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## Echoes of October

A Collection of Sermons in the Year following the  
Outbreak of the Yom Kippur War

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## Editor's Introduction

One year ago, for the fiftieth anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, I distributed Rabbi Lamm's 1973 Shemini Atzeret sermon, in which he urged his congregants to rejoice on Simchat Torah despite the tragedies in Israel. When I pressed send on the email, I could not have imagined how urgently relevant his words would become. As news of Hamas' devastating attacks began to spread that fateful morning, several people approached me after shul, remarking on how prescient Rabbi Lamm's message felt. In the days that followed, I heard similar reflections from dozens of readers. One even shared that when word of the attacks broke, he handed his rabbi a copy of Rabbi Lamm's address. The rabbi scrapped his planned Yizkor *derasha* and instead used Rabbi Lamm's words as the basis for his improvised remarks.

Nor were these comments limited to the Shemini Atzeret sermon. In the year following the outbreak of war on October 6, 1973, Rabbi Lamm returned to the subject in the majority of his sermons. Since October 7, 2023, I have regularly distributed sermons from that fateful year. Nearly every time, I hear the same reflection: just change a few details and the sermon could have been delivered today. In honor of the first anniversary of the Simchat Torah massacre on October 7, we therefore found it fitting to release this collection in memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice and in recognition of the myriad challenges we continue to confront.

There is a certain comfort in knowing that we have endured similar challenges before, and that the Torah, as refracted through Rabbi Lamm's enduring words, continues to offer guidance. Even – perhaps especially – in times of crisis, the wisdom of a half-century ago offers us direction. We hope this collection provides a measure of that comfort and insight as we reflect on the past year and look toward the uncertainties of the year that lies ahead.

Rabbi Tzvi Sinensky

October 7, 2024

Lower Merion, PA

### Peace in Pieces

In speaking on the theme "Peace in Pieces," I refer not only to the fragile peace in the Holy Land that has been so cruelly shattered this past Yom Kippur, but to a related idea that in some ways is untimely and in other ways most timely.

Perhaps the whole thing can be summarized in one statement of the Midrash (מדרש רבה נשא) that גדול השלום שאפילו בשעת מלחמה צריכין שלום, "So great is peace, that even in time of war, one needs peace." Even a little piece of peace is precious beyond words.

The late Rav Kook, of blessed memory, put it this way. In our prayers we ask ופרוש עלינו סוכת שלום, "spread over us the *sukkah* (tabernacle) of Thy peace." What is the relation between *sukkah* and *shalom*, between the booth or tabernacle which we build on this festival, and the concept of peace?

Rav Kook answers by pointing to the Halakhah, which did strange things with the commandment of *sukkah*. One would imagine that the observance is quite simple; one must build four walls, place over it the covering or סכך, and that is it. However, the Halakhah took a rather different approach. It told us that even if there are not four walls, but only three, that is adequate. Even more: "three walls" does not mean three whole walls but a third wall, i.e., if the booth consisted only of two full walls and a small piece of a third wall, that too is sufficient. And then, by a series of legal fictions, and utilizing such abstract ideas as גוד אחית מחיצתא, לבוד, and דופן עקומה, it expanded the legal concept of *sukkah* by minimizing the requirements to the very core.

The conclusion that we derive from Halakhah is that even if one does not have a whole *sukkah*, but at least a little piece of it, that too is good. So wonderful, so vital, so significant is the commandment of *sukkah*, that one must strive for whatever he can get out of it.

So it is with peace, *shalom*. I do not know if the classical ideal of total and universal peace ever really existed. I believe it is more of a myth than a reality. One scholar calculated that from the year 1500 B.C.E. to the year 1860 C.E., there were no less than about 8,000 peace treaties that were signed,

each one purporting to secure permanent peace, and each one lasting an average of two years. (See H. B. Stevens, *The Recovery of Culture*, New York, 1949, p. 221.) And that was before the two World Wars! I do not believe there is anyone alive today who can remember a time when universal peace prevailed. In all likelihood, we must resign ourselves to the bitter fact that this is a messianic ideal, one which will indeed not be realized until the Messiah has come.

Nevertheless, so precious is peace, so great is peace, that – like the *sukkah* – even a little piece of peace is a blessing! Even בשעת מלחמה, when the world is ravaged by war, we must seek the refuge of little islands of *shalom*, peace.

These bitter days, when even the illusion of peace has been shattered in the Holy Land, we must thank the Lord for the little pieces of peace, and strive our mightiest to retain them.

We must pray that even at the Israeli-Jordanian border, the uneasy peace will continue undisturbed, that the little King [Hussein] who had such a short memory in 1967 will remember more now, and, no matter what maneuvers he must undertake to satisfy his Arab critics, he will make sure that the border does not go up in flames.

We must pray that the friendship, peace, and understanding that currently prevails between Israel and the government of the United States will continue for a long time to come. So far the United States has proved to be a secure friend of Israel in this war. May the Almighty grant that this continue, that the superpower of which we are citizens remain steadfast and confront the enemies of Israel with determination.

Even more important is the *shalom* that prevails amongst Jews. Between 1967 and Yom Kippur of 1973, it seemed at times that the State of Israel and the Jewish people would be rent apart almost irrevocably by various struggles, factionalism, and animosities. It is a pity that it takes a war to bring us together. But this time we must attempt to forge links of fraternity between Jew and Jew that will not fall apart when the pressures of the outside world begin to wane and ebb. This time we must resolve that we will remain secure with the feeling of powerful Jewish identity, fraternity, and brotherliness, come what may. This time we must insist that the relations between Jew and Jew remain supreme even when we are not threatened by the missiles of the enemy.

Perhaps most important of all is the peace between God and Israel. We must pray for שלום בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים, that we will be at peace with our Father in Heaven. I mean this in two ways. First, *our* attitude to God. We were spoiled by the Six-Day War of 1967. We won a lightning victory that stunned everyone – even the generals, who later on knowingly and foolishly bragged that they knew all along we would win a stunning victory. The fortunate trauma of total triumph did something to the Jewish soul; it shook up Jews in Israel and throughout the world, it penetrated beneath the hardened layers of Sabra cynicism and realism, and allowed some kind of spark, some kind of historical longing, some kind of spiritual nostalgia to express itself without self-consciousness and embarrassment. What a great opportunity that was for Israel to take a giant step forward spiritually! But it was not to be, whether the fault was that of religious Jews (which it probably was) or of the inexorable pace of routine life which was quickly resumed. What is quickly won, is quickly lost. A year after the 1967 war, there was hardly a souvenir left of the feeling of spiritual exaltation which so gripped the entire country. The religious renaissance simply never materialized.

Perhaps now it will be different. Most unfortunately, this is not going to be a mere 6-day war. It is going to be much more difficult. The casualties are already greater than they were in the entire 1967 war. But when it is over, and we will have prevailed (with the help of God), maybe then the slower pace of victory will produce a different attitude: not one of sudden seizures of religious insight which will, like a flash, illuminate and vanish quickly, but a slow understanding, a mature development, a profound realization that we are totally alone in the so-called "Family of Nations"; that in the long run, after we have relied upon each other as Jews, and after we have secured ourselves militarily and politically, ultimately אֵין לָנוּ לַהֲשֵׁעַן אֱלֹהַּ עַל אֲבִינוּ שֶׁבִּשְׁמַיִם, we have only God in Whom we can trust, and with Whom we must make peace first and foremost. In the Jewish religious conception, every great event in one's life, and every great historical event in the life of people, must lead to a הִרְהוּר תְּשׁוּבָה, to a feeling of repentance, to a reconsideration of one's way, to a change in one's spiritual orientation. I firmly believe that we were not created and brought through the entire historical process, with all its agonies, in order to be a small embattled nation which will have to fight for its very existence every few years. We were meant for greater things, for achievements that will have made all this struggle

worthwhile. We were destined for something for which nationhood and independence are prerequisites, but which transcend mere political entities. So we must determine that when this war is done, it will lead to a greater feeling of *shalom* between Israel and its Creator.

But there is another side to this coin. And that is the *shalom* or peace by God towards Israel. Because 1967 produced such a brilliant and quick victory, many of us are today depressed by the slower and more agonizing pace of events. But I would not like to see despair as the only alternative to the exaltation of triumph. No, we must not, we dare not, despair. It simply cannot be that we are finished as a state or as a people. For a brief few years in our living memory, God abandoned us. He turned His face from us, and we were almost wiped out. But immediately thereafter, from 1948 and on, something else happened in the relationship between God and Israel. He restored us to – if you permit me the use of the term – a Most Favored Nation Status in the divine economy. It is a status to which we have been recalled and which is irrevocable. We can no longer afford to be abandoned. We must proceed throughout the remainder of this war and its aftermath confident in the faith that the Almighty will never again forsake us, that we shall remain the people through whom He will execute His designs for History, the People who, having been brought back to its ancient homeland, will continue to vindicate the historic promise to our forefather Abraham.

So we strive for peace even in pieces. Every bit of it, every piece of peace, every iota of *shalom*, is precious to us.

Rav Kook continues with the following insight: the Rabbis of the Talmud made two statements that are fascinating. In one (Shabbat 10b), they say שמו של הקב"ה שלום, the name of the Holy One is: "Peace." In the other one (Shabbat 55a) they say: חותמו של הקב"ה אמת, the seal of the Holy One is: "Truth." So the name of God is Peace, and the seal of God is Truth. What is the difference between these terms?

Rav Kook answers: a name is something that is both written and pronounced consecutively or sequentially. First you write one letter, then the next letter, and so on. Similarly, in articulating a name, you pronounce first one syllable, then the next. When you imprint a seal, however, then you do it not sequentially, but simultaneously. You engrave the seal on the paper and all of it comes out at once.

Truth is a seal. It must be all or nothing. A piece of truth is a lie. A fragmented truth is a falsehood. But when it comes to peace, there we cannot expect all at once. There we must try for even a letter, even a vowel, even a syllable. We must strive even for peace in pieces.

Almighty God, spread over us the *sukkah* of *shalom*, over us and all Israel and Jerusalem. Like the *sukkah*, we are anxious for as much as we can get of the divine blessing of peace. Even little pieces of it are gifts that we cherish infinitely.

But with all this, we pray as we do in the הושענות prayers – הושענא סוכת שלום – help us and prosper us with the *sukkah* that will be *shalem* – complete, a peace that will be inviolate, and universal as well.

### **How Can We Be Happy on this Simchat Torah?**

Earlier this week, a number of people called me to express their very deeply held feelings. Considering the difficult position of Israel, the carnage, the dangers, and the grim outlook, how can we possibly sing and dance when we celebrate Simchat Torah? When all American Jews walk around distraught, depressed, and unhappy, how can we bring ourselves to be cheerful and joyous? Is it not inappropriate to act merry at a time of this sort?

I confess that I too am troubled by this conflict of emotions and sentiments. How, indeed, shall we participate in a joyous Simchat Torah when Israeli soldiers have suffered such high casualties? How shall we sing while Jewish mothers weep? How shall we dance while Jewish families in Israel grieve?

And yet, shall we act on these sentiments and therefore mute, moderate, or even cancel out our Simchat Torah celebrations?

The answer is No, most certainly no. My conclusion issues not only from halakhic considerations, but from my reading of the spiritual judgment of Judaism as well. What is *Simchah* (joy, happiness)? Maimonides tells us first what it is not; it must never be *sikhlut ve-holelut*, frivolousness and levity. Rather, true Jewish joy must contribute to *avodah le-yotzer ha-kol*, it must be a form of service to the Creator of all that exists.

We can, I believe, discern at least four specific strands in this complex emotion called *Simchah*.

First, Jewish joy is a sign of *emunah*, faith. It is an expression of our commitment to the existence of God as the Source of all. *Ve-samachta lifnei Hashem Elokecha*, we are joyous "before the Lord our God." Halakhically, the presentation of oneself "before the Lord" occasions *Simchah*. The very knowledge that you stand in the presence of the Lord – that itself is the greatest source of joy. That is why our happiness is called Simchat Torah, the happiness with the Torah. How happy are we



that we are a people of Torah, a people whose base passions are restrained and whose aspirations are refined by Torah.

In the psalm that we usually recite on Saturdays and Holidays before the *birkhat ha-mazon* (grace), we say the following words: *az yomeru va-goyyim bigdil Hashem la'asot im eleh* – "then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us, we rejoiced." Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch makes a most incisive comment on these two verses. The nations of the world were able to appreciate God's greatness to us after they saw the full victory of Israel's restoration. However, we Jews were able to be happy even before that, even during the bitterness of exile, even during the long oppression which the *goyyim* visited upon us. *Az yomeru va-goyyim* – only *az*, then, at the time of triumph, were the *goyyim* (nations) able to understand happiness. But *bigdil Hashem la'asot imanu*, we ourselves were able to appreciate God's greatness and goodness to us, and *hayinu semichem* – in the past tense – we were able to rejoice and achieve happiness even before our liberation and triumph, even at the time that adversity surrounded us from all sides. For Jews are possessed of *emunah*, faith, and this is what gives us *Simchah*.

The second strand in *Simchah* is: *bitachon*, confidence in the Almighty that He will help us. As we shall say tomorrow during the *Hakafot* or circuits about the synagogue: *Ozer dalim hoshi'ah na*, God who helps the poor and the downtrodden and the disadvantaged will help us.

Just yesterday, a nurse returned to the United States directly from serving with the Israeli army at the Suez front. What she reported was most revealing. She served with a group of young Sephardi soldiers, most of whom were so-called secularists or non-religious. She described how they gathered on the eve of Sukkot to "daven" *Ma'ariv* without lights but under the full moon over the Sinai. Afterwards they retired to a Sukkah, and there they ate their festive meal. She described the utter devotion of the soldiers who prayed fervently and ate in the Sukkah performing the mitzvah with such great attentiveness and love. Then they left the Sukkah – and the Sukkah traveled away on the back of a truck! She was asked: what did you find most unnerving, most upsetting? Her answer speaks volumes: when I returned to New York and saw the long, drawn, sad faces on the Jews of the United States!

Many of us were rightly disturbed by the unwarranted over-confidence and even cockiness of the Israeli spokesmen in their initial reactions to the Yom Kippur attack. But the Israelis are not fools. They learn quickly. And they are not fools when they refuse to succumb to depression and despair. They are greater realists than we are. Consider how wise is their perspective. They know that although the situation today is not as good as in 1967, it is better than in 1948! And it is a million times better than in 1940, or 1941, 1942, 1943 or 1944!

Third, *Simchah* for the Jew issues from a recognition of the complexities, ambivalences, and ambiguities of life. The Jew knows that there is no sorrow without *nechama* or consolation; no joy without sadness. His *Simchah* is one that has been tested in the crucible of life; it is not a blind fiction that he creates as a means of psychological self-defense.

The Rabbis taught in the Ethics of the Fathers: *Al titya'esh min ha-puranut*. This can be interpreted in two ways. One is that when things are going well, when good fortune smiles upon you and you bask in affluence and good health, do not imagine that it will always remain thus. Do not distract yourself from the underlying misery and sadness and insecurity of life. Do not "give up" on the possibility that adversity may strike, cruelly and suddenly. But there is another way to interpret the same Mishnah: never despair because of adversity! When misfortune strikes, when life seems to crowd you in, when you are caught in narrow straits, when the sun has set and life seems to have darkened – nevertheless, do not give up, do not yield to despair, do not imagine that help will never come!

That is why we break a glass at a wedding, the time of supreme joy, as a token of *zecher le-churban*, in memory of the destruction of the Temple. And that is why on Tisha Be'av, the day of national calamity, we do not say the *Tachanun* prayer, because this very day is called *Mo'ed*, a holiday! We introduce a note of sadness during the wedding, and a note of joy during Tisha B'av. Yet – we do weep on Tisha Be'av and we do dance at weddings! Our sorrow is never untouched by a realistic recognition of the disasters of life. To be sad does not mean to interpret all of existence as an unmitigated evil, and to be happy does not mean to ignore the tragic dimension of life. No wonder the Halakhah teaches that there are times we must recite two blessings simultaneously – *Ha-tov ve-hameitiv* and *Dayyan ha'emet*, the blessing over good news and the blessing over evil tidings!

A great Sephardic sage, Rabbi Hayyim Alfandri, was once asked why we recite the *Mah Nishtanah* on Passover and not on Sukkot. After all, with all the differentness of the Passover Seder, there is something much more blatantly unusual about the Sukkot festival – especially leaving one's home and repairing to a little booth built outdoors. He answered that the nature and the meaning of the Sukkot festival is *Tzeh mi-dirat keva le-dirat aray*, leave your permanent home and go into a temporary domicile. The symbol of Sukkah is temporariness, exile, wandering. It is a sign of *Galut*. And that is the answer: *Galut*, wandering, exile, suffering, all this is no *chiddush*, no surprise to a Jewish child! When he sees this he is not moved to ask *Mah Nishtanah*, "why is this night different?" And nevertheless, despite the symbol of exile and wandering and persecution, it is a holiday that is called *Zeman Simchateinu*, the time of our happiness. And we sing. And we dance.

For this is the Jewish way: we recognize the interpenetration of sadness and joy, of fortune and misfortune, of adversity and gladness.

*Simchah* is a paradoxical phenomenon, especially with us Jews. We are not always happy because things are going our way, but often we manage to retain our emotional equanimity and spiritual composure despite adversity, and sometimes even because of adversity. If Jews had decided to spurn *Simchah* because of misfortune, we would have had a year-long Tisha Be'av for the last 1900 years! After the destruction of the Temple in the year 70, there was indeed a group of people who declared that they would never again eat meat or drink wine or celebrate at weddings, because of their disconsolate grief at the destruction of the Temple and the loss of national independence. Certainly, their hearts were in the right places. But the Halakhah disagreed with these *aveilei Tziyon ve-Yerushalayim*. It declared that we institute *zecher le-churban* – various ceremonies to memorialize the destruction – but not a life-long reenactment of the *churban*.

Furthermore, if *Simchah* is to be expressed only when our joy is complete and unmarred, by what moral right has any Jew in this country or any other country sung or danced or gone to the theater or watched television or made a party these past 30 years?!

In reading the various diaries of the survivors of the Holocaust, and in talking to members of this congregation – some of whom are here this morning – who lived through the death camps, I

learned that in the very concentration camps, during Simchat Torah, when the Nazis increased their viciousness and their bestiality, nonetheless Jews continued to sing and, if possible, dance, and to will themselves into a happy frame of mind! They did not yield to the grief and the depression that the enemies wished and visited upon them!

Of course we will not forget the soldiers who fell on the Golan Heights or in the Sinai desert. They are our flesh and blood. We weep with their broken-hearted parents, their bereaved wives, their orphaned children. They are part of us, and their pain is our pain. After the sermon, and before beginning the Yizkor service, we shall recite a special memorial prayer for them. And of course we will do things – we will pray, we will give more than we promised to UJA and Bonds, and perhaps we will even try to use our automobiles less often, saving gas, thus depriving the Arab oil blackmailers of their nefarious devices. But we will also be happy and we will dance. Because this is the Jewish way.

A fourth element is this: Simchah is itself a weapon with which to forge good news and battle evil. The author of Tanya asks the following question: the Rabbis taught us that on Sukkot, during the days of the Temple, seventy sacrifices were offered up, equivalent to the traditional number of nations in the world, seventy. But why should that be so? Do we not know that *be-yadu'a Esav soneh et Yaakov*, that the overwhelming majority of them hate Israel? In that case, if they are our mortal enemies, why should we offer sacrifices for them? The answer is this: the sacrifices were expressions of *Simchah*. And with a Jew, *Simchah* trumps *sin'ah*, happiness overcomes hatred, joy is the Jew's secret and most effective line of defense.

If we give in now to depression and despair and gloom, we will hand a psychological and spiritual victory to Sadat and Faisal, to Malik and Fulbright. But when we dance on Simchat Torah, that is the greatest expression of Jewish defiance. *Am Yisrael chai*, our people of Israel will live!

We all saw that picture in the New York Times last week, the picture of an Israeli soldier, carrying a *Sefer Torah*, surrendering to the Egyptians at the Suez. I wept when I saw it, as I am sure you did. It reminded me of those painful pictures of Jews, enrobed in *Tallit* and *Tefillin*, and carrying *Sifrei Torah* as they were taunted by the Nazis. Furthermore, I felt a special connection to that young man, because I have been told that there was an exceptionally large number of Yeshiva students (coming

from the *yeshivot ha-besder*, schools like Kerem b'Yavneh, Yeshivat Hakotel, Yeshivat Har Etzion, Yeshivat Shaalvim) who happened to be manning the lines on that fateful Yom Kippur day. I know quite a number of these youngsters, and I know their friends. So I wept, and I still do, for that boy and for his Sefer Torah. But I will also sing for that boy this Simchat Torah. And I will dance with other Sifrei Torah for that Sefer Torah which now lies in captivity. Because no one can take our Torah from us – and no one can take us from our Torah. Because no one can take Israel from us – and no one can take us from Israel.

Of course it is not easy to engage in *Simchah* when your heart is "sitting *shivah*." But Torah wasn't made for convenience, for emotional luxury. Torah demands of us not only a discipline of action and appetite, but an iron discipline of emotion as well. It commands us to laugh even when we want to cry, to dance when we want to faint, to sing when we want ashes and sackcloth.

So we shall be happy tomorrow: *sisu ve-simchu be-simchat ha-Torah*. We shall be happy because it is an act of *emunah*, faith. We shall be happy because it is an expression of *bitachon*, confidence in things to come. We shall be happy because our happiness issues not from childish and naive simplicity but from a recognition that life is complicated and complex and paradoxical. We shall be happy because our joy itself will overcome enmity and adversity, animosity and hostility. We shall try to restrain the sobs and sing out. And if a tear falls, we shall wipe it away and continue to dance. Because when we hold the Torah, we know that no defeat is permanent, and that victory will surely come. *Ki tetze la-milchamah al oyevecha ve-ra'ita sus va-rechev am rav mimecha*. "When you go out to war against your enemies" (Deut. 20:1-4), and you will see all his armies gathered against you, horse and chariot, tanks and jets and missiles, an army far greater in number than yours, outnumbering and overwhelming you – you shall not be afraid of them, for the Lord your God is with you, the God who took you out of the land of Egypt, and who let you triumph 3 times in the last 25 years against Egypt.

*Ve-haya ke-karavchem el ha-milchamah ve-nigash ha-kohen el ha'am ve'amar aleihem*, And it shall be when war draws near, that the spiritual leader, the priest, shall come forth and speak to the people and say unto them *Shema Yisrael, atem kereivim ha-yom la-milchamah al oyeveichem* – "Hear O Israel, you are approaching this day war against your enemies." Do not let your heart melt and

become faint. Do not be afraid. Do not panic. Do not buckle down in front of them. For it is the Lord your God who goes together with you to do battle with you against your enemies *le-hoshi'a lachem*, and He will help you, redeem you, and bring you your victory.

And ultimately – *shalom*, peace.

### **Hello, Cruel World**

For forty days and nights the heavens opened and the rains came. Then, for some one-hundred and fifty days, the waters rose. The world was engulfed in a cataclysm, and all living things were drowned in their watery graves. Afterwards, the waters receded, and the earth was turned into a mushy swamp. Finally, as Noah's ark rested on Mount Ararat, he heard the divine command: "God spoke to Noah, saying: *Tzei min ha-tevah*, Go out of the ark."

A careful reading of this passage indicates that apparently Noah was averse to leaving his ark. After all, for several periods of seven days each he had sent out birds to test the quality of the land, and decided that it is better to stay indoors. At the end, he did not leave until he heard a direct order by God to do so. He needed a divine command to eject him from his ark.

