

NEAR MOUNT SERBAL
Leo Schneiderman

In the evening
Near Mount Serbal
A thunderstorm breaks out
In the desert
And rain fills
The dry river bed
Quickly forming a river
Three hundred yards wide
And eight to ten feet deep
The flood tears up everything
Tamarisks, palm trees, boulders
At half-past nine it is all over
An by morning
Only a shallow stream remains
The hillsides are filled with holes
Where palm trees grew
And nothing looks
The way it looked before.
God visits His people
The same way
But we remain unchanged
After each storm
And will not allow our hearts
To become a desert
In spite of everything.

NEAR THE JORDAN
Leo Schneiderman

Near the Jordan
In the night
Among tall grass
And on damp earth
A small fire
Is started with difficulty
Using dry branches
Of prickly bushes
But when the flames appear
Fanned by the cold breeze
Men's faces are lit up suddenly
And the wind seems
To die down momentarily.
In the flickering light
And brief warmth
It is not hard to believe
That God is close by His river
Comforting those who have returned
To its deserted shores
And bringing light to those who
Have wandered too long in darkness
By the shores of Babylon.

*Progressive Judaism and Established Orthodoxy: The Realities and Challenges of Coexistence**

The 23rd International Conference was held in the 60th year of the founding of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. The Pirke Avot inform us: "*Ben Shishim Lazikna*" "a person of sixty is an elder." (Avot 5:24). An elder in turn is defined as one who has acquired wisdom. *Zaken Zeh Shekanah Chochma* (Kiddushin 32). *Ad Meah V'esrim*. Reaching now toward the proverbial 120 years, how do we as a movement distill the wisdom of the past sixty years?

If the past is any criterion, many factors are unpredictable and beyond our control. In the realm of technology, the delegates who met in London in 1926 travelled for days and weeks by steamship and train. Between conferences they communicated by post. Future delegates will gauge their travel through space in minutes and hours. If they choose to do so, they will convene their conferences without leaving their homes. By television, facsimile, computer, and other miraculous inventions yet to come, they will have the benefit of instantaneous communication.

In 1926, the Weimar Republic joined the League of Nations. Who would have predicted that in less than a generation the map of the world would have been so radically redrawn, and the face of mankind so distorted with agony? Who

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knows what cataclysms history holds in its bag of tricks and quirks, which nations will rise and which will fall, what new political ideologies, social systems and economic theories will build up or tear down the infrastructures of our societies. Who knows what new theologies and ideals will inspire minds, impel hearts, and impact on faith and observance.

How will all these external factors affect the character and the destiny of the Jewish people? In 1926, less than 100,000 Jews lived in Palestine, and Zionism was espoused by a small minority of world Jewry. Within a single generation the Jewish people went from devastation to regeneration, the Holocaust and the establishment of the Jewish state impacting on our fate more than any other events in the preceding two millennia. The changes in the geography, demography and sociology of world Jewry have been no less radical than the changes in world history and technology.

What is true for Jewry as a whole is true for Progressive Judaism. The founders of the World Union in 1926 came from five countries. Today, we have institutions, movements and congregations in more than twenty countries. American Reform Judaism was headquartered in Cincinnati, even as the World Union was headquartered in London. Today, our American movement is headquartered in New York, the center of American Jewish life, even as the World Union has moved to Jerusalem, the spiritual center of the Jewish people. The geographical moves symbolize fundamental shifts in belief and practice. A few years before 1926, Stephen Wise, in planning for the establishment of the

Jewish Institute of Religion, had become so frustrated with the anti-Zionist, anti-Klal Yisrael stance of the Hebrew Union College, that he wrote, "The only things to be changed at the College are the Faculty, the Board of Governors, the students and the course of studies — to say nothing of the spirit of the place."*

Within a single generation the Jewish Institute of Religion had merged with the Hebrew Union College and the Columbus platform had superseded the Pittsburgh platform. Today the College-Institute has a major campus in Jerusalem. We as a movement, sit at the tables of Klal Yisrael, fully accepting the responsibilities and persistently demanding the rights of equal participation in every local, national and international forum.

