OMAHA SPEECH 1992
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

It is a pleasure to be here today in Omaha, Nebraska, and especially to be introduced by my daughter. I was never introduced by my daughter before, and I must tell you that it is a very special feeling. Of course, my Devora, my daughter, is a very special person. I feel very close to Omaha since my mother used to come here in the 1960's to help organize the American Women Mizrachi Chapters here. Also, I have known about Omaha for many many years from Rabbi Nadoff. I, too, echo the sentiments of previous speakers saying how wonderful a man Rabbi Nadoff was. We attended the same yeshiva, although he was a few years ahead of me. We always met once a year at the convention of the Rabbinical Council of America, and he was a wonderful man who did so much good, not just here in Omaha but throughout the Jewish world. He was a rabbi's rabbi. Not only did he do good in Omaha but he did so much good in other places that you do not even hear about and do not even know about. We are all going to miss him. He was a wonderful, kind, compassionate, caring, learned human being. There are not many like him.

I am happy to be here today because, as you all know, Mizrachi was the first women's liberation organization in the world, the first women's lib organization in the world. Actually, the Ms. Rachi changed its name to AMIT Women when women's lib became popular. We all know that American Mizrachi Women was actually founded in Seattle in 1925 by Bessie Gottsfield before she went on to New York, and its mission was to train the young Jewish women in order that they should be able to have an occupation, so they could stand on their own two feet no matter what life threw at them, that they would be able to earn a living as seamstresses or secretaries or as homemakers or as cooks or in any other type of profession, that the goal of American Mizrachi Women was to provide an education to Jewish women so that they would be able to earn a living. Nobody knows what

the future can bring. We all know that so many of our young women became widows and so many times it happened that their husbands disappeared because of the uncertain conditions in Europe and because of the uncertain conditions in Israel in the 1930's. Therefore, it was very important that a woman also would be able to earn a living in a dignified and proper way.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who was walking along a beach when all of a sudden he found a bottle. He rubbed the bottle and out came a genie. The genie said, "I have been imprisoned in that bottle for 450 years, so I am going to give you one wish. Anything you want I am going to give you." The man who found the bottle said, "Well, I would like to be a success at something that no man has ever been successful at before. In fact, I would like to be successful at something that no man has ever even tried seriously." The genie said, "Your wish is granted." Immediately he was turned into a housewife. Of course, American Mizrachi Women did not negate the values of the home. They wanted their women to also learn how to be good wives and learn how to take care of children properly in order that they should have a good family, but they also wanted the young Jewish women to know how to take care of themselves, how to earn a living so that they should never have to be thrown into a situation where they could only learn their living in a humiliating and a disgraceful way.

They also, of course, wanted to make sure that the Jewish young women were connected to their tradition, that they knew who they were and what their identity was so that they would love their people and love themselves and be close to G-d and love G-d. I am reminded, too, of the story they tell about a rabbi who died and went to heaven. There he was met by Gabriel

at the gate and Gabriel said, "I am sorry. You cannot come in. You have to go below. There is no vacancy for you now." The rabbi said, "What, go below?" Gabriel said, "Yes, you have to go below and wait for a vacancy." All of a sudden, as he was turning to go, up came a bus driver and Gabriel said, "Okay, go in." The rabbissaid, "What do you mean? You're letting him in? You're not letting me in. I am a rabbi. I have tried to get people to love G-d all my life." Gabriel said, "Listen, I have looked at your records, and every time you get up to speak people fall asleep, but every time that bus driver puts his foot on the gas pedal, everybody says Shma Yisroel."