Philo, the Midrash, and the Ibn Ezra, among others, all wonder why Noah was so reluctant to leave. After all, I imagine that had I been cooped up with the same people and with all those animals in a floating menagerie for twelve months, I would be extremely anxious to get out and place my feet on earth again.

The commentaries offer various answers, but none of them is completely satisfactory.

Let us search for an answer by putting ourselves in Noah's place. That should not be too difficult. Because, in a manner of speaking, we too have almost had a Noah-experience. *Mutatis mutandis*, we Jews are just emerging from our ark, surveying the terrain, discovering death and destruction in so many families we know, and, even more, becoming suddenly precipitously aware of the flood of fire that engulfed and almost destroyed our people.

I find several reasons, as a result of this psychological identification with Noah, why he would not want to leave the ark. I discover the elements of fear, despair, weariness at having to start all over

again, even feelings of guilt. But, because of lack of time, allow me to concentrate on one special reaction that I suspect Noah had – because I experienced it in our analogous situation.

I believe that Noah was reluctant to leave his ark because of disgust. He must have surveyed the land about him and noticed painfully how this beautiful world had been destroyed, how all the magnificence of nature and the achievements of man had been turned to naught – all because of the irresponsibility, the immorality, the petty thievery of his contemporaries. He must have looked at this deluge-soaked ruin that the earth had become, and shuddered in revulsion at the kind of people who brought this on. He probably thought to himself that it is preferable to remain in the company of honest beasts rather than to walk even amongst the remains of such false humans. Touching earth again made him relive his profound disappointments in his fellow men, and he wished to stay on the ark.

I can sympathize with Noah. Having lived through the past three weeks, who is not disappointed in *Homo Sapiens*? What Jew would want to embrace this treacherous hypocritical world?

The Rabbis speak of the flood brought on because of the sin of those who used to steal *pachot mi-shaveh perutah*, articles worth less than a penny. And then they speak not only of *mabbul shel mayim*, the flood of water that engulfed the world in the days of Noah, but also the threat of *Mabbul Shel esh*, the flood of fire.

We are, all of us, sick and disgusted by the *Mabbul shel mayim*, the petty thievery that has brought on, if not a flood of water, then a flood of Watergate revelations. They are sickening to all of us.

But far more consequential, far more disastrous, infinitely more evil, is the duplicity in international politics which threatens to bring a *mabbul shel esh*, a flood of fire onto the world and especially onto the Jewish people. Watergate remains indeed a petty crime when compared with the enormity of the blasphemous collusion that now threatens us with the fire of Soviet missiles' bombs.

Consider this: when Israel was first attacked from two sides, during these fateful 24 or 48 hours, and the United States brought in a ceasefire proposal to the Security Council, it could hardly find one other government to go along with it. There were all kinds of discussions and conversations,



and we were told that they could not agree on a ceasefire resolution until "the military situation is clarified." What incredible rot, what transparent hypocrisy! What they meant – and any intelligent 10-year old knew about it – was that they first had to find out who was winning the battle. If the Israelis were winning, they would call an immediate ceasefire in order to limit its victories. If the Egyptians and Syrians were winning, they would let them continue until they finished off Israel.

And our great Western allies: France, *la belle France*! They have become the successors to India and Krishna Menon as the paragons of pious duplicity, of sanctimonious self-righteousness, of moral unctuousness. And France continues to maintain that the Mirages it sends to Libya are not meant for combat. Apparently, they are meant merely for the entertainment of Libya's dictator who likes to play with jet planes.

England, that land of civilization and gentlemen, continues to play the same game it always has: when you are out of the government, you are a pro-Israel Zionist, and when you are in the government you are pro-Arab. And it does not matter whether you are Tory or Labor.

And those primitive African nations, bribed by oil, who do not have the elementary decency to break relations with Israel and keep quiet, but have to float ads in the New York Times, maintaining that their enmity towards Israel is not because of oil, but because of the issues – and here they repeat the ritualistic inanities about Israel, mimicking the Arabs. And these nations have the unmitigated gall to call themselves "non-aligned!"

Greece and Turkey, which have been greased and fattened by United States help, will not allow their great benefactor to come to the help of an embattled small ally.

And Germany – ah Germany! What marvelous progress! Thirty years ago Germans killed and others were passive spectators, surveying the massacre of Jews with glossy eyes, and never raising a voice in protest. Now the Germans have climbed up the moral ladder. Now others are doing the killing, while Germany stands by as the passive spectator refusing to help!

When Moses took the Children of Israel out of Egypt to Palestine he pleaded with the leaders of Edom: *Naavrah na be'artzekha*, permit us to go through your land; we will not harm anything and we will pay for everything. But Edom refused. And so these contemporary descendants of Edom, these

modern reincarnations of Esau and all that he stands for, refuse to allow Israel even airspace above their territories!

And the United Nations – what an abominable exercise in low comedy! The Security Council has become a forum in which people revile each other in obscene language, in which delegates rush at each other in fist fights, and open their jackets to bear gun-holsters. International delegates have become armed thugs, and the Security Council is characterized by brawls that would disgrace a self-respecting saloon. A world forum steeped in double-think and obvious anti-Semitism!

So there is a tendency for us to clam up, to shut ourselves in, to remain enclosed in our own cocoons, to turn sour on the world. We react with disgust and revulsion. We build ourselves psychological arks, constructed from emotional strands of disgust and revulsion and fear and despair and wariness, and we prefer to remain away, remote from the world.

Yet, the divine command calls out to us *tzei min ha-tevah*, get out of that ark. What shall we do? The answer is you must reassess your understanding of man. It is quite possible that your disappointment in man was so great because your expectations were too high. You, Noah, must no longer entertain such extravagant notions about man's capacities. You have been too idealistic and too romantic.

Note this: God encourages Noah to a more realistic view by telling him that, as it were, God too had a mistaken notion of what man could accomplish. The divine judgment is issued: *Yetzer lev ha'adam ra mi'neurav*, I have just "discovered" that the inclination of man's heart is evil from his very infancy. God says: from now on man need no longer be a vegetarian, he may eat meat. I had imagined heretofore that man could rise to a higher level (to the level where he can exist without spilling blood) by himself. Now I see that I must compromise. I must allow this gluttonous, bloodthirsty human to bite into meat and let the blood soil his mouth and his heart, and perhaps in that way allay his blood-lust for his fellow human. But one maintain standard I insist upon: no murder of fellow man.

So, become realistic! Do not expect too much, but keep your minimum ideals alive.

For us, that means that we must do away with our old liberal pipe-dream about the capacity of the human community to transcend its *Yetzer*, its own self-interest at all costs. No more must we turn

our eyes heavenward and put on a pious mien when we recite that liberal litany about the UN representing "the family of nations." Family of nations indeed! But there are families and there are families; there are good families and there are Mafia families! And the UN has proved itself to be a Mafia family of Nations!

No more must we permit ourselves messianic fervor in speaking of the international community, as if a large collection of individual nation-roguers can merely by virtue of its size, become saintly.

We must recognize that cynicism and deceit and duplicity are part of the game, and we must not expect it to be otherwise.

But we must continue to use our ideals realistically. We must continue to insist that man is created in the *tzelem Elokim*, in the image of God, and we must always strive to enhance that image – even if we are the only ones to do so. Because that is our burden, and that is our glory.

So Noah teaches us something about our own condition today. Despair and guilt and disgust all make us turn away from the world and the tasks at hand. It is a justifiable reaction, God forces us too out of our psychological and emotional arks and prods us to reenter the stream of events, in effect to say "hello" to the cruel world, and go about our business wiser if sadder.

These have been traumatic weeks and we shall have to rethink them, reexamine ourselves, indulge in national self-criticism, and ask new questions. But despite our own well-founded reluctance to take on new tasks, we shall have to emerge into the new situations with resolve, vigor, vitality and, above all, a proper combination of realism and idealism.

And like Noah who was commanded to leave the ark and confront the world in all its cruelty, so may we be the recipients of *va-yevarekh Elokim et Noah*, the divine blessing.

*Abi Gezunt*

Our Sidra opens this morning with the revelation of God to Abraham. We are not told what it was that God told the patriarch, but the Rabbis inform us that the Lord, as it were, was performing the commandment of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick. Abraham was an old man, he had just been circumcised, and he was indisposed. It was at this time of his recuperation that God paid him the visit.

Reading of this account affords us the opportunity to speak about the Jewish view of sickness and health, and especially one of the most significant and cherished precepts in the Torah, that of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick.

First, it is unquestionable that health is an important value. Judaism raises *shemirat ha-guf*, care for the body, to the level of a *mitzvah* or precept. Maimonides had taught, long before Benjamin Franklin, that a sound mind depends upon a sound body. To deny that health is a great value is to fly in the face of the facts of Jewish teaching. Every four weeks we offer a special prayer at the advent of the new month in which we ask for *chilutz atzamot*, health, and three times every day we turn to God and pray, *refa'enu*, "Heal us, O Lord." Those who suffer from illness, either themselves or in their families, can surely appreciate the great blessing that good health is.

And yet, I question the implicit prejudice of many uninformed and semi-informed people that health is Judaism's chief value. Thus, for instance, they interpret the laws of Kashrut and Mikvah as primarily hygienic regulations, when in fact they are not such.

Furthermore, we are all acquainted with the Yiddishism, "*Abi Gezunt*" – as long as you are well. You've lost a fortune? – "*Abi Gezunt*." You failed a crucial test? – "*Abi Gezunt*." You are getting a divorce and breaking up your home? – "*Abi Gezunt*." Your children are marrying out of the faith? – "*Abi Gezunt*."

"*Abi Gezunt*" is based upon a philosophical assumption which I deny, namely, that health is the highest value. Perhaps this overemphasis on health derives from the tradition of the sickly child who

grew up undernourished in a sunless and cold ghetto, nurturing a secret envy of the strong, healthy, brutish peasants who tormented him.

The fact is that the danger to health or even life suspends most prohibitions, but not all of them. The three major sins – idolatry, homicide, and unchastity – are not annulled because of reasons of health or life itself. Thus, "Therapeutic adultery" is considered an abomination by the Torah. Immoral expression for the sake of enhancing physical or mental health is clearly forbidden by the Halakha. Holiness is more important than health. *Kiddush Hashem*, "the sanctification of God's Name" (or martyrdom) too takes precedence over health. The soldiers who crossed the Suez into the Israeli bridgehead would have been much healthier in Tel Aviv. Yet not only their generals, but their Rabbis too, sent them into battle!

"*Abi Gezunt*" is not true to our tradition. It is a Yiddishism which is not consonant with Judaism. It is a distortion of Jewish values because it is a half-truth, a misplaced emphasis. Holiness is important, but it is not the most important value. John F. Kennedy, whose tenth Yahrzeit is being observed this month, was not really "*Gezunt*." He was in pain most of his life. Would one call that a wasted life?

I have known people who have no sight, but do have extraordinary insight. And I know people with 20/20 vision who are blind to the beauty, the marvel, the sanctity of life. Who leads a more productive life? "*Abi Gezunt*?"

I know people who are bent over by cardiac disease, yet their hearts are young and vigorous and warm and full of compassion and love. I know others whose hearts never skip a beat, who are strong as can be – but they are callous, empty, cold. "*Abi Gezunt*?"

I know a person who has long been afflicted with cancer, but whose spirit is indomitable, whose heart is overflowing with courage and heroism, whose disposition is sweet and gentle. I know others who are healthy as oxen, but they are embittered, apprehensive, weak-willed. Is "*Abi Gezunt*" enough?

But I have a second objection to "*Abi Gezunt*" from an entirely different perspective. Permit me to begin with a few comments on the commandment of *bikur cholim*.

According to the Halakhah, a basic part of the observance of this commandment to visit the sick is: prayer. One must, preferably in the presence of the patient, offer up the following prayer: "May it be Thy will that You quickly send a speedy recovery from Heaven, health of soul and health of body, to so-and-so amongst all the other sick of Israel."

Why "amongst the other sick?" Because this prayer is an attempt to overcome the patient's loneliness, his solitude, by joining him to the community of the sick, the *she'ar Cholei Yisrael*, the other sick of Israel. The patient suddenly feels that he is out of things, the flux of life is bypassing him, the world has forgotten him. His family and business and friends seem to be getting along without him. He is shocked by his discovery; I am not indispensable, I may even be expendable! He is overwhelmed by his own marginality and insecurity, by the fragility of his life. He is so alone! So we remind him that he is not alone, for he is included *be-tokh she'ar cholei Yisrael*. You are not the only one who is sick. You are, along with other patients, part of a world-wide community of the bed-ridden.

Perhaps we ought to go further and modify and broaden this interpretation of that prayer. Perhaps *she'ar cholei Yisrael* does not mean that this patient is part of a well-defined community of specific people who happen to be sick. Rather, we are all of us *cholei Yisrael*! All people are sick! All humans are patients. All men and women are blind in some way, deaf and dumb and lame and maimed and feverish and unbalanced. Maimonides, that great physician, spoke of the defects of character in terms of *Choli* and *refuah*, health and illness. Who, by this definition, is in full and robust health?

What I am saying is that the definition of well or ill must not be confined to individual organs or only to the physical self. Rather, it is a question of wholeness of body and mind and emotion and will and soul and spirit. The Hebrew expression *refuah shelemah*, complete recovery or health, comprehends both *refuat ha-guf* (the health of the body) and *refuat ha-nefesh* (the health of the soul).

The sick man is thus told: The whole human condition is sick. You are only one case where the symptoms more obviously show that something is out of kilter. But you are not alone. We are all fragmented and atomized. We all lack wholeness and wholesomeness. Some need *refuat ha-guf*, physical health; almost all of us require *refuat ha-nefesh*, spiritual healing.

There is no such thing as "*Abi Gezunt*." There are no truly "*Gezunt*" people; and if there are, they are mighty few!

That is what *she'ar Cholei Yisrael* means. Proof of this is the similar formula that is recited when consoling the mourners. When we leave, we say to them; "May the Lord console you *be'tokh she'ar avelei Tzion vi'yerushalayim*, amongst all other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." Who are these "mourners of Zion and Jerusalem?" They are – all of us! All Jews! We are all mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. For the last 1,904 years we are in mourning, even as today we are in special mourning for the flower of Israel's youth destroyed and maimed so callously and unnecessarily. So the mourner is not alone. And in the same way, the ill person is not alone. He is part of the human community of the sick. Our body politic is moribund. Ethically we are at a dangerously low ebb. Morally, society is drowning in its own filth. We are sick and absurd and unhealthy in every conceivable way – some more, some less, but all ill. It is part of our inescapable metaphysical finitude, our unavoidable existential fate.

Diogenes was looking for an honest man. He would have had even greater difficulty had he been looking for a healthy man. Because, truly, all the world's a hospital.

Am I exaggerating when I suggest such a dour diagnosis of our human condition? I think not. With all the crime and lying in high places, we know that there is blight and moral cancer in world leadership, from Washington to Moscow to the UN. All the world's a hospital.

When there is no echo, no response to Israel's anguished cry, when it discovers the bodies of Israeli soldiers bound hand and foot on the Syrian front – according to one report I read, bound by the straps of their own Tefillin! – and tortured to death and mutilated, then it is not only the Arabs who are demented savages, but the world which will not issue an outcry of protest that is mad, dangerously insane, mortally sick, morally leprous!

The world religious leaders? Official Christian leadership has been as silent during the Yom Kippur War as it was right before the Six-Day War. This is "*Gezunt*?"

Ah, but surely the intellectuals are healthy? Consider this: a few days after the outbreak of this war, the Israeli Writers Association sent letters to hundreds of writers and poets throughout the world asking for their support for Israel in this hour of its travail. Until the middle of this week, not a single

word has been heard, not a single reply given, not a single letter received. There was, perhaps, one notable exception: the renowned Soviet physicist Sakharov, who talked up on behalf of Israel even without being asked. But he will probably, because of this, wind up in a Russian insane asylum! "*Abi Gezunt?*"

Lest we feel swelled up with ethnic pride or jingoism, and maintain that at least we American Jews have proved healthy, let us think about our own condition. We are healthy? Maybe and maybe not. It is true that the outpouring of help and sympathy and assistance by American Jews to Israel was most commendable, even historic. And yet, despite everything, those who are active on behalf of Israel will tell you that the total number of people who gave anything to U.J.A. or bought any Bonds, does not exceed 20 to 25 percent! Hence, the great majority of American Jews did – nothing. So we are not all "*Gezunt!*" American Jews know that their fate depends on Israel, and yet they were passive and indolent. Sick indeed! I Compare that to the young soldier in an Israeli hospital who was visited by my sister this past week. With his right hand he was tapping on the bed to the tunes of Shlomoh Carlebach who went from ward to ward, bringing joy and dispelling the gloom. Then a nurse came to attend to him and pulled back his sheet. When she shed a tear upon noticing that he had no limbs left except for that right arm, he consoled her saying; *Zeh shaveh li'medinat Yisrael*, "It is worth it for Israel." That boy is far healthier than many of us because he has found meaning in his life, he has sacrificed for something he believes in, he has lifted himself to a higher dimension; far healthier indeed than the American Jew who did not lift a finger to help because he was so involved in his own self-indulgence.

When we pray for health, we do not plead only for a small segment of the population. We pray for all of us, for all of mankind. We are all unhealthy. We all need healing, cure, recuperation.

Those who are bed-ridden, those of feverish brow and missing limbs, are only the obviously ill. Pity even more those who suffer from *Choli ha-nefesh* (spiritual sickness) than those who suffer from *Choli ha-guf* (physical illness), those who are sick and do not know it; those whose fatal wounds do not show and do not register on the thermometer – and therefore go on untreated. I have far more pity for the man who lacks sensitivity than for the one who is missing a kidney; for the pathetic person who has lost meaning in life than for the accident victim who lost a limb.



Pity the vain man who cannot bear not to be the center of attraction; his egocentricity is pathological.

Pity the man who cannot let go; he is ethically diseased.

Pity the woman who cannot grow old gracefully; she is emotionally debilitated. Pity the person who is obsessed with money and power and status; he is morally delirious in his hectic and frantic and pointless activities.

Pity the schemer and conniver and conspirator who has taken a healthy mind and twisted it into something sick.

Oh, how we need health! Oh how ridiculous to say of such people, just because they are not under a doctor's care, "*Abi Gezunt!*"

For indeed, the spiritually-morally sick are far different from and far worse than the merely physically ill. For of the physically sick the Sages taught that: *Shekbinah lemaalab merashotav shel ha-choleh*, the Presence of the Lord rests above the head of the patient. But just the reverse is true of the morally sick. Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin maintains that the term *Chilul Hashem*, the desecration of the Lord's name, comes from the word *Chalal*, a void, an empty space, signifying the absence of God. Where God is not, there you have desecration. Long before him, Ibn Ezra made a similar etymological observation. The term *chalilah* (far be it, or: profane – as in today's Sidra) is related to *chalil*, the flute, which is empty within.

I suggest that the same is true of the similar word *choleh*, the sick person. Ultimately, the etiology of our existential sickness, our pathological human condition, is our distance from God. That is what religion is all about.

Our disease is self-imposed. By turning from God, we turn against ourselves. By abandoning Torah, the source of our existence as Jews, we become dangerously anemic.

So I conclude on a rather optimistic note. The fact that all men are in some way sick does not excuse us individually, but should relieve the burden of those of us who are painfully aware of our personal shortcomings. And more important, because we know the cause of our spiritual malaise, we know how to correct it. It is – the return to God, the rapprochement with Torah, the rediscovery of the

spirit. The prescription is an ancient one, but it is still valid and always will be. This is the source of my optimism. And the prognosis – that depends on us.

Abraham, our first father, ignored his pain and discomfort and rose to greet the angels of the Lord. And we, his children, must return to the same God. This is our way to health.

But there is a difference. When Abraham was sick, God sent an angel to heal him, while He personally, as it were, performed the act of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick. We prefer the reverse. We will gratefully accept visits by an angel. But we need personal attention from the Divine Physician Himself: *Refa'enu Hashem ve-nerafeh*; "Heal us, O Lord, and we will be healed." Only if God heals, if God comes, if we go to Him, then *ve-nerafeh*, shall we be healed.

When that happy day comes, we shall all be blessed with *refuah sheleimah*, which includes both health of body and health of soul.

Then, and only then, will we be entitled to say "*Abi Gezunt*."

### **A History of the Future**

In times of stress, there is a natural tendency to look for solutions in the occult. In periods of crisis and uncertainties, we try to lift the curtain of time and peer into the future by unearthing in ancient texts of hoary prophecies the secrets of events that have not yet occurred.

This is an understandable feeling, but I am not happy with it. In the last several weeks I have received several letters from friends and family in Israel, reporting to me about (or including newspaper clippings of) a book recently published which predicted the Yom Kippur War, and later developments which have not yet taken place. Also, a number of Hasidic teachers have made predictive announcements about current events in Israel. My answer to all of them was: abandon your naivete! True *bitachon* or *emunah* (faith or confidence) does not need arcane hints or mysterious allusions. It is not necessary to interpret every crisis and imminent confrontation between superpowers as the biblically prophesied מלחמת גוג ומגוג (the fateful War of Gog and Magog). I remember in my own lifetime how the theme of this biblical war of "the end of days" was applied in contemporary fashion, successively, to the wars between Germany and America, Germany and Russia, Russia and the United States, Russia and China, China and the United States, and this past month, between Russian and the United States. One imagines, from all this speculative talk, that the Messiah is about to call his first press conference...

It is interesting that the author of the book I mentioned, on the basis of his exegesis of several difficult verses in Daniel, predicted that Israel would achieve a stunning victory in the month of Cheshvan. Well, unfortunately, Heshvan has come and gone and we are now in Kislev, and Israel still has won no astounding victories.

Yet I would not want it to be thought that I in any way deny prophecy, or the ability of prophetic texts correctly to predict future events. It is just that I am distrustful of the tendency to rely upon our imaginative interpretations implicitly, as if our salvation will come from speculative

commentaries. But I do believe that there are certain historic patterns that tend to repeat themselves throughout human history. Moreover, I accept fully what our Rabbis said: מעשה אבות סימן לבנים, the biographies of the fathers anticipate the history of their descendants. The best place to look for such historic patterns is in the life of the Patriarchs, and it indeed happens that specific events of our own days reveal the contours of occurrences of long ago.

So, despite my own skepticism – or, perhaps, because of it, since I feel more confident when I approach such a difficult task critically – let me invite you to explore with me one such pattern of מעשה אבות in biblical history, and wonder with you if this is not סימן לבנים, a history of the future; whether or not the story of Jacob is a parable for Israel today.

The Biblical tale is simple and austere in the outlines of its drama. Esau has sworn to kill Jacob for supposedly stealing from him the blessings of their father Isaac. Esau was now marching against his brother, and Jacob was afraid. He divided his family, preparing for a massacre, and hoping that at least part of them would survive. Jacob then crossed the river and ויותר יעקב לבדו, Jacob remained alone. He is then attacked by a mysterious antagonist who struggles with him until dawn and injures Jacob in the thigh, so that he leaves the battle limping. The unknown assailant wishes to leave, but Jacob will not let him go כי אם ברכתני, until you will give me your blessing. The blessing is given, and Jacob is told that his name would henceforth be not "Jacob" but "Israel." The next day, Jacob proceeds to his encounter with Esau, and there is no bloody massacre, but instead, they meet and part in peace.

The Rabbis flesh out this story by adding a number of details. For instance, on the Biblical verse that וירא יעקב מאד וייצר לו, that Jacob was very frightened and sorely afraid, the Rabbis say that two synonyms for fright are used in order to indicate that not only was Jacob afraid of *being* killed, but he was equally afraid of *killing* others.

