

SENATE—Tuesday, June 29, 1999

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's prayer will be offered by our guest Chaplain, Rabbi Shimshon Sherer, Congregation Khai Zichron Mordechai, Brooklyn, NY.

We are pleased to have you with us.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain, Rabbi Shimshon Sherer, offered the following prayer:

Our Father in heaven: We stand before Thee in humble supplication as we yearn for divine inspiration, for guidance, and for wisdom. We turn to Thee in gratitude for this group of exceptional men and women of good faith dedicated to this great Nation and to all its people.

We bless Thee, O God, for a most precious gift that Thou bestowed upon the United States of America, upon the Jewish people, and indeed upon all of mankind, in a person, a man of history who came to be a symbol of visionary leadership and uncompromising integrity. We pay tribute to the life and legacy of the saintly revered rabbi, Rabbi Morris Sherer.

We pray to Thee, Almighty God, that his memory inspire the Members of this august body, the U.S. Senate, to find within their hearts an echo of his nobility of spirit, selfless devotion, and compassion for all in need, to demonstrate for all to see that beneath the outer veneer of our Nation's bureaucracy beats a warm heart in which the anguished cry of the depressed, the deprived, and the disadvantaged strikes a responsive chord.

Give us the understanding, O God, to grasp the true import of the sacred obligation we have, to open our hearts and hands to bring the bounties of life to every man, woman, and child in our midst.

O Father in heaven, bless this distinguished assemblage of people determined to work effectively and tirelessly for the betterment of all the people of this great Nation, that we witness in our time the fulfillment of the vision of the Psalmist, "They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy," so that from all the upheavals which shatter the soul of society today shall emerge a new world of hope, tranquility, and serenity, for the glory of God and all mankind. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Senator SPECTER will now lead the Senate in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Honorable ARLEN SPECTER, a Senator from the State of Pennsylvania, led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able acting majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, today the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12:30 p.m. with Senator MOYNIHAN, or his designee, in control of the time between 10:30 a.m. and 11, Senator GRAMS, or his designee, in control of the time between 11 o'clock in the morning and 12 noon, and Senator SPECTER, or his designee, in control of the time between 12 noon and 12:30. Following morning business, the Senate will stand in recess until 2:15 p.m. so the weekly party conferences can meet.

When the Senate reconvenes at 2:15, there will be an additional 2 hours of morning business equally divided between the two leaders. The Senate is then expected to resume consideration of the pending and long-suffering agriculture appropriations bill. Therefore, votes are expected to occur.

I thank my colleagues for their attention.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. SPECTER. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, I thank my distinguished colleague, Senator MOYNIHAN, for yielding 2 minutes prior to the time that his special order takes effect.

RABBI MORRIS SHERER

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought this recognition to compliment Rabbi Sherer, who has just delivered the Senate prayer.

We are recognizing the outstanding work of Rabbi Sherer's father, also Rabbi Sherer, who died a little more than a year ago. Present today in the Senate gallery are some 200 representatives of a national convocation to recognize the outstanding work of the departed Rabbi Sherer.

I must say that Rabbi Sherer's comments this morning about freedom of religion and the impact on everyone in

America, but with special reference to Jewish Americans, is of great significance to me because both of my parents came from foreign lands to the United States and were pleased and honored to pledge their allegiance to the United States of America.

My father left a shtetl, a small community, Batchkurina, in Ukraine, to come to the United States in 1911 at the age of 18, barely a ruble in his pocket, literally walked across Europe, took stearage in the bottom of a boat to come to America to seek his fortune, as did my mother who came with her parents when she was 5 years old in 1905 from a small town on the Russian-Polish border. They settled in America. They raised their family in America. My father fought in the American Expeditionary Force to help make the world safe for democracy and, in his allegiance to his new-found country, rose to the rank of buck private. Next to his family, the greatest honor he had was serving in the U.S. Army.

Freedom of religion is fundamental Americana, and the Rabbi's prayer today brings it home to us. And I wanted to express my own views of thanks for this country, what it has done for my parents and what it has done for my brother, two sisters and me, and my sons and our granddaughters.

I thank the Chair, I thank Senator MOYNIHAN, and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROBERTS). The distinguished Senator from New York is recognized.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, I believe Senator ASHCROFT would like to speak at this moment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, I thank the Senator for accommodating me from the time reserved for his control.

I am glad for the opportunity to stand in the Senate today to honor Rabbi Morris Sherer, who passed away on May 17 last year. Today, I believe the very best way to pay tribute to Rabbi Sherer's memory is to celebrate his inspiring accomplishments.

