

Rh am:

(Rabbi takes off her watch and places it carefully on the lecturn)

This is one of the classic jokes of the rabbinate – makes me laugh each time – I hope that you will laugh along with me this time as well – no matter how many time I may have told it before! Congregant question: What does it mean when a rabbi takes off her watch and checks it before she begins the sermon?Honest rabbi's answer: Absolutely nothing!

For those of us accustomed to the half hour sitcom that is not even 30 minutes in length, the length of this service and sermon may seem like a mini-series. And yet when you are on the golf course and doing well or when you are enjoying a wonderful day with family – then the hours go by as quickly as minutes. I promise you that it is my intention to give a sermon which will not feel like forever but will use your minutes well.

And that is, at essence, the elusive nature of time – time ticking away in classes, time flying by when we are in love or enjoying the summer vacation. And those very strange moments when time seems to be standing still -- often at a time of transcendence – either an experience of pure joy or deepest sadness -- then we

live outside of time for a brief interval. Only human beings count time and live with a calendar; it is the ability to mark the passing of time that makes us human and distinguishes us from both the animals and from God. Animals need not observe time, they do not schedule and they do not plan. God by the very nature of Divinity exists beyond the framework of time. And so for us, observing a new year and then recognizing the brief and slippery nature of a day – these are truly human activities. We have a brand new year and yet we realize that it is really only one very short day. In a blink of an eye, it will be next year and we will wonder whether we have taken even one step further on the mission of our lives.

And with you I return to the text that will guide us throughout the High Holy day season: words from Rabbi Tarfon, one of our sages. He taught: the day is short, the work is great, the workers are lazy, the wages are rewarding, and the Owner of the House is impatient. We begin with the first words there: the day is short and the work is great.

This RH morning, I urge you, no I insist that all of us pledge to use today, our long but short day, our fleeting time, to take on an enormous task but one which we accept with honor – that is to renew our determination to support and love Israel.

This year, it is most clear to me that the time is now, that Israel and the world's relationship with Israel have come to a most dangerous intersection.

She is in danger from both within and without -- from those who would want us to go backwards in time, to forget the present, to ignore the future, and ultimately to be stuck in a past that will give us no future. Both internal and external challenges for Israel are our enemies this year, these require us to use this short day in preparation for our very important task.

Tackling the first step of our mission, the enemy within Israel begins with all of us looking very critically at ourselves.

As Reform Jews our immediate job is to actively recognize our responsibilities regarding our beloved Israel – we are commanded to speak as part of her loving, un-wavering family. Israel is part of our souls, part of our way of understanding and being Jewish. There is no Judaism without Israel. So we support her in that manner. We can disagree with political decisions and we can decry extremists because we must insist that she be the best Israel possible, living out the values that make her and us Jewish.

This calls us to make a active commitment to the Progressive, the Reform Jewish activists in Israel –

To make that commitment clear, we must stand with these activists and say that our Judaism is the Judaism that we want to see in Israel –faith engaged in modernity, an authentic religion that lives in this century and that embraces change

To make that commitment clear, we need to make our donations to Israel directly to Reform or Progressive as is the term in Israel, synagogues, directly to the progressive movement in Israel. These are our extended family members in Israel – they are us. Then when we go to Israel, we need to visit progressive synagogues and support them. it is time for us to no longer go to Mea Shearim—you can see the pictures in a history book from the 17 century and get the same feeling. We must end our nostalgic support of a community which does not wish for our success or even want our existence.

To make that commitment clear, we must stand up strongly and proudly for the women of the wall, all of those who support the right of women to pray loudly and in song, to read Torah, to wear tallitot and Kippot and to do this at the Western wall, the Kotel, the last remnants of our holy temple in Jerusalem. I would suggest that we demonstrate this support by no longer praying in groups at the Western wall but by boycotting that area due to the refusal of the religious

authorities to give equal access and rights to all Jews at the Kotel. We boycott services there, we do not attend nor arrange for bar mitzvah celebrations there. Rather we attend these at the Southern wall, at Robinson's arch and by our example we demonstrate that the Kotel cannot be a holy place for Jews if it is ruled by those who denigrate and indeed desecrate our Judaism, that the Kotel can only be a place where the presence of God dwells when it is one which allows both men and women to share fully in all Jewish rituals and responsibilities.

To make our commitment clear, we pledge ourselves to be fully informed of the actions and activities of the Israeli Religious Action Center. The IRAC speaks for all those who demand equal rights for those who are non ultra-Orthodox Jews. The IRAC pursues the legal avenues that will allow Progressive rabbis to have the same rights as do Orthodox rabbis and for Progressive congregations to have the same rights as do Orthodox congregations. The IRAC is our voice in Israel and we cannot be heard clearly either there or here if we are ignorant of its work and do not support its valiant efforts.

If we want Israel to be our Israel then we have no choice but to show our commitment to that Israel and to cease ignoring the inequities that our community experiences there. If we want Israel to be our Israel then we must

stand up and support those who have fully cast their lots with Israel and live there as Progressive Jews. And, always, of course, we must visit, travel, and study in Israel. Reform Jews cannot allow fear to ever prevent us from putting ourselves in Israel – it will take more than the prayers of our hearts, it takes the presence of our bodies as well.

