

GLOBAL SOUL

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Five years ago, at this cultural center, my dear friend Uri Herscher welcomed the first inaugural public meeting of Jewish World Watch. We are thankful of Uri's responsiveness and support of Jewish World Watch.

I am grateful to all of you for your generous praise. It will not go to my head, but it has gone to my heart. You who support Jewish World Watch renew my confidence in the moral character of our people and its global relevance. You lift up my spirit.

You may remember that when the Jewish World Watch was but a sermonic proposal, some said, *"This is all fine, Rabbi, but not for us. This is not our task."* Who could not understand their reluctance, traumatized by the heavy weight of Holocaustal memory?

"Six out of seven Jews slaughtered in Europe. The world mute. 1.5 million children destroyed. The world eyeless. One-third of our people systematically exterminated. The world dumb. Whom do we owe and what do we owe the world? Towards our people, the world held a lethal silence and turned a cold shoulder towards our plight. A world without conscience did nothing then to intervene in our slaughter. Now, we owe the world nothing. Our debt is only to ourselves."

We understand the disappointment. But you answered, "No."

"Precisely because the world was deaf, dumb and blind then, we will not close our eyes or ears or hands now. Now, we will do whatever we can to staunch the hemorrhaging of martyred people. After what our people endured of torment, torture, mass murder... how can we — their heirs — deaden our soul, still our heart, restrain the compassion of pity?"

Some said, about the rape of Darfur:

“Something ought to be done, and somebody ought to do it. But we? What can we do? We a people so large in morality, so small in demography. What difference can we possibly make?”

But you made a difference, continue to make a difference. You gathered together over sixty synagogues in Los Angeles, of every denomination. Serious Jews, young and old, who work together without territorial imperative or denominational separatism. You transcended Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist divisions. You acted as one people for the sake of *Kidush Ha-Shem*, the sanctification of the name of God in this world.

Others asked, *“What can a few synagogues do to salvage hope out of the inferno of hate?”*

You responded, quickly and energetically:

- You built two medical clinics in Chad, in the Geneina and Deliej refugee camps. And a third in the Central African Republic in Wada Djallie.
- You provided monies to build water wells and latrines in Iridimi and Touloum refugee camps.
- Your children sent 15,000 backpacks filled with educational and health supplies— mosquito nets and shoes, paper and crayon distributed to the children in Chad — and your children signed the backpacks for their peers in Darfur with a single line in Arabic: “You are not alone.”
- You sent 40,000 solar cookers to prevent genocidal rape, and prevented the ravaging of thousands of women in Iridimi, Touloum and Oure Cassoni refugee camps.
- In loving memory of one of our Jewish World Watch activists, Dillon Henry, his parents Steve Henry and Harriet Zaretsky have built a permanent medical center in the Central African Republic. The Dillon Henry Community Health Center serves 31,000 sick and impoverished human beings and will immortalize the memory of Dillon.
- You marched, you cried out to protest and petition states and statesmen, nations and international bodies.

You became voice to the voiceless. Eyes to the blinded. Hands to the armless. Wholeness to the amputated. You rejected the toxins of cynicism. You would not betray our ancestral oath before the whole of humanity: “Never again” would genocidal slaughter — against any racial, any religious or any ethnic group — be

greeted with folded arms and clucking sounds.

You and I have been through the bloodiest century in world history. The last of the multiple genocides of the 20th Century was the fastest genocide in all history: 800 thousand human beings wiped out in only 100 days in Rwanda. Three-quarters of the Tutsi population decimated.

And we witnessed the first genocide of our century: the sadistic rape of Darfur, the mass murder of 400,000 human beings, the burning of villages and the expulsion of 2.5 million from Darfur continue as we speak. Jewish World Watch saves human lives.

There are no Jews in Chad, no Jews in Darfur. They are people of different skin color, of different liturgy, of different language. But with Jewish ancient eyes we see no race or creed or religion: Only a frightened child; a tortured, raped woman; an amputated arm; a diseased eye; a crippled orphan, bloated stomachs and pitiful skeletal figures.

And we sounded a universal truth to the citizens of the globe: "Know, brothers and sisters: There was and always is an alternative to passive complicity to tyranny.

The disheartened said, *"Evil is contagious."* And we answered, *"Good, too, is contagious."*

So, Jewish World Watch reached out to the Armenian community, one of the first Jewish organizations to recognize the 92nd anniversary of their people's genocide. Two communities with a kinship of suffering and a need for consolation found each other. We mourned and consoled each other with prayer and song. They, the choir of St. Peter Armenian Church, sang our liturgy and anthem in Hebrew, and our synagogue choir sang their liturgy and their national anthem in Armenian. They sang our songs and we theirs. They danced our dances, and we theirs.

