

*There will always be dissident voices heard in the land, expressing opposition without alternatives, finding fault but never favor, perceiving gloom on every side and seeking influence without responsibility. Those voices are inevitable.*

*But today other voices are heard in the land--voices preaching doctrines wholly unrelated to reality...doctrines which apparently assume that words will suffice without weapons, that vituperation is as good as victory and that peace is a sign of weakness.*

*We in this country, in this generation, are--by destiny rather than choice--the watchmen on the walls of world freedom. We ask, therefore, that we may be worthy of our power and responsibility, that we may exercise our strength with wisdom and restraint, and that we may achieve in our time and for all time the ancient vision of "peace on earth, good will toward men." That must always be our goal, and the righteousness of our cause must always underlie our*

*strength. For as was written long ago: “except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”*

My friends, the world should have heard the words I just read, but it never happened. Those words came from the speech which was to be delivered at the Trade Mart in Dallas, Texas, by President Kennedy, on November 22, 1963. Of course, that speech was never given.

Between this Shabbat and the next comes November 22. Forty-seven years later, people still remember just where they were when they learned of the assassination of President Kennedy. Forty-seven years later, people still wonder about what the world might be like today had his motorcade made the left-hand turn from Houston St. onto Elm and proceeded peacefully to the Trade Mart. The words of that speech would not have changed the world, but one wonders how the world might be different if that speech had been given.

Who knows how, or even if, world politics would have been different? I certainly don't. But I do believe that the assassination of President Kennedy changed the future of the world. It had to. It had to have changed the future of the world because it changed the population of the world. I would bet that because of the new and innovative use of the medium of television, the assassination and funeral President Kennedy became the single largest global experience mankind had ever shared. How could a collective experience so powerful and intense help but to have some impact on humanity? It certainly had an impact on a five year old kindergartener in Cherry Hill, N. J. I not only remember that I was in kindergarten, but I remember where I was in the room and in what direction I was facing. I also remember the words that came over the loudspeaker: "Attention please, attention please, President Kennedy has been shot in Dallas.

I remember many other details: being sent home from school early and my mother waiting for me, watching his

body arrive on the plane in Washington, the murder of Oswald by Jack Ruby, the funeral and the lighting of the flame—the memories are so clear. Clearest of all is the memory of both of my parents weeping in our kitchen, and my father pounding his fist on our refrigerator.

To this day, I think with only one exception, the assassination of President Kennedy affected me more deeply than any other experience of my childhood. This year, I began to think about why that was so, and I reached the conclusion that the Kennedy assassination involved three very important “firsts” in my life, and I would like to share with you what they were.

First, and probably most important, the assassination of President Kennedy was my first encounter with evil. At the age of five, the world was a safe place. Sure, it could be scary at times, but the world was also full of people whose job it was to help the kids. They were called grown-ups, and they were there to do the right thing all the time, be fair and be nice and just generally be good. At five years of age,

who has even the slightest inkling of the capacity of humanity for evil? Unfortunately, some are all too experienced in that reality, but I certainly wasn't, and didn't even know that such a thing as evil existed until someone shot President Kennedy, until someone did something so horrible and terrible that it made my parents cry, and my father pound his hand on the refrigerator. But once I learned, there was no turning back. On November 22, 1963, a five year old kindergartner found out that the world really wasn't such a safe place after all.

The assassination of the President was also my first encounter with death. I was full of questions about caskets and souls and what part of us goes to heaven and what part goes in the casket—I remember the questions, and I remember not understanding the answers. Death is too abstract an idea at first. It requires some experience with it to begin to understand it. All I knew then was that death meant being put in a casket and a part called the soul going someplace else, but had no idea what the soul was or where it went. I did know that death was a bad thing, though. It

made your parents cry. It made your father pound his hand on the refrigerator.

Finally, the events following the shooting of President Kennedy provided me with a final first in my life: my first encounter with justice.

I remember my own Hammurabi-like thinking on how to respond to something like murder: Oswald should get put in one of those caskets. It's not that I thought he should be executed. That part of it never occurred to me. But fair is fair—he put the President in one, so he should be in one, too. Obviously, not only five year olds felt that way. I saw Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald on television, and although it was pretty confusing at the moment, I later understood that Ruby had shot the man who shot the President, and it seemed to me that things were finally starting to work out. I was surprised to learn that the grown-ups saw the shooting of Oswald as a bad thing, and I remember that it was my grandmother's husband who tried to explain to me that it was wrong to take the law into one's

own hands. He told me that it was always wrong to commit murder, and I guess I believed him, but it was easy to see that not every murder was as bad as every other one. When Jack Ruby shot Oswald, my parents did not cry, and nobody pounded his hand on the refrigerator.

Those first experiences shaped the man I am today. I never forgot the fact that there is evil in the world, and that it must be fought. One of my favorite verses in the Hebrew Bible is אהבי יהוה שנאו רע, *Those who love Adonai hate evil*. And I still can't hear or read or watch on television anything about President Kennedy without becoming that five year old kindergartner in Cherry Hill, N.J., crying like my parents did, and finally understanding why my father was pounding his fist on the refrigerator.

It wasn't over the political implications of the assassination and how it might effect world events. It was the loss of the icon that was JFK, the loss of the hope the he brought, and the end of the dream. Ralph G. Martin wrote:

*What then was John Fitzgerald Kennedy?*

*Not a myth. He was a very real human being full of his own foibles, his own doubts, his own weaknesses.*

*Not a great president. There was the growth of the man in office, the pragmatism that turned into passion on big issues, the courage that become wisdom. But there was no time to prove his potential.*

*Still, he was a hero for our time. In some mysterious way, he did inspire in so many millions of people all over the world a great excitement of hope. That excitement was real. That excitement still lingers.”*

My friends, all these years later, the icon still works for me. His legacy still motivates me to do more and do better in the service of others. And when I read his written legacy, I am often shocked at how timely his words seem for us today. When he died, he had a second speech prepared for that day, a speech he was to give to the Texas Democratic



State Committee, and I will conclude tonight with the conclusion from that speech:

*... this country is moving and it must not stop. It cannot stop. For this is a time for courage and a time for challenge. Neither conformity nor complacency will do. Neither the fanatics nor the faint-hearted are needed. And our duty as a party is not to our party alone, but to the Nation, and, indeed, to all mankind. Our duty is not merely the preservation of political power but the preservation of peace and freedom.*

*So let us not be petty when our cause is so great. Let us not quarrel amongst ourselves when our Nation's future is at stake. Let us stand together with renewed confidence in our cause--united in our heritage of the past and our hopes for the future--and determined that this land we love shall lead all mankind into new frontiers of peace and abundance.*

May these words, now forty-seven years old, be true of our nation today.