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Central Conference of American Rabbis Annual Conference
Opening Program
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Central Conferences of American Rabbis, 2019 conference.
Opening program.
Please stand by for captions.

[Music]

I will build this world from love
And you must build this world from love
And if we build this world from love
Then God will build this world from love

[Singing] [Speaking Hebrew].

>> Welcome to Cincinnati.

[Cheers and Applause]

As we begin this 130th Annual
Convention of the Central
Conference of American Rabbis,
we are poised to embark on a
week of learning, spirituality,
justice and meaningful
transition filled with
celebration.

I am Rick Kellner and I am

Honored to serve as your convention chair this year.

[Cheers and Applause]

Standing with me is Alex

Shuval-Weiner, our convention vice-chair.

It is important to recognize the
outstanding convention committee

Who stands beside us who has worked tirelessly for the last year and a half to build what we know will be an outstanding convention. Joining us on the stage, not in the order they are standing because they're in alphabetical by first name order.

Alan Cook, Amanda Greene, Ben Sharff, Brian Stoller, David Spinrad, Ellie Steinman, Jordi

Battis, who is making her way here momentarily.

Karen Thomashow, Kevin Kleinman,

Also making his way here.

Miriam Terlinchamp, Peter Stein, Sandford Kopnick, Sara Mason-Barkin, and Sissy Coran.

Please join me in giving them a round of applause as we collectively appreciate their time and energy in visioning, goal setting and planning workshops and excursions! Collectively they have created a gathering that we know will carry profound meaning and will give us inspiration to deepen our rabbinate in the year ahead.

>> ALEX SHUVAL-WEINER: In addition to the work of the committee, we should all be deeply grateful to the CCAR Staff who also puts in countless

Hours to help make this convention possible. Of course, we are all here and terribly excited to celebrate Steve on the occasion of his upcoming retirement and to welcome Hara as our new CEO.

[Applause]

We also want to acknowledge David Stern and Ron Segal as we

Celebrate their transition in leadership in our CCAR body.

We are grateful for your wisdom

Your insight, David, that has guided us along the way. And Ron, we look forward to what you will share with us all in the coming days.

>> RICK KELLNER: As we begin our gathering together, we have special words of welcome from an individual who regrets not being

Able to be with us, but due to some timing challenges, we do have however a short video with his words of welcome.

>> With thanks and praise for heaven's grace, I rise to greet you rabbis in Israel, teachers of righteousness and welcome you to this holy convocation, the 130th annual session of the Central Conferences of American Rabbis.

[Applause]

We meet to learn and to teach, to observe and to do the teachings of God's laws. However old, however wise and learned in the law, any person may be, we have always something to learn from others.

[Applause]

>> RICK KELLNER: Special thanks to our colleague Gary Zola and the American Jewish Archives for

-- for helping to bring Isaac Mayer Wise to live for us today.

To be in this famous space, the Hall of Mirrors, with all of us who lead Reform Judaism into the

Future in celebration of the 20th anniversary of Isaac Mayer Wise birth, we minds me of the

famous Talmudic text that depicts Moses being transported into Rabbi Akiva's Beit Midrash where he could not understand the discourse but was brought to tears when Akiva acknowledged that he learned his interpretation of halakha from none other than Moshe Rabbeinu himself.

Can we imagine for a moment, Isaac Mayer Wise, taking a ride in Doc's Delorean, they did go

Back to 1885 after all.

and being carried through time to our Beit Midrash 130 years

After Wise brought American rabbis together in Cleveland for the first time.

Now with the construction of

I-71, it's a little easier to traverse the state of Ohio.

We might wonder what Wise would think, say or teach as he witnessed us, the descendants of his grand vision.

Just as Moses wondered about the crowns of Torah, we too wonder what Wise would think as we interpret our sacred texts and use them to form opinions about how they impact our world today in 2019.

>> ALEX SHUVAL-WEINER: Wise once taught: "In the name of God and Israel, the rabbi must be a bearer of light and truth, of reason's choice gifts and conscience's holy lessons."

Rabbis must be people of peace and of good will; they must conciliate wherever they can, but must always be strong in the declaration of truth without fear or favor.”

As we gather during these next few days, we ask ourselves in what ways are we bearers of light and truth?

How do we nurture the middot of peace and good will?

How do we teach and live conscience’s holy lessons?

We hope that in these days together that we will explore and find answers to these questions.

>> RICK KELLNER: Today we sit, like Akiva did, to interpret Torah as Moses taught, and we try to carry on the legacy of Isaac Mayer Wise.

His words, still hold profound value, meaning and applicability for us.

For, we too bear the light and truth that informs our conscience and powers us in the pursuit of truth.

May these days ahead, be days filled with meaning and inspiration.

May we find the light of Torah through moments of hevruta.

I'd now like to welcome our colleague and CCAR president David Stern.

[Applause]

>> DAVID STERN: I'm a little nervous. I've never spoken after Isaac Mayer Wise before.

