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Standing in the Breach: Jewish Preaching During Crisis

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1. **R. Alexandra Wright, "NY: 11th September, 2001," Sep. 18, 2001,
Radlett and Bushey, Hertfordshire**

I had intended to speak about the concept of change this morning. Hebrew, as always neat, clever and economical, has one root—which means both 'year' (*shanah*) and 'change' (*shinuy*). I wanted to say quite simply how the New Year is an opportunity for change, and how our community at thirty years old has in some instances, become a little set in its ways, often resistant to change and innovation. But last week, as the events of Tuesday unfolded—first the snippet of news I heard on the radio at two o'clock that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Centre, and then at 2:15 that a second plane had with a technical preciseness that defies imagination, been steered into the second tower—it became clear that the interests of our own community, however important, were not going to be able to address the questions and reactions that have arisen over the past week.

Perhaps it is enough to say, that we are all, to some extent, changed at this Rosh Hashanah. That this tragically unexpected and shattering event has altered us for ever. That we have been slowed down in our daily routines, that as we have watched images replaying on the television, read articles and testimonies from bewildered and distraught survivors, we have looked at our own lives in a different light and thought to ourselves, if this can happen just a little way across the water, then it could happen to us. Nothing sharpens the human focus more clearly, than the contemplation of our own vulnerability and the transient fragility of our own lives.

I. Reacting to our Reality

2. Tehillim/Psalms 121

A Song of Ascents

שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת

I will raise my eyes to the mountains

אֶשָּׂא אֵינִי אֶל־הַהָרִים

From whence will my help come?

מֵאֵן יָבֹא עֲזָרִי:

My help is from God

עֲזָרִי מֵעַם ה'

Maker of Heaven and Earth.

לַעֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:

God will not let your foot slip

אֶל־יָתֵן לְמוֹט רַגְלֶךָ

Your guardian will not slumber.

אֶל־יִנּוּם שֹׁמְרֶךָ:

Here, God neither sleeps nor slumbers,
The Guardian of Israel.

הִנֵּה לֹא־יִנּוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל:

God guards you; God shades you at your
right hand.

ה' שֹׁמְרֶךָ ה' צִלְּךָ עַל־יְדֶיךָ יְמִינֶךָ:

By day, the sun will not strike at you, nor
the moon by night.

יוֹמָם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לֹא־יִכָּבֵה וַיְרַח בַּלַּיְלָה:

God will guard you from all harm; God
will guard your life.

ה' יִשְׁמְרֶךָ מִכָּל־רָע יִשְׁמֹר אֶת־נַפְשֶׁךָ:

God will guard your going and coming

ה' יִשְׁמֹר־צֵאתְךָ וּבואֶךָ

From now and forever.

מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:

3. R. Rivkah Lubitch, "Sleeps and Slumbers, the Guardian of Israel"
(Israel, 2024)

A song of Descents	שיר לנפילות.
I raised my eyes to the mountains	נשאתי עיני אל ההרים
and my help did not come.	ולא בא עזרי.
I have no help from God	אין לי עזר מעם ה'
Maker of Heaven and Earth.	עושה שמים וארץ.
God let my foot slip,	נתן למוט רגליי,
God let my guardians slumber.	נתן לנום שומריי.
Here, God slept and slumbered, the Guardian of Israel.	הנה נם וישן שומר ישראל.
God did not guard me; God did not shade me at my right hand.	ה' לא שמר עליי, ה' לא הצל על יד ימיני.
By day, the sun struck at me and the moon by night.	יומם השמש היכה בי וירח בלילה.
God did not guard me from all harm; God did not guard my life.	ה' לא שמר עלי מכל רע ולא שמר את נפשי.
How will God guard my going and coming	איך ישמור ה' את צאתי ובואי
From now and forever?	מעתה ועד עולם?

4. Eikhah (Lamentations) Rabbah 1:50a

מעשה במרים בת תנחום, שנשבית היא ושבעת בניה. נטלן קיסר ונתנן לגיו מן שבעה קנקלין [לתוך שבעה חדרים].