- Goodness is contagious. We recently extended our arms to the people of Cambodia, living here among us, traumatized by the savagery of the Khmer Rouge.
- Goodness is contagious. We now turn our attention towards the barbarism within Eastern Congo; the shudders of fright and the mass murder buried on the back pages of the newspaper obituaries.
- Goodness is contagious. Goodness is marvelously infectious. Local and national churches — not of our faith — have discovered our address and helped us morally and financially, and supported the work of Jewish World Watch. I call your attention to the embrace by churches and congregations of conscience: Baptist, Catholic, United Churches of Christ, Congregational,

Episcopalian, Ethical Culture, Foursquare, Islamic, Lutheran, Methodist, Mormon, Presbyterian and Unitarian.

- Goodness is contagious. You transmit it to your children. You provide your children and grandchildren with a Jewish sensibility that no class, no text, no sermon, no lecture can achieve.

The prophet Joel counseled:

עֲלִיָּה לְבַנְיֹכֶם סִפְרוּ וּבְנֵיכֶם לְבַנְיֵיהֶם וּבְנֵיהֶם לְדֹר אַחֲרָיִם:

"Tell your children about it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to the next generation."

And what will your children tell their children? They will say,

"We Jews are more than victims of persecution. We are rescuers. We are more than passive prisoners of brutal power. We are active agents of peace and freedom. We are not fossilized figures of antiquity. We are Jews of ethical contemporaneity. We are engaged with the body and soul of God's globe. "

Your children will not have to ask, as other children tragically had to ask their elders during the genocides of the last century, *"Where were you in all this human catastrophe? Where were you, Father, Mother, Grandfather, Grandmother, church, priest and pastor...?"* For your children hear and know we Jews are in this world, here and now. We are morally mandated, *"Be relevant to the world. Bind its wounds. Make whole its shattered lives."* And your children will have learned that what they have inherited from their parents must be earned again, or else it will be lost. We have found our youth. And they have found us.

Our young people are often maligned as selfish and uncaring. A teacher who is irritated by the inattention of one of her students scolds him: *"Listen, young man. Do you know the difference between ignorance and apathy?"* He answered, *"I don't know and I don't care."*

But our children know, and our children care. At Jewish World Watch, we parents have discovered the profound craving of our children for idealism, the depth of their need for meaning, for raising up those ground into the dust.

"We are told to emulate God. How can we imitate God who raises up those who are fallen?" *"Somech noflimm,"* Rabbi Shlomo replied,

"Would you raise them up? Then climb down. If you see someone

who has fallen into a pit, climb down into the pit. Do not stand outside the pit, looking down with pity. Climb down, get your clothes dirty, tear your garments, muddy your boots. Would you raise up the fallen? Climb down into the sink hole and raise them up."

Three women, leaders of the Jewish World Watch — Janice Kamenir-Reznik, Tzivia Schwartz-Getzug, and Rachel Andres — climbed down. They flew to Chad, looked into the hollow eyes of the fallen, saw with their own eyes the shriveled bodies of the emaciated, and they tasted the acrid, bitter waters. *"Climb down, that you may raise up."*

The entire staff of Jewish World Watch — led by Tzivia, Naama, Mina and Rachel, Ari, Jan, Abby and Dianna — is energized and morally motivated. For them, the Jewish World Watch is not a job or vocation. It's a sacred cause.

Janice Kaminer-Reznik, my founding cohort, is a woman of moral altruism. I have introduced her countless times. But Janice needs a vocabulary of her own. I found the word in modern Hebrew: The word for conscience is *matzpun*, which means "hidden." Out of the same root, Hebrew coined the word *matzpen*, which means "compass." Conscience is the hidden compass within Janice that enables her to navigate the shoals of fatigue, despair and surrender. She continues to translate aspiration into reality, sermons into substance, dreams into actuality. Conscience, the hidden compass, is the "Global Soul" of Jewish World Watch

My constant inspiration comes from my beloved Malkah. Malkah is my personal benediction. Malkah is the inspiration of my idealism. It is with her I share this evening.

In a world whose last century is laden with blood-soaked records of 50 genocides, a world stricken with the sclerosis of secular and religious sensibilities, you, dear friends, restore hope in the dormant godliness in humanity.

Be not small in your eyes. You are the great chain of Jewish being. You link our spiritual past and our aspiration of the future with the powerful clasp of the present. You bring the Bible to life. As the prophet Joel prophesied, *"Your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Your old shall dream dreams, and your young shall see visions."*

You are dreamers and visionaries. You watch and witness, you rescue and defend. It is an honor to know you.