Zaken Zeh Shekanah Chochma. A mature movement acquires wisdom. We have learned there are no simple answers, no progress without change, and no change without conflict. Despite the efforts of some of our precursors to redefine both Judaism and the Jew, we have determined to remain an integral part of the Jewish people. We have not excluded ourselves and we have not permitted others to exclude us. We have successfully resisted the centrifugal forces which have been at work throughout Jewish history, pulling individual Jews and sectarian movements away from the core of Jewish living. Within our own movement, these centrifugal forces

* Letter from Stephen S. Wise to Max Heller, *Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion. At One Hundred Years.* HUC Press, 1976. Part One. A Centennial History. Michael A. Meyer, p. 144.

threatened the Sabbath as our day of rest, Hebrew as our sacred tongue and Zion as our land of promise. But the centripetal force in Judaism has pulled us ineluctably back to the center.

The modern world has entered an era described by Alvin Toffler as "Future Shock." But we Jews confront the future energized by what I describe as "past shock." The past experiences of the Jewish people are so deeply ingrained in us that they constitute an ever-present force in our psyche. To use the metaphor of science fiction: the time machine of Judaism enables us to have simultaneous experiences in history: to receive in awe the word of God at Mt. Moriah and Mt. Sinai; to stand traumatized while the Romans put fire to the Temple in Jerusalem and the Germans burn the synagogues on Kristalnacht; to sing joyously with the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea, and to dance in the streets on the rebirth of the Jewish State, even as we are projected toward the next coming of Halley's Comet.

The primordial selection of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God's chosen people imposes on every Jew, like Jacob of old, the obligation to wrestle with Jewish destiny. Jacob becomes Israel only through the process of struggle with contending forces. *ויחלום והנה סולם מוצב*
ארצה וראשו מגיע השמים
"And he dreamed: a ladder was set on the ground and its top reached to the heavens" (Genesis 28:12). We progressive Jews stand on the ground of the Jewish past even as we climb the ladder to the stars.

Reform, Liberal and Progressive Jews represent a significant percent of organized Jewry in the world, and according to all the sociological projections, we are

likely to comprise an even higher percent in the future. In addition, many Jews who do not formally belong to us, identify with our views and our approach to Jewish life. We, therefore, carry a heavy pay-load of responsibility as we travel into the Jewish future.

What is the fuel which propels us?

What are the obstacles that are likely to await us?

How shall we adjust our course to assure that the people of destiny arrives at its destination?

Our distinguishing characteristic as a movement is that we make a positive response to modernity. Modern Jewish history has been a consequence of conflicting responses to the Emancipation. The responses have run the gamut from extreme separation to extreme assimilation. Among the extreme separationists are classical Zionists who see no future for Jews in the Diaspora and ultra-Orthodox groups who establish insulated Jewish communities, separated both from the outside secular world and from the larger Jewish community. Among the extreme assimilationists are those who are indifferent to Jewish survival and those who, like the American Council for Judaism, would so radically transform the Jewish character as to call into question the essence of Jewish survival. However, most affirming Jews do not place themselves in the category of the extremes. We, as a progressive movement, can be characterized by an intense search for a synthesis between integration and survival.

We recognize the continuing dilemma in our attempt to live in two worlds at one and the same time. How do we become a part of and still remain apart from our societies? How do we reconcile

the aspiration for integration with the passion for distinctive Jewish survival? Indeed, it is this dilemma and its divergent responses which in great measure have fueled the internal controversies within our movement over such issues as day schools. The dilemma is also the ideological setting for the disputes between our movement and other religious movements in Jewish life. But despite the conflicts, we will not be deterred from full participation in society as individual Jews and as a Jewish group. We see no conflict between universalism and particularism; indeed our universalistic impulses are enhanced through particularistic group action. *Tikun Olam*, the perfection of humankind, is an obligation not only for individual Jews but for the collectivity called the Jewish people.

