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Keynote Address

Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations

November 24, 1994

I always wondered, as have no doubt many of you, why, on Friday nights, we warmly welcome the two angels with שלום עליכם מלאכי השבת, and after a courteous צאתכם לשלום we rather discourteously tell them to leave: צאתכם לשלום! They have hardly arrived, and we send them off! Some way to treat an angel!

The answer I propose is this: The origin of the שלום עליכם piece is a statement by R.Yose b. Yehuda (*Shab.* 119b) that two angels accompany a person home on Friday night, and if they find that his home is prepared properly for Shabbat, the good angel blesses him and the bad one says "Amen." If the reverse, then the bad one curses him and the good one says "Amen."

However, what happens to these angels after you send them off with צאתכם לשלום? I suggest that other texts, one on the same *blatt*, indicate that there are two angels who *always* accompany a person (see too *Taanit* 11a and *Hagiga* 16a). In that case, what our passage means is that the angels from last Shabbat are with you all week and it is they who accompany you to your home on the eve of Shabbat. As they do, they are joined by a new set of two angels, and it is *they* whom you welcome with שלום עליכם, בואכם לשלום, וברכוני לשלום. That done, you now *courteously* turn to the two "old" angels and bid them adieu צאתכם לשלום.

It is a lesson in Jewish courtesy, in Talmudic manners: first you greet the new, then bid farewell to the old.

With that in mind, I am delighted to welcome the new administration of Dr. Mendy Ganchrow: שלום עליכם! We all greet and congratulate you and your colleagues-- בואכם לשלום. We admire your voluntary arranging to dedicate large chunks of your schedule to OU matters, your estimable talents and proven organizational effectiveness, and your healthy השקפה in Jewish matters; ברכוני לשלום, this bodes well as a blessing for the OU and for all Jews loyal to Torah. At the same time, we wish an official צאתכם לשלום to Shelly Rudoff and his administration for their time, their worry, their loyalty to the cause of the OU. Both groups, and all who work for the OU, are surely doing the work of angels... כי מלאכיו לך לשמרך בכל דרכיך.

I am now going to do something I consider quite unusual --I will actually talk about the Convention theme, דרכי נועם....translated by our conveners into, "A Torah of Peace in a Turbulent World."

Let it be said at the outset that דרכי נועם is far more than a homiletic preachment, far more than a preference for elegant and irenic style. In Halakha, it is understood in the most substantive ways, including that of relieving the plight of עגונות. The Rosh, in a *teshuvah*, holds that *darkei noam* is an operative principle of the Halakha in preventing fraud and deceit that might be practiced within the formal structure of the law. While I shall not be confining myself to halakhic issues, but sticking to public policies, we must still be aware of the seriousness with which חז"ל took this verse from משלי, that דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום (referring to חכמה, by which King Solomon meant חכמת התורה) and applied it to a wide variety of areas.

In order to attain דרכי נועם in our community--both the Orthodox and the general Jewish communities--we must explore with great honesty some of the issues confronting us. I arbitrarily choose four of them where *darkei noam* is applicable.

The first impulse is to declare that *darkei noam*, and especially *shalom*, refers to unity and thus make yet another attempt to preach unity in the Orthodox and in the wider Jewish community. That is something to guarantee what the pundits call MEGO -- "My Eyes Glaze Over"--a pleasant nap for the next 20 minutes.

Like you, I know enough of Jewish history and have too much experience in community affairs even to hope for unity, let alone expect it. I plead--once again--not for *unity* but for *peace*, for granting differences of opinion and approach and ideology, but getting along and cooperating peacefully wherever possible. That is what שלום means--it does not mean that the two former combatants lose their separate identities or missions, but that they lay down their arms--both military and rhetorical--and learn to live together in one community.

True, there are issues which are so deep, so critical, that no compromise is possible. I could name a whole string of such issues. Others have other views are important to them but which to us have much less or no importance at all--such as: pluralism, egalitarianism, etc. But we must limit our confrontations as much as possible, seeking to protect vital Torah and Jewish interests, and not to exclude from the circle of our concern all those who deviate in any manner or degree from our positions.

There is a very practical side to this concern for שלום in the Jewish community: the גויים, to the largest extent--except for the most sophisticated, and even in this period of relatively little blatant anti-Semitism--do not really appreciate those differences within the Jewish community that we consider very deep and unbridgeable; to them they are subtle and largely incomprehensible. *We* may not consider other Jews as adequately Jewish; for *them* all Jews are Jews no matter what they say, proclaim, or practice.

