

The Sermons
and
Torah Thoughts
of
Rabbi
Irwin (Yitzchak)
Landau
(1910-1969)

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Biography: Rabbi Irwin Landau¹

Rabbi Irwin (Yitzchak) Landau (1910-1969) was born in Michaelovski, Czechoslovakia to a prominent rabbinic family.

Rabbi Landau studied in the famous Pressburg Yeshiva, and he subsequently occupied a rabbinic position in Vienna for a short time. Then, in 1935, Rabbi Landau moved to the UK to serve as chazan of the New Central Synagogue in Leeds. Soon after he met Alfreda Cohen from Tradegar, South Wales. The couple were engaged in 1936 and they married in Wales. Following their marriage, Rabbi and Mrs Landau continued to serve at the New Central Synagogue in Leeds as minister, chazan and mohel until 1944, when Rabbi Landau was appointed minister, Headmaster and Secretary to the Gladstone Park and Neasden Synagogue. He served the Gladstone Park and Neasden community for over 25 years until his death aged 59.

In terms of his scholarship, Rabbi Landau was an expert in both biblical and rabbinic literature. But beyond this, he also earned an MA in Education which, as pointed out by Aviva Landau, was a truly remarkable achievement given that he had never received any secular education prior to this endeavour. Aside from this, Rabbi Landau was an extraordinary linguist with a fluent command of eight different languages, and the ability to converse in twelve.

Rabbi Landau was known for his cultured refinement, gentle charm, impeccable appearance, and sartorial style. An exuberant and magnetic personality, he had a warm laugh and an extrovert nature, and while he never lost his heavy foreign accent, it was said to have only added to his charm.

Under his dedicated leadership, membership of the Gladstone Park and Neasden community grew significantly with Rabbi Landau prioritising the creation of engaging opportunities for the youth and enabling the community to acquire and build new premises that met the needs of their burgeoning community. This he did, and although gravely ill, he deferred medical treatment to fulfil a wish to officiate at the first wedding held in the new synagogue - although he was sadly too unwell to be present for the official synagogue consecration. As Dr. Charles N. Faith, Life President of the Gladstone Park and Neasden synagogue remarked in his obituary published in the *Jewish Chronicle* (June 13th 1969), 'the new synagogue he established will remain a permanent monument to his inspiring leadership'.

¹ This biography has been informed by an obituary to Rabbi Landau from *The Jewish Chronicle* (June 13, 1969 p. 47), Rev F. F. Carlebach's remarks (*Jewish Chronicle*, June 20th, 1969 p. 47), other associated references in *The Jewish Chronicle*, the obituary for Rabbi Landau in the Federation of Synagogues *HaMaor* rabbinical magazine (December, 1969) and Aviva Landau's excellent biography in her book *Edmonton Federation Cemetery: A look at the lives of prominent rabbonim and communal leaders buried at this historic cemetery* (Federation of Synagogues, 2018)

Beyond this, Rabbi Landau placed a special emphasis on the mitzvah of *tzedakah* (charity) and, as noted in his obituary in the HaMaor magazine, '[he] would lend great personal effort when called upon in private need'.

But Rabbi Landau was not only interested in his own community. He cared greatly about his host country and he dedicated himself to the war effort by travelling the country and lecturing to members of the armed forces about 'Why we are fighting this war'. Beyond this, Rabbi Landau also maintained a friendly relationship with local ministers of other faiths. In fact, as noted in the Jewish Chronicle (February 1, 1952), he addressed the Senior Fellowship of St. Catherine's Church (Neasden) on "Judaism", and then accompanied the Rev. M. Dean, Vicar of St. Catherine's, along with a further 100 members of the Fellowship, to the Gladstone Park Synagogue where he explained some of the objects and ceremonies of the synagogue.

Rabbi Landau was dedicated to Jewish continuity and he was deeply committed to the newly established State of Israel which he was proud to have visited. Rabbi Landau often made appeals for Israel, and as evident from a Jewish Chronicle entry from January 18 1952, he also spoke on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Rabbi Landau was a gifted chazan and musician, and as noted in a Jewish Chronicle entry from June 4th 1937, he led a musical evening at the Trouville Hotel in Bournemouth in aid of the Jewish National Fund where he sang a number of Hebrew melodies and Yiddish folk songs.

Rabbi Landau was delighted to be able to officiate at the wedding of his beloved son David (d. 2010) and his wife Angela, but he tragically passed away while Angela was expecting the couple's second daughter.

Rabbi Landau was survived by his widow Alfreda (who later died in 1991, aged 79) and David, a hugely respected solicitor who was also blessed with a beautiful voice and who was a chazan for the High Holy Days in the Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue for over 33 years! It was David's dying wish that the sermons and writings of his father be transcribed and published, and so this book has been produced both in the memory of Rabbi Irwin Landau, and his son David.

Rabbi Landau was buried on June 4th 1969 in the Edmonton Federation Cemetery (section W-1-42) with hespedim (eulogies) being delivered by Dayan M. Fisher, Dayan I. Rudnick and Rabbi M. Landy.

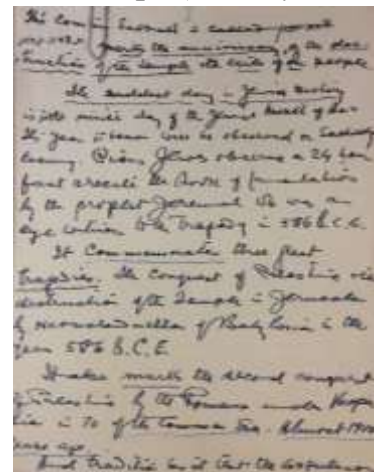
Preface by the Editor

In November 2016 I was contacted by Mr. Joe Stelzer of Hampstead, London, about my possible involvement in an extensive curation, research and editing project.

Joe is married to Annabel who, along with her sisters Edwina and Judith, are the daughters of the late David Landau (1938-2010) who was the only child of Rabbi Irwin and Alfreda Landau. As noted above (see 'Biography: Rabbi Irwin Landau'), it was David's dying wish that the sermons and writings of his father be transcribed and published, and Joe - along with the rest of the family - were determined to make this happen.

Joe had recently turned to Rabbi Dr. Rafi Zarum to seek advice about who may have the requisite skills to work on this project, and based on his familiarity with my work as a researcher, writer and editor, Rafi passed on my details. Soon after, Joe contacted me, and it was in November 2016 when I agreed to take on this project. By that stage I'd seen a few photocopies of some of the sermons, and I was told to expect a delivery with the handwritten sermons of Rabbi Irwin Landau in the coming weeks.

And so it was in December 2016 when a large cardboard box was delivered to my home in Even Shmuel - a small Yishuv towards the south of Israel. I carefully opened the box containing around 10 plastic bags, and I saw that each bag contained hundreds of pages of handwritten notes and sermons. Some were written in pencil, others in pen; some in Yiddish, but most in English. Moreover, while some were held together with paperclips that were beginning to rust, many of the pages were single leaves and clearly needed to be sorted in order to find the relevant matching pages for each complete sermon. Significantly, given that some of the pages were over 70 years old, some were brittle, while most were also accompanied by a scent that captured a time that I could only imagine.



As I looked at my office, which was by now covered with piles of hundreds of these handwritten sermons, I was reminded of the famous picture taken of Rabbi Solomon Schechter with a room covered with discoveries from the Cairo Genizah whose task it was to create order and find meaning, and I quickly realised that this was a project that was going to be truly immersive.

For the ensuing two years I have lovingly sorted, transcribed, referenced and edited these sermons, culminating in the publication of this special book containing both sermons and speeches delivered by Rabbi Landau, along with a few other essays that he penned and which I found in the archives of the Federation of Synagogues. From each sermon and essay I learned from Rabbi Landau about how he saw the world,

and about the world that he was seeing. Simply put, this project has provided me with the privilege of becoming one of his students.

Significantly, the period between 1944 and 1969 when Rabbi Landau ministered at Neasden Federation Synagogue was one of the most remarkable in Jewish history. In this period the State of Israel was born, and 19 years later it achieved a miraculous victory in the six-day-war and the reunification of Jerusalem. Rabbi Landau marvelled at these seismic changes in the Jewish world, and his passion and commitment towards the fledging State is evident in so many of his sermons.

At the same time this was also a period of increasing material comfort and spiritual apathy amongst many Jews living in the UK, and while Rabbi Landau tirelessly pushed to increase the provisions in his synagogue leading to its refurbishment for which he was so proud, he was acutely aware - as reflected in many of his sermons - that notwithstanding his considerable efforts, most Barmitzvah boys rarely returned to synagogue after their 'coming of age'. Given this, he often returned to the theme of providing dynamic educational programmes and resources for the youth.

Rabbi Landau was a thoughtful and creative Torah scholar. In these sermons we encounter a Talmid Chacham who was totally comfortable with the full corpus of Midrashic and Talmudic literature, and a Rabbi who - like the great Maggid's of yesteryear - was capable of investing deep meaning in parables and stories that spoke to the common folk. Though - like so many other great Anglo-Jewish leaders - Rabbi Landau was likely under appreciated in his life, this book offers readers the possibility to acquaint themselves with his Torah insights and communal leadership.

In terms of the book, each sermon has been carefully transcribed from the original manuscript, with only very few minor changes being made. Additionally, slight amendments in the transliteration used by Rabbi Landau have been made to conform with common usage. I have also included relevant Biblical and Rabbinic references, along with other biographical and historical information where relevant. Beyond this, as none of the sermons had titles, I have given each of them a title for the benefit of the reader which, I hope, are a fair reflection of their content. Finally, in order for readers to have an easy way to access some of the most delightful remarks made by Rabbi Landau, I have collected around fifty quotes from all the sermons I have transcribed which I think are particularly impactful and which can be found at the end of this book.

I am deeply thankful to Joe Stelzer and the Landau family for entrusting me with these precious manuscripts and for giving me the privilege to learn so much from Rabbi Irwin (Yitzchak) Landau. תנצב"ה.

Rabbi Johnny Solomon, *Shvat 5779*

PARSHA

Bereishit: A life of excuses

A basic shortcoming of mankind is the use of excuses. This weakness is old as life itself.

We read in this morning's Sidra that when God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden of Eden, He gave them permission to eat of all the fruits of the garden with the exception of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. When Adam violated this command and ate of the forbidden fruit, God appeared and asked him why he did it: The first answer of the human race replied. **הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר** **נָתַתָּה עִמָּדִי הִיא נָתְנָה לִּי מִן הָעֵץ וְאָכַל** "The woman that you have given to me, she gave me of the tree and I ate."² It is interesting to note that ever since that incident in the Garden of Eden, man attempts to blame women for a multitude of evils.

The Almighty then turned to Eve, the wife of Adam, and asked her "What have you done?" But she also had an excuse **הַנָּחָשׁ הִשְׁיֵאֵנִי וְאָכַל** "The serpent enticed me and I ate"³. The Bible does not inform us what the serpents excuse was, but he too must have had an excuse.

What we want to know is simply this: What was the sin of Adam? We read this morning that there was one condition that God made with Adam and Eve. **מִכָּל עֵץ וַיִּמְעַץ הַדֵּעַת טוֹב וָרָע** "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat,"⁴ **הָגֵן אֲכַל תֹּאכַל** "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it,"⁵ for it will bring destruction. This incident always puzzled me because I could never understand why the tree of knowledge was the source of all evil. After all, what is more wonderful than knowledge? Is not the gaining of knowledge the goal of life? And in what way is man different than the beast if not by his brain? Furthermore, what was the difference between Adam and Solomon? Solomon prayed for wisdom, and he received the blessing of **טוֹב לָרַע בֵּין לְהַבִּין** - "to distinguish between good and evil"⁶. Adam also wanted knowledge, to be able to discern between good and evil; and yet he was punished!

The answer may be found in the Targums interpretation⁷, **וַיִּמְאִלְן דְּאָכְלִי פִירוּהִי חֲכָמִין**, **בֵּין טָב לְבִישׁ לָא תִּיכּוּל מִנִּיה**. Adam didn't want to pursue knowledge; Adam only

² Bereishit 3:12

³ Bereishit 3:13

⁴ Bereishit 2:16

⁵ Bereishit 2:17

⁶ Melachim I 3:9

⁷ Targum Onkelos on Bereishit 2:17

wanted to eat of the fruit and attain knowledge immediately and automatically. Adam wanted to get knowledge, Solomon wanted to achieve knowledge.

My Rebbe ז"ל used to say, “We too want to be תלמידי חכמים overnight.” We want to learn everything in six easy lessons. We have reduced Jewish Education to reading a Parshah and Haftorah. We want a textbook on “How to be a Jew”, like a textbook for “How to play bridge”. Like Solomon, we too must struggle for חיים שתהא בנו אהבת תורה. Then we will be blessed with חיים שתמלא משאלות לבנו לטובה.⁸ Amen.

Bereishit: Granddaughter, Barmitzvah & wedding

The opening words of the Bible are very significant. בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים - “In the beginning God created.”⁹ The very first thought that is impressed upon us is that at the very beginning of things there was a God - a Supreme being who fashioned the world. The world did not come into being of its own accord or through some physical acts of nature as philosophers as Plato and Aristotle would have us believe.

The opening words of the Bible wished to emphasize that the God idea was basic and fundamental, an axiomatic truth which must be adopted if we want our moral structure to be firm and enduring.

In the Ten Commandments too the first words are, “I am the Lord thy God”¹⁰, for unless we agree with this declaration, we cannot have the other commandments operating effectively. Unless we believe that there is a God who is the Creator of the world and the Father of all mankind, we have no foundation to build upon. There we see where Judaism differs from the philosophies of life. The Jewish religion has given to the world the purest and finest conception of God. Its pure monotheistic ideal and its rich implications have never been exceeded, nor even equalled.

If we review briefly the Jewish story of Creation, we would see that it is not the simple story that some people imagine. It was the great poetic genius of modern Israel, Chaim Nachman Bialik, who remarked: “That the first chapter of Genesis constitutes a whole history of culture!”.

To really understand the true meaning of the opening chapter of the Bible we must read its words in the light of Rabbinic interpretation. These sages were true philosophers, keen observers of life and of history. Most of us, as we read this ancient epic, think that it was a simple task for God to call this world into being. All that God had to do was to say יהי! - “Let there be”! וַיְהִי - “And there was”! The ancient Rabbis, however, saw the event in a deeper light.

⁸ Brachot 16b

⁹ Bereishit 1:1

¹⁰ Shemot 20:2

No, it was not so simple a task! Even God found it not an easy undertaking. According to the sages, before this world came into being בורא עולמות ומחריבן עד שברא את אלו - “He created many worlds and destroyed them, one after the other, until finally this world appeared.”¹¹ He made other attempts before but, alas, they were not successful. Somehow those worlds could not exist: No sooner did He create one, when lo and behold, it crashed into ruins! He tried again, and once more the world met destruction. Again and again, He built worlds that soon perished until our world was fashioned and remained. The Rabbis, however, do not stop with this tale. They want to know why the other attempts failed while this succeeded?

“When a king wants to build a palace,” they tell us, “he does not undertake it in a haphazard way. He consults an architect. And the architect, too, does not build out of the fancy of his mind. Instead, he follows studied plans and designs, and builds according to specified proven laws that cannot be violated. So, too, the Holy One Blessed be He! When He thought of creating this world of ours, He knew that He must follow certain laws and plans, and so מביט בתורה ובורא את העולם - He looked into the Torah, followed its laws and fashioned this world!”¹²

What a meaningful interpretation of this world’s destiny do we find in this allegorical comment! The trouble with the other worlds was that God attempted to create them in that simple way of “Let there be a world!”

But God, Himself, כביכול - if it may be permitted to say so - learned by experience. You must first have laws, and then build according to these rules and laws. And so He first created the Torah and, like a master architect, followed the laws of that Torah and His effort was crowned with success.

But see, something soon went wrong again. Only a few generations passed and a flood almost destroyed this world too. What happened now?

The world was built upon certain laws of physical nature. There was morning and there was night. The seasons followed in regular order. The stars found their place in the firmament, the waters flowed into the sea all nature worked according to plan and followed physical laws. The author of that ancient tale, however, does not say that God followed merely an architect’s plan. Instead, He followed the Torah! Torah includes all laws, physical laws yes, but also laws of a higher nature of even greater importance, and of more vital significance for the building of the world. Namely, the Moral Law!

And just as the previous worlds were shattered because they were not based on physical laws, so too must this world go to ruin unless it follows the laws of the spirit

¹¹ Midrash Bereishit Rabba 9:2

¹² Based on Midrash Bereishit Rabba 9:3

– the laws of morality without which no worldly edifice can endure. Yes, when **וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס**, when “the earth was filled with violence,”¹³ when corruption became the rule of life, the world could not endure and the flood of destruction had to appear. And it is not an accident that soon after the story of the flood we read of the appearance of Abraham who was sent by God to preach this very truth. “Either you live according to the Moral Law or else **וְהָיִיתִי מַחְזִיר עוֹלָם לַתּוֹהוּ וּבוֹהוּ** - I must one again turn this world into void and nothingness!”¹⁴

This morning is Shabbat Bereishit when we begin a new year, and I must say that there has been some good planning, for we are celebrating three beginnings.

First, we are celebrating the birth of a new daughter in Israel, the first grand daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Levine who are old members of this synagogue, and we feel sure that this new daughter if she's brought up as a true daughter in Israel will bring much joy and happiness to her whole family.

Secondly, we are celebrating a Bar Mitzvah. Today my dear Brian the beginning of a new Jewish year Shabbat Bereishit! You too, in a certain sense, are celebrating a new world for yourself. You are leaving behind your childhood and you are entering the new life of manhood. You are a Bar Mitzvah, a son of responsibility, one who is duty bound to observe and practice the commandments of our Torah. In creating this new world of yours I ask you to do as the Almighty Himself: Use the Torah as your plan. It is a plan that has proved effective and has brought meaning to life! Our ancestors were happy though they endured and suffered hardships to live up to its demands. In the words of the prayer which we recited a little while ago: **דְּרָכָיָהּ יְרָכֵיךָ וְנֵעַם וְכָל נְתִיבֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם** - “Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths lead to peace.”¹⁵ The Torah, when followed, brings joy and peace of body and mind, dear Brian, on your Bar Mitzvah day. Let your motto in life be! **יְהִי אֹר** - “Let there be light, the light of Torah!”

Thirdly, we are celebrating the calling up of a Bridegroom, the future son-in-law of a worthy and greatly esteemed member of our community, Mr Ben Zion Margulious. To this prospective Bridegroom I would say you too plan your life on the Torah! Build as did your father, your future father-in-law, and countless generations that have proceeded them.

You, my dear Moishe will not find this so difficult: You have been brought up in a true Jewish atmosphere, in a true Jewish home!

¹³ Bereishit 6:11

¹⁴ See Midrash Shir HaShirim 1:6

¹⁵ Mishlei 3:17

In the words of Isaiah הַבֵּיטוּ אֶל צוּר חֲצִבְתֵּם וְאֶל מְקַבֵּת בּוֹר נִקְרְתֵם “I throw the rock whence ye were hewn, the quarry whence ye were digged.”¹⁶

To you, my dear Moishel! Planning your future life should be easy! Your father brought you up to use the Torah, as your guide! You went to a ישיבה and to College, and you left the comforts of your home in the United States to start your life in Eretz Yisrael at a time when material life is not so easy. You have shown your capacity for planning! In your choice of your future wife you have chosen the daughter of a man, who has given his whole life to the cause of Jewry, a man whose heart and home has always been open to the calls of the needy. You have taken one as your future partner who too has left the comforts of a good home, to live and work in Israel. Her intellect and character have been recognized, and she is now lecturing in English at the Hebrew University. You have chosen well, you have chosen a true עזר a helpmate, and we all wish you luck.

To you my dear friend Ben Zion! You have חכמה ומדות טובות, that rare combination you are also blessed with an אשת חיל, a woman of virtues, a woman infinite kindness. It is a woman of such calibre who build up the fortress of a nation! I want to wish you a רפואה שלמה and I am sure both of you will have נחת from your children.

Finally, I wish to come back to you my dear Brian! I want to remind you that Bar Mitzvah does not mean the end of your Jewish Education. On the contrary! For you it means the beginning. It means that now, you are old enough to know what you don't know. I ask you to continue the Hebrew Classes, the Services. Learn Chumash, Rashi, Jewish History and Literature then I am sure you will be a boy לְשֵׁם וּלְתַפְאֵרַת וּלְתִהְיֶה.

Now I have great pleasure in presenting this book to you on behalf of our shul. **אמן.**

Bereishit: What is Man? Chatan Torah & Chatan Bereishit

You have probably heard the story of a man who was enjoying his Sunday comfort by reading his newspapers and magazines. His little boy, however, would not let him read, but kept on asking him question after question. Naturally, the father became angry and irritable, and in a temper he tore off the front page from his magazine into very small pieces and said to his boy: “Look here! I have torn up this front page. If you put all the pieces together you will find a map of the world. Go to your room, and paste the jigsaw pieces together, and when you have done this, come down, and ask me any question you like!”

The little boy did what his father told him, and after a short while he came back to his father with the map put together correctly. In amazement and consternation his

¹⁶ Yeshayahu 51:1

father asked him: “Tell me, how did you do it? How did you manage to do such a difficult task in such a short time?”

“It was very easy”, said the little fellow. “You see, on the other side of the map, was a picture of a man all I had to do was to put the man together, and the map came out all right.”

The task of the world today is to put man back together, then a better world must follow. But the question which arises is simply this. What is man? What signifies man? Almost ever since men have been able to think from the time when man emerged upon this planet as a thinking creature, conscious of his own being, he has sought an answer to the fundamental question ie **מה אדם?** What is man?

Judaism’s answer to the question ‘What signifies man?’ is contained in the very word which the Hebrew language, has for ‘man’ - **אדם**. The Biblical concept of man is set forth in the very opening chapter of the Torah, which we read this morning. Man - **אדם** - they tell us, comes from **אדמה** - ‘earth’, and therefore the literal meaning of **אדם** is, ‘of the earth’, or ‘earthy’. Yet the Rabbis ask us to consider the three letters that make up the word **אדם**. They remind us that **א** stands for **אש** - ‘fire’, **ד** for **דם** – ‘blood’, and **מ** for **מים** – ‘water’.

The first constituent of the nature of man is fire. Man may be a creature of clay, yet in spite of being ‘earthy’ he has a soul of fire. And though the dust may return to the dust, the spirit breathed into him, by his Creator, returns to God who gave it. Man may be an animal in his physical nature, but he’s something more than an animal for God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him.

This teaching is vital for men and women of today, and never more so than today. At this time when the world is in a state of political turmoil, when human life is worthless and there’s a constant threat of total destruction, all people of whatever faith or creed must look for some reliable hold and we, as Jews, have our faith, our precepts, and our way of life. To these we must hold firmly for they have sustained us through the centuries.

Judaism made this recognition of the uniqueness and sacredness of human life the corner stone of its ethical and religious system. Because man is created in the image of God, man’s personality, whether his own or that of others, is sacred. In no other land and among no other people was there this recognition of **אש**, the Divine Spark in the human soul. In Babylonia and Egypt, in Greece and Rome, the mighty and rich oppressed the weak and the poor. These things were looked upon as a matter of course, and no cry of indignation, no voice of justice or pity, arose from the people. To the Hebrew prophets of old, the fact of oppression was the one huge blot on the universe, and the goal of the white history of mankind was, in their eyes,

the realization of justice on earth. i.e. universal reverence for the humanity of each and every human being.

Far reaching as have been the lessons of **ש**, fire, in the Constitution of man, equally so, as are those of **ד**, blood.

Nothing is clearer than the teaching of heredity. In the words of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, “Every man is an omnibus in which all of his ancestors are seated.” Can anyone deny that all we Jews are in life, we owe to the blood that courses in our veins? In other words, we are another link in a chain of those who have remained attached to this Chosen People for over 3,000 years.

The third letter **נ** stands for **מים**, ‘water’. Water is a symbol of the Torah, metaphorically speaking. **מה מים חיים לעולם, כך תורה חיים לעולם** - “Just as water means life to the world, so is the Torah life unto the world”¹⁷. Without water, the most fruitful soil turns into a desert, so an age without Torah, be it ever so intellectual or prosperous, is doomed to spiritual aridity, to speedy disintegration and decay. And more than of anyone else, is all this true of the Jew. Torah is his very life. The Biblical concept of man is that he was created **בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים**, “in the image of God.” It means that man is not a thing, but he possesses part of the nature of God.

This morning we begin a new year. Today is **שבת בראשית**, and Shabbat Bereishit in our shul is a special Shabbat for our Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereishit.

As you know, in Judaism we have no honours list and we confer no titles. The only honour that we can bestow is to appoint each year a Chatan Torah and a Chatan Bereishit, and the custom is to choose two worthy men from the community for this honour. And this year, like every other year, we have chosen two worthy and respected members for this ceremony. Mr Ben Morgan our **כהן** was chosen as our Chatan Torah, and Mr Woolf Singer, as our Chatan Bereishit. And I am sure that you will all agree with me that we have made a very good choice.

Our Chatan Torah Benny Morgan sets a wonderful example as a young **בעל בית** who is a regular worshipper at our Synagogue. He attends regularly the Friday evening and Shabbat morning services, as well as attending the shiur on Shabbat afternoon, and he is an active participant of the Sunday morning Minyan Club. He’s our **כהן**, he **זוכן**’s for us. In addition to supporting our services so regularly and faithfully, there is no charitable endeavour in the community with which he’s not associated, and he’s a generous giver to all worthy causes. His wife Roda, grew up in our community, and even as a little girl of 13 I remember quite well her bringing clothes to the house, to be sent to Germany, to help our Jewish brethren who had survived the

¹⁷ Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:19

concentration camp after the war. She is a member of a family who have been long associated with our shul. The Wilders, the Pawns, The Greenfields. In addition, I had the pleasure of marrying them and the Almighty blessed them with two lovely children who I am sure will bring them much joy and נחת.

Now I come to our Chatan Bereishit who I think is equally worthy of being chosen as Chatan Bereishit. I have known Woolf Singer for a very long time. Some of you know him as our collector, and that is no enviable job I can assure you! But I have known him also as neighbour and as a *chasbuer* member of our community. I knew his wife עליה השלום, a true אשת חיל - she was a woman of moral strength and of infinite kindness. I watched his children grow up. His daughter Lila and Melvin my barmitzvah boy.

Mr. Singer performs a very valuable task in the community and we are very grateful to him.

I am sure that I am voicing the sentiments of all of you, when I express to our Chatan Torah and our Chatan Bereishit and all their families our very good wishes. That the coming year, will bring them joy, good health, and happiness to carry on their good work and we all look forward with eagerness to the opening of our New Shul וְשָׁמֵחַ - נַעֲבֹדְךָ בְּיָרָאָה בְּיָמֵי עוֹלָם וּבְכַשְׁתָּיִם קְדָמוֹנֵיֹת.

Bereishit: The purpose of creation

A story is told of a dispute that was brought before a Rabbi for judgement. Two men were quarrelling about a plot of ground, to which each claimed ownership. Their dispute was very bitter and caused great hatred between the two contestants. The Rabbi listened to their pleas, and then he did rather a strange thing. Instead of passing sentence, he bent down and put his ear to the ground as if he were listening to someone speak. Then he rose and smiled.

The men were bewildered. They were surprised at his action and they asked him: “Rabbi, what is the meaning of all this? And why do you laugh?”

“Well” said the Rabbi, “I thought the best thing would be to ask the disputed ground itself, to tell me, to whom it belongs.”

“What did the ground say?”, they asked.

“The ground laughed and said these two חמורים - these two foolish men quarrel and each claim that I belong to him. Don’t they realise that ultimately both will belong to me!?”

My friends! At the very beginning, we can see already that the first war, between fellowman was waged over property.

In this morning's portion of the Law, we read that in the beginning of the history of man there were two brothers – Cain and Abel. All the world was their domain and possession. They decided to divide the world between themselves. Cain was to have the land. Abel, on the other hand, was to own all movable things. Immediately, after the partition was arranged, Cain cried: "Get off my land." Abel replied in retaliation: "The garment you wear is mine." In this manner the Midrash depicts the first fratricide and fight: The first war was over property. Josephus points out that "Cain" in Hebrew, implies possession, and Abel's name means "Vain." Abel was the philosopher who said: "All is vain."

Man, from the earliest moment of history, had to choose between the temporal visual things, and the eternal unseen objects. Cain was the materialist who preferred solid land, and Abel took the "*metaltalin*"- the movable things – the things you can really take with you.

I once heard the following story from an itinerant preacher.

A businessman was approaching his last days. He decided to test the ingenuity of his three sons and to entrust the business to the most capable one. He asked each son to fill up a room, with anything he could find available. The one who would best fill up the room, would inherit the business. On the first day, one son set to work, digging up the adjoining ground and filling the room with earth. The next day, another son brought in papers of all sorts and thereby succeeded in filling up the room even more. On the third day, the third son kindled a light in the room and the room was filled with light. Of course, he was made the heir to the business.

All of us seek to realise our needs for a full life in various ways. One hopes to acquire his pot of gold by acquiring property. The other hopes for a short cut to wealth, and deals with paper – by investing in the stock exchange. Finally, there are those who find happiness in the intangible things such as light and enlightenment. They are the Abel's, who see the follow in striving solely for material bliss. In the words of Ecclesiastes, they say: All is vain! The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of the man.¹⁸

Is there a wonder that we commence our Yom Kippur liturgy, with the words: "Light is sown for the righteous and joy for the upright in the heart."¹⁹ Similarly, we read today, that light, symbolic of that which dispels darkness and gloom, was the first in the order of creation.

And only for the possibility of discovering the light of the Torah, was the world worth being created.

¹⁸ Kohelet 12:13

¹⁹ Tehillim 97:11

Bereishit: The good of man

If you read carefully the first chapter of the Torah which deals with the creation of the world and its foundations, you will notice a certain differentiation made between the creation of man, and God's other handiwork.

On the first day when God created the light you will note that He was pleased, as it is written: וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב, "God saw that it was good"²⁰. And similarly, after each act of creation, we have the same phrase וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב, indicating the Almighty's complete satisfaction with the work of His hands. Only in the case of man is this phrase וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב omitted. Then we have a verse that reads, וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד, "And God saw that all which He had created, behold it was very good"²¹. There we have no reference to man as such being good. He is merely included with all the others objects of God's creativity. Why this distinction?!

The commentators, of course, have noted this point, and they have made many observations upon it. I believe, however, that this difference in phraseology is meant to stress the distinction between man's role in the universe, and that of the other creatures. From these few words we derive a clear picture of what man is and of the purpose he is to serve.

We must first of all understand that the term טוֹב - good, has a different meaning when applied to humans than it has when applied to all other objects.

When we speak of an inanimate object, or even of the beast or a domestic animal as being good, it does not mean that we associate any particular virtue with it. We are merely saying that it fulfils the function for which it was created.

When we say that a chair is good, we simply mean that it is comfortable, sturdy, or handsome in appearance. When we speak of a good cow, we mean that the animal gives lots of good milk etc. Each of these by being good is fulfilling the specific function for which it was created.

However, when we speak of a man being good, we are referring to something else entirely. We do not mean by good that he is either strong or handsome or even proficient in any skill.

Good, in reference to a human, refers to virtues that he possesses. Good refers to his quality of soul and spirit that portion which is goodly in him. Man's goodness, therefore, is not a foregone conclusion. It is part of his potential and it is that quality which distinguishes him from both the inanimate and animal world. In other words,

²⁰ Bereishit 1:4

²¹ Bereishit 1:31

we may say that man is characterized by his **בחירה** by his ability and freedom to distinguish and choose between good and evil in a moral sense.

Man fulfils his purpose, therefore, only in respect to the degree to which he develops his moral and spiritual potentialities.

When a man boasts of his physical abilities, we can easily point to members of the animal kingdom who far surpass him. The horse is stronger, the deer is swifter and so on. Man can consider himself superior only when he thinks of himself in terms of his God given soul.

Of all his creations, God might have used the term good most appropriately with reference to man. However, even God, as it were, could not predict. Only man himself, as he fulfils his potential, can decree whether or not the term good may be applied.

Bereishit: God is the beginning

The Talmud tells the beautiful story that when the first translation of the Torah was made into the Greek language, which resulted in the Septuagint, the translators felt it necessary to phrase the first three words of the Torah in this way: **אלקים ברא בראשית**, “God created in the beginning”. What was the reason? The reason for it was because they wanted the word God to be the first word of the Bible; God is the beginning. If we read the first verse as it is, they were afraid that ambiguity might result. One might say, that “Bereishit” is a name of a power, and that he created God. So, to avoid that possible mistake, they commenced with God as the first word. God Is the beginning is a lesson which mankind needs today.

Several weeks ago, I had an interesting conversation with a young man who is a student at the University. He told me about his worries and his hopes, about the uncertainty with which he faced the world out of the university. He didn't know whether it was worth making plans for a career. And then he asked me a question, a question which weighs heavily on everybody's mind today. He said to me, “Rev - we have been taught to believe **בראשית ברא אלקים**, that at the very beginning of things, there was a God, a supreme being, who fashioned the world. We have been taught to believe that God directs the affairs of men, that human history is the unfolding of a Divine plan.”

“Well now,” he said, “look at the world today. It's true that we live in days of progress, nuclear fission, electronic ingenuity, and outer space. Yet day in and day out, men are working on new and more terrible atomic weapons which can wipe mankind off the face of the earth. One wonders whether the tinderbox of human destruction will not be ignited at any moment and not by a great power but by little

Cuba or new born Congo. In a world of evil where is God? Where is the hand of God guiding the destiny of man?”.

Surely this is the burning question of our time! I thought for a moment and then I told the young man the story of the Rabbi of Kotzk. It's told that the great Rabbi of Kotzk was once sitting with his disciples at the conclusion of the Sabbath, the sacred hour of the Seudah Shlishit. They had partaken of the meal and they sang the holy Zemirot. Now the disciples were waiting for the Master to speak words of reaching, a דבר תורה. For a long while the Rabbi was sunk in thought, and then he lifted his head and asked a question: “My sons, tell me where is God?”. The disciples were shocked. “Rabbi,” they said, “what do you mean? It is not written²² מְשַׁרְתֵּי שׁוּאֵלִים זָה לְזֶה לְזֶה אֵי־הָ מְקוֹם כְּבוֹדוֹ, the angels ask one of the other “Where is the place of His glory” and they answer מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ, “His glory fills the universe”!”. The Rabbi shook his head and said, “No, my sons, that is the answer of the angels. For mortal man, the answer is different. For mortal man, the answer is “the presence of God is where He is permitted to enter!”.

Do we permit God to enter into the councils of nations? Do we seek the presence of God in the affairs of government? Do we open our businesses and our homes to welcome the presence of God? Of course, we have built nice houses of worship which we call “House of God”. But in reality, the so-called house of God is built not to allow God to enter our lives, but to lock Him out, and we have tried to imprison Him between the cold walls of empty synagogues where few, if any, come to seek His face, and where His presence will not disturb our everyday affairs. Yes, when we are sixty or over, and when we retire from business, we think of God. We go to synagogue more often, but that is not the right spirit. לְכוּ נָא הַגְּבָרִים, let the grown ups, the old men go to worship²³ was Pharaoh's suggestion. Moses, however, insisted בְּנַעַרֵינוּ וּבְזִקְנֵינוּ יִלְךְ, with young and old we must go to worship God.²⁴

God must find a place in our youth. Our synagogues dare not be מוֹשְׁבֵי זִקְנִים, the gathering of old men and women only. Youth must participate in our religious endeavours. The voice of youth must be heard in בְּתֵי כְנִסְיֹת וּבְתֵי מִדְרָשׁוֹת, for ask Balaam remarked²⁵, כָּל זֶמֶן שֶׁהִתְיַנְּקוֹת מִצַּפְצָפִים בְּקוֹלָם אֵין אַתֶּם יְכוּלִים עֲלֵיהֶם, so long as the voices of children issue from synagogues, we are invincible.

At the beginning of the year when we commence our activities, let us give heed to this thought. We ask: “Where is God?”. The answer is the presence of God is where He is permitted to enter! Only then will we be able to see God's hand directed the

²² Kedusha for Musaf on Shabbat and Festivals

²³ Shemot 10:11

²⁴ Shemot 10:9

²⁵ Midrash Eichah (Peticha 2)

world. Then will we behold the fulfilment of the prophecy: 'וְרָאוּ כָּל בָּשָׂר יַחְדָּו כִּי פִי ה' - "Then all flesh will see that the mouth of God has spoken"²⁶. אמן.

Bereishit: The tree of Knowledge (Barmitzvah - Paul)

This morning we begin a new year and you, my dear Paul, enter upon a new life.

Today is Shabbat Bereishit when we begin reading the story of mankind, and today is also the day when you attain your manhood.

As your Minister and teacher, I have a two-fold duty. I must tell you about the creation of this world and I must also tell you something of the world you are stepping into.

I must confess that I find this exceedingly difficult. For although it is the same world that I shall be talking about in both instances, the world of Bereishit and the world that we live in, yet you will find that there is a vast difference. The two are not only worlds, but universes apart.

We began reading this morning בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ - "In the beginning God created heaven and earth"²⁷. The world that was created was a big, wide, beautiful place, and the people, and the animals that inhabited it, were one big happy family. Indeed, it was all a גן עדן - a veritable paradise. It was a גן עדן because in the world of creation there was no division; there was no suspicion and hatred between man and man; there was no discrimination of race, colour or creed. The whole world lived as one happy family.

There is a beautiful story of the Rabbis that when God made man, when God resolved to create Adam, the father of the human race, He took the dust from which man was made not from Israel, the land of the Jew; not from Jerusalem, the holy City; not from Zion, the site of the Holy Temple, but he took a little earth from every corner of the globe, from the East and West, from North and South.²⁸

"Why?" you ask. Hear the Jewish Rabbis answer, "so that in future, no nation shall say "from my earth was Adam created; so that no people may say we are greater, we are worthier than our neighbor, for Adam had his birth here".

That is the Jewish conception of human brotherhood - that every man, no matter what his race, his colour, or his creed may be, is the child of God and bears the image of the divine. Therefore the world of Bereishit was a Gan Eden!!

That is the world the Bible introduces us to. The one that I must introduce to is something altogether different. This is a complex, puzzling, mixed up world. It is

²⁶ Yeshayahu 40:5

²⁷ Bereishit 1:1

²⁸ Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 11:6

אָרֶץ אֹכֵלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ.²⁹ It is a house that seems to keep eating up its tenants and about every 20 years or so it totters on the brink of disaster.

We have nations and states and sections and each misunderstands the other. Yes, the world that God created in six days is an altogether different place. If that was a paradise, this is a desolation. If that was almost heavenly, this is altogether too earthly.

Yet my dear Paul, it is not my intention to paint a dark picture for you, or to add another dilemma to this puzzling life. On the contrary, I want you to feel happy. I wasn't you to feel proud of what has been accomplished since creation.

The reason I show you the world of Bereishit and the world of today, the one so glorious, and the other so distorted, is because I want you to realise that both worlds are really one, and if we understood why the deeds of early man change the world, why the world has become so distorted, perhaps the deeds of other men can recapture the spirit of creation and make this place an Eden once more.

Now! The Bible this morning tells us of the first error committed by man, which showed him unworthy as guardian and keeper of the Garden of Eden.

You remember the story. It is one of the first things we learning in childhood: וַיֵּצֵא ה' אֱלֹהִים מִן הָאֲדָמָה כָּל עֵץ נְחֻמָּד לְמִרְאָה וְטוֹב לְמֵאֲכָל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הָגֶן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע - “And out of the ground made the Lord to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil”³⁰.

There was one condition that God made with Adam & Eve: מִכָּל עֵץ הָגֶן אָכַל תֹּאכֵל - “Every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it, for it will bring destruction”³¹.

This incident always puzzled me. I could never understand why the tree of knowledge was the source of all evil. After all, what is more wonderful than knowledge? And in what way is man different from the beast if not by his brain?

But you see the other tree was not the tree of ignorance. It was the עֵץ הַחַיִּים - the tree of life. That is where the evil of the former lies.

²⁹ Bemidbar 13:32

³⁰ Bereishit 2:9

³¹ Bereishit 2:16-17

I know that you are fond of sport and you know that whatever game you play, whether it's football, or Cricket, or Tennis, there are lots of rules and regulations attached to the game, whatever the game may be.

There is one rule, however, which isn't a rule at all, yet it's more important than all the skill and all the knowledge combined - and that is the spirit of teamwork, the desire that all men work together to win the game fairly. Now what would you think of a player who wanted to stand out as a star performer, regardless of the game and his teammates, you would say "you may be able to hit better, field better, and you may know more about the game than any of us, but if you are going to show us how well you can run and hit, when we need you to field, or vice versa, and do anything you feel like regardless of the other players, then we would better off not having you on our side at all."

Now it's the same thing with all of life, from the first man to be created, to the end of creation. We are gifted with a lot of powers and capabilities, and these can be the greatest blessing to all of us, or they can cause the greatest misery. It all depends upon the tree from which you have eaten and the purpose for which we play. If our desire is the tree of life; if we aim to live a better life, a finer life, a more wholesome life, then we need knowledge; we need understanding, we need wisdom to bring that finer, better life to all of us. Then knowledge, skill and power become the greatest blessings for good.

However, when we are fed on the **עץ הדעת**, when we forget about life as a whole where the welfare of one depends upon the welfare of all; when we think only of acquiring more knowledge, more cunning and more power, then this becomes a world of **טוב ורע**, for the moment it may seem wonderful, but in the long run it will bring disaster. Then electricity which should bring comfort is made to generate misery; the wireless which should unite men divides them, and the aeroplane which could be a **נשר בגוזלותיו** - an eagle bearing its young on its wings - becomes an instrument of destruction. The discovery and development of Atomic energy which should herald the dawn of a new paradise becomes a **מלאך המות** - an angel of death.

Yes! We have knowledge in abundance; we have eaten well of the **עץ הדעת** - of the tree of knowledge, but it is not the kind of knowledge that brings blessedness to man. It is a knowledge that is divorced from all moral values so that, while the mind is trained to conquer the physical forces, the heart is not taught to master its own nature, and so you have the strange phenomenon of men of knowledge whose hearts are filled with hate and cruelty.

Noach: Noach's vineyard

Almost all the personalities presented in our Torah, are definite and clear-cut. Thus, every reader of the Bible knows, that Abraham, Joseph, Moses, were righteous men. On the other hand, no one will question the fact, that Ishmael was a “wild man”, nor that Esau was essentially a wicked man. But about Noah there's a difference of opinion. Some believe him to have been righteous “perfect.” Others regard him, as a man, whose righteousness was questionable. The Torah itself, by using the expression, **יֵשׁ מֵרְבוּתוֹ** - “In his generation”³² contributes to this doubt. **יֵשׁ מֵרְבוּתוֹ** - some of our Rabbis say it is to the credit of Noah, that he was righteous *even* in his generation when all the people about him were wicked, but others say, “No!” He was righteous only in his generation, that is, by comparison with others, but, had he lived in the time of Abraham, he would have been of no account.³³

It seems that the second opinion is more logical, and it is born out by the rest of the story. Thus, we read later on, **וַיַּחַל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטַּע כֶּרֶם** “And Noah, the man of the earth planted a vineyard”³⁴, **וַיִּשְׁכַּר מִן הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכָּר** - “and he drank of the wine and became drunk.”³⁵ Our Sages comment on this verse very significantly. **הִיָּה לוֹ לִיטַע** - “Noah should have busied himself with planting other things than wine”³⁶. But Noah was an **אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה** - “a man of the earth”³⁷, that is a man who thought only of the earthly pleasures and forgot the higher things in life. It was this attitude of Noah, that disqualified him as the founder of a nation. This task had to be left to an Abraham, who saw things in a different light. The Rabbis have a curious and instructive legend to tell us, in connection with this incident. We are told that: When Noah began to plant the vineyard, Satan came to him and asked, “What art thou planting? Noah replied, A vineyard. Satan said, ‘What is its nature?’ Noah answered, “Its fruits, are sweet both, when they are fresh, and when they are dried. From its fruit, wine is made which rejoiceth the heart. Then said Satan, ‘Come let us both be partners in this vineyard’ Noah agreed. What did Satan do? He brought a lamb and slew it beneath the vine, then he brought a lion, and slew it also, then he brought a swine and slew it, and finally he brought an ape, and slew it. He mixed the blood of these four animals, and poured it over the vineyard. This indicates that before a man drinks wine, he is tame and innocent like the lamb; when a man drinks as is becoming, he is strong like a lion. When he drinks more than is becoming, he is like

³² Bereishit 6:9

³³ Rashi on Bereishit 6:9

³⁴ Bereishit 9:20

³⁵ Bereishit 9:21

³⁶ Bereishit Rabbah 36:3

³⁷ Bereishit 9:20

the swine, and when he is drunk, he behaves like an ape, acts foolishly and speaks unbecomingly before everybody, for he does not know what he is doing.