Our approach to modernity and our search for a synthesis are needed no less in Israel than in the Diaspora. The paradox of modern Israel is that some Jews living there have never adjusted to the reality of Jewish sovereignty. They continue to be motivated by a ghetto mentality. Fearful of all strangers, dreading the penetration of the secular world, they would have the Jewish state erect high walls to insulate Jews and Jewish culture from all contact with the outside world. They cringe in fear that every Christian is a missionary, every gentile an anti-Semite, and every Arab a terrorist. The ghetto mentality is reflected in the approach of the established religious authorities, who, themselves, have come on aliya, but who have left their Judaism behind in the *Galut*. They have proven themselves incapable of modifying Judaism to deal with the problems of Jews living as a majority in

their own land. The obscurantism of the established rabbinate and right-wing religious groups has been reinforced by the chauvinistic paranoia of right-wing political elements. An unholy alliance has been forged between religious fanatics and political extremists. This unholy alliance would exploit the powers of the state to impose an anti-Jewish, anti-democratic, anti-humanistic, anti-rationalistic spirit on the citizens of Israel and thereby negate the very foundations of Zionism and Judaism.

The challenge to Progressive Judaism is to serve as a dynamic antidote to ghettoization and to the threatened perversion of the Zionist dream into a Jewish nightmare. We dare not underestimate the challenge. We are engaged in a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people.

The program theme for the 23rd International Conference of the World Union for Progressive Judaism was *Progressive Judaism and Established Orthodoxy: The Realities and Challenges of Co-existence*. Initially, a sub-title asked the question. *Confrontation or Cooperation?* My response to the question is not either/or, but both/and.

Confrontation? Yes. When? When a leading American Orthodox rabbi issues an Halachic ruling that the marriages of Reform rabbis are invalid. When the community day school in Perth, Australia, welcomes gentile children, but refuses to register the children of women converted by Reform rabbis. When ultra-Orthodox fanatics put a *Mechitzah* around the fresh grave of the distinguished Rabbi Morton Berman, because they did not want the remains of a Reform rabbi to contaminate the

graves of the pious righteous ones buried on the Mount of Olives.

Confrontation? Yes. Where? Wherever Jews live. But we as a movement have yet to come to terms with the new fact in contemporary Jewish life. The front lines of the struggle are in Israel. Why in Israel? Because Israel is where the dark forces of reaction have drawn the battle-lines and learned the uses of political power and of physical and verbal violence. Because what happens in and to Israel impacts on the character, reputation and fate of world Jewry. Because Israel is the setting for testing the applicability and integrity of Jewish values.

If we, potentially the largest and strongest movement in religious Jewry, are to play our role, then we will have to accept the reality that Israel today is the center stage of the Jewish drama. If Israel is Broadway, we cannot afford to act only off-Broadway. If we have so far successfully thwarted the campaign to amend the Who is a Jew legislation, it is not only because we conducted a lobbying effort in the Diaspora, but because we engage the forces of neo-messianic zealotry from within Israel. In Israel, we speak not as spectators, but as "builders of Zion," in Zion, with our congregations, our schools, our settlements, our rabbis, and our world center. Yet, despite all our efforts, we have hardly begun to mobilize our energies and resources to wage the battle effectively and to confront the forces of retrogression on the field selected by them. Until we build spiritual ramparts of Progressive Judaism through people, institutions, and programs in Israel, we shall not exploit to the fullest our capacity to make a distinctive contribution to Jewish destiny.