[Laughter]

But I want to add to the wonderful words of welcome that we heard from Rick, add to the wonderful gratitude that we've only begun to express for their great work. It is especially my privilege to officially call this meeting to order.

First order of business is to express further thanks to the members of the outgoing board of the CCAR. Dan, if I could have that slide. And I'll ask you all to stand, please. Currently, president-elect Ron Segal.

[Applause]

Vice president program Wendi Geffen, Paul Kipnes is unable to be with us. Vice president membership Laura Baum, Lewis cameras, Janet Liss, please stay standing, everybody. Immediate past president for the time being Denise eager and trustees Leah Cohen, Davidline, David Spinrad, Erica Asch, Karen Citrin, Ruth, Seth and Barry

Block. I'll ask our staff to stand up. Thank you all so much for your leadership. You guys can take your seats.

My gratitude to the board is both on behalf of this body and especially on behalf of this rabbi. Your support, your wisdom, your good humor, your patience have been indispensable to me and to this conference. I thank you. It's now my privilege as the second order of business to invite forward the chairs of the nominating committee Zach Shapiro and Andrea Goldstein to present their report and slate for nomination.

[Applause]

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: Good afternoon. It is a great honor for the both of us to have been co-chairs of the CCAR nominating committee for this past year. We were very blessed to have worked with a wise, diverse, and kind committee of colleagues who made up the nominating committee. And we want to thank Alan Berlin, Alexis Burke, Ana, Larry Englander, Sandra Cats and Sue for the thoughtful and generous manner in which we were able to come together to complete this task.

We also want to thank Steve Fox and Rose for their help and guidance along the way.

[Applause]

After the call for nominations went out to the members of our conference, 89 individuals responded either by nominating a colleague or nominating themselves for consideration. And 79 colleagues ended up submitting responses to the questions we asked our nominees to consider. After reading so many thoughtful and challenging responses, our committee felt heartened by the number of rabbis who care deeply about the CCAR and wish to see it continue to grow and improve in its capacity to serve all its members.

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: Hi, everyone. It's good to be here. It was really important to our committee that we establish a set of criteria through which we could view and understand all of the nominees. And after discussions amongst ourselves, as well as with David and Ron whose insights were so very instrumental in helping us frame our criteria, we came up with the following guidelines. And there are four of them.

One, knowing that Steve Fox would be retiring and not yet knowing who the new executive director would be, it was really important that the new board maintain a sense of continuity that they could be able to hit the ground running. Second, diversity. Specifically we were looking to create a more diverse board when it came to gender, LGBTQ colleagues as well as non-pulpit rabbis. We were less concerned this year with geographic diversity or looking at the size of congregations or organizations that our colleagues served.

Three, dynamic initiative. We're looking for colleagues who we believed would not just fulfill the requirements and expectations of the CCAR -- of the CCAR board, but who would go above and beyond working to improve our conference. And finally, in the many ways, this is the most important, the committee was looking for people who would help us be better rabbis which is one of the core missions of the CCAR.

So we want rabbis who would inspire us and continue to remind us of why our jobs are so very meaningful.

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: As you can imagine, it was a very difficult task to pare down such a large and talented list of potential nominees to the board that we are excited to present to you today. We hope that all of our colleagues who were interested in board service will continue to find ways to serve the conference and definitely consider applying for a board position again in two years.

But right now, we wish to share the slate of nominees for the 2019-2021 CCAR board.

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: As before, when we share your name, we ask that you please stand and remain standing.

President Ron Segal.

[Applause]

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: President-elect Lewis Kamrass.

[Applause]

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: Vice president of leadership Erica Ashe.

[Applause]

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: Vice program of program Judith Segal.

[Applause]

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: Vice president of finance, David [audio breaking up].

[Applause]

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: Vice president of membership, Ruth Zlotnick.

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: Vice president of organization, the person that will help me organize my office, is Yael Splansky.

[Applause]

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: And our immediate past president, David Stern.

[Applause]

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: Our board of trustees --

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: Mona Alfi.

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: Barry Block.

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: Nickie DeBlosi, Yoel Khan.

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: Seth Limmer.

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: Randy Sheinberg.

>> ZACH SHAPIRO: And Andrea Steinberger.

[Applause]

>> ANDREA GOLDSTEIN: Thank you. So along with all of the ex-officio members we submit these names as the 2019-2021 CCAR board and move for their election.

>> There is a motion. I seek a second. And so I now call for a vote. All of those in favor of approving the last slides of slate of officers, please say aye. All those opposed?

I want to -- I want to give special thanks to Zach and Andrea for superb and thoughtful leadership that selected a wonderful group of leaders for us, but helped us improve the process as well. Thank you.

[Applause]

>> DAVID STERN: Rabbi.