They say that the general strategy of Jacob included preparation for three policies: לדורון לתפילה, he prepared himself to give gifts to appease Esau; he prayed to God; and he made all preparations for war in case the two previous approaches failed.

Who was this assailant? The Rabbis answer that it was שרו של עשו, the guardian angel of

Esau; as it were, the spiritual cause of Esau. What did this angel look like? There are many answers. Some say כְּרוּעָה צֶאֱן נִדְמָה לוֹ, he appeared to Jacob like a shepherd. Others answer: כְּאַרְכִּילִיסְטִים, an arch-thief. Others say פֶּרְמָקוּס, a magician. And yet others say לוֹ נִרְאָה חֶכֶם, he appeared to him in the guise of a scholar.

Why did Jacob request a blessing from this stranger? The Rabbis answer: the whole battle was over the legitimacy of the blessings that Isaac had given to Jacob. And these blessings primarily concerned the right to *Eretz Israel*. The angel of Esau argued that the blessings of Jacob were illegitimately obtained, and therefore the Land of Israel belongs to Esau. Jacob was willing to settle in the battle if at least Esau would concede the justice of Jacob's claim, his cause, the right of his title to the Holy Land.

I have told the story as simply as I can. Let us now go to the dangerous part – the drawing of parallels.

To me, Esau is represented by today's Arabs. I know that many people will object and maintain that the appropriate biblical symbol for the Arabs is Ishmael. However, that is not necessarily so. Some anthropologists maintain that Palestinians are ethnically different from other Arabs, and hence not, in all probability, descended from Ishmael. Furthermore, if one wishes to play on names, Esau is identified as *Edom*, the "red one," and clearly Red Russia is behind the Arab cause today. Moreover, and more seriously, in the prophets, such as Obadiah, and much more explicitly in the medieval commentators such as Ramban, Esau always represents whoever it is who seeks to destroy Israel, no matter what his ethnic descent.

The Arabs of today, like Esau of old, swear vengeance against Israel. The fear of the Israelis in our day, like that of Jacob, is not only that they will be killed, but equally their revulsion against killing others.

That stark biblical phrase, וַיִּתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוּ, "and Jacob was left alone," was never more true than it is today, when we are isolated from all the world.

We too have a triple approach. We are prepared, no matter how hawkish our views, to give Esau his *doron* (gift) – some of the occupied territories. We approach the future, despite our depression, with *tefillah* or hope; and we are, of course, prepared for *milhamah* (war).

Our struggle with the angel of Esau is the core of all our current entanglements and difficulties. All the wars we have fought in the past 25 years have concerned the right of the Jews to the Land of Israel, assured us by the blessing of Abraham transmitted to Jacob through Isaac. The claim of our antagonists is that Jacob stole that blessing, with stealth and deceit, and therefore it is not rightly ours.

Our Arab-Esau enemy appears and has appeared in various guises. For some he is the *רועה צאן*, the shepherd; this is the romantic image of the bucolic Arab or the bedouin, reminiscent of Lawrence of Arabia or Hollywood's Sheik of Araby. Many of us see the Arabs as *ארכיליסטים*, a murderous figure, looking collectively somewhat like Arafat, with the sneer of Ibn Saud. Yet others see them as magicians, *פרמקוס*, who can dig their fingers into the dirty sand of the desert and pull out infinitely rich oil wells. And now we have learned, to our great regret and at our expense, that *בדמות תלמיד חכם נראה לו*, Arabs are not all fools, are not all primitive, that they can be shrewd diplomats who know how to isolate Israel by concerted action.

We emerged from this most recent encounter *צולע על ירכו*, injured and hurt, having lost our finest and our best, the young men who were killed or wounded or missing.

Thus far, it certainly seems as if the story of Jacob is the history of the future. What of the rest of the story?

I do not know, nor can anyone know. But if the rest of the story does follow true to the Patriarchal pattern, and one certainly hopes that it will, if life will follow the script of Scripture, then somehow or other our right to the Land of Israel, to our autonomous existence as a free State, will be legally acknowledged and morally confirmed by all the world. *שרו של עשו*, the Angel of Esau, will recognize us. The Arabs themselves will declare that our home is not "Jacob" but "Israel," that is, that our rights to the Holy Land are beyond moral reproach.

Indeed, that is already partly the case as the Arab nations declare, for the most part, that they are willing to accept the existence of Israel. Although all of us who have lived through the Holocaust

recognize that when they speak about pushing Israel back "to the borders of 1967," that is only the first step to pushing us back to the borders of 1947, nevertheless there has been some movement. And the encounter with Esau may yet turn out to be not another bloody war, but, after all, a peace conference!

Admittedly, there are many differences between the story of Jacob and our contemporary condition. Certainly Jacob was much more of a dove than a hawk, too much for the taste of most of us. Indeed, the later Jewish tradition castigates Father Jacob for being overly deferential to Esau. And yet, the same plot may hold its general outlines.

We may have to give Esau his *doron* or *minhab*, his gifts of occupied territory. We may emerge from this encounter limping. But we must never despair! We will survive and our right to Statehood will be recognized.

Such is the pattern of Jacob's life. Is it a paradigm for us? Dare we hope so? I think we may, although we may never feel any certainty about events of the future.

It is true that we may have to give more of a *doron* or מנחה לעשו, more of our territories, than we want or certainly ought to.

Nevertheless, listen carefully to the following Midrash, the report of what one great Sage told us. His words are recorded in the Midrash called (וישלח י"א) תנחומא ישן:

א"ר הושעיא, אמר לי זקן אחד: אומר לך טיבו של מדרש וכשתהא דורשו אמור אותו משמי: עתיד עשו להחזיר ליעקב כל מה שנטל מיעקב. שנא' מלכי תרשיש ואיים מנחה ישיבו" מנחה יביאו אין כתיב כאן. אלא מנחה ישיבו. אמרתי לו: זהו הדבר הטוב, ובמשך אני דורשו. אמר לי: ומה את שנתן לו מדעתו ... דברים שנטל מישראל באונס עאכו"כ.

Rabbi Hoshiah said: I met an old man who told me, "I will relate to you a beautiful Midrash, and when you preach it, mention it in my name. And that is, that Esau will some day return to Jacob all that he had taken from Jacob. How do I know this? Because the prophet said that "the Kings of Tarshish and Iyyim will return a gift to Jacob." It does not say that they will *bring* a gift, but that they will *return* a gift." I replied to the old man: "That is a beautiful thing, and I shall repeat it in your name." He then concluded by saying to me: "Now, if Esau will return to

Jacob that which Jacob gave him willingly, how much more so is it certain that those things that he took from Israel by force will he return to him!"

To which we may respond: **זהו הדבר הטוב**, that indeed is a good word, something worth believing in and hoping for in the future. And we add one word: **הלויאי**!



### **The Plot against Jacob**

There is an important and apparently ancient theme in the Agadah concerning the episode of Jacob and his children that is both intriguing and disturbing.

The Scriptural tale is well known. The brothers decided to sell Joseph as a slave, removed his “coat of many colors” and dipped it in blood, and then showed it to their father Jacob. Jacob was convinced that the blood-stained coat indicated that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast. He went into mourning for Joseph, and refused ever to be consoled.

For 22 years, Jacob did not find out that Joseph was still alive. So many people knew the truth, but the secret was never revealed to the old patriarch. Was this a plot against Jacob?

Indeed so! It was a true conspiracy.

The Agadah tells us that the brothers, in order to protect themselves against the wrath of their father, pronounced a חרם or excommunication against anyone who would reveal the true story to Jacob. They even included God, as it were, in their ban! And the Almighty went along and agreed to be bound by the excommunication uttered by the brothers. Thus, the Agadah states, God withdrew His שכינה or Presence from Jacob, and it did not return to him until he learned, over two decades later, that Joseph was indeed alive. (Thus, ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם, “and the spirit of their father Jacob lived again,” is interpreted as referring to the “spirit of God” or the presence of the שכינה). Joseph himself did not contact his father during this time. Moreover, the Rabbis interpret the words ויבך אותו אביו, “and his father wept over him,” as referring not to Jacob weeping over Joseph, but to Isaac weeping over Jacob! At this point, Isaac was still alive, and he knew that Joseph had been sold by his brothers. He wept bitter tears over the anguish that his son Jacob was going through, but he did not reveal the secret to Jacob השכינה כבוד, “out of respect for the divine Presence,” arguing that if God wanted to keep the secret from Jacob, he had no right to break the confidence.

So we have the makings of a true plot. The members of the cabal were Jacob's sons and his daughter, Joseph himself, his own father Isaac, and even God!

Why this strange and apparently heartless plot against the old man?

Many answers have been offered in explanation. The brothers' action is unquestioned, because what they did was in their self-interest. But why did God, as it were, cooperate in this conspiracy? Some answer that it was a punishment in kind (מדה כנגד מדה) for Jacob's neglect of the commandment to honor his father, when for the 22 years that he was in exile, fleeing from Esau, he made no effort to contact Isaac.

But there is one special answer which I would like to bring to your attention and which I consider most troubling and most enlightening.

This response (offered by the author of שפתי חכמים) was that the conspiracy was used by God in order to move all participants to a goal that none of them was able to discern at the time. God had promised Abraham כי גר יהיה זרעך, that his descendants would be strangers, exiles in a foreign country, and only after this period of exile would they emerge to become not only a family or a tribe, but a great nation. First they would have to endure the pain of exile, and only then could they be redeemed to the dignity of nationhood.

Therefore, Joseph had to go down into Egypt and have enough time available to him to become second to Pharaoh. Only thus would Jacob and his children later come into Egypt to begin the Israelite exile, later to leave and make their way to the Promised Land. But in order for this to be accomplished successfully, the secret had to be kept from Jacob, for had he known, he would most certainly have moved heaven and earth to get Joseph back. He simply loved Joseph too much, as a father, to sacrifice him for all that time in order for the promise to Abraham to be fulfilled.

Thus, the plot against Jacob was the entire into גלות (exile) for the purpose of a greater גאולה (redemption); a ירידה לצורך עלייה, descent for the sake of ascent, pain for the sake of greater pleasure, suffering for the sake of more exquisite bliss. It was part of the growing pains of a chosen people.

This is what the conspiracy teaches us: that often it is necessary to endure a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good. And it reminds us that at the time that we are suffering, we must have a measure

of confidence that כל מה דעבד רחמנא לטוב עבד, “all that the Merciful One does is for the good” – even if we do not realize or appreciate it at the time.

Who knows but that this same principle was operative in our own times! The Yom Kippur War has revealed the ghastly loneliness of our people. It seems as if there was a plot against Israel, when all her former friends have become her enemies, when we sometimes feel that, כביכול, the Almighty Himself was against us!

If so, we must appreciate that this suffering we have endured is defeat for the sake of triumph, loss for the sake of greater gain. Its purpose was to improve us, to make us worthier, better, nobler, and more deserving of the greater dignity that awaits us.

What exactly can we learn from the Yom Kippur War, other than the need for a better evaluation of military intelligence reports? What may we learn from it on a larger and more meaningful level?

I offer the following analysis in fear and trepidation. I hope I will not be misunderstood, although I probably will.

Why this hesitation? Because who are we to criticize Israel? And is it not ungracious and presumptuous to sit here, in the comfort of the Diaspora, and pick out faults in the character of Israel when it has suffered so grievously?

Nevertheless, I shall proceed, and shall say what I genuinely believe, both here and in a week or so אי”ה (God-willing) in Jerusalem, because *we are one people*, sharing one faith and one destiny. I shall say it, despite my own hesitation, because I have already said these things much before the Yom Kippur War, and have said them in Israel, to the people most directly concerned, the military academies. I shall say it because I love Israel, and to love means to refuse to be indifferent to flaws in the beloved, but always to seek to improve the beloved.

In the course of our long stay in the Diaspora, we have developed an unhealthy Galut-complex. Jewish character developed the traits of timidity and self-abnegation, self-blame and a sense of helplessness, a passion for invisibility and an aversion to “making waves.” In order for the State of Israel to be born and to survive, Zionist leaders consciously had to change that image. Deliberate efforts were

made to inculcate in Jews a sense of pride and self-determination, resolve and autonomy, a do-it-yourself attitude to life.

These efforts were successful – too successful! We disengaged ourselves from the Galut complex so well, that we went to the opposite extreme. From 1948 through 1956, through 1967 and up to the Yom Kippur War, we developed a national psychology that was unhealthy, unrealistic, and ultimately un-Jewish.

Unquestionably, Israelis developed some character traits that were noble, beautiful, and admirable. Israelis fought difficult wars, and yet never hated their enemy. They administered the occupied territories in a manner that will forever be a model for other nations. They demonstrated an exemplary openness to immigrants that is unprecedented in human history.

Yet, certain mass attitudes that have developed in Israel are less than lovable or liveable with. Self-reliance has merged into self-confidence, with a remarkable lack of humility. Israeli leaders quite unself-consciously preached a doctrine against which Moses warned us in the Torah: the illusion that כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה, that all my success is the result of my own power, strength, and wisdom. Israeli leaders do not tire of the old litany, that “we can rely only upon our own strength, sometimes including the financial cooperation of American Jews.” We have now learned that that is not enough! Israel’s own strength was simply insufficient in this time of crisis. They had to rely not only on their own strength and the UJA, but on the good will of the government of the United States. And, perhaps, did God too have something to say about all this? Have we not yet learned that reliance on God is not a sign of weakness? That humility can be a sign of inner strength?

At bottom Israel is or was obsessed by an exaggerated and extravagant notion of עצמאות, independence. I have always faintly disliked that word, although it is a thousand times better than the obsequiousness that characterizes Diaspora Jewry. Modern Jews began to act as if national independence is not simply a desirable political state, but that it is all that counts, and that it is an *absolute*. We made a fetish of independence, and some of us declared our independence from God too.

But is “independence” really an absolute value? Is Israel all that independent? Indeed, who is completely independent today? The Arabs – who need the U.S.S.R.? The U.S.S.R. – which needs

American know-how and trade and most-favored-nation status? France and England and Japan and the United States – which need Arab oil? Let us face a fact of life: we are all of us dependent, beggars, even sycophants. There is no absolute independence. All of us are caught in a cycle of dependency.

Of course we must fight unto death to retain our political integrity and national independence. But we must never make a psychological or ideological or theological absolute out of it.

For centuries, Jews were militarily impotent. In the past 25 years, we have demonstrated the exemplary qualities and bravery of the Israeli soldier. כל הכבוד לצה"ל. Full honor to the Israeli Armed Forces! But does that warrant the attitude that Tzahal (the Israeli Defense Forces) is the culmination of Jewish history, for which all the ages labored? Does it warrant the attitude of pity-cum-contempt by the Sabra for the victims of the Holocaust? Does it warrant the smugness and over-blown self-esteem which too many Israeli military officers have evinced? Does it warrant the vague threat of militarism – as in the over-production of generals who are going into government and industry in Israel?

Religious Jews have not fared much better. The dominant ideology of Religious Zionism in Israel by and large presses the idea that the State of Israel represents a Messianic stage, the *אתחלתא* *דגאולה*, the first stage of Messianic redemption. I have always been annoyed by the presumptuousness and the arrogance in this dogmatic certainty that we know what God is doing in the great perspectives of history, that we can even dictate to God the scenario of redemption. For with it had come the tendency to absolutize politics, to endow conquered territories with sanctity, to make popular ideas (and even policies of the State) immune to criticism.

And we Diaspora Jews? If anything, we have sinned more. The great majority of American Jews, from 75%-80%, have given not one penny to UJA or bought one Bond! Does it mean that our majority does not sympathize with Israel? No, they certainly do! What then? They are satisfied to sit on the side and talk glowingly about “tough, little Israel.” So, it is *tough* and can fend for itself without our help; and it is *little* – so it is too small for me to visit for more than once or twice during my lifetime, certainly too small for me to want to live there. And so American Jews develop a vicarious thrill in the national machismo of Israel, a thrill which comes very very cheap.

The Yom Kippur War has changed all that. It has smashed more than one myth which has victimized us. The war was *ירידה לצורך עלייה*, a shock which will make us better. On the pattern of the conspiracy against Jacob, it was the prelude to national greatness.

The Yom Kippur War has made us humble, without making us timid; made us more aware of the limitations of independence and the perils of self-confidence. We have learned that we can fight and fight brilliantly, but that we are not omnipotent; that our leaders are often wise, but never infallible; that we must be strong, but we cannot put all our faith in our strength; that we do need others, and we may even be in need of *סייעתא דשמיא*, the help of Heaven.

Was it worth twenty five hundred young lives, of the best of our youth and the flower of our people, to learn this bit of humility? Absolutely not. But we are not asked; it is not for us to negotiate the price in advance. Jacob suffered 22 years of agony, and more after that, so that his descendants would experience *גאולה* and nationhood. Yet unquestionably Jacob would have given all that up in order to get back his beloved son Joseph – and it is for this reason that the conspiracy was necessary in the first place.

What I am saying, then, is that events are not always what they seem to be, and that it is uniquely Jewish to exploit adversity and find in it the *ניצוץ* or spark of hope. The silver lining on the cloud indicates the sun shining above it. The Agadah on Jacob teaches that we must not give up hope or faith, that we must never despair!

Up to this past Yom Kippur, we (and especially the Israelis) were too self-confident, too smugly optimistic. Now we (and, again, especially the Israelis) are too fearful, too depressed, too pessimistic. A little more true *emunah* (faith), proper Jewish trust in the Redeemer of Israel, would have counseled us against the illusion of *הזה לי את החיל הזה*, that our own power and wisdom caused us to succeed, and does now summon us to greater hope and confidence in the future.

We have suffered a setback, yes, but defeat – no! *חס וחלילה*, Heaven forbid for anyone to assert that our present difficulties will lead to *חיסול המדינה*, to the undoing of statehood. Jacob lived to proclaim *עוד יוסף חי*, “Joseph lives yet!” and his children reported to Joseph *עוד אבינו חי*, “our old father still lives.”

We shall do the same. עוד ישראל חי – Israel lives and will live, and not only will it live but it will live on as a greater and stronger people, as a finer and nobler people, as a people worthy not only of political wisdom and military strength and economical well being and scientific progress, but also of exemplary character and moral discipline.

In a word, we shall yet become ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש, a holy nation and a kingdom of priests.

### **The Mood in Israel**

My recent trip to Israel, from which I returned this past week, was qualitatively different from my many previous trips. I am still in the grip of the mood of the country—indeed too much so to be objective. I shall therefore leave the analysis for some other occasion, and offer now my personal impressions, given without claim to special expertise and without having been privy to any inside information.

The mood in Israel today is not a simple or homogeneous one. It is quite complicated and often contradictory. Instead of describing it in overall terms, it is best to identify the ingredients of this mood.

Perhaps the best way to begin is by observing the difference between us and the Israelis. During the first several days of the war, we recited *tehillim* (Psalms) at our daily services, and read the "Prayer for the State of Israel" with special fervor. But after a week or two we stopped, feeling that the danger had passed. In Israel, to this day, every service includes the recitation of *tehillim*.

It is true that the deep gloom has lifted somewhat both because of the Geneva conference (although Israelis hardly trust it) and the increase in tourism. The rise of tourism is uplifting for Israelis, especially since they correctly consider it as the barometer of what the world thinks of Israel's chances, much as the stock market is a psychological indicator. It is hard to emphasize how important it is for us American Jews to visit Israel now.

But sadness remains a primary ingredient of the mood, and it is very real. אבלות (mourning) grips so many of those who have lost members of their families and those who have lost friends or whose friends are in mourning. Never before have I seen so many people, especially children, rise to recite the orphan's *kaddish* in synagogues. It is not uncommon to see maimed or bandaged young men on the street. In many neighborhoods or *kibbutzim* the population is heavily female, with hardly a man in sight. A young lady from America, who accompanied her father on a trip, noticed that many of the



bus drivers were wearing caps (*kippot*), far in excess of what she had noticed three years ago when she previously visited the country. She was bold enough to ask one of the bus drivers of the Egged line in Jerusalem whether they had suddenly begun to employ more *datiim* (religious Jews) as drivers. The driver explained that many of them are Sephardim, and that the custom amongst them is that when they are in mourning for a close relative, they wear the *kippah* the whole year...

Even for the survivors there is not complete joy. For instance, youngsters in Jerusalem get a bit nervous when they hear the sound of jet planes overhead— reminding them of the jet planes they heard that Yom Kippur day. When I visited the yeshiva in Gush Etzion, I found a pervasive sadness because one third of the student body was present— those who come from overseas; the Israeli students are serving at the fronts. Shortly after my arrival, I received a telephone call from a colleague who teaches at the Tel Aviv University and who called to say hello because he had heard that I was in the country. We exchanged courtesies, and then I asked him about the situation. He broke down, crying over the phone, and explained that he had just begun to teach three days earlier, on Sunday, when the universities of the country opened up the first time since the war. He told me that he met many of his old students who had survived, but that though they may be whole in body, they were not whole in mind and heart. Some had been in Egyptian captivity, and reported to him that the tortures were so sadistic, so incredible, that they will never be the same. My colleague was dreadfully upset that this was remaining a secret, but apparently the government believes that, for diplomatic reasons, it is best not to publicize this fact. Some of the men who underwent these experiences were perplexed: at least the Nazis had an "ideology" about Jews being sub-humans and dangerous, but the Egyptians had no reasons whatsoever to perform their acts of mad sadism.

However, with this sadness there is another intangible element that I find extremely difficult to describe. I do not know how to identify it, whether as a peculiar Jewish historical awareness or an intensified grief. Perhaps it is best to refer to it as a special kind of dignity which allows one to keep his sanity and dignity intact in the face of the consciousness of all the grief of Jewish history telescoped into the short span of one's own lifetime. The story was told by President Katzir at the Seminar I attended. He decided to pay a condolence call to a father who had lost a son in battle. He came to the

home, and offered his words of consolation to the father. After a while, the father looked up, thanked the President, and said to him: "Yes, I am consoled. I feel better this time than I did thirty years ago. Then the Germans killed my father, but I never knew where his grave is; now at least, the Arabs killed my son and I know where he is buried..."

In addition to sadness and what might be called dignity, there is also the element of powerful anger. There is a feeling, especially amongst soldiers who were at the front, that they were betrayed by the government's negligence. What is called the *מהדליים*, the terrible neglect and failures of the security setup, are being investigated by a national commission of inquiry. But no matter what they will find, the charisma of the old leaders is dissipated, the halos are wilted, and no longer do they appear as shining and faultless heroes. One hopes that both Israelis and Jews of the Diaspora will now become a bit more sophisticated, and see people as only people, without looking for new heroes.

Part of this anger is revealed in the unusual kind of pre-election propaganda that appeared in the Israeli press this past week. I do not remember ever having heard anything of this sort. For instance, the *מערך* (Alignment), the major political party, announced to the voters: *אתה רוצה להעניש את המערך*, "You want to punish the Alignment– but consider what the alternative is..." In the English press in Israel, the same party published something of this sort: "You hold the government responsible – but that is still better than an irresponsible government..." In other words, it is an open secret, to which the major party confesses, that they are responsible and punishable but they ask for reelection because the others are even worse. All these are signs of a justifiable inner fury.

Following from this is, quite naturally, a feeling of frustration. Often, elections play a cathartic role, they allow the voter to vent his spleen, to get rid of his emotional excess. That did not happen this time in Israel. The elections proved – almost nothing at all.