When Rabbi Sherer became the executive vice president of Agudath Israel in America in 1941, the organization was but a small group with but a few members. Rabbi Sherer transformed Agudath Israel from the small organization that it was in 1941 to a respected and influential force in the culture and community we call America in both our political and religious life.

Rabbi Sherer's success came primarily from two strong leadership characteristics or character traits for

which he was most respected. One was that he was not one just to talk about something. He would do something. He was an activist. Second, he knew getting something done required more than just activism or motivation or inspiration. It required persistence. He could stay with a task until there was an achievement.

One often cited example of Rabbi Sherer's activism occurred almost immediately after he became a part of the leadership of Agudath Israel. During Hitler's reign of terror, when all too many here and around the world remained silent about the unspeakable atrocities committed against the Jews in Eastern Europe, Rabbi Sherer spoke and insisted that action was necessary.

While Rabbi Sherer attempted to get others involved in his efforts, he always understood that he must take the initiative and lead, and whether others would be involved or not was not the criterion for his own involvement. He knew that real leadership required the ability and willingness to stand alone. He knew he could not simply wait for someone else to do what he believed should be done.

With his still tiny organization, he sent shipments of food to Jews suffering under the terrible injustices of Hitler's regime, and he helped many to escape to gain refuge here in the United States of America.

Not only was Rabbi Sherer a man of action, but he was a man of persistence. He followed through. When the war ended, he didn't forget about the brothers and sisters who still remained in the ruins of Europe. Under his leadership, Agudath Israel shipped food and religious articles to Jews in displaced persons camps and he helped those who wanted to emigrate.

Rabbi Sherer's story, as we all know, continues in this same line and his philosophy of activism and persistence guided Agudath Israel in America for decades. He fought on behalf of Jews endangered behind the Iron Curtain, those who were endangered in Syria, Iran, and anywhere in the world where he saw that injustice was an imposition upon the liberties of individuals and discrimination that deprived individuals of their opportunity to reach the potential that God placed within.

He brought this attitude with him as he ascended to the presidency of Agudath Israel of America in 1963 and to the chairmanship of Agudath Israel World Organization in 1980.

In all of these roles, Rabbi Sherer demonstrated the unique talent, unique character that provided him with the capacity to unite people from disparate backgrounds and interests. While this was partially a result of his contagious warm personality and charisma, there was something deeper, too. People knew him as a man of integrity. This was rare ore, precious metal to be mined out of the character

of this great leader. Though they might have disagreed adamantly with his views, they had to respect the purity of his position, his sincerity and his honesty.

This loyalty and integrity often placed him at odds with or at other times in alliances with unlikely groups. This, however, was Rabbi Sherer's great charm. This is why he was so highly respected. He was loyal and passionate about ideas and truth, never letting political maneuvering get in the way of his ultimate mission.

I am pleased to be on the Senate floor to honor Rabbi Sherer's memory. He taught us that in the face of injustice we must act; in the face of failure, we must persist.

When the battle is over, he taught us there is still a war to fight: to continue to bind up those who had been injured, those who had been separated, and those who had suffered.

Finally, he taught us that there is a way to achieve success and ultimately respect. It is not by trying to appease all sides but by standing firm in one's convictions and holding fast to one's beliefs.

That is the legacy of Rabbi Moshe Sherer. That is what he passed on to Agudath Israel and to all here today who respect his wondrous accomplishment and his faith.

I am delighted and personally privileged to have the opportunity from this podium, in this body, to extend my condolences again to Rabbi Sherer's wife, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and to recommend his stature, his principle, his integrity, his persistence, and his activism as models to all Americans.

I thank the Senator from New York for according me this time and this privilege.

I yield the floor.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, we thank the Senator from Missouri for his moving, eloquent tribute.

I yield such time as he may require to my eminent friend, the Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. I thank my friend and colleague from New York. I thank Senator LOTT for agreeing to set aside this time this morning to honor the memory of Rabbi Moshe Sherer. I thank Senator MOYNIHAN for providing the dignity that is always his but the intimacy that reflects the relationship he had with Rabbi Moshe Sherer. I thank my friend and college classmate from Missouri who just spoke so impressively about this extraordinary man.

I am honored to have known Rabbi Moshe Sherer, a blessed memory. I met him after I became a Senator and benefited, as anyone did, from the opportunity to be in his presence, from his wisdom, insights—insights not just on matters of faith but on matters of the broader community.

This was a man of extraordinary personal dignity and discipline, of hard work and of very good humor. He was a pleasure to be with.