Cooperation? Yes. We have many allies in the effort to advance the Jewish people as an enlightened force among the nations. Many groups, religious and communal, ideological and political, public and private, are at work in both Israel and the Diaspora. In the instance of the Law of Return we have taken initiative to forge these groups into a broad coalition, both in Israel and abroad. It is now becoming clearer to the Jewish public that "Who is a Jew" is symbolic of larger questions: who is a rabbi, and what is Judaism, and who can belong to the Jewish people, and what should be the relationship between Judaism and the Jewish state, and between the Jewish state and world Jewry? We shall continue to expand our cooperative endeavours with all with whom we share a common vision of a humane, liberal, and pluralistic Jewish people.

Within the groups of allies, or more accurately, potential allies, I include those who denominate themselves as "modern Orthodox." Unlike the anti-Zionist, ultra-Orthodox, who in Israel discourage their adherents from serving in the army or observing Israel's Independence Day, the modern Orthodox remain steadfastly Zionist. In the United States, they cooperate with the Conservative and Reform movements on a host of Jewish public concerns. We respect and applaud them for their efforts to maintain institutions of intensive Jewish learning and for their steadfast observance of Jewish tradition. We share much in common with them, especially the conviction that without a vibrant Judaism there will be no continuity for the Jewish people. Whereas we may differ with each other on the emphasis we attach to the Jewish

imperatives of ethical conduct and ritual observance, they recognize that the strictest adherence to ritual commandments does not necessarily assure moral behaviour, just as we understand that strict adherence to a moral code does not in and of itself assure the preservation of Judaism.

We shall continue to be separated from them by our respective attitudes towards Halacha. They hold to the Halacha as the supreme, divinely-bestowed standard, subject to varying interpretations, but unchangeable. We consider Halacha as a venerated guide, but subject to modification, and even rejection, if it does not conform to our ultimate values and purposes. Thus, even though divergent views of Halacha will continue to separate us, it is to be hoped that our mutual respect for Halacha and our concern for the unity of the Jewish people will provide a basis for dialogue and accommodation.

The alternative is horrendous to contemplate. Consider just the following two facts:

1. Reform conversions are not recognized by the Orthodox who, therefore, do not accept the progeny of women converts as Jews.

2. A Jewish woman receives a civil divorce, but not a Get (a Jewish religious divorce), remarries and has a child with the second husband. In the eyes of the Orthodox that child is a *mamzer* (an illegitimate child), and a *mamzer* can only marry another *mamzer* and their progeny can only marry *mamzerim* for ten generations.

Projecting backward one generation and forward one generation, a significant percentage of persons who are considered full Jews in every sense by our

movement, will not be considered Jews by the Orthodox, or even by some Conservatives. It has been estimated that, given the high rates of conversion and divorce without Get, one fifth of the American Jewish population will not be considered by the Orthodox as eligible for marriage with other Jews by the end of this century.

Most Jews are unaware of the problem, and even most rabbis will conclude that nothing is to be done. There appear to be no partners for dialogue. We are headed on a collision course and a spirit of triumphalism and self-righteousness prevails in all the groups, including our own. After all, we are the majority in North America. But what a tragedy if we were to create two separate Judaisms: in America, a Judaism where *Ishut*, personal status, is defined unilaterally by a Reform Judaism oblivious to the stance of the rest of world Jewry; and elsewhere, a Judaism defined and imposed by the Orthodox, indifferent to the special needs and problems of Jews living in an open society. Each side lobbying in the Knesset with the identical slogan: Preserve the unity of the Jewish people! But unable to sit down around a table outside the Knesset to translate the slogan into reality.

We have every right and obligation to advocate pluralism to others. But does not the very exercise of the right entail an obligation to look in the mirror of self-criticism? I would plead with the leaders of our movement, to keep our minds and hearts open; I would plead with them not only to call for understanding and compromise on the part of Orthodoxy but to articulate willingness for compromise on *our* part. This would involve a long and difficult process of negotia-

tion, trying to formulate agreed upon standards and practices, or modifying long-held principles, but few principles are of higher priority than to seek the unity of Klal Yisrael.