>> We know that on that list, nothing excited you more than the title immediate past president. But we want to take one minute in this gathering of your colleagues and your friends to say thank you. We want to present you with a gift. We'd like to present you with a piece of original art of the photographer bill Aaron. We chose this piece because you have anchored us for two years in Torah. More importantly or as importantly, David, you passed Torah from generation to generation, not just in your work as a congregational rabbi but as your work in the CCAR rabbi, the third generation to serve as our president. From generation to generation, the rabbis in your congregation, all that have served with you over the years, and from generation to generation to those of us in this room of all years, we say thank you, we say it in appreciation of your service as our president, to you a leader whose scholarship, caring and commitment has enriched our rabbinic like. Thank you, rabbi David Stern.

[Applause]

>> DAVID STERN: Thank you. I thought I was going to get to say please be seated.

I do want to -- tomorrow, I'll have a chance to say a few more words to honor Steve for his magnificent service, but thank you for everything you have done to lead us over these 13 years, to the rest of the staff for their support, to the board whom I already thanked. I do want to ask a couple other people to stand up. Deborah Robbins, are you in the house somewhere?

[Cheers and Applause]

So I've worked at Temple Emanuel for 30 years. I've had the privilege of working with Debbie Robbins for 28 of those 30 years. She's a leader every day, but especially in these past two years, Debbie and the rest of our clergy team whom she represents here at this conference, our lay leadership, the whole family of Temple Emanuel has been supportive of me, but being supportive of me, deeply supportive of this conference. Debbie, thank you for everything you do every day and for all who join you in the work.

[Applause]

And Nancy.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

>> I would now like to introduce someone who, for many needs no introduction, Dr. Gary P. Zola. Dr. Zola has given incredible support for us in our

Guidance and preparation for convention. Also through the creation of a promotional video as well as AZ vast wisdom of Jewish history.

His guidance in teaching us about the lessons and legacies of Isaac Mayer Wise's impact on Jewish life in America which we have synthesized into our goals for convention.

Gary Phillip Zola is the Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of the American Jewish Experience & Reform Jewish History at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion here in Cincinnati.

As well as the Executive Director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

Gary serves as editor of The Marcus Center's award-winning biannual publication, The American Jewish Archives Journal.

President Obama appointed Dr. Zola on three separate occasions

to serve as a member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, an independent agency of the Federal government.

His own published volumes include we called him rabbi Abraham, an American Jewish history of primary source reader.

We are also grateful to the Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives for graciously sponsoring our convention's opening program.

Please give a warm welcome to our friend, teacher and colleague, Dr. Gary Zola.

[Applause]

>> GARY ZOLA: Thank you, colleagues. Thank you. It is a pleasure to welcome you to this, the 20th annual lecture memorializing Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus. Our beloved teacher, scholar of the American Jewish experience, and past president of this conference.

Now, we begin this historic conference by focusing on a theme that has concerned our conference from its very beginnings [Speaking Hebrew]. The founding president of this conference would undoubtedly approve of our decision to focus on this topic. You need not take my word for this as testimony, for as we have already seen, Dr. Wise is capable of speaking for himself.

>> We are destroying the old prejudices of color, race, tongue, and former condition, and unfurling the banner of the unity of the human family by and in its ethical nature.

[Applause]

>> GARY ZOLA: Colleagues, having known our keynote speaker for many years now, I can say with confidence that the city of Cincinnati and the Hebrew union college occupy a special place in her heart and in the heart of the Heschel family. And most of us in this room know or should know the special role that HUC's president Julian Morganstern and the school's lay leadership played in bringing Dr. Heschel to the United States in 1940. Thereby sparing him the fate that befell so many members of his own family, and of course millions of our Jewish brothers and sisters during that darkest of times.

Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel's extraordinary career in the United States is proof positive that this saga constitutes one of the most honorable chapters in our college's 144-year history. It is particularly fitting that Dr. Susannah Heschel will be serving this afternoon as the Jacob Rader Marcus memorial lecturer, because by her own testimony, our speaker owes her own very existence to a good deed performed by Dr. Marcus 78 years ago. Here is what Dr. Heschel wrote in her introduction to her 1996 volume on her father titled moral grandeur and spiritual audacity. I quote, "it was in Cincinnati that my father met my mother, Sylvia Strauss, at the home of professor and Mrs. Jacob Marcus. My mother, a concert pianist had come to Cincinnati from her hometown, Cleveland, to study with Severin Eisenberger. She was asked to play the piano, and my father fell in love with her."

Susannah Heschel is the Eli Black professor of Jewish studies at Dartmouth College. She is the author and editor of numerous books and articles, many focusing on

Jewish Christian relations, she is the recipient of countless communal awards, this would include four honorary doctorates. This afternoon, as you know, she will be speaking to us on the topic "My Father's Legacy and Commitment to Tzedek v'Shalom." Colleagues, won't you please join me in welcoming back home to Cincinnati, Ohio, Susannah Heschel, and of course to our conference. Susannah, please.