And now to the enemies from outside of Israel – of course of these there have always been too many. But thankfully, in each US administration -- from each political party over all of the years, the US has historically stood with Israel against those enemies. However each year, throughout the year, whatever the politics and whatever the administration, there is a need to intentionally continue that critical relationship. To ensure that politically, Israel is always supported 100% by the USA, we Reform Jews must be the first to write, email, and call our senators, our legislators, our elected officials and let them hear that Israel is a key issue for us and that we want them to understand her needs and to understand our firm love of her. For this, we can use Political Action Committees – and AIPAC is one very effective one but it means the most when it comes directly from us, from the actual voters who will not let the security of Israel be forgotten by a nation that has always recognized her unique value to the world and to the Middle east. We must remember and we must ensure that our nation always

remembers that Israel is the only true democracy in that region, that Israel is the only multi-cultural nation that ensures the rights of all of her citizens without regard to race, creed, or religion, that Israel has the most advanced judicial system in the middle east and it is, in fact, one which takes seriously the Bible's command to love and to pursue daily the difficult task of justice.

Our mission calls us to do even more than this in order to help Israel and to help the future of Judaism. Our job is to change the way that we see ourselves as Jews and the world sees the Jews. For centuries we Jews were the stranger, the threat, the weakling, the losers, the outsider upon whom everything could be blamed. And this was not just in Europe or just when Jews did not have civil rights. This was in America as well. The rantings of Henry Ford and Father Coughlin continued through the thirties. Our own government did not take the actions that might have saved thousands, even more from the Holocaust. Jews were not valuable here rather we were still the foreigner, the not-true Americans. But then things began to change and we proudly embraced that we **were** the American success stories, the students, the scholars, the visionaries in business, in entertainment, in medicine, in science, then as Israel was born and as she won conflict after conflict through the 6 day war, we were the powerful and the strong – the unbeatable, the fierce, the feared.

Now the world has tired of having us in the role of leaders and winners – and many have tried to suggest that we are once again the threat – we are too successful, too present, too powerful, that Jews should go back to being the insignificant minority that our numbers would suggest, that Israel’s position of power is too threatening and too dangerous to those who would prefer that there be no more Jews.

So we must change our vision, the world’s vision: we will not be the victims, we will not be seen as a cult from the 17th century, we will not allow others to define us as the stranger or the threat. We are the inheritors of an amazing tradition of ethics and values, a way of life that has produced more religions. We have ways of looking at the world and eternity that are positive and healthy and necessary for the wellbeing of the world. The world does need the Jews and because our faith holds a key to healing the world.

Then we must stop making apologies for those things that others do not like about Judaism or about Israel. We need to be clear with everyone around us that being anti-Israel is being anti-semitic. Anti-Israel is simply the new, dressed up way to oppose Jewish strength and wellbeing. First, those who are anti Zionist, anti Israel are most certainly against Jews being strong and safe, They care

nothing for the inseparable relationship between Jews and Israel – remember that star of David stands for all Jews and for Israel. From that ugly point of view, it is better that we Jews be scattered and dependent on the whims of nations and uncaring leaders rather than standing tall and being capable of always saving ourselves. Second, those who are anti Israel are anti semitic because Israel is us, when you say ugly things about Israel, you insult me, a Jew, personally. Not when you disagree with Israeli policy or wish for her to take a different approach socially or politically. No, I am speaking of those who view Israel as the enemy, the new place to oppose the future of the Jewish people.

How do we know that anti-zionism is essentially the same as anti-semitism? First because it involves seeing the Jews of Israel and Jews of the world as being one homogenous group without differing opinions and issues. Its only goal is the end of the state of Israel. And it uses all of the old stereotypes and dangerous myths as its foundation – that Jews have a secret plan to run the world, that Jews own the media and the banking system and can make everything run according to some world plot. This form of anti-semitism has Israel responsible for the world's problems and treats her as the world's newest ultimate enemy. I just reviewed information regarding a DVD that is being sold at political rallies. The program claims that our president was actually put into office by the current Baron Von

Rothschild who is the reigning leader of the Jewish Zionist group that is planning world domination and that Israel is actually in charge of our government. This is simply and sadly a new version of the same old destructive anti-semitic rant but its danger is now even more evident.

Then what shall we do once we have sorted out the issues and the enemies? We instruct our college students to never back down from challenging this new anti-semitism, to never ignore these slurs nor tolerate the presence of anti-semitism in any form in the formative environment of the university campus. We watch our public schools' curricula carefully to ensure that anti-semitism does not creep into its history and social studies classes. We refuse to allow political parties to suggest that it is ever acceptable to tolerate ideas which repeat the dangerous and well-worn anti-semitic lies or any lies about any group of people. Racism and religious intolerance in any form threatens us all. Finally we police the media and protest whenever we hear commentators suggest that those who are anti-Israel are really still friends of the Jews. We cancel our subscriptions to Time magazine when its shallow reporting promotes the slur that Israel really doesn't care about peace – the cover story of last week. There is one truth for us: we stand as one together as one people with an unceasing love for Israel.

A bit of humor to sweeten this short day: Deep in prayer, a man was spoken to directly by God. God told him that he could ask the top three questions that he had. The man asked first, "God, what is a million years to you?"

God replies, "My son, a million years to you is like a second to me."

Next the man asks, "God, what is a million dollars to you?"

God replies, "My son, a million dollars to you is less than a penny to me. It means almost nothing to me." Finally the man asks, "So God, can I have a million dollars?"

And God replies, "In a second."

A second, a minute, an hour, a day, a year. Time is elusive and fleeting. Rabbi Tarfon's words echo in our souls: our day is short and our work is great. Our Maker gives us the blessing and the challenge of using each short day in holy service. For God, time means something beyond our understanding. But the task in front of us is well within our power even during the short day of our lives. May we proudly embrace the gift of Abraham's inheritance, an enduring relationship with our beloved Israel. May we ensure that our short day leads to Israel's eternal presence.