This morning we shall be having a Kiddush and we shall drink a לחיים to celebrate the Diamond Wedding Anniversary of our dear friends Mr and Mrs Silverman. Mr and Mrs Silverman are well known in our community. Both of them are generous and never refuse any worthwhile cause in the community. The Almighty blessed them with years together. Her Majesty the Queen sent them a message of Congratulations and we as a community add our blessings and all good wishes to a particularly charming and gracious couple.

Lech Lecha: Be a Blessing

The Almighty said to Abraham, who was destined to become the father of the Jewish people and the founder of its religion, לְךָ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְמוֹלְדֹתֶיךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ - “Go out from your country and from your kindred and from your father’s house, and go to the land which I will show you.”³⁸ Thus Abraham received a promise and a charge. The promise was that he would be made into a great nation, that he would be blessed, and that his name would become great. The charge was וְהָיָה בְרָכָה – “and be a blessing”³⁹. In these two words is summed up not only the purpose of Abraham’s life, but also the purpose of Israel’s existence as a nation.

There are many Jews who, not knowing Jewish history and religion, question the reason for their people’s existence as a distinct and separate group among the nations. Many a time in the course of our history there were Jews who said, נהיה בגוים, ‘Let us be like the Gentile nations about us’. Let us assimilate and become part of the people among whom we live. We have no special reason for existence, now that the other religions and nations have accepted the main principles of our religion and morality. If we do remain Jews, let us be Jews secretly in the innermost parts of our lives. Thus, too, spoke the “Maskilim” in the period of the “Haskalah” who said: “Be then a Jew in the tent, and a man when you leave your home.” They made a distinction between Jew and man. In other words, they tried to point out that the two were incompatible. Furthermore, they were ashamed of their Jewishness and did not want to parade it in public. They suffered from an inferiority complex, and they gave the impression to the world that our culture was inferior to that of other people’s. Those Jews forgot the charge that the Almighty had given to Abraham when he sent him on his mission to found the Jewish people and its religion. וְהָיָה בְרָכָה, “be a blessing.”

³⁸ Bereishit 12:1

³⁹ Bereishit 12:2

The Jew through the ages who was loyal to his traditions, fulfilled that purpose of his national existence. Wherever he went he was a blessing and he brought good fortune and prosperity to all about him. Now when we see what has been done in Israel, we must come to realize that the charge made to Abraham has been faithfully carried out by his children.

You no doubt recall the famous story of the Jews in a little shtetel whose home got burned to the ground and whose possessions all became ashes. As he was looking at the scene of destruction, he was heard to make the ברכה of שלא עשני גוי.

When asked for the meaning of this ברכה - which sounded so absurd and out of place - he explained that when a גוי loses his idols in the fire, he becomes bereft and deprived of his justification for existence and has no future. But as a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he lost only his material belongings; his spirit and his unshakeable faith in the Almighty, were indestructible!

Now we are privileged to live in an age when there's fulfilled the ancient promise כִּי עַד עוֹלָם לְךָ אֶתְנַנְנָה וְלִזְרַעֲךָ אֶתְהָ רְאָה הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר כָּל אֶת - "For all the land which you see, to you will I give it and to your seed forever"⁴⁰. Israel is now again the homeland of the Jews, and its inhabitants are grappling with the millennial desolation of the Negev and the centuries of neglect of eroded mountains and abused earth.

The Jewish people have become normalized again. Farmers and soldiers, builders and tillers have replaced the Menachem Mendel's and the *luftmenshen* of the past. The ancient blessing has found fulfillment.

Dear Bar Mitzvah boy - In a sense you are starting on the same journey on which Abraham started more than 3,000 years ago. You too, in a sense, go out from your father's house, in that you become responsible for your own actions and no longer does your father carry the moral responsibility for you. You become a Bar Mitzvah, a son of commandments, a man in the best meaning of that term. Today you become independent, and from now on the good that you do is accounted to your credit, and the evil that you may do is likewise counted against you. What word of caution and advice can I offer you other than that given to father Abraham; וְהָיָה בְרָכָה – "be a blessing." Try so to live and act that you bring honour to your name and that of your family.

Lech Lecha: On names and destinies

It's commonly said of preachers that they do not know where and when to stop. That may be true, since, sincerity and earnestness, should be unaware of mere time.

⁴⁰ Bereishit 13:15

My difficulty this evening, however, is of a different nature altogether, my difficulty is where and how to begin.

When I heard that I was to welcome Dayan Swift, as our guest speaker, on this important evening, my difficulty was not where to stop, but where and how to begin. There's so much that could be said and there's so much that I wanted to say.

My second difficulty was to find a suitable text. No doubt you have heard the story. Three members were discussing their Rabbi's sermons. One said, "he's wonderful! I recall having heard him preach three sermons from one text!". "That's nothing compared to his predecessor," said another. "Why Rabbi Bloom once preached six sermons, on the shortest text in the bible."

"Oh" said the third man quietly, "neither rabbi can hold a candle to my wife. She has been preaching at me for the last 30 years without any text at all!".

As I was thinking and worrying how to begin, suddenly a kind of providence came to my rescue – The invitation card. And I noticed that the purpose of this evening's gathering is to rename our Synagogue – that helped me out.

I know that there are those, who think, that a name doesn't mean much. Very often we hear the famous quotation from Shakespeare "What's in a name?" But we Jews differ from this point of view. In Judaism names have played a very important part. Names of persons were considered of great importance and they were regarded as possessing special significance.

In Biblical days, names were chosen with great diligence and care. An attempt was made, to have the name express, an ideal or a pledge to which the bearer was expected to remain true for the remainder of his life.

Only in this morning's portion of the Law, we read how God changed the first patriarch's name from Abraam to Abraham. At first he was AV-Ram the father of Aram (Syria) But when he went forth into the world to preach to all men Monotheism - that there was one God and did so many noble deeds he become the father of the whole world - אַבְרָהָם הַמִּזְמוֹן גוֹיִם.⁴¹

In the same way, we find that Sarai – princess of her own tribe, was changed to Sarah – princess of the whole world. Jacob's name is changed to Israel to indicate a change in his character and to point to his achievements. After he had successfully wrestled with the angel – His name was changed to Israel meaning "He who prevails with God" "A champion of God". Many instances are recorded in the Bible עֲמָרָם is composed of two Hebrew words עַם meaning nation and מָרָם meaning elevated. At a time when Pharaoh and his followers attempted to degrade and to dishonor the

⁴¹ Bereishit 17:5

children of Israel עמרם did everything in his power to uplift, to elevate and to bring honour to his people. יוכבד is also composed of two words. י is an abbreviated form for the name of God and כבד signifies “honour”. יוכבד dedicated her life, to bring honour to the religion and the god of her people.

Of course, these days naming a child is quite a simple procedure. One chooses a dead relative and gives the child its Hebrew name after the deceased person, usually, the English name, does not correspond at all with the Hebrew one. For example, what has שולה to do with Stephen, or חוה with Henrietta. But we feel this is the least we can do for our beloved dead and we let it go at that.

A young father once came to my Shul to name his first child, a baby girl – very upset about the name, “I know, he said, the right thing is to name the baby after a deceased person, or after another close member of the family. But my people are all alive and I don’t know what to do?”

We find in the Bible not only people, but places, were considered important enough to be renamed when an event of special importance happened there.

When Jacob came to the city of Luz and dreamed of the ladder reaching Heaven, with angels going up and coming down, he built an alter on the spot and changed the name of Luz to Beth-El “House of God.”

It’s quite clear our forefathers placed a great deal of importance in “What’s in a name?”

This belief is clearly expressed in the following statement of the Talmud: מנא לן דשמא גרים? אמר רבי אלעזר: דאמר קרא (תהלים מו ט) "לכו חזו מפעלות ה' אשר שם שמות בארץ" - How do we know that a name is a determining factor in the character and destiny of a person? R. Eliezer said, Scripture says “Come behold the workings of the Lord who has accomplished שמות in the earth. Do not read שמות which is rendered “desolations” but read שמות meaning “names”⁴².

Tonight is an important night in the Spiritual History of our Shul אהבת שלום. “A Jew never knows whether he’s coming or going”. As it happens, we know where we are going!

Legend relates that when God was about to create the world, Truth (אמת), and Peace (שלום) came before Him and protested.⁴³

Truth said רבונו של עולם - Master of the Universe! How can You create a world that’s full of lies?

⁴² Brachot 7b

⁴³ Bereishit Rabbah 8:5

Peace argued: Why did you create a world which could never continue to exist? It's so full of quarrels and hatred!

What did God do? He took truth and threw him out of heaven toward the earth - השליך אמת ארצה.

Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk was once asked: Why did God throw 'Truth' down? Why didn't He throw 'Peace' down?

He replied because when anything is dropped from such a high place, it will naturally have to break into bits. God thought that it would be better to break 'Truth' than to shatter 'Peace'. Truth, He reasoned, doesn't have to be complete and entire. Man can get along quite well with a part of the Truth. Often the whole Truth is a detriment in fact. Peace, however, must never be broken. For peace is important and lasting only when it is whole - one hundred percent.

A broken peace, a slice of peace is valueless and has no durability. As a matter of fact, in the name of peace one is even permitted to misrepresent the truth.

It's most appropriate that at a time when the nations of the world are striving to reach the moon and conquering space, at a time when the nations of the world are concerned with building bigger and better Atom Bombs. Our Satellite is אהבת שלום. We don't lack space; we lack values we lack morals. It is fitting that we should name our Shul אהבת שלום because peace is the very name of God - שמו של הקב"ה שלום. It's the pillar upon which the entire social system is founded על הדין ועל האמת ועל השלום.⁴⁴ In the name of peace, one is even permitted to misrepresent truth.

You will probably say it's true. Peace must be complete but is there completed peace look at the world. The term שמים is composed of two Hebrew words אש מים, fire and water. These two elements do not get along very well with one another. Yet God was able to bring these two opposing forces together and to have peace and harmony reign between them. He joined them and out of the two he created שמים heaven. God glories in this achievement. השמים מספרים כבוד אל - "The heavens declare the glory of God"⁴⁵. The Jews were trained to value the ideal of שמים to shun conflict and exert every effort for peace.

At the conclusion of the שמונה עשרה he bends his head to the left, and then to the right, as he repeats the words עושה שלום במרומי הוא יעשה שלום - "He who made peace in His heavens, let Him cause peace to reign in our midst".

Almighty – You who has brought peace to reign במרומי - in Your heavens, between such opposites as fire and water, הוא יעשה שלום, bring a similar peace about עלינו.

⁴⁴ Avot 1:18

⁴⁵ Tehillim 19:2

amongst ourselves. Let no misunderstanding or bickering divide a Jew from his brother - וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, and may the world permit our people to dwell in security and peace.

Vayera: Act justly (Barmitzvah - Anthony)

When the Almighty was about to destroy Sodom, He decided to inform Abraham of what He was about to do. כִּי יִדְעֹתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ. - “For”, said the Almighty, “I have known him to the end, that he may command his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice”⁴⁶. How then can I conceal anything from him?!

In order that Abraham should understand the way of the Lord he must see that they ways of the Lord are right. Thus, God informs his of His plan, whereupon Avraham delivers that eloquent plea on behalf of Sodom: אִם אֶמְצָא בְּסֹדִם חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים, suppose there are 50 righteous men⁴⁷, or forty, or even ten? הֲיִאֵף תִּסְפֹּף צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע, will you destroy those righteous few with the wicked?⁴⁸. הֲשֹׁפֵט כָּל הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה, “shall the judge of all the earth not do justly?”⁴⁹

Some non-Jewish Bible commentators treat this beautiful plea of Abraham lightly, with humour. They comment facetiously “Here is the first Jew bargaining with the Almighty, an art which his descendants so ably mastered.”

These commentators utterly fail to comprehend the beauty of Abraham’s words. It is one of the most beautiful utterances in the while Bible. In it is revealed the lofty idealism of Avraham, the nature of God, and the very essence of Israel’s reason for existence. In this eloquent plea is found the tersest formulation of what Judaism stands for and it forms the basis of a later prophetic formula which sums up the essence of our religion in the words: וְמָה ה' דֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת הַסֶּדֶק, - “And now what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God”⁵⁰.

What, then, is the way of the Lord? To do justly. Even a sinful Sodom must not be destroyed before every attempt to save it is tried. This is the ideal which Abraham is to transmit to his children and household after him.

My dear Anthony! Today you become a Jew of responsibility.

⁴⁶ Bereishit 18:19

⁴⁷ Bereishit 18:26

⁴⁸ Bereishit 18:23

⁴⁹ Bereishit 18:25

⁵⁰ Micah 6:8

In order to be an intelligent Jew, you must know what your religion stands for and what is required of you. The answer is given very briefly in the verse quoted above. It is “to guard the way of the Lord, to do justice and righteousness” and the additional comment by the prophet, “to love kindness and to walk humbly with thy God”.

Justice, kindness, humility are three pillars on which the structure of Judaism rests. It is for this that you must work all the days of your life. To be a Jew worthy of the name you must act justly and kindly to everyone, and to be humble in the presence of God. We must recognise our human limitations, not to become too proud and overbearing, not to think that we are all powerful, for וְרָם לְבַבְךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, when one becomes haughty and boasts of his power, he forgets God and relies on his own strength.⁵¹

Indeed, if the nations of the world only learn this simple lesson, how much misery mankind would be spared. Surely war would be no more, and peace and good will would be the lot of all mankind.

Let us then work towards the achievement of this good and then will joy and happiness come to an embattled world.

Chayei Sarah: The secret of Israel's long life

Many historians have asked: What is the secret of Israel's long life? Hundreds of nations have come and gone, but Israel lives on today. Great powers swarmed over the earth. They defeated many peoples, our own among them. They ruled over great countries, but they have vanished as if they had never been. Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, Greece, Carthage, Rome; how helplessly they sleep in their grave of forgetfulness! An ugly mummy in a rotting case; a jagged piece of pottery, or a broken part of a statue; an account in the pages of ancient history; these are the only reminders we have, that such nations ever lived.

What is it that enabled our own people to live on, while all the others have disappeared? Some will answer that the Torah was our life-saver - and it's true! Others will say that our great faith in God helped us over every trouble and misfortune - and this too is correct! But one of the most powerful forces in Israel's existence was the purity of Jewish family life. When every other bond was broken, this tie remained whole. When every other hope seemed lost, this source of family strength enabled us to carry on.

We find the beginning of this holy ideal in the life of Abraham. He and Sarah led a beautiful life together. They shared their joys and sorrows, their successes and failures. Finally, when his beloved companion was taken away by death, Abraham

⁵¹ Devarim 8:14

asked the children of Heth, the forefathers of the Hittites, to sell him the cave of Machpelah for a burial ground. Abraham had a moral right to the land for the Almighty had promised it to him. Ephron the Hittite wanted (or at least he said he wanted) to give it to Abraham as a gift. But Abraham rejected the offer and insisted that he wanted to pay **בְּכֶסֶף מְלֵא** “full price.” This incident is further proof of Abraham’s honesty and integrity, and his desire to act fairly and justly.

In striking contrast to Abraham stands Ephron the Hittite, a conniving individual who speaks so beautifully about making a free gift of the land to Abraham, but ends up by demanding shekels that are “current to the merchant,” or the soundest kind of money.

The prophet Isaiah bids us to take Abraham as our example if we want to act justly. **הַבִּיטוּ אֶל אַבְרָהָם** “Look to the rock whence you were hewn”⁵², **הַבִּיטוּ אֶל צוּר הַצִּבְרֹתָם** “Look to Abraham your father.”⁵³ The pioneers who went to Palestine some 70 years ago headed this advice. When they began to think seriously about establishing Eretz Yisrael as a Jewish Homeland, they bought every inch of the ground they settled on. By means of the Jewish National Fund they bought land from the Arabs for a “Full Price”, paying far more than the actual value of the land. Not by acts of aggression or dishonesty did we acquire land in Palestine, but by purchasing it sometimes at astronomical prices. Not only did we buy the land, but with superhuman labour we cultivated it. We sowed with tears and anguish. We built with the gun in one hand, and the trowel in the other. But plant we did and build we did and Palestine flourished under the Chalutzim and the Heroism of the Haganah.

My Dear David! The lesson which our Sidrah brings to us is one which is very important to your life as a Bar Mitzvah. You are starting in life now as a Jew who must assume and shoulder responsibility. You must help in the building of Jewish life here, and in Israel. You must realise that we cannot rely upon the conniving Ephron’s of our day who promise much but who do little. Whatever we acquire we must purchase at the price of sweat and blood and tears. Every Jew must do his share. No one may shirk his duty. On your Bar Mitzvah day you too take the pledge that we took 2,500 years ago **אִם אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי** “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning.”⁵⁴ With such loyalty and devotion we hope that you and all of us, will live to see the day of redemption.

Chayei Sarah: Growing old

It is the hope of each and every one of us that when we reach old age we will experience a period of tranquility, a period of peace and quietness, a period when

⁵² Yeshayahu 51:1

⁵³ Ibid. 51:2

⁵⁴ Tehillim 137:5

we may review past years and accomplishments, a period when the perplexities and the intricacies of daily life will not plague us. Yet we all know that this is not what actually happens when we grow old. As the Rabbis phrase it: (קהלת יב:א) "יְמֵי הַרְעָה" (קהלת רבה) - "The difficult days" - these are the days of old age.⁵⁵

Old age is a blessing beset with problems. There's the problem of ailments, sickness and pain which come with old age. The period of decay that is associated with old age. There's the economic insecurity that confronts a person with the decline of active years. But the most oft repeated lament and complaint of the aged is heard concerning their children.

Sometimes it is a concern for the welfare of children. At other times it is the sensitivity towards the children that have made the aged apprehensive in every generation. Problems of old age are ages old, particularly vis-à-vis children. Thus, the Torah relates: וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וְה' בֵּרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל - "And Abraham was old... and the Lord blessed Avraham in all things"⁵⁶.

Abraham had good health, much wealth, ample honours, and yet the anxiety to see his son Isaac married caused Abraham much grief in his old age. כִּי לְסִיבַת הַזְקֵנָה דָּאג - "since he was old, he was concerned that he may die before seeing his son get married."⁵⁷

With Isaac too, the worries over children began on multiplying with old age. וַיְהִי כִּי יָצָק, "And it came to pass when Isaac was old"⁵⁸.

It was then, when the incident of the "blessings" occurred, that his concern for the right mate for Jacob is noticed. קוּם לְךָ פַּדְנָה אֲרָם בֵּיתָה בְּתוּאֵל אָבִי אִמְךָ וְקַח לְךָ מִשָּׁם - "Go to Padam Aram and take a wife from there"⁵⁹.

It was then too that the wives of Esav caused the patriarch much sorrow. וַיֵּרָא עֵשָׂו - "And Esav saw that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father"⁶⁰.

Certainly, father Jacob had no lack of distress from his children at his old age. Reuben's rash act, Dina's tragic affair, Judah's indiscreet behavior, and Joseph's disappearance, all of these happened when father Jacob was already an old man.

Let us not overlook the fact that the children of our patriarchs were fine, noble, considerate, attentive etc. Yet it is interesting to note that none of the patriarchs

⁵⁵ Kohelet Rabbah 12

⁵⁶ Bereishit 24:1

⁵⁷ Sforno on Bereishit 24:1

⁵⁸ Bereishit 27:1

⁵⁹ Bereishit 28:2

⁶⁰ Bereishit 28:8

“stayed with”, or “lived with”, their offspring. They avoided it. They shunned it. They did everything to keep out of the way. They sought other means rather than take up residence with even the best of their children.

Immediately after Isaac’s marriage, the Torah relates: וַיִּסֶף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה, “And Abraham took another wife”⁶¹, and made for himself a home. Isaac and Rebecca did not find it convenient to “move in” with their children. Even Jacob refused to live with his beloved and affluent son Joseph. He chose, rather, to live independently, though at some distance. It is apparently far better to live along in Goshen than with children in a royal palace.

For many, the choice is between living with the children and being confronted with numerous personal and religious problems, or living apart from the children and thus avoiding certain dilemmas. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob seemed to have indicated the choice.

May we soon learn to enjoy old age as a blessing, instead of a curse, as a reward instead of a threat, as a delight instead of a problem.

Chayei Sarah: Young and Old (Engagement of Margaret Angel to Peter Freedman)

The stamp on the coin of each nation expresses the character and the highest aspirations of the people it represents. In fact, this is one way in which a nation publicises its most cherished principles and beliefs to its own citizens as well as to the other peoples of the earth.

Practically, every nation has a certain design, has a certain inscription, symbolizing and expressing the characteristics and the highest ideals of the people it represents.

Our Sages tell us that Abraham, the founder of our people, exercised the rights and the prerogatives of an independent ruler. He had a private army of his own which he used in time of war to champion the cause of justice and mercy. Abraham also coined his own money.

We read that when he bought the מערת המכפלה - the burial plot from Ephron the Hittite, he paid 400 shekels of silver that came from his own mint. The Bible declares that it was עובר לסוחר - that this money was accepted by all the merchants and tradesmen of that day.

Now what kind of a coin did Abraham issue? What did he inscribe on its sides? The Rabbis offer the following description: איזהו מטבע של אברהם אבינו זקן וזקינה מצד

⁶¹ Bereishit 25:1

אחד ובחור ובתולה מצד אחר - “On one side of the coin there was the image of an old man and an old woman, and on the other side that of a youth and a maiden”⁶²

This unusual design which appeared on the coin of Abraham is very meaningful and preaches a sermon to us all. It addresses itself to the **בחור ובתולה** - to the builders of the future. It speaks to the man and woman of tomorrow. It urges them not to break with the wisdom of the past, nor to disassociate themselves from the traditions of the **זקן וזקינה** - of the elders who preceded them.

No human being can claim that he's a completely independent entity. Each of us represents the total experience of those who came before us. And we, in our turn, will add a little something to that experience and then hand it over to those who will come after us. In other words, we are but a small link in an endless chain. Our duty is to be a true and loyal link in that chain.

If you look only on one side of the coin, you see only the **בחור ובתולה**, vigorous and enthusiastic youth moving steadily ahead. To them the future belongs - they will inherit the earth.

But when you turn the coin and examine the other side, then you will see the **זקן וזקינה** and you will know that the parents and grandparents, or some unknown ancestors, deserve a great share of the credit in the progress that is now being made by us. Without them we would still be in the jungles or in the prehistoric cave.

This, in brief, is the message of Abraham's coin. There must never be a gap between the old and the young. We are of the same metal and design. We are the products of the same history and tradition. We need the enthusiasm and the energy of youth. When blended with the wisdom and piety of the past, it will forge the Jewish personality of the future, it will advance and form the kind of Jew who will be physically strong, mentally sound, and spiritually alert.

This morning we have a great simcha in our shul. This morning, we see a link in this chain of life. We have here a young couple who have just become engaged. Margaret Angel to Peter Freedman, and I am very happy to welcome them on your behalf in our shul.

Two young people are starting on a journey in life together, and they begin this journey by coming to the synagogue to give thanks to God. By coming to shul, they are remembering that they are part of a chain of tradition, stretching back to Abraham, of which they must be a true and loyal link. Their first step on the road of life which they have chosen to walk hand in hand has been made according to the traditions of our fathers and according to the customs of our faith. In other words,

⁶² Bava Kamma 97b

we have here the מטבע של אברהם אבינו. We have here the symbol of Abraham's coin.

On the one hand, we have here a בחור ובתולה representing the Chatan & Kallah. On the other side, we see the זקן וזקינה, the Parents, the Zeide etc.

Now! It's always of great interest when two people are drawn together with a view to marriage. It is such an important milestone in their lives that one can understand the significance and joy of this occasion. We can understand the feelings and emotions of the parents. After all! Throughout the years, from the cradle onwards, parents are nurses and teachers, and as the years roll by, they watch the children growing up through various phases of life until the first big step is taken to branch off in their own sweet way.

Much as we welcome any visitor - the Chatan and his fear family - in our shul, the engagement of Margaret makes it more interesting as is of great importance to our congregation because of the great part her father has played in the life of this synagogue.

Mr. and Mrs. Angel certainly merit our recognition and greetings. Their devotion to our shul is well known. There is no function of local importance which does not get their interest and support.

In his capacity as President, he has put his heart and soul into his work in steering the synagogue through smooth and troubled waters, and he couldn't have done all this without the support and encouragement from Mrs. Angel. Therefore, Mr. & Mrs. Angel's simcha is our simcha. It is a synagogue simcha!

Toldot: Opened wells and the gift of the Jews

Last Saturday night a member of mine invited me to his house to see a film which a friend of his, also a member of this Synagogue, had taken while on a visit to Israel. I was touched and inspired by the film. This man, whose two cousins are Colonels in the Israeli Army, had been privileged to take these films in an Army Jeep, right through the length and breadth of Israel, and with the help of telelenses from strategic positions, he was able to film scenes and places not only in Israel itself, but in the surrounding Arab countries.

As I watched these contrasting scenes – on the one hand the great achievements of our Israeli brethren, and compared them with the aridness and dryness and poverty of the surrounding Arab countries - I thought of myself how timely and applicable to our own generation is the lesson to be learn from this week's portion of the Law.

The Sidra tells us how a famine in the Land of Canaan compelled Isaac to travel southward and to settle in Gerar. There he prospered, but his prosperity evoked and

aroused the envy and hostility of his Philistine neighbours. Isaac, however, was not one to be satisfied with material success alone. He had a definite goal in view, and he was moved by nobler motives. He was determined to restore and reclaim and safeguard the accomplishments of his father.

The Bible tells us that Isaac reopened the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Abraham - for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham - and he gave them the same names as his father had given them. Isaac surrounded by envious and hateful enemies considered it his duty to reopen and uncover the wells which his father had dug in former times: וַיִּשָׁב וַיַּחֲפֹר אֶת בְּאֵרֵת הַמַּיִם ר' עקיבא אומר - “And Isaac returned and he dug the wells of water”⁶³. - כל מקום שהיו אבותינו הולכים היה הבאר מהלכת לפניהם - “Rabbi Akiva said: Wherever our ancestors went, the well would go in front of them.”⁶⁴

When one reads the Biblical account of the encounter of the clash between Isaac and the Philistines with regards to the digging of wells in the land of Israel, one cannot help but ask in amazement: Why should the Philistines have objected to the opening of wells in a country that is in dire need of water? Why should they have stopped the wells which Abraham had dug, and why should they have quarreled with Isaac when he proceeded to open them anew?

The written word of the Torah does not enlighten us on that point. But tradition tells us that it was because the Philistines were saying that the wells were attracting strangers to the country. So, instead of making the land a blessing to all, they were determined to have it remain a desert so that people should not be attracted to come there. The point is symbolic indeed not only with regards to the position of the Jew in the Land of Israel, but throughout his long history wherever the dispersion carried him.

Rabbi Akiva, in the above Midrash, stated it concisely: wherever the Jews went, there was a well of fresh living waters that went before them. There's not a country in the world where the Jew has lived that has not been deeply blessed by their presence! Whether it was ancient Alexandria - the greatest metropolis in the Hellenic world, or Bagdad – the main seat of Islamic civilization, or Barcelona - the centre of Spanish culture, and down to our own times throughout the capitals of the world, Israel bestowed of his genius upon the nations of the world. But true to their ancient ancestors, the Philistines, the Ferdinands, the Hitlers & the Nassers resented the wells of blessing that the Jew had opened.

The story is especially significant with regards to the Land of Israel. For the last 1,800 years, since the Jew has been exiled from his land, the nations which were in

⁶³ Bereishit 26:18

⁶⁴ Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 35:3

possession of the Land of Israel neglected it to such an extent that a land which was once known as flowing with milk and honey was turned into a desert. As I watched those films and saw the parts still held by Arabs, one gets a glimpse of this “Arab genius” of stopping up wells and keep the country a waste land.

Its only with the coming of the Jew, as we know, that this desert land has been turned into a blooming garden. Like Isaac of old, the Jew of today reopens wells for the benefit of all. The Arab world is deeply perturbed. They would rather sacrifice ten million souls than have the waters of the Jordan turned into a blessing for needy people. The pattern of the Biblical story is exact in every detail.

But once again, it’s the optimism of Rabbi Akiva, as mentioned in the above text, that sees the happy ending. In the account of the Torah, Isaac after many attempts finally succeeded in digging a well which even the Philistines could no longer tamper with. Then Isaac called the well by the name Rehoboth, room, “for he said, surely the Lord has made room for us now so that we can prosper in the land”⁶⁵.

Rabbi Akiva saw a repetition of this event in Jerusalem of the future where there will be a similar ending to the quarrel between the descendants of Avraham and those of the Philistines, and that is the eternal will cause a new well to come up in Jerusalem which will water all its surroundings.

Toldot: Being worthy of our birthright (Barmitzvah - Victor)

The Torah relates that when Esau returned from a hunting trip and said to his brother Jacob “Give me some of the lentil soup for I am famished”⁶⁶, Jacob took advantage of the situation and bought his brother’s birthright. Anti-Semites have exploited this biblical episode to malign and vilify the Jew. They cry, “This is the way the Jew does business”. Even Jacob, one of the patriarchs, was unscrupulous in his dealings. He forced a hard-pressed brother to sell him the birthright for a little nothing, and - sad to say - some of our own people repeat this slander and falsehood.

Those who make these charges overlook a pertinent fact. The birthright did not give any material advantage to Jacob. It merely made him the spiritual successor of his father and grandfather.

In olden days, the first born was the spiritual representative of the family. He laid down the rules and regulations for the other children. The example set by the firstborn son had to be followed by the rest of the children. That is why the spiritual minded Jacob was anxious to obtain it. It was not a material advantage that he sought to gain over his brother. He was not actuated by ulterior motives in buying out his brother’s birthright. He simply wanted to avoid the necessity of following the

⁶⁵ Bereishit 26:22

⁶⁶ Bereishit 25:30

example of Esau, or walking in his footsteps. And that was the reason why the materialistic Esau was eager to sell it.

One word in the Bible sheds light on this story. The crucial word is כַּיּוֹם, “as this day”. Jacob said מְכַרְהָ כַּיּוֹם, “Sell me כַּיּוֹם, the birthright”⁶⁷. That word is superfluous. “Sell me the birthright” would have been sufficient. Apparently, something extraordinary happened that day that spurred Jacob on to deprive Esau of the birthright. What was it?

Furthermore, since when did Jacob become a cook? The Torah describes him as a אִישׁ תָּם וְיָשָׁב אֶהְלִים - “a wholehearted man who dwelt in the tents”⁶⁸. But what made him cook on that day – of all things – lentil soup?

The explanation is to be found in the word כַּיּוֹם! On that day Abraham passed away and the world was cast into deep mourning. When the news spread, statesmen and dignitaries of the different tribes attended the funeral, crying “Woe to the world that has lost its leader. Woe to the ship that has lost its captain.”⁶⁹

One can well imagine how Abraham’s son Isaac felt. The crown of his head, the glory of life, was gone. People from all walks of life, even strangers, thronged to pay final tribute to the greatest man of their generation. Everyone was there – everyone but Esau. Jacob was worried and he searched for Esau, but could not find him.

After the funeral Jacob went home to prepare for the mourners a meal that consisted of lentils, in keeping with the tradition that mourners are to be given foods that have a round shape to indicate that the world is like a wheel that spins and that no one can really console the bereaved in their hour of sorrow.

Suddenly, Esau dashed in “from the field”⁷⁰ in hunting clothes, with bow and arrows on his back. When everyone was weeping, Esau was out enjoying his favourite sport. He had worked up a great appetite, and he wanted to eat.

Jacob stood there, shocked and ashamed. How could a grandson of Abraham be so disinterested in the death of his grandfather? And Jacob asked Esau “doesn’t Abraham’s death mean anything to you?! In that case, sell me the birthright כַּיּוֹם because of what happened today. By your indifference you have proved that you have no interest in, or talent for, being the spiritual lead of the family of Abraham.”

My dear Victor! You have read this morning the story of Jacob and Esau. You have read of the contrast between their characters and their modes of life. On the one

⁶⁷ Bereishit 25:31

⁶⁸ Bereishit 25:27

⁶⁹ Bava Batra 91b

⁷⁰ Bereishit 25:29

hand stood Jacob fighting a battle of the spirit, and on the other, Esau who concerned himself with the things of the body and showing so little regard for his people and his past.

On this day, when you stand at the threshold of manhood, we hope to impress this thought upon you. If you want to live a good life, a life that will bring happiness to you and blessedness to your fellow men, then live it in accordance with our Torah. I am saying this because usually the Barmitzvah day marks the end of Jewish education and Synagogue worship. Boys of your age think it is the height of wisdom and good form to leave Hebrew school, and to forget the training they have received. Somehow, they have a mistaken notion that the less Jewish they are, the more English they are, that the less they observe their Jewish traditions, and the more they sever connections with their people, the better are their chances for success in their occupation or profession. The truth is, the more one is loyal to his traditions, the more do people think well of him and trust him. For loyalty to one's faith and to one's people show strength of character which can withstand temptations and defy obstacles. People have little respect for a renegade, for one who shirks his responsibilities and for one who is false with his origins. But they do respect one who is steadfast, who is true and loyal. I want to express the hope that you, Victor, will be a Barmitzvah worthy of your name. I am sure, from what I know of you, you have the intelligence and the will to know that you must continue to come to shul every Shabbat as you have been doing in the past years. You must continue to learn more about your people to know the great contribution which they have made, and to resolve to be guided by Torah and will bring joy and happiness to you, and blessedness to all those that are near and dear to you.

Toldot: How we should serve G-d (Barmitzvah - Robert)

A very significant statement is found in the portion of this week (Bereishit 26:4-5):
וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזַרְעֶךָ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ עִקֵּב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע אֲבְרָהָם בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרָתִי מִצְוֹתַי חֻקֹּתַי וְתוֹרֹתַי - 'And by your seed shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because Avraham hearkened to My voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws'. The nations of the world will bless themselves through Israel only when Israel will observe the commandments, statutes and laws. Apparently, these terms are all the same and are synonymous expressions. But the Midrash gives us a distinction and tells us that each one of these stands for something else.

מצוות (Commandments) means laws dictated by the moral sense, eg. those matters which had they not been written in the Torah, we would nevertheless have considered them to be fitting matters to be subject of a commandment, such as robbery and murder (laws dictated by the moral sense). **חוקים** (Statutes) are laws ordained by God which we are to observe, although reason cannot assign an explanation. We have always had so-called "liberal" Jews who would divide the

teachings of the Torah into two divisions: rational laws - laws that find justification in reason like the Ten commandments, and ordinances which reason cannot in any way justify like the dietary laws, the prohibition of swine's flesh, and the wearing of garments made of a mixture of wool and linen - **שעטנז**. The former, it's argued, are binding for all times and must be observed by all, while the latter need not be observed and can be dispensed with. **תורות** (Laws) are customs and traditional ordinances orally transmitted from generation to generation.

Judaism, from an early period, recognized two authoritative sources. The written Law as contained in the scriptures **שבתב תורה**, and the oral Law which was preserved by word of mouth and transmitted from generation to generation.

Side by side with the written law, there developed a **תורה שבעל פה**, there developed an Oral Law that explained and interpreted the words of the written law. That there's a substantial basis of truth in this tradition is very probable. The laws of the Pentateuch do not embrace all the affairs of life, nor are they complete in themselves. They usually lay down general principles, and they make no mention of the details which would be required in actual practice.

Now the Talmud commenting on this statement remarks **קיים אברהם אבינו כל התורה כולה** - Avraham fulfilled the entire Torah - even such laws as the Eruv.⁷¹

There are many Jews today who mean well, but do not observe their religion as it should be observed, because of the fact that they select one phase or aspect of their religion and exalt it above the rest. They maintain that this is the most important part and if one observes that, then he's exempt from everything else. Thus, one type of Jew will select **גמילת חסד** and maintain that since he performs charitable acts, he need not partake in public worship or in study.

Another will exalt **עבודה** and think that if he goes to shul, he's exempt from giving charity and observing the other commandments. Sincere as these people may be in the profession of their faith, they nevertheless forget that religion, to be effective, must be full living.

There are three pillars, Torah, **עבודה** and **גמילת חסדים** on which the structure of Judaism depends. Remove one of the pillars, and the entire structure is in danger of falling.

It is this thought which our text emphasizes. The Almighty tells Avraham why will the nations of the world bless themselves through your seed, because you lived a full

⁷¹ Yoma 28b

Jewish life observing everything - commandments, statutes & laws, and it's through observing כל התורה that Avraham became a model to emulate.

My dear Robert! On this day when you stand here pledging allegiance to our people and to our glorious traditions, we hope to impress this thought upon you. If you want to live a good life, a life that will bring happiness to you and blessedness to your fellowmen, then live it in accordance with our Torah. For more than 3,000 years, it has brought happiness to men and women who lived by it. We can truly say of it: עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותמכיה מאשר - 'A tree of life it is to those who hold onto it and they that support it are rendered happy'⁷².

It is my hope that you will follow these words of mine, and that they will go deep into your heart, and that your life will be guided by Torah and will bring joy and happiness to you and blessedness to all those that are near and dear to you.

Vayetze: Dreams, Silver Wedding Anniversary & new shul

The general subject of dreams occupies an important place, as you know, in the history of ancient Israel. The whole story of Joseph and his brethren is profoundly connected with this theme.

If there's a person inclined to minimize this subject and to insist that this is a relic of some ancient superstitions, it is enough but to refer to a modern Jew, Sigmund Freud, who has gained world fame because of his revival of the doctrine of the significant of dreams and the tremendous role they play in the life of each and every individual.

All the great human accomplishments must be preceded by dreams. In the mind of some individuals, there must first be born the vision, the dream of an ideal, only then can reality follow. History shows that as far back as the era when man lived in caves, he already dreamed of a better world.

In the subterranean caves of southern France are still found the pictures that the cave man carved into the walls; images of the better world about which they dreamed. These were the harbingers and the forerunners of future civilization.

Herzl, the founder of the modern Zionist movement, is a good example of this. The idea of resettling the Jews on the land of their fathers came to him at first like a dream. He visualized the land, deserted for over two thousand years, repopulated with Jews from the four corners of the globe; the waste territory becoming a throbbing and prosperous centre of commerce and industry. The friends who listened to him pronounced him a visionary and lunatic - so much so that he himself began to doubt his reason. On coming home one day he sat down to calculate figures

⁷² Mishlei 3:18

in order to test his mind. After finding that he could still multiply three times four and get a correct result, he decided that there may be something wrong with his friends in pronouncing him insane. And he announced to the world, **אם תרצו אין זו חלום** - “If you will it, it is no dream”, and that some day it will be a reality. We, who lived to see with our own eyes the miracle of the rebirth of the Jewish State, are witness to the power of that dream.

But the greatest dream of all has been the one conceived by Jacob, the vision of mankind united in the worship of the one God. No other nation can possibly match the majesty and universality of the dream of the ladder. In a world of idolatry and slavery, Jacob dreamed of a better world.

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעֵר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֶרְנָה - “And Jacob went out of Beer Sheba and went to Haran.”⁷³ You remember the story of how his brother Esau wanted to slay him; how Jacob was forced to flee from his parental home because of the fury of Esau, and how he found himself a lonely wanderer on strange paths. Suddenly he finds that he cannot go further, **כִּי בָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ** - because the sun has set, darkness is fast enveloping him. The Rabbis add to the Biblical picture, “The whole world suddenly became **מתירא מן החיות** - like a huge wall before him.”⁷⁴ Terror seizes him, “He was afraid of the beasts that surrounded him.”⁷⁵

You would imagine that under these circumstances he would be up and doing, planning, thinking, making every effort to break through the darkness and to pierce through the iron walls. But no! Jacob does none of these things. Instead, he lays himself down and goes to sleep! In this critical moment, when his very life is threatened by the wild beasts about him, he closes his eyes and falls into a heavy slumber.

You remember how the story continues - he dreams. And in his dream angels appear before him, angels who ascend to the heavens and who then descend to earth again **וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם מְצַב אֶרְצָה וְרֵאשׁוֹ מְגִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ** - “And Behold! A ladder was standing on the ground, and its top reached up toward heaven. And behold! God's angels were going up and down on it.”⁷⁶

Jacob hears the voice of God assuring him fellowship, protection, and a safe return home. Jacob awakens, confused, and frightened. He exclaims **אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים** - “Surely this is none other than the House of God”⁷⁷ - a remarkable dream indeed! Jacob dreamed of sanctification, of building a holy Temple. And according to the famous English literary critic and essayist Henry Hazlitt, the dream of Jacob - he

⁷³ Bereishit 28:10

⁷⁴ Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 68:10

⁷⁵ Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 68:11

⁷⁶ Bereishit 28:12

⁷⁷ Bereishit 28:17

writes - is one of the most beautiful in literature. And the more we study Jacob's life, the more we appreciate what the Rabbi's meant when they said: כל מה שאירע ליעקב - אירע לבניו - "All that happened to Jacob happened also to his descendants."⁷⁸

History has proved the truth of this prophetic dream. From the days of our ancestor Jacob down to our very own, we have witnessed the eternal struggle between the hands of Esau and the voice of Jacob. But we are here, still a living force upon the stage of history. Powerful nations - Babylon, Media, Greece, Rome and others – appeared, attained considerable power and might, and then disappeared. But Israel survived. We are here because it has always been the voice of the Synagogue that summoned us, and because our hearts have always responded to that voice.

This Shabbat is indeed a happy Shabbat for our Shul, and today is a special day for one couple. I refer to Max Woolf, Chairman of the Rebuilding Fund Committee, and his wife Millie. This week they are celebrating their silver wedding anniversary, and as is appropriate for one who has given a most valuable and conspicuous service to our community, and as one who has played a great part in the building of our new Shul, it is only fitting that he should come to Shul surrounded by his dear friends and family to offer prayers of thanks to the Almighty for having brought them to this important milestone in their lives. To be born with a silver spoon in your mouth is counted a blessing. But to have live in happiness together for 25 years and to celebrate - as does Max and Millie today - a silver wedding anniversary, is both a blessing and an accomplishment. And I am sure that I am echoing the sentiments of you all when I extend to them both our heartiest felicitations and congratulations on this very happy occasion.

Very soon, we shall be privileged to see the realization of a dream which began 25 year ago, when the late Chief Rabbi Dr. Hertz, of blessed memory, inducted me into office as your minister. It was a time of great destruction for the world and for Jewry in particular. At that time we didn't even realize the extent of the destruction. We didn't realize that 6,000,000 of our fellow Jews were to perish in that Holocaust. The bombs were dropping outside here in Neasden when Dr. Hertz spoke, and in the middle of that destruction he said that he foresaw a time would come when a beautiful Synagogue would be built on this spot; and we are indeed very grateful to the men and women who devote themselves wholeheartedly to the wellbeing of our Synagogue. At an appropriate time, I am sure, we shall show our appreciation to those dedicated individuals who prepared the foundations upon which our present success has been built.

⁷⁸ Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 9

Vayishlach: The three courses (Barmitzvah - Alan)

The brilliant Thomas Mann has popularised in the modern world one of the beautiful biblical tales, and he has shown how these ancient traditions and sagas can still present a vital, significant message to the world of our day.

He has done for the modern world what the Rabbis of the Midrash did for the old world - they showed the timelessness of these sagas, fashioned out of the experience of ancient Israel.

This morning I want to take one of these tales that presents a picture of the early life of the patriarch Jacob. Jacob, more than all the other patriarchs, personifies the Jew throughout the ages. Well have the Rabbis epitomised his life when they said: “All that happened to Jacob happened also to his descendants.”

You remember the story of his adventurous life. He is the first Jewish refugee in history.

We read in this morning’s portion of the Law that when Jacob was about to return after dwelling with Laban for 20 years, he was still afraid of his brother Esav’s fury and anger. So he decided to take measures to overcome Esav’s enmity. התקין עצמו לשלושה דברים - לדרון, לתפילה ולמלחמה⁷⁹ - He prepared himself for three courses⁷⁹ - either to appease him with gifts, or to resort to prayer, or to go to war if need be.