A distinguished columnist in Israel, Eliyahu Amiqam, wrote on the eve of the election what he once heard from a Communist Polish professor of law, who was an observer at the Eichman trial, about Polish elections, and he applied it as well to the current Israeli elections – namely, that it is a sign of paradise. What does that mean? Because in Paradise, God took Adam, brought him to Eve, and said, "Here, choose a wife!" And so, Adam freely chose Eve...

The Israeli voter did not feel that he had a real, clear, decisive choice to make. The structure of Israeli politics is such that he was confused. Polls show that about 40% of the electorate was undecided on the eve of the election. Hawks and Doves are not clearly definable in Israel. The extreme of either position is probably rejected by the great majority of all voters. Often, hawk and doves coexist within the same person.

And then there is a feeling of suspiciousness as an important element in the mood of Israel, a suspiciousness which results from Israel's isolation. Some one put it well in the American press: "in every warm heart there is a cold spot for the Jews." One can hardly meet a single Israeli who does not believe with all his heart that the Arabs have only one ultimate aim: *חיסול המדינה*, the dismemberment of the state. Israeli Arabists expect really nothing of substance to emerge from the current Geneva conversations. Dr. Kissinger is the topic of incessant conversation amongst the Israelis, much of it speculative and unrealistic. Israelis keep reminding themselves several times a day that Kissinger is really the foreign minister of the United States, not of Israel...

Counterbalancing all these negative elements in the national mood, are several brighter aspects. One of them is a manifestation of a great and noble Jewish virtue: gratitude. Israelis are grateful. They are grateful to President Nixon, much to the chagrin of many American Jewish liberals. They are grateful to Jews of the Diaspora for their assistance – although, speaking for myself, I find that it is embarrassing, because I believe that American Jews could have done much more. They are especially grateful to Holland. During one of the days I was in Israel, young people stood at street corners in the large cities and distributed little red round stickers, to be placed on the lapel. They were in the shape of an orange, symbol of Israel, and within it was a windmill, representative of Holland. And on the perimeter were the words: *עם ישראל מוקיר את העם ההולנדי*, "The people of Israel loves (or cherishes) the people of Holland."

Perhaps it will be a good idea for some American Jewish businessmen to build a proper, kosher, and lavish hotel in Holland, and for American Jewish organizations to encourage tourism, so that after Israel, Holland will be the favorite place for American Jewish tourists – more than Paris, London, Tokyo, or even Puerto Rico.

There is also an element of justifiable pride in what Israel has accomplished. President Abernethy of Hebrew University was right when he said that Israel on Yom Kippur was defending the right of every little country to exist. Israelis know that if the Arabs were to destroy Israel, no little nation in the world would ever be safe. They take pride in the valor of their soldiers, non-professionals who fought against overwhelming odds.

Especially magnificent was the role of the students of Yeshivot ha-Hesder, those "modern yeshivot" whose students served in the army alternatively with studying at the yeshiva. These schools lost a disproportionately high number of their students, because it was they who were serving in the tank and paratroop corps on both fronts on that Yom Kippur day. Furthermore, students from such schools as Kerem Beyavneh, Har Etzion, Yeshivat Hakotel, Shalavim, etc., were also volunteering to serve as officiants during the High Holidays services. Their losses, their valor, their bravery, constitute a great modern instance of *kiddush hashem*.

Finally, I detected a new and deep questing and questioning. It is too early to call it התעוררות דתית, a religious renaissance. Sometimes, if one hurries to identify a new movement, he nips it in the bud and effectively kills it. What we are now witnessing is something much slower than the upsurge of feelings after the Six Day War, when we saw the pictures of paratroopers crying as they embraced the Wall. I feel that what is now going on is, perhaps because it is slower and more halting, something that is more profound and lasting than the euphoria of six years ago. It is a deeper, sadder, larger view of the tragic dimension of life, and with it comes a search for meaning. And the search for meaning is already a religious and spiritual quest.

One detects a kind of *teshuva*, repentance, for the previous arrogance, over-confidence, and cockiness of so many Israelis, a feeling of regret and contrition for their loss of idealism which made them look more and more like American middle-class Jews.

There is a feeling, vague and inchoate, but conscious nonetheless, that the Yom Kippur War *meant* something, but they are not quite sure what it meant.

Perhaps this developing attitude for the Israeli during the Yom Kippur War can best be explained in terms of something we read in this morning's Sidra. Jacob, the dying patriarch, called his

children about him, האספו ואגידה לכם את אשר יקרא אתכם באחרית הימים, "Gather around me and I will tell you what shall befall you in the end of days." It seems clear that Jacob intends to prophecy for his children, predicting to them their ultimate fate. Yet, after we read his poetic words, we notice that they are predictive only to a very minor extent, that they are mostly a combination of תוכחה וברכה, of rebuke and blessing, and of a description of the collective character of his children. Somehow, then, the major body of Jacob's words does not follow clearly from his prefatory remark. Perhaps that is why the Rabbis, in the Midrash and in the Talmud, maintain that something happened at this moment: ביקש יעקב לגלות את הקץ ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה, Jacob indeed desired to reveal to his children the end of days, the advent of Messiah, but at that moment the Divine Spirit departed from him and so he lost his predictive-prophetic faculty.

However, if I be permitted to offer an alternative explanation, I would say that Jacob never intended to prophesy to his children any detailed program of redemption at the end of days. Note carefully that the word he uses is not יקרה, which we would normally expect in Hebrew as "befall" or "happen," but יקרא, which literally means, "call." What Jacob meant to tell his children is this: I want to describe to you your own inner qualities, so that, at the end of days, no matter what the situation is, no matter what events present themselves to you, you will perceive them as challenges, as a summons from on high to respond with nobility and generosity, as a call from God to rise to new achievements and to greater heights.

Jews recognize that Yom Kippur War was such a or קריאה, such a call. It was a summons and a challenge. It revealed something. But we are not quite sure what that was.

Hence, requests for תשמישי קדושה, for religious articles such as *tefillin* and copies of *tehillim* (Psalms). I am fully aware that for many soldiers the little book of Psalms was more of a talisman than an opportunity to read words which would inspire them religiously. The request for *tefillin* has been derided by some as "foxhole religion." But that does not bother me. Better foxhole religion than penthouse atheism. I prefer that people come to religion out of gratitude and affluence, but the fact is that most people achieve a deeper recognition of their condition through crisis and hardship. What counts is the end result.

I might add that the Chabad people are not the only group who are distributing *tefillin*. The same is being done by Gesher, by the Mizrahi, by many small organizations of great significance, and by many private individuals who fill up their car with candy, liquor, cigarettes, and *tallit* and *tefillin*.

During the time I was in Israel, a small article appeared in the Israeli press which shows that the *tefillin* campaign even reaches beyond Israeli troops. Chabad people were at the Suez front, in the western bridgehead of the Israeli army in Africa, and were offering the *tefillin* to Israeli soldiers. The UN team was nearby, and engaged the Chabad people in conversation, inquiring after the meaning of the *tefillin* and their particular garb. One UN official was particularly persistent and inquisitive in his questions, and upon inquiry he revealed that he was a Swede by the name of Joseph Bergson. Are you Jewish? One of the Lubavitcher people asked. Yes, he was. Before five minutes were over, Joseph Bergson of the UN commission was "davening" in his *tefillin*...

My own experience confirm this new quest. Three years ago I spoke to troops several times, younger boys and girls, and I found that it was not always easy to communicate with them. I felt, uneasily, that I was simply not on the same wavelength. I detected indifference, an anxiousness to emphasize the "normalcy" of Israel and the Jewish people, an aversion to considering themselves as different and special, and a closed mind to the religious word.

It is different today. I was asked to address troops, first in the Canal and then in Syria, but the "full high alert" prevented that. Instead I went to the Bikaah, on the Jordanian front, nearly half a kilometer from Jordanian soldiers. A Hasidic band played and another speaker and I addressed the troops. Our themes were Israel as the *עם הנבחר*, the Chosen People; *אמונה* or faith; not wasting their special talents; questioning, searching. I found them not only receptive, but also participating. And in the dancing there was sheer ecstasy. Here were 300 soldiers, combat engineers, who took time out from laying mines and anti-tank traps, 80% or more officially "non-religious," who sang and danced to such songs as *עם ישראל חי* and other, new melodies both from American and Israel, with the abandon that comes from *דבקות*, or religious fervor. As one visitor pointed out, it was like a Hasidic wedding, without a bride and a groom.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you one story that I heard, first person, from a brother of a cousin of mine. It tells us something about the hope and the feelings that motivate our Israeli brothers. This young man emigrated with his very young family from the Lower East Side and he became an Israeli citizen. He was assigned to the reserves that served on the Bar Lev Line on that fateful Yom Kippur day.

Ephraim was one of 200 men, whom he referred to humorously as "third class infantry soldiers," most of them married with children, in the 24-38 year old bracket. These were part of the חטיבת ירושלים, the brigade of soldiers drawn from the Jerusalem area, the one that was most hard hit during the war, stationed near Kantara.

Ephraim told me of how they were attacked by 50,000-60,000 Egyptian soldiers, how the more he picked the enemy soldiers off with his machine gun, the more swarmed over the Canal. After several hours of battle, his own group was mauled and many of his close friends killed or wounded. Shortly thereafter, there came the order from his commander for his group to withdraw back into the desert toward the Israeli lines. Some 47 men departed and broke into two groups, as they made their way through the minefields back to their own lines. Ephraim and 22 others broke off from the rest of the troops, and they decided that each could take but one object with him. Most men chose an Uzi, the submachine gun. Ephraim took an Uzi but also decided to take along his *tallit*, and one of the other men chose a pair of *tefillin*. For one and a half days they made their way through the desert, avoiding enemy fire. Then they noticed that they were caught in crossfire, in between the Egyptian and Israeli lines, both sides firing on them. The Egyptians assumed, correctly, that they were Israeli soldiers. The Israelis thought, incorrectly, that they were Egyptians. At one point they made their way to the top of a hill, behind some bushes. The Israeli tanks thought that they were enemy tanks, and instead of firing with machine guns, aimed their cannon at the 22 Israeli soldiers. The cannon fire kept on getting closer, while the soldiers tried desperately to get a wavelength on their wireless radio to contact the tanks and tell them they are Israelis. But it was all to no avail and they expected the worst. And what seemed the last moment, Ephraim realized that he had with him the best form of communication: he unfurled his *tallit* and waved it. At first, the Israeli tanks thought it was an Egyptian robe, but they

quickly recognized it, got out of the tanks and beckoned to them to run over. Thus were 22 Jewish souls saved because of Ephraim's *tallit*.

Ephraim told me, after repeating this story, that he just "knows" that holding the Egyptians down the first two or three days was something that could not be explained by natural, logical, military categories or concepts. Something more was at work. It is inconceivable, he told me, that this was anything but a miracle – and the miracle came soaked in pain and grief and anguish...

I conclude this description of Israel's mood with the story of Ephraim Holland and his *tallit*, not because I believe in the magical properties of religious artifacts. I do not. But to me it is symbolic, deeply and gloriously, of Israel, its faith, and its great hope for its future.

Recall that Israel's colors, white and blue, originally were chosen because the תכלת ולבן, the white and blue *tzitzit* that once were part of the *tallit*. (Now it is all white).

The *tallit* is thus the symbol of Israel, both state and people, and it is the *tallit*, and the faith in the Almighty that it represents, that can and will save us.

When donning the *tallit* in the morning, many pious Jews recite a preliminary prayer in which, amongst other things, we say:

וע"י מצות ציצית תנצל נפשי רוחי ונשמתי ותפלתי מן החיצונים והטלית יפרש כנפיו עליהם ויצילם כנשר יעיר קנז על גוזליו ורחם.

"And by virtue of my observance of the commandment of the *tzitzit*, may my soul be saved from all dangers and demonic forces in the world. May the *tallit* raise its corners over me and protect me, like an eagle spreading its wings over its nest to protect its young."

May that *tallit* be the symbol of the wings of the Shekhinah, as the Almighty God of Israel offers us protection and security and love, so that we may go into the uncertain future calmly, prayerfully, successfully – and peacefully.



## **Reactions to the Yom Kippur War**

### **Evaluations and Directions**

Last week, I discussed the "mood" in Israel, and reported that it was mixed: shock and sadness had replaced some of the old ebullience, and yet I found resolve, determination, and hope. There was a dejection, but no despair; they were concerned, but not hopeless.

Today I would like to offer pertinent information culled from the seminar that I attended in the House of the President, and sponsored by the Hebrew University. The participants, many of whom were distinguished scholars from all over the world, ranged over the entire spectrum of reactions. Obviously, they are too many to condense within one talk. I should like, this morning, to concentrate on the reactions of the intellectuals of the world and on the response of the American Jewish community, and see whether these can yield us any conclusions as to directions for the future.

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A major concern of our Israeli brothers was the attitude of the intellectuals. In many ways, this is a symptom of the traditional Jewish over-evaluation of men of the mind. Sir Isaiah Berlin reminded us that we ought not to worry too much about intellectuals, that they are not all that important in the world. But they do have a certain crucial significance. They are the teachers of the opinion-makers and politicians and diplomats and journalists of a few years hence. In that sense, they mold the opinions of the opinion-molders.

The Israelis were worried – as no doubt all of us were – by the silence of writers and artists and professors when Israel was brutally attacked on Yom Kippur. Why were these people, so articulate and obstreperous for every other cause, silent when it was Jews who were suffering?

Many reasons were offered for this strange silence. Many intellectuals are obsessed with the Third World, and seem to regard it as the incarnation of all virtue, and since the Third World was solidly against Israel, they could not bring themselves to speak up for Israel. A number of other intellectuals, liberals that they are, are embarrassed by the fact that the vicious villain of Watergate proved to be a great hero for Israel. Yet others suffered from what has been called "battle fatigue" on Israel, from simply having expressed themselves too often and being worried too much in the past.

The most devastating explanation of all was: boredom. Many intellectuals found the whole subject a crashing bore, devoid of intellectual stimulation.

If that is so, it constitutes a major scandal, a shameful confusion of the intellectually titillating with the morally compelling. It tells us a great deal more about our intellectuals than it does about the State of Israel. There is not much we can do about it, save to recommend to the Israeli government that its Foreign Ministry appoint an attache in charge of academic entertainment.

Jewish intellectuals divided into two groups. There were many who were very active for Israel, indeed much more active than in the past. But some, and a not insignificant number, were opposed to Israel.

These were, to a large extent, those intellectuals who questioned the justice of Israel's cause, who felt that it was too rigid and perhaps imperialist. Of course, everyone has a right to question the rightness of Israel's position. In an era when very little is sacred, one cannot deny to Jewish intellectuals the right to keep their distance from Israel, even when it is obviously in the right – as in this instance of an unprovoked Yom Kippur aggression.

I suppose there is no way to satisfy some people. These Third-World-oriented Jewish intellectuals, at least some of them, were against Israel after the Six Day War because Israel won. One would think that they would be pro-Israel now that Israel has suffered. But no, Israel does not come out well either way. One understands now what the late Prime Minister Levi Eshkol once said. When Minister Shimon Peres was appointed by Eshkol to go to the United States after the Six Day War, he asked the Prime Minister what posture he should adopt to the American public. Eshkol told him: present us like a נעבעכל שמשון, like a pitiful Samson....

But personally, I will not give up on them. Many of these alienated intellectuals will not come back, not ever – not if they abandoned us in this time of need. But many of them will come back, after experience and history will have again proven the emptiness of their words and the vacuity of their position.

In our Sidra this morning we read the astounding news that Moses forgot to circumcise one of his two sons, and that the Lord wished to kill him for this, but that his wife Tzipora circumcised the child and saved the family in the last minute.

How does one explain this amazing lapse? The Rabbis solved this difficult problem with a solution that proves even more difficult, more strange, and more bizarre! The Mekhilta tells us that when Moses first came to the home of Jethro and wanted to marry Tzipora,

אמר לו יתרו למשה קבל עליך דבר זה שאומר לך ואני נותנה לך לאשה. אמר לו מה הוא. אמר לו בן שיהיה לך  
תחילה יהיה לע"ז מכאן ואילך לשם שמים. וקיבל עליו.

Jethro said to Moses: "Promise me this one thing and I will give you my daughter for a wife."

Said Moses, "What is that?" Jethro answered: "Your first son must be dedicated to the worship of idols; thereafter your children may be worshippers of one God." And Moses accepted and made the promise.

That is how the Rabbis explain why Moses' oldest son, Gershon, was not circumcised by his father, but had to await his mother's precipitate action.

Truly, this is shocking. There is nothing in the life or ideas of Moses as they unfold from the Bible itself that can possibly support the theory of such a promise by the greatest figure in Judaism. I feel inclined to accept the suggestion by Hasidic master, author of the םחידושי הרי"ם: Moses never intended to yield any of his children to idolatry. Instead Jethro said to Moses: you have been a worshiper of the one God all along, and that is how you attained your greatness. But is it not just as well that your son first test other beliefs, first experience other systems and faiths and then, disappointed in them, arrive firmly at the belief in one God? Moses agreed to this. There is something to be said for that point of view. He probably suspected that Jethro himself, who had changed religions often, would eventually become a monotheist. Therefore, let the first son recapitulate the adventure of

the life of his grandfather Jethro. Moses agreed to this, so that one son would come to Judaism from his very cradle, and the other would arrive at it after a long journey. Perhaps, Moses thought, this first son who would first be exposed to the falsehood and moral ugliness of all paganisms, would then learn to appreciate Judaism all the more. (One hears an echo of contemporary parents who fear that a yeshiva education is too "parochial" and confining...)

The agreement of Moses now becomes more comprehensible, but it is still wrong. ויבקש המיתו, he deserved to be punished for it. If not for the action of his wife Tzipora, his decision would have proved tragic.

Moses' theory was erroneous. But a theory of Moses is worth something even if it is fallacious and discredited.

So, I am optimistic about those, especially those intellectual Jews, who are flirting with all kinds of strange loyalties. Many of those intellectuals who are even today remote from us – to use the Biblical metaphor, ערלי לב, uncircumcised of heart – and who worship at the altars of the Third World and other popular ideological icons, will yet come back! Only after their current fads will have disappointed them grievously, will they appreciate what they had rejected. It is not the most desirable path, but it is viable.

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American Jews in general underwent a polarization as a result of the Yom Kippur War. The process we had noticed in religious life all along has now become more evident in American Jewry's relation to Israel. Those who were for Israel, loyal to it, have now – after the Yom Kippur War – become even more committed than after the Six Day War. Those who were indifferent, remain more intensively indifferent. And those who were opposed to Israel, are now even more hostile.

Normally, un-Jewish Jews seem to come back home as a result of anti-Semitism. This time, because of fears that the energy crisis would lead to widespread anti-Semitism problems, such Jews reacted against Israel and their own Jewish background. They felt that they were faced with a choice

between the welfare of American Jewry and all it had produced and built, and the safety of Israel, and their decision was that "our" security comes first. Of course, this presentation of alternatives is thoroughly inauthentic, because Israel and American Jewry are totally interdependent. But they made a decisive choice, unnecessary though it was. To me, it is a paranoid internal reflection of the "dual loyalty" problem – and it is a dreadful, grievous, and tragic choice.

The indifferent did nothing, although in their hearts there was sympathy for Israel. These are the new "Jews of Silence." Of such moral cowardice one can say little that is appropriate to the pulpit.

But the most important feature of the reaction of American Jewry was its overwhelming support, unprecedented in history. Committed Jews proved themselves to be even more loyal, they performed spectacularly, and this is something of which we may be proud. The fact that the truly committed segment of American Jewry is not its majority, is not a happy one, but we must remember that it is rarely the majority of the community that moves.

The analysis of this marvelous response yields three important conclusions for the future.

First, the importance of organization. At the Yom Kippur War, American Jewry had already the makings of a coordinated system, which it had learned after the Six Day War. American Jewry put this organization into immediate and effective use.

After years of sarcasm about Jewish organizations – and everyone has suffered from this, and from the consequent neglect, from Zionist organizations to sisterhoods to communal institutions – organizations proved their mettle and their worth.

Incidentally, the synagogues too proved their importance. Apparently, at every moment of crisis, whether dealing with Israel or even with America itself, the first place committed Jews repair to, in times of crisis, is the synagogue.

The second lesson is the importance of personal experience with Israel. Those who had visited Israel as tourists, or had spent a bit of time studying there, were the ones most easy to involve. Especially important is aliyah, for those who had relatives in Israel who were emigrants, felt most deeply involved. It is hard to feel remote when your own relatives are threatened, as they were during this war.

I wish to add only this: some of us, committed Jews, are also afflicted with more than a bit of fear or cowardice to deter you from doing your duty to Israel. I refer specifically to tourism. Too many people I have spoken to act as if the remote possibility of danger is sufficient to discourage them at this time. Heaven forbid! When we American Jews needed encouragement all these past 25 years, we went to Israel to draw upon their reservoir of courage and confidence and bravery. Now it is our task to bring them a smile, a comforting word. Do not worry: any risk is minimal, and that iota of danger is both negligible and always worth it!

When Moses and Aaron went on their first diplomatic mission to Pharaoh, we read that they consulted with the זקנים, the elders. ואחר באו משה ואהרן, and afterwards Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh. Where were the elders? A tradition, quoted by Rashi, gives us the answer:

אבל הזקנים נשמטו אחד אחד מאחר משה ואהרן עד שנשמטו כולם קודם שהגיעו לפלטין לפי שיראו ללכת.  
The word "ואחר" means not "afterwards," but "behind." The elders, to use a contemporary phrase, "chickened out." They became apprehensive, and each one in turn slipped away from behind Moses and Aaron who alone made their way to the palace to confront the mighty Pharaoh.

But in the end, when the Israelites came to Sinai to experience the great reward of Revelation, only Moses ascended the mountain by himself, and the elders were not permitted to accompany him. Moses turned them back. He turned *his back* to *them*. Those who were afraid to brave danger when it came to a moment of crisis, do not deserve to receive the reward that God will bring to his people.

I hope that the message is clear.

So the conclusion is that tourism and studying and aliyah must be encouraged if only to retain the loyalties of American Jews.

Finally, the most important element of all is education. Formal education proved to be the sure way to commitment, and from commitment to work for Israel. The best response came from the best educated. Easiest to rally were those whose Jewish education had prepared them for it. Also informal education, such as that which is fortunately now being offered to such groups as the UJA leadership, and the Welfare Fund leadership, proved worthwhile.

A beautiful phenomenon was something which I experienced in this synagogue, and which those who prepared the reports found all over the country as well, and that is that Jews, so often raised with the idea that they can fulfill all their commitments by writing a check for Israel (the contemporary version of "The People of the Book" – the checkbook), kept on asking: "what *else*, what *more*, can I do for Israel besides giving money?"

That is a healthy sign. It shows a degree of spiritual perception that goes far beyond the merely philanthropic.

The answer, of course, is that in crisis, such as the Yom Kippur War crisis, there is little more that one is able to do at such a time. The time to do things is *now*, before any new crises erupt. And what can be done? What can be done is to build a Jewish home, enforce Jewish love, deepen Jewish loyalty, make sure that Jewish education is not only skin deep, and encourage Jewish commitment.

It is that kind of program that will keep us as a viable community and fully interdependent with Israel.

It is that kind of program that will make us conscientious Jews.

It is that kind of program that will sensitize and prepare our young and teach them how to answer our most vicious critics. So that when a Bruno Kreisky suggests that the concept of chosenness, of *עם סגולה*, is what is making us unpopular; when this Austrian *meshumad* tells us to forgo our belief that we are a chosen people in order to win friends – presumably the friendship of the sorts of his country – our answer will be a resounding "No!" We are *davka* a chosen people, a people of Torah and commandments. We *are* a different people. We are *not* like those who submit obsequiously to the blackmail of terrorists. We are ashamed that the likes of Bruno Kreisky come from us. But we are proud to be a separate people, and never want to be like his country, which was ready to close down refugee centers, and to abandon human beings fleeing from persecution.