[Applause]

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: Thank you very much, Gary. A beautiful introduction. And I also want to thank all of you as representatives of the reform movement because you saved my father's life. I grew up always being reminded by my father of what Julian Morganstern had done. It was not easy in those days to obtain a visa for a Jewish scholar from Europe. My father was one of the five saved, and I've always been grateful. And also have to tell you that I wrote a book about Abraham Geiger. He was a brilliant scholar, a person of enormous integrity and optimism. And he, as one of the founders of reform Judaism, I hope is also one of your heroes as he is mine.

I am here at the CCAR meeting and grateful and honored by the invitation to speak to you. And of course my first thought is, what would my father suggest that I say to you today? He spoke to the CCAR many, many years ago, and I know what he said. He often would speak to groups of rabbis and then get attacked and -- he would say to people what they didn't want to hear. He would speak to reform rabbis and tell them you need more [Speaking Hebrew] and speak to more traditional rabbis and say you need more [Speaking Hebrew]. I'm not here to criticize anything. On the contrary. I want to convey to you something of my father's spirit. Some of his ideas, some of his work, but I'd like to show you that his political work and his religious beliefs inform one another. They're of one piece. They're a whole. They inspire me. And I know that you as rabbis and cantors and religious teachers, you have a very difficult profession. I look at you and I think, would you all -- could you possibly ordain me? No?

[Laughter]

But I know what a difficult profession it is. You have enormous demands. You have to be optimistic and hopeful and you deal with pressures coming from all sides. You're supposed to be learned and deeply intellectual and at the same time healers of troubled souls. You're supposed to inspire and deeply move so many people, and of course you have a gift. You have the opportunity to enter into the most intimate and sacred parts of people's lives. I just wonder sometimes who is there for you? And I hope in some way that I can convey something of my father to you. I hope he is there for you.

I would say that the task facing all of us today is extremely challenging. We live in an era of the wall, borders and boundaries. It's not only the boundaries and walls that they want to build around the country, this country and other countries in the north and Europe, we know that people from the southern hemisphere are fleeing. They're fleeing poverty and war, joblessness, inadequate health care, environment degradation. And in so many ways, they are fleeing the problems that we created. And we don't want to let them in. The walls aren't just physical. The walls are in our hearts. And I would say that some of us here today, myself included, also seek asylum. I seek asylum from the mendacity of the government. So I wonder, is there in some way perhaps that my father's writings and his personal example can help us today to overcome the walls in our hearts, the hardness of heart, can he contribute to your lives as rabbis?

I would say since the 1960s and more so today and on April 9th, we're standing as Jews before a crossroads. Is it Abraham Heschel? Never again to the Jews or never again to any human being? That's a choice. And we have to make a

decision. It's very tempting always for people living in a racist regime and a fascist regime to follow along, to go where the power is. And we Jews are not only divided, in some ways we're at war with each other and even within ourselves. And so we have to ask right now at this crossroads, what is our mission? What is the purpose of being a Jew in this world? Is there something, some reason why we as Jews are here at this moment?

There are some people who see a gulf between piety and social activism. In fact, the two, my father shows are bound together. There is no possibility, he felt, of genuine prayer when immoral activities are being conducted in our name by our government. And if we fail to protest, what is left? My father went to a demonstration against the war in Vietnam, and a journalist came over to him and said, what are you doing here. It was unfriendly. My father said I'm here because I can't pray. The journalist said, what do you mean, you can't pray so you go to a demonstration against war? My father said, when I open the prayer book, I see before me children burning from napalm. What do we see in our prayer books?

Social activism is meaningless without a heart and soul. And the truth is, we do not work to overcome racism because racism is wrong but because we cannot live with ourselves. We cannot stand before God. We cannot pray if we turn away from the racism of our society. Prayer, my father writes, prayer must never be a citadel for selfish concerns, but rather a place for deepening concern over other people's plight.

Rather than making us feel reassured, relaxed, self-satisfied, prayer, he writes, is meaningless unless it's subversive. Subversive, you don't walk out of the synagogue saying I'm a good person, I went today. No. Shake yourself up. He was of course a critic always thinking critically, a critic of Protestant prophets, a critic of the way scholars was reading medieval philosophy. He always wanted us to see the human dimension. And then he's informed by his own immersion in his life in Warsaw. He said piety is not about performing its vote. It's about the way, the way we do mitzvah. It's about the care and affection. The personal touch. Piety, he says, is the direct opposite of selfishness.

I wanted to say something about the march at Selma which has become so well-known, almost iconic of my father with Dr. King. I also want to tell you whenever I meet somebody from those days, from the civil rights movement, they embrace me, they hug me, they thank me, they show gratitude which is so rare in our world, gratitude. They're grateful to my father. My father came back from that March in Selma. He said, "for many of us the March from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling, and yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying."

