

THE SWORD OF PEACE

Rabbi Reuven Mann

VETERANS' DAY ADDRESS 2004

"Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth. We have gathered here today at a critical moment in our history, fully aware of the great blessings you have bestowed upon this nation.

We have just concluded one of the most toughly fought presidential elections ever. Yet, in spite of all the passion, the American people made their choice democratically, without a shot being fired.

We thank both candidates for their energetic campaigns and calls for reconciliation.

Let us never forget that unity and dedication to the greater good of America are vital for our survival at this time.

We can never forget 9/11/01, the day on which we sustained the most devastating attack ever to take place on our soil. On that day of darkness and despair we rediscovered a virtue which we had almost lost: Gratitude. Gratitude for those whom we take for granted but without whom we could not function. Gratitude for the faithful souls who put their lives on the line every day — the police, firefighters and emergency medical responders — who threw caution to the winds and established a beachhead of bravery amid the smoldering ruins of the Twin Towers. They too are veterans who must be remembered and revered.

Our debt of gratitude and appreciation does not stop there. It is hard to believe that there are many people who do not adequately appreciate the nation's most cherished asset — the men and women, young and old, active and retired — who are part of the greatest military force in history: the Armed Forces of the U.S.A. In times of peace we take our freedom and opportunities for granted. Let us be humble and admit that we did not earn the privileges we enjoy. We must be grateful to all who answered the call of duty, and took up arms so that we could enjoy the American way of life. As George Orwell said: "We sleep safely in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm." Let us therefore unite in full support of our soldiers who are fighting the war against terror. I call upon everyone — especially those with a public voice — to be extremely careful of what they say and how they say it, lest, heaven forbid, they undermine the morale of our troops or provide psychological encouragement to the enemy.

Let us be grateful to all who bear the wounds and scars of war, and especially to those whose loved ones went to serve — and did not come back. I speak specifically to John and Jacklyn Kolin, who are with us today, and whose son Kevin Kolin fell in the line of duty. No words we utter can make up the loss you have suffered. We pray that with time God will comfort and heal you, and restore your grieving souls. Always remember how much we appreciate his sacrifice — and be strengthened by the knowledge that he lived a noble life — that he did not die in vain — and that he will be a source of inspiration to countless others who will emulate his example.

Finally, I ask you to join me in prayer for the men and women in harm's way — especially on the battlefield of Falluja, which is of decisive consequence to our War against Terrorism. May God be with them to protect and shelter them, and give them the strength to be successful in their mission. I call upon each and every person never to lose sight of the evil nature of the enemy we face. Remember 9/11 when thousands of innocents were slaughtered — Remember the merciless beheadings of innocent captives — Remember the brutality visited upon schoolchildren in Belsan Russia. Remember, also, this critical distinction: The enemy fights for glory, conquest and the destruction of advanced civilization. We fight for freedom and the dignity of man. Theirs is a sword of war and destruction; Ours is a sword of liberation and peace.

Almighty God may the sword of peace be triumphant and may the prophecy of Isaiah be soon fulfilled. "They will beat their swords into ploughshares. Nation will not lift sword against nation — neither will they learn war any more. For the earth will be filled with knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea." Let this be thy will; and let us say — Amen."

*Presented at the Annual Veteran's Day Ceremony
Middle School Veteran's Memorial Park,
Hicksville, New York November 11th, 2004*