With continued organization, with more personal experience of Israel, with a deepened Jewish education, we will grow in our commitment.

And with it will grow, too, our faith and our hope and our confidence that *הנה לא ינום ולא ישן* that the Guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers.

### **When God Plays Games**

Does God play games?

The question sounds anthropomorphic and primitive, but it isn't. If it appears frivolous, it is not meant to be.

At a key point in the Exodus drama, as we read this morning, God says to Moses בא אל פרעה, "Come unto Pharaoh," ולמען תספר באזני בנך ובן בנך את אשר התעללתי במצרים, "In order that you shall tell your son and your son's son all that I have wrought in Egypt." That is the Kings James translation. But it is quite inadequate.

Rashi interprets התעללתי as שחקתי, not "wrought," but "played." In other words, God played games with Egypt! A more accurate translation, therefore, would be, "made sport of," or "made mockery of Egypt." So, indeed, God does play games!

He plays games – but not in order to entertain Himself. You can whittle away time in order to ward off boredom, but you cannot while away eternity. When I speak of God playing games, I do not mean it in the sense that Prof. Albert Einstein did, when he made his famous statement (In opposition to the Indeterminists) that, "I do not believe that God plays dice with the universe," in other words, that God is arbitrary. Of course he is right; God is not whimsical. I agree with Dr. Einstein that God does not play dice – but He does play games. Not games of chance, but games where effort and decency are rewarded, and where offenses against righteousness are punished.

David said (Psalm 2) יושב בשמים ישחק ה' ילעג למו, though the kings of the nations plot and conspire, "He who dwells in the heavens shall laugh (or 'play'); the Lord will mock them."

The laughter of God is no laughing matter. It entails the most serious theological issues and demands spiritual insight.

The game element comes in the developing and emerging realization when a pattern of justice begins to crystallize into a coherent structure from within the chaos of practical events. This awareness



of a divine-moral pattern that overlays our daily, petty, devious strategies, means that history is not completely caught up in causality; that economics and politics do not mean everything; that there is freedom and novelty and surprise and openness in life; that Marx was wrong, and Moses was right.

Divine laughter, by which we mean the triumph of God's purposes, and the awareness by man of the real nature of history as the unfolding of God's will, comes especially in those exquisite moments when flashes of insight into the games God plays, the ultimate invincibility of His moral rules, illuminate the jungle of society. As Hannah put it in her famous prayer, God's game is revealed in two extremes: ה' מוריש ומעשיר משפיל אף מרומם, when He makes the rich poor, and the poor rich; when he makes the lowly high, and the high lowly.

A game has rules. There is a goal. There is a sense of excitement and anticipation of the unexpected for both winner or loser. The winner is surprised when his sacrifice and hardship prove worthwhile, despite the initial setbacks and the disdain of his opponents, all of which had pushed him to the brink of despair. The loser is shocked and dismayed upon learning that when you make up your own rules, you may temporarily gain, but in the end – after you had thought that victory was secure – you suffer defeat when the past catches up with you.

So it was with Pharaoh and the Hebrews. Pharaoh played his game – in all its diplomatic and social and economic aspects – according to his own rules: that might makes right, that slaves are chattel and non-persons; that Egyptians are supermen; that Pharaoh is a god. He seemed to have won his game hands down: the Hebrew victims were cornered, genocide was at hand. No sensible gambler would have accepted odds in a bet on Israel's survival.

But God has a different set of rules. The Pharaohs move deviously across the checkerboards of life, concentrating only on power and influence and shrewdness and wealth. But God's strategy is a moral-spiritual one. It seems so weak, so ineffectual, a sure loser. How trying it is to our patience, how wearying. But that is where faith comes in – confidence that in the long run, "the race is not to the swift"; that the real winner is not the one who knows all the angles, discovers all the loopholes, and can seize all the channels of power; that ultimately God's purposes will prevail, that there is reward for virtue and punishment for malice.

Israel seemed a sure loser. But in ten swift moves (the Ten Plagues), Pharaoh was to be checkmated. The game was moving to a conclusion. The moral order was about to succeed over power politics and economic exploitation.

And so, between the seventh and eighth "moves" of these Ten Plagues, God said to Moses: let your children and your children's children know את אשר התעללתי במצרים, how I "played around" with Pharaoh!

The essential element in this God-game is the principle of מדה כנגד מדה, that the punishment fits the crime. This theme lends irony, drama, poignancy, rational tension, symmetry, and rational structure to the chaos of existence. It makes new sense out of life. It is a warning to the violent, and a promise to the meek.

Indeed, את אשר התעללתי במצרים is the divine game which suggests the moral pleasure that comes from witnessing justice done and ethical accounts straightened out. In Yiddish we say: מענטש טראכט און גאט לאכט (man thinks and God laughs). It is so much more earthy and expressive than its English equivalent, "Man proposes and God disposes." But the idea is the same.

The whole Exodus story – indeed, all of Scripture, and all of Jewish history – reveal how God plays His game, and how that game is successfully superimposed on the unfair, unjust, exploitative, and manipulative games that men play and by which they convert their society into a jungle.

An example: Pharaoh decided upon his genocide policy by saying פן ירבה, "lest he (Israel) increase." But in a significant play on one small word, God said: כן ירבה, "so will he increase." Pharaoh's פן evoked God's כן.

Or: Pharaoh drowned Jewish babies in the Nile; and who should emerge from that same Nile? – Moses, who will drown Pharaoh and his army in another river, the Red Sea!

In our own days, Western Europe was the first to submit shamelessly to individual Arab terrorists and hijackers. And now they are the chief victims of organized terrorism and blackmail of all the Arab countries! The African nations, which were friendly to Israel as long as Israel helped them, quickly abandoned Israel when Libya offered them bribes. And now that the Arabs have outrageously withheld their oil and raised them to scandalous prices, we are informed that fertilizer has become

prohibitively expensive, and as a result, drought and disaster threaten large parts of Africa, where famine has already begun.

I do not mean to sound sacrilegious when I say that there is a certain amount of "fun" in the downfall of a Pharaoh. Not in the sense of revenge, not as if it were a circus, not as a form of entertainment. There was too much human tragedy for that. But "fun" in the sense of the tension of a game building to its climax, in the sense of the combination of irony and the deflation of pomposity and the sudden exposure of impotence and psychological nakedness that so often underlie pretentiousness.

Consider this: Pharaoh the god – is itchy with boils! The Lord of the Nile – goes thirsty. The arrogant Emperor – begs Moses to pray for him. The infallible King of Egypt – confesses: אני ועמי רשעים, both I and my people are wicked. The immortal Pharaoh – who had his soul-boat all ready to whisk him away to eternal life – shivers in fear that he will succumb to an unknown and mysterious death which conveniently hops, skips, jumps and passes over the Israelite homes, knocks on the doors of Egyptians only, and strikes the first-born – the first-born, just like Pharaoh!

Yes, the tragedy clearly has its comical aspects. את אשר התעללתי במצרים is a comedy of cosmic proportions a comedy of infinite moral instruction. Hence, למען תספר באזני בנך ובן בנך, you must repeat it in the ears of your son and his sons after him.

Certainly it is worth teaching that idea to our children and their children after them. God sets the rules. You can ignore them – but at your own risk. You can step on people, "bury" competitors, abandon principles, forget you are a Jew, let your religion atrophy, be lulled into false confidence by quick victories and the easy successes that bring you money and status and luxury and the fawning adulation of sycophants. But if that is your game, remember: God may be playing games with you! Remember: things are not always what they seem to be! There is another score-card up above, and you may be rated by other criteria than the one you think. The moral order is not always obvious, and it is often mysterious. Pharaoh's life may seem to be a victorious one. But at the end he discovers that he is not even a player, he is only a pawn. It is a painful discovery made by all who play his game.

This knowledge is an antidote to despair. You and your descendants after you, must know that on the invisible scorecard they may be far ahead of what the worldly tally sheets show. If they realize **השם**, if they strive to know the Lord, they need never fall into hopelessness. All they need is – patience and a sense of humor.

The Talmud tells us (at the end of *Makkot*) that Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria and Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akiva were traveling one day (presumably as a delegation to Rome, which then controlled Palestine), and on the way they heard the noise of the great population of Rome although they were some forty miles away. **התחילו בוכים ור' עקיבא מצחק**. The other rabbis began to weep, and Rabbi Akiva began to laugh. They asked him: why are you laughing? Said he to them, and why do you cry? And they answered: **הללו כושים שמשתחוויים לעצבים ומקטרים לעבודה זרה יושבים בטח והשקט ואנו בית** Behold these pagans who bow to fetishes and burn incense to idols; they dwell in tranquility and security, and we witness that the House of the Lord of Israel is consumed in flames – shall we not cry? He answered them: that is precisely the reason why I am laughing! **ומה** if such good fortune befalls those who violate the will of God, imagine how much greater will be the reward for those who obey His will! And they answered: **עקיבא ניהמתנו**, Akiva, you have consoled us!

Rabbi Akiva was able to see beyond the imperial game that Rome was playing. He knew that God was playing another game. That is why he was tranquil and unperturbed. The disproportion between the two moved him to laughter. How comical pretentious man appears! That divine game, perceived by Rabbi Akiva, is what consoled his colleagues.

Rabbi Akiva's confidence – his smile, his chuckle – is what buoys me up in times of crisis.

Thus, it is possible to interpret Israel's retreat from the Suez this week as a defeat. Many Israelis do just that. But I am not so sure. Perhaps, according to military criteria, it is a negative element. But I am confident. I have faith in the justice and viability of God's game. I trust His "game plan." I appreciate His sense of humor. **מענטש טראכט און גאט לאכט**. And if our **טראכטען** (thinking) is in consonance with His; if **וידעתם כי אני השם**, we shall know that He is the Lord; then when He laughs, we shall all laugh with Him.

### **The Varieties of Anonymity**

A name, in our Western civilization, is simply a tag, a mere label and means of identification. Hence, it is understandable though regrettable that names are gradually yielding to numbers, which are more rational and more easily classifiable. We are beginning to lose our individual names to Social Security numbers, credit card numbers, and other computerizable figures. Street names, which are often of historic value, are more and more becoming merely numbered streets, like "West 86th Street"; town and cities, whose names are frequently picturesque, characteristic, and sometimes unique, have all but faded from our envelopes as postal authorities record merely the ZIP code numbers.

However, in the Bible – as in all Semitic culture – a name is more than a means of identification. It is somehow related to essence, it is mystically identified with the substance, with the individual. Therefore the Torah usually explains why a specific name is given to a certain individual.

It is for this reason that I have often wondered about those occasions in Jewish life, and general life, when the reverse occurs, when a name is covered up, deliberately omitted.

It may be instructive, therefore, to analyze the varieties of anonymity, and perhaps emerge with the beginnings of an ethic of anonymity.

For our first instance of anonymity, let us look to today's Sidra. In response to the complaints of the Israelites, the Lord sent them the manna, and Moses instructed them to take only a certain amount and eat all of it, without letting any remain to the next day. Most Israelites obeyed Moses, but not all: ויקצוף עליהם משה ... ולא שמעו אל משה ויותרו אנשים ממנו עד בקר. "They did not listen to Moses, but *some people* from amongst them left the manna over till the morn ... and Moses was angry with them." Who are these people? Tradition identifies them as the two infamous malcontents, Datan and Aviram. But why does the Torah not say so explicitly?

I suggest that the anonymity the Torah employs here is a way of denying to the arrogant and the wicked the very publicity they seek. Thus, Datan and Aviram considered themselves leaders, but

the Torah referred to them as merely אנשים, "people"; they wanted to "make a name" for themselves, so the Torah denies them that which they most wanted. Hence, their anonymity.

Similarly, the Talmud removed the name from the greatest heretic of that era, Elisha b. Abuyah, and refers to him simply as an אחר, "the other one."

Perhaps too, this is the reason why the Torah does not name the Pharaohs of Egypt who are so prominent in the Exodus story. "Pharaoh" is merely a generic name for an Egyptian king, in the same way that Caesar is the Roman emperor, or Czar is the Russian king. The Torah refused to immortalize Pharaoh by mentioning his name, specifically because the Pharaohs were fanatic in their desire for their names to be memorialized – witness the pyramids they built, the glorification of their own posterity.

But this question about the Pharaohs leads us to another reason for anonymity (which I had once before mentioned), proposed by Dr. Israel Eldad. The Torah cloaks Pharaoh in anonymity not in order to provide a livelihood for historians, antiquarians, and anthropologists who will build careers on the problems of identifying Pharaohs. Rather, it is a challenge to think historically, rather than individually; to attempt to achieve an overall view, rather than being lost in picayune details. Had the Torah mentioned the name of the individual Pharaoh, we would have discovered details of his biography, and then depth psychology would have taken over and we would have found individual reasons for his malice. We would have discovered that he was a paranoiac, or he was deprived in his childhood, or weaned prematurely, or the object of sibling rivalry.... At that point, we would have stopped thinking historically, and focused too narrowly upon one individual. Psychoanalysis leads us to explain Pharaoh, explanation leads to understanding, and understanding leads to forgiveness. And the victims – were forgotten. In this manner, the lessons of history recede and are lost on us. So the anonymity is there in order to fix the moral responsibility for one's actions. No matter what the reasons, man cannot escape the guilt for the consequences of his decisions on society and history.

I would add that the same holds true for the reverse situation: the anonymity of the benevolent and great figures. Moses' real Hebrew name is not given to us in the Torah (although tradition told us that he was called טוביה). Neither are we told much about his parents. His genealogy is rather humble: "וילך איש מבית לוי ויקח בת לוי", "A man from the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi."

Perhaps the Torah is telling us that just as you may not explain all the evil of Pharaoh by ascribing it to his hereditary or environmental idiosyncracies, so can you not explain away the greatness of Moses solely by genetics and upbringing. Of course, psychology is important, but there is always a core of free will which accounts for moral responsibility.

The third variety of anonymity is fairly obvious: modesty. A man who performs a good deed and does it for its own sake, signifies this absence of ego-dividends by obscuring his own name.

Thus, one of the highest forms of charity is *מתן בסתר*, one who gives secretly, so that he does not know the recipient, and the recipient does not know him.

This is true not only for philanthropy, but for other human achievements as well. The highest point is reached when a man can do something without attaching his name to it, and thus do it purely for its own sake.

That this is difficult is unquestionable. The founder of the Mussar movement, Rabbi Israel Salanter, once made the whimsical comment that he knows people who have written great, thick volumes on the quality of *ענוה*, humility, but somehow always remembered to affix their names on the title page...

Similar to this is the fourth variety: sensitivity to the feelings of others.

The Gaon of Vilna, in his halakhic writings, made it a practice never to mention the names of those with whom he disagreed, or those whose theses he disproved. What was important was the *שקלא וטריא* (reasoning, dialectic) and not the personalities involved. Similarly, his leading student, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, who was the most trenchant ideological critic of the growing Hasidic movement, never mentioned the Hasidim either by their individual names or even as a group, and instead referred to them by a circumlocution.

In this respect, it is interesting to notice a significant difference in practice between Anglo-Saxon case law and Jewish law. In American law, whether in the law books or newspapers, cases are entitled by the names of the litigants. As a result, all the dark secrets of a couple's domestic difficulties are spread out for all the world to see, satisfying a casual reader's prurient interest as much as teaching students legal principles. If a man, in the course of a lifetime, experiences a temporary

aberration, and does something wrong, this system of putting his name on a case ensures that he will be condemned to eternal disgrace. How different, how much more sensitive, how much more moral, is the practice of Jewish case law, the responsa literature. In the great majority of instances, cases are not discussed by using the real names of people, but instead Jewish respondents will use fictitious names, especially those of the first large Jewish family: Reuven, Simeon, Levi... Rachel, Leah, Sarah... The real names of the individuals are protected by the anonymity which comes of sensitivity.

Finally, the fifth variety of anonymity is that of fear, or, better, cowardice. Anonymity is often the cloak of the spineless and the gutless.

An example: the International Red Cross a week or two ago circulated to all member governments a document complaining that "the Middle East is not fulfilling the Geneva Convention concerning prisoners of war lists." What Middle East? What child does not know that there is only one country which is so debased, so cruel, so inhuman, that it would withhold this information from families? They meant Syria, but they did not call it by its name because of their cowardice. Imagine if Israel had been the culprit, Heaven forbid, and practiced such barbarism. Would the Red Cross have spared Israel and not mentioned its name? Some day the entire record will be there for the whole world to see – how the International Red Cross dealt differently with Jews from the way it dealt with others, both in the Holocaust and the three wars of the State of Israel.

Related to this form of cowardly anonymity is the anonymous letter writer. As a public figure, it has not been unusual for me in the course of the years to receive an occasional anonymous letter.

I confide to you: I never pay attention to them. I never even try to even figure out who the writer is, never try to decipher his handwriting or discern how he changed his style or punctuation or spelling in order to disguise his identity.

I just don't care. People who do not have the courage of their convictions, and are not willing to engage in serious dialogue, do not deserve to have others listen to their monologue. I consider them as nothing but pathetic.



And yet I recognize that it is often difficult for a person to voice criticism and place himself squarely behind it. I remember that several years ago the New Yorker magazine carried the following item:

Dear Editor:

I am revolted by those weak-kneed characters who are not manly enough to sign their own names. I suggest that in the future you never again publish anonymous letters. We can do without them.

Signed:

Disgusted.

Sometimes I think that the anonymous letter-writer is really revealing his true identity as symbolized by his anonymity: namely, nothing, the absence of personality, or better – the absence of character. The anonymous letter has the same value as a check signed "Anonymous."

So, we have enumerated five varieties of anonymity: one that is used to deny the malicious, self-serving publicity seeker what he most wants; the anonymity which emphasizes historical thinking and moral responsibility; modesty; sensitivity to others; and the anonymity of cowardice.

I wish to conclude with a species of anonymity which is radically different: divine anonymity.

At the end of the Sidra, we read of the hateful attack by Amalek on Israel. Because of this, the Lord swore that he would never forgive Amalek, in the following words: **כִּי יָד עַל כֶּסֶּם יְיָ מִלְחָמָה לְהָ' בַּעֲמָלֵק** that God's hand is placed on His divine throne (a figure of speech denoting an oath) that the Lord will war against Amalek in every generation.

The Rabbis are quoted by Rashi as follows: **וְמָהוּ כֶּסֶּם וְלֹא כִסְאוֹ וְאֵף הַשֵּׁם נִחְלַק לַחֲצִי? נִשְׁבַּע הַקֶּבֶד שֶׁאֵין שְׁמוֹ שְׁלֵם וְאֵין כִּסְאוֹ שְׁלֵם עַד שִׁמְחָה שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל עֲמָלֵק כּוֹלֵו** Why did the Torah use the word **כֶּסֶּם** instead of **כִּסְאוֹ** "throne?" And why is the Lord's Name only half of what it usually is? (**יְיָ** is only the first half of the full Name of God). The answer is: the Holy One swore that His Name would not be complete and His Throne would never be complete until the name of Amalek would be utterly destroyed.

The Name of God cannot be revealed as long as the name of Amalek is not erased. God suffers partial anonymity as long as the Amaleks of life still defy Him, still disturb the peace of mankind, still

have "a name" in the world. The struggle is between the Name of God and the name of Amalek; between the anonymity of the One and the anonymity of the other.

Our prayer therefore is that, regardless of the varieties of human anonymity, God no longer be anonymous in the world. והיה ה' למלך על כל הארץ ביום ההוא יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד, "May the Lord be acknowledged as King over the entire world; on that day the Lord will be One and His Name will be complete."

## **Mirror, Mirror on the Wall**

### **Reflections on Orthodoxy in Politics**

At the end of our Sidra, Moses is commanded to construct the laver and its base out of brass. Where is he to get the material from? The Torah says: **במראות הצובאות**, from the mirrors, made of burnished copper, which the women had donated at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

An old tradition has it that these mirrors were a point of contention between Moses and the women (thus making Moses the first Jewish leader to have a problem with "women's rights"). He refused to accept the mirrors, because he considered them a token of vanity, a quality which has no place in the Sanctuary. However, the Almighty interceded on behalf of the women, and insisted that the mirrors be accepted. The reason, as quoted by Rashi, is that the women used these mirrors to make themselves attractive, thus enabling the continuation of Jewish family life even in the bitter circumstances of Egyptian slavery.

I suggest a modified interpretation of that controversy between Moses and the women. The mirror is not only a specifically human invention, but it also elicits a special response. Ethnologists tell us that most animals, in looking into a mirror, believe that they are facing some other member of the same species. It is only man, and the higher primates such as chimpanzees, who recognize that the image they see in the mirror is – oneself.

Thus, the mirror is a symbol of viewing oneself in the eyes of another; it represents the capacity and tendency to see oneself as others do.

It is for this reason that Moses refused to countenance a mirror in the Temple. To be concerned with the impression one makes on another is an insult to authenticity. Moses demanded of his people to act on principle, not for effect; out of conviction, with no concern for "public relations"; because they believe in what they do, not because others approve. He wanted substance, not image; persuasion

and not projection. The mirror represented what the sociologist David Riesman, in our days, has called "other-directedness," and this Moses considered inauthentic.

A similar thought comes to us from the Kotzker Rebbe. When the spies came back from Canaan and the majority reported to Moses and the Israelites that they could never conquer the land because the inhabitants were giants, they said: והיינו בעינינו כחגבים וכן היינו בעיניהם, "We were in our eyes as grasshoppers, and so did we appear in their eyes." The Lord was incensed, and Moses considered their report unforgivable. But what was wrong with the statement? Were they not telling the truth – that they considered themselves little grasshoppers compared with the giants whom they met? The Kotzker Rebbe answers: when they said that they appeared in their own eyes as grasshoppers, they were merely reporting a fact. But when they added the last three words, וכן היינו בעיניהם, that this is how we appeared in *their* eyes, then they had reached the nadir of inauthenticity: they began to be concerned with their appearance in the eyes of the others! A true person of principle is never concerned with the impression he makes on others.

And yet, God wanted the women to prevail, and he forced Moses to accept their מראות הצובאות, the mirrors. Why? We are here taught something of the greatest significance. Principle alone, in and of itself, is sometimes inadequate. Along with *principle* must come another element, that of *relationship*, founded on the importance of other human beings. Relationship means that the I and the Thou are bound together in such a way that each is not only concerned about the other, but also sensitive to how the other views him. If the I truly respects the Thou, then the I will also be concerned as to how the I appears to the Thou.

Principle alone, without relationship, can subvert communication and can sometimes devour itself. Principle pursued without concern for others can bring society into disarray. In seeking to build, it can sometimes destroy. More than once in human history has the fire of righteous passion consumed its advocates and turned life into ashes – in the name of high ideals. Principle by itself shuns the mirror and considers it a violation of its integrity. Relationship needs and uses the mirror to reinforce its sensitivity.

The French dramatist, Jean-Paul Sartre describes, in one of his plays (I believe it is "*Les Mouches*"), a house full of every delight. This house is – Hell. The inhabitants may have whatever they wish, of every material pleasure, every intellectual indulgence, all that their heart desires. Only one thing may they not have – a mirror. For all eternity, they cannot look at themselves, they may not know how they appear to others. That, Sartre tells us, is Hell.