What is walking in Jewish tradition? What is walking to do with prayer? According to tradition, walking from town to town as an itinerant preacher, for example. Walking also uplifts the fallen sparks. And Jacob lifted his feet, genesis 29:1 [Speaking Hebrew]. What does this mean? He departed from the physical to the spiritual. What is this? This is the messianic task. Uplift falling sparks. The task of the rabbi, [Speaking Hebrew], the rabbi who is [Speaking Hebrew] who heals depression, who lifts people out of despair, walking is a metaphor for [Speaking Hebrew], for the footsteps of the messiah. The time when the sparks of souls captured in the demonic realm will be released.

What does this have to do with Selma? It is the redemption of people from the racism that entraps their souls and their conscience, lift them up. And so we ask: How can we transform a physical act, like walking, into a spiritual act like praying? To do a

mitzvah my father writes is to outdo one's self, to go beyond one's needs, it's an ecstasy deeds. I thought of my having walked in Selma, it reminded me of walking with rabbis on various occasions, I felt a sense of the holy in what I was doing. But then we ask: Where does holiness come from? It's not given to us. It doesn't drop like dew from heaven. It's created by us. We make the Sabbath holy.

My father writes in a letter to Dr. King, "the day we march together out of Selma was a day of sanctification. That day, I hope will never be passed to me. That day will continue to be this day."

What is he implying there? He writes in God in search of man about Sinai and the revelation at Sinai. He says the day of giving the Torah can never be passed, that day is this day, every day. Sounds like Selma. It sounds a little like [Speaking Hebrew], a taste of [Speaking Hebrew]. Selma, in other words, was an opportunity for revelation, for sanctification. And what is revelation? There's so many ways in Judaism of understanding revelation. The words of Torah, [Speaking Hebrew], the experience at Sinai, modern Jewish thinkers have all types of definitions and it's about laws. For others, the Bible was revealed, but not the tolerant, for others the moral principle was revealed, but not the rest of it.

My father is not interested in that, but rather he has another idea. He emphasizes that Torah was given, but also received. It's about giving and receiving. The Torah is always present. What changes is our ability to hear and understand Torah. There's a commentary [Speaking Hebrew] of Fryem who says in every generation we receive only half a Torah. Why only half a Torah? The Torah only becomes whole through our understanding. And each generation's understanding is different. And unique.

What I want to suggest is that my father's words function similarly. He gives us his words and his deeds. And yes, they're inspiring and people write to me and say, I feel that he's speaking to him in an intimate way. I think it's true. He had a wonderful ability to create intimacy with people. He gives us his words and deeds, but then we receive and understand his meaning, each in a unique way, Catholics and Jews, civil rights leaders and the Muslim scholar in Pakistan who just translated one of the books into Urdu.

So what's our mission today? How do we understand? How do we receive? And of course what we stand for as Jews defines who we are, and sets a legacy of Torah for the future. Now, with Selma a Hasidic act? Yes. How was it a prophetic act? My father asks the question, what manner of man is the prophet? He says the prophet is a person who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden upon his soul, and he's bowed and stunned at man's greed. Frightful is the agony of human beings and no human voice can convey its full terror. Prophecy is the voice God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the poor, to the profane riches of the world. It is a form of living a crossing point of God and human beings. God is raging in the prophet's words.

And yes, I would say many of us are indeed bowed and stunned at the greed and the callousness that pervades this world and pervades America and not only this country. So what does it mean to be a prophet? A prophet, my father says, is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, the revered, the awesome. There are beliefs that are cherished as certainties, institutions endowed with supreme sanctity. That is what they expose as scandalous pretenses. The prophet is a protester, not against the law, but appealing to a higher law. The Greek conception of justice is a balance. The prophet seeks radical change, fundamental change in human nature. Change of our passions. Change of what we do as human beings with this little bit of time called our

life. And in fact there are no administrative solutions to spiritual problems, he writes. We have to transform the very fabric of our society.

Okay. We know there is moral rot in Jewish society today. Why is there so much corruption? [Speaking Hebrew] will not solve this problem. Nor will law courts. Nor will shaming people in newspapers. We need a prophetic response. I want to say a word about Israel. Zionism was supposed to bring us together as Jews, to revive our identity, to inspire us and to protect us with estate. Yet that's not proving to be the case. Our anger at one another as Jews seem to be fueled primarily over our political positions regarding Israel. And I am struck coming from Boston that it seems more acceptable to express sympathy with Robert Kraft than to suggest the Palestinians also need a stay.

[Applause]

Israel, my father said, this was the land of dreams and hope and love. Israel lived in the hearts of Jews of all times, and I know had there been a state in 1939, my father's mother and sisters and family and all of our families would not have been murdered. My father's travels to Israel moved him deeply. And yet he warned the state of Israel is not an atonement. It would be blasphemy to guard it as a compensation for Auschwitz. Israel, is not compensation in itself as land. We do not worship the soil, he wrote. Instead, my father saw Israel as deeply entwined with Jewish history and inspiring moments in which God's presence is palpable, to invoke in us the ability to be present to God's presence. He asked, how do you live in the city of God? Israel, he said, is a demand that justice prevails over power, that awareness of God penetrates human understanding. The state of Israel is not a gift to the Jews nor an achievement on their part, but a test of the integrity of the Jewish people and the competence of Judaism.