Let me illustrate this with something that happened to me just 18 years ago. I was invited for a series of lectures in England, and my wife and I decided to go by ship, with the QEII. Now that famous ship advertised "kosher kitchen" the kashrut of which consisted of the fact that a separate kitchen was presided over by a Jewish waiter--Mendel from London. Another fact: a paper was published every day giving the news of the world. On the day of July 4, 1976, the paper carried the marvelous news of the incredible rescue by the IDF of the hostages being held in Entebbe. Everyone was moved by the news--including the officers and the staff of the ever so genteel anti-Semitic QEII. They very much wanted to express their admiration to Israel. How to do this? Simple. The captain lined up all his officers and staff. placed Mendel at a prominent place, and proceeded to shake his hand and congratulate *him* on the Entebbe rescue!

Indeed, for so much of the Gentile world, all Jews are the same, and every single Jew is the representative of all the Jewish people. Remarkable how they knew the Talmudic principle of *kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh*!

Of Course, I do not mean this aspiration for שלום to be merely a united front in facing the non-Jewish world. I intend, even more, the need for some degree of mutual respect even *within* the Orthodox community. I have been pleading and preaching and propagandizing for this at almost every UOJCA gathering for the last 30 or 40 years--unsuccessfully. But it is worthy of repetition until the situation changes.

The root of the problem, to some extent, lies in an unspoken assumption that there is only one way in *Yahadut*, that the Torah has only one solution to every problem that will ever arise.

Now, that is largely true for most halakhic questions--but not for *all* questions that our community must wrestle with, not for questions of public policy and, for that matter, not for a number of halakhic problems as well. Consider such issues as: Zionism--is religious Zionism right or wrong? Secular studies--forbidden or permitted or recommended? There is solid and serious opinion on both sides of each of these issues, but the attempt to declare that only one solution is legitimate and the other is outside the pale of Halakha is itself an illegitimate extension of Halakha beyond its limits; it is a case of מגלה פנים בתורה שלא כהלכה. Rav Bloch זצ"ל of Telz stated that with regard to secular studies, and the Rav זצ"ל in relation to *Medinat Yisrael*.

I maintain--and I believe that this should be the policy of all of us who are part of this community--that we are right to advocate our differing ideas within the Torah community, but we are wrong to engage in "*passeling*" all who disagree with us. We simply do not have the right to go about deligitimizing and demonizing all others.

Consider the theme of this convention--שלוש דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום: the "ways" and the "paths" of Torah--the words are in the plural! Torah has many ways, and many paths, and without understanding and accepting this, there can be neither שלום nor נועם!

Yes, the fact there are options means that we must think deeply and fearlessly and responsibly when we make decisions, that we cannot merely repeat by rote solutions that were relevant to other times and circumstances, and that we cannot relegate all thinking to someone else, no matter how much we may respect and admire him. And it means too that we must be considerate of other views *because* there are options.

I cannot overstate the importance of this last point. Especially in Israel of late, because of the critical nature of the issues involved, we have all of us descended to the lowest levels in mutual recrimination, insults, and degradation. Someone--*everyone*--has to rise in protest against the exaggerated rhetoric, the irresponsible verbal onslaughts, the poison pen pamphlets that parade as political discourse in Israel. I here take no sides. I mean it as criticism of the highest officers of the government who use inexcusably extravagant language in condemning the "settlers" as if they were pint-sized imperialist colonialists instead of loyal and committed citizens who responded to the urging of previous governments--as well as the call of conscience--to build up the areas in the West Bank. And I mean it as a sharp criticism of some of our fellow Orthodox Jews who have used unpardonably abusive language in calling the Prime Minister a traitor and accuse him of war crimes. This loose use of language is a sign of national immaturity, of insufferable self-righteousness, and of dangerous incipient civil war. It must be stopped before the social and political fabric of the Jewish people is ripped apart irrevocably. It must be replaced by the maximum amount of *darkei noam* especially because the issues are too critical to be confounded by personal attacks and *ad hominem* smears. There is clear line that divides legitimate, passionate advocacy from dangerous instigation of insurrection. Shouting matches never solved a problem, and passion is a guarantee neither of truth *nor* wisdom. The absence of דרכי נועם will surely not lead to שלום וכל נתיבותיה שלום.

