own Reform Movement – which broadly liberal in most policy areas – on the war in Iraq within the past two years.

Similarly, if you go to Hillel sites on the web, they will direct Jewish college students to publications which begin with the question, "Confused about Iraq?" and then launch into Jewish texts which illuminate and complicate ethical questions about war in general.

The situation on the right wing of American politics is no better. I looked at David Duke's website recently. He was very quick to pick up on Cindy Sheehan's comments about Israel. "Cindy is right," he declared, "Iraq is a Jewish war."

Even inside the "respectable spectrum" on the American right, voices like Pat Buchanan are ringing out charges of "it's their war, a Jewish war, not an American war." Even a congressional representative from Virginia recently echoed similar sentiments in public.

Buchanan, as demonstrated in an article in *Time*, was focusing on and exaggerating the views and powers of the so-called Neo-Conservatives in contemporary American political life. In fact, though, American neo-conservatism does have some roots in the American Jewish community of the late 1960s, which found itself caught in a contradiction pitting its anti-Vietnam dovishness against its hawkish pro-Israel views. Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary*, was one of the first left-wing Jewish intellectuals to move to the right on a number of foreign policy issues and develop a single, coherent, unilateralist view of America's role in the global community and thereby help lay the foundation for neo-conservatism.

Today the list of Jewish neo-conservatives is extensive and includes both Irving and William Kristol, Elliot Cohen, Elliot Abrams, Nathan Glazer, Paul Wolfowitz and even a local opinion maker, Daniel Pipes. Intellectually, much of the neo-conservative philosophy has been traced back to the prolific writings of a German-Jewish intellectual displaced to America during the 1930s, Professor Leo Strauss.

Of course, not all neo-conservatives nor all American unilateralists are Jewish. That is preposterous. And to think that President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleeza Rice are all intellectual puppets in the hands of Jewish political theorists is paranoid. But paranoia is debilitating, and some early Jewish proponents of the war have grown quieter over time as the specter of conspiratorial anti-Semitism increasingly looms overhead in political circles in this country.

On the other hand, many neo-conservatives and some other Jewish advocates of the American campaign in Iraq have held their ground and remain publicly committed to an American military victory in Iraq. Noah Feldman's 2003 book, *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy*, is unrepentant in its belief that we are on the right course as a nation. Other neo-conservative voices, such as the editor of our local Jewish community's weekly *Exponent*, have become shrill in their denunciations of anti-war activists and intellectuals but rarely spell out the reasons for their pro-Iraq views or goals, except that "It's good for Israel."

Israel itself is in a very peculiar position vis-à-vis American involvement in Iraq and, in my opinion, has won points for not returning fire when Iraqi scuds hit Tel Aviv in the first Iraqi War. Recently even Pakistan's president softened his public statements on Israel, but that was mostly to curb the growing connections between Israel and India and a nascent anti-Muslim Jewish-Hindu alliance.

Many Israelis I have spoken with would not mind if American tanks kept rolling west and into the streets of Damascus. On the other hand, if Iraq collapses into civil war and a broader Sunni-Shiite conflict develops in the Middle East, anti-Israelism could easily be used by either side to curry favor with their supporters in a broader fight. Most ironically, Israel's disengagement from Gaza has happened during the second Iraqi War, an action contrary to the wishes of American Jewish and Israeli hawks who vociferously support American actions in Iraq, in large part because they believe that the destruction of the Hussein regime was good for Israel.

In the face of this complicated mess, it's no small wonder that most American Jews are very quiet about Iraq in public. Why make noise now? Isn't this situation going to run its course and self-correct?

I'm reminded of the jam American Jews found themselves in this country just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. By the mid-1850s, nearly every religious community in the United States had split over the question of slavery and radicalized one way or the other. American Jews had stayed quiet and would have stayed quiet longer had not they been challenged by outside voices to take a stand. What followed was a brief but intense internal debate over slavery in the American Jewish community. A few Jewish abolitionists spoke up, as did apologists for slavery. One of the few rabbis who openly attacked southern slavery was KI's David Einhorn, and to this congregation's eternal credit, he was not stifled by his officers or trustees.

