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AS DELIVERED

REMARKS AT THE DEDICATION CEREMONY
OF THE JEWISH CHAPEL AT WEST POINT

BY

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General Palmer, Chief Chaplain Einertson, Chaplain Ford,
Reverend clergy, Mr. Ames, Members of the Faculty, Officers,
Members of the Corps of Cadets, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honor to address this dedication ceremony. I well recall the West Point Jewish Chapel when it was just a dream. I was given the privilege of being a small part of that vision; and I am grateful for the opportunity today to thank those leaders of vision, represented by the most effective and motivated of them all, Herbert Ames, for turning that dream

into the magnificent edifice we dedicate today. West Point, this outstanding national institution of learning dedicated to the defense of American values, is enriched by this symbol of the Jewish contribution to those values and their defense.

There are deep historic, cultural and religious ties between the Jewish ethic and American values. From the early days of our beginnings as a nation when the Puritans used the Hebrew Language as the language of their prayers, the ties that have bound Judaism to America have been strong. It is reported that Louis de Torres, a Jew and a member of Christopher Columbus' crew, was among the first to set foot on the soil of the new land. As early as September, 1654, 23 Jewish refugees from Brazil landed at the Harbor of New Amsterdam determined to settle there. It is interesting to note that they were not welcome by Peter Stuyvesant, the Dutch Governor, who protested to the Dutch West Indies Company: "Giving them liberty, we cannot refuse the Lutherans and Papists". Following the decision to permit the Jews to settle, the Governor then refused their request to bear arms and join the militia guarding the colony. The Jews insisted. They prevailed.

By 1775, there were about 2000 Jews in the colonies. The first Jew to die in battle in America's War of Independence was Frances Salvador. Written on his gravestone in South Carolina are these appropriate words: "True to his ancient faith he gave

his life for new hopes of human liberty and understanding".

The ancient tribes of Israel made a profound contribution to civilization when they proclaimed that there was only one God. This was at a time when the prevailing view of their neighbors was that there were many gods. If there is only one God then we are all of us His children and thus brothers and sisters to one another. The "Sh'ma Yisroel", the holiest and most repeated of Jewish prayers ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One"), symbolizes the essence of that message of human brotherhood.

In recent years, I have on occasion been called upon to serve our Government. This frequently required me to be overseas during important Jewish religious holidays. I have, therefore, been at services in London, Geneva, Madrid, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Bucharest, Belgrade, Johannesburg, and Salisbury. In all of those places and whatever the native language spoken, the constant was the familiar ring and message of the Sh'ma, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.

Thus, the prophet Micah's message: "Have we not all one Father? Hath not God created us?" Thus too, the Talmudic use of Rabbi Ben Azzai's assertion that the most important verse in

the whole Bible is the one from the Book of Genesis stating that Man was created in the divine image. The Sages pointed out that among the first questions in the Talmud is "When may morning prayers be recited?" After midnight? Before dawn? After dawn? The answer the Rabbis gave is that one recites the morning prayers when there is enough light for a man to recognize his brother. A further rabbinic story refers to the Jewish Passover tale of the Egyptian armies drowning in the Red Sea. The angels in heaven began to sing the praises of the Lord. And the Lord rebuked them by saying, "My children are drowning and you would sing?"

Here, in this doctrine of human brotherhood, we have the essence of our universal religious creed, the spiritual basis of our evolving civilization. Here too are the moral roots of political democracy, human rights, human dignity, the American dream. It is clearly no historic accident that we find an extraordinary degree of convergence between Jewish and American values.

Jews have had a unique romance with America. The frontier spirit, the open competition, the hostility to monopoly of power -- all these meant the Jew had a chance. In the United States today, more than 40% of all the Jews in the world live comfortably in two compatible cultures. This era in America may well be the golden age of Jewish history and culture. Some

of the greatest Jewish libraries in the world are here. The community is vibrant, with an intellectual and spiritual ingredient of significance. The American period for Jewry is at least as grand as, if not more so than, any other period in Jewish history. And all of this is protected by America's strength, most certainly including its military strength.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote that America has "the soul of a church". Gunnar Myrdal wrote that he was struck by the strength and depth of American values rooted in religious ethics. They reflected themselves, he said, in the power of the "ought" as a guiding light for our actions. The "is" of our lives as individuals or as a nation may not always be consistent with the "ought", but the "ought" is the moving force in bringing us steadily closer to the values and ideals we proclaim. We continue to stretch to attain our aspirations.

We know, however, that the evolving movement forward is not an automatic one. Achievement of the "ought" requires effort, dedication, sacrifice. It also requires an awareness that there is evil as well as good within us. The perception of Man as predominantly rational and God-like could not explain Man's continued capacity for cruelty against Man and Nature. How else can we explain totalitarianism except as an expression of that destructive drive? How else can we understand the Holocaust, or the cruelties of the Stalinist system?

The philosophic notion of the coexistence of good and evil is found in many ancient civilizations, but it is especially strong in the writings of the Jewish teachers. Consistent with the notion of human brotherhood, the Jewish scholars taught that there is in each one of us an ingredient in the heart and soul which is good and God-like. But, they continued, there is also in each one of us an ingredient which is destructive. [The sages defined it as "yaitzer hatov" and "yaitzer hara".] The Christian notion of "original sin" is consistent with that notion. The Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr called it "Children of Light and Children of Darkness". Freud and others based their understanding of Man on this insight. If there is one thing that history has taught us, it is that we ignore the dark side of Man only at our peril. We have the capacity to reach for the stars, but we do so with our feet in the dirt of the earth.

The history of civilization then becomes that of our effort to strengthen the light within us. This is the real meaning of the evolutionary challenge, the climbing of Jacob's ladder to the heavens. One might describe it as the evolution of the species homo sapien to that of the species human being. The active and fierce defense of our values is an integral part of that evolution struggle.

We cherish freedom, human dignity, and democracy. We must be prepared to preserve those values. Somerset Maugham once

wrote "If a nation values anything more than freedom, it will lose its freedom; and the irony of it is that if it is comfort or money that it values more, it will lose that too." Benjamin Franklin said it this way: "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Simply stated, our challenge is to learn how to preserve peace and expand human liberty in a world of conflicting values, competing interests, and the awesome capability which we now have of destroying civilization as we know it. It is perhaps the supreme irony of our age that we have learned to fly through space like birds and move in deep waters like fish. But we have yet to learn how to live and love on this small planet as brothers and sisters. In every age this has been the challenge, but it is today more urgent than ever as we realize that our continued existence as a species depends on a fragile thread.

That, my friends, is the message of Judaism for our time and for all time. It is appropriate that I share this message with you on this special day of dedication, which is also by Joint Resolution of Congress and by Presidential Proclamation our 1988 National Day of Prayer. In that Proclamation, President Reagan reaffirmed the essence of what our dedication ceremony today represents when he quoted the ancient words of

Leviticus cast on the Liberty Bell of our nation: "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." In those words -- on that bell -- with this chapel -- we have the symbol of America's strength, the merger of our religious ethic and the American dream.

Thank you.