Consider now our relations with Conservative Judaism. Historically, Conservative Judaism was a breakaway from German Liberal Judaism, and in the United States the Jewish Theological Seminary was established and funded by German Reform Jews for the newly-arrived Eastern European immigrants. Until the recent changes in Reform Judaism, there were clear-cut differences between Conservative and Reform Judaism. The ideological stance of Conservative Judaism: the emphasis on the use of Hebrew in worship, more traditional observance, the affirmation of Zionism and Jewish peoplehood, were reinforced by sociological differences. Today, the sociological differences have disappeared and the ideological differences have blurred. Right-wing Conservatism is not too far from modern Orthodoxy, just as left-wing Conservatism is not too far from right-wing Reform. The differences within each movement are as great as the differences between each movement. Today, most Reform and Conservative congregants are alike in their lack of observance. To be sure, the Conservative rabbinate tends to be much more traditional than their congregants, insisting that Halacha should be the primary standard for Conservative observance. However, this Conservative stance is rejected even by the modern Orthodox, who do not accept Conservative modifications of traditional practices as valid according to the Orthodox interpretation of Halacha. Now that the Conservative movement

has made the historic decision to ordain women, the Orthodox will never agree to differentiate Conservative from Reform. Both movements are equally unacceptable.

In 1978, I drafted a paper which served as a basis for a series of discussions among leaders of the Conservative and Progressive movements in Israel. The paper called for close collaboration on specific projects such as the fight for rights, the establishment of joint settlements and youth movements, and the issuing of joint publications. It projected as an ultimate objective outright merger of Conservative and Progressive Judaism in Israel. Given the severe handicaps we now confront in our common struggle for a just society in Israel, I renew that call.

We are, in effect, one movement, whether or not we or they choose to identify ourselves as such. Every achievement of theirs is an advance for us. Every attack on them is an attack on us. Do our vested institutional interests justify competitiveness and duplication? Does the state of spiritual stultification in Israel permit us to remain in our present condition, two weak struggling movements inadequately supported by our movements abroad? A dramatic move in the name of religious unity would enrich and strengthen our struggle for religious renewal.

I know full well the obstacles in the way. I appreciate the implications for relationships between the movements in Israel and their institutional counterparts in North America. Yet we must remember that outside Israel, North and South America there is no world Conservative movement to speak of and that in most World Union countries our move-

ment represents a synthesis of Reform and Conservative ideology and practice. Even in the United States, 65 graduates of our rabbinical seminary now serve in non-Reform congregations, just as we already have two graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary and one graduate of the Reconstructionist rabbinical seminary working with our movement in Israel. The Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot has applied to affiliate with the World Union, a tribute to what they deem to be the dynamic character of our world-wide and Israel programs. (There are many ramifications to the request for affiliation and a committee has been appointed to deal with the question).

It may be asked, if merger is good for the movements in Israel, then why not in Latin America? Confronted by dwindling Jewish populations, assimilation, anti-Semitism, unstable regimes, and an established rabbinate which rivals the Israeli rabbinate in its anachronistic conduct, do we need two competitive liberal movements? Our congregation in Buenos Aires is already served by a graduate of the Conservative rabbinical seminary, just as the congregations in Brazil have been served by rabbis from both our movements. Furthermore, if it is good for the movements in Israel and Latin America, then why not in North America? Why not indeed? Though, of course, in North America where there is a free environment with no established rabbinate and where each movement has enlisted a large critical mass and built established institutions, the issues would relate more to questions of organizational efficiency than to ideology. Indeed a case can be made for the value of constructive and creative competi-

tion. But, here, too, there is room for much closer collaboration on issues of common concern. Given the unpredictability of history, who can forecast what institutional and ideological realignments and coalitions will be required in order to assure the American Jewish future?