American Jews did not speak up in significant numbers about slavery until the eve of the Civil War. Nor have most of us been terribly public about our views on Iraq until this point. But we are approaching a critical marker in the history of the struggle over Iraq. The approval or rejection this coming weekend of a national constitution in

Iraq, which grants significant political and economic advances to the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south, is now upon us. In any event, if the Constitution is adopted and takes root, or is adopted and does not take root, or is vetoed by the requisite three provinces, it is time, in my opinion, to lay out a clear exit strategy. Either our political objectives will have been met or not. If the Iraqis, and especially the Sunni Iraqis, are ready for democracy, then so be it and let's leave the work of democracy to them. If they reject democracy, it is even more urgent to leave, lest we see our casualties spike from nearly 2,000 to 3,000 to God-knows-how-high.

In my opinion, it is almost impossible to have a clear simple definition of success in this situation. How ironic it would be if our expedition to Iraq resulted in a democratically elected pro-Iranian Shiite theocratic state! How tragic it would be if Iraq disintegrated into total civil war.

On this most sacred of nights, we need to challenge ourselves and ask all those hard and awful questions, beginning with: are the vital interests of the United States served by staying in Iraq or do we cut our losses and go home, sad, hurt and a little wiser? Do we draw a line in the sand in Iraq in the war on terror or do we find another, more pointed way to combat Jihadism? Do we continue the work of advancing democracy alone or in a multilateral fashion? These are not easy questions, and we are not exempt from trying to answer them either as Americans or as American Jews.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, a Jewish poet sat down on the banks of the Euphrates River. Without reflecting on the birth of the Jewish people near the headwaters of that mighty stream and without knowledge of the great rabbinic academies which would thrive in Mesopotamia in later antiquity, he lamented in Psalm 137, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept." Today, thousands of American tears are flowing into the waters of Babylon, and tens of thousands of American troops are dreaming of returning home to their Zion.

In my opinion, we cannot continue to go about our national life as if we live in normal times. We do not live in normal times. We are cursed, as an ancient Chinese saying goes, to live in "interesting times." It is not right to walk around on sunny

afternoons in the park or the mall as if the whole world was on holiday, when thousands of 19-year-olds from upstate and down the street, carrying the flag of our country, are in harm's way. It is not right to assign the total burden of war to a volunteer military community as if it is their duty, their responsibility, their choice. A flag in a lapel or a flag hanging from a front porch are good things, but they are not enough. There is no parallel commitment or sacrifice.

Our Jewish tradition is brutally realistic about war. It despises war as the greatest tragedy and sin we can inflict upon one another. It also understands that the time comes when we must defend ourselves or be vanquished by our enemies. There is a time for war and a time for peace, we are taught. There is a time to beat swords into plowshares and a time to beat plowshares into swords.

The great rabbi-scholar-activist Abraham Heschel once remarked that a prophet is a person who knows what time it is! On this Yom Kippur, ask yourself about the historical minute in which we are now living. Is it a time for war or a time for peace? A time to gather stones or a time to cast stones? A time for swords or a time for plowshares?

In my opinion, it is no longer a time to be silent, but a time to think and a time to speak. "I have set before you the blessing and the curse," the Torah tells on this holiday of holidays, "life and death." In a world of uncertainty and uncertain consequences, every option is frightening. The only option not available is simply to stand by silently.

There are times when we are called upon to choose. May we choose wisely for our nation and the world, and may God help us make our choices for what is right and true. If only the road to the Promised Land wasn't so long and so difficult. But that is our fate and that is our responsibility.

As the New Year begins, let us find the strength to respond to the shofar and its call to personal responsibility. May our intentions be pure, our actions just and our work enduring. Then Lori and Nolan and Daniel and Oliver and George and Eric and Lee and 1,949 others will not have died in vain.