Second, our concern for *darkei noam* must be focused on our non-observant fellow American Jews who are still far from Torah.

The situation here is complicated, and I need not recite for you the grim statistics with which we are all only too well acquainted. The Jewish community has been in panic the last few years as statistics have confirmed what Orthodox Jews have been warning about for the past few decades.

We must applaud the efforts, halting and inadequate as they still are, to enhance Jewish "identity" and "continuity." These efforts are well meant, albeit often psychologically complicated by intermarriages in the very families of those seeking to rescue the community from imminent collapse. Orthodox leadership dare not

stand aside as if this doesn't concern us because, after all, we will be safe in our own Noahide arks when this deluge sweeps over us. That is immoral, because these are our brothers and sisters; because we can't afford to lose a million or two more Jews after what we experienced in our life-time; because the concepts of ערבות and לא ערך do not permit us the luxury of ignoring their plight; and because once the flood commences, *no one* is safe--as the Rabbis put it,
מאחר שניתנה רשות למשחית לחבל אינו מבחין בין צדיק לרשע.

How shall we express our *darkei noam* attitude to our non-Orthodox brethren?

First, let us be done with the idea that *darkei noam* implies total indulgence, non-critical acceptance, a kind of communal Mr. Milquetoast approach. No, whatever help we can offer our fellow Jews must be done honestly. Therefore, as the first order of business, we must be relentless in our struggle against intermarriage. And we must not be deflected from our position by the propaganda for "outreach to the intermarried." I do not write off those who have married out--after all, *some* of them may by some fortuitous concatenation of circumstances, find their way back into the Mesorah community--but communal priorities must be established. And by any decent and fair system of communal triage, our major efforts must go to preventing further attrition and not to spending our scarce communal resources on the almost hopeless task of bringing intermarried Jews back into the fold.

This reminds me of the story of the people of Chelm who were concerned that people were slipping off the mountains around Chelm during their severe winters. They rejected the advice that they build railing and guide ropes on the mountains. Instead, their sages met and deliberated for 14 days and nights and decided--to build a hospital in the valley...

But beyond this, our task is to "reinvent" the total Jewish community, and most especially to bring the *darkei noam* of Judaism to our rapidly disappearing Jewish community by advocating *Jewish education*--if not maximal, at least the minimum necessary for young Jews to know what they're missing--and by fortifying Jewish home life. I am willing to concede to almost any kind of Jewish education, as long as young people are exposed to Jewish sources, rather than the total alienation which now prevails.

"Reinventing" the community means that we must take a pro-active approach and involve ourselves in all community-wide Jewish organizations. "Crisis," in the Chinese ideogram, consists of "danger" and "opportunity." We now have a golden opportunity to help all our fellow Jews and, as well, advance the cause of Torah. We must not wait till we are invited, but take a positive attitude and begin to participate in a far more visible way --not by patronizing the others, not as if we are looking down on our benighted fellow Jews, but as *brothers and sisters* who share *both the same history and the same destiny* we are ready to throw ourselves into this historic הצלה work together with them. That is what דרכי נועם requires of us.

Now, that is by no means an easy task. It means, among other things, rebuilding a crumbling structure as we urge and join others in doing so. But it is one of the most significant and holiest tasks we can perform. It is less glamorous but more praiseworthy than building new communities of our own while we ignore and abandon the American Jewish community.

I've often wondered why we make such a to-do about the rededication of the בית המקדש on Hanukkah, and we almost totally overlook the original building of the holy Temple by King Solomon, which we only casually refer to in the Haftarah for שמעתי עזרת. The answer, I submit, is that it is easier to build anew, to start fresh: there is excitement; the sense of participating in a pioneer, historic effort; the thrill of creating something from nothing and putting the stamp of our own personality upon things. Such is not the case when we rebuild what someone else started but which came to grief. There is little applause or recognition from the outside world, and our achievements are attributed to the originators and not to us. There is no drama, no thrill, no soul-stirring ceremonies. There is only the quiet awareness of having rescued and restored something precious, of having reversed history's negative judgment, of having done something לשמה, totally for God's sake and not for personal glory. Far from the cheering crowds, we rededicate the achievements of forbears even if our own contributions may remain unknown or under-appreciated. Indeed, the very *Kohen Gadol* who had the foresight to put aside for safekeeping a little cruse of oil of the Menorah--is anonymous! Such is the nature of rededication...