[Applause]

What would my father tell you? You know he would say sometimes that some synagogues are too big. Congregants sit back in their chairs. He wanted Jews to study more, but also to learn how to [Speaking Hebrew]. Don't be a [Speaking Hebrew]. Don't worry whether the gelatin is kosher. Worry whether the nuclear weapons are kosher.

[Applause]

Small-mindedness, he warned us, small-mindedness brings the [Speaking Hebrew]. He was of course equally critical of orthodoxy, warning against religious behaviorism and the **divination** of [Speaking Hebrew].

And he warned against bigotry. He said frequently, faith and a lack of mercy enter into a union out of which bigotry is born. The presumption that my faith is pure and unholy and those that differ is unholy. No, he said, Judaism has to be authentic to who I am. And I have to know who I am. I can't be Jewish the way my grandparents are Jewish. That, he said, would be spiritual plagiarism.

I want to conclude by giving my father the final word. In 1963 in January, he met Dr. King in Chicago. And a few months later, they spoke together at a gathering in the cat skills. They both spoke about racism. They spoke about freeing soviet Jews, they spoke about Israel. And then at the very end, my father decided I think for the -- one of the rare occasions, only when he went to Winnipeg did he lecture in Yiddish. But he said a few words for three minutes in Yiddish. And I want to play for you those few words, because I find them very inspiring, as a way that they on one hand look back and on the other hand look forward. He speaks to us of the challenge that faces us.

>> We have committed and let us not let it vanish. I would like to spend the next three minutes by saying to you just a few words in Yiddish in honor of the Russian Jews,

most of whom still speak Yiddish. I'd like to say something about our inner situation in relation to what happened in our times in the early '40s.

[Speaking Yiddish].

>> What is the task? Not to forget. Never to be indifferent to other people's suffering. Thank you.

[Applause]

>> Thank you, Susannah, so very much. We're going to now have some questions. And I believe that cards are being passed around. If you do have a question, we'll pose it. But I hope you don't mind if I begin by asking one or two questions.

So I'm wondering what you might suppose your father might say to many in the colleagues, I'm able to identify with one element, just one small element of your father's career, and that is when you serve in an institution, like a school or some other organization, sometimes it's easier to speak out and represent your own views without having to engage with the people who will be so critical of you. And it is a fact that many out here face that challenge, the tribalism about which you spoke, we feel in our congregations.

There was this long tradition in our movement that goes back to the Pittsburgh platform of being involved in issues of [Speaking Hebrew] and yet -- and many, many rabbis spoke about that. But today, more and more voices rise up and say we don't want to hear that, rabbi, we don't want you to speak about that. What do you think your father might say to -- to us in this era if you could hypothesize?

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: This is a very serious problem, and I know the dimensions of it, and I think it needs to be -- it's a grave issue because I know that every rabbi face this is problem. And I don't think there are simple answers because I also think many of these individual situations differ one from the other.

So who am I to give such advice? But I will tell you what I observed a bit from my father. My father said that there are some things -- and I'm just drawing from examples. In many close Christian colleagues and friends, many things to discuss, but there's some things not to discuss. You don't talk about Jesus because nothing a Jew says to affirm Jesus will ever satisfy a Christian. Let's talk instead about what he described as depth theology. That is the, the difficulty that we all face sometimes trying to pray whether you're a Jew, Christian or Muslim, sometimes it's difficult. That's the level at which we should be discussing.

So sometimes perhaps you find some way where you can find a common ground and some trust. Sometimes it's generational. Sometimes you have to seek out those people. But my father certainly was not someone to walk into a room and drop a bomb of his view that he knew everybody would disagree with. He was also very gentle in the way he spoke, and sometimes used irony or used humor or a joke to try to soften people, soften, soften, always trying to soften.

This is not the kind of answer and these are political issues as well, I understand. If it's possible to take it from the political realm and bring it to a religious -- to the level of the [Speaking Hebrew], maybe that would be easier in some cases. Believe me, I know, I know how hard it is. It's tragic. And then what? And then rabbis feel that they are saying superficialities? They themselves give up. I understand. It's a very big problem. I also know that every rabbi has a conscience, and that's why you became a rabbi. If your conscience is in pain because it's not being allowed to speak, then your own integrity as a human being is going to suffer. There's more to say, but why don't we take the audience questions.

>> GARY ZOLA: Okay. So another question that came to my mind is, your father in memory is very much today identified widely within the Jewish community and

beyond with his expressions of commitment to the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement of the '60s. But as I think you demonstrated so powerfully today, your father's writings, his scholarship, his interest not only in [Speaking Hebrew] but in the prophets is very important element of his work and what often happens to all great people is their life's work is often condensed into banners or themes.