We all know that it is important to know where you come from. It is important to be close to your people and to be close to G-d. We all know that American Mizrachi Women have always fought for Israel and for the rights of Israel even before Israel was created because we all know how much Israel means to each of us. Many times my gentile neighbors ask me, why does Israel mean so much to you? In fact, many times even Jews do not understand why Israel means so much to them, and I always look at them, and I give them an explanation which they can understand. I give them an explanation in their theological terms. It is not completely 100% accurate, but once I tell them about what Israel means in their theological terms they immediately understand and no longer question why Israel means so much to me, and why Israel means so much to all the Jewish people. I explain to them that the Holocaust was our crucifixion and Israel is our resurrection. Yes, Israel means that G-d still cares for the Jewish people. Israel means that G-d still cares for the world. Israel means that G-d's promise to the Jewish people still stands firm, that the world will be redeemed. When we support Israel we are supporting the redemption of all mankind.

It is important that we support Israel to save Jewish lives, but we should also realize that it has a theological importance. Our support of Israel means that we believe that G-d is going to redeem the world, and that G-d has begun that process of redemption now, that G-d's promise stands, that G-d will fulfill His promise. That, of course, is why we in our heart of hearts, in our deep unconscious, know that we all have to support Israel. Israel also stands for the working of G-d in history. We can see G-d's finger working in history when we look at Israel. After all, Israel could never have been created unless 7 mighty empires were destroyed. Before the first World War it looked like it would be impossible to found Israel. How could 7 mighty empires be destroyed? But they were. First the Turkish Empire would have to be destroyed. After all, the Turks were not going to allow Israel to be an independent state in Palestine; they ruled it. The Turkish Empire had to be destroyed. The Russian Empire had to be destroyed. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had to be destroyed. The German Empire had to be destroyed. The Italian Empire had to be destroyed. The French Empire had to be destroyed, and the British Empire had to be destroyed. What an improbable set of circumstances! Also, if we look at the UN, the only thing that Russia and the United States ever agreed upon in the UN before the end of the Cold War was the creation of Israel in 1947. Stalin, that big anti-Semite, had his representative, Malatov, vote for Israel. What's more, it was Stalin who actually saved Israel in the War of Independence, Stalin, who personally hated Jews and wanted to kill us all and had already formulated a plan to kill all the Jews of Russia and if he would not have died, again, a remarkable thing, that plan would have been carried out in the next few months, but he died, and his plan was never carried out. Stalin, that great anti-Semite, because he hated the British so much and wanted to evict them from the Middle East, allowed the captured German arms that the Russian

army had stored in Czechlosovakia to be shipped to Israel. It was with these arms that we were able to beat back the Arab armies. What an irony of ironies that we won our independence because a big anti-Semite sent us German arms.

Look what is happening in Russia today. Who would have ever thought that Communism would be banned in Russia, that the whole Russian Empire would collapse with only the loss of three lives. Improbable! In fact, who would have ever thought that 400,000 Russian Jews would come out in just two years? If anybody watched PBS last Chanukah they saw an unusual thing. The Lubavitcher movement, and I am not a Lubavitcher and not everything that Lubavitcher stands for or proposes do I favor, although I think the Lubavitcher does good work, but you have to give the Lubavitcher credit for what they did last Chanukah. Last Chanukah they had to chutzpah to go up to the Kremlin and ask for the Hall of Congress, the place where the Communist party used to meet, and there on world wide television they had the menorah lit in the hall where the Communist party used to meet. Communism is dead in Russia, but Judaism lives. What a great symbol! What a great revelation that G-d's hand is still working in history. Israel, too, has special laws, special agricultural laws, which speak about holiness. We know that in the land of Israel the first three years of a fruit tree you cannot eat its fruit, and in the fourth year you have to take it up to Jerusalem and there you have to eat it while you are in a ritually clean state, and you have to eat in within the confines of Jerusalem. In the fifth year you can eat the fruit anyplace you want and you do not have to be ritually pure. The Chassidim look at this especially, although it is implied in all the sources, and they say that this stands for the five levels of a human soul, that this story of the fruit of Eretz Yisroel stands for how we become holy.