הביא את הראשון ואמר לו: השתחוה לצלם. אמר לו: חס ושלום, איני משתחוה לצלם. אמר לו: למה? – מפני שכך כתיב בתורתנו 'אֲנֹכִי ה' אֶ-לֹהֶיךָ' (שמות כ, ב). מיד הוציאו והרגו.

... הוציא השביעי, והוא היה הקטן שבכולן. אמר לו: בני, השתחוה לצלם. אמר לו: חס ושלום.

... מיד צווה עליו להרגו, נפלה אמו עליו, והיתה מחבקתו ומנשקתו, ואמרה לו: בני, לך אצל אברהם אביכם, ואמור לו, כך אמרה אמי: אל תזוח דעתך עליך ותאמר בניתי

מזבח, והעליתי את יצחק בני, הרי אמנו בנתה שבעה מזבחות, והעלתה שבעה בנים ביום אחד. אתה ניסיון, ואני מעשה. עד שהיתה מנשקתו ומחבקתו, גזר עליו והרגוהו עליה.

... לאחר ימים נשתטית אותה אשה ונפלה מן הגג ומתה, לקיים מה שנאמר: 'אִמְלָלָה לְלֶדֶת הַשְּׁבַעָה' (ירמיה טו, ט). ובת קול יוצאת ואומרת: 'אִם הַבָּנִים שְׂמָחָה' (תהלים קיג, ט). ורוח הקודש צווחת ואומרת: 'עַל אֵלֶּה אֶגִּי בִּזְכִּיָּה' (איכה א, טז).

The story of Miriam bat Tanchum, who was taken captive along with her seven sons. Caesar took them and put them in seven different rooms.

He brought out the first and said to him: Bow down to the idol. He replied: God forbid! I do not bow to the idol. He said to him: Why? "Because thus it is written in our Torah *I am God your Lord* (Exodus 20:2)." He took him out and killed him straightaway. ...

He brought out the seventh, and he was the youngest of them all. He said to him: "My son, bow down to the idol." He replied: God forbid!...

He immediately commanded that he be killed. His mother fell upon him, hugging and kissing him, and she said to him: "My son, go to Abraham the father of all of you, and tell him, so says my mother – don't be too full of yourself, and say, I built an altar, I laid on it my son Isaac, for our mother built seven altars, and laid seven sons on them, in one day. You only performed the trial; but I, the deed." While she was kissing and hugging him, Caesar gave the order and they killed him before her.

... With time that woman lost her mind, and fell from the roof and died, fulfilling what was written *She who bore seven was wretched* (Jer. 15:9). And a *bat kol* (literally, a divine voice) called out, saying *The mother of sons is rejoicing* (Ps. 113:9). And the Holy Spirit cried out, saying *For these do I weep* (Lam. 1:16)

5. Nurit Hirschfeld-Skupinsky (Nahal Oz resident), "Midrashim of Destruction"

כשחרב הבית, כשחרב עלינו עולמנו בשבעה באוקטובר, דומה היה עלינו כי סיפורי החורבן יצאו מתוך האותיות בנות האלפיים. המילים קרמו עור וגידים ונהיו למציאות עכשווית אבלה, חפויה ודוויה, וקשים הדברים לאומרם, ואי אפשר לפה לפרשם.

כשחרב הבית נרצחו שבעת בניה של מרים בת תנחום לנגד עיניה, שסרבו להשתחוות לצלם.

כשחרב עלינו עולמנו בשבעה באוקטובר, עמדה ראומה קדם, האם-הסבתא השכולה, מול הריסות הבית בניר עוז, בו נרצחו ששה מבני משפחתה, שביקשו לישב בשלוה בביתם: בתה תמר, בעלה גיון ושלושת ילדיהם: התאומות ארבל ושחר, ובנם עומר. גם קרול, אמו של גיון, נרצחה שם באותו יום שחור.

בשעה שבאו לשחוט את אחרון בניה, בקשה מרים בת תנחום מבנה הקטן: "בני, לך אצל אברהם אביכם. אמור לו, כך אמרה אמי: אל תזוח דעתך עליך, ותאמר בניתי מזבח והעליתי את יצחק בני. הרי אמנו בנתה שבעה מזבחות, והעלתה שבעה בנים ביום אחד! אתה ניסיון, ואני מעשה!"