Amen. An easy fast.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

YOM KIPPUR MORNING 2005

Rabbi Peter C. Rigler

It all started with one e-mail:

We have received notice that Temple *B'nai Israel* in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, has opened its doors and will be helping hundreds of people left homeless by Hurricane Katrina. We will be collecting items to send on Tuesday, September 6th from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. at KI. Please bring these items on Tuesday only: new or slightly used oversized t-shirts, shorts, shoes, and new baby items. We may also need help packing much of the day.

The e-mail text goes on...but that message was a simple spark that grew beyond all imagination. We knew when we received the call that we had to respond and do so quickly. The first day after the long weekend was set...we assumed that we might be able to partially fill one part of a tractor trailer that was able to help us take the supplies down the same day. So, with help of a congregant, the truck was arranged. We thought every detail was considered.

On Sunday night as we gathered things in our own home to donate, I couldn't stop thinking how much we had. Although we have been trying to clean out closets, there was no holding back at that point - we knew people were in need. But even more I thought about the entire synagogue cleaning out their closets...so I asked Stacy if she thought that maybe we would need to figure out a way to get an entire truck instead of just part of one for shipping the donations. She laughed and asked if I remembered how little all of our stuff looked in the truck when we moved a few years ago. We could have tripled everything and still had room. So together we laughed at the ridiculous notion that we could fill an entire truck with donations. After tractor trailers are gigantic!

But, when I arrived at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, September 6th, I found over 150 bags waiting at our front door, my email inbox was full, all the message lights in the synagogue flashed, the phones were ringing off the hook and cars were actually lining up. Right away I realized the simple plan of how the day would work and where volunteers were needed was already on a scale way too small to be useful...I folded it up into my pocket and never looked at it again.

We were inundated with donations of new clothing, baby supplies, water, pet food, used clothing, food, books, and toys and over \$12,000 in contributions.

The flow of donations continued car after car until 9:20 at night. Why 9:20? I tried to close the door at 8:30 but the people and bags just kept coming. Finally at 9:20 we realized we had to say no and had to lock the doors. For those of you who didn't get to see it, our lobby was stacked front to back to the ceiling with packed boxes. Our Krauskopf-Ginsburg Auditorium was filled with thousands of bags. Even more impressive than the donations were the volunteers. We had over 500 people sign in and others that didn't. Many were KI members but every synagogue and many churches in the area had participants. Perhaps most amazing was the number of people in our community who pulled up just to drop things off, saw how large the relief effort had grown, parked their cars and came in to help. We witnessed many of our kids schlepping bags from cars, and members and non-members of all ages participating. We worked for three full days folding, sorting, and packing. To watch volunteers folding and weeding through clothes with such dignity for those who they knew would be on the receiving end What an incredible sight to see so many working so hard with so much dedication and determination! Carefully folding shirts, piling boxes, pairing shoes with rubber bands so they would not be separated, and throwing out clothing beyond salvage. We sorted into hundreds of piles to group things together so when the boxes were opened they could be used as quickly as possible and would not need to be sorted further. In one case a volunteer worked for so many hours that when she finally went to go home at the end of the night

we all realized that her shoes had actually been packed in one of the countless boxes! We shipped boxes for over a month, with the final few going out only hours before our Rosh Hashanah setup began.

There is no possible way to thank the countless volunteers and businesses! So many local companies donated packing boxes and sealing tape. We shared meals, donated by local pizzerias and individuals. We worked to find places that needed the thousands of boxes we packed. Sloane Movers stopped their work to donate nine trips with moving trucks and the people to pack them and they repeated twice more in recent weeks. A local insurance company closed its doors and brought over seven employees to help us pack.

This outpouring by the members of KI and the surrounding community was truly inspiring! So much so that at 11:00 a.m. when I finally had to take a moment by myself, I ran up to my office to tell the synagogue in Baton Rouge about our incredible response. You can imagine my shock when I was told, "Thank you so much but we are already overloaded with donations...we can't accept anything."

But, as you know, that was not the end, with the help of many people we pressed on and looked across our country for ways to get the goods to people in need. Here are just some of the ways the many donations were used:

- We formed a partnership with the Black Clergy Alliance of Philadelphia. Together we sent five large tractor trailers to the Astrodome in Houston and local distribution centers, filled with items we collected. Through partnership with the black clergy, other boxes stayed here in Philadelphia to help hurricane survivors who came to our community, with an agreement that in the coming weeks any leftover clothing would be used in local homeless shelters.
- 75 cases of water were shipped to New Orleans with the help of a local trucking company.