Our Sages tells us that מעשה אבות סימן לבנים - that “the things that happened in the lives of our patriarchs, also happened later to their descendants.”

In studying Jewish history, we find that the Jewish people also employed three methods against the many Esav’s and Amalek’s whom they encountered throughout their existence. In the Middle Ages, Jews were able to live and be protected from their enemies by paying large sums of money to kings and nobles. Their lives were literally bought for money. They always tried to appease their enemies by dangling gold coins before them.

Of course, the Jew always resorted to prayer. They always implored the Almighty to save them from their enemies. The “Kol Yaakov” was constantly heard in Tefillot VeTachanunim. When great danger threatened them, the Jews proclaimed fast days at which the men, women and children gathered in their synagogues and prayed for divine intercession.

Sometimes the Jew prepared for war against their enemies. But this course of action was never employed in Galut (in exile) except in rare instances when “Haganah” (self defence) was used for protection.

⁷⁹ Kohelet Rabbah 9

Young Jews were organized to combat assault of their enemies. But this was only in defense of their lives.

In the 1,900 year long exile, Jews in the Galut never took the offensive. Only in Israel do we have instances of the Maccabee, Bar Kochba rebellion, and now in modern Israel, we have the Israeli army.

The exploits of the Israeli army recently have greatly increased the prestige of the newly born State of Israel. Of course, it's regretful and disappointing that in this day and age people forget the tribute they owe Israel for its spiritual contributions and admire it only for its physical prowess. But be that as it may, Israel has demonstrated, like our father Jacob, that the Jew is not a coward, but as brave - if not braver - than many others. For the Jewish sacrifices were made **על קידוש השם** - for the sanctification of God's name. There was a sublime ideal that animated them.

It was not a war for the sake of war. The Jews didn't engage in **מלחמת רשות** - "in wars of conquest and aggrandizement". The ways in which the Jews engaged were **מלחמות חוב** - wars in which they were duty-bound to engage in to protect their land and their home.

My dear Alan! You pledge allegiance to your people today. It is a great privilege that is conferred upon you to become a member of a people so distinguished, and which has contributed so much to the culture and civilization of the world. But remember, being a member of the children of Israel is not only a privilege but also a responsibility.

We are always surrounded by enemies. **בכל דור ודור... עומדים עלינו לכלותינו** - in every generation men rise up against us to destroy us. What is the Jew to do? He must be prepared to employ the three weapons that our father Jacob was preparing to use - **דורון, תפילה ומלחמה**.

We must try to appease our enemies as did our father Jacob. We must pray to the Almighty for his protection and deliverance. But we must also be ready to fight - not wars of aggression, but wars of defense. We must maintain an army to guard ourselves against our enemies.

Vayeshev: The thirty-six

Last Shabbat, on my way to Shul, I saw a placard and on it was written in bold letters, "If you want peace, let the five meet." I didn't have time to stop and see under whose auspices the placard was written and who the five referred to were. But the placard recalled to my mind a legend on the folklore of the Jewish people. This legend tells us that the world exists for the sake of a very few righteous men. Who they are is

the greatest of mysteries, but there are always exactly thirty six in the lands of the living.

They are a varied lot, from all countries and all walks of life. Their nationality, their social and economic station and their level of education are completely unimportant. Men attain to the company of the Thirty-Six through the merits of their souls. They are known only to one another. They are bound together by the greatest of all attainments – their saintliness, the equal perfection in God's service, their common humanity.

The thirty-six meet very seldom. The journey would be too great for most of them who are once busy and poor. They do not wish to trouble heaven to transport them miraculously to the place of their parleys. Sometimes, however, in times of crisis for mankind, they must break their self-imposed rule. An assembly must be held so that they can deliberate and set the world right again.

These are such days of crisis. Men are still dying in war in Korea. But this in plain every day language is merely a local war. That is, people are being killed and families ruined on merely a small scale.

We suffer from an even greater fear. The drums of the Cold War are beating ever louder as an unhappy world drifts towards the greatest imaginable disaster.

There is no peace today because the making of peace is not being attempted by the right people. The diplomats are well versed in the so-called national interests of their respective countries. The military men have planned in advance for every possible war, their armies might wage – and they want to be sure that they have the necessary strategic bases right now. Peace is being attempted as a delicate balance of conflicting selfish interests. The world is therefore involved in maze after maze of ever more complex problems. It is impossible to satisfy even halfway the unbridled desires of all men and nations.

Yes, let the thirty-six meet. Let there come together carpenters, machinists, shoemakers, teachers, lawyers, doctors, ministers, beggars - and all the rest. Let them wear hats, turbans, skull-caps or go bareheaded. Let them speak in all the languages and all the accents of this varied planet. Let them see the issue of war and peace in basic terms.

The way to peace is only to be found along the high road of morality of our common humanity. To simple, decent people from all over the world, like the saints among the thirty-six, perhaps the problem would look different. Perhaps they would not see boundary lines on maps which, in most cases, require armies on both sides of the border. Perhaps they would not care about who is to monopolise power anywhere in the world. What they would see is a planet teeming with riches meant by God for

the benefit of all mankind. They would weigh as the cost of war the rows of graves in military cemeteries, and the heartbreak that each has left behind.

Our century is supposed to be the most civilised and advanced that the world has ever known, and yet it is the most murderously warlike. This paradox concerns all men today.

What does suffering humanity really want today? The mighty ones may have all kinds of desires – and they differ so widely as to be incapable of making peace. The simple, common people all over the world, are in remarkable agreement. Their peace aims are the same. They want their children to grow up to manhood and not to be sacrificed to the gods of violence. The world is tired, very tired, of losing some of its best young people in each generation. We want no more wounded bodies and broken souls. We have too many fatherless children and widows to be comforted.

Men and women everywhere want freedom. They want the right to worship God in their own way. They want to be able to say that they think and do what they please, so long as it does not harm others. They long for the chance to speak their mind without fear of reprisals – to speak as freely in Poland and Russia, as in England and in the United States, as freely in Romania, as in France.

The heart of mankind is dreaming of security. The biblical vision of earthly bliss – “each man under his vine tree, each man under his fig tree”⁸⁰ still beckons. What is it then that prevents man from reaching the goal of true brotherhood?

The answer is human prejudice. There are two basic reasons for human prejudice: one is a feeling of superiority; the other is a sense of inferiority. The first is the well known “I am better than you attitude,” It’s the familiar pattern of men of a certain race considering themselves better than those of another race, of people of a certain class looking down upon people of another class, the Nordic thinks he is better than the Slav, the Lattin is nobler than the Semite, and the white man considers himself superior to the yellow or black man.

There is an ancient Chinese folktale which aptly illustrates this attitude. It is an Oriental version of creation. When God was about to create man, He made an image out of clay and placed it in an oven in order to bake it properly. But it was removed too soon from the oven and it looked very pale. That was the white man – he was half-baked. The creator continued the experiment, placing another image in the oven. But this time, it remained there too long, and when taken out, it was scorched; this was the black man. The third attempt was successful, the temperature was perfect and the man was well-baked. This was the yellow man. And, the Chinese

⁸⁰ Michah 4:4

legend goes on to say, the Creator was so pleased the He made hundreds of millions of these men.

Every race or nation has a similar fable about its own superior qualities. But these accounts are pure legends, inventions of the imaginations of primitive man. Science ridicules these claims, and insists that the adage “all men are created equal” may not be true in an economic sense, but is certainly true in a biological sense.

Jewish tradition has preserved an altogether different version of creation. It is based upon the verse: **וַיִּצֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים** - “The the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”⁸¹ From which part of the earth’s great surface did He gather the dust, asks our ancient Hebrew sage. And the answer is to the effect that the Lord sent four angels to the four corners of the earth to gather the dust from which Adam was created, so that no man may say “my ancestors came from a better country than yours.”

But the second category is far more dangerous. Men whose prejudice stems from a feeling of inferiority are more fanatical and more persistent. They are consumed by envy and by ill will toward the person they consider superior. And that feeling exists even among members of one family, even among brothers of the same blood!

We need not go so far afield for examples of this type of individual. We find them even in the Bible. Consider the story of Joseph and his Brethren. Why did his brothers hate Joseph so keenly? Didn’t he go to the trouble of inquiring about their welfare in a true brotherly spirit? He went to strange and unfamiliar lands in order to show his interest in their well-being, and when a stranger, seeing him “wandering in the field” asked him **מָה תִּבְקֵשׁ** - “What do you seek?”⁸². He answered: **אֶת אַחֵי אֲנִי מִבְּקֵשׁ** - “I seek my brethren”⁸³.

How was Joseph, rewarded for “seeking his brethren”? **וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתוֹ מֵרֶחֶק וּבְטָרָם יִקְרַב** - “And they saw him afar off, and before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.”⁸⁴ Why did they conspire to kill their own brother who showed so much concern and affection for them. Scripture furnishes the answer in the same chapter. **הִנֵּה בֹעֵל הַחֲלֻמוֹת הַלְזָה בָּא** - “Behold,” they said, “this dreamer comes”⁸⁵. The sole crime that Joseph had committed was, that he was a dreamer. He had imagination and he dreamt of great things. He had a vision of stars bowing before him and of the very elements of nature doing his bidding. His brothers were envious. They begrudged him his ambitions, his desire to

⁸¹ Bereishit 2:7

⁸² Bereishit 37:15

⁸³ Bereishit 37:16

⁸⁴ Bereishit 37:18

⁸⁵ Bereishit 37:19

accomplish great things. Instead of emulating Joseph and attempting to reach up to his stature, instead of cherishing dreams in their own hearts too, they said, נְשַׁלְכֵהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת - “Let us cast him into one of the pits”, וְנִרְאֶה מָה יְהִי חֲלֻמָּתָיו - “and we shall see what will become of his dreams”⁸⁶.

So it is with our fellow man of this day as well. As soon as they notice one of their friends rising above their own level, showing signs of initiative and superiority, they turn against him. The dreamer, the idealist, is viewed with suspicion. The fellow who has a vision of a better world, of happier days, is harassed and opposed. The reason: a fear of being inferior, a desire to pull everyone down to a level of mediocrity.

Let us carry this thought a bit further. The dreamers, the men of initiatives, are responsible for the improvement of the lot of all men, including all those who begrudge their ambitions and suspect them. If not for Joseph and his dreams, and his ability to interpret dreams, Jacob and all his brothers would have perished during the years of famine. It was his vision and his leadership that saved a whole empire from starvation. Yes, it is more than Brotherhood that we need; it's Brotherhood based upon character. We must learn how to regard our fellow men, as our benefactors and as our comrades in the struggle for a better tomorrow. We must learn how to repress our small and selfish motives and to rise to the status and the dignity of humanity made in the image of God. Even when we disagree with our own brothers, we must learn to respect them and the things they believe in. We must recognize that just as there are different types of children in a family, varying in appearance and in mentality, equally so there are various colors and races and creeds in the human family. We are nevertheless, but one family. The moment we begin to lose sight of this fact, we are all in common danger.

It's like the story of the two men on a sinking ship. One said to the other: “I think the ship is sinking.” And the other replied: “What do we care, we don't own it.” This illustration is very timely and the application is self-evident. We are all literally in the same boat. If one is the captain of the ship, then more power to him; if he is a plain oarsman, let's bless his efforts too.

This realisation must be with us not only for the duration of one month or one week, but every day of the year and every hour of the day.

Yes, now as never before, is it necessary for the thirty-six to meet and to imprint this lesson upon mankind today, to teach the world - in the words of our Talmud - “that none should say to his fellow, My father was greater than thy father... But a simple man was created to proclaim the greatness of the Holy One Blessed be He, for man stamps many coins with one seal, and they are all alike, but the King of Kings, the

⁸⁶ Bereishit 37:20

Holy One blessed be He, has stamped every man with the seal of the first man, yet not one of them is like his fellows.”⁸⁷

Vayeshev: On Joseph’s success

This Sabbath we begin to read in the synagogue the story of Joseph who was one of the most colourful and dramatic personalities in all literature. It’s the saga of an orphan, a prisoner, and a slave, who became the viceroy in the most powerful empire of his era.

The bible dedicates many passages to display the glory, and to illustrate the sagacity and kindness, of this man. It gives a detailed description of his dealings with strangers, as well as his own brothers. These episodes constitute the strength of force, and importance, of the Joseph story.

Here is a man who, at the peak of affluence and power, to whom the brothers who had wronged him, have come for keep. He is in a position to deal harshly with them, but acts kindly instead. There’s no veangance in his heart, for he believes that everything that happened to him was in accordance with a divine plan.

There’s a very interesting word about Joseph. When he begins his meteoric rise to fame and glory, the Bible remarks: וַיְהִי ה' אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מְצַלִּיחַ - “And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man”⁸⁸.

מְצַלִּיחַ is a difficult expression to translate. Sometimes the word ‘lucky’ is given as a translation. But that is not correct neither grammatically, nor etymologically. The word מְצַלִּיחַ is used three times with reference to Joseph. This is most unusual, for the word מְצַלִּיחַ is rarely found in the Torah, and never applied with such frequency to any other Biblical figure. Nor would one mindful of Joseph’s circumstances consider him to be particularly prosperous.

But here is a wonderful and inspiring lesson on the meaning of success. “What is success?”, people ask. In our age, success is alas usually and mistakenly associated with material achievements; with power, glamour, and popularity. Normally, success means that someone has gotten ahead in business or in his profession, and that he has acquired wealth and has achieved fame. But that is not the Jewish conception. In this chapter we are given a true and lasting definition of הצלחה.

People always admire the practical man of affairs, for he’s the one that accomplishes things in this world. He deals with realities. But people scoff at, and abhor, the dreamer, the prophet, the man of the spirit.

⁸⁷ Sanhedrin 37a

⁸⁸ Bereishit 39:2

Joseph, who was a dreamer, was intensely hated by his brethren, and when they saw him approaching they jeered at him in the words: “Behold, the dreamer is coming”⁸⁹.

The Jewish State proposed 60 years ago was also laughed at and ridiculed. But today it has become a reality, and Herzl, instead of being called a fool, is now considered “a modern prophet”.

Despised by his brethren, he was sold as a slave and put into a prison on a false charge. Joseph in his early life faced three critical tests-periods. They represent the three main problems or crises experienced by all human beings.

First, at the tender age of 17, he was persecuted by his own brothers, torn away from his family, and thrown into a strange environment. The love and care of a devoted father is now replaced by the harsh master of a slave owner. This was obviously a period of gloom and darkness in his young life, and there are two possibilities at such a moment. One may be filled with despair, sigh, weep and give up hope. Or one determines to do the best under these circumstances and face the future with hope and faith.

It reminds one of the well-known story about two boys who fall into a tall pitch-jug of milk. One boy folds his lips to lay one over the others to bewail, bemoan and bewail the tragic situation and gives up all hope of escape. This boy is lost.

The other boy decides to kick and fight with his last ounce of strength and quickly, through his motions, churns the milk into butter. The second boy saves himself.

Joseph was indeed fortunate, for in his hour of misfortune and trouble he too was imbued with faith in God, and because “the Lord was with Joseph”⁹⁰, he never lost hope. He devoted and applied himself to his work. He did his best in difficult circumstances, he was therefore indeed an אִישׁ נְמוֹצֵלִים - a prosperous man.

The second crisis provided Joseph with a severe moral test. He had to face the powerful allurements of the mistress of the house and fight against temptation and evil. As the Midrash indicates, it was not an easy matter. But again, Joseph succeeded, for at the height of this crisis he was not alone. He was conscious of his moral responsibilities, of his presence before the Almighty, and of his father’s reputation and teachings. In a forceful tone he replied, “how then can I do this great evil and sin against God?”⁹¹. He succeeded once again.

The third, and perhaps the supreme crisis of his life, came when he faced the powerful Pharaoh and brilliantly interpreted his dream. From the bottom of a dark pit he had now risen to the heights of fame and success. He was now to become the

⁸⁹ Bereishit 37:19

⁹⁰ Bereishit 39:2

⁹¹ Bereishit 39:9

viceroys of Egypt. All admired his wisdom and ingenuity. It was so easy, so tempting, to become vain and arrogant and to be impressed by your own wisdom and power and think “my strength has achieved all this for me”⁹². Joseph - in true humility - answers: “It is not in me. God will give an answer for the peace of Pharaoh”⁹³. Once again Joseph has succeeded. He has not permitted the shining of the moment to corrupt and demoralize his life.

Are not these the typical crises man faces in life? All of us, at one time or another, fight despair, battle our own conscience, and seek to retain our humility in the face of success.

Though these various vicissitudes of life we will remember, that man is not alone, that man must give a reckoning for all his deeds, and that in spite of all our achievements, our lives are frail in the hands of God, then we too, like Joseph, will have succeeded.

Vayeshev: Dreams (Barmitzvah - Charles)

People always admire the practical man of affairs because he is the one that accomplishes things in this world. He deals with realities. But people scoff and abhor the dreamer, the prophet, the man of the spirit. Joseph, who was a dreamer was intensely hated by his brethren and when they saw him approaching they jeered at him in the words: “Behold the dreamer is coming”.

Surely it must have sounded foolish and fantastic for Joseph to dream, that the sun, moon & stars would bow to him. In other words, it meant to say that his family would some day acknowledge his superiority. No wonder that the brothers were angry and despised him. He! A mere youth, was to be king, and they his servants. But much as the dreamer is despised, he continues to dream; much as the prophet is derided, he continues to prophecy; and much as the man of the spirit is regarded as crazy by his fellow men, he continues his labours, he continues showing in time that he is sane, and the others without vision. Yes, it may be that the practical man gets results, but it is the dreamer that provides the ideas for the practical man! In other words, dreamer and man of affairs need each other and complement each other's works. But the world not realizing this, treats the dreamer harshly and persecutes him. Nevertheless, the dreamer triumphs in the end, and fantastic as his dreams may have appeared at first, they eventually become realities.

Witness the case of Joseph! Despised by his brethren, he is sold as a slave, put into prison on a false charge, yet in time, Pharaoh the king begs his advice and sees in him a man possessed of the spirit of God. Joseph becomes viceroy and saves Egypt from one of its most critical periods. It was Joseph, the dreamer, who foresaw the coming

⁹² Based on Devarim 8:17

⁹³ Bereishit 41:16

of the seven-year famine and who suggests the remedy to combat it. Egypt of Pharaoh's day realized the greatness of Joseph's work and his contemporaries openly admitted הִחַיֵּתָנוּ - you kept us alive or else we would have perished in the famine.⁹⁴ Later we read, וַיִּקַּם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף - "a new king arose in Egypt and all of Joseph's work was forgotten"⁹⁵.

However, Joseph's brethren, when they came to Egypt, learned that their brothers dream was not an idle one, and that all he had prophesied had become reality.

My Dear Charles! Today, you become a member of a people whose distinction has always been that it has been the dreamer among the nations of the world. Unfortunately, men laughed and scorned and ridiculed our dreams.

Herzl, the founder of the modern Zionist movement, is a good example of this. The idea of resettling the Jews on the land of their fathers came upon him at first like a dream. He visualized the land, deserted for over two thousand years, repopulated with Jews from the four corners of the globe, the waste territory becoming a throbbing and prosperous centre of commerce and industry. The friends who listened to him, the first few days under the spell of this idea, pronounced him a visionary and lunatic. So much so that he himself began to doubt his reason. On coming home one day, he sat down to calculate figures in order to test his mind. After finding that he could still multiply three times four and get a correct result, he decided that there may be something wrong with his friends in pronouncing him insane. And he announced to the world, "If you will it, it's no dream!". Some day it will be a reality.

We are witness to the fact that Herzl's dream has now become a reality. It is such dreamers that have inherited the earth and upon whom there always fell the mantle of leadership. Such people were our great prophets, dreamers of a better and finer world.

And so, my dear Charles, remember that as a Jew you must dream. By all means, be a practical man of affairs as you grow up. But forget not your dreams, for of them your heaven will be made. Life without dreams is meaningless. Do not be ashamed of being called a "dreamer". Rather, be honoured by such a designation, for Joseph the dreamer is also the אִישׁ מַצְלִיחַ, "the successful man"⁹⁶, and the model for us to follow. On your Barmitzvah day I want you to remember Herzl's motto: "If you will it; if you have the will, it's no dream", and you can become a great Jew.

⁹⁴ Bereishit 47:25

⁹⁵ Shemot 1:8

⁹⁶ Bereishit 39:2

Miketz: The greatest book on earth

People sometimes wonder why the Old Testament, and particularly the Pentateuch, is given such acclaim and applause as the Book of Books. And some Jews who have an inferiority complex even repeat like a parrot the claim of Bible Critics - whom Professor Solomon Schechter designated as Higher Anti-Semites - that there are other books that are as great. Furthermore, they go out of their way, they take pains to prove that our Bible is not original, but was copied from the Babylonians and the Code of Hammurabi. One need but turn to the Sidra Miketz and in the opening word we will see the greatness of the Torah.

It begins with the story of Pharaoh's dreams, and the interpretation that Joseph gave them, which ultimately resulted in the saving of Egypt and other nations from famine and starvation. Pharaoh dreamt that he saw seven fat cows and seven lean cows come from the Nile River. The seven lean cows consumed the seven fat cows, and it was not even noticeable that the lean cows had swallowed the seven fat cows.

Again, Pharaoh dreams that seven ears of corn came up, seven rank and full ones, and that seven ears, thin and blasted with the east wind spring up after them. The seven thin ears devour and consume the rank and full ears of corn.

These dreams disturb Pharaoh, but all the magicians, priests, and sages of Egypt cannot interpret the dreams for him. It is only Joseph who is able to interpret them.

What a brilliant interpretation! Joseph explains that the seven lean cows, or seven thin ears of corn, represent seven lean years which are coming, and the seven fat cows, and seven full ears, are the seven years of plenty which Egypt was enjoying. Therefore, concludes Joseph, it is necessary to conserve the supplies of the seven years of plenty and store them, so that the people of Egypt might be saved from starvation.

Pharaoh is impressed with this exceptional insight of Joseph and exclaims הַנְּמָצָא הַזֶּה - "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the spirit of God is?"⁹⁷. Joseph is right. The famine comes, and Egypt is saved.

Great economists of our time see in the Joseph interpretation of the dreams a prediction of the economic cycles of today when every seven years, or thereabouts, there's a depression and a prosperity. What is more, some economists in recent years urged adoption of the Joseph plan as a means of avoiding depression.

Need we go further to show why the Bible is regarded as the greatest book on earth? Every page is studded with wisdom and inspiration. What the world needs today

⁹⁷ Bereishit 41:38

more than ever is the inspiration of the Bible. “Back to the Bible” should be our slogan!

It's not by chance that Chanukah always falls when we are reading the Sidra Miketz. Is not this a reminder of the miracle of Chanukah? גְבוּרִים בְּיַד חֲלָשִׁים, וְרַבִּים בְּיַד מְעַטִּים - “The multitudes in the hands of the few and the mighty in the hands of the weak”⁹⁸.

Vayigash: Four should give thanks

Of the many virtues which we find commendable and praiseworthy, there are some which constitute the very foundation of human character, without which the human character would have no stability.

Virtues such as honesty and truth have stability because they constitute the very foundation of human character. There is, however, another virtue, namely gratitude.

Gratitude may perhaps not be as essential as some other virtues, but it is like a rare and tender flower, meaning that it is of no use in supporting human existence, but it fulfils its purpose in arousing admiration.

Gratitude awakens us to feel the loving kindness of that Great Being who not only supplies our physical necessities, but also scatters around us, with lavish hand, objects which charm the senses and refine the human mind.

Ingratitude, on the other hand, is regarded as a moral crime. Black and “Base” are words used to describe it. It's called “Sharper than a serpent's tooth” by Shakespeare⁹⁹ because not only does it inflict wounds, but like a serpent's tooth it instils in them a poisonous venom. Ingratitude wounds a sensitive mind and even deters men from good action. Gratitude may not be an essential, fundamental human virtue, but it must be accorded an honoured place in the scheme of things.

Now let's see what are the reasons for being grateful? What are the events and occasions which arouse in man the feeling of gratitude?

“Good”, says the philosopher, “is recognized by its lack”. We recognize most sharply, most poignantly, that which is good when you go without, and that which is beautiful and enjoyable when we most lack it. No one appreciates food as much as the hungry. No one is grateful for sound sleep as the weary and exhausted. It's sometimes necessary to suffer lack before we can fully appreciate what we have been given.

And therefore, the Talmud says, “ארבעה אנשים צריכים להודות” - Four should give thanks: Those who have been to sea; those who have traveled in the desert; the ill

⁹⁸ From the ‘Al HaNissim’ prayer

⁹⁹ ‘King Lear’ by William Shakespeare

who have been cured, and whoever has been imprisoned and has been released.”¹⁰⁰ These four classes of people have known danger of privation. When they return safely to the normal flow of life, they have reason indeed for giving thanks.

Usually we expect a man to be grateful for events which have occurred to him. But great men, however, feel the emotions of others as well.

In this week portion of the law we read of the meeting between Joseph and his brother Benjamin. We are told, that when Joseph met his brother Benjamin, וַיִּפֹּל עַל צַוְאָרְיוֹ בְּנֵימִן אָחִיו וַיִּבְךְּ וּבְנֵימִן בָּכָה עַל צַוְאָרְיוֹ “And Joseph fell upon the neck of his brother Benjamin and he cried and Benjamin cried of Joseph’s neck.”¹⁰¹ The two brothers met and acknowledged each other for the first time in years, and they fell upon each other and cried.

Rashi, the famous commentator, explains the weeping. Joseph cried עַל שְׁנֵי מִקְדָּשׁוֹת - because in the land of Benjamin, the two temples would be destroyed. And Benjamin cried, עַל מִשְׁכַּן שִׁילָה שְׁעֵתִיד לְהִיּוֹת בְּחֶלְקוֹ - because in the land of Joseph, Shiloh, the temporary sanctuary of Israel, would be destroyed. Each cried because of the tragedy that was destined not for himself, but for the other.

So, also, with gratitude. If ever there was reason for gratitude, we Jews have it. Not for personal reasons, but for the events which have befallen our “younger brother Benjamin” - our people in the young state of Israel. We can rise to the height of feeling with them and sharing with them theirs, and our, great miracle. And here the words of the Talmud apply in full force. What are the reasons for gratitude? Which people have cause to give deep thanks? The Talmud says, “Those who have been to sea.” Our people indeed have been to sea. In patched up and overcrowded boats, our people left the murderous land of Europe and sailed for Israel. Do you remember the ‘Exodus’? Do you remember Cyprus? The incredible story of women and children in overcrowded unsafe boats, braving danger and suffering for a chance to reach their own land? And the ‘Exodus’ never reached the land of Israel - and the world was silent. There were no outraged cries of protest. No one stirred! In a world of incredible indifference and stupor, our brethren were put to sea. And if they now have a state of Israel, we indeed have cause for rejoicing.

The Talmud continues who has cause to rejoice: “Those who have travelled in the desert.” A desert of exile, a desert of wandering and homelessness – that has been our people’s lot for 2,000 years. A desert where, if anything could be made to grow and live, there was always danger that we would have to move on. A desert in which we moved – but never in any direction. And now a homeland - again cause for

¹⁰⁰ Brachot 54b

¹⁰¹ Bereishit 45:14

rejoicing. Against the lack of a home – 2,000 years of exile – we can appreciate what we now have.

Thirdly, the Talmud lists “the ill who has been cured”. How accurately are the people of Israel here described! Exile is an illness akin to no other. Exile is a sickness of Jewish identity, of broken people, of 2,000 years of inferiority and rejection. Israel, the new state, has begun the cure. Already the Jew walks erect, already the Jew holds his head high. Life has new meaning and purpose. The Jew has a place where he fully belongs.

Fourthly, the Talmud says “And whoever has been in prison, and has been released”. Our people’s history in exile of Pithom and Ramsess, of building for others who ruled over us. We became imprisoned by the laws and demands of the countries of our stay in exile. We became imprisoned, more subtly, in the false values and ideals of the countries of our exile. At last we are released! In Israel the Jew works and lives free – out of the prison of fear of others, free of subjection to the will of others.

“Four should give thanks”. We together with all our brethren in Israel are all four!

Vayechi: Unity and Purpose (Barmitzvah - Harold)

The last portion in Genesis begins with the significant word **וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב** - “And Jacob lived”¹⁰². Dr. Hertz, the late Chief Rabbi, used to ask, “of how many men could one repeat such a phrase as **וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב** - “And Jacob lived”?”.

Usually when a man dies, a death notice appears in the press. In reality, it’s a life notice. Because, but for that death notice, the world might never have known that that man had ever lived.

Only that man, who has been a force for human goodness and lives in the hearts and souls of those who have benefitted by his presence in this world during his pilgrimage on earth, of him only can it be said **וַיְחִי**. Only such a man is heir to immortality.

Significant words are these of the third Patriarch, who earned the name of “Israel”. The name “Israel”, or “Yisrael” in Hebrew, means ‘contender’, or someone who fought and struggled with men and with angels. He was so named because he contended with men and angels and emerged victorious.

The life of Jacob was a strong one. Starting with the difficulties he has with his brother Esau who threatened to kill him, he had to go through the painful experiences with his daughter Dinah and the sad and tragic events in the life of his favourite son Joseph.

¹⁰² Bereishit 47:28

But despite all his tragedies he emerges a beautiful figure. Even granting that the taking of the blessings from his brother was not entirely justified, yet he comes at the end a personality whose morality is unimpeachable.

Now! The time has come for Jacob to die, and this morning's portion of the law portrays to us a touching scene. We read that Jacob, lying on his death bed, called his sons together to his side as he was anxious to bestow upon them his parental blessing and to foretell what the future has in store for them. וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל בָּנָיו - "And Jacob called unto his sons and said gather yourselves together, that I may tell you, that which will befall you in the end of days"¹⁰³.

The student of Hebrew will observe something very strange in the Hebrew text. The word וַיִּקְרָא, "will happen," is usually spelled with the letter א, which ordinarily is translated, "will call" or "will summon", and thus puts a new meaning into the whole phrase. In fact, the ancient sages elaborate a great deal upon this scene. They tell us that Jacob was about לגלות את הקץ - Jacob wanted to reveal the future to his children, but at that very instant the שכינה, or Divine Presence, departed from him.¹⁰⁴ No one, not even this saintly Patriarch, may draw aside the curtains that hide the events of the future. But what he could do, and what he did, was to reveal to them on what their future would depend. And so the Rabbis add הראה להם בנין בית המקדש - He showed them the building of the Holy Sanctuary! Pointing to that sacred edifice, he gave them the secret of their continued existence to the end of days. "Do you want to know what will happen to you in the days to come? It will depend on אַתְּ אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֶתְּכֶם, on what will call unto you, what voice will resound in your hearts and your souls. If it will be the building of the Holy Sanctuary that will summon you, then your future is assured and no power on earth can conquer you."

History has proved the truth of this prophetic warning. From the days of our ancestor Jacob, down to our very own, we have witnessed the eternal struggle between the hands of Esau and the voice of Jacob. We have been forced to go through fire and water. But we are here, still a living force upon the stage of history. We are here because it has always been the voice of the Synagogue that summoned us, and because our hearts have always responded to that voice. And in order to do this effectively, and in order to make the call of the Synagogue the clarion note in Jewish life, we must be united in this task. We cannot accomplish it singly and alone. הִקְבְּצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב "Assemble together," "Join together and hearken ye children of Jacob!"¹⁰⁵ was the dying advice of the patriarch.

¹⁰³ Bereishit 49:1

¹⁰⁴ Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 96:1

¹⁰⁵ Bereishit 49:2

This means that we must try in our relationships one with the other to avoid silly, stupid, petty differences. A lot of our communal life is marred by what we call ‘farribles’¹⁰⁶, by people taking offence over things that do not matter. We must join together, we must unite our forces and work together, for this - our common goal.

My dear Harold! You start a voyage today upon the sea of religious life. When a sea liner begins to voyage, there are cheers, flags flying, sirens tooting, and cries of good luck and Godspeed. Now is it not exactly the same with a Bar Mitzvah boy? On this day there’s a fuss and parade, the boy thinks himself everybody, and imagines everybody thinks of him. He begins his religious life with cries of joy, expressions of goodwill, wishes for success.

But the question is not whether the Bar Mitzvah day is to be a success, but the Bar Mitzvah life, for a journey like yours, only begins with today’s ceremony. Whether it is a success or not depends upon you and you alone.

Shemot: The survival of the Jewish people

The second book of the Five Books of Moses, which we began reading this morning, begins with the story of the birth of Israel, the nation.

In Genesis we deal with the individuals, the builders, the founders, and Patriarchs of the nation. Here we find the people born. And strange as it may seem, that people, one of whose sons had done so much for Egypt, is immediately threatened with extinction. The Pharaoh’s take every measure to prevent the birth of Israel. But despite all their efforts, Israel is born. Born to trouble and oppression and torture, Israel emerges strong and powerful. A very miracle at its birth.

Let us read the words of the Bible, **וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנֵנוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ**, “but the more they afflicted them, the more they spread about”¹⁰⁷. What was going to be the fate and destiny of the people that had such an inauspicious beginning?

The very interesting revelation to Moses in the wilderness, while shepherding the flocks of Jethro, tell us what the future was going to have in store for us. What did Moses see? **וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסִּינָה בֵּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּינָה אֵינָנוּ אֹכֵל** - “And behold, the bush burned with fire and was not consumed”¹⁰⁸. The burning bush is symbolic of Israel – small and lonely among the nations, and yet indestructible because of the Divine Spirit that dwells in it.

How well that describes the history of Israel. From its very birth as a nation, it was like the burning bush. Consumed by fires of hate, it had to endure Pharaoh’s, Amalek’s, Haman’s, Torquemada’s, and worst of all, Hitler. And yet, **הַסִּינָה אֵינָנוּ אֹכֵל**,

¹⁰⁶ Yiddish for ‘grievances’

¹⁰⁷ Shemot 1:12

¹⁰⁸ Shemot 3:2

“the bush was not consumed”. Despite the persecutions, Israel has survived and has now revived.

Yes, Pharaoh and his hosts sank into the mighty depths. Haman and his henchmen met their doom on the gallows. The leading Nazi’s committed suicide. But Israel, weak, weary and exhausted from centuries of persecution, celebrates its rebirth as a nation.

Can we not see the hand of God in all this? How can one doubt the existence of a Supreme Power in the face of this miraculous survival of our people?!

Shemot: Amram & Yocheved

The second book of the Five Books of Moses is called Shemot. Shemot is derived - as is usually the case - from the opening words of the Book, in which are given the names of the sons of Jacob who migrate to Egypt.

Very striking, and full of meaning, are the very first words of this morning’s Sidra **וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת** - “And these are the names.” Shakespeare once asked, “What’s in a name?”¹⁰⁹, and he came to the conclusion that a name doesn’t mean very much. “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet”. This may be true, but the name is still important.

It’s true that a name does not change the meaning of an object. The object, however, certainly determines the meaning of the name. It’s true that the name rose will not add fragrance to the flower; but the fragrance of the flower certainly lends beauty to the name. In the same way, Tallis, Israel, Amram, Yocheved, are simple names, but ever since the days of Abraham, they have come to mean, *something real, something true, something difficult*, but *something wonderful*.

This morning I would like to direct your attention to one of the most important marriages in the history of our people. In a simple sentence we are told how **עמרם** married **יוכבד** and established the most illustrious family in Israel. As you know, this couple **עמרם** and **יוכבד** became the parents of Moses, the greatest teacher and prophet of all times; of Aaron, the first High Priest, who was also the personification of the lover of peace, and of Miriam, who shared with her brothers in the redemption and salvation of her people.

The commentators wanted to know what traits of character, what distinguishing features, these two individuals possessed that enabled them to rear such wonderful children - and they explain that the clue is to be found in the names they bore.

In these days, of course, naming a child is quite a simple procedure. One chooses a dead relative and gives the child its Hebrew name after the deceased person. Usually

¹⁰⁹ ‘Romeo and Juliet’

the English name does not closely correspond with the Hebrew one. For example, what has שמואל to do with Stephen, or חוה with Henrietta? But we feel that this is the least we can do for our beloved dead, and we let it go at that.

In biblical days, however, names were chosen with great diligence and care. An attempt was made to have the name express an ideal or a pledge, to which the bearer was expected to remain true for the remainder of his life. You will note that the name עמרם is composed of two Hebrew words - עם meaning nation, and רם - elevated. At a time when Pharaoh and his followers attempted to degrade and to dishonour the children of Israel, עמרם did everything in his power to uplift to elevate and to bring honour to his people.

יוכבד is likewise composed of two words: יי is an abbreviated form for the name of God, and כבד signifies honour. יוכבד dedicated her life to bring honour to the religion and the God of her people.

When husband and wife build their home on such sound foundations, on service to their God and to their people, and when husband and wife are resolved to give honour to Am Yisrael and to Torat Yisrael, is there any wonder that their efforts are crowned with such signal success?!

Shemot: The burning bush and the new shul

The second book of the Five books of Moses begins with the story of the birth of Israel, the nation. In Genesis we deal with the individuals, the builders, the founders and Patriarchs of the nation. Here we find the people born. And strange as it may seem, that people - one of whose sons had done so much for Egypt - is immediately threatened with extinction.

The Pharaoh's take every measure to prevent the birth of Israel. But despite all their efforts, Israel is born. Born to trouble and oppression and torture, Israel emerges strong and powerful. A very miracle at its birth. Let us read the words of the Bible.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנוּ אֶתְּכֶם - "The more the Jews were oppressed, the more numerous and powerful they became"¹¹⁰.

What was going to be the fate and destiny of the people that had such an inauspicious beginning? The very interesting revelation to Moses in the wilderness while shepherding the flocks of Jethro tell us what the future was going to have in store for us. What did Moses see?

וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסִּינָה בֹעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּינָה אֵינָה אֵכָל - "And behold, the bush burned with fire and was not consumed"¹¹¹.

¹¹⁰ Shemot 1:12

¹¹¹ Shemot 3:2

The burning bush is a symbol of Israel, small and lonely among the nations, and yet indestructible because of the Divine Spirit that dwells in it.

How well that describes the history of Israel. From its very birth as a nation, it was like the burning bush. Consumed by fires of hate, it had to ensure Pharaoh's, Amalek's, Haman's, Torquemada's, and worst of all, Hitler. And yet, **הַסֵּנֶה אֵינּוּ אֶכָּל** - the bush was not consumed.

Despite the persecutions, Israel has survived and has now revived. A new lease of life has come to that nation which was nearly consumed by Nazi flames. Can any history show a greater miracle?

How do we account for all that? It is the divine spirit with which it was endowed by Abraham's, Isaac's, Jacob's, Joseph's, Moses and prophets and sages and saints and martyrs.

How can one doubt the existence of a Supreme Power in the face of this miraculous survival of our people?

It is my privilege and pleasure to announce to you that on Monday night we are having an Extraordinary General Meeting, and the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the building of a new shul.

We have looked forward to this day for many years, and I want to remind you that it is the responsibility of every member of the community to be present. No doubt you will recall that at the revelation of Sinai we are told **וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְעוּ וְיִרְאוּ** - "all Israel let themselves be heard and seen"¹¹². The building of a new shul in Neasden is an historic occasion, and it's an occasion that merits that **כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל** should be heard and seen at the meeting!

I am confident that you will all be present on Monday night, and I pray that the Almighty will give us the **זְכוּת** to see a fine new shul built on this site. **אָמֵן**.

Vaera: The meaning of Morasha (Barmitzvah - Ian)

The second book of the Five Books of Moses begins with the story of the birth of Israel, the nation. In Genesis we deal with the individuals, the builders, the founders, and the patriarchs of the nation. Here we find the people born. Here we deal with the nation itself. The birth of the nation, its struggle for freedom, its final liberation from Egyptian bondage, and many of her momentous events such as the revelation at Sinai, the forming of the Golden calf, and finally the construction and dedication of the Mishkan. In all these events are mirrored the character, the nature, and the spiritual makeup of our people. And we read these events for us to note how the land Canaan – later known as Palestine and now as Israel - is bound up with the

¹¹² Devarim 21:21

destiny of our people. Of course, to every nation its land is important. The topography often influences the national characteristics, and the traditions that grow up there become part and parcel of the people. But in the case of Israel the land played a more significant role. Israel's greatest contributions to the world were made possible through its little country. It was there that the prophets wrought their immortal works. It was there that the Bible was created. It was there that Prophets prophesied, and it was there, that the Psalmist sang his immortal psalmodies. It was there the men of the Great Synagogue laid the foundations of the Synagogue and Liturgy. It was there that the Mishna was created which became the basis of the Talmudic lore. It was that little land, that inspired poets like Yehuda HaLevi and Bialik. It was that little land that was the heart of the world, as our sages put it. It was that little land, that became the shrine of three greatest world religions. It was that little land that was responsible for the Crusades of the Middle Ages.

If there are some who still maintain that the land does not belong to us, that we took it from the poor Arabs, then listen to the words of our portion. After promising to redeem them from Egyptian servitude, the Almighty says וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ - אֲשֶׁר נְשָׂאתִי אֶת יָדִי לָתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלְיַעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לָכֶם מִוְרָשָׁה אֲנִי ה' - "And I will bring you into the land concerning which I lifted up My hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a heritage."¹¹³

Twice in the Torah is the word מִוְרָשָׁה "inheritance" used. Here in reference to the land of Israel, and in Devarim where we read תּוֹרָה צְוָה לָנוּ מִשָּׁה מִוְרָשָׁה קְהֵלֵת יַעֲקֹב - "Moses commanded us a law; מִוְרָשָׁה - an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob"¹¹⁴

Only these two, Torah and the land of Israel, are referred to as מִוְרָשָׁה. This is significant. It seems that the Torah wishes to emphasize the close connection and interrelation between the Torah of the Jew and the land of the Jew. The Torah and the land are both מִוְרָשָׁה, the unique inheritance of the Jew; one is essential for the other, one without the other, is lacking that which is vital for its very life. Like a flower, a people's culture, is rooted in its own soil. And if that culture is to grow and thrive, it cannot be cut off from the soil that gave it birth. There is, therefore, an intimate and vital connection between the land of Israel, and the Torah of Israel.

There's a remarkable passage in the Talmud which expresses this very thought in striking fashion. "Had Israel not sinned, then, they would have only been given the Five Books of Moses and the Book of Joshua"¹¹⁵ - which represents the measures of Israel. What is the meaning of this placing of the book of Joshua above all the

¹¹³ Shemot 6:8

¹¹⁴ Devarim 33:4

¹¹⁵ Nedarim 22b

other books of the Prophets and Scriptures – as an equal of the Pentateuch itself? What is the historic and the psychological cause, that would explain this connection?

Of course there are many interpretations given by the various rabbinic commentators, but behind all these explanations is the fundamental truth that in the mind of this sage of the Talmud, the book of Joshua is as important and as essential to the Jew as the five books of Moses because, as a scholar of our own day recently put it: “In these books of Moses, we have the foundation of the Torah of Israel, and in the book of Joshua we have the designation”. We have the address, as it were, of the home of the Torah, and the detailed measurements and description of the land of the Torah. And just as it is impossible for this people to live without its Torah, so is it impossible for this people of Israel to live without an attachment to its historic land; without a knowledge of *Arkah Shel Eretz Yisrael*, the significant value of this land to its own life. No wonder, that when the Jew prayed, he always turned his eyes, and directed his heart, מוֹרְשָׁה towards the land of Israel!

There is, however, another meaning hidden in the word מוֹרְשָׁה. The Hebrew word that we should expect here to convey the thought of “Inheritance” is יְרוּשָׁה, not מוֹרְשָׁה. Why does the Bible use the latter term?

The Bible evidently makes a conscious distinction between the two. The word מוֹרְשָׁה implies an active role on the part of the recipient. It wants to convey the thought that this Torah, this land of Israel, is not an inheritance that is handed down of itself; its not an inheritance that is handed down automatically, but מוֹרְשָׁה. It must be made the יְרוּשָׁה; it must be made the heritage of the Congregation of Israel. As Samson Raphael Hirsh puts it, “Its possession depends upon Israel’s appreciation of, and obedience to, its God-given law”.

My dear Ian! On this occasion when you have reached the age of responsibility, you come here seeking instruction on the kind of Jewish life that will reflect honour upon you and upon all around you. Moses is called רַבִּינוּ (our teacher) - a term that is used only of him. From him we learn the proper attitude towards life and towards our fellow man.