לאחר השבעה באוקטובר עמדה ראומה קדם מול בעל המעמד והשררה. הישירה מבטה, תחילה ללא קול, ואז זעקה: אל תזוח דעתך עליך. "איפה הייתם?!?" אני מעשה, ואתם לא עמדתם בניסיון.

מרים בת תנחום ידעה כי ילדיה בחרו במוות ובלבד שלא יעברו על "ייהרג ובל יעבור", וסופה, שנשטית ונפלה מן הגג ומתה. "ורוח הקודש צווחת ואומרת: על אֵלֶּה אָנִי בֹכֶּה (איכה א, טז)".

ואילו ראומה קדם, מה יהא עליה? מה יהא על אותה אם-סבתא שכולה, שאפילו נחמה פורתא זו לא נמצאת לה? מה תצווח רוח הקודש על נשות ואנשי העוטף שנמחקו משפחותיהם ביום אחד?

When the home was destroyed, when our world, on October 7, was destroyed, it seemed to us as though the stories of The Destruction emerged from out of letters, two thousand years old. The words were made flesh, becoming a grieving, anguished, despondent reality, and the things, they are hard even to utter, and the mouth cannot articulate them.

When The Home [The Temple] was destroyed, the seven sons of Miriam bat Tanchum were murdered before her eyes, for they refused to bow down to the idol. When on October 7 our world was destroyed, Reumah Cede stood, the grieving mother and grandmother, before the ruins of the home in Nir Oz, in which six members of her family, who just wanted to sit peacefully at home, were killed: Her daughter Tamar, her son-in-law Jon, their three children – the twins Arbel and Shachar, their son Omer – and Jon's mother Carole were murdered there on that black day.

When they came to kill her last child, Miriam bat Tanchum asked of her youngest son: "My son, go to Abraham the father of all of you, and tell him, so says my mother – don't be too full of yourself, and say, I built an altar, I laid on it my son Isaac, for our mother built seven altars, and laid seven sons on them, in one day. You, the trial; and I, the deed." After October 7, Reumah Kedem stood before the man of status and authority. She looked straight at him, voiceless at first, and then screamed: "Don't be too full of yourself. Where were you? I performed the deed, and you failed the trial."

Miriam bat Tanchum knew that her children chose death, so that they would not commit a *yehareg ve'bal ya'avur* [a sin which one should rather die than do]. Moreover, her end was that she lost her mind, fell from the roof and died. And the Holy Spirit cried out, saying *For these do I weep* (Lam. 1:16). Yet Reumah Kedem, what will become of her? What will happen to that bereaved mother and grandmother, who has not even

that meager comfort. What will the Holy Spirit cry out for the women and men of the Negev, whose families were erased in one day?

6. Supplication/Tahanun – Esther 8:3

Esther spoke to the king again, falling at his feet and weeping, and beseeching him to avert the evil plotted by Haman the Agagite against the Jews.

וַתִּוְסַף אֶסְתֵּר וַתִּדְבֹר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַתִּפֹּל לִפְנֵי רַגְלָיו וַתִּבְדֹּק וַתִּתְחַנֵּן-לוֹ
לְהַעֲבִיר אֶת־רַעַת הַמֶּן הַאֲגָגִי וְאֶת־
מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְהוּדִים:

7. Compassion/Rahmanut – Iyov/Job 30:25

Did I not weep for the unfortunate? Did I not grieve for the needy?

אִם־לֹא בִכִּיתִי לַקְּשָׁה־יּוֹם עֲגִמָּה
נַפְשִׁי לְאֶבְיוֹן:

8. Anguish/Tsa'ar – Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 22:10

Do not weep for the dead And do not lament for him; Weep rather for him who is leaving, For he shall never come back To see the land of his birth!

אַל־תִּבְכּוּ לְמֵת וְאַל־תִּנְדּוּ לוֹ בְּכּוֹ
בְּכּוֹ לְהֵלֵךְ כִּי לֹא יָשׁוּב עוֹד וְרָאָה
אֶת־אֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתּוֹ:

9. Joy/Simhah – Bereshit/Genesis 29:11

Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and broke into tears.

