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## **A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner**

Friday February 20, 2026 ~ Parshat: Terumah

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

### **After Jesse Jackson: Hope and its Limits**

This week, as our country reflects on the life of Rev. Jesse Jackson, much of what is being said is true and significant. He was a consequential figure in the civil rights movement, which, despite decades of ups and downs, and successes and failures, has reshaped American moral life.

Jews, and Jewish organizations were also pillars of this movement, intentionally and deliberately so, because of our own history of oppression and violence, and because its moral language resonated with our own. We have always believed that our covenant calls us to expand the moral life of the societies in which we live. We have marched. We have advocated. We have built coalitions. That engagement is something to be proud of.

But Jewish memory is complicated. We are capable of holding gratitude and discomfort at the same time.

That memory must be brought to bear when evaluating the often laudatory tributes that have dominated the narrative since his passing earlier this week. It is true that Rev. Jackson once referred to New York as “Hymietown,” a remark that was not merely careless, but deeply wounding to the Jewish community. It is true that he met publicly with Yasser Arafat at a time when the PLO was committed to Israel’s destruction and the murder of Jews. (It still is, but that is fodder for another message.) It is also true that he maintained a relationship with Louis Farrakhan long after Farrakhan’s antisemitism was unmistakable. These are but a few of the [troubling](#) aspects of his relationship with Jews, Israel, and the Jewish community, aspects which are being glossed over even as I write this message. Yet these are not minor

footnotes. For many Jews, they were moments when the ground shifted slightly beneath our feet.

The lesson is not about one individual. It is about something more enduring and more uncomfortable.

No moral movement remains frozen in its founding moment. Movements evolve. Language hardens. Priorities shift. New generations reinterpret old ideals. Sometimes that evolution deepens moral clarity. Sometimes it narrows it. And when ideological drift narrows a movement's moral vision, Jews have often found ourselves in the blind spots.

We are living through a period in which antisemitism, both crude and sophisticated, has become more visible again. In many ideological spaces, Jews are no longer viewed primarily as a minority community with legitimate safety concerns. We are reframed as representatives of power, privilege, or colonialism, and thus undeserving of protection. That reframing does not always begin as antisemitism. But it creates conditions in which antisemitism becomes easier to rationalize.

This is a lesson that I have taught for years in our Adult Education classes: antisemitism does not disappear simply because a movement speaks the language of justice. If we assume that moral alignment guarantees Jewish safety, we will eventually be caught unprepared. That is not fear. It is historical realism.

The Torah understood something that modern societies often forget. God did not secure Israel by attaching us permanently to the most enlightened empire of the ancient Near East. He did not promise Abraham permanent acceptance among the nations. He promised covenant. He promised descendants. He promised a people bound together by Torah and responsibility. The message was clear. Jewish safety was never to be outsourced. It was internalized.

Our survival has never depended solely on the moral stability of the societies around us. It depended on internal strength, on covenant, on community, on sacred time, on the responsibility for Jews for other Jews, and on vigilance.

Jews must care about justice. We must uplift the moral dimensions of the societies in which we live. We must build coalitions and seek the delicate balance between the universal and particular values of our tradition. But we must never confuse participation with protection.

In every generation, Jews must ask: are we engaging the world from a position of rooted strength, or from the hope that the world's moral language will permanently shelter us?

Jesse Jackson was famous for the phrase "keep hope alive." The lessons of Jewish history teach that hope alone is not enough.

So we build. We strengthen. We remain vigilant. Not because we distrust the world, but because we understand it. And because Jewish survival has never rested on hope alone, but rather, the courage, clarity, and the discipline to protect what we love, and what we believe.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner