

Harold M. Schulweis Institute Board of Governors, Annual Dinner Meeting with
Address by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis
October 12, 2014

[This is the Last Public Speech by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis]

(This is a transcription of an audio recording which can be found in the Online Library at www.schulweisinstitute.com under the keyword "Governors" or in Collections under the title "In Memorium – Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis")

Sylvia Bernstein Tregub: Rabbi Schulweis would you like to share a few words with us?

Rabbi Schulweis: Could I do this from here?

Sylvia Bernstein Tregub: Yes, you can.

Rabbi Schulweis: Thanks. I am sorry I am not younger. I like being actively involved with this congregation with these people. I know you, I honor you and I revere you.

And I ask you just to allow me a few random remarks. I go to bed and I wake up with the news, with television, and I am deeply afraid. I believe that the world is experiencing a deep global depression. Who can laugh easily, when you have the news of Ebola and incompetency and confusion and wars and beheadings and decapitations and a reversal of the most primitive and now forms of life. It is for this reason that the synagogue of the future is so very important. There must be joy, there must be hope, there must be action, there must be conviction, there must be a recognition that we remain the oldest religion of the daughter religions. We are not 22 billion as the Christians and we are not the billions of Muslims, we are in the thousands, not in the billions, and we have something to say and something important to give. I leave from every such meeting on all of the branches of the institute, with hope and with a recognition that we are indeed the father of [unintelligible] religions and we have an obligation to the world, that our children, who want to be Jews and want to be relevant and I am so fortunate as a human being to be able to be involved with my colleagues who are remarkable people. Who give so much of their energy, their time, their thought to elevate the world and to promise a better world in which to live.

This was quite amazing this discovery of something I had written when I first came to this congregation. The name of the book is called, When You Are Older, You'll Understand, and it's rekindling the religious questions of our youth. I hope you will read it. I hope you will give it to your children and your grandchildren to read and to be proud.

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I am very fortunate to be working with people whom I truly respect. Rabbi Feinstein has been a good friend, a colleague, a person who feels and suffers the fears that those of us who read and care, suffer. He gives so much of his energy, of his vitality. And for that, I am blessed, you are blessed, and the congregation and community is blessed. This is true of the other rabbis. As you know, fortuitously or not, I've lost my voice at this critical moment in the Rabbinate. I've always spoken on Rosh Hashanah Yom Kipper for many many years and I must thank them for filling in with such grace and generosity. There were moments when I was supposed to speak and could not and Rabbi Farkas took my place with eloquence and elegance and made me glad that I could hear a voice that I wish I had. I think if I have one thing that's critical in my old mind and must tell you directly. I think we do not appreciate ourselves.

We have had always quite remarkable presidents. Our incumbent President, Nancy, represents the finest of Jewish thought, altruism, idealism, and love for people and for humanity. I knew that early when she came from Kansas City. I had no idea she would mean so much to this community, but she has, using her legal energy and her deep passion for the poor. She was and is voice for the voiceless and she was strength to the bent and for this we ought to be very grateful.

And we have to build. This is a congregation too precious to be lost in melancholy, in cynicism, in despair. There is an answer to those who wrote in the Pew report that they were non-Jewish. "To be or not to be" has been translated throughout our 4000 years of history into to stand or to surrender. We stand for justice and for mercy and for care and for the poor and for the aged and for the stranger. We have it all our lives and through our various branches we will, once again, rekindle our dreams and our visions.

I love you as persons; I love you as a congregation. I love you for your vision; I love you for your idealism and for your loyalty. May we meet together in health, in good voice, with hope and with a sense that tomorrow will be better, for us, for our people, and for humankind.

Thank you.

Sylvia Bernstein Tregub: Thank you Rabbi Schulweis for the words which we take to our heart and I want to assure you that while we don't always hear your voice, your written word speaks to us loud and clearly all the time.