The life we celebrate today was a most extraordinary and consequential life, based on values that go back thousands of years, motivated by a single overriding towering motivation to honor God's name, to perform acts of Kiddish Hashem, the sanctification of God's name. That is to say, to do good works, to be true to the values that are set down in the Bible, in the Ten Commandments, in the broadly held ethical system that we call the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer did that, magnificently rising to become, as we end this century, clearly one of the great leaders of the Orthodox Jewish community in America in this century, one of the great leaders of any faith-based community in America during this century.

Those who have spoken before me have spoken of the extraordinary record of service and growth that Rabbi Sherer gave. I spoke to him several times about his involvement in 1943 when he was asked to take a position at this organization, Agudath of Israel. He spoke to friends and they told him he would be foolish to even consider it. This was an organization that had little credibility, few members. In fact, it was at a time when even within the American Jewish community there were predictions that the Orthodox community would not go with much vibrancy into the future. Somebody actually referred to the Orthodox community generally as a "sickly weed." The resilience and feistiness of this man and his commitment to the values that were the foundation of his faith propelled him in the face of those pieces of wise counsel to go forward and prove them wrong. And did he ever do that, devoting the rest of his life to this organization, particularly in the context of the end of the Second World War, and the great suffering that occurred to so many suffering Jews in Europe during the war—watching the growth of this organization as a reaction, a kind of affirmation of faith and life after the temporary victories of death and antifaith, if I can put it that way, and anti-God certainly during the Second World War.

This organization rose out of that experience, and enjoyed the extraordinary, unprecedented liberty that America provided to this community, becoming the great, strong organization it is today. It is as Rabbi Sherer passed away with thousands of members in this country and all over the world in an extraordinary array of religious, social service, and communal activities. It is a remarkable program of study.

I don't know if anyone else has spoken of what is called the "daf yomi"

program, a page-a-day of Talmud study done under the auspices of Agudath Israel. It takes 7½ years to finish the Talmud—a compilation of Jewish literature attempting to interpret the values and the specifics of the Torah, the Bible. On the last completion of that cycle, which occurred in September of 1997, if I am correct, 70,000 people gathered, filling Madison Square Garden in New York, Chaplain Ogilvie. It reminds me in some sense of the Promise Keepers or groups of other faiths coming together to do some of the work you have done with Reverend Graham, and others—70,000 people, first filling Madison Square Garden, and then in the halls and chambers all over America and all over the world on one night to celebrate what is called the A Siyum, the completion of the 7½ year day-by-day trek through this experience, a remarkable achievement, and a commitment to live by the values that were part of that organization and that experience.

Rabbi Sherer, it has probably been said here—and I will say it briefly—not only built the inner strength of the American Orthodox Jewish community through study, through social service, through communal strength, but was a remarkable ambassador to the broader community of faith-based organizations working with people of other faiths, and then reaching out into the community, and particularly the political community during his time in recent years. He opened an office here in Washington, a kind of government relations office for the good of Israel—working again with other groups to support across religious lines commonly held principles, even when they were controversial.

On the day that Rabbi Sherer was buried and his funeral occurred, there was a remarkable outpouring in New York to pay tribute to him. More than 20,000 people stood outside the synagogue where the service was held. They lined the streets to pay final honor to Rabbi Moshe Sherer. It was heartfelt, it was emotional, and it was also an expression of gratitude to all he had meant to the organization, to them personally, to their children, to the institutions from which they had benefited, and to their sense of freedom and confidence being religious people in the America context. And now, as we are taught the way to continue to honor his memory is to live by the principles that guided his own life, we are taught that when a person dies and leaves this Earth and their soul ascends to heaven that they are in that sense unable to do more to elevate themselves, that it is up to those of us who survive them here on Earth to try to do deeds that are good in their name, if you will, to be of support and strength to them.

I think that is the work that has continued in the organization and in the lives of the individuals and all of us

who were touched by Rabbi Moshe Sherer.

I join my colleagues to pay tribute to him, and to those who continue the strong and important work for the good of Israel, and to offer condolences to his wife, to his children, to his grandchildren, and to his great grandchildren.

May God come forth and give them the strength—as I know He will—to carry on the extraordinary good work that characterizes the life and times of a great Jewish American, Rabbi Moshe Sherer.

I thank the Chair.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Connecticut for his beautiful words.

My dear friend and colleague, the Senator from New York, has asked to speak, and I yield him 3 minutes, if we may, of the time that is beginning to run out. Also, the distinguished majority leader has come on the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I thank my colleague, Senator MOYNIHAN.