According to the tradition the soul has five levels. It has Chaya, which is, of course, the basic level which even an animal has. That is why you have to keep the laws of kashruth because when we eat meat we are taking a life, not a human life but still a life and we can only do it with G-d's permission. So Chaya is the animal nature of our soul. Then we have Nefesh, which stands for the mind. Then we have Ruach, which stands for direction. We can choose to use our talents in a good way or in a bad way. If we do not have direction we end up with riots and so forth like was in Los Angeles recently. Then you have Yecheedah, which stands for the uniqueness of the individual and for our talents and how we have to develop them in the correct and proper way. Then we have Neshoma, which teaches us that we are all part of the world, that we have a piece of G-d within. Neshoma is the piece of G-d which is in each of us, that we all are holy because we have a piece of G-d in each of us. The Chassidim teach especially based upon these verses that the 3 bottom levels of the soul, the Chaya, the Nefesh, and the Ruach, stand for Aseeya, Netzeera, and Breeah. They stand for doing things in the world, that we have to learn how to earn a living. We have to live. Chaya means to live. We have to earn a living. We have to learn skills to earn a living. Nefesh stands for the mind, to develop our minds. We have to be creative. Thirdly, we have to have direction. The Ruach stands for direction, the third level of our soul, and we have to learn the right moral direction. Then we have Yecheedah, which stands for Atzeelus, which stands for the nobility we get when we learn how to act morally in the correct proper way, in which we develop our inner resources. That requires study and learning, but that is not the highest level. Just sitting in a Kolel and learning all the time is not the highest level in Judaism. Yes, it brings you to a higher state of G-dliness, but the highest state is to take this higher state of G-dliness and to go back into the world, to connect

yourself to the World, which the Neshoma is. Everybody has a Neshoma to connect yourself to G-d by connecting yourself to people by connecting yourself to your people, in that sense, Keter, the highest level of the soul. That, of course, is what the American Mizrachi Women, AMIT Women, is trying to do and what they do in all their schools. They, first of all, teach a child, and, of course, now we teach both boys and girls, in our many, many high schools and are responsible for almost all the religious vocational education in Israel. We have to teach a person a trade. We also have to develop their mind so they have more interests besides just the interest of how to earn a living. We have to give them the proper direction, and then we have to develop their spiritual power. But that is not enough. We have to bring them back to our people. We have to connect them to G-d and to Clal Yisroel, and, of course, Mirachi Women have produced some of the greatest people in Israel. They should be proud of them. The Mayor of Yavneh is a graduate of Tfar Batya. Many of the leaders in Israel have gone to AMIT Women schools because they have a sense that they have a responsibility to the community, to Clal Yisroel, a responsibility to G-d and to themselves and to Clal Yisroel, and they make wonderful, wonderful citizens.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman in the late 1980's who decided to go to Eretz Yisroel and she, herself, was in her early 80's with white hair and a frail woman. She got on an El Al plane in New York and flew 11 hours to Eretz Yisroel. All she had was 2 little carry on bags. She took them off the plane, went out of the terminal, and there she saw a woman who spoke halting English, her maiden language was Hebrew, and she turned to her and said, "Would you like to share a cab because it would be cheaper to share a cab up to Jerusalem." The woman said, "Sure, come on with me." She came into a Sherut. In Israel they have these taxis which