וַיִּשָּׂק יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־קֻלּוֹ
וַיִּבְדֹּק:

10. R. Saul Levi Morteira, (Portuguese Community in) Amsterdam, 1640s

'I said that it is indeed true that at present these four kinds of weeping were occurring before us, two of them primary and two of them secondary.'

The **first** is the weeping of pain and anguish from the terrible events that have confronted the glorious holy community of Lublin. Cruel enemies have destroyed it, and the weeping is profuse. It is as Jeremiah said: 'Do not weep for the dead and do not lament for him; weep, weep for the one who is leaving, for he shall never come back to see the land of his birth' [Jer. 22: 10]. This means, from this point on, weeping over the dead does not seem painful in comparison with the weeping over the captives—the men killed, their wives and small children taken into captivity. This is the greatest evil...

From this is derived the **second** weeping, that of compassion, as Job said: 'Did I not weep for the hard-pressed; did I not grieve for the destitute?' [Job 30: 25]. This applies when you think about the considerable number of notables who yesterday were wealthy, but for whom today fate has set up an ambush, when they were driven out of their domicile of pleasure, out of the land of Brazil. They are indeed hard-pressed and destitute; they are in anguish because of their previous good fortune, while now they have no covering against the cold [see Job 24: 7] as they arrive from that warm land...

At this same time, we experience a **third** weeping: of joy. This is because of the great miracle of abundant deliverance by which God has saved us from the plague that prevailed in this city for six months. Yet among all the Jews, no one died except for two infants: they were like two lambs without blemish, an atonement sacrifice for the entire community. This was while the number of dead each week was close to nine hundred...

From this is derived the **fourth** weeping, that of supplication, as it says of Esther, 'She wept and made supplication' [Esther 8: 3]. This means to weep and implore God to continue His providential beneficence with us...

II. Taking Responsibility Within/For Our Reality

11. Vayikra/Leviticus 16:17

When he goes in to make expiation in the Shrine, nobody else shall be in the Tent of Meeting until he comes out. When he has made expiation for himself and his household, and for the whole congregation of Israel.

וְכָל־אֲדָמָה לֹא־יְהִי־הִיא בְּאֶהָל מוֹעֵד בְּבָאֵו לְכַפֵּר בְּקֹדֶשׁ עַד־צֵאתוֹ וְכַפֵּר בְּעֶדּוֹ וּבְעֶדֶד בֵּיתוֹ וּבְעֶדֶד כָּל־קְהַל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

12. R. Dr. Walter Wurzburger, "The Individual in the Crisis," Brighton, Massachusetts, Congregation Chai Odom, Yom Kippur, Oct. 9, 1943

It is very tempting to wash our hands of all responsibility for the debacle of civilization. After all, what is the individual amidst all these powerful forces? Is he not merely a helpless ship tossed about by the political, social and economic waves? The truth of the matter, however, is that religion is no opiate at all. It offers no soothing sedative to calm the individual. It offers no protecting harbor from a stormy sea. Religion stresses the sacredness and the importance of the human personality. There is no alibi, no excuse for our failures, it says. We are responsible for our deeds.

On this Day of Atonement this message is brought home to us with extreme clarity and lucidity. When the Jews lived a normal life in Eretz Yisroel they assembled at this solemn hour, the holiest day of the entire year, at the holiest place, in the Temple of Jerusalem. The eyes of the entire people were focused on the **כהן גדול**, the High Priest, foremost member of the holiest tribe of the 'Chosen People'. Imagine the awe that gripped the people, when its most saintly son entered the Holy of Holies to ask forgiveness for the sins of the nation. There, facing his G-d, stood the High Priest to give account for all the failures and shortcomings that undermined the structure of all Jewish existence. Who was to blame for the pettiness and the jealousies which have caused untold suffering to the nation? Upon whose shoulders rested the responsibility for the chaos that put man against man, nation against nation? The militaristic Romans? The idolatrous Babylonians? The G-dless Assyrians? The faithless Egyptians? Did the High Priest blame the internal enemies of Israel, the profiteers, the politicians, the criminals? Nay! This is what he said: **אנא ה' חטאתי עויתי פשעתי**, 'O Lord I have sinned! I have failed! I am guilty.'* I am responsible for the suffering of man. I caused all the agony, misery and injustice that shakes the structure of our ailing society.