It’s my hope that you will continue the תּוֹרַה צִוָּה (the Torah Moses gave us), which has become מוֹרְשָׁה קְהֵלֵת יַעֲקֹב (the heritage of the congregation of Jacob). Thus, will you become a credit to yourself, a source of נַחַת to your parents, and an inspiration to all Israel.

Vaera: Youth in shul (Barmitzvah - Dudley & Ronald)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְכוּ עַבְדוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִי וּמִי הַהֲלֹכִים וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּנַעֲרֵינוּ וּבְזִקְנֵינוּ נִלְךָ בְּבָנֵינוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְכוּ עַבְדוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִי וּמִי הַהֲלֹכִים וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּנַעֲרֵינוּ וּבְזִקְנֵינוּ נִלְךָ בְּבָנֵינוּ - “And he said unto them: ‘Go serve the Lord your God. But who are they

that shall go?’ And Moses said: ‘We will go with our young and with our old; with our sons and with our daughters’¹¹⁶.

After several plagues had been visited on Egypt, Pharaoh realized that, sooner or later, he would have to meet Moses’ demands to send the children of Israel to serve God. But here a question arose: “Who shall go?”. Pharaoh was ready to yield and to permit the grown-ups, the adults, and the very old, to depart. But Moses insisted that young and old alike be sent forth: **בְּנֵעָרֵינוּ וּבְזִקְנֵינוּ נֵלֶךְ** - “with our young and with our old we will go”; **בְּבָנֵינוּ וּבְבָנוֹתֵינוּ** - “with our sons and with our daughters”.

Pharaoh was wise in his ways. He thought to himself that there was no harm in letting the old men go, so long as he still controlled the youth of Israel. But Moses, great leader as he was, realized that if worship was to mean anything at all, it had to begin with inspiration of the youth.

Synagogues that have only old men and women are **מוֹשָׁב זִקְנִים**, ‘old aged homes’ where usually those who have outlived their usefulness reside, people awaiting death.

A synagogue must have the youth interested in it, or else it cannot function properly. You remember that when the nations of antiquity gathered round Avnimus Hajardi asking how to destroy the Jewish people, he told them: **לְכוּ וְחִזְרוּ עַל בְּתֵי כְנִסְיֹת וּבְתֵי** - “Pass by their synagogues and houses of study. If you hear the voices of children praying and studying, you cannot overcome them.”

Yes, that is where the strength of a nation lies, in its youth. And so Moses, the great leader, said to Pharaoh: **בְּנֵעָרֵינוּ וּבְזִקְנֵינוּ נֵלֶךְ** - “with our young and old”. Notice that he places the young first. The older people do not need instruction. Force of habit, if nothing else, will direct their steps to the synagogue. It’s the youth that we must inspire. If we succeed, then the future is assured.

The challenge of **מִי וְיָמֵי הַהֲלָכִים** which Pharaoh thundered and hurled at Moses in ancient days is one which applies equally to Anglo Jewry in the 20th century. Just as the children of Israel of old had to fight a battle for survival, so must Anglo Jewry today.

In start, we are faced with the life or death question: “Can a meaningful, traditional Judaism survive in England?”. In this battle for spiritual survival, we find many powerful forces arrayed against us. We must surmount the wall of apathy and indifference on the part of so many of our people to all Jewish values. We must overcome the problem of the abysmal ignorance of Judaism and all things Jewish so prevalent in the Anglo Jewish community. And perhaps the greatest obstacle which

¹¹⁶ Shemot 10:8-9

we must find ways and means to overcome is the desire of the Jew to ape and imitate the non-Jewish environment in which he finds himself, the desire to become indistinguishable from the prevailing majority culture around him. These are indeed great and terrifying challenges which we must face. As we contemplate the future of Anglo Jewry, we must ask ourselves the question **מִי וְמִי הַהֹלְכִים** - Who are they that shall follow?

A great many of the problems by which we are beset in our struggle for survival have occurred simply because we have failed to grasp the full meaning and intent of the reply which Moses gave to the challenge of **מִי וְמִי הַהֹלְכִים**! Moses understood the necessity of total commitment on the part of everyone, if the Jew was to survive Egyptian bondage.

To the challenge of **מִי וְמִי הַהֹלְכִים** there can only be one answer if Judaism is to survive in this country. It must be the complete and undivided answer of Moses: **בְּנֵעָרֵינוּ וּבְזִקְיָנוּ וּבְבָנֵינוּ וּבְבָנוֹתֵנוּ** - young and old, sons and daughters, must march hand in hand if we are to build here a vibrant, vital and living faith. This is the kind of synagogue Moses had in mind when he said **וּבְזִקְיָנוּ וּבְבָנֵינוּ וּבְבָנוֹתֵנוּ**.

My dear Dudley and Ronald! The synagogue is the source from which our fathers and forefathers drew their inspiration. The power to overcome persecution and suffering, the strength to outlive and outlast our enemies, were acquired from the synagogue. The readiness to sacrifice everything in life, even life itself, for our religion and our God, came from our house of worship.

Remember therefore that your first duty as a Barmitzvah is to see that the institution which meant so much in the life of our people should remain as effective today. It's in your hands and in the hands of other Barmitzvah's that the future of the synagogue lies.

Make your attendance regular. Do not come here merely on your Barmitzvah day or, God forbid, in case of misfortune. The synagogue is a place for joy as well as sorrow. Try to recapture some of the spirit of the psalmist that made him exclaim **שָׂמַחְתִּי בְּאֲמָרִים לִי בֵּית ה' נִלְךָ** - "I rejoiced when they told me 'Let us go to the House of God'"¹¹⁷

Make your synagogue attendance a joy, not a burden. Go there for the inspiration it affords; for the association with your fellow Jews, for recitation of the beautiful prayers in our ancient Hebrew tongue. Go there because you're going may influence others to attend. Go because your presence will lend strength and power to that institution which is responsible for our survival. If your Barmitzvah will mean no

¹¹⁷ Tehillim 122:1

more than a dedication to the synagogue, it will have permanent value and significance.

Bo: Joseph, Yizkor & the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1965)

The great moment had arrived in the life of our people. After centuries of bondage, they were about to be freed. All was hustle and bustle in the Jewish camp. Men and women were hastening to take all they could carry with them. Gold, silver, and other valuables occupied their attention. **שכל ישראל היו עסוקים בכסף וזהב** – the entire people was thinking of the booty and plunder.¹¹⁸ But one man had his thoughts on something nobler.

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ - “And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph”¹¹⁹. The wise of heart, Moses, was interested in performing a great **מצוה**. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him. He realized that more valuable than gold or silver or precious gems was the ark containing the bones of Joseph.

For 40 years, our sages tell us, the Jewish people carried this ark containing the bones of Joseph on their wanderings in the wilderness. And by its side they carried another ark containing the tablets on which were engraved the Ten Commandments. When people asked why these were carried together, the answer was **המת המונח בארון קיים** **כל מה שכתוב בזה**, this man, whose bones we carry, fulfilled what is written on these tablets of stone.¹²⁰

A beautiful idea is conveyed by the sages in this midrashic comment. Our people had to wander for forty years in a wilderness. They were to encounter much suffering and they had to encounter many obstacles. What could give them the necessary courage to persevere until their goal, the promised land? First was the memory of Joseph, that ideal type of Jewish manhood who suffered so many hardships and yet rose from the lowest pit to the topmost pinnacle of success. Joseph was hated and despised. He was cast into a dungeon, sold into slavery. And yet he rose to the vice-regency of Egypt. Faced with the greatest temptations, he had the power to emerge morally and spiritually victorious, and to become immortalized in our annals as **יוסף הצדיק**, Joseph the righteous, the saintly man. What greater source of inspiration to the newly-freed slaves could be found than the memory of the life of Joseph?!

But with the ark of the bones of Joseph there was another – the Ark containing the tablets of God. Within it was our Torah which not only taught the people the way of life in the present, but which held out a promise of a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and promised them a land where this goal might be realized. With these

¹¹⁸ Midrash Shemot Rabbah 20:19

¹¹⁹ Shemot 13:19

¹²⁰ Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach 2

two sources of inspiration, the memory of a great life, and the hope of future greatness, they were enabled to ensure all the hardships of the wilderness and to reach the promised land.

Not only for the forty years in the wilderness, but throughout the forty centuries of our national existence, we Jews have carried with us the **עצמות יוסף** – the bones of Joseph, meaning the memory of great men of the numberless holy martyrs who sacrificed themselves **על קידוש השם**, in God's cause. Each one of us, too, carries the **עצמות יוסף**, the memory of our deceased and sainted parents. What is this beautiful Yizkor service today if not the recalling and remembering of our fathers and mothers who gave everything in life, that our faith might live on and endure as an inspiration to all mankind? At this solemn hour of **הזכרת נשמות** we also honour the heroes of the Warsaw uprising. Twenty-two years ago, on the first day of Passover, heroic men & women, **זקנים ונערים**, old people and young, venerable sages and children, rose up against their Nazi oppressors and wrote a new chapter in the historic saga of human heroism and bravery, and ultimately died **על קידוש השם**, the death of martyrdom. Those of you who have read the recently popular novel "The Last of the Just" by André Schwarz-Bart will have an idea of the virtual compulsion that drove some of our **קדושים** to seek out and meet such an end. With home-made crude and primitive weapons, they battled the superior force of the Nazi's for weeks and weeks. A new respect filled the world for the men who wished only to prove to the world that Jews can fight valiantly and heroically, and that they will even do that when they are doomed and there is no hope for victory or survival.

This type of fighting with their back against the wall, without hope and without chance, became known as **אין ברירה**. This very slogan, and this very same spirit, filled the Jews when the State of Israel was surrounded on all sides by relentless Arab hordes. This time, however, against the expectations of the still passive world, miraculously the Jew victoriously defended himself. But let there be no mistake about it. This new course of action, this unconventional new approach to problems facing the Jew in a hostile world, was born in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto on Pesach twenty-two years ago when the uprising started.

What did the free world do to help these imprisoned and tortured Jews? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! It shrugged its shoulders and said the situation was hopeless. An effort was worthless. It remained not only passive to its eternal shame; it even remained silent! Not a single voice, including that of the Pope, was heard in protest!

Let me quote what Eichmann said to the Minister who sought to convince him of his guilt: "I have no regrets, no regrets. I did nothing wrong. I am clear with God. I did nothing of myself, only what I was told to do. Every soldier must do what he's told."

The heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto wrote a chapter that will be an inspiration to posterity. Remembering their courage, let us pray that we and our children need never again be called upon to accept the death of martyrs. But in all fairness to their memory, let us resolve to do our utmost to live for the same identification of the name of God.

Let us here resolve that we too, like our fathers, shall continue to live our full measure of devotion, loyalty to our glorious faith. Then, indeed, shall the memories of our dead be honoured, and of them we shall truly be able to say זכר צדיק לברכה, the memory of the righteous in one of blessing.

Beshalach: Of roads, short & long (Barmitzvah - Alan)

We find in the Talmud a very interesting story told by Rabbi Joshua Ben Chananiah. He was once walking on a road, looking for the way to a certain town. As he was seeking his way, he met a young boy at the crossroads and asked him to show him which was the best way to get to the town, and the boy, pointing his finger to the right, answered: "This road is near and far". He then turned and said "This road is far and near". Rabbi Joshua took the road to the right, thinking that it was the shorter, but to his dismay he found the way blocked by fruit gardens surrounded with fences. He turned back and suddenly he found the boy who directed him. He reproached him: "Why did you mislead me?". And the boy said, "Well! You didn't take any notice of my directions. Didn't I say that the road to the right is near and far? It's the nearer road, but because of the garden barriers, it's further. The other road, although it's farther, is nearer because its clear & unobstructed."¹²¹

Very often, my friends, the short and easy road may appear more enticing more attractive. The short and easy road may even bring us to a situation in life where the fruits of our labour lie within our reach. But suddenly, unexpectedly, we encounter insurmountable impediments barring the fruition of our plans. The fruits of victory in the garden of bliss seem surrounded by impregnable fences. We then discover that not all the short roads are the fast roads, nor are all the easy roads the best roads.

This same thought is conveyed and expressed in the very first sentence of this morning's sidra: וַיְהִי בְּשַׁלַּח פְּרַעֲהוֹ אֶת הָעָם וְלֹא נָחָם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא - "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not by the way of the Philistines because it was near."¹²²

Pharaoh at last had to give in to Moses, and the children of Israel had been freed from Egyptian bondage and were headed for their goal, the promised land. Now there were two ways to reach their destination. One was a short route, by way of the

¹²¹ Eruvin 53b

¹²² Shemot 13:17

land of the Philistines. The other was the long route, through the wilderness. The Almighty decided that they avoid the road to the Philistines **כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא**, 'Because it was near'.

This seems rather a strange reason. Why should we avoid a road because it is near? After all, our whole ideology these days seems to be to make things as easy as possible, to take short cuts whenever possible. All our modern improvements and scientific and mechanical developments serve to create gadgets that will lighten the burdens of the housewife and the office worker. Yet, in leading the Children of Israel to the Promised Land, the short route was avoided. Instead of a road that would have taken few days, a route was chosen which took 40 years to cover. How can we explain this phenomenon?

Perhaps the best explanation is that of our sages, in a famous notation: **שלוש מתנות** שלש מתנות - "Three precious gifts the Almighty gave to Israel & all of them were given through suffering. They comprise, Eretz Israel, Torah & life in the world to come."¹²³

Eretz Israel is one of the precious gifts given us through **יסורין**, suffering, even torture. But the fact that we endured such hardships over the land made it all the more precious to us. Had the Almighty led the Jewish people to the Promised Land in ten days, we would never have appreciated it as much as we did when we had to travel forty years in the wilderness and endure sufferings before reaching it. Had we been able to enter the land without hindrance, it would never have been so precious to us. We had to fight many battles and overcome the walls of Jericho and other obstacles. And the same thing applies to Torah and every worthwhile thing in this world. Grass and weeds may grow up overnight, but wheat and corn and fruit trees take much time and effort and energy to produce.

My dear Alan! Today when you enter formally into the Jewish fold you pledge yourself to hold dear everything that is precious in our life. Remember that among the many things we prize are these three priceless gifts: Eretz Israel, Torah and the World to Come. Many sacrifices have we wrought for these possessions, and because of that fact they are the more dear to us.

Need I tell you how precious is that new state of Israel which we have acquired? How many sleepless nights and anxious days have we spent waiting for the nations of the world to permit the newborn babe to bask in the light of day? But patient we endured until now. We are a nation among the nations of the world, admired by all and with the fond wishes of most of the other peoples.

¹²³ Brachot 5a

Let this be your guide in life as a Jew. Remember that you must be willing to labour with energy and be ready to meet any obstacles. For the things we treasure are **מתנות טובות** - precious gifts, and these can be acquired only through **יסורים** - suffering and hardships.

It is my sincere hope and fervent prayer that you will realise the obligations incumbent upon you to safeguard these sacred spiritual treasures and that you will try to make them part of your life!

Remember that without Torah we are an ordinary people. Without Eretz Israel we are a homeless people. Without the **חיי עולם הבא**, 'a world to come' we cannot rise about the average standard of nationhood. With these three however, we become a **ממלכת כוהנים וגוי קדוש** - "a kingdom of Priests and a Holy People"¹²⁴.

This is the goal towards which we have been striving. Contribute your share towards attainment of that goal. This should not be very difficult for you. Your father comes to Shul regularly every Shabbat, and both your parents are hardworking and worthy members of this community who never refuse to help for worthwhile causes.

It is my hope and fervent prayer that these words enter deeply into your heart and soul. Thus will you become a blessing to yourself, to your dear parents, and a source of pride to all Israel.

Beshalach: Stand firm

The Scriptural portion which we read this morning describes vividly the crossing of the Red Sea. It was a dramatic and critical moment which was resolved by this absolute order of God to Moses. We read that as soon as the children of Israel had taken advantage of Pharaoh's permission to allow them to go, then immediately he changed his mind. **מה זאת עשינו כי שלחנו את ישראל מעבדנו** - "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel to go from serving us?"¹²⁵ What on earth have we done to allow these valuable slaves to leave?! Rapidly he mobilised his army and set off in desperate pursuit of them. And the departing slaves, lifting up their eyes, saw on the horizon the ominous terrifying cloud of the approaching host.

For days, the Jews flee from Pharaoh and his company of soldiers, and at last they find themselves at the banks of the Red Sea. They can go no further. Before them flow the raging waters of the sea. Surrounding them on both sides are the lonely desert wastes. **סגר עליהם המדבר** - "The wilderness closed them in,"¹²⁶ Behind them are the wild Egyptian hordes. What did they do? What could they do? In the midst of such troubles, is there a wonder, that they turned to Moses in their terror and

¹²⁴ Shemot 19:6

¹²⁵ Shemot 14:5

¹²⁶ Shemot 14:3

cried **הַמְבִּילֵי אֵין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לָמוּת בַּמִּדְבָּר** - “Where there no graves in Egypt that thou hast taken us to die in the wilderness”¹²⁷? for whichever way they turned, the disaster seemed complete.

In commenting on this dramatic event in our people’s history, our sages tell us that standing at the banks of the Red Sea, **ארבע כתים נעשו בני ישראל על הים** - the children of Israel were divided into four categories, each with its own opinion of what course of action to adapt, each with its own solution to the dilemma which confronted them.¹²⁸

One group cries **נפול לים**, “Let us throw ourselves into the sea. Rather than return to Egypt and once again face the pangs of bondage and persecution, let us destroy ourselves.”

The second group said **נחזור למצרים**, “No; let us all return into Egypt. Life in any form is better than death. Let us remain slaves, but let us at least live.”

The third group advocated **נצווח כנגדך**, “Let us make an outcry against them. Let us protest and perhaps through our arguments, we shall succeed in arousing in their hearts, a degree of pity for our plight.”

And the fourth and last group argues **נעשה עמהם מלחמה** “Let us wage war against them. Let us take up arms and defend ourselves. Better to die fighting than return to slavery.”

If we compare Israel through the ages with our forebears of Biblical times, one realises immediately that the ancient proverb that history repeats itself is applicable with peculiar force to the Jewish people. For during their long exile our people have been faced with a problem no less perplexing and no less troublous than that which their ancestors of Mosaic times encountered. And just as in Moses’s day solutions to the problem were suggested and policies advocated, so in the long history of our exile down to the present day, have divergent opinions been put forward as the solutions to our problem.

There was a time when our people, faced by persecution and intolerance like our forefathers in Egypt, advanced the argument **נפול לים** as the only solution. “Let us cast ourselves in to the sea,” they cried. “Let us destroy ourselves in a sea of assimilation. The only solution to the Jewish problem is to assimilate, to lose our Jewish identity and to become a citizen of the world.” One hundred years ago, German Jews, faced by horrible anti-Semitism and intolerance, gave birth to the Reform movement. Reform Rabbis preached assimilation as the only solution to the problem. Every element of Judaism was ruthlessly cast out of the Synagogues.

¹²⁷ Shemot 14:11

¹²⁸ Mechilta, Beshalach; Yerushalmi Ta’anit 5:5

Sabbath services were abolished and Sunday morning Services substituted instead. The Synagogue was made to resemble, as closely as possible, the Christian Church in an effort to eliminate any differences which existed between the Jew and Gentile. Jews hid their Jewish identity, they changed their Jewish names, called themselves Germans of Mosaic faith, and walked about secure and complacent in the belief that they had - at last - eliminated the Jewish problem by eliminating the Jew. What was the result? Exactly one hundred years later German Jews were rudely and tragically awakened to their Jewish identity. At last, Jews began to admit that casting ourselves into the sea, destroying our Jewish identity, was not the solution to the problem.

There are many in our midst who cry despairingly, נחזור למצרים "Let us return to Egypt"! Resistance to the forces of tyranny is useless. "Human beings," they argue, "are born, with the instinct of hatred, too deeply ingrained within their nature, to ever eradicate the evils of prejudice and anti-Semitism." We are born with prejudices, with likes and dislikes and the Jew must resign himself to his fate. "The mission of the Jew," we are told, "is to preach the word of God, to exemplify by his every act and deed an exalted concept of life and to suffer for his convictions. As the conscience of humanity, the Jew will always remain humanity's scape-goat! Resistance is useless!"

A third group that stood on the seashore said נצווה כנגדך "Let us argue with them" "Let us make an outcry against them." And in Jewry, down to this very day, there has been no want of those who have hastened to emulate the policy of their Biblical predecessors and have sought to make "נצווה כנגדך" the watchword of their Judaism. On those too frequent occasions, when the Jew suffers with greater violence than usual at the hands of his enemies, they are to be seen organising protest meetings and mass demonstrations. נצווה כנגדך is their cry! Let us protest against them. And so when the terrible massacres of our people occurred in pogrom-ridden Russia at the close of the last century, when the accession to power in Germany of the most ruthless of Jew-haters in modern history brought in its train the suffering of our stricken brethren there, this group echoed the cry of their ancestors, נצווה כנגדך.

Too often, however, does it happen that their Judaism begins and ends there. They are to be seen at the protest meetings, but not in the House of Worship. Their voices are to be heard at the demonstration, but not in the Beth-Hamidrash, and the be-all and the end-all of their Judaism is this נצווה כנגדם - this raising of an outcry.

Finally, a fourth group advocated. נעשה עמהם מלחמה "Let us wage war with them." Let us protect our pride and our dignity, be the cost what it may. To those who advocated this course, Moses said, הִתְיַצְּבוּ וְרְאוּ אֶת יְשׁוּעַת ה' - "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord."

To our brethren in Israel today who are threatened with Pharos on all sides, the answer is equally unequivocal. הַתִּיצְבוּ “Stand firm!” Hold resolutely to your religious convictions! For only so will there be יְשׁוּעָתָה only so, will you see the salvation of the Lord. אמן.

Beshalach: What we can learn from a face

Face-lifting became quite popular several years ago. People who were not satisfied with the faces that Mother Nature bestowed upon them, would go to a plastic surgeon to trade in, their natural faces, for something better. A face, like a calendar, tells time and age, and it is therefore natural for some people to want to camouflage it. There were criminals whose faces were bad credentials, and they too, went to these experts.

As I was preparing my Sermon for this morning, I naturally read through the Scriptural portion which we read this morning concerning יציאת מצרים and I was led to a consideration of this subject by a phrase in the חומש. Pharaoh says to Moses and Aaron: רְאוּ כִּי רָעָה נֶגְדַּ פְּנֵיכֶם - “See, there is evil in your faces”¹²⁹. Pharaoh was irritated, and he exploded. Moses had given Pharaoh another warning: “You will either free the Israelites and let them go worship their God, or else I shall smite you with another plague.” Pharaoh and his people took some of the other plagues rather lightly; they thought to themselves, that the magicians, would perform the same tricks. But now Moses threatened to bring upon them a plague that made even the light-hearted ministers, and “yes men” shake and shiver. Did not Moses say a locust? In that part of the world, a locust is a disaster, that drives the fear of God into the hearts of men. When the locusts came, they are so thick that the sun of noon is covered as if by a heavy cloud. And the locusts eat every blade of grass and every leaf on the branch even stripping the trees of their bark, and when they leave, field and tree are naked and barren. Starvation looms. NO wonder, then, that when Moses had mentioned “locusts” the advisers of Pharaoh took their life in their own hands and said. “Let them go, these Israelites.” But Pharaoh could not give in altogether. לְכוּ נָא הַגְּבֵרִים “Let the men go”¹³⁰, since you want to worship God. Leave the children behind; for he said “your scheme is to escape and never come back. כִּי רָעָה כִּי רָעָה - “See there is evil in your faces.” Pharaoh like men before him, have tried to read their minds, their inner thoughts, on their faces. For the face is a tell-tale, it’s the mirror of the soul; it reflects inner thoughts, emotions, and even the history of a person’s life. And Pharaoh seems to have been one of the students of the face.

There is something magical about a face. When you hear of a great discovery, or you read a good book, you have desire kindled in you to meet the individual responsible

¹²⁹ Shemot 10:10

¹³⁰ Shemot 10:11

for these achievements face to face. And we are attracted not only to a beautiful face! What is behind this curiosity? Perhaps an unconscious feeling that we may find out some hidden secret about the man to which there is otherwise no access. Maybe it's an instinctive yearning to look upon man who was made in the image of God, and, by looking at him, we might be given a glimpse of Godhood. At any rate, whenever we come across a new face, we study it hungrily, in an attempt to penetrate beneath the surface, to locate the man's soul, to read his thoughts.

The Talmud tells us that a Roman matron once met the Sage, Rabbi Yehudah ben Illai. Not knowing who he was, she tried to guess his profession or trade by looking at him. And she announced haughtily; "This man is either a drunkard, usurer, or pig-breeder." "That, you see was a rather a wild guess. To enable one to read human character by a study of facial features there have been attempts to build a science named physiognomy. It's based upon the principle that a person wears his soul on his face. The theory is further, that the body and the organs there shine through the inner traits of character, even a man's hopes and dreams.

It has long been excepted that human speech is the best x-ray of a man's soul. Sometimes, we are able to tell what a man is from what he says. The famous Greek philosopher, Socrates, used to say to people he met for the first time: "Speak, so that I might see you." However, we know that speech can also serve as a screen behind which a person hides his true self. The courts, for example, do not rely much on what a person says. The lie detector is now used to verify the testimony of suspects. Hence, Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, changed the saying of Socrates. When he met a person, he would say, "keep your mouth shut, so that I might see you as you really are." He believed that he could tell more about a person from looking at him, than from hearing him speak.

Some people have concentrated on certain parts of the human body, as a guide to a better understanding of man's intellectual, moral, and spiritual tendencies. The phrenologists, will predict your future by feeling the bumps on your head. However, apart from you're the face, the hand has been considered of great importance for the study of man's soul and mind. Of course, here too, there has been a lot of fraud and nonsense.

There are experts who will take your hand, and by the lines on the palm will tell you exactly how long you will live, when you will make that €75,000 on the pools, and whom you will marry. Yet the hand is very significant. Man's hand is unique among all living beings. Man is the only one who has a hand, with the exception of the monkey who has four hands. The hand tells whether a person is refined or vulgar, efficient or lazy, courageous or a coward, whether he is easygoing or nervous, all these traits are reflected in the hand.

There is a big difference between the hands of a Yehudi Menuhim and a Joe Luis or between the hands of a Paderewsky and Randolph Turpin. There is something unique about the hands of a surgeon – they are the hands of one who is always ready to put up a fight against death. Now, the face, for example, can deceive as to a person's age, but the hands will usually give him away. You have seen an actress play the part of a Juvenile, but the hands told the true story. The famous story-teller and playwright, Luigi Pirandelli has a story on "The Hand" It is he tells of an experience in a hospital, where he lay next to a patient whose face he could not see, nor could he hear him say anything. The thing he saw of his hospital neighbour, was a hand hanging down on the side of the bed. That hand told him the complete story of the man's life. The color of the skin, the protruding joints, the thick veins, a missing thumb, told him, that here was a man, who had worked hard all his life without joy or hope. The famous author, Helen Keller, the woman who has been deaf, dumb, and blind from birth, tells that the only way she learned about the world was through the hand. She said: "I never forget a loving hand. If I could have shaken hands with Shakespeare, I would have heard his voice and seen his face."

But the most important thing about a person is his face, there we find the real mirror of his true self. Schopenhauer said. The face may be more eloquent than the mouth. "The face tells what a man may say at any time in the future." It speaks a natural language.

Now, what is it about the face that tells so much? First to be considered are the eyes, which have been called the windows of the soul. Eyes have been classified as happy, sad, modest, shrewd, innocent, cunning, smiling, sour, commanding, begging. There are eyes that look with confidence, and eyes that look with suspicion. Sometimes you can see all of a man's past in his eyes, all of his hopes and disappointments joys and sorrows. One expert remarked of Professor Einstein that he looked like a watchmaker who was used to looking through a magnifying glass into the movement; he looked like a child or poet who had seen creation itself and is therefore, full of wonder.

The face, then, does reflect the inner soul of a person. In other words, the thoughts, feelings, and emotions affect the looks of our faces. And Ben Sira long ago remarked לִבְ אָדָם יִשְׁנֶה פָּנָיו בֵּין לְטוֹב וּבֵין לְרָע - "a man's heart changes his face, either for good or ill"¹³¹. It follows then, that if we are not satisfied with our looks, we ought not to run to a surgeon but change our mode of life and thought. We in a measure, can do our own face-lifting. There are some people who are proud that they no longer look like Jews. But what was the typical Jewish face? It was a face that reflected wisdom, the wisdom gathered from the Bible, from studying the Talmud and all sacred lore.

¹³¹ As cited in Bereishit Rabbah 73:11

Those were beautiful faces. The eyes shone with trust and faith even in the severest crisis.

Do you remember Her face shielded by the hands by the Sabbath candles? It was the face of one who yearned for children, that shall be instructed of the Lord, who will deal kindly with their fellows, and grow up to become the pride of Israel. That face needed no lifting. It was a face lined with beauty. Such faces can be moulded by returning to Jewish life, which consists of study, faith and deeds.

Let us lift our faces, and make them beautiful, shining with a light of divinity within.
אמן.

Beshalach: Shabbat Shira and the first Shabbat in the new shul (1969)

The Sabbath of this week is honored with a special title “Sabbat Shirah” - the Sabbath of Song. Today we read Israel’s first song of the people, the most stirring song known to man- the שירה, the song of אז ישיר. Then Moses and the Children of Israel sang this song of joy, the song of redemption, as they saw the fulfillment of their dreams and the realization of their hopes.

There is a beautiful and strange Midrash in connection with the שירה. The Midrash tells us, מיום שברא הקב"ה את עולמו, “From the time that God created the world” i.e. from the very beginning of time, ועד שעמדו ישראל על הים - until that very day when the Israelites stood at the banks of the Red Sea, לא מצינו שאמרו שירה - we do not find anyone singing before God.”¹³² The question which arises is simply this: “How is it possible that not one of the great men - Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, ever sang a song to God? The Midrash even tells us that Adam was the author of the 92nd Psalm, namely מזמור שיר ליום השבת. This Psalm is attributed to Adam. So evidently he did sing! What the Rabbis probably meant was that this was a different kind of song. It was a שירה חדשה שבחון גאולים - “It was a new song that the redeemed sang.” Others sang before, but it was an individual singing, a שירת יחיד. An individual was happy so he expressed his feelings with joy in song. But here, for the first time, you have a שירת רבים, a whole people singing of deliverance.

What a difference it makes when a whole people can sing a song of joy! The Midrash continues that when God heard the whole people sing their song of freedom, He said לאילו הייתי מצפה “For this I have been waiting!” Not merely for an individual, but for a whole people to sing a song of freedom. My friends! We are here this morning for the first time in this newly constructed House of God! We therefore have ample reason to be proud of our accomplishments and to be able to sing a song of joy, a שירת רבים. Our whole congregation can sing together! It’s my privilege to

¹³² Shemot Rabbah 23:4

bid you all a cordial welcome on this very important Sabbath, and to offer you the traditional word of our people- the blessing of “Shalom” “Peace unto you.”

I am sure that you will appreciate the feelings and emotions that as I address you this morning. Yet this year, 1969, has added personal significance for me, as it marks my 25th year as your Minister. I recall the words of the late Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz of blessed memory, when he inducted me into office. It was a time of great destruction for the world, and for Jewry in particular. At that time we didn't realize the extent of the destruction, we didn't realize that 6 million of our fellow Jews were to perish in the Holocaust. The bombs were dropping outside here in Neasden, when Chief Rabbi Hertz spoke, but despite that and all the destruction that was taking place in the world, Chief Rabbi Hertz said that he foresaw a time would come when a beautiful synagogue would be built here, and he blessed us. Much has happened since that time! If the Jewish people reached the lowest depth of degradation in the annihilation of 6 million of our fellow Jews, we were comforted and strengthened by the emergence and birth of the State of Israel and the creation of a new center of Jewish life. Our first thought today therefore, must be, to offer a fervent **שהחיינו** to the Almighty, who has granted us life, sustained us in all our vicissitudes and enabled us to reach this joyous day.

Coupled with that gratitude to God is gratitude to that loyal and devoted hand of members, some of whom - are alas - no longer with us, who have helped to bring about the realization of our dream.

I should like this morning to pay tribute to each and every one of you. To the Federation of Synagogues, for their valuable help. To the Honourary officers and Board of Management, who have worked magnificently to make this day possible and have had the patience to withstand all kinds of obstacles. To the Parents Association, the Ladies Guild, the Friendship Club, the J.P.A and J.N.F Committees, the WIZO, the Sabbath Afternoon Study Circle, the Education Committee, who have given their time, effort and energy to keep the multifarious activities alive in spite of great hardship. And to you, all our members, who shared the inconvenience of the last few years and remained loyal to us.

To those of our members who are unwell and phoned me to send their good wishes, I should like to wish them a **רפואה שלימה** and I look forward to seeing them back in the synagogue again soon.

It's not without significance that today, when we open the shul for the first time, a baby has been brought to this House of Worship to be blessed. And what is even more significant is that the baby is the first grandchild of the Chairman of our Building Fund, who has given his heart and soul for the building of this shul and has spent more time with the builders than anyone.

We also have two other celebrations this week. Our Honourary Secretary and his wife are celebrating their Pearl Wedding, and a member of our Board of Management and his wife are celebrating their Silver Wedding. To both couples, we wish a hearty Mazel Tov and wish them many many more years of married bliss.

The opening of this shul has begun well with celebrations. Let us hope and pray that this House of Worship will see many many celebrations among our members.

Mishpatim: Moments of enthusiasm (Barmitzvah - Eric)

Only a short time had passed since the Israelites stood at Sinai and promised to become the keepers of the Torah. They had just been privileged to observe a vision of Divinity. They had seen Godliness in its ramifications. They heard the voice of God addressing them concerning the Ten Commandments. What a magnificent inspiration that must have been! One should have thought, one would imagine that they would have been imbued with the idealism and sanctity which they had absorbed, and as a consequence their lives would move on a lofty plane.

But instead, what do we find? As soon as the lofty visions are passed, as soon as the great moment of inspiration is over, they sit down first to eat and drink - וַיֵּאָכְלוּ וַיִּשְׂתּוּ - “they saw God, and they ate and drank.”¹³³

How was it possible for a people who, only a short while ago, had stood on such a lofty pinnacle, to descend so quickly to the depth of the profane and the commonplace? Was there to be no spiritual consequence of the Divine vision, only eating and drinking?

And yet, my friends, are we very much different today? How many people come to shul, are inspired by what they behold there, and as soon as they leave the synagogue they forget all about it. They go back to the same coarse and meaningless life, which they lead before they entered.

When the State of Israel came into existence, how much fervour and enthusiasm was engendered thereby? And yet, a short time later, most of us were back to the same indifference and disinterest we had shown before that great moment of inspiration!

The period of the High Holy Days is, for most of us, a very exalted one. We make the most idealistic resolutions with the firm resolve to carry them out. But when the vision of Divinity is passed, we return to eating and drinking. Forgotten are the high resolves, neglected are the lofty ideas to which we had dedicated ourselves.

¹³³ Shemot 24:11

When we examine the Biblical story of our ancestors once again, we discover that as a direct consequence of their spiritual let down they fell pray to those among them who wanted to make a Golden Calf. Gone was their enthusiasm and devotion.

The Torah tells us that after the episode of the Golden Calf, God commanded the Hebrews to construct a Tabernacle. The tabernacle was to be the outward symbol of the inner tabernacle, which they were to fashion in their own hearts and minds. לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם - “to make atonement for your souls.”¹³⁴

Their wealth, their gold and silver, were to be used to construct the House of God, rather than as a means to satisfy their physical appetites. The ins of corrupting the Divine vision had had its consequences in a golden calf. The tabernacle was to be an atonement for it. They were to learn that God was to dwell amongst them in their daily living and not only during great moments of inspiration and enthusiasm.

My dear Eric! Today you become a member of an illustrious people. A people that has survived hardships, persecutions, and exile for almost 2,000 years. What has given it the power and strength to survive? It is the will to live and the conviction that it had a purpose worth living for. This is perhaps best expressed by the Psalmist in the words. לֹא אָמוּת כִּי אֶחְיֶה וְאֶסַּפֵּר מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה - “I shall not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord”¹³⁵. It is because we had a reason for existence that we survived. It was because we were conceived as a people whose aim would be to establish justice and righteousness in their world that we are here today.

You, my dear Eric, must remember on your Barmitzvah day that as long as you pursue this source, mapped out for us by the Almighty, you will thrive in body and mind and you will develop into a man and Jew who will be a credit to your family and a source of pride to your people.

Mishpatim: Lost property and the synagogue (Barmitzvah - Richard)

Jewish law is very much concerned with lost property. The return of lost property in Judaism is considered to be one of the most important obligations of every individual.

It is the duty of the finder to seek out the true owner by publicizing and advertising the property he has found. When the loser appears and furnishes סימנים - true marks of identification - as proof of his ownership, the article must be restored to him. Anyone who willfully retains lost property is considered by Jewish law as an embezzler and is punished accordingly.

¹³⁴ Shemot 30:15

¹³⁵ Tehillim 118:17

The injunction to restore that which is lost is mentioned in the portion of the Torah which we read today: **כִּי תִפְגַּע שׁוֹר אִיבָרָה אוֹ חֲמֹרוֹ תֵּעָה הָשִׁיב תְּשִׁיבֵנּוּ לוֹ** - “if you meet thine enemy’s ox or donkey going astray, thou shalt surely bring them back to him”¹³⁶.

The מצוה of השבת אבידה - the duty to restore lost possessions to their legitimate owners - is discussed fully in four different chapters in the Mishna and the Gemara of tractate **בבא מציעא**. There we are told that during the period of our national independence it was customary to make announcements of lost and found items in Jerusalem on the three pilgrimage festivals when the population would come to the Temple of God: **ומשחרב בית המקדש התקינו שיהיו מכריזין בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות** - “After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the announcements of lost and found property were made in the synagogue and in the academies of learning.”¹³⁷

This custom prevailed for a long time. When anyone lost anything he would come to the synagogue to claim it. But this custom was finally discontinued because foreign governments which sought to oppress the Jews would send spies to the synagogue and would confiscate the articles found for themselves.

Today, when we lose anything valuable, we inform the police or we advertise in the “lost and found” columns in the newspapers, and we no longer attend the synagogue for that purpose. What a pity! Perhaps that would help to increase the attendance in the synagogues of our country.

But there are certain possessions which, when lost, can still be found only in the synagogue. These possessions are of a special nature. They represent the most priceless assets of the most cherished possessions of our people: deep faith, moral courage, and Jewish consciousness. When these are lost in the hustle and bustle of life, neither police nor newspaper is in a position to help restore them. Only the synagogue can do it.

The great Hebrew poet Hayim Nachman Bialik dramatizes this thought in a haunting refrain: **אל בית המדרש סור** - “turn to the synagogue”. In a poem entitled **אם יש את** **נפשך לדעת**, “if you really want to know?”, the poet asks: If you really want to know, whence your brothers drew strength to combat the armed phalanxes of their enemies? If you really wish to know whence they drew their courage and their faith? **אל בית המדרש סור**, go to a little synagogue in some forsaken village, and there at dawn, or in the twilight of the vanishing day, you will find three or four men changing the ancient tune, chanting the old Talmudic chant as they study the Torah.

¹³⁶ Shemot 23:4

¹³⁷ Bava Metziah 28b

There you will stand before the miracle of our people's eternal life and you will see the glory of an undying race.

Now, while adults lose things only from time to time, with children it is a serious problem. The young ones seem to have an extraordinary capacity to lose their belongings. One can loudly blame parents for the repeated warning they give to their offspring: "Take care my child and don't lose it!"; "Don't lose the umbrella!"; "Don't lose your gloves!"; "Don't lose your money!".

But there are worse things than being absent-minded about umbrella's, gloves and money. Money can easily replace them. But when one loses a good name, faith, honour or moral fortitude, one loses possessions which are difficult if not entirely impossible to replace.

My dear Richard! The lesson which our Sidra brings to us is one which is very important to your life as a Bar Mitzvah. I should like you to remember that your first duty as a Barmitzvah is to see that the synagogue, which has meant so much in the life of our people, should remain as effective today.

You remember the famous poem of Bialik **אם יש את נפשך לדעת**, "If you desire to know". In this, he tells that the inspiration which made possible Jewish martyrdom was derived from the synagogue. It is in your hands, and in the hands of other Barmitzvah's, that the future of the synagogue lies. Make your attendance a joy, not a burden. It's my hope and fervent prayer that you will hearken to these words. Then your Barmitzvah will have meaning, and your life as a Jew will have significance. Then you will be a source of blessedness to yourself, your parents, and the entire house of Israel.

Terumah: The Synagogue (Barmitzvah - Jonny)

Many historians have asked: What is the secret of Israel's long life? What is the latent power, the inexhaustible strength and endurance, which has enabled our people to ensure so much, and yet despite all, to exist?

Many nations have come and gone, but Israel lives on today. Great powers arose and defeated many peoples – our own among them. They ruled over great countries, but they have vanished as if they had never been. Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, Greece, Rome. How helplessly they sleep in their grave of forgetfulness, and today only relics in museums and excavations remind us that these nations ever lived. The minds of the world want to know what is it that enabled our people to survive, while all the others have disappeared?

This difficult and perplexing question has evoked countless theories and opinions in various schools of thought. Some will answer that the Torah was our life-saver. It is the Torah which has made the Jewish people an eternal people. And it is true. Others

will say that our great faith in God, the **אני מאמין** – the faith of a Jew, has helped us over every trouble and misfortune; and this too is correct. There are those who hold that our survival is to be attributed to the endless persecutions and slaughters which united our people in their will to exist. And there are many other theories on the factors and elements of Jewish survival. But after due reflection one of the most powerful forces in Israel's existence which has served as our pillar of strength in time of adversity must definitely be our house of worship – the Synagogue.

A very significant, and one of the most beautiful passages in all Scripture, is the verse which we read this morning: **וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם** - “And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them”¹³⁸.

It seems to me that in these words God gave a device to the Jewish people at a time when the Jewish people were still in the wilderness, that might help them in the future to endure and to carry on with the staunch belief in a bright future. In these words God gave them the secret of their continued existence to the end of days - **וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם**.

When our people were exiled and were scattered to the corners of the globe, it was the Synagogue that held them together. It was the Synagogue that marched with our people through the long and dark centuries of persecution. It witnessed Israel's joys and sorrows. Within its walls the haunted soul of our people sought refuge, and in it, the prayer for his return to Zion.

The great Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik dramatizes this thought in one of his powerful poems titled, “If you really want to know”. He cries out **אם יש את נפשך לדעת** – if you really want to know whence your brothers drew the strength to combat the armed phalanxes of the enemy; if you really want to know whence they drew their courage and their faith, then **אל בית המדרש סור** – go to a little synagogue, in some forsaken village, and there at dawn or in the twilight of the vanishing day you will see three or four men chanting the ancient tune, reciting the old Talmudic chant, from their sacred law. There you will stand before the miracle of our people's eternal life, and see the glory of an undying race.

Indeed, in the words of Professor Herford – a noted non-Jewish scholar – “No human institution has a longer continuous history, and none has done more for the uplifting of the human race”, than the Synagogue.

Today, no less than yesterday, the conscious and thinking Jew loves his Synagogue. Today he is even more convinced that nothing can take the place of God's house in man's pilgrimage upon earth. For despite all the material progress of the last decades, despite the amazing and remarkable achievements of science and atomic energy, the

¹³⁸ Shemot 25:8

inner life of man is mute. Civilization has not risen to higher moral levels. Man has not found peace and contentment. Man is disturbed, restless and distressed. He's lonely. His soul is hungry, empty and vacuous. The achievements of the brain do not satisfy its guest. This is the very reason why men are seeking today, as they never have before, the solution to the mystery and mastery of life.

Deceived and disappointed by the vague promises of science, men are turning with pathetic longing to the source whence all life flows. God – the spiritual values of life, Israel's heritage.

Man is discovering, at last, that religion only can give him an at-homeness in this vast, struggling, striving universe. All the more reason that we today accentuate the Jewish positive ideal of life. Upon this ideal hinges the salvation of humanity, for it is an ideal which proclaims the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It is an idea which teaches 'בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה' - "You are children to God"¹³⁹. Every man, regardless of race, creed, colour, nation, children are children of the Lord Your God. It is an ideal which demands צְדָקָה וְיִשְׁרָאֵל, ¹⁴⁰ the establishment of justice and righteousness in this world. Its our ideal which speaks of peace and love, of faith and hope. Its an ideal which inspires man ever to labour for that blessed time when "the world will be filled with knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea"¹⁴¹.