I was taken by the validity and the timeliness of many of the quotes that you selected from his writings that came from his scholarship. Maybe you could reflect a few minutes on that. Because when we see the title of tzedek v'shalom and your father, I think our minds immediately go to civil rights. But I think you were trying to point out that it goes beyond that. Maybe you could say a few more words on that topic.

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: And perhaps I might also mention that some wonderful people in Philadelphia gathered some of the essays that my father wrote in Germany and have translated them. And there's a book coming out in a few weeks [audio breaking up] what's important to me about those writings is that he was writing in Nazi Germany, what does one say, how do you speak to Jews in the newspapers, how do you write scholarship at a time like that. So there are some lessons to be learned from that.

Now in terms of your specific question, I think that -- the issues that we face politically are not that different from the issues that my father faced in his time because we haven't resolved them. Because the poverty is still there and the racism is still there and so on, and the corruption and the manipulation of wealth. And so you know what the issues are, but we need to sustain ourselves. Otherwise, we feel overwhelmed and we just run to a corner and hide. We don't know where to begin and what to do. I think that's what he was struggling with and that's part of what he was writing in one book after another whether it's about the prophets or the meaning in revelation and he writes about God in search of man. Or what it is to be a human being and in search of man.

Professor Michael Meyer once discussed at a CCAR meeting --

[Cheers and Applause]

Yeah, that's Margie's husband.

[Cheers and Applause]

And so what Michael Meyer pointed out, this was a book about [Speaking Hebrew] who was constantly speaking out about mendacity that my father was speaking about and writing about and speaking about the mendacity of the American government. So they had something to say from the 19th century for us today, too.

In that sense, I think these are sources of inspiration for us. They give us direction, his words, and I think also -- I feel and so many people say to me, too, I feel as though he's comforting me and inspiring me and speaking to me, understands. That's what I find very helpful.

>> GARY ZOLA: So here's a question. A much more focused on a topic. Given the admonition not to ignore others' suffering combined with your father's passionate Zionism, how would you imagine he would respond to the current BDS anti-Zionist movement on college campuses and the political left much more broadly spoken?

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: I first of all want to say having discussed this with someone who recently gave a lecture and did some research about BDS, that the existence of BDS on college campuses has been greatly exaggerated. It's not as bad as people think. Where it does exist, could be a place like Columbia University, there's a sizable Jewish community of Zionist students and orthodox students. I'm worried a little bit that the BDS thing is politically manipulated. There is a leftist critique of Zionism, that's true. And Zionism has become one with the republican party. There were all different branches of Zionism.

Finally, I would say my father always just believed in talking to people. He never walked away -- never walked away from a difficult question or a problem or from something ugly. So, yes, there's a problem and we need to talk to people. If the left is feeling alienated from Israel and angry at Israel and angry at Zionism, we need to talk to them. We need to show there is also a left wing Zionism. If we can't do that, I believe we're really lost. But we can. I believe we can.

[Applause]

>> GARY ZOLA: I'm going to ask two questions. In my mind, at least, they're somewhat related. You can answer them separately or together.

One question is: How can our movement, our seminary help us keep our focus on the personal relationships that make communication possible? And then this question: Is there a reform approach to [Speaking Hebrew]? And third --

[Laughter]

I think that Dr. Heschel wanted me to offer a few questions at once. Okay? So I'm in rare form. I'm obeying the rules.

Third is how do we teach and nurture the building of a moral imagination for those who are trapped in their own personal view of the world?

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: Yeah. I think that -- first I want to emphasize that my father had some relatives who managed to come over before the war who were Hasidic. His father is the head of a [Speaking Hebrew] and the ones I remember from growing up. I was inspired by them. It's clear to be Hasidic means also to observe mitzvah and go beyond that. I just learned yesterday at a [Speaking Hebrew] -- I always knew that you don't eat any Matzah from the beginning. It turns out that's [Speaking Hebrew] and it's not [Speaking Hebrew]. I never knew that.

I think a understanding of human relationships is something that is of appeal to any human being. I can't imagine who wouldn't find it appealing. I think there is a depth of understanding of the inner life of a personal life that is for everyone, and certainly for the reform movement. How do you speak to people, how do you help on a personal level and teach and nurture moral imagination? How do you do that? You do with that your [Speaking Hebrew]. You do that as a [Speaking Hebrew]. You don't speak to someone who is trapped and lost, whether it's in a racist imagination or in depression. You don't say to them get over it. You can't even sometimes speak in words. They write about this, that it has to descend which means you have to feel what they feel and then lift them out. Not necessarily with language. It can be with song, with the song because each person has a [Speaking Hebrew] that is representative of your [Speaking Hebrew].

So I think this is -- what reform Judaism gives to Hasidism is the question. And you know what? Women.

[Cheers and Applause].

>> GARY ZOLA: All right. I -- I want to ask one --

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: [Off Mic].

>> GARY ZOLA: You sure?