- Another full truckload of boxes went down to Mississippi in partnership with a local thrift store.
- One young woman escaped the storm in New Orleans with just the clothing on her back. She was staying with relatives locally, heard about our drive and came literally to build a new life for herself right here. She filled two suitcases with donated clothing and toiletries.
- Donated gift certificates from home improvement stores were sent directly to members of a Reform congregation in Mandeville, LA, whose homes were impacted by the storm.
- A family arrived from the devastated region to our area and took clothing and necessities for their children, including baby supplies, a car seat and boxes of clothing.
- The Eastern Workers Service Association took ten boxes filled with school uniforms and kids' clothes for needy young people in the Philadelphia community.
- The ASPCA received 3 vanloads of pet food from us that they shipped straight to the devastated region.
- The Philadelphia Food Bank filled a truck with food and water to be distributed in hurricane affected areas and here in our city as well.
- Philadelphia Reads picked up dozens of boxes of children's books that will be used in local Philadelphia Schools.
- \$5,000 was donated to Union of Reform Judaism Jacob's Ladder warehouse in Utica, MS. I received word that through this project we were the main sponsor of a 56-foot tractor trailer with 55,000 pounds of food. This overstuffed trailer contained eight pallets of mixed canned vegetables, eight pallets of mixed cereal, eight pallets of peanut butter crackers, one pallet of baby formula, 243 jars of Jif peanut butter, 50 cases of chicken dinners, 50 cases of Bisquik and a variety of pasta and sauces.

Other money that has been raised will be used to help the Jewish community in the devastated areas. We have formed a number of connections and are waiting to hear how we can best help.

Shockingly, this is only a partial list. We had many other social service organizations locally that received a few boxes, or baby supplies. We made a difference in the hurricane-devastated region and also here at home in our own community.

We are so proud to have been part of this effort! This was truly social justice work at its finest. We united as a community and an outpouring of love emerged. It was incredible to witness the power of what we can accomplish when we come together to help others.

As I've reflected on our achievement I tried to ask myself why this worked so well. Since I first arrived here at KI, with the Social Action Committee – now under the direction of Dr. Margie Curtis Cohen – and with Rabbi Sussman, we have been trying to find ways to make social action more of a priority in our congregational life. Even within my own life I have been struggling to find a deeper and more meaningful connection to social justice and involvement in the world. I am a news junkie, but like many, I don't always seem to have time to get past the headline to get involved.

But why did it take such an event to drive us all to action? Think about it... three million children are dying every year from preventable diseases. There is a genocide going on in the Sudan; so far 1.5 million people have been killed. According to the National Census Bureau, in our own country between 2001 and 2004, the number of Americans in poverty jumped by more than four million, to 37 million people. The number of Americans without health insurance has increased by 6 million since 2000, bringing the number of uninsured to 46 million. In recent days, even as I wrote this sermon, a weekend of deadly floods and landslides in Central America and a 7.6 magnitude earthquake in South Asia

have left more than 30,000 dead – and more dying, as rescuers digging with their bare hands despair of reaching loved ones.

And these are just a few drops in the endless bucket of things going on in our world that need our attention. In the weeks that I have been thinking about today's sermon, I considered for a long time what my message would be. On one hand I am so proud of our accomplishments, but I recognize now the power and ability that we have to make a difference in our world. I thought of the powerful words of Hillel, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, and if I am only for myself what am I? And if not now when?" I realized that I wanted to convey as strongly as possible my belief and a core belief of Reform Judaism and Judaism in general that we are mandated to involve ourselves in repairing our world. It was then that I turned to today's Haftarah portion from the Book of Isaiah, where these powerful words are written as a wakeup call to communal responsibility, "God says to the people : Cry Out with a full voice, do not hold back, let your voice resound like a shofar."