My Dear Jonny! There's no doubt in my mind that this day of your Barmitzvah will remain for you one of the unforgettable occasions of life. With the Synagogue filled to capacity, with your relatives and friends who have come to participate in this auspicious celebration, with the notes of the Maftir and the Haftorah which you sang so beautifully and so impressively still echoing in our ears, I am certain that this is a time of true inspiration and a moment of deep religious fervor.

Just as you stand here amidst all this joy and happiness, a disturbing thought haunts my mind and I cannot help but ponder over one important aspect of this momentous event.

Often have I seen young men who ascend on this day of Barmitzvah to the highest levels of spiritual and religious feeling. Unfortunately, with the end of the celebration comes an inevitable renunciation of all the promises and the disappearance of all the fervor engendered by the festivities of the Barmitzvah.

At this solemn moment in your life, my dear Jonny, you must realise that you are not a Barmitzvah for today only, but a Barmitzvah - a "son of the commandment" - for all the length of your life. On this day you must realise the importance of the Synagogue and its proper functioning. Remember the famous poem by Bialik, דא

¹³⁹ Devarim 14:1

¹⁴⁰ Devarim 16:20

¹⁴¹ Habakuk 2:14

יש את נפשך לדעת, in which he points out that the inspiration which made possible Jewish martyrdom was derived from the Synagogue. It is in your hands and in the hands of other Barmitzvahs that the future of the Synagogue lies.

Make your attendance regular. Make your Synagogue attendance a joy, not a burden. Go there for the association with your fellow Jews and for the recitation of the beautiful prayers in our ancient Hebrew tongue. Go there because your going may influence others to attend. Go because your presence will lend strength and power to that institution which is responsible for our survival. If your Barmitzvah will mean no more than a dedication to the Synagogue, it will have permanent value and significance.

Finally, my dear Jonny! I should like to remind you that the Jewish religion always places the greatest emphasis on the respect, honour and obedience one should show one's parents. One this day I would urge you to call in mind the deep debt of gratitude which you owe your parents for their untiring exertions on your behalf; for the trials and tribulations that have cheerfully borne in their endeavours to rear you in body and in mind, from your birth until the present hour.

It's my hope and fervent prayer that you will hearken to these words, so your Barmitzvah will have meaning in your life as a Jew. Then you will be a source of blessedness to yourself, your parents, and the entire house of Israel.

Terumah: The way we look at things

A young man sat in a train looking out of the window. Suddenly, an express train came thundering by, hiding the view of the beautiful countryside. The young man snapped his fingers and, turning towards the workman, exclaimed: "There it is. It's always there. That's my train."

"Is that so?" returned the older man with a smile. "You look all hot and bothered about your train?!"

"What I mean", the young man explained bitterly, "is that something always gets between me and what I like. It never fails. When I was a small child, my uncle bought me a ticket for the circus but that very day, I was laid up with scarlet fever. When I was older I wanted to go to college, but my father lost his business and I had to go out to work to help. And later on there was always something to stop me doing what I wanted."

The older man interrupted and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder and said: "But I still don't see what the train has to do with it."

"Well," said the boy, "a few moments ago I was enjoying the countryside through the window of the train. I was admiring the beautiful scene, the trees, the

farmhouses, the grass, the beautiful landscape gardens, and along came this train and blotted out the view.”

The man nodded thoughtfully and said: “that often happens to us, but did you ever stop to think that there are windows on both sides of this train? Look over there now.”

As the man looked across through the corridor of the train to the window on the other side, he saw the water of a lake, blue under the summer sky, a small ship with sails, all quite lovely to behold. “You will often find,” the old workman murmured, “that a lot depends on which way we look.”

The old man was talking about the importance of a point of view. Much of our happiness and our misery spring entirely from our attitude towards events. It depends on how you look at a thing: how you change it, or else, how you accept it. In great matters and small, what happens to us is not nearly so important as our attitude towards it.

Every misfortune in life is an opportunity for advancement in spiritual strength for which we should be truly grateful. It all depends on how we meet God’s challenge to us.

It’s this meaningful lesson in life which this morning’s Torah reading tries to convey. We read that among the holy vessels, built for the Tabernacle was the ark in which were kept the tablets. The Talmud states *לוחות ושברי לוחות מונחות בארון* - “both the whole tablets and the fragments of the tablets were placed in the Ark.”¹⁴² What was the purpose for the fragments of the tablets to be placed in the Ark?

All of us would have liked that our lives were to be made up only of whole tablets. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The Rabbis, however, add a more realistic touch and see life as it is. Life is spelled out in terms of whole tablets and broken tablets. It is made up of our successes, and our failures; of our frustrations, and our fulfillments; of stepping stones, and stumbling blocks; of our integrity, and our compromises. Adversity makes the man, says the French proverb. The great heroes of history cannot be fully estimated without both their victories and their defeats. So it is with all of us. For we are all soldiers in the battle of life and in our daily lives. The defeats are worth as much as the victories, the tears are as values as the smiles, the broken tablets are as much part of our Ark as are the whole tablets. The greatness of Moses himself lies in a combination of his attainment on Mount Sinai, and his disappointment on Mount Nevo.

¹⁴² Brachot 8b

Our Sages tell us that in the moment when the Temple was destroyed, the Messiah was born.¹⁴³ Our people long ago proved that the memory of a defeat can be transformed into the hope for everlasting life. Israel wove the dream of a beautiful future out of the strands of its own grief. Our prophets saw joy in sorrow, light in darkness, and hope in misery.

The Jew has proven that in his Ark he could carry broken tablets and whole ones, and that in the words of Franz Werfel, “Only the eternally defeated are the eternally victorious”. The Jew, in his long march through history, has been like Wordsworth’s Happy Warrior, “Who, doomed to go in company with Pain, And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train! Turns his necessity to glorious gain”¹⁴⁴.

Tetzaveh: Be a perpetual light (Barmitzvah - Michael)

The opening verse of this morning’s Sidra beautifully expresses the historic role and responsibility of Israel: לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד - “to kindle the light of the Menorah, that it should burn continually”¹⁴⁵.

Our Sages, commenting on this commandment, make a very interesting and instructive observation that has special significance for Jewish life in our times.

They note that the scripture uses a peculiar word to indicate “lighting”. Instead of saying להדליק, which means “to light”, the text reads לְהַעֲלֹת, which means literally “to cause to go up”. It should have said להדליק נר תמיד, “to kindle the perpetual light”.

When the Jewish mother kindles the lights on Friday evening to usher in the holy Sabbath, she recites the benediction להדליק נר של שבת, and on a major Jewish festival she says להדליק נר של יום טוב. During the winter season we light the Chanukah candles for eight consecutive nights and we say להדליק נר של חנוכה. Why, then, is the word לְהַעֲלֹת, which means “to cause to rise” used in this instance?

Rashi, in the name of a great sage in the Talmud¹⁴⁶, offers the following explanation: מדליק עד שתהא שלהבת עולה מאליה - meaning that the person lighting the Menorah must hold the fire to it long enough for the flame to ascend of its own accord, and to transform a mere flicker into a שלהבת - a real flame of light.

It is our responsibility to keep on kindling and kindling, lighting and lighting, until a spiritual flame will grow into brilliance and splendor of its own strength. This phrase expresses the duty of parents to provide for their families a fine and wholesome Jewish environment עד שתהא שלהבת עולה מאליה, until - when the time comes and

¹⁴³ Midrash Eicha Rabba 1:51

¹⁴⁴ ‘Character of the Happy Warrior’

¹⁴⁵ Shemot 27:20

¹⁴⁶ Shabbat 21a

the children must leave home - they are ready, willing and able to emulate the example of their forebears.

In the field of philanthropy, the question arises: How long must we extend aid to the poor? How long must we give to the J.P.A.? How long must we contribute to the State of Israel? The answer is again clear and unequivocal - **עד שתהא שלהבת - עולה מאליה**, until the flame can go up on its own momentum.

We must keep the needy until they can stand upon their own feet economically. We must support and strengthen the State of Israel, until it becomes self sufficient so that it can produce and provide adequately for the manifold needs of its citizens and the immense number of our people who continue to enter its gates.

My Dear Michael! Today you become a Bar Mitzvah, a son of the commandment. From today onwards you assume the duties and responsibilities of a Jew.

I should like you to remember the first words of this morning's Sidra which refer to Israel's obligation to keep a perpetual light burning in the sanctuary. The light which burned in the sanctuary was fed with pure olive oil.

It's a long and arduous process to extract oil from the olive. It had to be pressed, and pounded, and beaten, before there was a yield.

Our Sages see in the olives that were beaten a symbol of Israel. Israel, too, was beaten and persecuted, and the more he was tested, the purer was the oil he produced to light the world. And it was that kind of oil that made the light to burn continually.

Your job from now onwards, my dear Michael, is also to see that the **נר תמיד** - the perpetual light of Judaism, should always burn brightly. It's this thought which you ought to remember! My advice to you therefore is to continue with your hebrew studies, come to shul regularly.

Ki Tissa: The effect of friends and environment (Barmitzvah)

In this week's Sidrah we read one of the most powerfully dramatic episodes in the early history of Israel: the episode of the Golden Calf; and it's an extraordinary story! Here we have a people who, with their own eyes, saw the great wonders that God wrought for them. Moses poured his life out for his people. When we study this week's portion of the law we see how intricate was the process of emancipation, what a thorny uphill road was the road that led from slavery in Egypt to freedom. And throughout, one goal, one aim, burned like a perpetual lamp in the soul of Moses; namely, to replace the master Pharaoh with God, to refine slaves into freemen, by taking them to Sinai, and to educate them in a new morality - the law of God.

Many were the preparations for the great day consisting of outward and inward cleansing. The great moment arrives. There is thunder, and lightning. The voice of

God is heard thundering out “I am the Lord thy God – thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”¹⁴⁷ Moses stayed away forty days and nights - a period which he spent like an angel, without food or drink. But when he returned with the coveted prize - the Ten Commandments written in the hand of God engraved with divine fire - he found the people worshipping a golden calf! They had completely forgotten the vows and promises which they had made at the great ceremony at Sinai! They had forgotten Moses! They had forgotten God! They were worshipping a calf! Not a live one admittedly. Not one that has breath and movable organs. But a lump of gold shaped in the form of a calf made out of their own jewelry, and they were singing אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם - “This is the God that brought you out of Egypt.”¹⁴⁸

And yet, Moses rose in defense of this rebellious and fickle people. When God says וְאֶכְלֵם - “I will destroy this people and make of them a great nation”¹⁴⁹, Moses would not hear of this. Rather מַחֲנֵי נָא מִסִּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ - “Blot me out of thy book which they hast written.”¹⁵⁰ “Let me die but let Israel live!” is what Moses in essence said to the Almighty.

Another line of defence suggested by the Midrash is based on the expression used by Moses לָמָּה ה' יַחַרֶּה אַפֶּיךָ בְּעַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם “Why are you angry with the people that you have brought out of Egypt?”¹⁵¹ In other words, look at the surroundings and from where they came, and you can no longer blame them for their conduct.

And the Midrash quotes the parable of a father who opened a perfume business for his son in a neighborhood of ill repute.¹⁵² After a short while, the father discovered that his son had become immoral. He had gone astray and became a virtual outcast. The father was infuriated to the point of destroying his son. But a friend pacified him with these words: “Look here! Of all the trades you chose for your son, the perfume business?! Of all the businesses, you selected one that is rotten with vice and with immorality! In that case, why do you blame your son for his conduct now?!” Similarly, Moses pleaded for the Jewish people. “Of all the lands, you placed them in Egypt, a land steeped in idolatry, then how can you blame them for making a golden calf?” Thus Moses pleaded for his flock.

¹⁴⁷ Shemot 20:2

¹⁴⁸ Shemot 32:4

¹⁴⁹ Shemot 32:10

¹⁵⁰ Shemot 32:32

¹⁵¹ Shemot 32:11

¹⁵² Shemot Rabbah 32:11

These incidents alone are enough to stamp Moses as the greatest leader and teacher. **וְלֹא יִקָּם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה** - “There will not arise another leader such as Moses.”¹⁵³

If we study the contrasts between Moses and Noah, we see how far superior is Moses. True, Noah was a great man in his way, for the Bible designates him as a **צַדִּיק תָּמִים** - “a perfectly righteous man”¹⁵⁴. Yet what a vast difference in moral standards existed between the two! I imagine if the Almighty had made the same promise to Noah that he would destroy the people but make him into a great nation, Noah would have consented. He would never have stopped to consider his own people in the selfish motives of himself becoming great.

In the noted Midrash, Noah is pictured as boasting to Moses of his greatness in that he was the only person saved from the flood. Whereupon Moses reproaches him: “You saved yourself but you had no power to save your generation.”

Here, Moses sets a standard for all generations to follow. It’s not enough to save yourself. You must save others with you.

My dear Lewis! This week’s Sidra teaches you two things. Firstly, to have the right kind of religion and to lead a good and worthy life, you must think not only in terms of saving yourself, but your conduct must be to have regard for others as well. Secondly, it teaches you that environment plays a very important part, i.e. the friends that you make and that the place you live in influences your whole life.

Therefore, I say to you: If you want to be a true Bar Mitzvah, you must see to it that your friends are nice Jewish friends, and you must attend the services and continue the Hebrew Classes. You have only been here in this neighbourhood a short while, but I can see you have already made nice friends among the children of the classes. Your parents are very much concerned about your Hebrew education. Your father promised me that not only is he going to encourage you to come Shabbat each week, but he himself is going to accompany you to the Shabbat morning service.

It is my hope that you will continue the “Torah Tzivah” (the Torah Moses gave to us) which has become “Morasha Kehillat Yaakov”, (the heritage of the congregation of Jacob). Thus you will become a credit to yourself, a source of “nachas” to your parents, and an inspiration to all Israel. **אמן**.

Ki Tissa: The fire, not the coat (Barmitzvah - David)

There are many stirring incidents in the portion we read today including many tense situations. But the most interesting one is the scene between the Almighty and

¹⁵³ Devarim 34:10

¹⁵⁴ Bereishit 6:9

Moses, when God says: וַיַּחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאֶכְלֶם וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְאוֹתְךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל - “My anger will be kindled against them so that I will destroy this people and make of thee a great nation.”¹⁵⁵

But Moses would not hear of this. Rather, מַחְנֵי נָא מִסִּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ - “Erase me now from Your book, which You have written”¹⁵⁶. “Let me die but let Israel live!” - Moses, in essence, says to the Almighty.

This incident alone is enough to stamp Moses as the greatest leader and teacher: וְלֹא יָקֻם נְבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה - “There will not arise another leader such as Moses!”¹⁵⁷

If we study the contrasts between Moses and Noah, we see how far superior Moses is. Noah, too, was a great man in his way, for the Bible designates him as a צַדִּיק תָּמִים (“a perfectly righteous man”¹⁵⁸).

Yet what a vast different are his moral standards. I imagine if the Almighty had made the same promise to Noah that he would destroy the people but make him into a great nation. I am sure Noah would have consented. He would never had stopped to consider his own people in the selfish motive of himself becoming great.

In a well-known Midrash, Noah is pictured as boasting to Moses of his greatness in that he was the only person saved from the deluge. Whereupon Moses reproaches him: “You saved yourself, but you had no power to save your generation.”¹⁵⁹

Here Moses sets a standard for all generations to follow. It’s not enough to save yourself. You must save others with you.

There’s an interesting idiomatic expression in Yiddish which expresses this very thought. There are some prior and righteous people who are designated as צַדִּיק אֵין פֿעלֶךְ (Fur coat). I had the occasion to use this expression many times but never understood the real meaning until a Rabbi explained it to me as follows: When a person sits in a room and feels cold, what can he do to warm himself? Either one of two courses is open to him. He may make a fire and warm the whole room so that others present may benefit by the heat. Another way is to put on a fine heavy coat and wrap it round you so you feel warm while the others remain just as cold as before.

¹⁵⁵ Shemot 32:10

¹⁵⁶ Shemot 32:32

¹⁵⁷ Devarim 34:10

¹⁵⁸ Bereishit 6:9

¹⁵⁹ Midrash Devarim Rabbah 11:3

True religion as taught by Moses dictates the use of the fire rather than the coat. The expression of צַדִּיק אֵין פְּעֻלָּץ then comes to mean a righteous man whose interests centre about himself, with no attempt to save others with him.

My Dear David! On this occasion when you have reached the age of responsibility, you come here seeking instruction on the kind of Jewish life that will reflect honour upon you and upon all around you. This is the test whether you have the right religion or not. If your conduct is such that it makes you lead a good Jewish life and at the same time to have regard for the saving of others then you have the right kind of religion. On the other hand, if you think only in terms of yourself, and have no regard for the welfare of your brother, neighbor or friend, then you have the religion of Noah but not the religion of Moses.

The following ditty¹⁶⁰ expresses this philosophy well: I had a little tea party/this afternoon at three/It was very small, you know/Just I, myself and me/Myself ate all the sandwiches/ while I drank up the tea/It was also I who at the pie/and passed the cake to me.

Moses is called “Rabbeinu” (our teacher), a term that is used only of him. From him we learn the proper attitude towards life and towards our fellow man.

Vayakhel: Planning ahead (Aufruf of Harold & Roselyn)

“Planning ahead” is an interesting concept in life. Particularly, it is the slogan of the twentieth century. The attitude of Judaism, is to plan ahead, to create today, to face the future. The very opening verse of today’s Torah reading, tells us, how Moses gathers all the congregation of Israel וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל עֵדֻת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם - concerning the construction of the sanctuary.¹⁶¹ He then went into minute details of how the Temple should be built, because he realised that in the building of a Sanctuary there must be careful and detailed planning, with an eye on the future - not only for ourselves, but for those who come after us.

Judaism cannot survive if there is no planning for the future. The great words of the Torah, our entire religion - Judaism - will not survive if we do not plan for the day after. What is the best road of life on which a man must travel; איזו היא דרך טובה? What one virtue should a man cultivate in life?¹⁶² Rabbi Shimon said הַרְוֵאָה אֶת הַנּוֹלָד - “He who perceives the future.”¹⁶³

If those who originally built the Shul in Clifford Way had an imaginative plan, if they would have thought of us and our children, we would not be in the position we are

¹⁶⁰ Written by Jessica Nelson North

¹⁶¹ Shemot 35:1

¹⁶² Avot 2:9

¹⁶³ Tamid 32a

today, inheriting the problems which they did not foresee. We are unfortunately the successors of a generation that refused to see the future.

We have been given a great privilege! To us has been given the great זכות to build a new Shul. We cannot afford a laissez-faire attitude or the philosophy of “Let God worry about tomorrow.” Here must be proper planning, and consultation, and every adult member of the community must co-operate. A lot of thought must be paid to the Ladies Gallery, to the position of seats, and to many other details. Just as Moses felt it necessary to describe every detail of the new Sanctuary, so must we too give thought to every detail of the new Shul, and that need for economy should not blind us to essential details.

Even in the field of Romance, there must be planning for the future. We read the when Eliezer was commanded by Abraham to select a bride for Isaac, we read, that he took his responsibility very seriously. He realized full well that in this instance, no random choice would do. He therefore devised a plan to assume the proper companion for his young master.

“I will approach the maiden who is willing to draw water at the well”, he said. “And I will ask them for a drink of water. The girl who will be kind enough to offer a drink, not only to me, but also to my thirsty camels אֶתְּהָ הַבְּחֵתָ לְעַבְדִּי לְיִצְחָק - that woman is destined to be the wife of my master.”¹⁶⁴

The rest of the story is familiar. Rebecca came forward and offered water to him and the camels. Eliezer had every right to be thrilled and happy. After all - his plan had worked! Yet we read that he was still in doubt as to whether or not the Almighty had crowned his mission with success. וְהָאִישׁ מִשְׁתַּאֲהָ לָּהּ מִחֲרִישׁ לְדַעַת הַהֶצְלִיחַ ה' דְּרָכּוֹ אָם - לא - “It was only when Rebecca consented to accept the gift of a pair of bracelets, the Eliezer was satisfied.”¹⁶⁵ And so he proclaimed: בְּרוּךְ ה' ... אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָזַב חֲסִדּוֹ וְאֱמֶתוֹ “Praised be the Lord for not having abandoned his kindness and his truth from my master Abraham.”¹⁶⁶ But one cannot help but ask why was Eliezer in doubt before רבקה accepted his gift; and what reassured him when she took the bracelets?

The answer, my friends, is to be found in the meaning of the Hebrew words חסד and אמת as they represent two different qualities of character.

חסד signifies an overflow of kindness and goodness, and אמת means truth. Our sages tell us that אמת - the seal of the Almighty - is truth. The Torah is referred to

¹⁶⁴ Bereishit 24:14

¹⁶⁵ Bereishit 24:21

¹⁶⁶ Bereishit 24:27

as תורת אמת - the teaching of truth. Thus, אמת represents faith in God and religious devotion.

When Rebecca displayed hospitality to the stranger and pity for the beast, Eliezer knew that she possessed the quality of חסד. He knew that she was kind and good. Doubts, however, continued to cloud his mind. He was worried about the religious convictions of the young lady. Coming from an idolatrous environment as she did, he was afraid the Rebecca might not fit into the home of Abraham, the discoverer of the one God. He therefore put her to another test. He offered her the two bracelets, the שני צמידים; symbolic of the two tablets of the Law, symbolic of the שני לוחות הברית, whose weight was ten gold pieces representing the Ten Commandments, and when Rebecca took them from his hands, Eliezer was certain that the match was divinely ordained. It was then that he thanked God, “who has not forsaken his kindness and his truth,” and as an expression that חסד and אמת would continue to flourish and to thrive in the house of Abraham. Here is the main reason for the happy family life that characterizes our people through the ages. At a time when long courtships were unknown, our grandparents and great grandparents led happy lives. Divorces were uncommon. The in-laws on either side looked for couples who possessed חסד and אמת as essential qualities.

This morning is a special שמחה for us. It's a Sabbath of joy and happiness for all of us, for the חתן who has been called up, and his כלה who is here to witness his call up, met in our Shul and Hebrew Classes. They both came to Shul on Shabbat mornings. When they were children, they attended our Hebrew Classes, and we are happy to know that it was in our Shul and Hebrew classes that this young couple met, became friends, and their friendship blossomed into love culminating in their wedding tomorrow. Let us hope that for many years to come, may our School be the means of bringing other young couples together.

Mr. and Mrs. Woolf and Mr. and Mrs. Jays who will lead their children to the canopy tomorrow certainly merit our recognition and greetings. Their devotion to our Synagogue is well known. Our Chatan, Harold's father Sid Jays, is a member of the Building Fund. His mother Cissie helps the Ladies Guild to beautify the סוכה, and is always willing to support any worthwhile cause. The כלה Roselyn's father Max Woolf, is known to you all. He is vice Chairman of the Synagogue, Chairman of the Rebuilding Fund, and the building of our new Shul will fall heavily on his shoulders - although I hope not too heavily! Roselyn's mother, Milly, apart from being an active hostess of all the Committee meetings in her house, also takes a very active part in the many activities of local communal life. Besides their loyalty to the Shul and the community, I am personally involved because the Jay and the Woolf families have been good friends of mine for a long time. I still recall when my wife and I returned

from our memorable visit to Israel and our plane was delayed and redirected from London Airport to Gatwick, Milly and Max waited for 3 hours in shocking and dreadful weather at Victoria Station with their car and warm coats to welcome us back home. Such friendship is invaluable, and their joy today is our joy.

I am particularly moved when I look upon our חתן Harold and I remember that it wasn't so long ago, that he was a Bar Mitzvah and stood before me then, on this very pulpit. At that time, I charged him to do his utmost to follow the example of his parents, to be as sweet and as charming as his mother, to be as sincere, as good hearted, and loyal, as his father.

Vayakhel: Building a synagogue and a tabernacle

There's an interesting statement in our Rabbinic literature to the effect that when God created this world and all that it contained, He was wary and cautious about creating gold. Knowing the human being as He did, He feared the consequences which would follow the creation of this yellow metal. He foresaw the evils, the terrors, the sufferings, that gold might bring into the world. He was afraid of the sins and crimes that man will commit; all because of this precious metal.

“The world is not fit to make use of this metal” - He cried out. But then He had a second thought. He remembered. He thought matters over. He thought of the good that gold could accomplish. He thought of the Temple that would have to be built and of the gold that would be necessary for its construction. And so בשביל בית המקדש נברא - Because of the good that it could and would produce, God created it.¹⁶⁷

This Midrashic tale comes to mind as I think of who have helped to make this function a success. Yesterday in all the Synagogues we read that when the Tabernacle in the desert was completed, what was finished was the very first Synagogue; the first sanctuary, their spiritual centre.

This should have been an occasion for great rejoicing. The whole structure was built with free will from communal offerings, and so great was the generosity of the people that the whole project was completed in a short time, and people were so anxious to contribute that it was necessary to ask the people not to bring any more contributions that could not be used.

And no wonder that this undertaking was such a huge and unprecedented success! Look who the chairman of the building committee was!

¹⁶⁷ See Midrash Shemot Rabbah 35:1

Pekudei: How we use money

The metals collected for the Mishkan are designated in a special way. The gold is called **זָהָב הַתְּנוּפָה**¹⁶⁸, the brass is called **נְחֹשֶׁת הַתְּנוּפָה**.¹⁶⁹ This was not gold or brass in the ordinary sense; it was gold and brass which elevated the donor. As the Gaon of Vilna comments on the verse: **דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה** - “Speak unto the children of Israel that they take for me an offering”¹⁷⁰, the expected word would have been **וַיִּתְּנוּ לִי**, - “and they shall give unto me”. The use of **וַיִּקְחוּ** in place of **וַיִּתְּנוּ** signifies that when one gives money, or time, or work for a sacred cause, he is really not giving; he is - in the long run - receiving something in return.

The **זָהָב** and the **נְחֹשֶׁת** of the Tabernacle are called **תְּנוּפָה** because they gave something in return to the donor. They elevated him. Because he gave them to the sacred cause of the **מִשְׁכָּן**, his heart and mind became ennobled, and he became a better person for it.

Our Sages never discouraged the value of money. They often criticize the use to which money is put, but they never saw evil in money itself. Commenting on **זֶה יִתְּנוּ** - “this is what they shall give”¹⁷¹, the Sages tell us **שֶׁהָרָאָה לוֹ מִטְּבַע שֶׁל אֵשׁ** – when Moses did not know the type of half-shekel to be used, God showed him a coin of fire.¹⁷²

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, the famous Chassidic teacher, explains that the reason a coin of fire was shown to Moses was to illustrate to the Jews that money is like fire. Fire has constructive and useful purposes: it heats, lights, warms. But it has also a destructive use: it burns, it destroys. It depends upon how one uses fire.

In the same way, money can build sanctuaries, it can build homes, it can build businesses. It can be a constructive force in the community, in the nation, in the world. But money has also been termed: “the root of all evil”. It has destroyed sacred places, it has brought discord and hatred to homes, it has set people against people, and group against group. It depends upon how we use money.

The sages therefore tell us that the half-shekel given to the sanctuary was to be of ten gerah, corresponding to the Ten Commandments.¹⁷³ It was to be money used according to the standards set by the Decalogue. Money which is measured in terms of dictates of the Ten Commandments is a constructive force and not a power of destruction. As the renowned homilist Rabbi Moses Alshich put it: “Every Jew had

¹⁶⁸ Shemot 38:24

¹⁶⁹ Shemot 38:29

¹⁷⁰ Shemot 25:2

¹⁷¹ Shemot 30:13

¹⁷² see Rashi ibid.

¹⁷³ Yerushalmi, Shekalim 2:3

to contribute a half shekel and not a whole shekel. This is to teach us that without his fellowmen, one is only a half a person.” This is what Jewish tradition saw in the power of money. Rather than be a divisive force, a power of discord, if properly used money can draw people together and make them aware of their communal responsibilities.

Commenting upon the verse **מִזְבֵּחַ אֲדָמָה תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי**, - “an altar of earth thou shalt make unto me”¹⁷⁴, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch says: “the Torah commands us not to drag down the Heavenly to the level of the earthly, as is so often done in this world of ours. On the contrary, our duty should always be to try to elevate the **אֲדָמָה**, the earthly in life, and consecrate it to become an altar to God.”

Money may be **אֲדָמָה**. It can drag man down to the lowest levels. But it can also become the **זָהָב הַתְּנוּפָה**; an elevating and ennobling force in life if used to improve oneself not only economically but spiritually also by helping others and by supporting worthy causes for sacred purposes.

That is why God wanted to show through this Sabbath that money may be used for good purposes, to build a sanctuary, to maintain the spiritual welfare of a people.

Vayikra: Self-Sacrifice

The third book of the 5 books of Moses is called **ויקרא** in Hebrew, and Leviticus in English. The explanation of the Hebrew title is simple enough - **ויקרא** is the first word of this book.

The reason for the name Leviticus is also quite easy to understand. Practically the whole of the work deals with the sacrificial cult that was observed in the Sanctuary. The service in the Temple was carried out by the priests and the Levites. The Priests, too, were descendants of the Levite tribe. Hence the title Leviticus.

It's a rare thing nowadays to hear anybody say a good word about the Biblical concept of sacrifice. Sacrifices, we are told, are primitive and archaic and have no meaning nor message for modern man, and yet, practically the whole of the Book deals mainly with sacrifices.

Many of you no doubt are aware of this fact that in the old life of our fathers, in the East European lands, when a child who went to Cheder (Hebrew School) and was about to be initiated in the study of the Bible, he would not commence with God telling him the fascinating tales of the Creation and of the early Patriarchs, nor from the Exodus teaching him the story of the life of the Jews in Egypt and their Emancipation. Every child began his study of the Bible with the dry and

¹⁷⁴ Shemot 20:20

uninteresting pages of Leviticus where he read the rules and the injunctions of the various types of offerings.

I have often heard modern pedagogues speak with ridicule and contempt of these old teachers, because they showed such lack of psychology as to teach a child of tender years these intricate and spiritless laws of the sacrifices. These old instructors may never have heard of psychology or of pedagogy, but it was a deep-rooted psychological truth sensed deep in their hearts that prompted them intuitively to saturate the child's heart and mind with the underlying laws of Jewish life - the laws of sacrifice.

The child had to learn and he could never be too young to begin that to be a Jew meant that he had to bring sacrifices; that when one loved something or someone, he would be happy to buy an offering as a living evidence of that love. The very word **קָרָב**, sacrifice or offering, is derived from the word **קָרוֹב**, to be near, to be close.

When one is close and feels near to a person or an ideal, he will be willing, even glad, to mark a sacrifice on its behalf. This concept is perhaps one of the most basic and important ideas ever promulgated in an ethical document.

The verse says: "When any man from among you brings an offering unto the Lord"¹⁷⁵ - **אָדָם כִּי יִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ קָרְבָן לַיהוָה**. The Rabbis were quick to note that the word **מִמֶּנּוּ** is superfluous, and they ask why the Torah could not have said **אָדָם כִּי יִקְרִיב קָרְבָן לַיהוָה**?

Wishing to explain the additional **מִמֶּנּוּ**, they answer that this word was included to teach us the unique and distinctive feature of true sacrifices. The Talmud interprets **מִמֶּנּוּ** as meaning **משלכם**, meaning that the true understanding of sacrifice, the true concept of giving is that it must be from yourself.

In our day we have but to look back to the people of the tiny State of Israel who gave of themselves completely - first as Chalutzim in the struggle to make a fertile land out of a parched desert, and then as soldiers, giving their lives to retain their precious land and even now continuing to give and sacrifice in order that any Jew who wishes to do so may find a refuge in their Promised Land and to make sure that it shall remain the National Homeland of the People of Israel.

Shmini: Rational & Irrational Laws (Barmitzvah - Sefton)

On this week's Shabbat we read that after the consecration of the Tabernacle and the installation of the priesthood, the Jewish people were taught the laws relating to clean and unclean animals. They were taught the laws that make a distinction

¹⁷⁵ Vayikra 1:2

between clean and unclean, between מותר and אסור - between the permitted and the forbidden, between נשר and טריפה – between things which are allowed and things that are not allowed, the laws of self-consecration.

We find that these laws were given after the consecration of the Sanctuary. Why was this so? So that people should not think because they had built a Tabernacle and offered sacrifices, they were then free to sin without punishment. On the contrary! Immediately following the consecration of the sanctuary, they were already given ordinances of sanctifying not only the people as a whole, but every individual: וְהִתְקַדְּשִׁתֶּם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ אֶת נַפְשֵׁיכֶם, and be ye holy, for I am Holy, and do not defile yourselves”.¹⁷⁶ The Midrash comes and explains the reason for all these ordinances and for all these ceremonies: רב אמר: לא נתנו מצות לישראל אלא לצרף בהן את הבריות, וכל כך למה? שנאמר "מִגֵּן הוּא לְכָל (תהילים יח:לא) - החסדים בו" - "Rab said, the object of all these commandments given to Israel is but to purify their lives, as it is said "He is a shield unto all them that trust in Him."¹⁷⁷

Now there has always been a tendency among certain so-called “liberals” in our community to divide the teachings of our Torah into two sections: Rational laws - laws that find justification in reason like the 10 commandments, honouring ones parents, neighbourly love. Their significance – they argue – is self-evident. They are *really* important. They are *really* binding for all times and *must* be observed by all. But dietary laws, the prohibition of certain animals for human consumption, שַׁעֲטָנִים, these laws – they argue – have no moral value, and therefore they need not be observed and can be dispensed with.

Experience, however, shows that just that Jew who scrupulously observes the dietary laws for which there’s apparently no rational reason, also leads an ethically pure life. On the other hand, that one who has done away with the Jewish mode of living, that one who looks upon all these ordinances and ceremonies as old fashioned and out of date, gradually sinks into irreligion, losses the strength to withstand temptation, and gives way to habits that are neither moral nor rational.

Take, for example, respect for parents. This commandment is certainly rational and self-evident. Is this commandment observed now as in the days of old? However much we should like to answer in the affirmative, I am afraid the answer lies in the negative, and we must not forget that nowadays parents do so much more for their children than in former times. Yet it must be admitted that the respect and obedience shown by modern children is not the same as in former days. On the other hand,

¹⁷⁶ Vayikra 11:44

¹⁷⁷ Tehillim 18:31

that child who has been brought up to know the importance of a shul, the importance of a Talmud Torah, that child will also respect his parents.

The Midrash of this weeks Sidra tries to teach us that the object of all these ordinances is to purify Israel and to accustom the Jews to discipline and to obedience. It is a training for the subjugation of ones will to a Higher power.

The person who has been trained to dispense, if necessary, with enjoyment because it has been prohibited, will have no difficulty in abstaining from any unlawful action. It will be so much easier for him to live purely according to ethical standards once he has developed the quality of abstention and been used to saying “No” to his desires and inclinations.

And now my dear Sefton, on your Bar Mitzvah day I want to address a few words to you and I hope that the lesson learnt in this weeks Sidra will serve as a guide for you in the future. I know that you are fond of sport and you know that whatever game you play – whether it is football, or cricket, or Tennis - there are lots of rules and regulations attached to the game, whatever the game may be. Some of these rules and regulations seem superfluous; they seem to be unnecessary. But you as a sportsman Sefton will know that all these rules and regulations are drawn up with one purpose i.e. to play together as a team, so that in a fair and honourable way, you should win the game. So it is with our people. There are many rules and regulations belonging to the Jewish people, and while some of them may seemingly be old fashioned and out of date, they too are put in for a reason, which is to discipline us and to keep us together as a people. These rules and regulations have kept our people together as a team throughout the ages.

So, my dear Sefton, on your Bar Mitzvah day, I want to ask you to play the game for your own people. Then I have no doubt you will grow up to be a credit to yourself, your family, your community, and your people.

Acharei Mot: The two lives of the Bar Mitzvah (Barmitzvah - Peter)

Robert Louis Stevenson, in his famous novel Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde, revealed to the world in all its vividness the torn and twisted personalities of the man who leads two lives.

Dr. Jekyll was a kind and gentle character who always helped the poor, the needy, and the helpless. On the other hand, Mr. Hyde was an evil man who did evil things. He was a person who held a revolver in his hand, ready to kill anybody who would stand in his way. Yet Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde were one and the same man! Robert Louis Stevenson, in his book, tries to convey to us that it is possible for a man to have a dual personality to the good and the evil.

Now many psychologists have been puzzled over this eternal **וַיִּתְרַצֵּוּ** - over this constant inner struggle between the two opposite forces within man. In the majority of cases, they believe that it is circumstances which produce the evil traits in man. The environment, the friends that a man happens to choose. These factors play a major part in creating the dual nature of his personality. The man with two lives is like the person who has got on the wrong bus; he had the right intentions, but circumstances took him away from the correct destination.

Let us see, however, what the Torah has to say on this matter. We find in the Gemara a discussion concerning an unusual matter: **בעא מיניה פלימו מרבי** - A student by the name of Pelimu asked his teacher Rabbi Judah the following question **מי שיש לו שני ראשים באיזה מהן מניח תפילין** – “If a person has two heads, on which head does he place his tefillin?” Rabbi Judah became very angry, for he considered the question the absurdity as he didn’t believe that such a being was possible. **אמר ליה או קום גלי**, “Go exile yourself or else be excommunicated!”, meaning that he wanted to discipline his student because he thought he is trying to make fun of him. In the meantime, a man entered and related that his wife had given birth to a boy with two heads, **אדהכי אתא ההוא גברא א"ל איתליד לי ינוקא דאית ליה תרי רישי כמה**, and he wanted to know, since the child was a first born son and he had to be redeemed, should he give five shekalim to the Kohen for one child or ten for two?¹⁷⁸

I am referring to this strange incident because there is a message inherent in this Rabbinic narrative. Not only in the days of the Talmud did such strange creatures occur. We see them in our own world of today. We see that a mass murderer, who produced the horror of the crematorium, which brought death to millions of Jews, nevertheless he was able to carry on diplomatic negotiations in a most gentlemanly fashion. We see murderers in the form of gentleman! We see gangsters in the form of diplomats! But it is not only on the political scene of the world that we find such unnatural creatures.

Ever since man’s earliest awareness and recognition of himself, that which he is and that which he can be, man has known of this conflict. Possessed of animal passions and savage emotions, man ceaselessly struggles to attain the stature and dignity of man.

And the remedy for this dual nature is given to us by King David who writes in Tehillim **אִמְרַת ה' צְרוּפָה** – “the word of God is refined”¹⁷⁹. On this passage, Rav Yehudah says in the name of Rav: “The Torah was given only for the sole purpose

¹⁷⁸ Menachot 37a

¹⁷⁹ Tehillim 18:31

of refining people”¹⁸⁰ - The ethic and the teaching of the Torah was given to remove the animal from man. The most cultured of people, who is not cognizant of the sacred concepts of the Torah, can never be a complete person. As such, the Torah does not only provide us with a faith, but also with a cure which gives man a personality that is integrated and not split into fragments.

In a symbolic sense, there are many boys who when they become Bar Mitzvah possess two or more heads. Spiritually and intellectually their minds are split. In school they are taught one set of principles, and in Cheder another. The result is that there’s frequently a clash between the doctrines preached to them in the Synagogue, and the callous practices they observe in the street and even in their own homes. Consequently, most of our children are thus equipped with two or more heads. In fact, even the good boy often finds it hard to synthesize and to combine the spiritual and the secular, the mundane and the divine. And the questions poses itself, **מי שיש לו שני ראשים באיזה מהן מניח תפילין**. How can a Bar Mitzvah boy who has two-heads, put on the tefillin which teaches love of God and of Israel, and the observance of the sacred commandments of the Torah?

The conflicting ideas that strikes and impinges upon the young man’s brain, the various emotions that sweep over his head and the diversified practices he sees, frequently confuse the poor boy. The result, unfortunately, is that soon after the glorified Bar Mitzvah is over, far too many discard and reject their tefillin for life and become totally estranged from everything Jewish.

My Dear Peter! We just chanted ¹⁸¹ **כִּי לָקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם תּוֹרַתִי אֶל־תַּעֲזֹבוּ** which means that I have given you a good doctrine, do not forsake my Torah; it’s a tree of life to all who hold fast to it¹⁸² and they who support it form a happy circle. Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths will bring peace.¹⁸³

It’s my hope and fervent prayer that through your loyalty to the Torah, your Barmitzvah will have meaning in your life as a Jew. Then you will be a source of blessedness to yourself, your parents, and the entire house of Israel.

Emor: Thanks (Howard Woolf Engagement)

Our forefathers were advised in today’s Scriptural reading that if they sacrificed a thanksgiving offering unto the Lord, it had to be eaten on that day – “Ye shall leave none of it until the morning”¹⁸⁴. The donor had to partake of the offering, at that very moment, and he could not delay consuming it for another day. How wise were

¹⁸⁰ Bereishit Rabbah 44:1

¹⁸¹ Mishlei 4:2

¹⁸² Mishlei 3:18

¹⁸³ Mishlei 3:17

¹⁸⁴ Vayikra 22:30

our sages in their interpretation of this rule! What they attempted to emphasize, was, the importance of giving thanks, at the time, at which it had the most meaning, namely, on the very day of the offering of thanks.

There are those who feel that giving thanks unto the Lord can wait until a later date. They honestly feel that they can return to religion when they get older, when they have more free time. Theirs is the philosophy of “manyana” – tomorrow. Though they do not apply this philosophy to their practical affairs or to the physical pleasures that life offers, this weakness of delaying their thanks creeps into the spiritual path of their life. But my friends, today is - after all - all that we have. Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow is not yet here, and he who waits for the morrow will probably wait forever. His children will grow up alien to him, scatter in the world to live their own lives, and he will remain to all eternity with that opportunity lost.

Our Rabbis attempted, in their inimitable manner, to develop within us a sense of gratitude. We should express our feelings at this very moment. If we have somebody to love - love him now. If we have some duties to perform to our faith, to God, to fellowmen – do not delay. Don't wait until the “sunset” of life. Give thanks during the “dawn” and also during the “day” of life. Don't come to God only in sorrow. Go to Him in joy, for your life will be so much more meaningful. “It's good to give thanks unto the Lord... to proclaim thy goodness in the morning and thy faithfulness at night.”¹⁸⁵

I am happy to say that this morning we have a Simcha in our shul. Mr. and Mrs. Woolf are fulfilling the מצוה of not delaying their thanksgiving offering to the Almighty. On the first Shabbat of the announcement of their son's engagement, they have come to this Synagogue to make a Kiddush to celebrate Howards engagement.

It's of course not an unexpected thing, because Mr. Woolf, has been associated with this Synagogue for many years. He has been Secretary, auditor, member of the Board of Management, treasurer of the J. P. A. and he has taken an active part with Mr. Hyman in the Gemiluth Chessed Fund. Mrs Woolf was, for quite a number of years, Honourary Treasurer of the Ladies Guild, and she takes a keen interest in the welfare of the old “The Willesden Friendship Club”. Our Chatan Howard of course is a regular worshipper in our Shul. I well recall his Bar mitzvah when he read the whole Sidra. It's our fervent prayer that parents of both bride and groom will derive much nachas from them, and on your behalf I want to wish them a hearty מזל טוב.

Bechukotai - Jerusalem of Gold (1968)

Before I commence my sermon this morning, I should like, first of all, to extend a very cordial welcome back to two stalwarts of our community who returned back

¹⁸⁵ Tehillim 92:2

from their visit to Israel. I refer of course to Mr. Janowitch, our grand old man, and Mrs. Sussman, our sweet singer of the **אדון עולם**.

We are also glad to see Mr. Pliskin, our Honorary Secretary, back to our shul since his operation, and hope from now on he will enjoy good health and keep well to be able to carry out the good work for our shul.