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: Yes.

>> GARY ZOLA: Just a quick question. Do you think -- even though we know your father felt so much more religiously at home at JTS and so forth, do you think that his years at the school had any -- in Cincinnati had any influenced his thinking about prophetic Judaism and the role he would later play?

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: Of course. Don't you think he was inspired by Julian Morganstern who was going to Washington to demand visas. That's a prophetic example. My father spent five years living in a dorm room at HUC with a little

refrigerator in his room because the food wasn't kosher. He was all alone. He had no family, he had no friends. He was desperate to save his mother and sisters and his whole extended family. He thought he could save them. He was sending money to his mother in the Warsaw ghetto.

Just think for a minute, yes, he had an opportunity to move to New York where he had a sister and her husband and relatives. Yes, of course he would go to where his family is. Who wouldn't do that? Also, when you live in a place that is so associated with terrible heartache, sometimes you need to move to a different place. You understand that. So he didn't repudiate HUC. Anybody would do that. You understand that. Sometimes you need to leave that place. So I think that absolutely, he -- you know what he suffered at JTS. You must know that. I would walk home from the synagogue and my parents would talk about L and F. You think I didn't know who it was? You know, Freud was upset because his father told him his hat was knocked into the gutter by an anti-Semite. How do you think I felt when my father was L and F? It was terrible, and it hurt him. And I'm sorry. I'm sorry for him. He used to say to me, never become an academic.

[Laughter]

>> GARY ZOLA: Well, Susannah, I don't want you to forget, if there was one thing that you had wanted to add, but I think we have time for one other question. As my colleagues know, Zola is always on time. And therefore we're going to end right on time.

But the last question, which I think is a really -- I think is a nice question for you to engage with as our last question, is: Right now, so much is pressing and painful. Where would you focus first? What breaks your heart? Where is a Jewish voice the most powerful in this moment?

>> SUSANNAH HESCHEL: Yeah. I -- I think that's a question we -- we should each ask ourselves, first of all. I'm not the one to make a decision for anyone else. Everybody makes the decision for themselves. And I think we also have to remember that there's some things we can accomplish and some things we can't. And we need to have a balance in our life. My father was sleepless over the war in Vietnam. Really pacing the floor for hours at night. And he was heartbroken and he tried very hard. But he also -- he also remembered, for example, in Shah bat, there are two things you don't talk about. You don't have controversy. He also maintained his personal relationships and was able to be loving even when his heart was broken.

So I think where we focus first is a personal issue, but I think we need to choose something because it's overwhelming. Every day we're bombarded with more. So to focus on one thing, to have that focus is important, and always to remember -- always to remember the personal and the people, individual people who need us. I think we have one minute. And I'd like to end maybe with -- there was something I wanted to mention which is a Hasidic teaching from my father. Yeah? Is that okay?

So he -- my father -- you understand it's very important to me that people understand how -- how close he was to his Hasidic family in America. How close and how he called his brother-in-law at least once a week and talked to him about Vietnam and about the ecumenical movement, all kinds of issues. And the love, the love that he felt. I also want to tell you that my father would point to his bookcases and say this is your [Speaking Hebrew], this is your inheritance.

One story in particular, the one that he loved was the [Speaking Hebrew], he was named for him. There was one story my father used to tell often. He said it was a very charismatic. People would come from all over to talk to him and tell him all the

problems and difficulties and ask him to pray for them. One day his assistant asked him, how do you remember all these people and what their problems are? And the optaruv answered, he said, when someone comes and tells me their troubles, I open my heart. And their problems come inside and they make a scar in my heart. And when I go to pray, I open my heart to God and I say, look at all these scars.

I think what's important for me from that story is first of all to think that there is someone capable of listening in that way, of hearing in that way. And the gift that it is for each of us to be heard by someone who's listening like that. And I think maybe all of us have had an occasional experience like that when you've talked to someone and you know, you know how they're listening to you. And to strive to be like that, to be that kind of person, that is a kind of [Speaking Hebrew] and [Speaking Hebrew]. To be able to listen to someone in that way so they feel that. It's extraordinary.

We strive to do that on a personal level and with God's help we can strive to do that on the national and international political level as well. May it come to pass. Thank you.

[Applause]

>> ALEX SHUVAL-WEINER: Friends, three very brief announcements. At 6:00 p.m. this evening, we are all invited to reception in the pavilion room sponsored by the rock Warren charitable foundation in honor of our Cincinnati colleagues.

[Applause]

We'd like to invite you if you have not downloaded the -- the app for our convention that you please do so and make sure that you turn on the notification so you can get all of the up-to-date information as it comes. And then finally, we have been asked to clear this room very quickly so that they can turn it around for the evening events. And I know many of us want to greet Dr. Heschel.

So at the conclusion, we are going to all exit this room. Dr. Heschel will be in the back in the outside area. Thank you very much. We will see you in a little bit.

[Event concluded at 5:28 p.m. ET]