

Speech by Rhoda S. Pomerantz

Chancellor Eisen, Rabbi Siegel, members of the clergy, co-honorees. It is with great pride and humility that I accept the Eternal Light Award. I thank, individually and as a group, all those who have contributed to my ability to achieve this distinction.

I thank you for the inspiration and incentives that have been given to me over the years. I thank you for your willingness to come here this evening to share this honor with me. Particularly I want to mention my wonderful husband, Irwin Feinberg, my children and step children and their spouses, my Rabbi Michael Siegel, the other clergy of Anshe Emet Synagogue, and all the remarkable individuals who had found a place for themselves in the local and national movements to advance and strengthen conservative Judaism. (To call these individuals merely “administrators” or “support staff” does not seem adequate.) Now, if I took the advice of my remarkable husband, which I rarely do, I would stop and sit down at this point. He feels that is no need to ad lib and sermonizing is best done by others in this room.

However I want to share with you an interesting experience that I had last Shabbat. Some of you know that I go to Synagogue every Sabbath morning. I am always there on Sabbath morning if I am in Chicago. If I am blessed with a healthy husband and mother, they go also. Sometimes I wonder why I go... is it just that I'm supposed to do this? I love to watch the year pass by and rehear the stories and lessons of the Torah, I love the music of the service. I like to participate especially in the singing and to learn new melodies, a challenge so frequently offered by our wonderful Hazzan Mizrahi. But last Saturday morning I went to Synagogue to get inspired. I needed to find something to say tonight and I think I found it in the Seharit service. I would like to share a part of this with you. As a footnote on page 226 of the siddur was the following.

A World Renewed Each Morning

Unless we believe that God “renews the work of Creation each day,” our prayers and observance of the Commandments will grow old and accustomed, and tedious.

As the Psalmist says: "Cast me not off in the time of old age: - which can mean : Do not let my world grow old.

And in Lamentations we read: "They [God's mercies] are new every morning: great is Your faithfulness." That the world is new to us every morning-that is God's great faithfulness!" Somehow these words spoke to me as never before, I think a major factor in my life has been my ability to find new and interesting things to do.

"Cast me not off in the time of old age" left me a little shaken at first. But if I may translate this into, "as I grow older, do not let my world grow old around me, I can accept this phrase. I am also blessed in this way. The world, my world, has offered me so much to occupy my time, interest, and effort. Some examples:

Being president of Anshe Emet was a remarkable experience but my world did not come to an end with the end of my 3 years presidency. My relationship with Rabbi Siegel endured, and I found new outlets in United Synagogue (local and national), in the Community Foundation for Jewish Education, in the board of the Chicagoland Jewish High School, in the Jewish Theological Seminary (and in the Davidson School in particular) and now in my increased interest in and devotion to the State of Israel. My remarkable trip to Israel with Rabbi Siegel last August was a 40th birthday present for daughter, Susan Moore, and daughter-in-law Laura Feinberg. This trip was mind boggling and life altering for these two. Forget the joys of three in a room this was at their request. They were two great women that I took to Israel and I came home with two great Jewish women. My 2 years of video conferencing with Hartman in Jerusalem has provided some insights as well as stimulus for further study. Our recent involvement with AIPAC at the encouragement of Rabbi Siegel and our dear friends, Cindy and Bob Stern resulted in our attendance at the national AIPAC Summit. Here too there is so much to do.

As I reread the citation of the Eternal Light award, I think that perhaps it was backward. Support of, devotion to, involvement in the state of Israel is certainly paramount for this is the beginning, the present, and the future of the Jewish people. "Am Israel chi" but we cannot take that for granted it deserves efforts of support by each of us. Thank you again.