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December 2003

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From the Desk of Rabbi David E. Fass

Light Many Candles

I believe it was David Ben-Gurion who said, "A Jew who doesn't believe in miracles isn't being a realist."

- A miracle: Despite the venomous hatred of much of the Arab world, Israel continues to thrive. For the first time in over two thousand years we have our own armed forces, and they are among the most powerful in the world. Israel's might remains the guarantor of "Never Again!"
- A miracle: In the former Soviet Union, a monolithic dictatorship that proclaimed atheism the official "religion" of the state, Judaism is flourishing.
- A miracle: In the comfort of our social hall, over one hundred people gathered to hear Rabbi Alexander Dukhovny, head of the Reform movement in Ukraine, among the most anti-Semitic republics of the USSR, tell of new Jewish congregations springing up everywhere.
- A miracle: That we are even still in existence as a people defies the odds and staggers the imagination. We can ask why until the end of time, but there is no real answer. We are still here. It's a miracle.
- A miracle: That along with computers, karate, art, ballet, piano lessons and homework, dedicated parents send their children to learn about their Judaism at our Religious School.
- A miracle: To see the pulpit filled to overflowing when we called the children up to see the ark.
- A miracle: To be part of a renaissance of spirit and activity that is energizing our entire congregation.

Miracle after miracle. If we lit a candle for each one, we'd burn the house down. So we'll stop at eight, with one more to light them. I agree with Ben-Gurion: I'm just being a realist. So to you and all your loved ones, a realistic Hanukah, filled with the miracles of

being part of the Jewish people.

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Cantor's Notes

As many of you probably know, last month, Nancy Goldberg, Joan and Peter Lifson, Pat Barad, Sally Winter, Honey Leone, my wife Lena and I attended the Biennial Convention in Minneapolis. It was an unforgettable event. Almost five thousand Jews gathered to worship together, to study Torah together, to discuss the issues of the Reform Movement, and, of course, to sing and enjoy Jewish music. One hundred and thirty years after it was founded, the Reform Movement voted to change its name from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to the **Union for Reform Judaism**. This vote to change the name of the Union was the fourth such effort in sixty years. Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union, said that many people have asked why this is the time to undertake a name change. "Let me be the first to say that the most important part of any Jewish organization is not its name but its values and its mission," he said. "But in Judaism, a change of name takes place when a person or a group undergoes a change in essence." One of the highlights of the Convention was Eric Yoffie's speech. I hope that you will find time to read this wonderful Presidential Sermon, which you can access on www.urj.org. I hope that next time, at the 68th Biennial in Houston, more of you will join us at this festival of Jewish identity.

Several weeks ago we gathered in the Social Hall to meet the Chief Progressive Rabbi of the Ukraine, Alexander Duchovny. We started a wonderful program of twinning with a congregation in Kiev, which was initiated by Len Sklerov. To my excitement, in his speech at the Biennial, Rabbi Yoffie raised this very issue of the necessity of these programs. I was so proud when I realized our Temple Beth Sholom is exactly in the right place at the right time! What a wonderful beginning, let it be continued!

For the last several years, Temple Beth Sholom and I have tried to provide you with spiritual food in the shape of short classical concerts after Friday night services. With great pleasure I would like to invite you to join us on December 12th for a Light Classical Concert, presented by a string trio, featuring a violin, a viola and a cello. I promise you a wonderful and enjoyable evening and another reason to feel proud to be a member of Temple Beth Sholom.

Cantor Schwartz

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