I, too, want to join my friends, Senator MOYNIHAN, Senator LIEBERMAN, Senator LOTT, Senator ASHCROFT, and others in honoring the memory—the blessed memory—of Rabbi Moshe Sherer, who is truly one of the great heroes of the Jewish community and of all of America in the second half of the 20th century.

I am proud to have called him a friend as well as a mentor. He would guide me regularly on political and moral events. He is missed by myself, and my wife and my family, as he is by millions of others.

Rabbi Sherer did so many good things. Senator LIEBERMAN spoke about how he gave great strength to the orthodox community which had been through one of the worst periods of history ever inflicted on any people, and they came to America. What Rabbi Sherer did more than anything else was show them that they could live by Torah values, and the values of teaching, as well as by American values—in fact, that the two strengthened each other; that the values we have learned in the Torah, the Bible, and our teachings, the Talmud, which was mentioned by Senator LIEBERMAN, would make people better Americans; and the values that America allowed us to grow in, no matter who you were, or where you came from, if you worked hard, you could achieve something for you and your family, were consonant with Torah values.

What Rabbi Sherer did through the guide of Israel, aside from the way he touched all of our lives, is that he helped my State of New York and our

great country grow, because today there are hundreds of thousands—maybe millions—in America who follow Rabbi Sherer and who follow what he taught. They are living the ways that have been lived by our ancestors for thousands of years—the way of Torah, the way of life. But at the same time, they are building this country by the American values consonant with Torah values of hard work and dedication. And as they build and work hard to help themselves and their families, they help America grow; they start companies; they work in other companies; they teach.

So Rabbi Sherer's loss has been a loss for us who know him and knew him and miss him. It has been a loss for the Jewish community in America—one of our greatest leaders who taught us about education and who taught us that living a life of Torah values and being proud Americans is totally consistent. So it is also a great loss for America because America has always depended on and relished in the glory of lives such as that of Rabbi Moshe Sherer.

So I join with my colleagues, my friends in the gallery, in remembering him, remembering his life and his good deeds, and knowing that, as a Jew and as a New Yorker and as an American, I am proud to stand before my colleagues and before all of our country and say words of praise in memory, in blessed memory, of Rabbi Moshe Sherer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from New York.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, might I add I am proud of the warm and insightful remarks of my junior colleague. I thank him.

I see the eminent majority leader is on the floor. Through his courtesy, this time has been made available. I wish him to take whatever time he requires.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the majority leader.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I extend my appreciation to the distinguished senior Senator from New York. It is always a pleasure to work with him. I thought it was appropriate we have this time this morning to pay tribute to this great man.

Mr. President, today, along with other Senators from both sides of the aisle, I note the first anniversary of the death of Rabbi Morris Sherer, the longtime president of Agudath Israel of America.

This is a sad memorial, in that the nation has lost his ethical leadership and his commitment to justice and religious liberty. But this should also be a celebratory observance, to honor the memory of a man who, while treasuring the past, always looked forward.

Rabbi Sherer was a living example of President Reagan's favorite saying: there's no limit to what you can accomplish when you don't care who gets

the credit for it. But today, we rightly give him credit for a lifetime of good works on behalf of this people, his faith, and his country.

More than a half-century ago, in the worst of times for European Jewry, he put Agudath Israel in the forefront of assisting the persecuted and saving the hunted. And with the defeat of Nazism, his organization pitched in to help refugees and immigrants.

Here at home, he took a small organization that seemed to be on the sidelines of American life and transformed it into an active, weighty, influential factor in the mainstream of national affairs.

He was not reluctant to apply the value of his faith of public policy. Because religious education was at the very core of his community's life, he fought for equitable treatment of students in faith-based schools, whether Christian academies or Orthodox schools.

Because he understood that a culture without values is a culture without a future, he fought against the moral decline that has brought so much suffering and sorrow to our country in recent decades.

His concern to preserve and strengthen the Jewish religious heritage in America did not prevent him from working with those outside his own community who shared his principles. We need to have more of that in America, not less.

In matters of public policy, it is easy to win applause, but it is even harder to win true respect.

Rabbi Sherer sidestepped the applause and earned the respect that today brings members of the Senate of the United States to pay tribute to his memory.

I know he would be especially pleased by this observance, not because we are here praising him, but because his son, Rabbi Shimshon Sherer, is serving today as our guest Chaplain.

We thank him for that, as we thank the men and women of Agudath Israel for their continuing commitment to defend their faith and advance the humane vision of Rabbi Morris Sherer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from New York.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, our time has expired. Might I ask for 1 concluding minute?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. I thank the majority leader for his fine, perceptive remarks and for making this occasion possible.

