

## **Re-Dedication Speech by Sheldon Goldberg | November, 13, 2016**

GOOD AFTERNOON LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. SEVERAL YEARS AGO I WAS INVITED TO ATTEND THE THIRD ANNUAL FRIENDS OF THE ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES GALA IN BALTIMORE. AT THAT GALA, SENATOR JOSEPH LIEBERMAN OF CONNECTICUTT, THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER, WAS PRESENTED WITH A MEMENTO THAT REPRESENTED A SAYING FROM PIRKEI AVOT – ETHICS OF THE FATHERS - THAT THE WORLD RESTED ON THREE PILLARS: TORAH, SERVICE, AND ACTS OF LOVING KINDNESS.

I HAVE SINCE LEARNED THAT IN THE SENSE THAT PIRKEI AVOT USES THE TERM “SERVICE,” OR AVODOT, IT MEANS DIVINE SERVICE TO GOD. HOWEVER, AS I UNDERSTOOD WHAT WAS SAID TO SENATOR LIEBERMAN, THE GIFT BESTOWED UPON HIM WAS FOR SERVICE TO COUNTRY AND IT IS THAT “SERVICE TO COUNTRY” THAT BRINGS HERE TODAY.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HOLDS THAT JEWS ARE NOT WARRIORS, BUT OUR TORAH TELLS US DIFFERENTLY. OUR BIBLICAL ANCESTORS, THE ISRAELITES, WERE MIGHTY WARRIORS. THEY FOUGHT AND DEFEATED THE PHILISTINES, THE HITTITES, THE JEBUSITES AND ALL THE OTHER “ITES” OF THAT EARLY PERIOD. NEXT MONTH, WE WILL

CELEBRATE HANUKKAH, THE VICTORY OF THE MACCABEES OVER THE SELEUCIDS, AND EVEN THOUGH THE ROMANS DEFEATED THE JEWISH REBELLION IN THE YEAR 70 C.E., THE FEROCITY WITH WHICH THE JEWS FOUGHT MADE THEM PRIZE SOLDIERS AND OFFICERS IN THE ROMAN LEGIONS.

IT WAS ONLY AFTER THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE CONVERTED TO CHRISTIANITY AND CALLED THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL IN NICEA IN THE YEAR 325 C.E. THAT JEWS WERE NO LONGER ALLOWED TO SERVE AS SOLDIERS IN THE ROMAN ARMIES; ONLY CHRISTIANS WERE WELCOME. AND SO THE MYTH OF THE NON-FIGHTER JEW BEGAN.

FAST FORWARD TO 1655. ASHER LEVY, A DUTCH CITIZEN AND LEADER OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF NEW AMSTERDAM, NOW KNOWN AS NEW YORK, FILED A PETITION WITH THE DUTCH WEST INDIA COMPANY. THE PETITION, WHICH WAS APPROVED TWO YEARS LATER ALLOWED FOR THE FIRST TIME JEWISH CITIZENS TO TAKE UP ARMS TO GUARD THE WALLS OF THE COLONY INSTEAD OF BEING TAXED TO PAY FOR THOSE BURGHERS WHO STOOD GUARD. THUS, THREE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-ONE YEARS AGO, BEFORE THIS COUNTRY EVEN BECAME THE UNITED STATES, JEWS WERE PARTICIPATING IN ITS DEFENSE.

FROM THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WARS TO THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR, WHERE LT COL SOLOMON BUSH SERVED AS THE HIGHEST RANKING JEWISH OFFICER IN THE CONTINENTAL ARMY, TO COMMODORE URIAH P. LEVY, THE HIGHEST RANKING JEWISH NAVAL OFFICER IN THE WAR OF 1812 WHO SAW TO IT THAT CORPORAL PUNISHMENT WAS ENDED IN THE NAVY, TO THE 6 TO 8 THOUSAND JEWS WHO FOUGHT FOR THE UNION, 4 OF WHOM RECEIVED THE NEWLY CREATED CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR, AND THE 2 TO 3,000 JEWS WHO FOUGHT FOR THE CONFEDERACY AND TO THE JEWS WHO FOUGHT IN THE INDIAN WARS OF THE LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, JEWS HAVE SERVED AND FOUGHT.

YET THE RUMORS OF JEWISH COWARDICE PERSISTED. EVEN MARK TWAIN, AS LATE AS 1897, ONCE WROTE THAT THE JEW WAS “CHARGED WITH AN UNPATRIOTIC DISINCLINATION TO STAND BY THE FLAG AS A SOLDIER.” A YEAR LATER, HOWEVER HE APOLOGIZED AND WROTE THAT HE “HAD BEEN IGNORANT...OF THE FACT THAT THE JEW HAD A RECORD AS A SOLDIER , SERVING AS SOLDIERS AND HIGH OFFICERS FROM THE REVOLUTION, TO THE WAR OF 1812, AND THE MEXICAN WAR. AND THAT HE WAS REPRESENTED BY 10 PERCENT OF HIS NUMERICAL STRENGTH IN THE ARMIES AND NAVIES OF BOTH SIDES OF THE CIVIL WAR – THE

SAME PERCENTAGE THAT WAS FURNISHED BY THE CHRISTIAN POPULATION.”

