Sermon 6/30/00

We live in an ever changing world. As I drove to the temple today I passed a billboard on Santa Monica Boulevard. The billboard proudly proclaimed in a gazillion point font, 'We've Got Chutzpah', pictured beneath this chutzpadik headline on the billboard was the new Volkwagon Bug. We this past year bought our first new car and it too is a VW.

This past week the United States, returned a child to his homeland in a communist country, a country that we will not establish diplomatic relations with and that we will not permit our citizens to travel freely to. Yet by most standards our nation was acknowledged by the world for doing the humanitarian and just thing, by returning Elian to Cuba.

This past week a Texas man was killed in the electric chair even though he was convicted on the testimony of only one witness and the DNA evidence the could have exonerated him years later was not allowed to come before the court.

On Wednesday night I went with Kim and our good friend to the opening screening of the new Mel Gibson movie, 'The Patriot' in it two Australian actors play the lead roles in a story about the American revolution. Without giving anything away about the outcome of the movie, though I will tell you that we did win the war. At one particularly dramatic point in the film, Gibson's character turns to his two pre-adoloecent sons and hands them each a musket, saying to them, remember what I told you about shooting, they nod knowingly and together they head off to defend their nation. What is immediately apparent, is that with all our anti-gun fervency, and our national outcry to restrict gun ownership, and the call by some to repeal of the 2nd amendment, at the moment these young boys are handed guns, everyone in the theater is thankful that they know how to use them, and in this context not one of us is questioning the propriety of gun ownership. Mind you we all quickly grasp that a musket with its 4 shots per minute rate of fire, is not a weapon of the likes that have been used on school yards, and office buildings, but still we realize that had we not been a nation of farmers and hunters familiar with weapons, we might not have become a nation.

I review these incidents in my mind and realize that
It would be correct, if still an over simplification to say that what was good, and right and just in one time, need not be so in another time. Over simplification or not, nothing could be more true, not only about the world we live in, but the religion we believe in as well. The Jewish people, so often referred to as the people of the book, is by another name the people of the long memory. We have recorded the entire history of our people, not only names, places and great victories and defeats, but also our laws, customs and ideals. Yet unlike our ability in as a nation to recognize when a law or custom is no longer as just as it once was

It says in our Torah that homosexuality is abhoration, it says in our Torah that a man can have more than one wife, it says in our Torah that God wants us to sacrifice

animals, it says in our Torah that one should be stoned to death for breaking the Sabbath, that it is permissible to own slaves. I don't hold any of these things to still be true and just, and I would imagine that many of you would agree.

There is a concept about Jewish law that speaks to us with regard to these changes of perspective and position. Dr Eugene Borowitz writes about the