Who utters these terrible words? A traitor to the cause of G-d? A criminal? A social outcast? Nay, it is the **כהן גדול**, the High Priest, the chosen representative of the chosen

tribe of a chosen people; he who represented the best, the highest, the noblest of Israel realized his responsibility. He began with a process of personal cleansing and repentance. Before he spoke of the sins of his people, he thought of his own. Before he blamed the world, he blamed himself. Then and only then, had he a right to include others in this terrible indictment. Did he look for scapegoats?—the legions of Greece? The cohorts of Rome? The treacherous Sadducees? The rich? The poor?— 'אנא ה' אהרון חטאתי עויתי פשעתי לפניך אני וביתי ובני אהרון, 'O Lord,' he said, 'I have sinned, I have failed, I and my immediate family, the house of Aaron.' We sinned, we failed, we are guilty. We brought all this suffering and agony to a stricken world. After he blamed himself, he had a right to blame others: 'אנא ה' חטאו עוו פשעו לפניך עמך בית ישראל, 'O Lord, they have sinned, they have failed, they are guilty.' Naturally, we must not be shortsighted. Wrongs are committed by others. There are no two ways about it. Once we make a determined effort to cleanse ourselves from all defilement and contamination, we have a right to denounce others. Yet, we must never blame others in order to escape from our own sense of guilt. We must not run away from ourselves.

My friends, how badly have we need of this message today! We are always ready to denounce and blame others. How much time and energy do we waste in condemning the Nazis and Fascists! We witness a conflagration of the world that is unparalleled in history. A civilization goes to pieces, and we seek comfort and consolation in the thought that 'ידינו לא שפכו את הדם הזה', 'that our hands did not spill this blood' (Deut. 21: 8). It is not our fault. We pity ourselves. We lament our fate and bemoan our misfortune. How deplorable it is to live in an age that denounces justice, goodness, morality and decency! We throw our hands up in despair and give up the struggle. We feel that we are merely a pawn in a gigantic chess game. What can we do in the fare of all the demonic forces of evil? ...

We are always ready to condemn others. But do we ask ourselves these discomfoting questions? Did I send a letter to my Congressman to intervene in behalf of these Jews? Did I join a national Jewish organization that strives to save these doomed people? Did I contribute my money to help those that still can be helped? Did I buy war bonds so that this war may be shortened?...

Let us now go one step further! After the process of personal cleansing, let us approach our own people...

O yes, it is a degenerate world, a world that kills the innocent and the weak, that desecrates everything that is holy—a world of master-races and of slaves. But we in America have also failed miserably. Do we have to travel to Europe in order to discover racial persecution? Why not go to Detroit with its race riots? Couldn't we have stopped Hitler back in 1933? Of course, we could have, had we not adopted the policy of isolationism and appeasement! And so, we behold a world of agony, misery,

cruelty, injustice, brutality and tyranny. We are responsible for it. It is our world. No complaints! No excuses! No defense mechanisms! No passing of the buck חטאתי חטאתי , 'I and my family, we sinned, we failed, we are guilty, we are responsible.'

Once we have taken this bold step, we may venture to blame others, we may say: 'They sinned, they failed, they are guilty.' ...

Each and every one of us is responsible for the debacle of civilization. Do I not hear a voice from a corner: 'How can you accuse me? I am not a politician. I have no influence. I cannot oppose the powerful political, social and economic forces. I am a helpless individual. Does not science maximize the importance of society and environment and minimize the significance of the individual?'

Friends! Let no one deceive himself! A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Every individual is a link in a great chain. One of the most interesting and most inspiring stories of the entire war, is the history of the British Eighth Army. Today, it is one of the best striking forces of the United Nations. Yet, we still recall the trying days when the Eighth Army was chased by Rommel through Africa. The Germans stood at the gates of Alexandria. But suddenly the entire picture changed. General Montgomery assumed command and instilled confidence in the hearts of the beaten and shattered legions. Within a few months, he chased Rommel through Libya and Tunisia. Today he leads his victorious legions into the battle against 'Fortress Europe'. What was the secret of General Montgomery's success? He comes from a Puritan and strictly religious family. He knows and appreciates the importance of every individual. At the eve of every campaign he informs his soldiers about all the details of strategy. Every soldier is acquainted with the immediate as well as with the final objective of the campaign. The common soldier no longer feels that he merely is a cog in the wheel, a part of a military machine. He realizes his stake in the battle and is aware of his responsibility. He is no longer the 'forgotten man', the pawn in the hands of the commander. Every soldier is aware that this is his war, his battle, his campaign. This is the secret of the success of the British Eighth Army...

During a recent trip, I came to a small community in New Jersey. At the entrance of the village, I noticed a big poster that read 'America looks at you, Vineland!' I said to myself: 'This is a small and insignificant community. It cannot boast of any important defense industry. How presumptuous on the part of so small a community to say, "America looks at you, Vineland"!' Suddenly, however, I realized the truth of this statement. We cannot win this war unless every city, every village, every hamlet, every family and every individual hears that voice. 'America looks at you!' Every one of us must realize his responsibility towards his family, his community, his city, his state, his country and his humanity.

Friends, we are now approaching the solemn moment commemorating the **עבודת יום הכפורים** [the divine service of the Day of Atonement], which once was the most sacred function of the High Priest. He confessed the sins of his people and atoned for his nation. Thus he attained forgiveness and thus he repaired the breaches in the crumbling foundations of the Jewish nation. Let us carry the lesson that the High Priest teaches us well in mind! Let us rededicate ourselves to the eternal fountain of Jewish hope that assures us: **כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאותיכם לפני ה' תטהרו** (Lev. 16: 30), that G-d will grant us atonement and will cleanse us from all defilement and contamination, and that he will lead us into a future that will be built upon the foundation of harmony and brotherhood, justice and righteousness.

13. Emma Lazarus, "Epistle to the Hebrews" (1883)

In defiance of the hostile construction that may be put upon my words, I do not hesitate to say that our national defect is that we are not "tribal" enough; we have not sufficient solidarity to perceive that when the life and property of a Jew in the uttermost provinces of the Caucasus are attacked, the dignity of a Jew in free America is humiliated. We who are prosperous and independent have not sufficient homogeneity to champion on the ground of a common creed, common stock, a common history, a common heritage of misfortune, the rights of the lowest and poorest Jew-peddler who flees, for life and liberty of thought, from Slavonic mobs. Until we are all free, we are none of us free. But lest we should justify the taunts of our opponents, lest we should become "tribal" and narrow and Judaic rather than humane and cosmopolitan like the anti-Semites of Germany and Jew-baiters of Russia, we ignore and repudiate our unhappy brethren as having no part or share in their misfortunes- until the cup of anguish is held also to our own lips.

14. Yoel/Joel 4:9-10

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for battle! Arouse the warriors, Let all the fighters come and draw near!

קראו זאת בגוים קדשו מלחמה
העירו הגבורים וגשו יעלו כל
אנשי המלחמה:

Beat your plowshares into swords, And your pruning hooks into spears. Let even the weakling say, "I am strong."

פתו אתיכם לחרבות ומזמתיכם
לרמחים החלש יאמר גבור אני:

15. R. Leo Franklin, "The Lure of Peace," Beth El Congregation, Detroit, Oct. 13, 1918

Let us look matters squarely in the face that we may properly evaluate the spirit of our people...Nothing is as it was. Life has become cheap...Ploughshares have been turned into swords and pruning hooks into spears...The whole world is in a state of terror...we have resigned ourselves to the fact that even our children are but instruments in the hand of God through whose sacrifice we must speed the day of making life worth living in the world...