are really big Mercedes Benz where 3 people sit in the back and they have a jump seat for 3 more people and one person sits in the front next to the driver. As she came to the cab a husky man in his 50's took her two little bags and threw up on the taxi and tied them down as if they were nothing. She got into the cab and sat next to the pregnant woman. Next to her was a woman from Scandinavia who could not really speak any English. In the jump seat in front there was a American who was going to Israel to study in yeshiva. Then there was a soldier who was sitting there who spoke mainly Hebrew, hardly any English, and then there was a businessman, a very stout man named Roff who was a diamond merchant. He had just gone to New York to sell his wares and he was sitting there. Then there was Gottlieb, the travel agent, sitting in the front seat. Gottlieb seized the initiative and turned to the pregnant woman and said, "How come you came to Israel?" The woman said half in Hebrew and half in English, "Well, I was visiting my sister in New Jersey but I am an Isreali and I wanted my child to be born in Israel so I came here to make sure that my baby would be born in Israel." Then he turned to the Scandinavian woman and said, "What are you doing here?" She said, "Ya, ya," she could not understand English anyway or Hebrew. Then he turned to the yeshiva boker and asked him why he was there. He said, "Well, I am coming from New York to study in yeshiva in Yerushalayim." He turned to the soldier who said he was visiting his brother in Los Angeles and had returned home to see his parents. They all glowered at him. He said, "No, no, I am not a Yoraiv. I plan to stay here in Israel." Then he turned to Roth and he said, "Well, I am a diamond merchant," and he spoke only in Hebrew because he could not really speak English, "and I sold my wares in New York and now I am coming home." Gottlieb, the travel agent, introduced himself and then he turned to the frail, white haired lady and said, "Safta, tell us about yourself." She says, "No, I'll skip

it." At that moment, the taxi lurched forward and she bumped her head against Roth sitting in the jump seat sitting in front of her. Gottlieb said, "Come, tell us. Everybody else told us." She said, "All right, I'll tell you. I am a Holocaust surivivor and I am coming here to a reunion of Holocaust survivors from Poland." Gottlieb looked at her and said, "Oh, a school reunion." She grimaced. She remembered the last time she was at a school. It is in 1942 in Loge when she, standing on a gray rainy day in the courtyard of a school, her husband, Mordechai, was separated from her and pushed to one side and she and her husband, AAron, and her little baby in arms was pushed to another side. Aaron could not stand it and ran over to get his boy. He was immediately shot on the spot. Of course, they took her baby from her. Miraculously, she survived the war and after the war she went to Philadelphia. Gottlieb noticed the grimace on her face. He said, "How come you're coming to the Holocaust survivor's reunion from the Jews of Poland?" She said, "Well, my son, Mordechai, was separated from me when he was only 10 years old, and I have never heard from him, and I am hoping that maybe I will find him at the Holocaust reunion of survivors." Roth heard that. He understood English; he just could not speak it, and he said, in Hebrew, "How will you find him? How could a boy 10 years old survive? Impossible!" Gottlieb translated that for Safta. He did not, though, want to sound a pessimistic note so he changed it a little bit. He said, "How will you recognize the boy? How will he recognize you? How will you find him? I am sure he will be there if he is in Israel, but how will you find him?" Safta opened up her bag and she took out a T-shirt and held it up. She said, "I know this is very American," but on the T-shirt was written, "I am Luba Sermock from Loge, Poland. I am looking for my son, Mordechai, born February 12, 1932." Gottlieb took the shirt and showed it to all the passengers. Then he turned around and showed it to the driver. Immediately

the taxi lurched forward. The driver pushed his foot against the brake. His jaw fell and a primeval cry came out from his mouth, "Mama, mama, mama." Luba had come to Israel looking for her past so she could have a future, and that is what American Mizrachi Women, AMIT Women, do in Israel. They give their children a feeling of the past so they can have a future. They train them in the latest technological techniques but they make sure they know who they are and where they are. They make sure that not only their Chaya is taken care of, that their physical skills are taken care of, not only are their minds taken care of, not only are they given a correct moral direction and not only is their soul, their spiritual side, developed, but they are also taught how to connect with their people, Israel, how to find themselves by being close to G-d and being close to the Jewish people. Their Neshoma is enlarged. Their Neshoma is brought forth, and that, of course, is why we are all so proud of AMIT Women. That is why we are all so proud of you for what you have done for AMIT Women, for what you have done for their children of Israel. Let us all hope and pray that you will continue to help and that others will continue to help and that the children of Israel will all be connected to each and to G-d because not only are they learning skills but they are learning how to use their Neshoma and because they have learned the use their Neshoma, may the Geula come, the redemption come, quickly in our day. Amen.