המוסד למען קדושת חיי אדם

Saving Jewish Lives



Healing Jewish Hearts

I want to thank Melinda Cosentino, President, Board of Directors, and the festival program committee of Birthright of Peekskill, for inviting the Jewish Pro-Life Foundation to speak at this Festival for Life. It is an honor and a privilege to share our Jewish pro-life heritage and message with you in this beautiful setting.

Birthright is a wonderful organization. It's non-sectarian philosophy welcomes anyone who needs help as well as anyone who wants to help. Before I started our Foundation, I wanted to work as a pregnancy care counselor in order to understand the real issues facing women in crises. My first attempt to volunteer ended abruptly when I was required to sign a statement of faith. Not to be dissuaded, I met with the director of Birthright Pittsburgh, who welcomed me enthusiastically and unconditionally, and who assured me that Birthright doesn't evangelize nor do they require volunteers to be of a certain faith. I learned a lot during my two years with Birthright, and came to love and respect the organization and the dedicated volunteers who help so many women and children. Through this experience, I found that the methods and goals of Birthright's mission coincide well with fundamental principles of Judaism.

Judaism is all about LIFE.

It's the original pro-life religion. G-d's law regarding the sanctity of human life was given first to Noah and all of humanity after the flood in 3000 BC and then to Moses and the Israelites on Mt Sinai in the year 1500 BC.

Jews are taught to choose life(bachar chaim)that we may live and our children will live; to drink to life(l'chaim)for peace and blessings; and to study G-d's word in the the living Torah (Torat Chaim.)

We believe that G-d created all things, and through Divine Providence, continues to animate all living things. Rosh Hashanah, the New Year holiday coming up on September 20th, celebrates His creation of the first human beings, Adam and Eve.

Judaism emphasizes the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, making it incumbent upon us to find life saving ways to deal with unplanned and unwanted pregnancy. Adoption, marriage, and single parenthood are the life-affirming choices.

Judaism is all about TRADITION.

I'm breaking tradition by working on the Jewish Sabbath. Some Jews don't even turn a light switch on during the weekly Sabbath because our Fourth Commandment reminds us to Remember the Sabbath Day and To Keep it Holy. We have 613 Jewish laws to live by, and one of them requires us to break all the Sabbath prohibitions against work and travel to aid a woman in labour - to save the life of an unborn child. So, I figure that G-d knows I'm trying to do just that by being here today and He's OK with it!

Judaism is all about FAMILY.

Family life and children form the foundation of Judaism. We still refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as fathers of our faith, rather than leaders or founders and we refer to Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah as mothers of our faith. Fellow Jews are considered brothers and sisters - all connected through the spirit of the Creator and the Covenant at Sinai, when G-d promised to care for us despite knowing our future waywardness.

Judaism declares procreation a religious duty—a positive commandment. G-d has commanded us to be fruitful and multiply with the intention of preserving the human species, and this is what the Torah says: "As for you, be fruitful and multiply."'

In (Isaiah 45:18), the prophet says, "G-d did not create the world to be chaos. He created it to be inhabited" The Talmud records that "one who does not participate in 'be fruitful and multiply' causes G-d's presence to vanish. When there are to be children after you, the G-dly Presence dwells amongst you.

This phrase, ”Be fruitful and multiply" is not just one of the commandments, it is everywhere in the Torah and it is always a blessing. In Genesis 1:28, on the sixth day of creation, G-d blessed man and woman and said unto them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it' “ Later in Gen. 9:1 after the Flood, mankind is reborn and Noah is blessed with fertility. Through Isaac, Abraham is to be blessed with progeny as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:5). Through Jacob, Isaac is to be blessed "with seed... as the dust of the earth" (Gen. 28:14).

Judaism is all about FAITH

So many people today decide to have no children because of the spiritual darkness, financial instability, and political unpredictability threatening our world. The birth of Moses teaches us that dismal circumstances ought not influence our family decisions. According to Jewish Oral Tradition, Moses was born in a time when the government had declared war on the Jews by legalizing the killing of all Jewish male babies and removing all Jewish female babies from their home and placing them in pagan Egyptian households. Moses’ father, the religious leader of the Jews living under Egyptian rule, ordered all Jewish couples to divorce rather than continue marital relations that would produce children doomed to death and assimilation. His daughter, Miriam, argued that resignation born of faithlessness would mean the end of Judaism. But, action motivated by faith in G-d would give hope for a better future. Her father rescinded the order, remarried his wife, and Moses arrived 6 months later….3 months premature, viable, and safely hidden from the baby police, who anticipated his arrival 3 months hence! We encourage people who would choose a childless life to have the faith and courage to choose life - to raise a new

generation who will provide the moral example and leadership needed to improve our world.