And that is why Hanukkah rates higher than Solomon's initial building of the Temple. Rebuilding is more meritorious because it is less dramatic, because the re-builder does not benefit from the side-products of engaging in new projects. Here we have something very special to commemorate--the *human* miracle of effort selflessly expended without any hope of psychic awards.

And that is precisely our task as Orthodox Jews towards אחינו בני ישראל whose family and communal life are in severe crisis. We must help rebuild the American-Jewish community despite the lack of glamour and the arduous and thankless efforts required to succeed.

As a third illustration of *darkei noam*, I feel it important to raise an issue never before (to my knowledge) discussed at any of our forums, and that is: the poverty and impending worsening economic plight of many Haredi, especially Hasidic, communities. A number of them, for ideological reasons (which I do not endorse, but which is their right), spurn any kind of training, even strictly vocational, for their young people. The Kollel system, begun by Lithuanian Mitnagdim, has now been adopted by many if not most Hasidic groups and it has become the norm for almost the majority of young men, and thus many of their young people face a future of unemployment--even for blue-collar jobs. That means that they are forced to take government funds such as food stamps, something not calculated to enhance

their self-respect or the respect for Torah in general.

The Rambam puts it this way (הל' ת"ת פ"ג ה"י):

כל המשים בלבו שיעסוק בתורה ולא יעשה מלאכה ויתפרנס
מן הצדקה, הרי זה חילל את השם ובזה את התורה וכבה מאור
הדת וגרם רעה לעצמו ונטל חייו מן העולם הבא, לפי שאסור להנות
מדברי תורה בעוה"ז. אמרו חכמים...אהוב את המלאכה ושנא את הרבנות
וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה סופה בטילה וגוררת עון, וסוף אדם זה
שיהא מלסטם את הבריות

If we Modern Orthodox sin by *over*-emphasis on profession and career--and we do--some of the Hasidic groups sin in the other direction: *under*-emphasis on self-support in a manner that is dignified and therefore befitting a Torah Jew.

The Kollel system is a marvelous innovation in our communal life. Blessed is the memory of those gallant pioneers who brought it to these shores! It has raised Torah levels to new and unexpected heights. That is why we at Yeshiva have four separate Kollelim, each with a different emphasis--*but in no case do we allow Kollel fellows to stay on endlessly with no goal in sight and no way to earn a living*. The Kollel was meant for *יחידי סגולה*, for the best and the brightest, for those elite with the obvious potential to become great and outstanding *talmidei chakhamim*. It was not and should not be extended to each and every young man in the community irrespective of his talents--such that some young men in very *frum* neighborhoods are reluctant to admit that they are holding down a job and earning a living because such a confession would make a *shidduch* very difficult for them...

I recall with pain a conversation I had some years ago with a leading Israeli Rosh Yeshiva. He asked me if I would write a recommendation for his son who was seeking a grant from the Memorial Foundation. I asked him for some details about this son. He informed about his great scholarship, etc. His family situation? Here the Rosh Yeshiva turned pale, and told me in Yiddish, "Ich bin umgliklech" -- It is my misfortune. The son is 45 years old, married with 5 children, incapable by personality of teaching, not ready because of training to accept a rabbinic post or one of *dayanut*. He was capable only of further learning in a Kollel--and remaining on the dole... I then asked him, "If indeed you regard this as an *umglik*, why do perpetuate it in *your Kollel in your yeshiva*; why wish your suffering on parents of your students?" No answer was forthcoming.

My heart goes out to those in the Haredi community who find themselves burdened by family responsibilities and have no visible means of support save the degradation of hand-outs from individuals or the worse case of relying on government charity. At the same time that we support Kollelim--and we should--for the brightest of our young *lomdim*, we must not be indifferent to the pain and suffering of hundreds and hundreds of young families straining under the burden of poverty.

I believe that it is right and proper for us, as an expression of our concern for these many young people who deserve to experience the "pleasantness" of Torah, to reach out to the Rebbeim and Admorim, encourage them, and offer whatever help we can in arranging for vocational training within the limits of what they consider legitimate.