And yet, in the face of all these things, our enemy's pleas for peace could not have been without its power to lure the weak and the troubled among us. It would be asking too much of human nature that immediate sorrow should not eagerly grasp at a chance of surcease and that many a mother's heart torn and bleeding with anxiety for her boy over there should not have read with a thrill of joy the proffer of peace made by our enemies, and reading, hoped that it might be accepted...

I am not callous to the abounding suffering and that the mother's heart, full of prayer that her boy may soon return to her from the bloody battlefield, finds no rebuff at my hands.

On the other hand, it would be unworthy of a nation that has risen to the supreme heights of patriotism that we have scaled, were it ready at a time like this to sacrifice the whole future of civilization for what would be at best a temporary rest...To be willing to enter into any sort of a compromise with a nation degraded as no nation in human history has before been degraded, or indeed to stand ready to negotiate with a brutalized people whose national soul has not been chastened, but that has been brought to its knees merely through considerations of expediency; or to consent even to a momentary cessation of hostilities with a regime that does not yet understand the iniquity of its philosophy, would be to bring upon our heads not only a well-deserved humiliation at this time, but as well, the disdain and even the hatred of those future generations who security would be implied by our cowardice...

Perhaps there are those who, intense in their Americanism, and deeply resolved as any that we shall not turn from our purposes, are yet surprised that words such as these should be spoken from the pulpit, and in the name of religion. Religion, they say, should teach love and forgiveness and forbearance. Religion, they say, should close its eyes to iniquity and by loving persuasion seek to convert the individual or the nation that sins. Such a position, however, will not be taken by those who understand the spirit of Judaism. Well can I understand that those who have been fed upon the soft sentimentalities of our sister religion might in these times assume such an attitude. Strangely enough, as they who read history must know, a religion in whose name and

under whose banner bloody crusades have been carried on through the ages, has been philosophical a teacher of peace...

While the Jew has never been a militant people in the ordinary sense of that term, he has never, never, through all the centuries of his existence, sanctioned as an ethical ideal a peace that was based in compromise with evil. His God is not denominated "The Prince of Peace;" He is called "A-donai Zevo-oth" (The God of Armies), the God who would lead his people unto battle against those who would defy the principles of justice and humanity...

The Jew...has recognized throughout, the basic truth that to compromise with evil is to condone evil. This sentiment is not inaptly summed up in that suggestive third chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes wherein we are told that there is a time to kill as there is a time to heal, that there is a time for war even as there is a time for peace (Eccl. 3:3,8) ...

III. Maintaining Vision

16. Shemot/Exodus 20:22

And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them.

וְאִם־מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה־לִּי
לֹא־תִבְנֶנּוּ אֶתְהוֹ גִזְיֹת כִּי חֲרָבָה
הִנְפֹת עָלֶיהָ וְתִחַלְלָהּ :

17. Devarim/Deuteronomy 24:5

When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be assigned to it for any purpose; he shall be exempt one year for the sake of his household, to give happiness to his wife.

כִּי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה חֲדָשָׁה לֹא
יֵצֵא בַצָּבָא וְלֹא־יַעֲבֹר עָלָיו לְכָל־
דָּבָר נָקְוִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵיתוֹ שָׁנָה אֶחָת
וְשִׂמַח אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח :

18. R. Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, "The Morality of Warfare," United Synagogue Lecture, Central Synagogue, London, May 25, 1982

Moreover, war is never regarded as either a first recourse or a desirable solution to human conflict. It is not only that we must first call out for peace. Anything connected with the ultimate aspirations of our people, with the supreme sanctity of life in Judaism, is incompatible with war. David, King of Israel, first of the Davidic dynasty, conqueror of Jerusalem, yearning to consummate his establishment of Israel's capital and the unification of the Jewish people by building the First Temple there, was told, 'You shall not build a house for My name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood' (1Chr. 22: 8, 28: 3). The wars he waged certainly belonged to the category of 'obligatory wars'. But however just a war, however worthy and even heroic a battle and its objectives, anyone engaged in it is not fit or qualified to build a Temple unto God. For the Temple is a symbol of peace.