That is why the women offered the mirrors to the Temple. Moses as the prophet, as the איש האמת, the man of uncompromised integrity and unimpeachable authenticity, could not abide a mirror, the symbol of moral weakness and compromised principles, in the Sanctuary. But the women knew that there can be no life, no family, no society, without relationship; and there can be no relationship without sensitivity to the effect we have on others.

Thus the great principle of *Kiddush Hashem*, the sanctification of God's Name, is an expression of sensitivity of reputation. God, as it were, demands that we be concerned with how He is received by the people of the world. It is a kind of sacred public relations: we must always act in such a manner that God is revered and when we do—that is a sanctification of His Name. Should we act in such a manner as to bring God's Name into disrepute, then we have performed *Hillul Hashem*, we have desecrated Him. Hence, sensitivity to how others look at us is not altogether invalid; it has its place in the Sanctuary of life.

So that God voted in favor of the women, and insisted that Moses accept the מראות הצובאות; but in a gesture to Moses and his high advocacy of personal autonomy in matters of principle, He did not demand that the mirrors become prominent but that they be used only for כיור וכנו, the laver and its base.

The lesson for us is urgent indeed. It tells us that, at all times, we must live in a constant tension between principle and relationship, between truth and peace, between personal and ideological authenticity and the concern for communal harmony. We must always maintain the balance, always remain within the dialectic, yielding neither the one nor the other. If we do not take the mirror into the Temple, if we insist upon pure principle alone, we run the risk of alienating all potential worshippers and keeping the Temple empty. If we are concerned only with relationships, only with communal

peace, only with maintaining harmony, then we have abandoned all principle and given up on Truth. If we are over-concerned with the mirror, then we have converted the Temple into a beauty parlor, we see nothing but ourselves and each other, and we have lost our souls.

So we must hold on to both elements. We must, of course, never give in on matters of principle; but good relationships too are a principle of Judaism. What you *are* counts most; but what you look like to others is not entirely insignificant consideration.

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It is for this reason that I am distressed by certain recent developments in the Orthodox community both here and in Israel.

The "Who Is a Jew" issue is unquestionably an urgent and vital issue. I have spoken and written about it before. The halakhic definition of Jewishness *must* prevail, for we here deal with the most fundamental principle of our existence: who we are and what we are. Principle must be firmly maintained in this issue.

I therefore regret that the Conservative and Reform movements have gone fishing in muddy waters, pressing their claims at a time of weakness for the State of Israel. The Reform are especially guilty of unmitigated *chutzpah* when they demand recognition of the validity of their conversions, when they have not yet instituted any discipline over their own members who officiate with ministers of other faiths in mixed marriages, in which the Jewish partner has not been converted even by Reform standards. And the Conservative movement would have been better advised not to align themselves with Reform for narrow partisan advantage.

And yet, the use of the mirror, as we have defined this symbol, would have suggested to the Orthodox community not to press for new legislation in the critical aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. The problem has been with us for a long while, and would sooner or later have to be resolved. The point is, was this the time to do it?

I do not fault the Rabbinate. When Rabbis are asked questions in Halakhah, they must answer. But this was not the time to submit the question to a halakhic decision. We have complicated a national crisis at a time of such tenderness and delicacy that we have, in the long run, lost more than we have gained even were we to succeed in revising the legislation in order to conform to halakhic norms. The result has certainly not been a *Kiddush Hashem*. Our appearance to others is not that of Jews who are concerned with the survival of the State. What we gained in the magnificent heroism of the yeshiva students on both fronts in the Yom Kippur War, we may have lost because of poor timing after the Yom Kippur War.

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Orthodoxy in the United States seems to be on the verge of making its own error. For many years prior to 1954, Orthodox Jews accepted as a matter of fact that they are a part of the large Jewish community in the United States, and they did not consider that they compromised their ideological integrity because of it. In that year, eleven ראשי ישיבה (heads of yeshivot) issued an edict prohibiting membership in mixed religious groups. There was considerable merit to their position, and one cannot, of course, dismiss it out of hand. Yet it had consequences that have not necessarily enhanced the cause of Torah in the American Jewish community.

The major problem focused on membership in the Synagogue Council of America. This organization is a "roof organization," consisting of six groups: the rabbinic and lay organizations of the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements. Its purpose is not to decide on inner Jewish religious questions. Its function is to represent the common religious question. Its function is to represent the common interest of the religious Jewish community towards the outside world. In order to be sure that the Synagogue Council of America never violates a halakhic principle, the rabbinic Orthodox group (the RCA) and the lay Orthodox group (the UOJCA) have veto rights over the Synagogue Council of America's decisions—as do the other constituents.

The right wing of Orthodoxy has demanded secession from the SCA. It must be understood that the importance of the SCA in this respect is primarily a matter of symbol. To stay in or to get out of the SCA is really representative of a larger question: shall Orthodoxy practice coexistence or separatism: cooperation or withdrawal? Shall we "go it alone" because cooperation implies recognition of the validity and legitimacy of the Orthodox philosophies; or shall we work with and within the total Jewish community, without in any way implying our sanction of these non-Orthodox approaches?

For many years, this Rabbi and leading members of this congregation have fought within the councils of the UOJCA to remain in the SCA as a symbol of the fact that we are in and part of the Jewish community; that we can disagree firmly but respectfully; that we can be tough without being rough; that we can and should be aggressive, without ever being offensive; that we can reconcile principle and relationship, using the מראות הצובאות (in the mirrors) of which we spoke.

This past week, the Board of Directors of the UOJCA decided by majority vote to suspend membership in the SCA until the National Convention of the UOJCA, in November, will decide to break off with or resume participation in the SCA.

Pristine-pure principle has prevailed, and relationship with the rest of the Jewish community is beginning to unravel. The majority asserted its ideals, in all good conscience, but failed to look into the mirror, failed to consider the dangerous consequences when the rest of the Jewish community begins to take offense at what it will consider a gratuitous insult.

Those who voted to opt out have not consulted the mirror of the מראות הצובאות. If they look into any mirror, it was probably the wrong one: the mirror of the fairy tale in which the queen looks into the mirror of the fairy tale in which the queen looks into the mirror and asks, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" Maybe the magic mirror answered "You are," but the מראות צובאות would not have responded with a snow-white image.

The decision of the Board of the Union gives reason for great regret. This is especially true because the Union has made historic contributions to the welfare of the Jewish community in general and Torah in particular. It has brought a creditable structure of kashrut into what has previously been chaos. It has created, through the National Conference of Synagogue Youth, a vibrant and vital and



far-reaching youth program which has won many young people back to Torah. It has accomplished all these things without throwing the gauntlet before other groups. I am sorry that it has now seen fit to hope that at its National Convention in November, this grievous error will be corrected.

Who knows but that perhaps that is why מראות הצובאות were placed one כיור וכנו, the mirrors were used for the construction of the laver and its base, so that when the worshiper came into the Temple and took a good, long, deep look at the mirror, he would see himself as others do – and realize that he was imperfect, that he had to improve himself before making demands of others, that he had to wash his face and cleanse himself.

It is a good way to keep clean.

## Lions and Dogs and Doves and Hawks

### The Zoology of Freedom

"הג המצות זמן חרותנו" – the festival of Passover is the celebration of our freedom. Passover not only commemorates an act of liberation in the dim past, but reminds us that the aspiration to and striving for freedom are unending tasks.

Freedom is quixotic. One is never sure of it. It is not something which, once achieved, is forever certain, safe, secure. It requires constant struggle. Judaism no doubt endorses the American Revolutionary slogan, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

All of Jewish history is, in a manner of speaking, a long record of freedom lost and regained; a drama of *galut* and *geulah* (exile and redemption); of *cherut* and *avdut* (freedom and slavery). It is as if Jewish history were really a large Seder table, where sometimes we drink the "Four Cups," and are heady with freedom – and then bite into the bitter herbs and experience the agony of subjugation; where now we practice *besevab*, inclining in a manner of aristocracy, and then taste the humiliation of the *haroset*. And sometimes, perhaps most times, life is more like the *matzah* – a peculiar and paradoxical blending of both motives, of freedom (for *matzah* is the sign of that bread which did not rise because we were in a hurry to leave Egypt and emerge from servitude) and slavery (the "bread of affliction").

We may, perhaps, find a wise insight of the Sages into the nature of freedom in a rather unexpected source. The Mishnah tells us that there were five unusual characteristics of the *אש של* *מזבח*, the fire on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem. One of those qualities was that it was *רבוצה*, the fire seemed to crouch like a lion. The Talmud (*Yoma* 21b) comments upon this: can you then say that the fire was *רבוצה כארי*, crouching like a lion? *והתניא אמר רבי חנינא סגן הכהנים אני ראיתייה ורבוצה*, did we not learn that Rabbi Haninah had said, "I saw the fire on the altar in the Temple, and it looked like a crouching dog?" The Talmud solves the problem by stating: *לא קשיא כאן במקדש ראשון כאן*

במקדש שני. Both statements are true, but they refer to different temples! In the First Temple, the altar-fire looked like a crouching lion, but during the Second Temple it appeared like a crouching dog.

Frankly, I do not know the difference between the two crouching shapes. But no matter, their importance is as symbols. For a lion and dog may be said to represent two conceptions of the conduct of a Jew, especially of Jews as a national entity.

The lion is not afraid of resistance. He knows what he wants, and will fight for his vital needs. He may suffer defeat, and in that case he will lick his wounds – but never will he bow, never will he beg for his wants. The lion loves freedom – better freedom alone in the desert, hungry and thirsty, than mountains of meat in a posh cage.

The dog places no value on freedom. He seeks only to survive, and eat. Not only does he not cherish freedom, but rejects it: he is always looking for a master, someone to please, someone with whom to ingratiate himself, someone whom he can serve faithfully and thus get his reward: a bone from the table. He will even prefer a merciless beating in his master's house to being on his own, and if expelled will return again and again.

The First Commonwealth was the period of the Lion in Jewish history. It began with the conquest of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites, went through the period of monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon, and their followers), the building of the First Temple, until the defeat of the Israelites and their exile under Nebuchadnezzar. This was a colorful if uncertain period in Jewish history. There were many defeats as well as triumphs, moral backsliding as well as spiritual attainments. But above all, these were 900 glorious years of proud and dignified national selfhood. The fire on the altar was רבוצה כארי, crouching like a lion.

The Second Commonwealth was the era of *Kelev*, the Dog. The return to Palestine was not precipitated by our own determination and resolve, but by the grace of the Persian Emperor Cyrus, who issued the original "Balfour Declaration." It began when the great Nehemiah, hearing of the distress of his brethren in the Holy Land, wept before the King and his consort, who inquired as to his unhappiness. Only then did they promise to help the Jews, and Persia even granted us our first Jewish governor-general (Zerubabel). It was the period of *shtadlanut*, of political maneuvering and

manipulation and begging and cajoling in order to attain the end of Jewish statehood. For 400 years we served different masters: Persia, Greece, Syria, Rome.

Jews during the Second Temple were wealthier, more affluent, and more developed than during the First. But during the First Commonwealth, we acted like hungry lions – רבוצה כארי; during the second, more like well-fed pets – רבוצה ככלב.<sup>1</sup>

I believe that both themes can be detected in the story of the exodus from Egypt itself. For the exodus represents an oscillation between *ari* and *kelev*.

In the beginning, when the Israelites left Egypt, they went out ביד רמה, with their heads up, with dignity, with joy. We were even told וכלב לא יחרץ לשונו, "the dog will not whet his tongue against thee." Indeed not, for the dog knew that we were made of different mettle, that we were crouching like *lions*!

But soon, our people lost this leonine quality as the loneliness and leanness of freedom in an uncharted desert took its ineluctable toll. In their hunger and solitude and fear of the unknown, the former slaves began to think back to the סיר הבשר, the fleshpots of Egypt – which probably never existed. In their fear, their minds threw up fictional illusions and false memories: זכרנו את הדגה אשר נאכל במצרים, "we remember the fish which we ate in Egypt." They were slaves! They forgot the beatings, the torture, the agony, and they created for themselves memories of things which never were, all in an attempt to find security from the terror of freedom.

A canine conception if there ever was one! One is tempted to see a reflection of this doggish deprecation of freedom in the *halakhah* that *hametz* is permitted on Passover only if it is so denigrated, so ugly, so denatured, devalued, that נפסל מאכילת כלב, that even a *dog* will not eat it. The *kelev* is the bottom limit, the symbol of that against which genuine freedom is measured.

That is why the Lord told this generation that had turned from *ari* to *kelev* that במדבר הזה יפלו, in this desert you will fall dead, you are not worthy to enter the Holy Land. Only a generation born in the desert – free, proud, dignified, leonine – will be privileged to enter the Land of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for the above thought to Isaac Elon, in an article in *Sinai*, Tishri 5719.

Not only the Exodus and the two Commonwealths, but the modern history of Zionism too shows both motifs. Zionism began as *shtadlanut*: Herzl approached the Sultan, Weizman influenced Balfour, Jews throughout the world worked on the United Nations. The fire on the altar of Jewish life was רבוצה ככלב, crouching like the dog. However, our experiences with the nations of the world, with Europe and the East, with the Holocaust and the Arab intransigence and cruelty, awoke within us an ancient spark of גור אריה יהודה, of "Judah as a lion cub," and Jews rose like the lions of Judah to restore their land and their folk to their former eminence.

The State of Israel, no matter what its political leadership, is not ready to grovel like a dog. It will strive for peace, but it will not beg for crumbs from the table of Nixon, or for *shirayim* from that of Secretary Kissinger. Israel may be forced into unpleasant moves, in an effort to attain peace. But the real question is: how far will it go?

My readings of the temperament of Israelis is that there are very few extreme Hawks and very few extreme Doves. Most people vacillate between the two.

For myself, I am not a Hawk. I would be ready to return most of the Sinai and the parts of Syria beyond the Golan Heights. But although I am not a Hawk, I do not want Israel to act out of weakness. Eric Hoffer was right when he said that, "Power corrupts the few, but weakness corrupts the many."

I am not a Dove. I cannot identify with those who are ready to give *anything* for peace, because that is not far from being ready to give *everything* for peace. But although I am not a Dove, I would not want purely religious issues concerning Judea and Samaria to becloud the crucial political decisions of whether or not to return the West Bank or how much of it. The issue must be decided as one of national survival, not as a halakhic question to be decided by rabbis consulting texts.

But whether Dove or Hawk or neither or undecided or both – and most Israelis are in the last three categories – Israelis today are רבוצה כארי, never רבוצה ככלב! We have lived through too much to leave our status of lions and go back to being mere household pets of other nations. The Jews of Israel know that we have what we have not because of the kindness of the world, but despite it! Never again dog-houses!

The recent report of the Agranat Commission, which investigated the **מהדלים** or shortcomings that led to the setbacks of the Yom Kippur War, has already been traumatic, and may yet prove to be convulsive in Israel. But I take that as a sign that the country is basically healthy, that it retains the quality of **ארי** and not of **כלב**. Consider this: this is the first time in living memory that Jewish leadership is being brought to account, that it is forced to be responsible to its constituency. It has not happened before. It does not happen now in the United States. What "Jewish leaders" feel they must report to the people whom they purport to represent?

It is possible that the government will fall because of it. That may appear to weaken us externally for a short while. But it will strengthen us internally immeasurably. I do not say that I would like to see such a political development, but if it comes, and it well may, it will be a sign of inner rejuvenation, of the re-democratization of Israel. And I am confident that we will emerge stronger and better. And as for the enemies about us: **לא יחרץ כלב לשונו**, "let not the dog whet its tongue!"

Furthermore, we American Jews are wrong in our general attitude to the results of the Yom Kippur War. I am personally annoyed with Israelis who, in an attempt to keep up the old image, declare that the victory of the Yom Kippur War was even greater than that of the Six Day War. Such statements are a tribute to the power of myth-making. But I am more distressed over the attitude of many American Jews who either fear to visit Israel because of political and military unrest, or equally as much, those Jews who visit Israel as an act of **ניחום אבלים**, consoling the mourners. Yes, it is true that grief and bereavement exist in the land because of the 2,000 young people, the cream of the country, who gave their lives in the war.

But let us remember: *it was not a pogrom!* Jews did not cower in their cellars as the enemy wrecked havoc above. They fought back, and fought back bravely. Lions have suffered a temporary setback, and they are not likely ever again to beg like dogs.

This Passover, the **זמן חרותנו**, at the season of our freedom, let us remember that in our days the **אש המערכה רבוצה כארי**, the fire on the altar of our national life crouches like a lion. Of course, the old Israeli arrogance and cockiness was foolish. The self-image of so many Israelis (fostered by American Jews, whose knowledge of Jewish and Zionist history usually came from Leon Uris's *Exodus* and who

saw the typical Israeli as an Ari Ben Canaan) as a Jewish superman, was both dangerous and silly. But that does not negate the real psychological fact that a new mentality now motivates Jews, especially the Israelis.

In Israel's dilemma – and it is ours as well – survival remains the first order of business on the national agenda. Solomon had taught us that טוב הכלב החי מן הארייה המת, better a living dog than a dead lion. But the *quality* counts as much as survival itself! What kind of freedom shall we be getting for ourselves? Israel may indeed have to make some concessions for peace. But Israelis, most of them, will not consent to a salami-like dismemberment of the country. If, Heaven forbid, it comes to that, the "spirit of Masada" (which always lies very close to the surface of Israeli awareness) will be aroused, and Israel will inform the world, paraphrasing Solomon, that טוב הארייה המת מן הכלב המת, better to die like a lion than to die like a dog!

The United States learned in Vietnam that you cannot defeat an enemy just because it is a little country. The United States must now recognize that you cannot sell out an ally just because it is a little country.

In the next few weeks or months, we will learn the real intentions of our Secretary of State. I hope all will go well. But there is good reason to feel that deals have been made and promises have been given which will weaken Israel critically. If that is the case, and I certainly hope it is not, we American Jews will have to stand by the State of Israel during very difficult days, even if it means resisting this possible change in American foreign policy.

So let us summarize our thoughts in this season of our freedom.

The choice between Dove and Hawk is a purely political one in deciding the means of establishing maximum freedom. But the choice between Lion and Dog is a spiritual one in deciding the very nature and essence of our freedom.

The political zoology of freedom will be based largely on whether we veer more towards Dove or Hawk. But the ultimate theology of freedom will be based squarely on our choice of *kelev* or *ari*.

לשון, the dog did not whet its tongue as the Israelites left Egypt, and it must remain silenced in the exodus of our day as well. The choice has been made for us.

The Talmud (Ber. 57b) tells us that

ראה גוב של אריות אומר ברוך שעשה ניסים לאבותינו במקום הזה

One who sees a den of lions should recite the blessing to God, "who performed miracles for our ancestors in this place." The plain meaning of the text is that when one beholds a pride of lions, he must recall the miracle that occurred to Daniel and his friends when they were cast into the lions' den and emerged safe by the miracle wrought by God.

I suggest another meaning. When one sees a pride or den of lions, he must thank God for the miracles performed for our ancestors. He must praise the Almighty for having endowed our people with the quality of the lion, for having given us even in the infancy of our history – when we left Egypt as a band of disorganized slaves – the blessing of leonine courage; for having graced Jews throughout history with the ability to rise from the crouching of a dog to the crouching of a lion. For it is this quality of the lion that has given us Passover, זמן חרותנו, the time of our freedom.

Therefore, he who sees a pride of lions must bless God who gave us the pride of freedom.



Rabbi Norman Lamm  
The Jewish Center

April 27, 1974  
Tazria-Metzora/Yom Ha'atzmaut

### **Wishing the World a Speedy Recovery**

I had a dream last night: I was leafing through the New York Times in the late 1900s, when my eyes chanced upon the following item in the obituary column:

WORLD, THIS. Passed away yesterday morning, after long illness.  
Death came quietly instead of by nuclear explosion. No survivors, no  
mourners. Services will be conducted in Heaven by a relieved  
Creator.

It requires no dream, no nightmare, but a hard-headed and analytic realism to look at the world and conclude that it is sick and moribund, a candidate for the obituary columns of the cosmos.

Here are some quick examples of dreadful symptoms: the USSR, a superpower of hundreds of millions of people, is afraid to let a hundred thousand Jews out, and decides to risk its economic and technological future by cracking down on a handful of ideological dissenters.

African nations self-righteously condemn white countries as imperialists and colonialists, and proceed to destroy neighboring (black) tribes with genocidal relish.

The United States is mortally wounded by Watergate. Its normal, healthy sexual inhibitions have withered up and vanished. Its clergymen having already excused every sexual deviancy as acceptable in the name of "love," its psychiatrists now declare that homosexuality is no longer an illness – as if proclamation can change the nature of the perversity. The whole country is being "liberated" to death.

Israel is undergoing an erosion of its government and experiencing major political malaise. The first Jewish Commonwealth in over two thousand years, brought into being by the teachings, traditions, and aspirations of a people nourished for millenia by Judaism, feigns ignorance of "who is a

Jew." Religious Jews are torn apart by internal dissension. The Neturei Karta delivers itself of an anti-Zionist diatribe not in a Jewish journal, but on the pages of the New York Times – on the weekend of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

So the world is indeed sick, and we must wish it a speedy recovery. It is desperately in need of a *refuah shelemah*.

And yet, despite my lack of expertise in either political or medicinal science, I venture that there is a basic difference between Israel and most of the rest of the world in the nature and etiology of their respective illnesses.

I can best describe this difference in terms of the two Sidras which we read this morning. Both tell of organic conditions which lead to the state of *טומאה* or impurity, and which require the process of *טהרה* (purification) and the offering of sacrifices.

The difference is that the first Sidra, *תזריע*, tells of the anguish of childbirth, and the procedure that a mother must go through after delivering a baby. It is what in Yiddish is called, charmingly, *א געזונטער קרענק*, a "healthy illness." Whereas the second Sidra, *מצורע*, speaks of leprosy, of plague, of the pathological. The Rabbis said, with a full measure of justice, *מצורע הרי הוא כמת*, a leper is as one who has died.

The first Sidra, *תזריע*, thus speaks of birth pains; the second, *מצורע*, speaks of death pangs. *תזריע* treats of the instability of growth; *מצורע*, of the stench of decay.

To my mind, Israel's malaise is that of *תזריע*, while the rest of the world is caught up in the predicament of the *מצורע*, the leper.

Of course, I know that I am oversimplifying. But permit me to explain.

We American Jews are sorely distressed at events in Israel on this, its 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary. But it is time that we stopped looking at Israel like incurable romantics. It is time for us to be realistic. Israel's internal wrangling, its self-doubts, its purging of old leadership, its profound uneasiness – all this is a catharsis which will yet bring out the best in Israeli society: a new sense of caring, of concern, of participation. We have reason to hope that Israel will reemerge with renewed faith, with high resolve, with rediscovered patriotism.

Out of all this there will take place rebirth, not only of a new Israeli leadership, but perhaps a new Israeli society – one less prone to lose the idealism of early Zionism in favor of imported Americanism, less arrogant, more attuned to the Jewish history and culture and faith of 3500 years before 1948, and with more trust in its new generation.

I know that the battles and the arguments are disconcerting. But it was an American President, James Madison, who taught us that democracies always show off their internal controversies, and are all the stronger for it.

In the last book of the Torah (Devarim 21) we read: וְעַל פִּיהֶם יִהְיֶה כָּל רִיב וְכָל נֶגַע, "by them (the priests) shall be decided every controversy and every plague." The Rabbis asked: וְכִי מָה עֲנִין רִיבִין אֶצֶל נֶגְעִים, What is the relation of controversy to plague?