The Rabbis teach in the Talmud that the Almighty “gave three precious gifts to Israel”¹⁸⁶ - **שלוש מתנות טובות נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל**. This morning in our shul, the spotlight is focused also upon **שלוש מתנות** upon three events which we are privileged to witness:

- 1) We are celebrating the first anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem under Jewish control for the first time in 2000 years, an event of supreme importance in the history of our people and our State.
- 2) The second event is the installation of officers! A year has passed since we installed our last Honourary Officers and Board of Management, and we are now gathered here again to officially induct those who will lead us for the coming year, and there's not need for me to tell you that this year is an important one for us and for our country, because we hope to see in it the fulfillment of all our hopes and prayers for a new Synagogue, and therefore a special responsibility, but also a great privilege lies upon those who have taken office this year.
- 3) The third great event is the celebration of a Golden Wedding Anniversary. And it gives me great pleasure to extend a very warm and sincere welcome to Mr. & Mrs. Biellik who have come here to our shul to give voice to a feeling of thankfulness and gladness for the blessings that they have been privileged to enjoy, when they can celebrate 50 years, a half a century of marriage together, if for them, it's a great **זכות** and privilege, its for us an equal privilege to be able to share with them in this great celebration, particularly as they have come all the way from Bournemouth where they are living in retirement, to our shul to maintain their close and continued interest in our welfare.

Now! Before I install our Honorary Officers I would like to draw your attention to a famous quotation of our Sages. One of our Sages tells us that Eretz Yisrael is the centre of the world and that Jerusalem is the centre of Eretz Yisrael. How true it is! Israel's greatest contributions to the world were made possible through its little country, through **ירושלים עיר הקודש**.

It was there that the prophets wrought their immortal works. It was there that the Bible was created. It was there that the prophets prophesied, and it was there that

¹⁸⁶ Brachot 5a

the Psalmist sang his immortal psalmodies. It was there the men of the Great Synagogue laid the foundation of the Synagogue and liturgy. It was there that the Mishnah was created which became the basis of the Talmudic lore. It was that little land that became the shrine of three greatest world religions. When the Holy Temple was destroyed and that Jewish community was decimated and the bedraggled exiles saw the ruins, they vowed **אִם אֶשְׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִי** - "If I forget thee O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning"¹⁸⁷.

It was that spirit that was displayed by the defenders of the Warsaw Ghetto, who while being led to Gas Chambers, sang the plaintive but triumphant tunes of **אני מאמין** - I believe in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he delay in coming, yet I believe.

Those martyrs who were suffocating in the Nazi gas chambers visualized an Israel restored, and even though they could not live to seek it, they were happy that their children might reach the Promised Land.

The Pharaoh's of the ages are gone and long forgotten. However the Jewish people are still here to witness this great and historic event, the reunification of Jerusalem and the glorious victory of the six day war last June.

At the conclusion of the third book of the Torah this morning we solemnly rose and exclaimed with fervor, the cheerful and soul inspiring traditional words **חזק חזק ונתחזק** - "Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen ourselves".

It's in this spirit of **חזק חזק ונתחזק** that it gives me great pleasure to install you in your offices. May God bless you all with health and strength to carry out your duties, and may the congregation prosper and progress under you, and let the pleasantness of the Lord be upon us and establish the work of our hands.

A Golden Wedding anniversary spanning half a century of companionship is in itself a testimonial of love, mutual affection and devotion to each other. The Hebrew word for 50 is **חמישים**, but many Sages have equated the term fifty with the Hebrew word **כל** which numerically has a value of 50. They say that one who is blessed with fifty years of married life is also blessed at times with all - **וה' בָּרַךְ אֶת אֲבִרְהָם בְּכָל** -¹⁸⁸ with children, with money, with joys and with happiness. And I know that you will all join with me in wishing them that the Almighty will spare them in good health to witness the opening of our new shul and to celebrate their Diamond wedding with us, surrounded by their near and dear ones **אמן, באהבה ושמחה וכל טוב**.

¹⁸⁷ Tehillim 137:5-6

¹⁸⁸ Bereishit 24:1

Bemidbar: Our Finest Hour (Barmitzvah - Paul)

Millions of words in tribute have been expressed about the personality of the late Sir Winston Churchill. They extolled his brilliant statesmanship, his prolific writing, his skill as an artist, and his multicolour as a person. Above all else, they extolled his gallant determination to win a military contest in an uneven struggle. This was singled out as his greatest virtue.

In his book “Their Finest Hour”, Winston Churchill speaks of the most glorious hour in the history of the English people which was when England stood alone as a bulwark of resistance against the Nazis at the beginning of World War II. England at that time, he writes, was subjected daily to attacks from the air, with hardly any weapons of defense at its command. There was even imminent danger of an invasion. And yet England resisted.

But if this was England’s finest hour, what should be said of Israel which throughout the ages stood alone in the fight to preserve the purity of Biblical ideals? Our finest hour was not a mere brief span of time. It continued uninterrupted for 2,000 years since the destruction of the Second Temple. It is the record of our history - as symbolised in the book of Bemidbar – the book of the Wilderness - which we read this morning.

Is there another people in the world which has suffered one defeat after another, one humiliation more tormenting than the other, than the Jew?

As one reads the chapters of **במדבר**, one cannot help asking what was the dominant factor in the strength and tenacity to wage this battle? In other words, how was this victory made possible? What kept the torch of Judaism from becoming extinguished?

Three accomplishments are prominent in the book containing the record of events that happened “in the desert”: Torah, Mishkan, and Sanhedrin.

1) Torah, Yeshivot. Throughout our long history in the exile, we have held the torch of learning high and bright. The uninterrupted chain of academies of learning, as well as the entire sacred literature after the Bible written since the time of the exile bear, witness to the fact that there was Torah in Israel during its wanderings “in the desert”.

2) The Mishkan, or Synagogue. If Jewish life survived the destruction of the Temple, that was because the Synagogue had been prepared to take over the whole burden and carry it onwards for generations to come.

3) Great individuals, thinkers, philosophers – the Sanhedrin of their times – were our leaders and judges. Every generation has had its share of the great men in Israel.

The story of Israel “in the desert” constitutes our “finest hour”. It shows that we stood the test of adversity and tribulations. Equally so, at this moment when Israel and the Jewish people are facing their gravest hours since the war of Independence in 1948, the book of **במדבר** reminds us that our ancestors outlived the ancient empire that tried to destroy them. The crowded ghetto could not crush them.

The dark ages did not put out the inner light of their courage. The gas chambers and the flames of the crematoria of the last generation could not consume them. Yes, Pharaoh and his hosts sank into the mighty depths. Haman and his henchmen met their doom on the gallows. The leading Nazis committed suicide. Israel, despite Hitler's attempts to destroy it, is reinstated as a nation on its own homeland. Equally so at this grave hour, there's not the slighted disposition to doubt its victories.

My dear Paul! Today, you become a member of an illustrious people. A people that has survived hardships, persecutions and exile for almost 2,000 years. What has given it the power & strength to survive? It is the will to live, and the conviction that it had a purpose worth living for.

This is perhaps best expressed by the Psalmist in the words **לֹא אָמוּת כִּי אֶחְיֶה וְאֶסַּפֵּר יְהוָה** – “I shall not die but live & declare the words of the Lord”¹⁸⁹. It is because we had a reason for existence that we survived. It is because we were conceived as a people whose aim would be to establish justice and righteousness in this world that we are here today. From now on, my dear Paul, you must be interested in everything that makes for proper Jewish living.

Foremost of institutions of Jewish life is the Synagogue. The Synagogue is the source from which our fathers and forefathers drew their inspiration. The power to overcome persecution and suffering; the strength to outlive and outlast our enemies were acquired from the Synagogue. Remember that your first duty as a Barmitzvah is to see that the institution which means so much in the life of our people should remain as effective today. It is in your hands, and in the hands of other Barmitzvah's, that the future of the Synagogue lies. Make your attendance regular, and if your Barmitzvah will mean no more than a dedication to the Synagogue, it will have permanent value & significance.

I have every confidence in you, Paul, that you will listen to these words, and I am sure that you will be a blessing to your dear Mother, sister, and Grandparents.

A few months ago, when you came to me as a pupil, you could hardly read Hebrew, but through sheer hard work and persistence you have not only just read a portion of the Law, but you have given a beautiful rendering of the world Maftir & Haftorah, and by doing so you have made us all very proud of you.

¹⁸⁹ Tehillim 118:17

As your Minister, teacher & friend, I know how this was not an easy task. That's why I have every confidence that your Barmitzvah will mean something to you. Besides, I knew your late father **ה"ע** very well. He was an active member of an important branch of Synagogue life. The Parents Association and your Mother continue with this good work.

It is my earnest hope and prayer that you will do everything in your power to strengthen the Synagogue and other institutions to Jewish life. Then your Barmitzvah will have meaning, and your life as a Jew will have significance.

Nasso: Tradition and change (Barmitzvah - Jeffrey and Derek)

The younger generation of Anglo Jewry has persistently been asking the question why our religious observances must remain as rigid and as rigorous and as onerous as they have been in the olden days of our grandparents.

Although well-meaning and sincere and often imbued with a genuine love of things Jewish, they repeatedly press for more reforms and an increasing number of deviations from our time-tested practices which would serve, they say, to attract more of our young men and women to the synagogue. Those responsible for the clamor feel certain that unless the Rabbinate acquiesces to authorize certain changes in Jewish tradition which would render it more "modern", Judaism - and particularly Orthodoxy - will certainly perish.

The advocates of moderation have become more eloquent especially since the establishment of the State of Israel, the claim being that the time has now come for the required revisions to be implemented by authority centralized in Jerusalem.

There is a striking verse in the Bible which serves to shed light upon this present day problem. In the scriptural portion read this morning, we find the following words:

וְלִבְנֵי קֹהַת לֹא נָתַן כִּי עֲבֹדַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֲלֵהֶם בַּכֶּתֶף! שְׂאוּ - "But to the sons of Kohath he did not give, for incumbent upon them was the work involving the holy [objects], which they were to carry on their shoulders."¹⁹⁰

Wherein did the work of the **בני קהת** differ from that of the other tribes of Israel, as they marched through the desert on the way to the Promised Land? Obviously, it was different insofar as the service they performed consisted of carrying the holy vessels upon their shoulders, and it was due to this fact that their particular contribution is considered highly sacred.

They did not consider it sufficient to carry the holy vessels of the Mishkan on wagons. They did not seek to lighten their burdens by transporting the vessels on wheels. They preferred to carry them on their shoulders.

¹⁹⁰ Bemidbar 7:9

The story is told that a young man once entered a Jewish book shop and asked for a ספר תורה which he wanted to present as a gift to his parents upon their wedding anniversary.

When he asked the cost, he was shocked and amazed to learn the high price he would have to pay for the Sefer Torah.

The shopkeeper patiently explained to him that the high cost is due to the fact that each sacred scroll is written by hand, and there are special scribes who devote their lives to the writing of scriptures. He explained that a special ink is used, a special quill, and special parchment.

The young man called out in disgust, “What a backward people we are! In this modern day and age, with printing presses and modern methods, we are still writing with feather on parchment?!”

That young man, like so many of our young men and women of today, failed to realise that while we have millions of printed Bibles, they are not to be compared with our holy scrolls. He failed to realise that in each scroll there is a portion of Jewish heart and soul, a portion of the love and devotion of a holy man to whom his work is sacred.

Is there one case on record of a Jew endangering his life to save printed Bibles? And yet, how often in our long history has it occurred that our ancestors were willing to plunge into the flames to save the sacred scrolls of the Lord. It's the personal element in a Sefer Torah that renders it so divinely sacred.

Who does not recall the confusion that reigned in our homes Erev Shabbos? Or more particularly, Erev Pesach, when our Mothers toiled selflessly to sterilize the house and to make of it a sanctum sanctorum? No aids were engaged to do the work. It was unthought of to allow someone else this שמחה של מצוה. Consequently, the homes of our forefathers breathed a warmer spirit of Judaism. They were happy to carry their religion upon their shoulders, and it was this characteristic that rendered their work עבודת הקודש.

My dear Barmitzvah boys Jeffrey and Derek! On this day you are commanded to live the life of a Jew. You are asked to observe the ‘Mitzvot’ and to do the things demanded of every Jew.

Some boys of your age think that it is the height of wisdom and good form to leave the Hebrew Classes and forget the training they have received. Somehow or other, they have a mistaken notion that the less Jewish they are, the more English they are, that the less they observe their Jewish tradition and the more they sever connections with their people, the better are their chances for success in their occupation or profession.

The truth is that the more one is loyal to his tradition, the more people think well of him and trust him. For loyalty to one's faith and to one's people show strength of character which can withstand temptations and defy obstacles.

I want to express the hope that you will be Barmitzvah boys worthy of your name. That you will be true and loyal to our religion. And that you will be true sons of Israel.

This morning a Chatan was called up. He too was one of my first Barmitzvah boys and I am very pleased to welcome him here now as a Chatan, and I am sure that the good wishes of all of us go out to the Barmitzvah boys and the Chatan, and the sincere hope that they will bring much joy and happiness to all their respective families.

Beha'alotecha: Hakarat HaTov (Sid & Lisha Mitchel's Silver Wedding Anniversary)

This morning I will speak to you on a subject seldom discussed in the pulpit, i.e. the duty of expressing one's appreciation.

A basic moral principle of Judaism is **הכרת הטוב** - expressing one's appreciation. By **הכרת הטוב**, I don't mean "Chanifah", meaning vulgar flattery. But rather, letting your friends and associates know that you realise their work and appreciate what they are doing for you or others.

It's a fact, and no one will deny it, that as a rule a normal person feels gratified when he receives kind encouragement from a friend! Even animals respond favourably to such treatment; a dog will wag his tail in a frenzy of delight when he feels that he has pleased his master.

Appreciation pays handsome dividends. It encourages a man to do even better in the future. It's easier to work hard in an atmosphere of appreciation, but it is quite difficult to do even a simple task in the presence of those who are always critical and sour. If that is the case, then why not make a point of encouraging our friends in this way? Why not say a word of praise to those who deserve it or need it?

When someone is doing a good job, tell him so! If your wife, for example, has excelled herself; if she has outdone herself with the 'Gefilte Fish', or the pudding, or with the baking, tell her so!

Unfortunately, most of our comments about others is of the critical variety. Even when we are proud of the achievements of a relative, or friend, we must be forced to say so. And then we mix the bitter with the sweet. It's hardly encouraging for one who has done his very best to hear it characterized as **נישט קשה**, 'not so bad'.

Someone must be saying by now: what does the Minister try to tell us? Is he trying to tell us to praise people, and thus give them a “swell-head”? Not at all! It’s true, some conceited people think that they are the best speakers, the finest musicians, the wisest leaders, and the shrewdest business men. Those people have such an exaggerated idea of their ability that the opinion of others will have little or no effect.

Most people, however, do not belong to that category. There are far more individuals who suffer from self-deprecation, discouragement, and self-distrust than from over-confidence.

There are numerous men and women who, in trying hard to do a good job, are near the breaking point. How a little encouragement could revive and refresh them. The last straw that breaks the backs of hardworking housewives is that they get no word of gratitude.

A classic example of **הכרת הטוב**, expressing appreciation, is provided for us in the Torah. Moses jeopardized his life to save his people. He was a great personality. For years his father-in-law accompanied the Jewish people in the desert. But Jethro was not sure if he was needed, or wanted, since he was not a Jew by birth. But Moses assures him that he’s appreciated and needed: **וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל נָא תַעֲזֹב אֶתְנוּ כִּי עַל כֵּן יִדְעָתָּה** - ‘And he said: “Leave us not, I beseech you, for you know that we are to encamp in the wilderness and you shall be with us like eyes.”’¹⁹¹

Upon learning these sincere words, Jethro resolves to remain with the Israelites and proves himself to be a useful guide in the march through the desert. Here we have a classic example of what appreciation and encouragement do to us, and to others.

This morning we have a **שמחה** in our shul to celebrate the Silver Wedding anniversary of our dear friends Sid & Lisha!

Mr. & Mrs. Mitchel certainly merit our recognition and greetings. Apart from being personal friends of mind, Sid & Lisha have done yeoman service for the community. Their devotion and dedication to our shul is well known. There’s no function of local importance which does not get their interest and support. They have been associated with every branch of communal life and endeavor in Neasden. Sid has held many offices in our shul, but at the moment he holds one of the most important jobs in our community, i.e. being the financial representative of our shul.

Lisha, on the other hand, is loved and admired for her wonderful backing, for her unbounding energy, her constant good humour, and her ever ready smile never ceases to amaze us.

¹⁹¹ Bemidbar 10:31

We are delighted to see here Sid's mother. She's a wonderful lady, an **אשת חיל**. I am sure that I am echoing the sentiments of you all when I extend to them our heartfelt and most sincere felicitations on the occasion of their Silver Wedding, and hope the Almighty will bless them and spare them in good health and prosperity to have nachas from their dear children, and to live to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary as full of vigor of life as they are now.

To Mr and Mrs. Angel, President of our shul, Mr & Mrs Woolf - Chairman of the Rebuilding Fund, who are doing to Israel, we wish a bon voyage, **צאתכם לשלום** ו**בואכם לשלום**.

Shelach Lecha: Our life choices

One of the great artists of the Renaissance in Italy was searching for a young child with an innocent and angelic face who might serve as his model for a commissioned portrait. It was very difficult to find this ideal model. The artists wandered from city to city looking for such a child. Wherever he would see children playing, he would stop and he would carefully observe their faces, their gestures and their behavior.

Finally, as he was walking one day in the slums of Naples, his search met with success. This particular boy possessed everything the artist was looking for to depict in his masterpiece. The youngster – although unkempt, dirty and in rags – possessed that rare childish and angelic face. The artist brought the child to his studio, washed him, dressed him in new garments, and began to paint. The combination of the great talent of the artist & the ideal model resulted in a remarkable masterpiece!

Some thirty years later, the same artist wanted to make a painting of a “fallen” man, a picture of a social outcast, a portrayal of one addicted to alcohol, the drifter with no purpose in life. The artist again began to search for a model. And after many weeks, he finds a shabby and seedy tramp that will fill the requirements.

When the tramp enters the artists studio, he recognizes himself in the picture of the angelic child. The very same face which was once the epitome and summary of the sublime, the pure, the angelic and the innocent had, over the years, become transformed into the degenerate and dishonourable.

The contrast between the potential in human development and behavior, the real and actual, is often a devastating shock to parent, teacher and community. How meaningful are the words of the prophet when, in a mood of shattering disappointment, he cries out, “And he looked that it should bring forth grapes& instead it wrought forth wild grapes.”¹⁹²

¹⁹² Isaiah 5:4

What a remarkable lesson in human behavior and potential of human development is offered in today's sidra & Haftorah.

The Sidrah this morning deals with the **מרגלים**, the twelve spies sent by Moses to report on the Promised Land of Canaan. As the Israelites approached the Promised Land, Moses decided to send forth agents to spy out the land of Canaan. They were charged to seek out its weaknesses, the type of people living there, were they strong or weak, few or many? Was the land itself good or bad, capable of being worked or barren? Was it a land of possibilities, or one that was weak or unyielding?

We read that the men chosen for the commission were the heads of their respective tribes, accredited men of judgement and character, upon whose considered opinion reliance could be placed. But unfortunately, the expedition turned out a sad misfortune. The spies were content with one look; they did their work without care and without intelligence. They failed to judge the actual facts. They were sent to investigate, they saw the things that did not matter, and missed those which did. Selfishness and personal ambition distorted their findings in the Land of Promise. Their evil caused the Israelites to be detained in the wilderness for 40 years and caused untold suffering for generations to come. These outstanding men of their generation plunged from meteoric heights into precipitous depths.

On the other hand, the Haftorah tells us about Rahab whose life represented the lowest depths of perversion and sinfulness who, nevertheless, emerges as a fully rehabilitated and completely transformed person.

The contrast is indeed perplexing. The **מרגלים** who are described as **נשרים** as outstanding men, end their lives in treachery, betrayal & tragedy.

Rahab, on the other hand, climbs from the valley of disgrace to the very heights of moral growth and spiritual progress.

Thus the Torah – the authentic mirror of human behavior - offers in this contrast the unforeseen and endless possibilities both in man's potential to grow and to stumble, for pedigree, social status and spiritual standards are also subject to the challenge of the ever shifting storms and stresses of life.

Shelach Lecha: The Spirit of Joshua & Caleb (Post 6-day war)

In this week's portion of the Torah we read the story of the 12 spies who were sent out to investigate conditions in the promised land, to prepare the way for the entry of Israel.

You will remember that after Moses led the people from Egypt, the children of Israel encountered many difficulties, they were faced with many problems, and there was a time when they thought that they had been brought out of Egypt to die in the

wilderness. But at long last, after many vicissitudes, they came within sight of the promised land and their victory over the King of Arad in the extreme south of Canaan gave them encouragement to look towards the promised land. And so Moses thought that the time was now ripe for undertaking the conquest of the Holy Land.

The opening sentence of this week's Sidra tells us: **שְׁלַח לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיִּתְרוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן** - "Send thou men that they may spy out the land of Canaan"¹⁹³.

We are told that the commission consisted of 12 responsible men, and the men chosen for this commission were the heads of their respective tribes: **אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ** - accredited men of judgement and character upon whose considered opinion, reliance could be placed.

Now let us see, for what purpose were they chosen? They were chosen to find out certain definite information. They were charged with the responsibility of seeing the actual physical nature of the country itself, the type of people living there, **הַחֶזֶק הוּא**, were they strong or weak? **הַרְפָּה הוּא**, were they few or many? **הַמַּעַט הוּא אִם-רַב**, whether they were few or many? Was the land itself good or bad, capable of being worked or barren? **וְמָה הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר** **וְהַטּוֹבָה הוּא, אִם-רָעָה הוּא יֵשֵׁב בָּהּ**? That is what they had to find out!

The Sidra tells us that the 12 men went to spy out the land, and they came back with their report. We find that there were 2 reports, one signed by 10 of the commission, and another by only 2 men - Joshua & Caleb. The majority report agreed that it was a land flowing with milk and honey, but they advised against entering the promised land because the cities were too well fortified and the inhabitants were fierce, and they only foresaw disaster.

Why did they give this bad report? They gave this bad report, because they did their work without care, and without intelligence. They failed to judge the actual facts they were sent to investigate. They saw the things that did not matter, and missed those which did. External conditions made up their minds for them. They judged a land by the physical stature of its inhabitants and by the size of the fruit upon the trees.

The minority report signed by Joshua and Caleb, however, agreed that there were many difficulties. They agreed that the situation was grave and serious. Nevertheless, they felt that they were not insuperable; they were not unsurmountable. The question that had to be settled was could Israel prevail against the inhabitants, or was the promise of God and the purpose of the exodus to be null and void? In other words, its the old problem of what constitutes the strength of a nation? Is it brute force or

¹⁹³ Bemidbar 13:2

physical power? Or is it some other unseen characteristic which is stronger than the external features?

Joshua and Caleb believed that a nation is not exalted by strength, and that force in the long run will not avail, and that the real test of a nation is the moral fibre and spiritual values. And had it not been for the fact and common sense of those two, there would have followed a rebellion of such magnitude, of such consequence, that the history of Israel would have been eroded almost as soon as it had begun. And we read further that when the time came for Israel to enter Israel that Joshua & Caleb proved to be right.

All the alleged terror of the inhabitants melted away, and the so-called giants turned out to be veritable pigmies when confronted with men fired by the enthusiasm of an ideal.

History repeats itself in the story of modern Israel. Just think of it! Seven armies of the giant Arab countries have been defeated by one small Israeli army consisting of men who were fired with the enthusiasm of an ideal. It was possible because the spirit of Joshua and Caleb prevailed.

Shelach Lecha: Look up and not just down

The word וַיִּרְאוּ, “And you shall see”, appears twice in this Sidrah.

The first time it is used with reference to the men who were sent by Moses to visit the land of Israel with the charge, וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ, “Look you well to the Land”¹⁹⁴. The twelve men who were sent to investigate conditions in the Promised Land to prepare the way for the entry of Israel were told to examine the actual physical nature of the country itself, the type of people living there - were they strong or weak, few or many? Was the land itself good or bad, capable of being worked or barren? The Sidra uses the word וַיִּרְאוּ.

The second time it is used in connection with the law of fringes to be placed on the edge of garments: וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־וּזְכָּרֹתֵי, “And you shall see and you shall remember all the teachings and commandments of the Lord”¹⁹⁵.

In the history of human civilisation, there were two cross-currents of thought. There were those who concentrated their energies and talents upon אָרֶץ - the earth. Only those things which were tangible and had substance; only those things were considered worthwhile and deserving. Only material objects which one could touch, feel and smell - only those merited attention and consideration. The sum bonum of life, they maintained, was to derive pleasure and enjoyment from the bounties of

¹⁹⁴ Bemidbar 13:18

¹⁹⁵ Bemidbar 15:39

the earth. Their literature and art, their paintings and statues, reflect this concept of life, an idolization of the beauty of form and even of brute force.

On the other hand, there were those who went the opposite extreme. Those who negated and denied life and its pleasure. There were those who maintained that everything that is material is evil. Those people made a virtue of self-flagellation and celibacy, and manifested a deep-seated hatred of life.

The Torah is unalterably and adamantly opposed to both these views. Its bids man to look at **אָרֶץ** and **אֹתוֹ**, at heaven and earth at the same time. Both can and must be blended and harmonized in our lives. Judaism endeavoured to span the stream of life by building a bridge from the shore of **אָרֶץ** across to the bank of **אֹתוֹ**. This in fact was the new note that the Torah struck, the revolutionary doctrine to the world.

We actually live in two worlds. Sometimes we call these worlds body and spirit; sometimes we speak of them as of heaven and earth. Whatever it is, the Torah insists that we live in both these worlds at one and the same time, that we blend **אֹתוֹ** and **אָרֶץ** in our lives.

Biologists tell us that insects, especially ants, live only in a one-dimensional world. The ant sees only the straight line upon which it creeps, and it thinks there is nothing else besides it. It has no idea of the existence of height, depth or width. How many people are like that? How numerous are those who live in a one-dimensional world, who fail to see anything else but **אָרֶץ**.

The story is told of a man whose back was bent and who walked in a stooped position. A boyhood friend of his who had not seen him for many years was puzzled about his physical deformity. He remembered him as a strapping youth, straight and tall. He learned later the cause of the affliction. His friend had once found a gold coin in the street. This made him very happy. In his desire to find more and more money, he walked with his eyes fixed to the ground. He did manage to find a few more coins, but in the process of a lifetime of searching, his back was bent and his eyes were dimmed. What a price to pay for a few coins! What a pity it is to miss the beauties of the heavens above for the glitter of gold!

To prevent such tragedies, to make us greater than the ant, and to make us live in a multi-dimensional world, the Torah urges us to raise our heads heavenward and to see that which is unseen, to get a glimpse of the Divine. **אֱמֵן**.

Shelach Lecha: Touring vrs. Exploring (Barmitzvah - Paul)

The opening of this morning's Sidra tells us the story of the twelve spies whom Moses sent forth to spy out the land of Israel.

The twelve men were sent to spy out the land that Israel was to attack, and they were sent to investigate conditions in the Promised Land. וְרֵאיתֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ מֶה הוּא וְאֶת הָעָם הַיֹּשֵׁב עָלֶיהָ - “You shall see what [kind of] land it is, and the people who inhabit it”¹⁹⁶. They were charged with the responsibility of seeing the actual physical nature of the country itself, the type of people living there. הֲחֹזֵק הוּא הָרֶפֶה?¹⁹⁷ Were they strong or weak? הֲמְעַט הוּא אִם רַב?¹⁹⁸ Few or many? וְמֶה הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוּא יֹשֵׁב בָּהּ הַטּוֹבָה הֲרָעָה?¹⁹⁹ Was the land itself good or bad, capable of being worked or barren? Was it a land of possibilities or one that was weak or unyielding? We read that the men chosen for the commission were the heads of their respective tribes, accredited men of judgment and character upon whose considered opinion and reliance could be placed. But the expedition turned out to be a sad misfortune. After forty days, they returned with a “majority” report against the possibilities of conquest, a report full of exaggerated fears. They said, הֲאֵפֶס כִּי עַז הָעָם הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ וְהָעָרִים בְּצִרּוֹת גְּדֹלֹת, מְאֹד וְגַם יְלְדֵי הָעִנְקָה רְאִינוּ שָׁם. “The people that dwell in the land are fierce, and their cities are fortified and very great. And we saw the children of giants there. We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.”²⁰⁰ This was the report brought in by the majority- a report full of exaggerated fears. With cowardice and murmurings, the report is received by the people, and very tragic are the consequences of this lack of belief and confidence.

The Haftorah, on the other hand, tells us of the two men sent by Joshua on a similar mission to Jericho, who 38 years later after the death of Moses returned with an inspiring declaration, “The Lord has delivered unto our hands all the land,”²⁰¹ which thrilled the people with an assurance of victory.

What a striking contrast is provided by their mission, when compared with that of their forefathers! The contrast in the reports is perplexing, and the questions become even more perplexing when we study the two stories carefully.

We read of the many difficulties that the messengers of Joshua encountered. Secretly and quietly, they slipped out and unnoticed, they crossed the Jordan. Immediately they were involved in exciting and dangerous adventures. Betrayed to the King of Jericho they had to entrust their lives to a woman of low reputation. They had to be hidden in the flax, spread out on the roof to dry, and they had to escape down a rope, over the city walls. They had to hide in the mountains for three days while the hunt was on and then make their dangerous way back. And yet, when they came back, they proclaimed optimistically and joyously, “The Lord has delivered into our

¹⁹⁶ Bemidbar 13:18

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. v. 19

²⁰⁰ Ibid. v. 28

²⁰¹ Yehoshua 2:24

hands the whole land and all the inhabitants of Canaan are melted away before us!”
It’s easy they said!

Compare this with the Sidra where the spies of Moses travelled freely through the land, untouched and undetected., So much so that the Rabbis even tell us that God brought a plague upon the Canaanites so that they were occupied with burying their dead and that they had no opportunity of even noticing the presence of the spies and consequently they were able to enjoy the fruits of the **אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ**. And yet, they returned with so demoralizing and fearful a report. The question arises. Why should there be this difference between the spies of Moses and the spies of Joshua?

The answer lies in the difference of one word, a word which signifies the difference in perspective. In the story of Moses we find repeatedly the word **לְתוֹר**²⁰², and in the story of Joshua the word **לְחַפֵּר** is used.²⁰³

The word **לְתוֹר** describes the journey of a tourist; the word **לְחַפֵּר** denotes exploring. The look of a tourist is superficial, he only sees the surface, the look of an explorer is a searching one, investigating, digging into the bottom and hear of things. The men of Moses went **לְתוֹר**, and so they only beheld what their eyes saw. They saw the things that did not matter, and missed those which did. They judged a land by the physical stature of its inhabitants, and by the side of the fruit upon the trees. Outwardly they said it was fruitful and luxurious. But there were giants there and Israel could not hope to penetrate with any success. The men of Joshua, on the other hand, went **לְחַפֵּר** - to dig deeply into the hearts, minds and souls of the inhabitants, and they discovered that only outwardly do the Canaanites appear strong and unconquerable, but inwardly ²⁰⁴**נִמְגְּוִים** they were weak, melting away before us.

Haven’t we for a good example of this in our own days? How many times have we heard people who go on a short visit to Israel and come back spreading evil reports, telling us that the people of Israel are irreligious and criticizing the economic conditions! The reason for this is that they went to Israel **לְתוֹר** - for a holiday, just as if they were going on a holiday to France and Italy. And yet the people of the **יְשׁוּב** who live under such dangerous conditions, who have suffered and sacrificed their best in the marshes and battlefields, say “Truly the Lord has delivered into our hands all the Land,” - for they came **לְחַפֵּר**!!

The same thought can be extended to Jewish Education today. In spite of all the modern techniques and text books, in spite of all our efforts, yet never was there a denser ignorance prevailing among average groups of Jews on Jewish matters than

²⁰² Bemidbar 13:17

²⁰³ Yehoshua 2:2

²⁰⁴ See Yehoshua 2:9

in this age, in this country. Compare the schools of today with the Cheder, Bais Hamidrash or Yeshiva of yesterday. The Chadorim of yesterday were housed in gloomy rooms, lit by dim candles. The pupils studied from old torn chumashim and gemaras. They sat on hard benches, and they often spent the night upon these same benches with a tallis for a pillow. They suffered many privations. Nevertheless, these institutions and these conditions produced the great scholars of the past generations.

The child of today comes to Hebrew School **לְתוֹר**, on a tour, for a short visit until Bar Mitzvah, seeking only the superficial and enjoyable! The pupil of yesterday came to the “Cheder” **לְהִפָּר** - to explore all the precious, inexhaustible mines, and all the ethical, judicial and spiritual treasure houses of the Torah; to dig deeply into the ideals and dreams of Judaism and come up with an abundance of scholarship, a glow of spiritual realities, and a soul thrilling reverence before the sublime epitome of all thought.

My dear Paul! This is a proud day for you, for those who love you, and indeed for all the members of this congregation. Today you take your place as a full member of the House of Israel.

My advice to you on your Bar Mitzvah day is to continue your Hebrew Studies after your Bar Mitzvah. You must give plenty of time and devotion to the Jewish side of your development, to Jewish culture, to Jewish ideas, to Jewish knowledge, to remember the word **לְהִפָּר** - to dig deeply into Judaism.

You have roots in this Synagogue. Your older brother Robert was Bar Mitzvah'd here. Your father and mother are old members of the Synagogue, and in this sacred ark there's a beautiful Sefer Torah which your father presented to this Synagogue.

It's my hope that you will continue the 'Torah Tzivah' - the Torah Moses gave us which has become 'Morasha Kehillat Ya'akov' - the heritage of the congregation of Jacob. Thus, you will become a credit to yourself, a source of “nachas” to your parents and an inspiration to all Israel. **אמן**

Balak: Balak, Jewish History & the Kotel

A very interesting narrative has been read to us from this morning's portion of the Law - the story of Balak and Balaam.

We are told that Balak, King of Moab, invited the Gentile prophet and renounced magician Balaam, to curse the children of Israel who were encamped on the plains of Moab and of whom the Moabites were sorely afraid.

Yet a strange thing happened to Balam. While in his heart, he was ready to curse the Israelites, his lips by force uttered blessings.

From the field of Zophim, on the tops of Pisgah, a magnificent scene unveiled itself before the eyes of Balaam. The scene of the multitudes of a young and vigorous people, reposing in the wild plains of Moab; thousands of their tents surrounding the tabernacle, which rose in all its glory in their midst. His poetic nature was touched, and he could not help giving expression to his enthusiastic admiration. The foe became a friend, and in his ecstasy he was carried away by his imagination. While Balak had represented the people of Israel as the incarnation of all that was evil, Balaam, on the other hand, looked upon them as the embodiment of all that was noble and good. Standing at a vantage point from where he could gaze upon the whole people, he uttered those beautiful words, which now adorn the page of the Siddur: 'מה טובו אהליו יעקב משכנתיו ישראל בנחלים נטיו בגנת עלי נהר באהלים נטע ה' - "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; Your dwellings, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth As gardens by the river side."²⁰⁵ A picture of perfect happiness and following prosperity! "לא הביט און ביעקב ולא ראה עמל בישראל" "He beholds no iniquity in Jacob, nor does he see perverseness in Israel"²⁰⁶; "מה אקב לא" "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? How shall I defy whom God has not defied?"²⁰⁷; "כי מראש צרים אראנו ומגבעות אשורנו" "From the top of the rocks I see him. From the top of the hills I behold him"²⁰⁸; "הן עם לבדד ישכן ובגוים לא יתחשב" "Lo it's a people that dwell alone, And not counted among nations"²⁰⁹; "מי מנה עפר יעקב ומספר את רבע ישראל" "Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel?"²¹⁰; "תמת נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי" "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."²¹¹

To him, they were all godly people, free from wickedness, enjoying the special favour of God. They must therefore be a subject for admiration and regard.

One can visualize the utterly disappointed, furious, and impetuous Balak! After all, he had brought Balaam from afar to execute his carefully drawn plans against the Jews! He had the money to pay for the heathen prophets services, and the choice sites from which to curse the Israelites. Suddenly, God wrought havoc with all his plans.

²⁰⁵ Bemidbar 24:5-6

²⁰⁶ Bemidbar 23:21

²⁰⁷ Bemidbar 23:8

²⁰⁸ Bemidbar 23:9

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Bemidbar 23:10

²¹¹ Ibid.

Frustrated, and terribly disillusioned, he repeatedly cried to Balaam לִקְבֹּא אֵיבֵי לְקַחְתִּיךָ וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכַתְּ בָרֶךְ “I have summoned you to curse my enemies, and behold you have blessed them.”²¹²

Balaam’s reply reveals his utter helplessness in this situation. אֶת אֲשֶׁר יִשִּׂים ה' בְּפִי אֶתוֹ אֲשַׁמֵּר לְדַבֵּר “I can only speak that which God tells me to speak.”

We can imagine the feelings, we can just imagine the unusual scene of Balak, the mighty leader of Moab and Balaam, the most brilliant orator and prophet of heathendom, uniting in a determination to uproot the Jewish people. What chance did the children of Israel have against that powerful combination of prowess and cunning? But the Bible is quite clear and explicit in declaring that the Balak’s, and the Balaam’s, do not have the last word. God above will not relinquish His mastery, over the destinies of nations and men. And even though there may be times when we feel that the patterns of life seem to have gone astray, yet we must not lose faith in the fact that when we span a continent in an airplane, we are not nervous about our safety. We are not nervous because we have confidence in the pilot and his crew. We know that the airline companies would not gamble with a Viscount or Britannia, costing thousands of pounds and the lives of the passengers and crew. They simply couldn’t afford to risk a huge fortune and their own good name by trusting their plane to incompetent hands. When the flight is a bumpy and rough one, we don’t run to the pilot to tell him what to do. We are certain that he doesn’t need our advice.

The same thing applies when we go on a cruise or take a trip on a luxury liner like the Queen Mary. We have confidence in the captain of the ship. In a storm, we would not advise the captain how to steer the ship, and what orders to issue to the crew. We have faith that the captain on the bridge knows what to do.

So it is with the voyage of life. The Captain on the bridge knows his business well. When stormy waves toss the ship of mankind precariously to and fro, we ought not abandon hope. We must have faith that the world and humanity are not doomed. In such moments of danger it is our clear duty to do whatever we can for ourselves and for others, namely to keep our faith pure and our courage strong until the storm blows over and we may continue our journey.

It’s almost trite to speak about Hitler these days. But the following is an illustration of this morning’s theme. The Nazis built along the shores of the Rhine a “West Wall” which bristled with “pill boxes” and was surrounded by fortifications made of motor and steel. Extending for many miles in length and in depth were camouflaged large guns and other instruments of destruction. Our enemies pinned great hopes on that

²¹² Bemidbar 23:11

wall. They believed that it would help them to conquer the world and enslave man. For a time, it seemed as though the Nazi “West Wall” would rule the world.

Hitler failed, however, to take into consideration the “West Wall” of the Jewish people. I am of course, referring to the Kotel HaMa’aravi - the West Wall of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. A remnant of that Wall still exists. The Temple was twice destroyed by fires set by the enemies of Israel, but the “Kotel HaMa’aravi” survived. It is true that it consists of just of a few rows of old and moss-covered stones. It can neither offer protection to a city, nor even provide adequate shelter against the ravages of nature. But, for many centuries, heartbroken and heavy-laden Jews gathered there from all corners of the earth, to pray and pour out their souls unto God. They came there, by the hundreds and thousands to be inspired and consoled. At the sacred wall they were reminder of the deep faith of their forebears and their abiding devotion to the teachings and traditions of Israel. No wonder that it became our most sacred place, the symbol of our undying faith.

We can recall those bleak and dismal days when it seemed as though the old West Wall of Israel would be crushed and pulverized by the immense might of the Nazi West Wall. Those were crucial and heart-rending moments. Many fainthearted souls had given up hope. But the faithful demonstrated their faith that the Pilot up high is trustworthy; the Captain is still on the bridge. Yes! Indeed! What a great day it was, for the faithful, when they heard that the Nazi West Wall was first pierced and then pulverized. As of Balaam the same thing could have been said of Hitler וַתִּלְחַץ אֶת רַגְלֵ בַלְעָם אֶל הַקִּיר “And his foot was crushed against the wall.”²¹³!! The modest “Kotel HaMa’aravi” still stands, while its competitor and adversary went down in destruction.

Why did it end like that? Because God willed it so! The verse הִנֵּה זֶה עוֹמֵד אַחֲרֵי כְּתִלֵּנוּ “Behold he stands behind our wall”²¹⁴ our sages tell us, refers to the “Kotel HaMa’aravi.”²¹⁵

Balak: Balak’s past and present

A very interesting story has been read to us this morning in this week’s portion of the Law, the story of Balak and Balaam!

You will remember that the children of Israel crossed the red sea and left Egypt, and they spent many long and tedious days in the wilderness. And in this week’s Sidra we are told that, at long last, after many hardships and endurances, they come within

²¹³ Bemidbar 22:25

²¹⁴ Shir HaShirim 2:9

²¹⁵ Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabba 2

sight of the long-expected Promised Land, and they encamped in the plains of Moab, on the eastern banks of the Jordan.

Now the children of Israel had no hostile intentions against the land of Moab. Their goal was Canaan; their aim was Eretz Yisrael. Moreover, they were warned by God against trespassing upon the territory of their kinsmen. Yet, we learn that Moab was afraid of the people because they were many - וַיִּגַר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד כִּי רַב הוּא וַיִּקְּץ - וַיִּגַר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל²¹⁶ - and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. So they went and took counsel with the neighbouring Midianites as to the best means of checking the progress of the newly rising people who were likely to spoil the land “As the ox liketh up the grass of the field.”²¹⁷

The elders of Midian, however, were not able to offer any material help in crushing the power of the invader, and the king of Moab was compelled to resort to supernatural agencies to affect a victory over the imagined enemy. And he thought of a peculiar plan.

Not far from Moab there lived a man whose name was Balaam. The people believed that Balaam possessed magic power to do wonderful things. So Balak, the king of Moab, sent for Balaam and he told him. הִנֵּה עִם יִצְחָק מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה כָּסָה אֶת עֵין הָאָרֶץ - “Behold, there’s a people come out from Egypt, behold, they cover the face of the earth. Come, I pray thee, curse me this people, for they are too mighty for me, peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land.”²¹⁸

Balak believed that Balaam could call upon evil powers and bring misfortune no Israel. At first, Balaam didn’t want to go. But when Balak sent for him again and promised to make him rich, then he consented to go.

Balak took him to a hill overlooking the valley where the Israelites had pitched their tents. Balaam looked down into the valley of the wanderers, and thinking that here he saw Israel humbled, he would stamp them a shameful, homeless, bedraggled, people for all time to come. But no! Balaam is נִפְל, but he is וַיִּגְלוּ עֵינָיו.²¹⁹ His heart is sunk low, but his eyes are wide open. Thus it happened that instead of cursing, Balaam had to bless Israel and protect the glorious future which God had in store for the people of His choice.

וַיִּקְהוּ שָׂדֵה צְפִים, אֶל-רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה - From the field of Zophim, on the top of Pisgah²²⁰, a magnificent scene unveiled before the eyes of Balaam the scene of the multitudes

²¹⁶ Bemidbar 22:3

²¹⁷ Bemidbar 22:4

²¹⁸ Bemidbar 22:5-6

²¹⁹ Bemidbar 24:4

²²⁰ Bemidbar 23:14

of a young and vigorous people reposing in the wild plains of Moab. Thousands of their tents surrounding the tabernacle which rose in all its glory in their midst. His poetic nature was touched, and he could not help giving expression to his enthusiastic admiration. The foe became a friend and in his ecstasy was carried away by his imagination and said **מַה טּוֹב אֹהֶלְיָי יַעֲקֹב** “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob”, **מִשְׁכְּנֹתַיִךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל** “thy tabernacle, O Israel”²²¹. At close range it would appear that **עַם לְבַדָּד יִשְׁכֵּן** “It’s a people that shall dwell alone”²²² **וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב** “and shall not be reckoned among the nations”²²³. But that is sheer short sightedness. **מֵרֹאשׁ צִירִים** “View him from the rocky cliffs and from the mountaintops”²²⁴. Look back into his past and see whence he comes and why he lives this life, and you will find that **לֹא הָיָה בְּיַעֲקֹב וְלֹא רָאָה עִמָּל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל** “There, was not seen iniquity in Jacob nor perverseness in Israel.”²²⁵ **ה' אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ** - “The Lord God is with him”²²⁶. He has undertaken to live the good, clean, virtuous life. What appears to you a tent, is to him a palace, for a prince of God lives there. Yes, it’s a people that seems to live alone, but there is beauty in that solitude and glory in that privation.