Judaism is all about COMPASSION

Our faith in a better future rests on the Jewish mystical tradition that kindness is the reason for the Creation. In Hebrew, the word for compassion, rachamim, comes from the word for womb, rechem. This reminds us to treat with great care and kindness the baby who resides there. Since G-d's "nature" is absolute benevolence and loving-kindness, He created the world so that He would have people upon whom to bestow His kindnesses, and to have people who would bestow kindnesses upon one another. Rabbis place great emphasis on having compassion for the weak, the disenfranchised, the underprivileged, the people in society who need help. They often cite Leviticus 19:18 *"You shall love your fellow as yourself."* In Deuteronomy 28:9 we are taught to *"walk in His ways",* since "It is the nature of G-d Who is good to do good."

Torah insists we visit the sick, to meet both material and spiritual needs of those whose vitality needs renewing. A special value is placed on providing baby care items, and prayers for the health and righteousness of a new arrival. The practical application of this kindly attitude makes Judaism a natural when it comes to protecting unborn children, giving assistance and safe haven to mothers in need, and to helping couples who may be unprepared for a new baby. We hope in the future to have many pregnancy centers that cater to Jewish women, currently we have two - In Shifra's Arms in the Maryland area, and Efrat in israel. Both of these organizations is named for courageous midwives who protected vulnerable Jewish infants in ancient Egypt.

Judaism is all about FORGIVENESS

So many Jews today are raised in an anti-life culture. I was no exception. I'm forever grateful that G-d awakened me, brought me into the light of truth, and forgave me my ignorance - just as He saves and forgives anyone who recognizes past mistakes and sincerely repents. Since our incorporation in

2006, we at the Jewish Pro-Life Foundation have been mentored, supported, counseled, and encouraged by many pro-life Catholics and Protestants. Today's warm welcome is no exception. I think I can safely say that as our Foundation educates and informs Jews about the need to preserve Jewish life, we see more Jewish participation in the whole pro-life movement. Recently, a very progressive Jewish publication called, of course, The Forward, published an article entitled, *Jewish And Pro-Life: Still A Minority, No Longer A Contradiction In Terms.* We were honored to be interviewed for that piece, and the writer did an outstanding job as he expressed our views accurately and respectfully. Really a huge miracle and a change in paradigm!

My favorite Rabbi in Jewish history was Moses Maimonides. Maimonides was a very well known and respected Rabbi, doctor, and philosopher who lived in the 12th century AD. He published the Mishneh Torah in 1180, a reprise of the original Jewish law long forgotten by Jews in exile during the previous 1000 years after the loss of the center of Jewish life, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. In his book, he echoed the early pro-life opinions and commentary in the Talmud and for which he met a lot of resistance in his time - just as we meet a lot of resistance today. Maimonides said, "Men like the opinions to which they have been accustomed from their youth; they defend them, and shun contrary views: and this is one of the things that prevents men from finding truth, for they cling to the opinions of habit." Wow, he was so right! We try everyday to provide information that will help people open their minds and hearts to the joy of life and for the defense of life.

To finish up, I'd like to quote Rabbi J David Bleich, the quintessential authority on Jewish law today. His illustration of our relationship to the unborn child expresses perfectly what I have hoped to convey to you today.

A Jew is governed by such reverence for life that he trembles lest he tamper unmindfully with the greatest of all divine gifts, the bestowal or withholding of which is the prerogative of God alone. Although he be master over all within the world, there remain areas where man must fear to tread, acknowledging the limits of his sovereignty and the

limitations of his understanding. In the unborn child lies the mystery and enigma of existence. Confronted by the miracle of life itself, man can only draw back in silence before the wonder of the Lord.

As a special treat, I'd like to conclude with the sounding of the shofar. It is blown on Rosh Hashanah, the first of the annual Ten Days of Repentance, to awaken us from our spiritual slumber and to prepare us for self examination, confession, and repentance. The shofar reminds us of the voice of the prophets, who called upon us to correct our ways, follow G-d's commandments, and act properly with others. The sound touches our soul, connecting us with G-d's presence in this place and His creative energy that makes life possible.

May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and good life upon us and upon all the world. Amen. Shofar.