The question is right. And the answer is that they sometimes seem alike – they both appear as illnesses, as sicknesses, as weaknesses. But there is a vast difference between them. The arguments and infighting can be part of the difficult process of coming to great decisions; plague and leprosy are debilitating. Israel today is in the category of כָּל רִיב; whereas the world, or most of it, is beset by נֶגַע.

Consider what the world did this week. After the brutal and sadistic assault by three Palestinian terrorists who killed 18 innocent people, mostly women and children, in Kiryat Shemonah, and injured 18 more, the Israelis responded by a raid in Southern Lebanon. They warned the inhabitants of the houses to leave and then blew up the houses. No one was killed, except for one possible casualty which was completely accidental.

This week the Security Council met. It condemned Israel by name, by a vote of 13-0. It did not mention the Palestinian guerrillas or their atrocities.

These 13 countries have proved themselves to be lepers! I know: there is a matter of oil, of economics, of energy, of politics. I do not expect countries to keep moral issues paramount in their policies or diplomacy. But is there no limit to this hypocrisy? Can they be so morally obtuse that they cannot bring themselves to condemn the murder of little children?

The Rabbis listed those sins of society for which the plague of leprosy (נֶגְעִים) is visited upon it. Amongst others, they listed: רֵעַ מוֹצִיא שֵׁם רָע (slander), לִשׁוֹן הָרַע (gossip), גִּסְתֵּי הָרוּחַ (vulgarity and

insensitivity), משלוח מדנים (causing strife amongst others), עינים רמות (superciliousness), לשון שקר (falsehood), לב חושב מחשבות און (hearts which think evil thoughts), and רגליים ממהרים לרוץ לרעי (feet which hasten to do evil).

Do you recognize these qualities? They are a veritable Security Council of evil traits!

And yet the Biblical prescription was reversed this week. The Torah commands the מצורע, the leper, to perform a שלוח המחנות, to be sent away and cast out of the community. But in the United Nations this week, it was Israel's Ambassador Tekoah who walked out, while the others remained where they were, in this international leper's colony!

I recognize that my rhetoric may be strong, that I am overlooking important subtleties and fine distinctions, that politics is a finely honed procedure. I know that many non-Jews and even some marginal Jews are astounded at the intensity of our commitment to Israel. I myself certainly do not intend that Jews must ignore or neglect the rest of the world. The world is too small for that, and I think we are too sophisticated for that.

But I unabashedly admit that I subscribe to the thesis of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi that ישראל הוא "לב האומות", "Israel is the heart of the nations!"

By that I mean, and Halevi meant, that *without Israel the world will cease to exist – or cease exist as a civilized community*; that Israel by itself can no more exist than a heart can pump without the rest of the body; that Israel's existence is meant to serve the rest of the world and give it life; that Israel, like the heart, is a sensitive organ, which registers every pain and every joy, every disillusionment and every fulfillment that is experienced by all the rest of mankind.

Because I believe in God and in the Covenant and in the meaningfulness of life and world and history, to and for all people, I believe that Israel is the לב האומות, "the heart of the nations."

And therefore when I get the feeling that many world leaders and academic theoreticians consider Israel a "headache," I respond by warning them that it is not so: *Israel is really your heartache!*

Israel's Independence Day follows Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Day, by exactly one week. It is a warning to the world: the Holocaust was a major heart-attack for civilization. It is a warning to the

world: *you can't afford another coronary*. For the sake of the world itself, we Jews of the Diaspora are determined that we will not let Israel down!

And because I believe that Israel is the heart of the nations, I have hope for all of them. Because Israel is now undergoing creative agonies (those of *אשה כי תזריע*), while so much of the rest of the world is in various stages of decay (*מצורע*), I believe that a healthy heart will save the rest of the mankind.

The moral sickness of the international community arouses in me more pity and sympathy than does the political and social malaise of Israel.

I feel for the world, even in my revulsion at its offensive disease.

And it is in order to avoid the nightmare of its effective demise that I wish it a "speedy recovery," and pray *מי שברך את אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב הוא יברך את החולה כל העולם כולו, רפואת הנפש ורפואת הגוף*, May He who blessed the forefathers of Israel bless the patient – the entire world !! – and grant it a complete recovery, of both body and soul, morally and politically and economically.

May Israel, too, experience healing of its self and its soul, as it goes through the creative agonies of rebirth as described in *תזריע*, bringing health and recovery to a world that has become a leper, a *מצורע*.

This month *Iyyar* (*אייר*), the month in which the State of Israel was established, is a month that we must pray for the health of all the world.

For so it is written in some of the holy books, that the Hebrew word *אייר* forms the initial letters of that great phrase from the Book of Exodus: *אני ה' רופאך*, "I am the Lord who heals thee."

### **A Piece of Peace**

Most Jews, and almost all non-Jews, were thrilled with this week's historic news: the disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria.

Certainly, we ought not deny ourselves a bit of consolation, or begrudge ourselves a ray of hope for the future. If only for the silencing of the guns on the Golan, we must all join in a vote of thanks to our brilliant Secretary of State whose tireless efforts have produced this unprecedented agreement.

In our Sidra this morning we read of the blessings bestowed upon Israel by the Kohanim (priests). The blessings conclude with the significant words וישם לך שלום, "May He grant thee peace." In a remarkable comment, the בעל הטורים informs us that the *gimatriya* (numerical value) of the word shalom (peace) is 376, which is also the numerical value of the name עשו (Esau!) – ללמדך להקדים שלום – לכל אדם: this remarkable coincidence of "peace" and "Esau," comes to teach us that it is our duty to initiate peace with every individual, even an Esau.

And so, we, this week, have seen the beginnings of disengagement – which, even if it is very far from true peace, at least brings with it the remote promise of shalom – with Syria, the veritable "Esau" amongst our enemies.

And yet, two points must be made, and if they tend to moderate our enthusiasm and induce in us a bit of skepticism, it is worth the pain now if it will spare us frustration later.

First, it would be a tragic mistake if we were to overestimate what has been done and allow ourselves to be swept up in euphoria. We must not relax our vigilance. We must not ignore the dangers and booby-traps that lie in the way of the State of Israel and therefore world Jewry.

After all has been said and done, we have not yet had the first signal of real intentions for peace by any of the Arabs. For every dovish statement that they make to the world, they make two which are twice as hawkish to their own people. More and more, one begins to feel apprehensive, suspecting that the Arabs may be merely indulging in a tactic in a long diplomatic strategy leading to the

dismemberment of the State of Israel. While for others war is an extension of diplomacy, for them now it just might be that diplomacy is an extension of war.

The famous commentator, author of "כלי יקר," tells us in our Sidra the portion of the blessings of the Kohanim follows immediately upon that passage which deals with the law of the Nazarite, one who accepts a vow of abstention and is therefore forbidden to drink wine or liquor or any product of the grape. The sequence of the priestly blessings after the commandment to the Nazarite to refrain from drinking wine, comes to teach us a well known halakhah: that the priests are forbidden to bless the congregation when they are שתויי יין, intoxicated with alcohol.

I interpret that in the following manner: the very climax of the priestly blessings, their essence, that to which all its counterparts strive from the first word to the last, is: peace, וישם לך שלום, "May He grant thee peace." The Rabbis refer to this as כלי מחזיק ברכה, the "vessel" which contains all the rest of the blessings. So it is with the Amidah prayer: from the very beginning to the end, all of it leads up to the pinnacle of all blessings: שים שלום - המברך את עמו ישראל בשלום, the blessing of peace.

What does that mean? Peace is valuable only if one attains it in sobriety. But there is no blessing if peace is apparent only when one is intoxicated with illusions and a sense of unreality. Peace is no blessing if it is concocted or conceived through an alcoholic-type haze of self-delusion resting upon the gossamer threads of one's own wish-fulfillment.

It is good, as the American Indians used to say, to smoke the pipe of peace – but not if that smoke is going to blind you to the dagger in your enemy's hand.

And so, there must be no relaxation, no premature celebration, There can be no ברכת השלום as a result of שתויי יין – no blessing of peace when we are psychologically intoxicated, because when the heady stuff evaporates, so does the putative "peace."

If we approach this stage of development in the manner I have elaborated, with clear heads and open eyes, then indeed we can afford at least a murmured prayer of thanks to the Almighty. Then we can console ourselves that even if this is not the final peace between Israel and Arabs, that for which we have been praying and striving all these years, still, even a temporary respite in the battle is good. In a

paradoxical statement, our Rabbis said – and we must agree – that גדול השלום שאפילו בשעת מלחמה צריכים שלום, peace is so great, that even in the midst of war one needs peace!

Indeed, better a piece of peace, then all of peace in pieces.

My second point is that the peace for which we pray and hope and strive, must not be limited to Israel and the Arabs, or between the superpowers. It must not be restricted to the international, military, and diplomatic spheres alone.

I am increasingly distressed about an area of Jewish life where shalom is desperately needed, and where neither Kissinger nor Sadat, neither Geneva nor Washington, can be of any help.

Let me explain. The Midrash quotes ר' חנינא סגן הכהנים as stating a one-word commentary on the priestly blessing. On וישם לך שלום, "May He grant thee peace," R. Haninah, the assistant to the High Priest, added this word: בביתך, "in your home." The priestly blessing of peace refers to domestic peace, to שלום בית.

Now, that is astounding. One would have thought that in this expression we would find the biblical warrant and authority and source for the great visions of universal peace as elaborated by the Prophets of Israel, the grand visions of cosmic harmony which we find in Isaiah and Amos. Furthermore, it is the same R. Haninah who has taught us – much to the displeasure of radicals of his generation and of ours as well – הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות – always pray for the peace of the realm, for national and international peace. Why, in this case, does he restrict himself to the rather modest wish of שלום בית, domestic peace?

The answer is quite evident. If there is no שלום בית there can be no שלום בעולם; without peace and harmony which reign within, no peace without can be very enduring. If there is divisiveness and hostility and dissension within, then no permanent good can come from any pacts or treaties between nations and blocs. Of course shalom is vital on the battlefield, and in the chancelleries of the world. But I am deeply troubled by the lack of peace in Israel itself. What good will shalom with the Arabs do if, as the Israeli press maintains, we are on the verge of מלחמת היהודים, wars amongst Jews!

Israel is today experiencing a disappointing atomization, a lack of cohesiveness, a sudden loss of public consensus. This characterizes every group – right, left or center! The ruling Labor Party has



showed signs of breaking up into the original factions which constitute it. The same is true of the right-wing Likud Party. The religious party is in shambles. The Chief Rabbis, both of them distinguished scholars, are airing their personal grievances by personal assaults upon each other in the press. And I deeply regret and deplore the relentless campaign by an important Hasidic group in Brooklyn against the religious ministers, pressuring them to stay out of the government. I can sympathize with the motives of the Lubavitcher group – I agree with them on the importance of the "Who Is a Jew?" issue, but I am distressed by the manner and the timing and the evaluation. I do not think that shalom can be attained within the ranks of all of Israel by means of constant pressure on religious ministers not to join a fragile government. I think that issues may be vital, but they still have their place and time – and a time of such national emergency is not one in which to press for improvement in the law. I am worried that a government of the kind that is now being formed – without a single religious person – will do us much more damage than failing to improve the "Who Is a Jew?" legislation.

So, if we are going to pray and strive for peace, let our prayers and endeavors include – or perhaps begin with – שלום בביתך, peace in our own ranks. What all of us must work for is a new consensus based upon mutual respect and love. Peace is not a one-time thing that is all-or-nothing, either all there or not there at all. It is a cumulative process, a blessing that is achieved bit by bit, and begins with שלום בביתך, with our own inner reconciliation, before we can attain שלום בביתך, peace on the national and international fronts. The blessing calls upon each and every one of us to make his own contribution of peace in heart and hearth, in family and community. It summons us to begin a great campaign, each by himself, to earn the blessing of וישם לך שלום.

The way to reach that climax of all blessings is by remembering what comes before it: יאר ה' פניו, which is usually translated in that elegant but not completely comprehensible phrase, "May the Lord cause His countenance to shine on thee and be gracious unto thee." A "shining countenance" is the biblical or Hebrew idiom for – a smile. The blessing is that God smile upon us, that He be receptive and warm to us. And therefore the same meaning must be attached to the Midrashic interpretation of that phrase: יתן ה' מאור פנים אליך, may God give you a smiling face towards

your fellow Jews. The greatest blessing is not only when God smiles upon us, but when He teaches us to greet our fellows with smiles, with warmth, with affection. And thus ויחנך, according to the Midrash means:

שיתן לך דעת שתהיו חוננים זה את זה ומרחמים זה את זה

"be gracious unto thee" means, "May He give you the knowledge and intelligence to be gracious to each other and to love and be compassionate to each other." We are a people of דעת, of thought and knowledge. We are very often stubbornly and even fiercely independent in our thinking, and that is why we tend to be divisive. But we must now use this דעת, this knowledge and intelligence, to be חוננים זה את זה, gracious and loving and compassionate and smiling to each other.

And while we each begin on the venture of shalom from the grass roots and up, we must hope and urge and encourage Jewish leadership here, and especially in Israel, to compose their own differences not by abandoning genuinely held positions, but by eliminating all personal assaults and private grudges and the interminable political infighting that is unworthy of our people.

Indeed, it is perhaps there, in the high places of Jewish communal and Israeli political life, that בית שלום (domestic peace) must begin.

Then all of us will benefit from it – all the rest of us, all Israel, and all the world.

עושה שלום במרומיו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל ישראל.

"May He who makes peace in His 'high places' – in government and leading religious circles – make peace for all of us and all of Israel." ואמרו אמן, Amen.

### **Too Wise, Too Foolish**

The rebellion of Korah constituted a trauma of major proportions in biblical history. The whole enterprise of Moses – the spiritual reconstruction of his people, their political liberation, their psychological emancipation from a slave mentality, the development of a "holy nation and kingdom of priests" – was jeopardized by the demagogic Korah and his band of malcontents.

In retrospect, Korah was doomed from the outset. Moses, after all, was not a leader by his own choice, but had this mission imposed on him by Providence. So, in effect, Korah was rebelling against G-d. Hence, Rashi was moved to quote the Sages in exclaiming: *קרח שפיקח היה מה ראה לשטות זו* "Korah, who was so clever, how did he become involved in such foolishness?"

But the Kotzker Rebbe adds two or three words to that quotation from Rashi which provide us with a new insight. To Rashi's words, he adds *להיות פיקח* – how did Korah, such a clever man, get involved in the foolishness of being clever!

He means to say that, at the time, Korah appeared to have everything going for him. The people were afflicted with widespread discontent, with fear, with want, with jealousy of Moses, with feelings that Moses and Aaron and Miriam were nepotistic. Yet the fatal mistake of Korah was not *שטות* (foolishness) as such, but quite the opposite: he was too sharp, too brilliant, too capable.

Is this contravened by the Yiddish proverb *א חסרון די כלה איז צו שיין* (the bride is too beautiful...)? Not quite.

Korah, according to the Kotzker Rebbe, is teaching us that it is foolish to be too clever. Korah's very sharpness was a sign of his dullness; his very astuteness was a symptom of his want of intelligence; his very shrewdness was the stuff of stupidity.

It is an old truth (and truth does not dilute with age) that was known to the sages of all cultures and all times. Thus, Jeremiah taught us *אל יתהלל חכם בחכמתו*, "Let not the wise man glory in his

wisdom." And his contemporary Aristotle taught that vice is virtue taken to excess. Earlier yet, the Greeks were aware that hubris (pride, arrogance) leads to the revenge of Nemesis...

\* \* \* \* \*

Our whole society suffers from this tendency to value intelligence as an end in itself, without moral dimensions. It is true of our science and technology, which have for so long proclaimed an indifference to the moral consequences and social implications of their activities; to business, which piously proclaims only one goal, that of profit; to law and to journalism and to a hundred other professions.

That is why I personally subscribe to the thesis of James Madison, one of our Founding Fathers, that democracy is based not on the naive and romantic faith in man's innate goodness, but quite the contrary, on an expectation that groups of men, like individuals, will be motivated only by their self-interest. Each group tends to extremes in order to achieve its aims. Democracy means that we allow all the groups of society to come into a tension with each other, and in the interplay of forces, each group cancels the overreaching of other groups. This is the theory of checks and balances. Yet, despite all of this, it sometimes happens that one or several groups rip apart the social and political fabric by just being too smart and too successful.

The Yom Kippur War proved it for Israel. The Israelis fought valiantly and heroically. But they realize now, as do all of us, the danger of the *שטות של פיקחות*, the arrogance that comes from being too smart. We foolishly tried to be clever, and imagined that our superiority was unmovable, ingrained, and permanent. We therefore become negligent and careless.

But if for Israel our overshrewdness was expressed in negligence, no such mitigation can be provided for what happened in the USA.

Here, a band of sharp-headed but small-minded men overreached themselves by trying to do in the opposition with impunity. But the Watergate gangsters succeeded only in out-smarting themselves. During the entire course of the exposure of this sordid affair, we are often moved to wonder: *מה ראו* – how foolish of them to be so smart! At every step, at every fresh revelation, in this sordid and dirty business, I have been shocked at how supposedly brilliant men do such foolish things.

But I am convinced the solution lies in the Kotzker formula: להיות פיקה. שטות They are being too smart, too shrewd – foolishly so!

The same worry about an excess of success, a superfluity of brilliance, leads one to apprehension and ambiguity about our Secretary of State, One must of course admire his unquestioned genius. But is that a guarantee of peace? – of the welfare of the United States? - of the survival of Israel?

His recently proposed compromise figure of 45,000 Jews to emigrate from Russia every year sounds good, yet it also sounds quite hollow when you read that, in anticipation of President Nixon's arrival in Moscow, Russian-Jewish activists are being chased, persecuted, arrested. Some good omen for the success of Kissinger's policy!

In religious life per se, too, we must beware of the להיות פיקה, שטות, the foolishness of being too wise, too smart.

Knowledge remains the highest goal of the Jewish spiritual enterprise. But never is it valued without a spiritual-moral commitment, and never with arrogance.

I have always been fond of the statement of R. Nachman Bratzlaver that no matter how educated a man is in the ways of Torah, in the ways of G-d, and in the ways of the world, when he rises for prayer ישליך כל החכמות אחר גבו, let him throw out all his knowledge, all his sophistication, all his wisdom, over his shoulder – and stand before G-d childlike, simple, plain. All our philosophy, all our learning, all our ratiocination is as naught before Him. Surely each of us knows some people who think they are sophisticated when they are only indulging in sophistry!

Permit me to cite a famous mishnah in Avot which I shall consciously misinterpret – in order to illustrate my point.

The Rabbis said: איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם. "Who is a wise man? One who learns from every man." My "misinterpretation" (in the sense that this was obviously not the original intent of the author) is to read that: איזהו חכם "who is a wise man?" הלומד מכל, "One who learns from everything" – from all of life, from all of experience, from all individuals – that: אדם, "man." We are only human. We are only men and women. We are limited and mortal and finite and inadequate and fallible.

The merely פיקח (the shrewd man) thinks he has monopolized understanding and learning. The חכם (wise man) is one who knows how much remains inaccessible to man and forever closed to his probing intellect. The foolish "sharpie" imagines that his smartness will save him. The חכם distrusts an exaggerated view of wisdom itself.

Korah was only a פיקח, a "shrewdie," and he thought he could outsmart the whole world. So he proved to be a שוטה, a fool. But the חכם, the truly wise man, knows how easy it is to fall into the pit of שטות, or stupidity; he knows that with every advance in knowledge or insight we walk on a thin line, on the rim of an abyss of foolishness, so that one error, one misstep – and our wisdom has begotten us eternal folly. Therefore, the truly wise man humbly acknowledges that there is no true knowledge without faith, no wisdom without morality, no advancement of man without the greater knowledge that he is also a שוטה, a fool.

Perhaps this is what Isaiah meant in his great Messianic vision: 'ומלאה הארץ דעה את ה', usually translated, "The world will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord." But then the Hebrew should have read 'דעת ה', not 'דעה את ה'. Why the את? That small word sometimes means "with." Hence: the world will be filled with knowledge – all kinds of knowledge: religious and secular, spiritual and scientific, economic and psychological – 'את ה', *with* the Lord, accompanied by and restrained by and graced by the healing trust and faith in G-d, and the humility that comes with it.

Only when faith is combined with knowledge, when the Lord is acknowledged along with the exercise of one's own intelligence, are we ready for the Messiah. Only then are we worthy of redemption.

### **The Akedah – Again**

My theme this morning is the *Akedah*, which I shall treat subjectively, even autobiographically.

I confess that for a long time I have had difficulties with the *Akedah* story, the command of God to Abraham to bind Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice, saving him only at the last minute. The *Akedah* has always both fascinated and troubled me.

The disturbing element has not been the philosophical one, namely, how can God demand of man that he be prepared for such a horrendous sacrifice? I am satisfied that some causes are worthy of the greatest sacrifice. I think it is the glory of man that he cherishes some things more than life itself, more than the greatest human love.

The imperative for such ultimate sacrifice is innate in man.

At every stage of creation, the divine reaction was *ki tov*, "behold, it is good." But after man was created, which according to tradition took place on Rosh Hashanah, we read that the Creator beheld his creation, *Ve'hineh tov me'od*, "and behold, it was very good." Whereupon the Midrash records a rather startling comment of Rabbi Meir: *Hineh tov me'od – hineh tov mavet*, "it is very good" refers to death!

What could Rabbi Meir have meant by identifying the "very good" of man as death? A dear friend and colleague, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, has interpreted this to mean that only that for which you are willing to die, is it worth living. Only when there is something that is worth giving your life for, is life itself "very good." In his words, "For what shall a man live? For that for which he would die."

So I have no problems with the concept of the *Akedah* as such.

It is human to sacrifice.

My difficulties with the *Akedah* are far different, and far simpler. I am frightened by how small it makes me feel. The demands it places on me are too great. When I measure myself against Abraham and Isaac, I feel inadequate, shallow, trivial. My ancestor Abraham gave more than his own life – the life of his precious son; but what about me? What have I ever done for Yiddishkeit? What have any of us ever done that approaches the *Akedah* even remotely?

Of course, the mind spins out its rationalizations, some primitive, some sophisticated. I told myself that Abraham was remote, both chronologically and in cultural ambience, and that a man of ancient Mesopotamia cannot really serve as a model for twentieth-century man. I agreed avidly with the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, who applied to Abraham the title of, "the Knight of Faith." That placed Abraham in an altogether different category.

He could make such sacrifices. I, however, an ordinary mortal, beset by the usual weaknesses and perhaps a few more – I am certainly not a hero. I therefore cannot aspire to the knighthood of faith. That remains the super-human vocation of an Abraham.

But I must tell you that all my rationalizations are empty, all my excuses lame, all my sophisticated explanations ring hollow, and all my self-serving illusions are shattered and lie in ashes. Why so? Deep down, I knew all along that I was evading the issue. But something I read this summer forced it into my awareness.

Now I have no choice but to confront it directly.

In the course of preparing a series of lectures on "The Holocaust and The Halakhah," which I hope to deliver on Saturday afternoons beginning in several weeks, I chanced upon a teshuvah written by a Lithuanian scholar, Rabbi Hirsh Meisels, who died in Chicago this past year.

The author was in Auschwitz in the 1940s. The question concerned something that happened on a Rosh Hashanah day in that death camp. In that section of Auschwitz there were several hundred boys, aged fourteen to eighteen. The Nazi commandant of the camp decided that he needed a number of them for labor, and the rest would be put to death. And so he ordered one of those infamous



"selections." He set up what looked like an 8-foot vertical pole with a horizontal pole extending from it. He then had the boys walk past it. Whoever was tall enough so that his head touched the horizontal pole, was considered strong enough to work, and would be kept alive. All those who were too short were sent to a special barrack where they were denied food and water and prepared for the crematorium that night – this on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. The children quickly realized what was going on. Those who were too short stood on tiptoes to reach the wooden beam. But when they did, Nazi guards with rubber truncheons would bludgeon them to death. And so many of the children were sent to the bunkers to await death.

The anguish that gripped the Jewish inmates of Auschwitz that day was profound because the children, who were to die, were to be selected that very day. The kapos, tasked with delivering the exact number of children for the SS, would be put to death themselves if any were missing. However, they were willing to accept bribes and exchange children; some of the inmates had some money tucked away in an article of clothing, or some jewels between their toes, and so parents and relatives rushed to the kapos in an attempt to redeem their children. However, before taking a child out, the kapos would hunt for a child not condemned to death and pull him into the bunker so that the total number of condemned youngsters would remain the same. In other words, in order to save one child, you knew that another Jewish lad would surely be put to death.

And so, a simple Jew from Oberland came to Rabbi Meisels and said to him: "According to the Torah, am I permitted to redeem my only child, whom I love more than life itself, who is now in that bloc? I have the means to ransom him. I know that if I do, some other hapless Jewish child will be killed in his place. Am I permitted to do so or not?"

The Rabbi attempted every which way to evade the responsibility of having to give an answer. "I can't," he said, "I can't give you an answer! It is the sort of question which is worthy of a Sanhedrin. I don't even have any books to consult here in Auschwitz." But the Jew would accept no evasion. In his book (מקדשי השם), Rabbi Meisels quotes verbatim the remarks of this Jew in the Yiddish in which they were spoken:

רבי איך האב געטאהן דאס  
 מייניגע וואס דיא תורה איז מיך מחייב ציא טאהן.  
 איך האב געפרעגט א שאלה ביי א רב אין קיין אנדערער  
 רב איז דא נישט דא. אין אז איהר קענט מיר נישט  
 ענטפערין, דאס איך מעג אויסלייזן מיין קינד, איז  
 דאך א סימן אז איהר זענט ביא אייך נישט פערטיג  
 אין דיא הלכה מתיר צי זיין. ווארין ווען עס וואלט  
 געוועהן מותר, בלי שום פקפוק, וואלט איהר דאך מיר  
 זיכער געענטפערט, אז עס איז מותר. הייסט דאס ביא  
 מיר וויא א פסק דין, אז איך טאהר נישט על פי ההלכה.  
 אין דאס איז ביא מיר געניג, אין ממילא וועט מיין  
 איינציג קינד פארברענט ווערין עס"י התורה וההלכה  
 בין איך דאס מקבל באהבה ובשמחה, אין איך טיח  
 גאר נישט. איהם אויס צי לייזן ווייל דיא תורה האט  
 אזוי געהייסן. עכ"ל.

Rabbi, I have fulfilled my duty to which the Torah obligates me. I asked a question of a Rabbi, and there is no other Rabbi here. And if you cannot answer me that it is permitted for me to ransom my child, that is a sign that you are not at all certain that the Halakhah permits me to do so; for if it would be permitted without any doubt, you of course would immediately tell me that I am allowed to save my only son. I therefore accept this as your halakhic verdict, that according to the Halakhah I may not save my child at the expense of some other. That is sufficient for me. Therefore my only child will be burnt to death according to the Torah and the Halakhah. And I accept that with love and with joy, and I do nothing to redeem him, because that is what the Torah has told me.

Rabbi Meisels adds his own postscript:

That entire day of Rosh Hashanah, the Jew walked back and forth, talking to himself, in euphoria, telling himself that he had the privilege to offer up his only son to the Lord even though he was able to redeem him; but nevertheless, he did not redeem him because he saw that the Torah would not permit him to do this, and therefore, let this act be accepted before God like the *Akedah* of our Father Isaac, which also occurred on Rosh Hashanah day.

So, never mind the complexities of the Halakhah and the subtleties of the legal decision. The moral and halakhic issues were clear enough – and so was the compelling love of this poor man for his only son, and his sublime commitment to Torah and God and morality. And this happened not to a Knight of Faith four thousand years ago in ancient Canaan or Mesopotamia, but – surprise of surprises! – on this very planet, in Europe, just thirty years ago! The *Akedah* – all over again!

This is only one example of the *Akedah* during the Holocaust. But it happened not only then. It happens now too. It happened last year. It happened this year.

Just eight days ago, on Tuesday September 10th, we had a *Sofer* (scribe) here at The Jewish Center. You may recall that we announced that on that day a scribe would be here to examine and correct your *Tefillin* and *Mezuzot*. A number of you brought these articles here for such examination. The scribe is Mr. Mechaber, a Sephardic Jew. He did not look well, and I inquired after the reason. His composure suddenly melted, and he broke down and told me: "The High Holidays are approaching, and that means the first Yahrzeit of my only son who was eighteen years old when he was killed on the Bar Lev line on Yom Kippur day." He raised his eyes to Heaven, picked up his hands, and said, *Et hakol natati lamedinah*. "Everything have I given for the State!"

That was his *Akedah*. Multiply that by twenty-five hundred and you have the evidence of the *Akedah* this past year alone.

This is what shatters me, what makes me feel so trivial and petty and unworthy and insignificant. Because the *Akedah* is a recurring theme, *bekhol dor va-dor*, in every generation. I am expected to be ready for it, and you are expected to be ready for it. The Torah considers that I am capable of it, and that you are capable of it. And it therefore embarrasses me. And you. All of us! Because I look around me, and I look at myself, and I see how we live, and how tenuous are our convictions, and how our *Avodat ha-Shem* is done without *simchah*, how we practice our Jewishness so begrudgingly, as if we are doing God a great favor!

And what, after all, is it that we are asked to do on this Rosh Hashanah? To sacrifice our oldest sons, as did Abraham?

No, not in America. In Israel, yes! But not in America. All we are asked to do is to be serious Jews, be better Jews, sacrifice just a bit – and don't chafe and wear a martyr complex on your lapel because of it!

What are all those demands and restraints and sacrifices that we American Jews in 1974 consider so onerous and so taxing?

- That we continue to support Israel through the UJA and bonds and travel even when it is not safe?
- That we support the synagogue both financially and by using it?
- That in times of recession and inflation we do not cut off charity as the first item in the budget to go?
- That occasionally we attend a rally for Russian Jews and invite a Russian Jewish family to our home?
- That men who, despite all their busy schedules, find time religiously for tennis or bridge, should also find a little time religiously to attend a Shiur?
- That women not use their continuing education and career, after having children, as an excuse for abandoning the Jewish community, from Sisterhood to Mizrahi Women, from Hadassah to Federation to Yeshiva University?
- That we send our children to Jewish schools and Jewish camps?
- That we observe *Kashrut* and Shabbat, despite the ridicule of ignorant and self-hating Jews?
- That we abide by principles, instead of losing ourselves in our perpetual status-seeking, and our indulgence in a hedonistic frenzy?

Are these the things that we do as great acts of sacrifice on behalf of God and Torah and Israel and Judaism? – or, worse, that we fail to do on their behalf?

How distressing when we measure such concerns against the *Akedah* which is being lived and relived and re-lived by so many others!

So, the whole point of the *Akedah* story is that we are the children of Abraham and Isaac, that we are capable of genuine greatness, that the capacity for ultimate sacrifice is in our genes and chromosomes, in our blood and in the very marrow of our bones. And it is therefore a scandal if we let ourselves become petty, if we undersell and underestimate ourselves.

One of the great luminaries in the dynasty of the Rabbis of Ger, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Ger, author of *Chidushei Ha-Rim*, and known by the name of that work, was once asked by one of his Hasidim: "Why is it that Jews cry (in the days when Jews would shed a tear during prayer...) when they recite the words of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayer, *Adam yesodo me'afer ve'sofo le'afar*, Man's origin is dust and his end is in dust. If, they ask, man's origin were gold or silver or platinum, and his end in dust, then we could understand weeping and wailing. But if he begins in dust and ends in dust, then the books balance, and there is no total loss. Why weep?"

The Rabbi Answered: "It is true, man's origin is in dust and he ends in dust. However, although his origin is in dust, he is endowed by his Creator with the capacity to raise the dust *ad lev ha-shamayim*, to the very heart of the Heavens. And when he fails in this mission, when he is born in dust and grovels in dust, and barely ever raises his head above the dust, and spends his life building his castles and palaces all in the dust, and forgets to reach upwards, and fails to try to raise the dust of the earth to the heart of the Heavens, then indeed there is something to cry about!"

That is why I am so troubled by the *Akedah*, which is the central message of Rosh Hashanah, and the Shofar which symbolizes the Akedah as the horn of the ram that was offered in place of Isaac. It is precisely what Rosh Hashanah and *Akedah* and Shofar must do for us – it must accusingly remind us of the greatness that is within our grasp, of the heroism and the high faith, of the fierce loves and the sublime commitments that lie across our ethnic endowments, our individual gifts – whether on Mount Moriah or in Auschwitz, whether on the Bar-Lev line or on the West Side of Manhattan. It is a symbol of the Heavens to which we can raise this paltry dust which is our body and our life – a symbol as profound and as great as the distance between the heart of the Heavens and the dust of the earth.

And even as it is disturbing and accusing in pointing out the difference between our capacities and our realities, it is also inspiring in reminding us of what we could be – of what we once were – of the beautiful Jews – what once used to be called *Sheine Yidden*.

And just as the Shofar and the *Akedah* are a double symbol that speaks to us in accents of both accusation and inspiration, so is the Shofar a message that we send to God – a prayer, perhaps even a kind of accusation, and, yes, an inspiration. It is a declaration – behold, O Lord, how Abraham and the *Akedah* still live. Behold your Jews so ready to sacrifice for You, for Your Torah, for Your people! Behold how this people of the Shofar are a people of *Shefer*! They are beautiful.

No more holocausts: Even if You are worth it, even if we are ready for it, don't ask for it!

So the sound of the Shofar is a wordless summons to us and a wordless prayer to God. It is the ultimate dialogue, though a word is not spoken. It speaks volumes, it says all there is to say – and much more.

Shofar, send back our message to our Father in Heaven.

*Alah Elokim b'teruah*. When such a message is sent to God, He rises, as it were. And when such a message is sent to us, let us, in awe and reverence, in fear and trembling, in love and devotion, rise for the sound of the Shofar.

### Diffidence and Indifference

Years, decades, even centuries seem to have passed since we last assembled here for Kol Nidre services. What a difference between last year and tonight! Last year at Kol Nidre, things seemed so normal despite the intermittent crises, so innocent despite the occasional scandals, life so secure and danger so remote. We did not even know how lucky we were. Tonight, however, in the State of Israel, parents and children of some twenty eight hundred young men will rise at the end of the service to recite Kaddish at the occasion of the first *yahrzeit* of their children who fell in battle.

The Jewish tradition tells us that one of the fundamental differences between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is that Rosh Hashanah is **יום הדין**, the day of judgment, whereas Yom Kippur is **יום הרחמים**, the day of mercy or compassion. While each contains an element of the other, these are the major emphases. Thus, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapiro, author of "**בני יששכר**," complained that the **מי לכובוד יום**, the special prayer recited for those who receive Torah honors on Yom Kippur, mentions **הדין**, "in honor of the day of judgment." He ordered that these words not be inserted in the prayer, because Yom Kippur was a day of love and compassion, not judgment and justice. I confess that for a while I was planning to do the same at The Jewish Center.

But no more. Yom Kippur, of course, remains a day of mercy and compassion. But, alas, the stamp of **יום הדין** (day of judgment), is indelibly impressed on it as of 2 P.M. last year on Yom Kippur day, and so it will remain forever. A new and ominous dimension has been added to the historic character of this day.

Never before in my adult life did I recite the words of the **ונתנה תוקף** prayer with such feeling and conviction as I have since the outbreak of hostilities last year. **מי יחיה ומי ימות, מי בקיצו ומי לא בקיצו** – who knows? Who is destined to life and who is destined to death? Who to an early end and who to survival? **מי במים מי באש מי בחרב** – who will drown in the Suez Canal or the Mediterranean, who will be incinerated in a burning tank or a crashing jet, who will be the victim of the enemy's sword or napalm

or missile? *ועל המדינות בו ייאמר, איזו לחרב ואיזו לשלום*, and on this judgment day it is decided which nations are doomed to war, and which will be graced with peace.

We have achieved a new awareness of the fragility of our lives, of the marginality of our existence, of our vulnerability, of the extent to which we are pawns and not players in the games of life.

But, Jews are Jews! And Jews never let any experience of life pass without squeezing out of it some lesson, something that they can both learn and teach, some insight into securing survival.

What were the lessons of that traumatic experience a year ago? I am not speaking of the military and political reevaluations: these themes neither fall within my competence nor are they appropriate for this holy night. Rather, I ask the question in the spirit of the Jewish tradition, which from its beginnings insisted that every cardinal event must become a springboard for self-examination, for *teshuvah* (repentance). Our question, then, is: where have we gone wrong, not as soldiers but as people, as Jews? Certainly, Yom Kippur, the time of introspection and confession, is appropriate for such soul-searching.

There are two problem areas which cover all our lives: the spiritual and the social. Or, to use the classical formulations of our tradition, the realms of *בין אדם למקום* (between man and God), and *בין אדם לחברו* (between man and man).

These two areas are alluded to in the *Amidah* just concluded: *כי אתה סלחן לישראל ומחלן לשבטי*, "For Thou art the pardoner of Israel and the Forgiver of the tribes of Jeshurun in every generation."

Rabbi Baruch Epstein, author of "*ברוך שאמר*," asks: why do we in one case refer to our people as "Israel," implying an organic entity, and in the second phrase as "*the tribes* of Jeshurun," implying a divided people?

He answers by referring to a Kabbalistic idea which is not at all overly mystical. The Kabbalists ascribe all sins and failings to two primal sins committed by our people in the dim past. These are, the Golden Calf, when the people of Israel made themselves a calf and worshiped it, and the selling of Joseph by his brothers. The Golden Calf is paradigmatic for all sins *בין אדם למקום*; all spiritual failures derive, no matter how indirectly or remotely, from that of the Golden Calf. The selling of Joseph is the



source of all sins **בין אדם לחברו**; all social injustices reflect, somehow, some aspect of that cardinal crime of treachery early in our history.

Therefore, on Yom Kippur we pray that God be a **סלחן לישראל** – that he pardon *Israel* for its crime of making the calf, and for all sins against God that derive from it; and that He be a **מחלן לשבטי** **ישורון**, that He forgive the *tribes* of Jeshurun, the brothers who sold Joseph into slavery and thereby accepted responsibility for all wrongdoings of one Jew against another for all generations.

I would analyze that a bit more carefully. The sin of the Golden Calf is recorded in the Torah after the following prefatory words: the people saw **כי בושש משה**, that Moses was delayed. Our tradition says that **בושש** comes from **בא שש**, "six hours had passed." By this they mean that Moses had promised when he went up to receive the Torah that he would return in 40 days. The people thought that meant the 40<sup>th</sup> day, whereas he meant the end of 40 full days. Because of a difference of six hours, the people became exasperated, frightened, impatient, anxious, nervous. Because of this they made the calf and proclaimed: **אלה אלהיך ישראל**, this is your God – or, preferably, your leader – O Israel. Their fundamental insecurity leads to impatience, to search for a leader, to impulsiveness, and this is always the cause of man's sins against God.

The selling of Joseph into slavery came from just the opposite characteristic: from over-confidence rather than from diffidence, from insensitivity rather than from insecurity and anxiety. The tribes or brothers were too independent, too contemptuous, and therefore developed disrespect and enmity for their brother.

The illusion of weakness results in alienation from God, and a search for ersatz gods, for substitutes whether for Moses or for the Lord. This was the essence of the sin of the Golden Calf. It holds no less true today for young Jews who, in their exasperation and in their unwillingness to learn the difficult and demanding road of Judaism, thus find their ways into ashrams, into Jesus-freaks groups, into Buddhism and Christian Science and – some four thousand years after our ancestors repudiated moon worship – to this new evangelist from Korea, Rev. Moon.

The delusion of power leads to the alienation of man from his fellow man, of Jew from Jew. It leads people to sell their brothers down the river!

These, then, are the two primal sins for which we beg forgiveness and pardon on Yom Kippur: diffidence and indifference, impatience and impudence, nervousness and "nerve," insecurity and insensitivity.

Before last Yom Kippur our major problem was: the selling of Joseph. We were too much "the tribes of Jeshurun." We were overconfident to the point of arrogance, and not only Israelis but American Jews as well were cocky, secure, and – divisive! Israel had become a powder keg of internal strife. The tribes of Jeshurun were at each other's throats: Black Panthers, economic scandals, political infighting, hatred, were tearing apart the fabric of Israeli society.

Since last Yom Kippur, our major problem is not the selling of Joseph, but the Golden Calf. We have become nervous and weak, too pessimistic, on the brink of hopelessness. The voices of despair and self-doubt are abroad in the land. Some Israelis ask: maybe we should never have built a state, maybe we should give up what is asked from us, maybe the Arabs are not wrong after all. The alienation of Torah and God as the source of our national dignity has affected our claims and rights to the land. Our alienation from our history and past jeopardize our very future. As with the Golden Calf, insecurity leads to infidelity.

Not only does this hold true for Israel, but for the United States as well. Our whole community suffers from these two weaknesses.

This was brought back to me with stunning clarity last Friday morning when, with a group of colleagues, I met with Senator Jackson in his office in Washington, D.C. The Senator is truly one of the חסידים אומות העולם (noble gentiles). He is the prime mover, despite the absence of any obvious political motivation, in the effort to tie in credits for the Soviet Union with the rights of Jews to emigrate from Russia, and an end to their harassment, in the famous "Jackson Amendment." We met him immediately before he was to meet with President Ford at the White House, who was to meet thereafter with Ambassador Gromyko on the same problem.

We came to tell the Senator not that we support him – we are not politicians – but that the Jewish community has a sense of gratitude and that we approve of and applaud what he is doing. He told us that he had trouble with two groups of Jews. One was the American Jewish leadership which,

devoted though it was to the cause of American and world Jewry, was overly-nervous, too fearful, and buckled under too quickly to pressure. Every time Secretary Kissinger felt a cold coming on, American Jewish leaders sneezed. They allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the Executive Branch. They were too ready to compromise too much, even before beginning negotiations. The second group were the American Jewish intellectuals, especially the leftists, who were so concerned with advancing their abstract concept of Détente, who were so committed to their liberal dogma of friendship with Russia, that they were willing to overlook the vital interests of Russian Jews or Israeli Jews or any human rights.

There they are! One group – the impatient, insecure, nervous Jews, who are willing to compromise whether it be with the Golden Calf or with the Soviet Union. And the second group, Jews who are guilty of contempt and indifference towards their fellow Jews; "tribes of Jeshurun" who are willing to sell Joseph to every passing band of Midianites or Egyptians – or Russians – in the name of liberalism!

So if we ask God to forgive us these sins, to be the *עַמּוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמַחֲלֵן לְשִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, we must make every effort to rectify our failure, whether in Israel or in communal life in the United States.

But it is not sufficient, on this holy day, to speak about communal leadership problems in which we do not have much of a voice. Permit me to speak rather directly and personally as well about two areas in our life here at The Jewish Center. In both of these, I urge you to overcome the sense of alienation, both in the area of man-God relationship, and in the area of our social life.

First, as "Israel." In times of such threats to the continuation of Judaism, we simply have got to be more vigorous in our practice and our observance of Judaism. We are a bit too smug. We look about each other, notice many people in shul, and think that it will always be this way. We are not sufficiently aware of the constant dangers and assimilatory pressures that surround us. And the answer must come not by what somebody else will do, but by what we ourselves are willing to do. It means that we, who are sufficiently sophisticated to read what we read and do what we do, must at least attend on *shi'ur* of Torah study per week. It means that those of us who come only on the High Holidays must do more. Of course, I know you are good Jews in the sense that you support every Jewish cause so liberally;

would that all of us would follow your example! But is it not necessary to recharge your batteries, to establish your contact with the synagogue and with the Torah, and with Jewish life, in order to *gain* something from all that you are *giving*? It means that those of you who come every Shabbat – and that is the overwhelming majority of this congregation – must come Friday night as well. I am often deeply embarrassed at the fact that this great synagogue sees only 40 or 50 people and hardly any children on Friday nights. Is it not possible to come home 45 minutes earlier and welcome the Sabbath the way it should be welcomed? It means that our women who have time for every cause, must not refuse to respond to the Center itself when it calls upon them for assistance.

Second, the area of "the tribes of Jeshurun." We often speak of "The Center Family." Sometimes I wonder if this is only a great ideal, and whether it is or is not a reality. For instance, if, Heaven forbid, there is a funeral at The Center, I look about me and wonder: where are all the friends, where are all the people who see each other every Shabbat? Why is it that when we have to have a *minyan* in the house of a mourner, we must use the telephone to invite people? That should never be necessary! Those who are friendly in times of happiness, must be friendly in times of need as well. It means that we must feel a closeness to every Jew, and if a stranger comes into the synagogue and moves into our seat, we must not act aggrieved and upset.

Yom Kippur must teach us greater devotion to the Holy One, and greater love of Israel.

If we sincerely dedicate ourselves to this double program of avoiding the sin of the Golden Calf and of the selling of Joseph, God will indeed be the "Pardoner of Israel and the Forgiver of the tribes of Jeshurun."

Last year at this time we rose and we prayed. יעלה תחנונו מערב, may our prayer rise at sunset, when we recite Kol Nidre; ויבוא שועתנו מבוקר, may our cry arise before God at sunset on Yom Kippur day; ויראה רנונו עד ערב, and may our song, indicating God's acceptance of our prayer, be seen and heard by sunset, by Neilah time.

Apparently, we did not pray hard enough or wisely enough or with enough sincerity and *kavvanah*. Even if we did, it did not help. Because while יעלה, while our prayer arose at sunset; while ויבוא, our cry came to God in the morning – it stopped there. There was no ויראה. By Neilah time, no

רינה, no song, was seen or heard. Instead – the cold clash of iron and steel. No melody, but wail and lament. Fire and blood and tears. יעלה ויבוא, but not ויראה.

Tonight, chastened by a year of travail so cruelly and abruptly thrust upon us by the enemy last year on Yom Kippur afternoon, we pray with special fervor יעלה ויבוא ויראה.

O Lord, let Your help and goodness and salvation be Your answer by tomorrow evening.

Because, Lord, as Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev said to You one Kol Nidre eve, after a particularly vicious pogrom: "Master of the World, we need You! But Master of the World, You permitted these pagans to murder us and spill our blood, the blood of our old and our young, of our men and our women. No more, O Master of the World! Because while we need You – You need us! What, after all, will You do without Your Jews in the world? Who will speak of You? Who will keep the memory of You alive?"

So we say, O Lord, "how we need You! How You are needed by those who are sick and worried; by those who are disappointed, whether in children or in themselves; by those who feel economically threatened, their whole position in life jeopardized; by American Jewry; by the Jews of the State of Israel. But Lord, You need us too! Your prophet Isaiah said, אתם עדי, 'Ye are my witnesses.' And so forgive Israel and pardon the tribes of Jeshurun, because we must still witness to You in this world."

You need us, O Lord, so let *all three* of our prayers be answered this time.

יעלה תחנונו מערב ויבוא שוועתנו מבוקר ויראה רינונו עד ערב

May our prayers arise tonight, may they come before Thee in the morning, and by Neilah time may they be answered with song and a promise of a year of health and peace and redemption.