It is a little over a year since the passing of Rabbi Moshe Sherer, one of American Jewry's most distinguished communal leaders. Rabbi Sherer was the president of Agudath Israel of America for over 30 years and served as

a reasoned, wise voice whose counsel was widely respected in the Yeshivot of his beloved Brooklyn and the halls of government in lower Manhattan, Albany, Jerusalem, and here in Washington.

I first met Rabbi Sherer in the early days of the Kennedy administration when he came to Washington on behalf of Agudath Israel. I quickly learned to admire his sagacity and rely on his insightful counsel and abiding integrity. For over 35 years he was a treasured mentor and a trusted friend.

Rabbi Sherer's earliest work on behalf of the Jewish community was the grassroots, and largely illegal, organization and transport of food shipments to starving Jews in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe in 1941. His efforts also produced affidavits for European Jewish refugees that helped them immigrate to the United States.

After the end of World War II, he and Agudath Israel continued to assist European Jews—survivors interned in displaced person camps—with foodstuffs and religious items, and helped facilitate the immigration and resettlement of Jewish refugees on these shores. In ensuring decades, Rabbi Sherer spearheaded Agudath Israel's efforts on behalf of endangered Jews behind the Iron Curtain and in places like Syria and Iran. In 1991, years of clandestine activity on behalf of Soviet Jews culminated in his establishment of an office in Moscow to coordinate Agudath Israel's activities in Russia. Under his leadership, Agudath Israel also played an important role in providing social welfare and educational assistance to Israel Jews, and in advocating for Israel's security needs.

Ignoring the pessimistic predictions about Orthodox Jewry made by sociologists and demographic experts in the 40s and 50s, Rabbi Sherer went on to help engineer a remarkable change in the scope, image and influence of the American Orthodox Jewish world. A staunch advocate of Jewish religious education as early as the 1960s, he helped establish the principle in numerous federal laws—like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—and State laws that, to the full extent constitutionally permissible, children in non-public schools were entitled to governmental benefits and services on an equitable basis with the public school counterparts. In 1972, his efforts on behalf of education led to his being named national chairman of a multi-faith coalition of leaders representing the 5 million non-public school children in the United States.

On the day of his funeral last year I took the Senate floor to declare that:

World Jewry has lost one of its wisest statesman. America Orthodoxy has lost a primary architect of its remarkable postwar resurgence. All New Yorkers have lost a man of rare spiritual gifts and exceptional creative vision.

Rabbi Sherer passed away only hours before the President of the Senate,

Vice President AL GORE, addressed Agudath Israel's 76th anniversary dinner in New York. He spoke for the Senate and for all Americans when he eulogized the Rabbi as "a remarkable force for the understanding and respect and growth of Orthodox Jewry over the past fifty years," whose "contributions to spreading religious freedom and understanding have been truly indispensable in defending and expanding those same rights for all Americans in all faiths."

I know I speak for the entire Senate when I express my condolences to his widow Deborah, his loving children Rachel Langer and Elky Goldschmidt, who join us today in the visitor's gallery, and his son Rabbi Shimshon Sherer whose inspiring prayer opened this morning's Senate session.

"There were giants in the Earth in those days," the book of Genesis teaches. Rabbi Noshe Sherer was a giant in our midst, whose counsel and wisdom will be missed by all of us who were privileged to enjoy his friendship.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12 noon shall be under the control of the Senator from Minnesota, Mr. GRAMS, or his designee.

The Senator from Minnesota.

TAX RELIEF FOR AMERICAN FAMILIES

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, we wanted to take a little time this morning to again talk about what I consider the overtaxation of the average working family in the United States. The tax burden is getting larger and larger every day and every year. In fact, under this administration it has grown by about 50 percent in just the last 6 years. To sum up some of these things we do have a number of other speakers who will come down this morning and join us and lay out some of the facts and figures on the current tax status in the United States.

Next Sunday our Nation will celebrate the Fourth of July. Millions of Americans and their families and friends will gather to raise the national flag, parade in their hometown, grill in their backyard, or drive to the beach for a relaxing vacation.

The Fourth of July is always a truly great American holiday.

As we observe this special occasion, I rise to remind the American people of why we celebrate the Fourth of July, Independence Day, and to call upon Congress and the President to take immediate action to provide meaningful tax relief for all overtaxed Americans.

This great Nation was born out of a tax revolt. The revolt was not because of Founding Fathers were selfish but because they did not want to be shackled under more government regulations, bureaucracy, taxing powers, and unjust legislation of their homeland.