Isaiah lived in Babylon in the sixth century before the Common Era. The Jewish community of his time was probably something like ours. There were rich and poor among them. Many Jews thought primarily of their own livelihoods and turned their backs on the hungry and homeless. They prayed, fasted and came together on Yom Kippur, feeling a connection because of their one-day self-sacrifice. They did not have a rabbi but a preacher among them, Isaiah, who called them to action with this simple and timeless challenge, "What is the purpose of Yom Kippur? What does it mean for us as a people?"

Listen to what he said: "On your fast day you think only of your business...what you need and want...not about your neighbors. Such a way of fasting on this day will not help you to be heard on high. "

Isaiah chastised them, "You think this is the fast God wants? A day of self-affliction? Look at you! Is this truly what a fast day is all about, is it all about you?"

Isaiah demanded, “God wants us to look past and to unlock the shackles of injustice, to undo the fetters of bondage, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every cruel chain and to share bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into our house; when we see the naked, to clothe them.”

Yom Kippur is about so much more than just apologizing for the mistakes we make or considering how much we gossip, finding ways to be nice to members of our families.

If Isaiah were to storm in here this morning as he does every year through his words, and we were to ask him what it means for him to say “I am Jewish,” he would say that it means “to remove the chains of oppression, the menacing hand, the malicious word; [to make] sacrifices for the hungry, and satisfy the needs of the afflicted.” It means linking the ritual with the ethical, not just fasting, but learning from your fast what it feels like to be hungry and then doing something about hunger, not just mouthing the prayers, but taking them to heart. If Isaiah were here, he would challenge us all to be here, too, to say, “*Hineni*, here I am, present to the divine in all of creation and therefore present to the suffering of other people. “

This year, moments after I gave a sermon on Sudan, I heard one comment that has stayed with me, “Why, why would the Rabbi talk about that in synagogue?” I believe that people come to synagogue for many reasons, for reflection, for comfort, to express joy, for inspiration and also for motivation, which we need especially on this day of Yom Kippur.

We are encouraged during this time and when we enter our synagogue to honestly examine the state of our souls. How do we do that?

The High Holiday liturgy suggests three ways: through *tefillah*/prayer, *teshuvah*/repentance and *tzedakah*/acts of righteousness. We are asked to turn in three different directions. We are asked to turn upward to God, in the act of prayer. And we are asked to turn inward, to ourselves, in honest self-

examination, introspection, and change. And we are asked to turn outward, to other people, in acts of charity and kindness.

As modern Jews, how can we turn upwards? The Hebrew word *tefillah*/prayer is derived from the word, "*l'hitpalel*", meaning "to judge oneself." This surprising word origin provides insight into the purpose of Jewish prayer. The most important part of any Jewish prayer is the introspection it provides, the moment that we spend looking inside ourselves.

The second part is *teshuvah*/repentance, and to do this, we must turn inwards. For true *teshuvah* we must look deeply into our own souls and work for positive change.

It is of this hope of forgiveness that Yom Kippur reminds us. There is no simple recipe for change. We each need to find our own way, but if we honestly and sincerely look into our souls, we can find true *teshuvah*.

Tzedakah is the third, after soul searching and seeking forgiveness and opening our hearts with prayer to connect with God: we must reach out to help others in need. But how do we get from "justice" to "charity," which is how "tzedakah" is usually translated? Throughout most of the history of the Jewish people, *tzedakah* was legislated. The Talmud ordered that Jews were to give at least 10 percent of their income to charity. Historically, *tzedakah* was administered in much the same way that taxes are today. Over and above the standard flat rate, the act of giving charity was woven into the fabric of traditional Jewish life. In the shtetl, whenever something good or bad happened, one put a coin into a box. Beggars were everywhere, and *tzedakah* was simply the way that the Jewish community took care of its own.

Tzedakah in the traditional sense is no longer a part of our daily life, and I would suggest that simply writing a check does not entirely fulfill the obligation to others.