STILL THE RUMORS REMAINED DESPITE THE FACT THAT JEWS WERE IN THE FRONT LINES WITH TEDDY ROOSEVELT ON SAN JUAN HILL, TOOK PART IN THE PHILIPPINE ANDN HAITIAN INSURRECTIONS, AND THAT 225,000 JEWS SERVED DURING WORLD WAR I, FOUR OF WHOM RECEIVED THE MEDAL OF HONOR AND 550,000 SERVED IN WORLD WAR II, OF WHOM THREE WERE AWARDED THE MEDAL OF HONOR FOR THEIR BRAVERY AND HEROISM. MORE RECENTLY, ALTHOUGH THE NUMBERS OF JEWISH SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT AVAILABLE, TWO JEWISH SOLDIERS OF THE KOREN ERA RECEIVED THE MEDAL OF HONOR AND ONE JEWISH ARMY OFFICER AND AN ENLISTED AIRMAN WERE RECIPIENTS OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR FOR THEIR ACTIONS DURING THE VIETNAM WAR.

PERHAPS IT WAS THE ISRAELI VICTORIES IN THEIR WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE ENSUING ARAB-ISRAELI WARS THAT CHANGED PEOPLE’S MINDS...I DO NOT KNOW, BUT THERE IS NO QUESTION IN MY MIND THAT TODAY NO ONE DOUBTS EITHER THE FIGHTING QUALITIES OR THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP ABILITIES OF THE AMERICAN JEW,

MANY OF WHOM HAVE REACHED THE PINACLE OF THEIR RESPECTIVE SERVICE COMPONENT.

AND THAT IS WHY WE ARE HERE TODAY. NOT TO MEMORIALIZE THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN IN BATTLE, BUT TO THANK, HONOR, AND REMEMBER THOSE AMERICAN JEWISH MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED IN THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES AND THOSE WHO STILL SERVE TODAY.

BY RE-DEDICATING THIS MEMORIAL IN THIS NEW AND BEAUTIFULLY DESIGNED LOCATION, WE CAN NOW HAVE A PLACE TO HOLD COMMEMORATIONS EDUCATE OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE WORN THE UNIFORM OF OUR COUNTRY'S ARMED SERVICES AND THE VALUE OF THEIR AVODOT – SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY.

AND FOR ANYONE WHO WISHES TO VISIBLY HONOR A LOVED ONE WHO HAS SERVED OR IS STILL SERVING, WE HAVE ADDED TO THIS PLAZA, A WALL OF HONOR AND A REMEMBRANCE WALK TO WHICH PAVERS AND PLAQUES CAN BE AFFIXED WHERE ALL WHO VISIT THIS PLACE CAN THE NAMES OF THESE HEROES.

TOGETHER, THE SCULPTURE WITH ITS BRONZE FACES REPRESENTING THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVE IN THE

VARIOUS ARMED SERVICES, THE WALL OF HONOR, THE REMEMBRANCE WALK, AND YOUR PARTICIPATION, A BOND HAS BEEN CREATED FOR ALL WHO COME HERE. A BOND THAT UNITES US WITH ALL THOSE BRAVE AMERICAN JEWS WHO HAVE DEFENDED, AND CONTINUE TO DEFEND THIS GREAT NATION OF OURS. AND THAT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN IS WHY WE ARE HERE TODAY.

LET ME NOW CLOSE WITH A FREE VERSE WRITTEN ONLY RECENTLY BY A MEMBER OF POST 692, THE POST WHO UNDERTOOK THE RE-DESIGN AND RE-DEDICATION OF THIS MEMORIAL.

“THIS MEMORIAL SCULPTURE AND WALL OF HONOR STAND FIRMLY FOR ALL TO SEE.

THEY EVOKE A STRENGTH THAT REPRESENTS JEWISH WARRIORS FROM ACROSS OUR COUNTRY WHO HAVE STOOD FAST ON ALL AMERICA’S BATTLEFIELDS AND CONTINUE TO DO SO NOW,

MANY A JEWISH SOLDIER HAS CONSECRATED THOSE FIELDS WITH HIS OR HER BLOOD,

HONOR THOSE JEWISH PATRIOTS, THAT EVERY JEWISH VETERAN BE KNOWN TO ALL.”

THANK YOU