

## **Alex and Mela Roslan Honorarium--- Righteous Gentile Service — Led by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis**

**Temple Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, CA  
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*(This is a transcription of an audio recording which can be found at [www.schulweisinstitute.com](http://www.schulweisinstitute.com))*

Rabbi Schulweis: There is a Pasukh, a verse, from Tehilim, the Book of Psalms which we sing quite often especially around the high holidays “Or Zarua LaTzadik Ul'Yishrei Lev Simcha” “Light is sewn for the Righteous and to the upright of heart” Let there be joy. What is the reward for righteous people? Is it wealth? I don't think so. Is it fame? Regrettably not. Is it power? Also, not. For the righteous, there is one thing that wherever there is darkness and they entered, they bring light that wherever there is despondence they bring joy. We are honoring two people, Alex and Mela Roslan, who have brought joy to all of us. And in their honor, I would like for you to sing with us “Or Zarua LaTzadik Ul'Yishrei Lev Simcha.” A song for Shabbat and what could be a law-fitting reading of the Shabbat than to have people who have brought Shabbat to all of us; a Shabbat of joy, a Shabbat of hope, a Shabbat of exaltation.

We are here in the tenths of hundreds. We are here... some of us from Temple Judea, some of us from Valley Beth Shalom, some of us from other congregations, some of us Jews and some of us non-Jew but this Shabbat, we lose our denominational identification and we are part of a larger community; a community of justice, a community of love, a community of responsibility. And so, I would want for you to join with all of us by rising and by extending a hand of friendship to the person next to you and say to them “Shabbat Shalom, Good Shabbos”.

We do not teach our children by the way we speak. We do not teach our children by the way we declare sentences and other theological propositions. We do not believe our God, we behave our God. With our bodies, we behave our God. With our arms and with our legs and with our feet, we behave our God. When this morning, a newspaper reporter asked Alex Roslan the ultimate question and why did you do this. Why did you do this, risk your life and risk the life of your family for the people like is not your people, for children not of your faith? He gave no great theological answer, no great philosophical sophisticated line. He simply said, “If there is no love, what else is there left in our lives?”

We, Jews, are storytellers. It is with us not a matter of some idol interest. It is a moral .... Hebrew as in Yiddish, the word for story is Ma'aseh and A' maseh is a deed. It is

an act. It is not some abstraction, some ideal or some idea. It is something that one does with one's flesh and one's blood. We, Jews, are storytellers and we have given the world one of the great stories of the universe, the Bible, but we are not finished because we did not finish telling the stories at the end of the Book of Chronicles. We have all kinds of stories to tell our children, to tell our children's children.

It was David's brother, Jacob, who came to see me when I was in Oakland Rabbi... A temple with Abraham and it was very difficult for me in those days to speak about the holocaust for a variety of reasons. He told me one story that has edged in my mind that I want to share with you and I hope you with your children and your children's children, you and your Jewish friends, you and your Gentile friends.

David referred to the fact that the Roslans sustained the loss of a son Yurich but that Yurich was a little boy the same time that Jacob and David were being hidden in their homes. There was a contagious disease, Scarlet Fever. The Roslans could not take David or Jacob to a hospital because it would be discovered that they were doing something that was so blasphemous and unheard of that they were hiding Jewish children. But Yurich was a Gentile, a poet, a 10-year old boy who went to the hospital knowing that his good friends, the boys Jacob and David, also were afflicted with Scarlet Fever. The doctors in the hospital gave medicines to Yurich and this 10-year old boy siffend off from every prescription, from every bottle some of the medicines to be given to his mother and his father to be administered to Jacob and to David. That is greatness; that is a child of parents who have taught him the inviolable dignity of the human spirit. It was not another story. It was the story of how a world can be shaped and how a character can be formed and how a world can be saved.

There is in the conclusion of the chapters which we read last week, the Lines, and the Lord saw that the wickedness of men was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually and it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart and the Lord cried, "I will blood out man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast and creeping thing and fowl of the air, for it repented me that I have made them." God was sick. And the solution, tomorrow morning, we will begin with these 13 words. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was in his generations, a man righteous and wholehearted, Noah walked with God. The secret to the Jew is not to be found in how the world began or even how man should begin, but how he should begin again and that is the remarkable message of this Sabbath.

When they asked the Ba'al Shem Tov why it is that the end of the Amidah, one recites Oseh Shalom Bimromav, hoo yaseh Shalom, one steps back and one begins to bow and then bow, and bow again. The Baal Shem Tov says, "I do not know the reason why. I know that we go down and down and down and then bow but I tell you that if

you bow too low and too often, you're in danger of forgetting how to lift up your head." It's very important to know how to bow. It is extremely important to know how to keep your head erect unless the Roslans can do what they did to spit in the eye of the desecrators of man to save and to hold their head erect they would be no such image, no such life and no such confidence. We rise, we stand, we pray. We will bow not too low, not too often.