This year, especially, I feel Isaiah's challenge so much more in light of what I realize we were able to accomplish as a community. He would look

around this synagogue, notice all the wonderful things we are doing and then he would ask, "But what about social justice at KI? "

And I would say, "All of our B'nai Mitzvah students are required to do mitzvah projects. They volunteer and work with other children, they collect clothing/books/sport equipment, they work at local parks and so many other great projects. Our students who need to earn mitzvah credits run a 'jump rope for heart' program, attend the Religious Action Center in Washington to learn about lobbying, and raise a tremendous amount of *tzedakah*. I would also share that last year's Confirmation Class purchased a *tzedakah* box that will soon be hanging on a wall in our lobby and all the money from it will benefit Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger."

I imagine Isaiah listening, considering all this in our favor. And then asking, "Tell me, what are the adult members of your synagogue required to do?"

So I would answer, "Well, you can't require adults to do anything. But many of our congregants are very active in all kinds of community work, from raising money for research into diseases, to tutoring kids in reading. Many give generously to our congregation and participate in our community. We have volunteered at homeless shelters, donated countless children's books to the City of Philadelphia, collected an incredible amount of food...And of course, we are very involved with Israel. "

Isaiah would still look puzzled. "What do you mean you can't require grown-ups to be involved with social justice?"

What happened to the prophetic voice of Judaism? Even with the Religious Action Center in Washington, DC, lobbying on behalf of important social causes for the Reform Movement, we the Reform Movement, once the champion of social justice, no longer place social justice at the center of our movement's agenda. Make no mistake about it. I am not saying that we have no social action here at KI – we do! We cook meals for those in need, collect books,

help the environment, we have an active Social Action Committee, an ongoing Mazon appeal, a Brotherhood, Sisterhood and KIFTY youth group who all engage in acts of social justice, through Sharing Is Caring we give to members of this community and beyond. We have our annual High Holy Days Food Drive in which many of you participated just this morning.

Given our size, ability and potential, are we doing enough? And am I as a rabbi doing enough? I debated long and hard about giving today's message but I feel that it is my obligation as I stand before you today.

There is a wonderful Hasidic story about a poor man who could not afford to purchase wood to heat his home for the winter. So he left his freezing family and went to the home of a man in town seeking some *tzedakah*, or at least a loan. The man turned him down.

So the poor man went to the rabbi, seeking his counsel, enlisting his support. Upon hearing his story, the rabbi immediately went to the wealthy man's home. He knocked on the door, and when the man answered, the rabbi said, "I need to speak with you on an important matter." "Of course, rabbi! Come in!" the wealthy man responded. "No," said the rabbi. "It won't take that long. You just come out." And the wealthy man did. And the rabbi began to talk. He quoted verses from Torah and Talmud and Midrash and commentaries. It was all very scholarly, but not very much to the point.

The wealthy man, shivering in the cold without a coat, said "Rabbi. I am sorry, but I do not see your point. Come inside and we'll talk about it"

"No, that's not necessary. Just wait. It will become clear in a minute." And the rabbi droned on.

Finally, not able to take the cold any longer, the wealthy man burst out saying, "Rabbi! I have no idea of what you are talking about! I am freezing. I can't stand this cold any more. Please! Come inside now!"

The rabbi then turned to the man and said, "If you cannot stand this cold after this short time, then tell me, how do you think it feels for this other fellow

and his family who must live with this cold all the time? This other fellow, to whom you denied the money to purchase the wood to warm his home.”

We human beings can learn in many ways, but we learn most effectively through our experiences. Let today’s fast remind us of what we are blessed with and how we need to help others. If you feel the pangs of hunger remember that most of us only feel them today while others suffer every day.