For, as the Malbim points out in his commentary to *Mishlei*, the "paths" and "ways" of Torah include both *בריאות הגוף ובריאות הנפש*, and while we must be concerned for our own *spiritual health*, we must be equally concerned with our fellow Jews' *physical and economic health*.

We have spoken of *darkei noam* in relation to those outside the orbit of Orthodoxy and those within Orthodox ranks. But it is equally if not more important to enjoy some of that exquisite, supernal *noam* for ourselves. And that means maximizing opportunities for ת"ת in our own shuls. This is a process that has already begun quite admirably by the UOJCA, but must be accelerated and enhanced. Let our people be stimulated to taste of the *noam* of Torah--by encouraging a בית המדרש in every shul and elevating the בית הכנסת to the holier level of a בית המדרש.

And one more thing: if indeed the study of Torah is such a spiritual pleasure and psychological delight, let us encourage our sons and daughters to continue their "learning" on a regular diet during their undergraduate years. In a recent and exceedingly important study by Dr. Alvin Schiff of our Azrieli Graduate Institute for Jewish Education and Dr. Mareleyn Schneider of Stern College for Women, the authors showed how exposure to day school education through high school has a profound effect on their Jewish future. Of such students, only 4.5% intermarry, as compared with 52% of the general Jewish non-day school population. All other indices show similar, drastic differences between these graduates and their unschooled Jewish peers.

To be honest, merely not marrying out is hardly a cause for rejoicing; we expect greater "nachas" from our children. We expect them to be learned Jews, to keep up their learning throughout their lives. Now, if a high school yeshiva education makes such a difference in the ordinary indices of Jewish behavior, how much more profound would be a thorough Torah education during all the post-secondary years! In that case, we must reconsider whether parents ought to succumb to the allure of the "ivies" or other general colleges, where under the best of circumstances the continuation of Torah study is a haphazard affair and requires a very mature discipline on the part of young college students.

I humbly suggest (without a scintilla of institutional self-interest) that for most young people such a diet of Torah conducted in a systematic manner with regular hours and outstanding *Ramim* is far superior to a voluntary grab-as-you-can Torah education in a remote and unsupervised campus. ומהבין יבין...

Allow me to conclude with what I believe to be most appropriate as the "keynote" of the convention which is, after all, the task assigned to me.

Conventions are normally rallying events, when we point with pride to our achievements, even overstate them a bit, and encourage ourselves to greater loyalty and more effort on behalf of our cause.

That is quite acceptable, but it should not be the major theme of this convention. The act of פרסומי ניסא is an integral part of the Hanukkah observance, but there are values that take precedence over it.

Let me quote the Rambam at the very end of his הלכות חנוכה. He writes:

היו לפנינו נר ביתו ונר חנוכה, או נר ביתו וקידוש היום, נר ביתו
קודם משום שלום ביתו, שהרי השם נמחק לעשות שלום בין איש
לאשתו גדול השלום שכל התורה ניתנה לעשות שלום בעולם,
שנאמר, דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום.

So, the Shabbat candle takes precedence over Kiddush and, as well, over the Hanukkah candle. Remarkable: it is the custom of the Rambam that, at the very end of a group of halakhot, he includes an agadic flourish to emphasize the *importance* of the mitzvah or its values. Yet here, concluding the laws of the mitzvah of Hanukkah, he specifically proclaims that, important as Hanukkah is, the Shabbat candles take first place. Why so? *Because בית שלום, domestic peace, ranks higher than פרסומי ניסא.*

I do not begrudge us the pleasure of proclaiming the miracles of the OU's accomplishments. But far more important is what we can achieve in advancing the cause of communal peace amongst Orthodox Jews, and between us and the rest of the Jewish community. That is the priority established for us by the Halakha.

May this convention fulfill that mission of establishing בית שלום in the House of Israel, and may *that* be the great miracle which will be worthy of פרסומי ניסא for years and years to come. If that will be the contribution of the OU during the tenure of our new administration, then that miracle will deserve to be recorded and celebrated for generations to come--even if that will create a new halakhic dilemma as to which takes precedence, since the larger meaning of both have now been combined...

May you have an interesting and productive convention, and a happy and pleasant Hanukkah filled with נועם ושלום.

ויהי נועם ה' אלקינו עלינו ומעשה ידינו כוננה עלינו ומעשה ידינו כוננהו