To him, they were all a godly people, and he only saw a great and glorious future for Israel, as he says: **מַה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבְּהָ אֵל וּמָה אֲזַעֵם לֹא זָעַם יְהוָה. כִּי מֵרֹאשׁ צִירִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ וּמִגְּבֻעוֹת אֲשׁוּרָנּוּ: הֵן עַם לְבַדָּד יִשְׁכֵּן וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב. מִי מִנְהָ עֵפֶר יַעֲקֹב וּמִסֶּפֶר אֶת רֹבֵעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּמְתַּחַּשׂ מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵיתִי כְּמֹהוּ** - “How shall I curse, whom God has not cursed? How shall I defy, whom God hath not defied? From the top of the rocks I see him, from the top of the hills I behold him, ho, it’s a people that dwell alone and not counted among the nations... Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the stock of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”²²⁷

Here we have the two extreme views concerning Israel and his character! Balak had represented Israel as the incarnation of all that was evil Balak saw in the Jew a parasite, who devoured his surroundings, who exploited all sources for his own interests. He saw the Jew everywhere; and he would not hesitate to employ any means to overcome him, to drive him out of the land.

Balaam on the other hand, speaks of the Jew, as the embodiment of that was noble and good. He sees no iniquity in Jacob, and sees no perversity in Israel. He speaks of the remarkable unity of the Jews, and admires their tenacious clinging to their Law. But my cries he too does us, an injustice as a people because, we wish to be

²²¹ Bemidbar 24:5

²²² Bemidbar 23:9

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Bemidbar 23:21

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Bemidbar 23:8-10

treated as human beings, possessing merits as well as demerits, having strong, as well as weak points; We claim, that we neither have all the vices attributed to us by Balak, nor do we merit all the exaggerated praises of Balaam. The picture drawn by Balaam is not a true likeness of Israel; it is not as he is but as he should be. It is a state of perfection to which every noble soul must aspire to attain it's the ideal towards which we should all strive.

We ask of our neighbours in the words of our portion **גַּם קֹב לֹא תִקְרְבוּנוּ גַם בְּרַךְ לֹא תִבְרְכֵנוּ** - Neither curse us nor bless us.²²⁸ Regard us as human beings - like yourselves - subject to all the weaknesses and deficiencies of human nature, but also capable of manifesting all the good and nobility, which is inherent on every living soul!

Yes! My friends! Since those days of antiquity, the Balak and the Balams have followed our people throughout history.

How long ago was it since a modern Balak said that the Jews were not strong enough to overcome the strong and overwhelming Arab armies, and foretold that it would only be a matter of weeks before the children of Israel would be flung into the sea.

Two weeks ago, we heard another modern Balak - Colin Jordan - in Trafalgar Square, extolling the virtues and achievements of Adolf Hitler. The Jews, Jordan said, thought they had destroyed Hitler and his great idea, but the Jews were wrong. The great idea, he said, which Hitler gave to the world was gaining ground in Britain and more and more people were joining the National Socialist Movement in Great Britain to prove that Hitler was right.

On the same day, the archdeacon of London, the Venerable George Appleton, preaching a sermon on Christian Jewish brotherhood in St. Pauls Cathedral, told a congregation of some 500 worshippers, that while the new Nazi Movement was attacking Jews in Trafalgar Square, it was only right, he said, that somebody should be expressing not only toleration, but brotherhood with them. He strongly affirmed that now might be the moment for a bridge to be made, and he believed that the Christian contribution to that bridge, must be a reassessment of the Torah, as it's set out in the Pentateuch, with its magnificent emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the need to express God's laws in social behavior and in national life.

My friends! Since the day the Jewish people assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai, and pledged themselves to accept, the Law and its teachings since then we Jews have had to contend with Balak's and Balaam's. They have been called by many names in many ages. But what has enabled the Jew to withstand all the vicissitudes of 2,000 years of exile, all tortures, pogroms, and persecutions in every part of the globe, if not Torah?

²²⁸ Bemidbar 23:25

If Torah were not endowed with the quality of indestructibility – both in its content and in its rewards - could such an endurance have been possible? It's only by virtue of its life-giving qualities in the world of today that Torah has saved Jewry from annihilation and that Jewry can live. It therefore follows that the education of Jewish children in the Jewish heritage remains one of the highest values in the Jewish home. The child whose education is being starved today will be less able to shoulder the burden of responsibility for community and national welfare tomorrow.

How discouraging is it to see parents who are concerned with the various aspects of their children's training, development and even amusement, and yet are insensitive to the need of giving them their Jewish birthright. In an environment such as ours, where so many are swept along with the tide, this indifference is suicidal.

Let us remember that without education we cannot expect observance. Without learning we cannot expect loyalty. Unless we practice our faith ourselves, we can scarcely hope to influence our young in that direction. Let us determine to transmit our invaluable heritage to our children, and by our own example, inspire them to walk in the ways of our fathers.

If we shall be mindful of our sacred responsibility as Jews, we need have no fear for the future. As long as we keep transmitting our unique signal, the **שמע ישראל**, the satellite of Israel will not stop. As long as we continue to affirm, in word and deed, our faith in God, we shall remain in orbit. That is why I welcome this Youth Service here this morning in this Synagogue. You young people will inherit tomorrow the Judaism of today, but I am afraid that the legacy will be on the sorry side unless we do something about it today and not tomorrow.

I said it before, I say it now, and I will say it again and again, that the spiritual progress of a Synagogue is in direct proportion to the rate of increase in the number of children and young people who frequent it. If youth can be motivated to worship God in His House, the future of Judaism is assured.

This is why I have always felt that the youngsters must become integrated into the regular Synagogue service. It is vital that they develop first an understanding, then a taste, and finally a love for the services held in the Synagogue proper, amid a congregation of faithful adult worshippers. It's essential that they develop the habit of worship in the most normal fashion, as part and parcel of the congregation. And, above all, it is indispensable to the future survival of the Synagogue, that they conceive of it not merely as a place for "old people," but as a spiritual headquarters for all Jews of all ages. Of all the salutary and beneficial purposes I can think of for the Jewish development of the child, I can conceive of none more telling than the parents establishment of a spiritual communion, of a sense of religious affinity, with his child. And how can that communion and affinity be better established than

through the beautiful, the poetic, the magnificent sight of father and son, mother and daughter, worshipping together?

It was Moshe Rabbainu who, in response to Pharaoh's suggestion that it would be sufficient if the adults only went on to worship the Lord, thundered forth as follows: "We must go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters"²²⁹.

If we are to go at all, there's no other way. That is why I welcome this Youth Service here this morning, in this Synagogue.

Mattot: The Power and gift of speech

The Chafetz Chaim, Rabbi Israel Meyer HaCohen, lived in a very small city. Yet his fame was worldwide and he was in every sense of the word a great man. He was called lovingly by all the "Chafetz Chaim", because he made his life's philosophy not to speak evil or deceit about others.

In his great ethical and halachic treatise, he enumerates more than 30 positive and negative commandments in the Torah that concern themselves primarily with our faculty of speech. How utterly mischievous and false is the baseless charge by our religious antagonists that Judaism is more concerned with what goes into the mouth than that comes out! 'זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' - this above all else, is what the Almighty commanded: "Do not profane your power expression by falsehood, blasphemy, evil mongering, or vulgarity"²³⁰

This is the central theme, of our whole sidra this morning, ie. the holiness of the land, the sanctity of speech. The whole passage on Nedarim, is based upon the holiness of a man's word. Breaking a word, our sages indicate in the above quotation, is profaning it. To dishonour it is to desecrate it. Just as holiness and faith are related concepts, so does the value of a word depend upon faith. The Chafetz Chaim tries to point out that the very superiority of man over animal rests with the word. Only he who possesses the power of speech is capable of ideas.

The Jew, whose destiny it is to teach the world Torah, can do so only by communicating with others. And communication is chiefly accomplished through words. Prophecy itself is of little value if it's not verbalised. The word נביא derives from נב. Onkelos renders the verse²³¹ וְהָיָה הָאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה to והות באדם לרוח ממללא - "it (the breath of God) became in man a speaking spirit". A living soul must be a speaking soul. Man's words, as well as his soul issue from God. Both are holy, and both can be desecrated.

²²⁹ Shemot 10:9

²³⁰ See Rashi on Bemidbar 30:3

²³¹ Bereishit 2:7

Words are also instruments of power. Properly used, they can be a tremendous creative force. Improperly used, they can destroy the world.

בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם - God's creation of the universe was in the form of ten words.²³² In the hands of man too, words can be creative, as when he teaches the truth. They can be destructive as when he issues the volumes of propaganda which deafen both, our senses and sensitivities. Because power can corrupt, we must go out of our way to sanctify it – לא יעשנה חולין.

Small wonder, then, that the wise Psalmist gives his people this brief but sagacious counsel. “Guard your tongue from evil, your lips from speaking deceit”²³³. For many were the strifes, feuds, hatreds and even wars which came about because of the lips that did speak evil and those that did practice deceit.

Vaetchanan: Yetzer Tov & Yetzer Hara (Barmitzvah - Lionel)

“And you shall love the Eternal your God with all your heart”²³⁴, upon which we are taught: love Him with your two inclinations - the יצר הרע and the יצר טוב.²³⁵

My Dear Lionel! Today you become a very rich man. Not only did you receive all types of gifts from your relatives and friends, but God himself has bestowed upon you something very precious, though it is not visible. Do you know what it is? It is the יצר טוב - the good inclination. For our Rabbis say that until the age of thirteen, a Jew has only a יצר הרע - the evil inclination, and he is dominated by it. As a result, until the age of thirteen a young man is not responsible for his actions; he has no choice. But from today on, you are blessed with the יצר טוב. From today on, it is incumbent upon you to join forces with your יצר טוב and to follow its dictates. It will be for your benefit. It will guide you in the right direction towards the blessings of God.

From today on there will be a steady conflict between these two forces within you. It is stated: טוב ילד מסבן וחקם ממלך זקן וחסיל: - “Better is a poor and wise child, then an old and foolish king”²³⁶, and the Midrash Rabbah²³⁷ comments: טוב ילד מסבן וחקם, זה יצר טוב, ולמה נקרא שמו ילד, כי אין מזדוג לאדם אלא מבן שלש עשרה שנה ולמעלה - the wise ‘child’ is the יצר טוב which enters into the human being after the age of

²³² See Avot 5:1

²³³ Tehillim 34:14

²³⁴ Devarim 6:5

²³⁵ Brachot 54a

²³⁶ Kohelet 4:13

²³⁷ Kohelet Rabba 4:13

thirteen and teaches him wisely to follow the right path. The old king is the **יצר הרע** who accompanies the child from the day of his birth until his old age.”

These, then, are the two powers within us. The “old” **יצר הרע** with its primitive desires – lust and passion, greed for money, greed for power, these primitive desires would drag us down to the level of the beast. The other force, the **יצר טוב**, the “wise child,” is the Godliness in man which seeks the holiness of individual life and teaches man to raise himself above the mundane. The struggle between the good inclination and the evil inclination is the great struggle of truth against falsehood, of good against evil, of beauty against ugliness.

From today on it will be your sacred task to use all your energies, all your thoughts, and all your being, to overcome life’s temptations, to harken to the still voice of your **יצר טוב**, which will enable you to serve your creator with all your limbs, as it is written “**כָּל עֲצֻמוֹתַי תֹּאמַרְנָה ה' מִי כָמוֹךָ**” “All my being shall say: O Lord who is like thee?”²³⁸

And you will ask me my dear Lionel, what are the chances? Is it really possible to conquer the “old king?” The answer is definitely yes. For we find it in the Torah: **לִפְתַּח חַטָּאת רִיבֵץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁוִקְתּוּ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ** - “Sin crouches at the entrance and tp you is its longing; nevertheless you may rule over it”²³⁹, and Rashi remarks that “Sin” refers to the **יצר הרע** - the evil inclination, which enters into the human being at his arrival into this world and is continually longing and desiring to make you sin. But if you desire, you can gain victory over it.

So you see, Lionel, God has promised us that there is a chance to conquer the **יצר הרע**. What is needed is iron will, perseverance, and tenacity of purpose. Thus you will be able to channel the desires of the **יצר הרע** towards the service of God. By overpowering the sinful allurements of your **יצר הרע**, you will be able to serve God lovingly and passionately with both of your inclinations. Thus will you fulfil the Divine commandment as we recited it this morning - **וְאַהֲבַת אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ** - **בְּשֵׁנֵי יִצְרֶיךָ**, Love the Eternal God with all thine heart. Love Him with the two inclinations: the **יצר הרע** and **יצר טוב**.

Re'eh: Blessing and curse

Almost ever since men have been able to think and right from the beginning of time, men have reasoned, discussed and debated this problem of philosophy and religion.

What is man? Is man a free agent? Does he have the ability, does he have the power and capacity to order his own life and to control his actions? Or is he merely the tool

²³⁸ Tehillim 35:10

²³⁹ Bereishit 4:7

of powers greater than he, the unwilling pawn, who must follow the pattern which has been set before him.

This debate has, of course, never been completely settled and established. We are still arguing its finer points. We are still mustering, we are still, gathering evidence, now on one side and now on the other.

There are those who believe that man has no choice. To these people man is like a leaf, driven and tossed by the frivolous winds of chance. His birth is a biological accident, his life a mere lingering, and his death a dissolution into nothingness.

To this group, belong the Epicureans of a bygone age, the Mechanists and the pseudo-Scientists of our age, and the Fatalists of every age.

Naturally, for the group that holds such a view of life, there's no destiny for man. If there's nothing to cling to, then man cannot go forward, nor can he climb upward, and since he cannot stand still, then his destiny is to drop downward – downward into a bottomless abyss.

There's another group that believes that man might have been a perfect creature, his life might have remained untouched by sin. Eternal life might have been his destiny. But, because long long ago Adam and Eve gave way and yielded to temptation and violated Gods command, therefore all the children of men lost their destiny and they were doomed to pre-destiny, and from that time onwards, man is doomed to original sin and imbedded - as it were - in nature, he became predisposed to evil, to sin, and to ultimate death.

There's another form of predestination i.e. the theory of heredity and environment. This group says that man cannot be himself. He's incapable of choice for himself. He is what his ancestors predestined him to be. He behaves as his environment conditioned him to behave. He's not the master of his destiny, nor the captain of his soul.

Religion generally, and Judaism in particular, have always taken the attitude that man is a superior being with a freedom of choice, and Judaism is rooted in the doctrine of human responsibility, i.e. Freedom of the Will.

Free Will is granted to everyman! If he desires to incline towards the good way and be righteous, he has the power to do so; and if he desires to incline towards the unrighteous way and be a wicked man, he has the power to do so. According to Maimonides, this doctrine is a very important principle. Nay! It's the pillar of the Law and of the Commandments. For how else can we conceive, how else can we form a conception of good and evil, reward and punishment, if these are matters in which we have no say and over which we have no control?

In this morning's Sidra there's an interesting hint which can give us guidance. The very first verse is significant. רְאֵה אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה. "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing, and a curse!"²⁴⁰ The choice between good and evil lies in our own hands.

The Lord, our Creator, has endowed man with free will. Man has the ability to choose between the two ways, between good and evil. According to our teachers, there's a constant battle going on in life between the forces of good and those of evil. These two forces are not only outside of us; they reside within our very being. No honest person will deny this fact. There is, on the one hand, the evil impulse which stirs up the bad elements in our nature, causing us to perform deeds which bring sorrow and suffering to other people, and ultimately heap ruin upon ourselves. We refer to this impulse as the יצר הרע.

And on the other hand, there's the יצר הטוב, the force which prompts us to goodness. As the sages tell us יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום - Man's cravings and desires seek to dominate him, each day and every day.²⁴¹ ואלמלא הקדוש ברוך הוא - "And without the help of God, man would succumb to them."

רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַטּוֹב וְאֶת הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת הָרָע...וּבְחַרְתָּ בַחַיִּים - "See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil. Choose life"²⁴². The month of Elul, the last month of the old Jewish year, and at the same time, a month of preparation for the new year, reminds us that every Jew has free will, man is capable of choosing. He should therefore choose life, choose good, and choose the blessing. This is the advice of the Torah.

Shoftim: The Message of the Tallit (Barmitzvah - Leslie & Michael)

This morning both of you have become Bar Mitzvah. This morning both of you have been called upon to the Torah, and you proclaimed your thanks to the Almighty – אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ תוֹרָתוֹ – "who has given us the doctrine of truth & has planted everlasting life in our midst."

By pronouncing the ברכה, you have accepted the ideals, laws and precepts of the Jewish people. By pronouncing the blessing both of you have proclaimed your inclusion in the ranks of the ancient people of Israel who for many centuries have born the word of God and propagated it among all of the nations.

Today is a proud day for you and for those who love you. Today is an important day for you, because from now onwards you take your place as a full member of the House of Israel. Today you have been admitted to the oldest army in the world, to

²⁴⁰ Devarim 11:26

²⁴¹ Sukkah 52a

²⁴² Devarim 30:15, 19

the 'צבאות ה'. The soldiers of this army are bidden to fight for God, and every soldier is called ישראל which means “fighter for God”.

It is an army which has been struggling throughout the history of men. It is an army which has won countless victories, it has wrought terrible sacrifices, and today, it is still as strong and as young as when it was started.

So you, my dear Leslie & Michael, have become soldiers in that army, and I know that you want to be good & loyal soldiers. But what are the qualifications of a good soldier?

First, he must know his regulations. A soldier who does not know his regulations cannot know how to conduct himself as a soldier. He will not know when to march, when to stop, when to fight, when to rest.

But it's not enough for a soldier to know only his regulations. Even if a soldier knows the whole book of regulations by heart, that would not make him a good soldier. To be a good soldier he must live up to his regulations; he must practice what he is told to do, he must obey orders.

Now as soldiers of Israel you have been given a banner, an emblem, a strangely coloured garment which you are now wearing across your shoulders. I am referring to the Tallit.

I want you to look at this Tallit for a moment. Strange, isn't it? It won't keep you warm, it isn't very useful, and though it's pretty, there are certainly many articles of apparel far more beautiful than the Tallit. Yet to the Jew, the Tallit is more precious than the most precious of garments, and more closely guarded than the finest furs.

You are wearing a modern suit today. Your forefathers, thousands of years ago, wore tunics in Egypt, yet they used practically the same Tallit you are wearing now. This Tallit has never given way to any current fashion or style.

Now – why is this Tallit more precious than this most costly garment? The reason is very simple. You don't have to be a student of style to understand it. It is because the Tallit is valued not only for itself, but for what it stands for.

Did you ever see with what dignity a person wears a uniform or did you even notice with what attention people stand when the flag passes by? Well, the uniform may be just a suit, & the flag just a coloured cloth. Yet, when you see either one, you are reminded of the nation which it represents. You pay allegiance not only to the flag, but to the country for which it stands, and in doing so, the emblem and its wearer therefore become part and parcel; they become one and inseparable.

This morning we read in our portion of the law these words צְדָקָה תִּרְדּוּף לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה - “Justice, Justice shall you follow, that you may live”²⁴³.

I want you to remember these words, because the lesson which we read from your Bar Mitzvah Sidrah is one of those ethical gems which ornament and characterize the Book of Deuteronomy.

These words remind us what Judaism is. Ideologies may wither away like grass. Political principles valid yesterday may be considered dead today. But these words, “Justice, Justice shall you follow, that you may live” never changes. These words are the eternal answer to the problems of humanity. For these words, for these ideals our forefathers have endured terrible hardships, and millions of Jews in the past have laid down their lives. Now I want you to realise that all this is represented by that Tallit, and that the Tallit is now upon the back of each of you. The Tallit symbolizes Judaism, it symbolizes a way of life.

Therefore, my dear Bar Mitzvah boys! Take cognizances of this Tallit that now adorns you and wear it with honour. Let this be your uniform and your badge. Learn to know its meaning and to love it, and you will really be worthy of the blessing which its my pleasant duty to confer on you on this great & sacred day.

Ki Tetzei - Security and Insecurity (Barmitzvah - Michael)

In our daily vocabular, the words security and insecurity occupy a prominent place. They are symptoms of our time and its emotional problems. For decades the leaders of government and industry have been dealing with the problem. The individual aspires to a state of security “from the cradle to the grave”. Economic security and social security are terms which are frequently used. In our time they have become part of international discussions.

World leaders debate military security and international collective security. We live in an age where security has become the major concern of most individuals, groups and nations all over the world. And yet in spite of all this, nations have not always lived up to the terms of security agreements.

At this moment in our history, we have still not solved the problem of military, collective and international security. Nor have we approached a solution of the security problem of the individual.

In our time we have learned many lessons. The chief thing we have learned is that no man in this universe is entirely independent of his fellowman. We know today that there’s no such thing as complete independence. Every human being in this universe depends upon someone else. We may well speak of interdependence. Isolation in a political or even in a spiritual sense is non-existent. We may therefore

²⁴³ Devarim 16:20

well ask - what is the actual meaning of security? Do we attain it by military armament? By signing international pacts? By insuring the economic condition of the individual “from the cradle to the grave”?

With all our economic, political and military arrangements we find prominent persons plagued by doubt and insecurity. If wealth contributes to the assurance of the individual, why is there so much unhappiness among wealthy folk, and why are broken homes among the richer classes daily occurrences?

Undoubtedly, material factors contribute greatly to comfort and ease. But does it even assure inner security? It has become clear beyond doubt that no individual can attain the desired state by surrounding himself with an iron wall of protection, nor does any amount of gilt edge security or accumulation of the best properties achieve absolute security. The rearing of even higher fences, walls and hedges around exclusive private security represents a gigantic waste of raw material and human material.

May I convey by a story what I have in mind?

There was a man who thought hard labour succeeded in sowing, planting and developing a beautiful bed of flowers. Anxious to keep out the hungry rodents, he built a hedge around the flowers. He then contemplated his work with much delight. But before long doubt developed in his heart about the value of a mere hedge for the protection of his treasure, so he went and built a fence around the hedge, and now he thought he felt secure in his possession of the bed of flowers.

Before long his fears again robbed him of serenity, so he built a wall around the fence. The hedge had been grown with great care, the fence put up with complete thought of its purpose into the building of the wall went a great deal of concentrated skill and work. With this threefold precaution, the owner felt sure he had absolute security. Neither beast nor man could enter his precious plot. But one morning, when he went to enjoy his treasure he found the flowers dead. Overanxious for its outward protection, he had forgotten the most important thing; he had forgotten to use the watering can. He had neglected to supply the vital waters. Absolute security had brought him not life but death; not fulfilment but frustration.

This morning's Sedra contains a basic pronouncement concerning security. While it is common belief that spiritual and emotional security depends largely upon material security, it is the biblical concept that the material security of the individual depends largely upon his spiritual security.

This morning's portion of the Law relates the story of the sneak attack of Amalek upon Israel when the Israelites had just left Egypt and they were in no position to face an enemy. And the Sedra relates an amazing fact: “And it came when Moses

held up his hand that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed”²⁴⁴. Holding up of Moses’ hands turned the tide of battle!

The Rabbis comment by asking: Could the hands of Moses really cause victory if they were raised or defeat if they were lowered? How could the hands of Moses prove responsible for victory or defeat? The answer may serve as a powerful pronouncement on the subject of security.

They believed that the hands of Moses had no effect whatsoever upon the battle itself, but the lifting of his hands were of symbolic meaning to the Children of Israel.

Scripture teaches here “that when even Israel lifts his hands and eyes to God in Heaven, and puts its trust in Him, it will conquer its fears and doubts. But when Israel lets down its hand and puts no trust in God, it will lose its battles.

This is the basic concept of security that it’s not our own power and might that gives us security, but our dependence upon God which invests us with inner security through which we are able to withstand all temptation and outer and inner enemies.

My dear Michael! Today you have become a Barmitzvah. Barmitzvah is a day which is full of rejoicing and happiness for the whole community. Your family and relatives are happy because one of their members has reached a turning point in his life. Your parents are rejoicing because they have been privileged to witness years of sacrifice crowned with the Barmitzvah of their first child. Your teachers are happy because they see that their work has been crowned with success after having heard your recital of your portions. The congregation rejoices because we are all happy to see how our ranks are increased with young blood - youth who will appreciate the essence of our holy teachings. In addition to all this happiness, Barmitzvah is a great day in your life because it calls for serious accounts.

Your Barmitzvah - my dear Michael - takes place in the month of Ellul which happens to be the month before Tishrei with its solemn New Year and Day of Atonement. Special importance is ascribed to this month of Ellul. As you know, every day during this month, the shofar is sounded after every morning service. This is done in order to stir the people to repentance. It’s a warning that the Holy Days are rapidly approaching. It’s a reminder that soon, every Jew will stand in judgement before the great King of Kings on both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It’s a call to repentance. The shofar is sounded to awaken man from spiritual slumber and to bring the message of religion to his heart and mind.

On your Barmitzvah day, you too must take into account what you have done in the past and what you plan to do in the future, in order to live a life of happiness. I am stressing the word happiness because there are some Jews who do not realise that to

²⁴⁴ Shemot 17:11

be a good Jew one must be happy. They think that to be a good Jew, one must be sad or melancholy. But our sages tell us that the שכינה - the divine presence - does not abide with him who is unhappy. God wants the Jew, and especially the Jewish boy, to be jolly and full of the strength of happiness all his life.²⁴⁵

The phrase which I should like you to remember is שמחה של מצוה, which means 'the joy of the Mitzvah'.

A Jew ought to be happy when he fulfils a Mitzvah. Every Mitzvah that you fulfil makes you a finer boy. Every mitzvah that you fulfil makes you faster, stronger and happier, for there's nothing that makes Jewish parents happier and stronger than good Jewish children. There's nothing which makes them sadder than children who are disloyal to our Holy Faith.

The Hebrew word for children is Bonim which means 'builders'. Children build up what their parents have started to build. Every child adds something to what his father has done. For you, Michael, this should not be difficult. You have before you a splendid example of service to your people and to your Synagogue. Your father too has been a builder in our shul. He gives up a lot of his time to communal work. He is the Treasurer of the Rebuilding Fund, and Chairman of the Parents Association. In your father you have got a very good example of communal service and he couldn't have done all this without the generous support of your dear Mother.

My message to you on this, your Barmitzvah day, is if you want to live a life that will bring happiness to you and blessedness to your fellowmen, then live it in accordance with our Torah. You must give plenty of time and devotion to the Jewish side of your development, to Jewish culture, to Jewish ideas, to Jewish knowledge. And if you will do this your future will be secure and happy.

Ki Tavo: Appreciating what we have

The Jewish concept is that we must thank the Lord for the evil he visits upon us, God forbid, just as for the good. Thus, at the time of bereavement, when we would be prone to forget that fact, we make the blessing ברוך דיין האמת, and it is then that we recite the Kaddish which is a song of praise with the Almighty.

The Yam Shel Yehudah finds this idea echoed in the passage אָדָם כִּי יִקְרִיב מִמֶּם קֶרְבָּן - "When one of you bring a sacrifice as an offering to God"²⁴⁶, which implies that we must present offerings to God at all times: in adversity, as in prosperity. אֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֶּקֶר - "Prepare one sheep in the morning" he points out refers to the period of prosperity, and וְאֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם - "and the second

²⁴⁵ See Shabbat 30b

²⁴⁶ Vayikra 1:2

sheep in the afternoon” refers to the period of adversity. Similarly in the שמע, the ‘Shem’ refers to God as the compassionate father, and אלקים to Him as the righteous judge. In Judaism, the שם and אלוּקינו are one.

Today’s reading from the Torah tries also to convey to us the great moral lesson of man’s dependence upon - and indebtedness to - God for all his blessings. We read this morning of בכורים, of the bringing of the first fruits. As soon as the land produced its first fruit, every Jew was obliged to bring the בכורים - the first ripe fruits into the sanctuary of Jerusalem.

The Talmud describes in minute detail and in picturesque language how these fruited were gathered, packed, and carried on the shoulders of the pilgrims all the way to the city of Jerusalem, and how the dignitaries of the Holy City greeted their brethren with music and song and accompanied them to the Temple with great pomp and ceremony.

And yet, amidst this pageantry and rejoicing, the climax was reached when they would lay their baskets before the כהן and recited the chapter of אֲרָמִי אֲבִד אָבִי - “my ancestor was exiled to Aramaea”²⁴⁷ and described their hardships of the past when they were slaves in Egypt and how God delivered them from their suffering.

It’s rather strange that at a time of such great joy the Bible should require the Jew to recall his humble and lowly status as a slave in Egypt. What purpose could it serve to conjure up such unpleasant memories at an occasion set aside for rejoicing?

It seems that the Torah intended to impress upon our minds a very important moral attitude. As a rule, when things are going well with a person, he is inclined to take his blessings for granted. It is at such a time of שמחה when we are surrounded on all sides by material riches and good fortune that the Torah bids us to recite the chapter אֲרָמִי אֲבִד אָבִי, indicating something of his humble origins and those of his people, that we may not forget our indebtedness to the Almighty and our obligations to our fellowmen.

This morning I have a double duty to perform on behalf of my community. Firstly to extend our heartfelt condolences to the treasurer of our Ladies Guild Mrs. Wels on the death of her mother. She was indeed a true אשת חיל - our heartfelt sympathy goes out to the Wels our warden. Both have been through a very trying period during the last few months. May the coming New Year bring them good health and freedom from any further sorrow.

My second duty is indeed a very pleasant one, namely to extend to Dr. Manny Figov, the Chairman of our Education Committee and one of our regular Shabbat

²⁴⁷ Devarim 26:5

attenders, our warm and sincere Mazal Tov on his engagement to Miss Pamela Vennett, the daughter of a colleague of mine the Minister of Hammersmith Synagogue.

All of us here in this synagogue watched Manny grow up into a fine observant young Jew of whom we are all proud, because he managed to combine secular achievement with Jewish traditional observance, and I have personal pleasure in the knowledge that my pupil has chosen for his life-partner a girl from an exceptionally fine Jewish family whom I know very well and esteem very highly. I know the grandparents too. It is our fervent hope and prayer that the union of this young couple will bring joy & nachas to their families and indeed to **אמן. כלל ישראל**.

Ki Tavo: Bikkurim (Triple Bar Mitzvah)

You are indeed fortunate to become Bar Mitzvah on this great Sabbath, for in this mornings portion we read of the Bikkurim, the first fruits, which Jews had to bring into the Temple, as an expression of Thanksgiving to God, who gave life and the food necessary for life.

The opening paragraph of this weeks Sidra describes the Laws concerning the first fruits brought to the Holy Temple. **וְלָקַחְתָּ מֵרֵאשִׁית כָּל פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּבְיֵא מֵאֶרֶץ** - “you shall take the first of every fruit of the ground produced by the land that God your Lord is giving you”.²⁴⁸

The Mishna in Bikkurim describes in splendid detail the pomp and ceremony which accompanied this Mitzva. The first fruit to become ripe were gathered in special baskets which beautifully decorated, was brought to the Temple amidst song and dancing, our Rabbis tell us, that even the King of Israel, joined the band of Pilgrims, who came to the Holy City for this festive observance.

This offering of Bikkurim was an acknowledgement and demonstration, that the first fruits of the earth, the first blessing of our lips, the first offering of our possessions, belongs unto Him, from Whom all blessings flow. We need, in our days, more than ever before, a reaffirmation of this principle.

We read further that each Jew, when bringing the Bikkurim into the Temple, would say: **וְעַתָּה הֵינָה הֵבֵאתִי** - “Now I have brought the first fruits unto the Lord as He has commanded”²⁴⁹, and then he would bow down before God. And the Sifre interprets the three words of the verse **וְעַתָּה הֵבֵאתִי** means **מִיַּד** - now; **הֵינָה** means **שִׂמְחָה** - rejoicing; **הֵבֵאתִי** means **מִשְׁלִי** - I have brought what is mine, and does not belong to anyone else.

²⁴⁸ Devarim 26:2
²⁴⁹ Devarim 26:10

My dear boys! Those words which I have just mentioned, have important meaning for you, because today you bring your first Bikkurim, your first spiritual fruits in to the Temple. From this day on you will be expected to fulfill many obligations. You will find yourselves surrounded with more duties every day. How should you go about fulfilling your duties? **לשון מיד - ועתה** - “Now”, say the Rabbis.

Young boys usually meet their problems by saying tomorrow: Tomorrow I’ll learn my Hebrew. Tomorrow I’ll put on my Tefillin. Tomorrow I’ll go on an errand for my Mother. But tomorrow never comes. **ועתה** - “do it now!”, say the Rabbis.

A Bar Mitzvah must get rid of laziness. Don’t put off any duty until tomorrow. Do it now! **הנה** means **שמחה** happiness. Many boys only perform their duties because they are forced to do so. They go to Cheder. They attend Shul only because Mother makes them go. They attend school only because they have got to. Now, this is not a right way to do a duty! Do it with happiness. Be glad to know that education will give you power, education will make you a good member of society and will bring you joy in life. **הבאתי** means **משלי** – of mine. Until today, you have been living on the account of your parents. You have been proud of them. Now you must begin to show your own results. You must reach your own goals. You must begin to make them proud of you.

Now it does not often occur in a congregation that on one and the same Sabbath, three of our young congregants, in the act of becoming Bar Mitzvah, publicly testify that they belong to the faith in which their fathers were born, and that from this day henceforth they will strive in honouring that faith, to honour their God and their fellow-man, and to act with honour to themselves. Upon the supposition of the Wise Man that “the triple cord will not easily be broken”²⁵⁰, the fact that each one of you Bar Mitzvah boys will always remember that two besides you were this day admitted into the congregation of men, may perhaps exert a lasting influence upon each of you in the future and may in coming years act as an anchor to you.

I want you to remember the three Hebrew words which each Jew uttered when he brought his offering of the Bikkurim to the Temple, and take them as a guide throughout your lives i.e. **ועתה הנה הבאתי**. For if each one of you Bar Mitzvah boys will make up your mind to carry out your duties as a Jew **עתה** - immediately; **הנה** - happily, and **הבאתי** - achieve things for yourself, I am certain you will each become a source of joy to your parents, your friends and our entire people.

²⁵⁰ Kohelet 4:12

CHAGIM

Rosh Chodesh Ellul: Constructive Criticism

There are many people in general, and Jews in particular, who fall prey to compliments and flattery when it comes from strangers. But these same people become highly provoked at criticism meted out by their closest and most intimate friends. The Book of Deuteronomy which we began reading a few weeks ago has as its main theme the exhortations of Moses, the great lawgiver and friend of his people, as he takes leave of them before his death. It was not pleasant for the Israelites to hear the truth told to them about their misconduct, yet these chastising words were of far greater importance by way of teaching the proper way of living than all of the glorifying superlatives of the Heathen prophet who blessed with his tongue and hated with his heart.

A story is told about a group of Jews who were travelling in a train in Poland. Being in a strictly Jewish company they felt quite at ease, so they sprawled all over the seats of the compartment of the train and they carried on heated conversations.

A military dignitary suddenly entered the train and said, “Are there any Jews in this train?”. The passengers sat up at attention and a deadly silence fell over them. When one of them, a courageous fellow, stood up and said: “Yes, we are all Jews here!”. The uniformed officer said, “that’s fine. I have Yahrtzeit today and I was looking for a minyan.”

Upon learning that, the passengers again sprawled all over the train and resumed their dusty arguments and heated conversations. It’s the gregarious instinct in man that makes him feel completely relaxed in the presence of one who is part of the group and causes him to tighten up in the presence of an outsider. The old adage has it, “Familiarity breeds contempt”.

That is the reason why some synagogues lack decorum, because the attitude is that as long as we are among our own, it does not matter how we behave. But, let some non-Jew, even a minor official, enter a Synagogue and what a remarkable change overcomes the audience. There seems to be a tacit agreement that in the presence of total strangers, we must be on our best behaviour.

The sages reused this attitude among people, and that is the reason why they present us with the contrast of Moses and Balaam. In actual fact we know that it was Moses who loved his people and it was he who pleaded their cause whenever they were in trouble. It would have been quite simple for Moses to utter the words “How goodly

are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwellings, O Israel”²⁵¹, or “None hath beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath one seen perverseness in Israel”²⁵². But strangely enough it was Balaam who made these kind remarks. Conversely, it would have been typical if Balaam, the arch enemy of Israel, to say “And Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked”²⁵³ or “they are a nation, void of counsel, and there’s no understanding in them”²⁵⁴, yet it was Moses who used these scolding words. Herein lies the vast difference between constructive criticism and vain flattery.

The true friend is he who will not hesitate to point out a fault with the clear objective of correcting it. We must only beware of those who heap lavish praises upon us with the sole objective of disarming us and then in an off moment, stab us in the back. Such was the work of Balaam and such are the tactics of those who say “Some of my best friends are Jews.”

This morning we invoked the blessing for the new month of Ellul. As you know, special importance is ascribed to the month of Ellul. The whole month of Ellul is set aside for the purpose of putting us in the mood for penitence. It’s a warning that the Holy Days are rapidly approaching. It’s a reminder that soon, every Jew will stand in Judgement before the great King of Kings on both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It’s a call to repentance. It’s a call to be a **שומר תורה ומצוות**.

We are sadly in need of a discourse of reproof by a Moses, who can afford to scold us and to level charges at us, simply because it’s honest criticism calculated to bring constructive thinking and righteous action into our lives.

Ellul: Standing Guard (Barmitzvah - Stephen)

One of the word pictures for which the prophets of Israel are famous, depicts a scene of a city expecting an attack from an enemy. It was the custom in those days to place a watchman on a high tower with a commanding view of the land for miles around.

It’s in the darkness of night that the danger of attack is greatest. The people in fear walk backwards and forwards & regularly approach the watchman to ask **שֹׁמֵר מָה מְלִילָה** – Watchman, what of the night?²⁵⁵ Is there imminent danger of an attack from the enemy or is the threat of a foe no longer to be feared? The watchman gives an unusual answer - **אֶתֶּה בֹּקֵר**, “the morning comes”²⁵⁶ but **וְגַם לַיְלָה**, “and also the night”²⁵⁷.

²⁵¹ Bemidbar 24:5

²⁵² Bemidbar 23:21

²⁵³ Devarim 32:15

²⁵⁴ Devarim 32:28

²⁵⁵ Yeshayahu 21:11

²⁵⁶ Yeshayahu 21:12

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

The morning is coming and soon the danger will be over. But there's the night too that's still with us, and that will once more follow the day when the danger will again be great. Therefore, be on your guard. Do not relax your vigilance for a moment.

The month of Ellul reminds us that every Jew is a watchman, a guard, a custodian. Every Jew is entrusted with a Heritage, with the ideals of Godliness and humaneness, with faith and hope, with the future of Israel and humanity.

Thus, a pious Jew is called a **שומר תורה ומצוות**. He's not only observing and upholding the Torah; he's guarding and preserving it. Even more so, he's conserving it.

No matter how great and imposing our institutions may be, their fate and future are dependent upon its people who watch over it. So said the prophet Isaiah **על חומתיך** - "I have set a watchman on your walls, O Jerusalem"²⁵⁸. The walls are not sufficiently protective - we must have **שומרים**.

This may have alas been the thought of the Mishna teaching us, **העמידו תלמידים** - "raise up many disciples and make a fence for the Torah"²⁵⁹. The fence is ineffective unless we have the **שומר** who would be its guard.

Well known is the story of the Great Wall of China. An enormous amount of time and labour was spent in erecting this 1,400 mile-long wall to keep out destructive Nomadic tribes. Behind it, the Chinese felt safe. However, within a few years enemies entered China three times. Yet the wall was never once damaged! Not a stone was touched; its gates were never smashed. Each time the enemy has nothing more to do than bribe the guards and walk it!

My dear Stephen! This morning you have become a Barmitzvah. As a son of good deeds, you have accepted the ideals, laws and precepts of the Jewish people, and therefore you have been accepted into an old, old order. As a Barmitzvah boy, I suppose you want to know: What is a Jew?

A Jew is a **שומר**, a watchman, a guard. He has to keep guard and observe the **תורה** and **מצוות**, the Torah and its commandments. A Barmitzvah boy receives his Tallit and Tefillin. This is the uniform of a Jew as a **שומר**. Fulfil your duty as a guardian with conscientiousness, honesty and honour. It's my sincere hope and fervent prayer that you will be that type of Jew. Then you will bring honour to yourself, and your beloved parents, and blessedness to your people.

²⁵⁸ Yeshayahu 62:6

²⁵⁹ Avot 1:1

Ellul: Psalm 27

From the beginning of the month of Ellul until Shmini Atzeret we recite the beautiful 27th Psalm evening morning and evening. It contains some very sublime and encouraging thoughts and it is to one of these thoughts that I wish to draw your attention this morning.

At the conclusion of the Psalm we recite 'קוֹה אֶל ה' חֲזַק וַיֵּאֲמַץ לִבִּי וְקוֹה אֶל ה' - “Hope for the Lord, be strong and He will give your heart courage, and hope for the Lord.”²⁶⁰ But why do we repeat the expression of waiting at the beginning and the end of this verse? Isn't the second קוֹה superfluous? What is implied?

I believe that here we have, in a nutshell, one of the basic causes of sin and error. What is a sin? It is essentially a symptom of immaturity. The child has great difficulty in learning to give up an immediate pleasure for a later satisfaction. He is impatient, and unable to wait. The unfortunate thing is that many adults never learn this either. They are still like children in this regard. They have not learned the lesson of self-control. After all, what is one of the purposes of Torah and Mitzvot? Is it not to teach precisely this lesson of control over one's drives and passions? The truly religious person is one who is כּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יִצְרוֹ - “who conquers his impulse”²⁶¹ and who can exercise mastery over his physical self. If the sinner were to consider the consequences of his actions, he would hesitate and then turn in another direction. This is the significance of תְּשׁוּבָה.

When Hosea in the opening verse of this morning's Haftorah cries out, שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל - “Return, O Israel”²⁶², he meant turning in another direction as a result of mature and contrite reflection.

What can make a person exercise self-control and learn to wait? It's the faith and optimism that it will be worthwhile to wait, and only he who has the confidence in the Almighty, and the understanding that there is reason and value in waiting and self-mastery, will be willing and able to do so.

Therefore, we twice repeat the expression of קוֹה. The first implies hope and optimism, courage and spiritual strength, while the second implies the ability to actually wait as a consequence of the first.

A Chassidic Rebbe once asked a disciple to explain the meaning of the verse: בְּרָחֹק מִמְּעַרְבֵי הָרְחִיק מִמְּנוֹ אֶת פְּשָׁעֵינוּ - “As far as East is from West, so has He made

²⁶⁰ Tehillim 27:14

²⁶¹ Avot 4:1

²⁶² Hoshea 14:2

our sins distant from us”²⁶³. So the Rebbe asked his talmid “How far is East from West”?

“Why - the whole world separates East from West!” answered his talmid.

“No”, said the Rebbe, “When you face West and you wish to face East, all you have to do is turn around and you will be facing East”. In other words, “What we need is a change in direction”.

To this ideal and way of life let us dedicate ourselves and may God give us strength to persevere. **אמן**.

Rosh Hashanah: Is giving up ever an option? (1967)

Two interesting traditions have come down to us from the Rabbis concerning the festival of Rosh Hashanah. In the first place we are told that Rosh Hashanah marks the birth - the creation of the first man and the first woman upon this universe. “It was on Rosh Hashanah, in the first hour of that day, that the thought came to God to create Adam, the first human being”²⁶⁴. We celebrate today, according with this tradition, the birthday not of the father of the Jewish people alone, but of the father of all humanity.

In the second tradition we are told that a very heated debate took place among the angels on high concerning the crowning achievement of all creation - the making of man. **מהן אומרים יברא ומהן אומרים אל יברא** - Some said that man deserved to be created. And some maintained he shall not be created.²⁶⁵ For two and a half years - we are told - they were discussing, disputing and analyzing man’s value on earth. Perhaps it would have been better for man never to have created? There’s so much evil and wrong doing, so much temptation and failure, so much frustration and agony in life. Others maintained that life is essentially worthwhile, meaningful, purposeful and triumphant - **חסד אומרת יברא** - the attribute of mercy and lovingkindness said man should be created, for there’s some good in every human being. **אמת אומרת אל יברא** - but absolute truth objected and said **שכולו שקרים** - man should not be created because he is deceitful and lying, man is dishonest, a cheat and fraud.

מה עשה הקב"ה? נטל את האמת והשליכו ארצה - What did the Almighty do? He cast truth to the ground! He rejected the **אמת** completely, and while confusion reigned, He created man and said ²⁶⁶ **נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם** - Behold man is already here, he is here to stay.