I am challenged by the words of the late Marshall Meyer, rabbi in Argentina, and then founder of B’nai Jeshurun, the extraordinary synagogue on the upper west side of Manhattan. The motto of his synagogue is “To inspire and to require.” To be a member, you must pledge to be involved with the synagogue through prayer, learning, and social action. If you are not ready to make that commitment, you are encouraged to participate, but you may not become a member. Rabbi Meyer wrote, “Behind what little I have done in human rights, there was and is one basic idea: if we take the Prophets seriously, we cannot negate history and return to a golden ghetto.” I have tried to respond as I believe a rabbi should respond. The problems are ours because Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah taught us they are ours, taught us that there is one humankind just as there is one God. Why should so few have so much and so many starve? This is a Jewish question

Being Jewish cannot be limited to our personal search for spirituality or meaning. Our *b’rit*/covenant with God is predicated on our willingness to be a light to the nations. Our relationship with God obligates us as partners in the ongoing perfection of this world. As Jews living in a sacred community, it is our duty to look for the divine spark in others, and to magnify that light by creating a world based on the principles of justice and righteousness.

Judaism is more than a religion of thought and belief. It is a way of being in the world. It is a way of life that supports the ongoing work of creation.

More than 40 years ago, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marched arm in arm for civil rights with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and numerous other Jewish

leaders. Heschel understood that the long and painful walk from Selma to Montgomery was in his words “both protest and prayer....Even without words,” he said, “our march was worship. I felt my feet were praying.”

KI has a proud history of praying with our feet – we have never been afraid to meet a challenge head on. From our earliest days under the guidance of Rabbi David Einhorn, a firebrand abolitionist, we have helped feed the hungry and demanded civil rights; we were instrumental in bringing Russian Jews to freedom in America; we have done incredible interfaith work, our Sharing Is Caring Committee has touched endless lives. Many of the men and women who have served this congregation as clergy have embraced social action with numerous causes. Countless lay leaders and congregants have done limitless hours of work.

We pray by the thousands over these High Holy Days, and we pray by the thousands throughout the year by performing acts of Tikkun Olam – repairing the world.

Heschel’s passion, the passion of our past, should be a major focus of our future. We will fight for social justice, we will touch lives, and we will repair our world.

We believe that to be a Jew means to be involved, to speak out. It’s as if God said: “Here’s a blueprint, the Torah. Here is the world that should be built, but now you must build it.” Together as a congregation we are going to march through this year repairing the world through acts of social justice.

When you entered our sanctuary this morning you were handed a Tikun Olam pledge card. On this holiday of Yom Kippur, with the words of Isaiah in our hearts, I am asking that every member of this congregation pick at least one of the many programs that you will find on the pledge card to participate in this year. If you came today to reconnect just one time this year or if you come every week, let us join together as one community. Help with our upcoming Sharing Is Caring Hanukkah dinner for residents of Federation housing, give blood,

volunteer in our local parks, be tested as a bone marrow donor on October 30th, join the Mitzvah Corps and lead Shiva minyans, help those who are sick in our community, help us with our ongoing Sefer (book) project, cook meals, join our Social Action Committee, help us participate in social justice advocacy, continue our partnership with Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger, or help us to continue our ongoing hurricane relief efforts. At the end of today's service I ask that you find a table in the lobby with some of our Social Action volunteers, fill out the cards and return them today. For those of you who are not here with us but are listening online or on the radio, please contact the KI office to find out how you can fill out a card as well. There are social action opportunities for all ages and for people who may not be able to leave their homes but are able to make calls.

Together in recent weeks we have seen an outpouring of love, people uniting to make a difference, stacks of donations so high that you could barely see the top.

Rabbi David Saperstein, the Director of the Religious Action Center and a major moral and political voice of Reform Judaism, exhorts us: "Make no mistake about it. To be a Jew means to speak out on these issues. To be a Jew means to be bound up with the struggle for social justice."

"Rabbi," you might say, "even with so many programs to choose from, the problems are so huge, what difference can I, or my family, really make?"

Margaret Mead, the great anthropologist, answered the question for us when she said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

When we leave here today, I pray the our focus will shift from prayer to action. We will pray with our feet.

The Haftarah of Isaiah ends with words that ask us to get involved in our community, "Then shall your light burst through like the dawn and your healing

spring up quickly... then when you call, the Lord will answer; when you call out, God will say: Hineni. Here I am. “

May our acts of Tzedakah cause God's presence to shine upon us and bring blessing into our lives. May this New Year record this people's rededication to our core mission – to do acts of justice and righteousness – Tzedakah, for the benefit of the entire community.