I know full well that a call for coexistence with Orthodoxy and potential merger with Conservative Judaism in Israel and Latin America will in all probability not receive a positive response from official quarters. Then why issue the call? Because a liberal movement committed to *Klal Yisrael* must be committed to changing the current deteriorating direction of intra-Jewish relations. Because just as we have a right to expect of the modern Orthodox that they speak out forthrightly against ultra-Orthodox violence, fanaticism and racism, so they have a right to expect of our responsible leadership that we modulate the strident voices of those in our movement who are insensitive to the needs of the Orthodox community. Because the task of a liberal movement is to keep the door open in hope and prayer that our brothers will one day want to enter.

The Sassover Rebbe described the true meaning of brotherhood when he recounted the conversation of two simple peasants. The first said, "Tell me, Ivan, do you love me?" "Of course," responded the second. "I love you deeply." The first: "Do you know, my friend, what gives me pain?" The second: "How can I know what gives you pain?" The first: "If you do not know what gives me pain, then how can you say that you truly love me?" The Sassover Rebbe concluded, "to truly love

means to know what brings pain to your brother." If we, indeed, believe in the brotherhood of *Am Yisrael*, then we must know that certain decisions of our movement and practices of individual rabbis deeply pain other Jews. However, the reality is that liberal Judaism is here to stay, even as Orthodoxy is here to stay. The challenge is to coexist, to learn to live together, despite our differences.

I am well aware that what I have said about our relationships to the Orthodox and Conservative movements may not represent the views of the majority in our movement. Is my message unrealistic? Naive? Premature? Perhaps. However, knowing the radical changes in our movement during the last sixty years, I am convinced that we need to position ourselves for kaleidoscopic changes during the next sixty years. If in the past our challenge was to respond to modernity, in the future our challenge will be to respond to Jewish peoplehood. How do we as a movement vivify *Am Yisrael*, our people, our land, our language, our heritage, our faith? We shall have to engage in long-range policy planning. We shall have to create new institutions and new programs. We who have embarked on an Outreach Program to Jews of choice and non-Jewish spouses need an outreach program to our fellow Jews. We shall have to relate to the fact that we are only one part of the Jewish people. If we as a part do not act as integral to the whole, then we shall not be considered authentic, not in the eyes of others, and eventually, not even in our own eyes. It is for that reason that I suggest an extended process of negotiation, if not among organizations, then among individuals, with the modern Orthodox on the one hand, and the Conservative on the other hand, both separately and together. We

need serious dialogue, away from the glare of acrimonious public disputations and heated Knesset debates, among those of us who are committed to Judaism as the life-enriching source of the Jewish people's existence.

To reason is not treason, to seek reconciliation is not appeasement, to strive for moderation is not political expediency, and to express a willingness to compromise is a sign of strength, not weakness.

When Leo Baeck gave his first address to the World Union after his return to freedom in 1946, he declared: "We are Progressive, Liberal Jews not for the sake of Progressive, Liberal Judaism, but for the sake of Judaism, of Judaism as a whole ... Progressive Judaism can have its significance only in the midst of the whole of Judaism, of all Jewish life, only with a strong feeling for the common tasks, for the whole that is before and above all the parts, for *Klal Yisrael*. We do not want to be a mere party, great or small, but a movement; not a sect, but an energy in Judaism. An egoistic Liberal Judaism which would only think of itself, which would forget that it has its task for the sake of the greater whole, such a Liberal, Progressive Judaism would be a contradiction in terms, it would be neither Liberal nor Progressive, nor would it be Jewish."

As we embark on the next stage in the history of *Am Olam*, our people's journey to eternity, let us be liberal, progressive and Jewish, in spirit as well as in name. Let us approach our fellow Jews motivated by the words of the prophet Malachi:

אז נדברו יראי ה' איש אל רעהו ויקשנו ה' וישמע
 "Let those who serve the Lord speak one to another, and then God will hearken and heed." (Malachi 3:16).