"Ateh Meidiye he are my witnesses, said the lord." The Midrar says, "If you will live in accordance with Godliness, then I am God. But if you will betray me and live a sordid and wretched and perversed life, then you testify against me and I am not God."

Alex and Mela, you know us Jews very well. You know that we are Jews, the Jews of this generation who have lived through a deep terror which is seared in our heart, have burned in our bones, tattooed in our skins, swallowed in our systems. It is very painful to remember and we are... all of us attempted to forget. For the memory of Harrah runs against the instinct for preservation because we love life, we love laughter, we love song, we love dance, we love art, we love to raise up the cup of wine and to say, "L'chaim for life." We want so much to have the old wounds healed. We, Jews, want so much to fill the gaping holes with flesh of compassion.

We want to wake up from the nightmare of history. We want to trust again. We want to believe again. We want to live again but it is very hard because the enemies are not gone or just when we take a deep breath and the briefest respite, we see the resurrection of the despises of culture and the despises of Jews. We read of bombs of synagogues and stores and schools and often asylums in Grenoble, in Marseille, in Montpellier, in Paris. We read of cemeteries that are desecrated and Jewish homes that are defaced of Neo-Nazis in France, in England, in Germany, and in Belgium. In the land that is so... lands that are so blood-soaked with Jewish innocence. We read in South America of the rise of Neo-Nazism. We read even in our blessed and free country of hooded hoodlums parading with their white sinister shrouds and with burning crosses.

We want to live and to laugh and to sing. We have to overcome the inner despair because we know that the holocaust cannot be the organizing principle of our lives because we know that the holocaust cannot be the ultimate rationale for Jewish existence. I want to be a Jew not because someone hates me. I want to be a Jew not because someone wishes me death. I want to be a Jew because it is good, because it is strong, because it brings happiness, because it brings ethics, because it brings joy to me and my family and my people in the world.

We cannot live with curses against the heavens for its silence, against the earth because of its violence because we have to believe not because it is a matter of luxury

to have faith. It is no more a luxury to have faith than it is to breathe or to eat bread or drink water. It is indispensable for life and that is why Alex and Mela, you are so precious to all of us because you are the evidence. Simple, clear, lucid, unmistakable that there is goodness in the world and that is a testimony. "Vayar Elohim ki-tov." And the Lord saw that it was good, it's verified in the life of these two people. Blessed are those who bless others. Blessed are those who are the descendants of Noah, the sons and daughters of Noah who saved the world. Blessed are Alex and Mela who have preserved the life of a child.

On the Tree of Knowledge, we read that Adam and Eve ate but not of the Tree of Life. That Tree of Life belongs to the descendants of Adam and Eve to gain, to acquire, to share. This is the Tree of Life and you, Alex and Mela, are the choosers of life and you have given us life. We do not know how to express simple ways but this says, "Eits chayim hee", it is a Tree of Life and it is inscribed, "Noah was in his generation, a man righteous and whole hearted." Alex and Amelia Roslan, two people who walked with God in their generation Valley Beth Shalom and Temple Judea, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1980. Let us rise and let us declare.

Some foolish clergymen and there are fools amongst clergymen, said recently that prayers of some people are not heard by God. How he knows? I do not know. That poor benighted soul let him read the Bible and let him find out who it is to whom God pays attention. The output says, "I call, as witnesses, heaven and earth that be it Israelite or Gentile, man or woman, male or maid servant, the holy spirit rests on each person according to the way in which he acts." God hears the prayers of every single human being who prays with honesty and who behaves with decency. Noah was not a Jew. Noah's prayers were heard. Without Noah, there would be none of us.

While you are standing, what more appropriate thing than the sanctification of the wine, the symbol of rejoicing. It is a wine which makes it the heart of men to rejoice... that is not entirely correct. It is human being and only human being who live with heroism and with compassion who rejoice the heart of all of us. The world is an ark and the waters beat savagely against it. And the ultimate question for each of us is whether or not we are willing to allow those who are swimming about in the depths and coldness of the water to climb aboard our lifeboats to share with them our food, to share with them our clothing, to share with them our life. It is an awesome question and there are very few people who have that remarkable image of divinity in them who can answer, "Come into the ark and let us live together." I want to express before we leave and I do hope that you will give the Roslans an opportunity to retreat to the very end of the synagogue so that perhaps you could shake their hand and give them your strength as they have given us theirs. I want to thank the many people, the wonderful committee of Judea and Valley Beth Shalom that worked with such dedication...

[Roslan-Honorarium-Righteous-Gentile-Service-10-10-1980]