YIZKOR

YOM KIPPUR AFTERNOON 5766

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

In the Jewish tradition we call Memorial Services *Yizkor*. In its original literary setting in the Hebrew, *Yizkor* literally means “May God remember.” Personally, I render *Yizkor* as “God will remember.” Spiritually, I am comforted by the fact that “God will remember.” The phrase “May God remember,” on the other hand, includes an element of doubt, of petition, of unsureness. Of all the services I lead or attend, *Yizkor* is the one I experience without any doubt at all. I know that I will remember my loved ones who are no longer with my family. There is no way I can forget them. They are with me every day. Just as in life, sometimes their presence is active and sometimes it’s dormant. But they are there in my heart, in my mind, in my memory, in my soul. Without question, I remember them – *Yizkor* – and God remembers them too.

When we come to *Yizkor*, we don’t need help remembering. We need something much deeper from one another, from God, from ourselves. We need comfort. We need something to touch the pain of loss inside us, like a doctor putting pressure on a bleeding wound. For some of us, the wound is new and deep and refuses to close. For some of us, that wound is old but still aches. We need a firm but unseen hand to put tender pressure on those wounds.

Comfort is not the same as healing. It is a much more modest emotional goal. It is possible to find comfort. It is less likely to be fully healed. That’s why we call out for *Yizkor*, for God to remember our loved ones, to give us some sense that their lives have been validated by the great primal force in the universe. We need to know that their lives were good, even if their deaths were unfair, or untimely, or even inexplicable.

Many times when we lose someone unexpectedly or too early in life, death violates us like a thief robbing us at gunpoint or slithering into our homes in the shadows and taking away what rightly belongs to us. According to the rabbis, the commandment “not to steal” actually refers to kidnapping, the stealing of people.

Death is that thief. Death is that kidnapper. But there is no court of law or appeal to prosecute death or compensate grief.

Sometimes grief is expressed in anger.

Sometimes grief is experienced like a puncture wound.

Sometimes grief evokes irrepressible feelings of guilt.

Sometimes grief is experienced as a violation of our own persons.

Sometimes grief cripples us.

Sometimes grief forces us to retreat into ourselves.

Sometimes grief forces us into the embrace of others.

Sometimes grief forces us to look at life differently.

Sometimes grief teaches us to love more fully and with less reservation.

Grief is never a good thing but sometimes good things can come from
a grieving heart.

When I come here to *Yizkor*, I know that my grandmothers and uncles and in-laws are not forgotten in the heavens above or here below. They are totally remembered. What I do want is for God to remember me and my hurts and my losses and my brokenness and my terrible sense of incompleteness.

Death can teach us to live fully. Sometimes, when we are lucky, we loved someone completely in life and continue to love them after they are gone. Complete love lives on.

On the other hand, if we allow it, broken love can continue to break lives. But broken love can also admonish us to repair the emotional breaches or at least learn to deal with them more kindly. Grief can teach us not to waste a moment in life because in experiencing death we learn that there is no such thing as excess time. Time is precious, and not taking time to love, to help, to forgive, to extend a kindness, to yield to someone else...all these human shortcomings are very expensive in the great scheme of things.

At *Yizkor* I pray for guidance and strength to live. I owe that to those who have gone before me. I need to live for them. I need to live for me. I need to live for those who love me and depend on me.

For some of us, the last year has been brutal. The thief called death visited us and stole away a piece of our life. We are crushed and hurt and angry and incomplete. I lost a favorite uncle unexpectedly this year. He hadn't been sick. He was so important to all of us and then, he was gone. His death instantly placed me and keeps me in the world of surreal grief.

Many of you are part of that same broken landscape. Some of us have traversed it together. Some are here in hope of finding a comforting word. We all want some measure of comfort, some proof of undying love, some hint of healing.

I believe that God will remember our departed loved ones just as God will remember us in our hour of pain. May this be a time of comfort, of forgiving, of turning to the future.

May God remember all of us, the departed and the living, for the good. May these moments of remembrance help us to keep our memories of them alive and our spirits strong within.

Amen.