For the same reason, it was forbidden to build the altar with 'hewn stones', that is, cut with metal implements. By objects from which swords are made being lifted upon it, it is profaned (Exod. 20: 22). As the Ibn Ezra remarks on this passage, the Hebrew language uses Cherev for 'sword' because it 'destroys' (Charav: hence Churban). War can never be constructive; it is a synonym for destruction.

The Temple and particularly the altar are meant to promote peace, an ideal attainable only through some sacrifice and mutual concession. Therefore, any link between war and worship, however remote, disqualifies the Temple and the altar from serving their purpose. Peace is the supreme Jewish ideal far transcending the horror of war and its destructiveness. In the vision of the Prophets, the central and ultimate focus of all our

Messianic hopes lies in universal peace, when 'they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' (Isa. 2: 4). In the Jewish view, the whole vision of the eventual moral order presupposes as a prime-condition the elimination of war. There can be no perfect world, no redemption of man, without the destruction of war itself as the first and ultimate prerequisite.

When we speak of peace, Shalom, it is not just the absence of war. It is not just a purely negative virtue. The very word Shalom derives from Shalem which means 'perfection'. There is a positive ideal in peace. Every major prayer in our liturgy concludes with a plea for peace. With it we end the Grace-After-Meals, the Amidah and the Kaddish. Symbolically, when we recite this passage in public worship, we walk back three steps. You cannot have peace without going back and surrendering something. There must be conciliation through some sacrifice, as already indicated by the association of the altar with peace. Pacification must require a readiness to give up some claim or even a right conflicting with someone else's...

Let me conclude with some wider reflections on the morality of warfare. I was always fond of telling young couples whose marriage I was due to solemnize of a regulation which sheds a particularly revealing light on the relations between morality and warfare in Jewish thought. Among the biblical rules of conscription, exemption from army service is granted to betrothed and newly-wed men (Deut. 20: 7, 24: 5). The express reason given for this exemption is that the newly-married man 'shall be free for his house one year, and he shall rejoice his wife whom he has taken' (Deut. 24: 5). To rejoice one's wife is regarded as a full-time occupation, especially during the first year of marriage which often either makes or breaks the marriage.

This duty is considered as a national and not just personal obligation. By consolidating your marriage, this law teaches, you perform a greater service to your nation, to the survival of your people, by having a stable home than by joining the army and defending the people in military battle. The ultimate security of our people lies in our homes. Had we relied merely on military strength and victories, we would have been extinct long ago. Hence, in the choice to be made here between home and army, priority was to be given to the home. By staying home for the first year 'to rejoice your wife' you render a more essential service to the nation than by joining its defenders in the trenches. In the moral scale of values, then, even in terms of Jewish security, happy homes come before powerful armies. Jewish homes are our principal fortifications, our first line of national defence.

Not unrelated to this is another moral dimension of warfare, as taught with remarkable insight by our Sages in a striking comment on the very Let me conclude with some wider reflections on the morality of warfare. I was always fond of telling young

couples whose marriage I was due to solemnize of a regulation which sheds a particularly revealing light on the relations between morality and warfare in Jewish thought. Among the biblical rules of conscription, exemption from army service is granted to betrothed and newly-wed men (Deut. 20: 7, 24: 5). The express reason given for this exemption is that the newly-married man 'shall be free for his house one year, and he shall rejoice his wife whom he has taken' (Deut. 24: 5). To rejoice one's wife is regarded as a full-time occupation, especially during the first year of marriage which often either makes or breaks the marriage.

Thus the cycle is complete: from the violence of war to immorality, to unhappy marriages, to juvenile delinquency, to the violence of capital crime— all to be redeemed by the reminder that all men are created in God's image and therefore infinitely precious. We are to recognise that if we find ourselves now afflicted with rising crime rates, this is not unconnected with the instability of international affairs, with wars past and present continuing to undermine the moral fabric of society. The price of war is not just human life laid down in the just defence of values in which we believe. It is also paid in the cheapening of moral values in which we believe. In the face of this danger, Jewish law sets out all the restrictions to be observed, with the prime objective of always reaching out for peace as the overriding ideal.

For ultimately we are to use our strength and power not to achieve victory in war, but to secure peace, as it is written, 'The Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace' (Ps. 29: 11).