²⁶³ Tehillim 103:12

²⁶⁴ See Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 23:1

²⁶⁵ Based on Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 8:5

²⁶⁶ Bereishit 1:26

When I first read this legend I was baffled and amazed that God - whose stamp is truth²⁶⁷ - should cast truth to the ground. That the Almighty, who is the source of truth, should reject אמת in so brutal a fashion?! After all, wasn't אמת speaking the truth when he rose and said אל יברא, do not create man, because he's full of שקרים, that man is capable of lying, cheating and acting deceitfully with his neighbour? Why then did God resent so strongly the opinion expressed by אמת?

But my friends, as Jews and citizens of the world, we find here a great and timely message. A truth - be it ever so honest and accurate - but whose logical conclusion is אל יברא, don't do, don't fashion, don't create, must be rejected. A truth - however rational - a truth which rejects and negates the idea of building and creating, must be cast to the ground.

It is more than 20 years since the United Nations was created. There are many who say that the United Nations have proved that they are no more than a debating club and that every country in the world looks after its own interest first in the political, as well as in the economical field. They say that the United Nations is a centre of בולו שקרים, it represents political duplicity and is therefore ineffective and meaningless.

Look at the world situation today, they say! Look at Vietnam; South Africa; Aden; Rhodesia, the Middle East! Unfortunately, the critics are right - but what is the alternative?

אל יברא - Drop the United Nations and give up the only hope for peace? Such a truth? Never! A truth that leads to the defeat of the last hope of mankind must be rejected.

Fifty years ago, Jews in Eastern Europe said that in England and America you can't be a good Jew. In those countries it will not be possible to create an environment and an atmosphere that is favourable to Jewish knowledge and learning. Jews are apathetic and indifferent! Shuls, Talmud Torahs, Jewish Day Schools - who will attend them?! There was a great deal of truth in what they said. But today, where are the great Synagogues, ישיבות and Talmud Torahs of Eastern Europe? Crushed in the Holocaust of Hitler's crematoria. And today, Shuls, ישיבות, Talmud Torahs, and Jewish Day Schools are flourishing in the very countries once called טריף, and all because there were men of vision and courage who challengingly asked whether the policy should be אל יברא and to sit idly by and watch our children die a spiritual death. Not at all! They respected that kind of thinking, and they created Shuls, Talmud Torahs and Jewish Day Schools.

²⁶⁷ See Shabbat 55a

How many baalebatim say to me from time to time “Rev, why should we tire ourselves out if the community just doesn’t care? Why should we spend our time, and our wealth, when everyone is so callous and indifferent to אמת? Why should we bother to try and build a new Shul? After all, the Shul is only crowded three times a year? Some of our baalebatim have died, or they have moved out of the area, and in any case Willesden is becoming a diminishing area, from the Jewish point of view!”

So why bother? But the fact remains that when we take a חשבון הנפש - as we should do on Rosh Hashanah - the fact is that we have a good strong membership. We have Hebrew classes, we have a strong Friendship Club, and we are reluctant to accept new members for it because of lack of space. We have a very nice youth here and lovely boys and girls. Yet we have not been able to do much for them because, here again, we lack accommodation. We have an active Parents Association, a wonderful Ladies Guild. A strong J.P.A and J.N.F commission, an energetic Wizo group. Now, under these circumstances, should we listen to false newspaper reports and to say אל יברא - close up the Shul, close up the Talmud Torah? That is spiritual suicide! Never!!

When I invite men and women to join our Shul, or the Ladies Guild, or send their children to our Hebrew classes and attend the regular services and the Talmud shiur, some say to me, “Rev, we are friends, we can be frank and honest with you. The truth of the matter is that we are not religious people, so why bother?”. But I always come back at them and say to them “What is your alternative? To be total strangers to Jewish life? Never! Never!”.

My friends, I have had the honour and privilege to serve as your spiritual leader for a number of years, and I sometimes make a חשבון הנפש and ask myself what have I accomplished in these years in terms of influencing people to become faithful and loyal Jews. How many people have I induced to have a kosher home? How many people have I inspired with my sermons to become closer to Israel and to attach themselves to everything that we hold dear and sacred to our lives? But then I say to myself what is the alternative? Not to teach? Not to preach? Not to plead? Not to beg? Not to demand? אל יברא? No! that surely is not the solution!

People say that the situation in Israel is impossible. The Arabs will never make peace with Israel. She is a friendless state, surrounded on all sides by mortal foes who are determined to destroy it. We cannot depend on the West because it is כולו שקרים, and certainly we cannot look to the East for help. אמת - all this is true. But what is the alternative? אל יברא? Give up Israel? Stop giving to the J.P.A? God forbid! Such אמת must be cast to the ground and stepped upon. אמת מארץ תצמח²⁶⁸ - a truth

²⁶⁸ Tehillim 85:12

which can grow and last on a nourishing foundation is the kind of trust to be followed.

My friends! Our generation has been given that rare privilege to witness the **אִמְתּוֹת מֵאָרֶץ תִּצְמַח**. We have just lived through the most momentous year in Israel's history. And as we stand at the threshold of a New Year, our thoughts wander back to last year's Rosh Hashanah. Who would Have dreamt then what exciting and historic events this year was to bring for the Jewish people? Who would have dared to envisage the historic changes that were brought about in Israel? After expressions of hatred and threats of war and annihilation on the part of the Arab States had reached a crescendo, aiming to destroy Israel and to possess her land, Israel found herself compelled to fight the entire Arab world and succeeded in gaining a swift and complete victory. Our heroic brothers and sisters of the Israel Defense Forces fought like lions, outstanding their dedication, excelling in wisdom and courage, they crushed the might of the armies of our enemies on all fronts. The year 5727 was undoubtedly for the Jewish people one of the most historic and momentous year in our millennial history. Almost every Jew today admits that we have experienced an epoch almost as great as **יציאת מצרים** and all sections of the Jewish people agree that we have witnessed miracles taking place in front out our own eyes. The Holy City of Jerusalem together with the Holy Sites in the land of our fathers was returned to us, and after so many years of agony and suffering and utter hopelessness, we are today again free to worship at the Western Wall, at Rachel's Tomb, and in Hebron at the graves of the forefathers of the Jewish people.

In spite of all the still prevailing threatening clouds on the political horizon, the people of Israel and all Jews in the Diaspora offer their humble thanks to the Almighty, coupled with deep prayers that the new year may at last bring peace to our tormented people and our land as well as in the Diaspora, where so many of our brethren still languish under the yolk of the oppressor and long for their return to Zion and Jerusalem, and may God inscribe you all in the Book of Life, a life that will spell real happiness to us, glory to Israel and blessedness to humanity. **אמן**

Rosh Hashanah: A harmonious and integrated Jewish life

Passing Kilburn Cinema on Monday I saw in big letters, the title of the film that is being shown there this week, namely, "Around the world in Eighty days" and I started to think.

When Jules Verne, wrote his book of that title in 1873, it seemed fantastic. The idea had come, but it was too remote to be realised. Yet, to take 80 days now to go round the world, would be very slow indeed. It can now be done in considerably less than 80 hours. And satellites go round the world in little more than 80 minutes.

But as I thought of the title. It struck me. It is one thing, to go round the world but quite another thing, to go into the world.

There are many people who are fortunate enough, to go around the world or some part of it: Often they are tourists, they go to see the sights. They can choose where they will go and what they will see. They can visit great cities and see the wonders of the world, and if they wish to, they can turn a blind eye, to the slums, in some of those cities and the squalors of the world. Holiday makers, who are rich enough, can go to the lovely islands of the West Indies, and perhaps be quite unaware of the appalling conditions of poverty, in which thousand of the inhabitants there, live. Big game hunters, can enjoy themselves in tropical Africa, without a thought of the sensitivities or longings of the Africans. Going around the world can be a very superficial business.

Long ago, Judaism realised this big distinction. Examine the prayer service read on this holy day, and you will find it imbued with the spirit of human fellowship and universal brotherhood. We pray for the whole human family in the following words: "Our God and God of our fathers, reign in glory over the whole universe, and shine forth ...upon all the inhabitants of the world."

And we also include in the service the fervent prayer **צאנו מעביר** **בבקר רועה עדרו מעביר צאנו** - "Like a shepherd pasturing his flock, making sheep pass under his staff, so shall You cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living".

On this sacred day of Judgement, our sages teach us, nothing is hidden from Him; every individual is counted, and we are all entrants on the earthly stage of life and are judged by the King seated upon a high and lofty throne.

Indeed, the very shape of the Shofar, which we are about to blow, suggests this universalistic outlook of our faith. Narrow at the mouthpiece, and wide at the opposite end, it is symbolic of our national consciousness, as contrasted with the wider end, which represents the cosmopolitan outlook. The sound of the Shofar is thus a clarion call to rally behind the battlecry **ויעשו כולם אגודה אחת לעשות רצונך** - "And all the peoples will form one band to do the divine will, with a perfect heart."

On this Rosh Hashanah, therefore, let us look together: first into the world, and then into ourselves.

The world in which we live today, has certainly an abundance of things. In a material sense we were never so prosperous. The wisdom of science has provided us with gadgets that previous generations never dreamed of. We have luxuries and pleasures

that not even Solomon or the fabulous Queen of Sheba considered within the realm of possibility. Why then, are the prophets of doom so vociferous, and why is the world engulfed in a heavy blanket of gloom?

The tense situation in Africa is one which springs first to most minds when we consider the world situation. The Council of the United Nations is meeting at a time, when the situation, according to Anthony Eden, is more tense than at any time since 1939. The conflict and 'Cold War', as we call it between East and West, grows even stronger. Mistrust and fear form the basis of negotiation instead of peaceful co-operation.

It is only right to ask, why in a world of plenty, should this be so?

I am neither a diplomat nor a financier. I may not be able to grasp or explain the technical reasons for the breakdown of the Summit Conference and of our civilization. And, yet, may I not offer an analysis found in our ancient Rabbinic literature which may make clear what is happening before our eyes? In a remarkable statement, an ancient Rabbi tells us, If one should say to you, that the peoples of the world possess חכמה-wisdom, believe him. But if one should say to you, that they possess Torah, believe him not.²⁶⁹ This cryptic sentence contains an analysis that goes to the very root of the evils that have come down upon the world. The world is experiencing a clash between חכמה and Torah, and its future is dependent upon the outcome of this struggle. What we are witnessing today is the final round in the clash between two fundamental outlooks upon life. What we are witnessing today is a clash between two weltanschauung; a clash between חכמה and Torah.

Both words, in the original Hebrew, mean wisdom. Yet, there's a tremendous difference between the two. חכמה is the wisdom of the mind; the wisdom that deals with things. It is the wisdom that is responsible for invention, discovery – all material progress. The world has this wisdom in abundance, and this age is the symbol of it. This is the era in which חכמה reigns supreme. The human mind, is overwhelmed by the remarkable progress achieved in the realm of חכמה.

Torah, however, is something else something greater. It is the wisdom of the heart, it is the wisdom that deals with human life, that treats of ethical and spiritual human relationship.

For instance, launching a rocket to the moon is חכמה, launching a campaign to relieve hunger and want is Torah. Using all the modern methods to produce more food is חכמה; distributing this food, to the hungry undeveloped areas of the world is Torah. The trouble with the world is that it has enthroned חכמה, that it has believed that civilization can be built upon a mechanistic theory alone. More

²⁶⁹ Midrash Eichah Rabbah 2:17

mechanics, more inventions, more mass production, more gadgets and things, that is the solution, we are told, that will bring more gold into our pockets and gold means happiness. Torah on the other hand, has been dethroned, we have excluded Torah from the council of nations and the hearts of men. What we are witnessing now is the rebellion of the human soul, against the enthronement of חכמה It's the cry of humanity for תורה - for a new adjustment of our social order!!

Now my friends! I took as my text this morning "Around the world in 80 days." Let us at supersonic speed go around our little cosmos, and let us turn to ourselves.

We live in an age of specialisation. Ours is an age of specialists. As a wit once said. "We learn more and more about less and less." Now you may ask, but what has this to do with us? A great deal! Life for each of us, has become increasingly confused and complicated! Years ago, if you wanted to enlarge your home, for instance, what did you do? You got in touch with a builder. In those days, a builder knew enough about plumbing, electricity, carpentry, plastering and painting, to do the job! For the householder, it was comparatively simple, as long as he had the money! Today, if you want to add a room to your home, and do it properly, it's almost a career. First you engage an architect to draw up plans, then yet submit these plans to the council, for their approval, and then when you have their approval you must consult a leading engineer, a plumbing contractor, an electrician, a master carpenter, an outdoor decorator, and an indoor decorator. You, the owner, must coordinate this body of technicians and specialists, and, provided, of course, none of these, call a strike, the job will be done well.

Let me give you, an even more personal and intimate example. Years ago, if there was something wrong with you physically, you knew where to go and what to do. If you had a toothache you went to the dentist: If you had a pain anywhere else, you went to your own Doctor.

Today, if you want a physical examination, if you want a complete checkup, you start with a doctor called a general practitioner. Then follows visit, to a constellation of specialists, a heart specialist, an ear nose and throat specialist, a diagnostician a neurologist; and if you really want to know what's the matter with you, you end up with a psychiatrist.

Now! Please don't misunderstand me. Thank God that medical research has advanced so far, that we have developed these specialists. Medicine today, is saving millions of lives that would have been doomed fifty years ago. You may ask, what then is my point? We have so partitioned, fragmented and specialised man, that we are losing sight of the total person the complete and integrated life.

I wish you could read Robert Lynds perceptive book “Knowledge for What”? or some of the essays of Eric Fromm and others. They brilliantly describe the acute conflict between specialization and integration in our culture.

Assuming this is true, what has it to do with us Jews and Rosh Hashanah? It’s relevant indeed. You see, we - in our Jewish thinking and practice - reflect the very tendency and pattern I have just portrayed. We are leading splintered, fragmented, dissected Jewish lives.

There was a time when a Jew lived a balanced and harmonious Jewish life. He combined the trilogy of essential ingredients: Torah, study and learning; Avodah, piety, and observance; and Gemilut Chasadim, charity. He didn’t limit his Jewish loyalties and commitment to any single dimension of Judaism - however appealing and attractive a particular facet of Judaism appeared to him. When he went to the Synagogue – and he went at least once a week - it was not only to pray to God. He knew that there in the Synagogue he would be given the opportunity to perform the מצוה of צדקה, to pledge a gift for the support of the Synagogue, the poor and sick, Eretz Yisrael, and for the maintenance of Torah institutions. Not only prayer and charity, but study of the Torah was pursued during his visits to the Synagogue. He listened to the Torah reading, heard the Ministers message, and refreshed his soul with spiritual morsels from our sacred lore.

And when the Jew returned home, he carried this formula with him. He boasted with the Seer בֵּיתִי בֵּית תְּפִלָּה - “My home is a sanctuary of prayer,”²⁷⁰ for he actually davened in his home mornings and evenings, he recited grace after meals, and offered prayers before retiring. Charity too, was practiced in the home, through an array of pushkas, charity notes, which lined the cupboard, even in the poorest of homes. We Jews, lived integrated, harmonious, and consistent Jewish lives. As the Psalmist exclaimed כָּל עַצְמוֹתַי תִּאֲמַרְנָה - “all my limbs joined in glorifying God.”²⁷¹ To live total Jewish lives and to achieve harmonious Jewish personalities, is the supreme goal of the Torah.

But unfortunately, we today have drifted into the practice of fragmentizing and partitioning Judaism into segments and pieces, and we have become “men of parts” spiritual specialists or rather social specialists. There are the צקדה specialists - the members who believe that by giving money they are discharging their full duty towards Judaism. They seem to believe, that if they support a synagogue they do not have to pray, if they contribute to worthy causes, they are not obligated to observe מצוות. They have an idea that they can buy their way into עולם הבא.

²⁷⁰ Yeshayahu 56:7

²⁷¹ Tehillim 35:10

Then there are **עבודה** specialists, those who feel that all they need to do is to personally observe the tenets of Judaism: the Sabbath, Kashrut, davening, and the rest. To help others to see the light, to support institutions of learning, Synagogues, Zionism – “that, no! - that is for those who are not devout and pious. My task is to see, that I and my family, receive an adequate Jewish Education and lead a fully Jewish life.”

There are also Zionist specialists, whose total commitment to Judaism is wrapped up in the magic word – Zionism. You can ignore everything else in Judaism, you can ignore every other worthy cause, Synagogue, Talmud Torah, Shabbat, Yom Tov, everything else is expendable except Zionism.

Then there are Jewish defense specialists. They are the champions of Jewish defense against our enemies. Their highest goal is to teach the Goy about Jews and Judaism. If only we can teach the Goy, the truth about Jews, about our faith, the cure will have been found. The fact, that Jewish children are denied a Jewish education, the fact that our sons and daughters are permitted to become ignoramuses and illiterates, Jewishly speaking – this does not concern them, if only the Goyim know about us.

There are also other specialists. A few months ago, a prominent Jew told me that if everything else in Jewish life disappeared God forbid, so long as Jews observed the Seder, Judaism would survive. To him the Seder is the most glamorous exciting and dramatic ceremony in Judaism. I did not manage to ask him whether it was the Hagadah or the four cups of wine, or the kneidlech, that so appealed to him.

My friends, everything in Jewish life is sacred and every Jew is precious. We love all Jews whether they do little or much, whether they embrace everything, or observe little. All Jews are part of **כלל ישראל**. But let us remember that Judaism is not a formula for specific days of the year, but a specific formula for all the days of the year; let us remember that Judaism is not a program for special aspects of life, but a special program for all aspects of life.

Let us return to a harmonious and integrated Jewish life, which combines all the edifying and ennobling facets of Torah Judaism.

Almighty Father, we beseech thee on this solemn occasion, to bestow upon us and upon all thy children, the gift of life and health, a year of sustenance and contentment, free from shame and reproach, a year in which all thy children walk in the way of the upright before thee.

May it be thy will, to renew unto us, this coming year, for good and for blessing, and may the year to come bring much spiritual and material joy to us all. **אמן**.

Rosh Hashanah: Kemach & Torah

The assigned reading in the Torah for the first day of Rosh Hashanah portrays a most dramatic and gripping scene. It describes the tragic experiences of Hagar and her only son, Ishmael, lost in the desert.

When they left the home of Abraham, Hagar took along a small flask of water. The real trouble began **וַיִּכְלוּ הַמַּיִם מִן הַחֶמֶת** - when the water was finally consumed.²⁷² It was then that her condition became desperate. Think of her plight! There she was, lost amidst the seemingly endless stretches of burning sand, with no shelter from the blazing sun, and not a drop of water to wet the parched lips of her and her only child. The woman could somehow endure her own pangs of thirst, but she simply could not stand by and watch the dreadful torment of her boy. So, in utter desperation, she placed Ishmael **תַּחַת אֶחָד הַשִּׁיחִים** - under one of the dried-up shrubs **וַתֵּשֶׁב מִנֶּגֶד וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת קֶלְהָ וַתִּבְרֶךְ** - And she sat in the distance and wept. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, and asked her **מַה לָּךְ הָגָר** - Hagar why are you crying?²⁷³

This question has always intrigued me. Surely the angel must have known why Hagar was crying. One glance was sufficient to note the tragedy that was overtaking Hagar and her boy. What would any other mother do in similar circumstances?

I have seen mothers breaking down when relatively minor mishaps had overtaken their children. I have seen mothers breaking down even after an appendix operation, or the removal of infected tonsils from the throats of their children. Certainly, in this instance, when her only child was on the verge of death, it was quite normal for Hagar to give vent to weeping and wailing. Why then did the angel ask **מַה לָּךְ הָגָר** - “Hagar what are you crying for”? She was crying because of her **צָרוֹת**!

I would therefore like to give a more literal interpretation to the words of the angel. The angel exclaimed: “What is the matter with you Hagar?! Is this the proper time for crying and self-pity? You can see for yourself that your weeping and wailing are accomplishing absolutely nothing. They will neither still the thirst of your child, nor let you out of the desert. Do not sit idly by while your boy is in the throes of misery and in the agony of death. Arise! Get up and search for water! Turnover every rock in sight! Pull up every dried up shrub! And then, if you still cannot find water, dig deep into the sands of the desert, with your bare hands, and perhaps you might uncover a hidden spring!” - **קוּמִי שְׂאִי אֶת הַנֶּעַר וְהַחֲזִיקִי אֹת יָדְךָ בּוֹ** - “Arise and pick up your child. Comfort him and fight with every ounce of your strength for his survival. That is what you ought to do at this very moment, instead of sitting and crying, doing nothing to help him or yourself.”

²⁷² Bereishit 21:15

²⁷³ Bereishit 21:15-17

Fortunately, this story has a happy ending. Stirred by the sharp rebuke of the angel, Hagar resolved to heed his advice. She rose and she began a desperate search for water, and **וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרָא בְּאֵר מַיִם** - “She opened her eyes and she saw a well of living waters.”²⁷⁴ She ran and gave water to her child and quenched her own thirst, and thus both were saved.

Now the text is quite explicit in stating that there was no special creation of a new well of water to satisfy the needs of Hagar and her son. It was not a miraculous well that was created for her sake. The well was there all the time - Hagar simply didn't see it. She was blind! She was blinded by despair!

My friends! Has not this touching story of Hagar a special bearing on our lives today? I feel that this text has a special application to the plight of all of us. We mortals, all of us, are similarly afflicted. We too are blind to the opportunities that are near us, and we strive after the unattainable. Day after day we hear of people who emigrate to other countries, and after years of hard work and suffering they return home and start on a career which they could have taken up at first, and make a success of it. How many people lose their heads in trouble? How many people have recourse to all impossible ideas and never think of the simple and commonplace? We are too far-sighted. We look at the distance, and neglect that which is at hand. **הכל בחזקת סומין** - Say our sages. “All of us are in a state of blindness.”²⁷⁵ How true these words are!

We live today in a world of rapid change. Revolutions of all kinds are taking place before our very eyes: social changes, nationalistic uprisings, differences in ways of living, economic clashes. Yet despite the tremendous changes of all kinds, mankind - according to Professor Murray - is rapidly approaching the brink of destruction. Our age has been aptly characterised as the aspirin age, or ‘the age of anxiety’. All of us are deeply disturbed by what the morrow may bring. We have lost our footing and seem to be treading on uncertain ground. What is the basic cause for this state of affairs?

To me, it seems that this feeling of futility and frustration which affects us is due basically to a conflict between material values and spiritual values. The sages in the Talmud expressed this very aptly by the concepts of “Kemach” and Torah. “Kemach” means flour, and refers to food and - by extension - to all the other material things of life. Torah means law, and in a wider sense it can be interpreted as referring to all matters of the spirit, to the cultural expression of the human soul. Our sages say, **אם אין קמח אין תורה** - “If there is no bread, there is no spiritual life”²⁷⁶.

²⁷⁴ Bereishit 21:19

²⁷⁵ Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 53:14

²⁷⁶ Avot 3:17

And they add, **אם אין תורה אין קמח** – “If there is no spiritual life, there is no value in mere bread alone.”

We must satisfy our physical needs, but to make that the be-all and the end-all of life is to sink to the level of dumb animals. A healthy body should be the means of building a finer spiritual existence. Having supplied our basic material necessities, we should develop the other elements of our nature. We should turn to the abiding pleasures of literature and music and art. We should think in terms of developing our characters, of building friendships, of aiding those in need, of living up to the image of God in which we were created. The tragedy of our lives is that we have blindly overemphasized the material values. We seek a certain something which we call happiness, but in so many cases, we fail dismally to achieve this state.

In the famous play ‘The Bluebird’, a little girl searches in vain for the blue bird of happiness. After much searching, she reaches the place where the longed-for-bird is alleged to be. However, instead of one bird, she discovers a roomful - but each one turns into a dead blackbird when caught. In this poetic play, the Belgian playwright describes the eternal human quest for happiness. Human beings believe that they can attain happiness if they secure wealth, glory, power and pleasure. But all these ends, when achieved, turn out to be dead blackbirds. They bring not happiness, but frustration and disappointment.

From my own experience I have seen many examples of this. Many rich people are miserable with their money. Their lives are empty of all meaning and value. How frequently do we hear the familiar saying of people, who reached one of the higher rings on the ladder of success: “It is not I who have the business, but it’s the business that has me.” How true are these words, and how tragic they are! How frequently do we see a man coming home from a hard day in business, only to find his wife and children fast asleep. He rises early the next morning and leaves the house when they have not yet risen. All day he rushes to and fro. Often he is hungry, thirsty, and weary, and although he’s near food restaurants and in the most comfortable surrounding, many times this man - who is wealthy and powerful - has to nibble on biscuits and milk because in his mad rush he has developed ulcers. Not seldom are the cases when this very comfortable man, who controls the lives and the economic security of numerous people, has to swallow pills in order to ward off a heart attack or a thrombosis.

This reminds me of the story of the two men who came to visit their Rebbe. One was poor, and the other was reputed to be very wealthy. The poor man entered the Rabbi’s study and remained only for a few minutes. The other walked in and was kept there for over an hour. Finally, after taking leave of the Rabbi, the poor man came in and he began criticising the Rebbe for showing greater consideration for the reputed wealthy visitor.

I'll tell you, replied the sage smilingly. "You - I could see you were poor the moment you entered my presence, but it took me more than an hour to realise that he was poorer than you." True indeed is the famous statement that "there's none so blind but who refuses to see."

This paralyzing blindness, however, finds its most painful expression in the realm of Jewish life. It is this important area that our willful blindness has resulted in the greatest damage in such matters of grave importance as religious education of the young, the practice of the principles of our faith, and the general interest in, and devotion to, problems of the Jewish survival. There are some Jews who decide that Jewishness is an intolerable burden, and they seek to run away. Somehow, they have a mistaken notion and think that the less they observe their Jewish traditions, and the more they sever connections with their people, the better are their chances for success in their occupation or profession.

There is a well-known saying that "we Jews can change our Moses, but we cannot change our noses". Some Jews have disproved that saying and have actually changed their noses! They have resorted to plastic surgery! But if we think we can fly away from the Jewish fold we are blind.

Benjamin Disraeli was asked by Queen Victoria, "Tell me Mr Disraeli, what are you? You are not quite a Christian and yet you are not a Jew." And the great Prime Minister replied: "I am the blank page between Judaism and Christianity."

Unfortunately, there are no Disraelis, but there are many blank pages in Anglo Jewry today. There are too many Jews who are confused as to what distinguishes them from the non-Jews. To such an extent is this confusion felt that many Jews do not know what is expected of them, nor know what they may expect from Jewish life. As a result, Jewish life has suffered. Jewish institutions suffer for want of support; Jewish movements suffer for want of devoted followers; Jewish Education suffers because Jews - in their confusion - do not realise what value such education might have for them, and do not know - even when they are interested - what they ought to learn.

The problem of what it means to be a Jew is a comparatively new one. Before our time Jews knew exactly who they were and what they stood for. Jewish life, and the program of Jewish living, were clearly understood. A Jew might have neglected the customs which he was expected to observe, but at least he knew exactly what it was that he was breaking away from.

Today there are many conceptions of what it means to be a good Jew; no longer is everyone agreed on this question. Some say that it means to live in strict accordance with the traditional laws contained in the Torah. Others say that it means weekly attendance at the Synagogue. Still others maintain that it is possible to be a good Jew

“at heart” and that all one has to do is to live normally, not to lie or cheat or steal, and it is not necessary to go to the Synagogue. Some people feel that it is quite enough to contribute money to Jewish charities. Others feel that it’s enough to help Israel.

My friends! Rosh Hashanah throws out a challenge to each one of us – to strike a proper balance between *קמח* and *תורה* - between material things and things of the spirit. We all want food and clothing and comfortable homes. In addition, we should strive for the development of our minds and souls, for the development of our mental abilities and our spiritual potentialities. We need a life of faith in God. We need that spiritual basis for life. Otherwise, it’s no life at all.

One of the most humorous tales ever attributed to the Chassidim involved a coachman who came to his Rebbe to ask advice about his horse that was behaving in a most inordinate fashion.

“The horse refuses to eat the usual diet of hay and oats. Instead of water he insists on the finest of beverages!”

“Furthermore,” complained the Chassid, “He refuses to sleep on the stable floor. Instead, he stubbornly insists that I should supply him with a mattress and pillow.”

The Rebbe wrinkled his brow and asked the Chassid. Tell me. “Did you daven? Did you say your prayers this morning?”

“I got up too late,” answered the Chassid, a little ashamed.

“Did you wash your hands before you sat down to Dinner?” “Did you bentch after your meal? Did you repeat the afternoon and evening prayers?”

To all the Rebbe’s questions the Chassid answered in the negative.

The Rebbe just stood there and looked at the Chassid with a look of disdain.

Finally, the Chassid couldn’t stand it any longer and he mustered enough courage to ask. “But Rebbe, forgive me for asking, but what has one thing to do with the other – What has my religious failings to do with my horse?”

“Can’t you see?” said the “Rebbe”, “Your horse, noticing that you were behaving like an animal, so he decided that he would conduct himself like a human being and therefore he demands special treatment.”

This tale depicts the true purpose of the High Holiday observance. It cautions man to repent to do Teshuvah, to discard his animalistic inclinations, and to revert to his human self once again.

This Rosh Hashanah, let us pray for the Divine light to open our eyes and guide us in the right path; let us turn to the beauty of Jewish tradition; let us turn to the grandeur of Jewish ethics; et us bask in the warm glow of the Jewish Sabbath; let us enjoy the Jewish festivals with their rich symbolism and their fine ceremonials.

We pray בְּיָבֹאוֹר פְּנֵיךָ נִתְּתָ לָנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ תוֹרַת חַיִּים - "Bless us all, O our Father, with the light of Countenance, because in the light of Your Countenance You have given us, O Lord, our God, a way of life." May the Almighty grant you all long life, health, strength and happiness. May you all have a happy new year, and may you be blessed with קַמַח and תוֹרָה - Material sustenance and spiritual nourishment. אָמֵן.

Rosh Hashanah: The message of the Shofar and living a life of worth

זְכַרְנוּ לַחַיִּים. מֶלֶךְ חַפֵּץ בַּחַיִּים. וְכַתְּבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים. לְמַעַן אֱלֹקִים חַיִּים - "Remember us with life, O King, who delightest in life, and inscribe us in the Book of Life, for thine own sake, O Living God".

On the threshold of a new and unknown year, we pray for life and we pray that in the coming year, life may be granted to us, to our children and to all those dear to us. This is the greatest boon for which we crave, the prime motive of all our thoughts. It is fitting therefore, to ask ourselves today: What do we live for? What makes life worthwhile? What is the meaning of life?

I recall when I was Headmaster of our classes, I once received a note from the mother of one of my children. The note read: "Please excuse Bernard for being late for classes this morning. 10 o'clock came sooner than we expected". I wonder if there's not to be found here a depth, a profoundness, that usually escapes us. How often do times in life come to us sooner than we expect them, or even want them? Our children grow up before we are prepared to understand them. Illness comes before we have worked out an attitude towards suffering. Death startles us into non-being, before we have fulfilled ourselves. Yes, 10 o'clock for most of us comes sooner than we expect it.

It is therefore worthwhile that we should periodically pause to discuss some thoughts that are too deep for tears. Have you ever asked yourself "Why was I born?" "Why do I live?" "What's the purpose and meaning of my existence?" Unless we can begin to grapple with these kinds of questions, unless we can begin to approach an answer, life turns out to be an absurdity. Unless we find most of our daily actions endowed with meaning, then life will turn out to be, in the words of Shakespeare, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"²⁷⁷. We are told of Rabbi Bunam that when, on his deathbed, he noticed his wife weeping bitterly, he asked her: "My dear wife, why do you weep? Don't you realise that all my life has been

²⁷⁷ 'Macbeth'

given me so that I might learn how to die?” This is the answer of the mystically minded on the meaning of life. A sage in “Ethics of the Fathers” expresses the same thought in these words. “This world is likened unto a vestibule before the world to come. Prepare thyself in the vestibule, that thou mayest enter into the banquet hall”²⁷⁸.

But there’s another answer - in direct contradiction to this attitude, which is that of the Epicurean. To the Epicurean, life is but a banquet hall, where we should eat and drink and make merry, for tomorrow we die. This philosophy is summed up in a similar denunciatory phrase of Isaiah, for even in his day such an outlook on life had captured the fancy of the multitude. The thoughtful person sees in this the essence of baseness and selfishness.

But let us see what Judaism has to say concerning the meaning of life. In Hebrew, the word for life is **חיים**, which is the plural form, because life consists of body and spirit. Judaism teaches that the meaning of life is usefulness, effectiveness. The proper intention of man is to be useful, to be purposeful. We were given minds and muscles to employ them to the service of ourselves, our homes, our people and our world. Man was born to be of use, says the Psalmist. If we look around us, we find that every being serves a purpose higher than its own small self. Shall we say that man alone has no one to serve, but his own body, his own minor ego?

We are about to blow the **שופר**. This is considered the most significant part of the New Year service and there are many reasons offered for sounding the shofar.

One is to remind us of the Revelation on Mount Sinai for when the Law was given to Israel, a trumpet resounded.

Another explanation is that today we crown God as Creator and King of the Universe. It is fitting on such an occasion to carry out the thought of the phrase - **בְּחִצְצָרוֹת וְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר הָרִיעוּ לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ ה'** “With trumpets and sound of a **שופר** to shout joyously before the King, the Lord”²⁷⁹.

A third reason, as explained by Saadia, is to arouse the people to their duties and responsibilities towards Judaism. But all these fail to explain why we employ a ram’s horn. Our Rabbis say, “Blow before me with a ram’s horn, so that I shall be reminded of the sacrifice of Isaac, the son of Abraham”²⁸⁰. You recall the story in Genesis. After many years of anxious waiting, Abraham finally begets a son, Isaac. But no sooner has Isaac grown up than God tests Abraham and tells him to take this only son and offer him as a burnt offering upon the altar of God.

²⁷⁸ Avot 4:16

²⁷⁹ Tehillim 98:6

²⁸⁰ Rosh Hashanah 16b

Abraham does not hesitate. He arises early the next morning, prepares the fire, the wood, the knife, awakens his son, and together they go to Mount Moriah. On the way, Isaac looks about and is puzzled. He asks his father this question. הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ הִנֵּה הַיֵּשֶׁבֶט וְהַעֲצִים וְאֵיךְ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה לְעֹלָה? – “Here’s the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”²⁸¹ His father bluntly replies: “God will provide a lamb”²⁸².

They reach Mount Moriah, and there Abraham informs his son that he is to be sacrificed. The latter ungrudgingly prepares himself for the ordeal. But just as Abraham stretches out his hand to slash his son’s throat, God intervenes. The Lord informs him that now he may slaughter a ram as substitute for Isaac. Abraham offers up a ram as command, and that is why - the Sages observe - that a ram’s horn will remind God of the sacrifice of Isaac.

Let us pause a moment and consider the deeper implication of Isaac’s question, for in it lies the thesis of our discussion. Isaac asked his father: “Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” The concept of fire in Midrashic literature stands for man’s spirit, his soul. Proverbs say נֵר ה' נִשְׁמַת אָדָם - “The light is the Lord is the soul of man”²⁸³. Wood is suggestive of flesh and man’s physical desires. The burnt offering is symbolic of both body and soul. And so the question that Isaac raised can be interpreted thus: הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ - You all have souls, וְהַעֲצִים - you all have bodies, וְאֵיךְ הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה - And where is the burnt offering? What are you doing with your bodies and souls? To what uses are you offering them?

My friends! This is the message of the שופר that reminds us of Isaac’s sacrifice. It bids us to pause and to ask ourselves these questions so that we may be inspired to make our lives useful, vital and effective. The blowing of the שופר on this holy day is a challenge to us to reconsider the meaning of life.

I remember reading a very fine and logical interpretation given to us by the saintly Chafetz Chaim, of blessed memory, an interpretation of a verse in the Psalms which we recite every Rosh Hashanah - the first and the second night. Many of you will remember the 24th Psalm in which the psalmist David speaks of the greatness of God and how man can reach great spiritual and ethical heights. And this is what David says: מִי יַעֲלֶה בְּהַר ה' וְמִי יִקּוּם בְּמִקְוֹם קִדְשׁוֹ נְקִי כַפַּיִם וְיָבֵר לִבָּב אֲשֶׁר לֹא נָשָׂא לִשְׂוֹא - “Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord and who can stand in His Holy Place? He that has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken my name in vain and who has not sworn deceitfully”²⁸⁴.

²⁸¹ Bereishit 22:7

²⁸² Ibid. 22:8

²⁸³ Mishlei 20:27

²⁸⁴ Tehillim 24:3-4

Now the word נפש has a number of meanings, and we interpret the phrase אָנָּשׁוּר לֹא נִשְׂא לְשׂוֹא נַפְשׁוֹ to mean, “he who has not taken God’s name in vain” or who hath not sworn with God’s name in vain. But as you know, the word נפש mean “soul” and the Chafetz Chaim translates this phrase literally: “He who has not taken my soul in vain” - he will reach great spiritual heights. And the Chafetz Chaim explains this verse with the following story:

A man once came to his friend and asked him for a loan of one hundred pounds for a period of thirty days. The friend immediately took out a cheque book, wrote out a cheque for a hundred pounds, and gave it to him. When the thirty days expired, the lender came to the borrower and asked him to pay back the loan. The borrower immediately walked over to his safe, opened it up and took out the exact same check that his friend had given him thirty days before, and gave it back to him.

The lender, looking at the cheque, stood in amazement and consternation and said to the borrower, “Tell me, why did you ask for this loan and why did you take my cheque if you didn’t intend to use it? After all, the only reason I gave it to you was because I thought that you might do something constructive with it, that you might use it in your business, or in your home, for some purpose that would help you in life. If you didn’t intend to use it, then what was the sense of my giving it to you?!”

This then, says the Chafetz Chaim, is the meaning of the verse in the 24th psalm. God loaned us, or gave us, a soul for a certain period of time so that we could do something constructive and good and fine while the soul is within us. If, however, we take the soul that God has given us and do nothing with it, then God, as it were, says to us, “Why did you take my soul in vain? I only gave it to you for a certain period of time, so that you would use it constructively. I didn’t give it to you for you to keep I in vain!”. This is what the Psalmist David tells us: “Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and who can stand in His Holy Place? He who has not taken my soul in vain.” It is only when we do something worthwhile with our days and years, that we can consider our lives worth living.

Rosh Hashanah: Good vrs Happy New Year

From time immemorial the blowing of the shofar, which we are about to commence, has signaled a moment of reflection. Stopping from the bustle and confusion of life, the sound of the shofar bestirs us to pause and reflect. The ancient prophet Amos expressed it most emphatically when he proclaimed אִם יִתְקַע שׁוֹפָר בְּעִיר וְעַם לֹא יִחָרְדוּ - “will the shofar be sounded in a city and the people not tremble?”²⁸⁵.

But the question that one may ask is: Why is the shofar sounded on Rosh Hashanah? Why not on Kol Nidrei night or Yom Kippur which are most sacred? The reason

²⁸⁵ Amos 3:6

why we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, long before Yom Kippur, is to give us sufficient time to examine ourselves and to arouse us from our lethargy and indifference. In the words of the great Maimonides²⁸⁶ עורו ישנים משנתכם. Just as at sea in stormy weather, the ships are warned beforehand of impending disaster; so must the shofar be blown long before Yom Kippur to give us sufficient time to heed the warning and to take full charge of our ships of life.

A story is told of a Jew who had who had a strong desire to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. The people of the town resented him and they would not allow him to serve as the “Bal Tokea”. The man happened to be friendly with the local “Poretz” and he asked him to intervene with the Minister on his behalf.

The Poretz summoned the spiritual head of the community and demanded that his friend be permitted to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. The Minister was in a predicament, because he was afraid that the Poretz would harm the community if his request was refused. He thought fast and said: “As your excellency knows, Yom Kippur is event holier than Rosh Hashanah. Let him blow on Yom Kippur.”

The Poretz was satisfied and he called his Jewish friend to let him know that he would blow the shofar in the synagogue on Yom Kippur. When the man learnt this, he said “אדני הפרץ, I am not pleased! You see - on Rosh Hashanah the shofar is sounded so many times during the services, but on Yom Kippur its blown only once - at the conclusion of the Neilah service!”. So the Poretz said to him, “Moshle, don’t be a fool. When the shofar will be in your hand you just go ahead and blow as long as you want.”

It is especially appropriate that we should, on this Rosh Hashanah, heed to the call of the shofar and analyse the conditions that surround our lives today, because we are living in an age of confusion and contradiction. Like the two surfaces of a coin, with one side in sharp contrast with the other, our life is full of paradoxes, dilemmas, and incongruities. As Moses, in his final message to Israel, complained דור עקש ופְתִלְתֵּל - a generation of ambiguities and distortion²⁸⁷, דור תְּהִפְכֵת הַמָּה, - a generation of confusion of topsy-turvey.²⁸⁸ Let me give you several illustrations of the paradoxes and contradictions of our lives:

We enjoy a higher standard of living than ever before. Despite occasional recessions, we have achieved a degree of economic stability and social security beyond compare. Old age pensions, a national health service, employment insurance. In fact, we enjoy the security of a welfare state. This is one side of the coin.

²⁸⁶ Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4

²⁸⁷ Devarim 32:5

²⁸⁸ Devarim 32:20

Now let us look at the other wise of the coin. Our age is also the age of thrombosis, ulcers, slipped-discs, the age of aspirins and insomnia.

On the one hand, we have every reason to feel calm and secure. After all, we have the security of a welfare state. And yet on the other hand, we are a nervous and most insecure nation, consuming millions and millions of aspirins, sedations and tranquilizing drugs in an attempt to escape from our tensions, stresses and strains. Isn't this a strange paradox?

We are, as a rule, a homeloving people. More and more families own their homes than ever before with a large mortgage. Our young married couples spend months, and even years, furnishing their homes. Decorators are engaged to help achieve the ultimate in beauty, harmony and elegance. Because of this love of home, the suburbs are growing, and people are moving more and more from the centre of the cities to the suburbs. Today, our newly married couples are buying houses further out. In Kenton, Ruislip - very nice isn't it? But this is only one side of the coin.

Now let's look on the opposite side of the coin. It's true we all love our homes, but from Pesach onwards many of us, and even from Chanukah some of us are already busy planning and worrying how to get away from these homes for a change or for a break, as we say - 'anywhere': Bournemouth, Torquay, Cliftonville, Italy - as long as we are away from home. But this doesn't make sense, for we have just agreed that we love our homes. So why then should we run away from them?

Let me proceed further. We are the most educated generation in history. There are more chances today for a wider education than ever before. We are able to keep abreast of almost everything important through the medium of books, magazines, films, television and wireless. All this of course is to our credit. And yet with all our education and advancement, we are most disturbed and neurotic people.

One would have thought that we, who read so much, and are so cultural, would develop emotional maturity and conquer our anxieties. But now, a modern writer Karen Horney accented our most pressing problem when she entitled her book: "The Neurotic Personality of our Time".

Now let's turn to marriage. In this area of life we have effected tremendous changes. No longer do we believe that marriage is a union of two families, or for the satisfaction of parents. We believe that marriage is meant to fulfil the lives and needs of two free individuals, two sovereign personalities. It's for them to select their partners and today, the choice is made on the basis of romantic love which draws two people to each other. Well, if this formula is better than our parents and theirs was far from perfect, very good! Yet with all our exaltation of personal freedom, romantic love, and glamorous courtships, the fact is that we produce more divorces,

more broken homes, more marital conflict, more violated vows than ever before. You may say that it doesn't sound reasonable - but unfortunately, that's the truth.

For our *pièce de résistance* I turn to our children - God bless them. Never were children so well off. They enjoy the most and the best of everything. The finest schools, the best chances of wider education, summer schools, holidays abroad, the best food, the best vitamins, and yet in the latest report published a few weeks ago, there has been in this country a greater increase of juvenile delinquency than ever before. With all that we do for them, why are they rebelling? Rebelling against whom? We often wonder what drives them to such fads as "Rock n' Roll". What's basically wrong with them or with us? Why are they and we suffering from a condition of unbalance and confusion? Why these paradoxes?

Economic security without spiritual serenity; love of home, yet the need to escape from it; trust in romantic love, only to find it betrays us, education without being liberated from our anxieties and neurosis. How is it we give our youth everything we believe they need and want, only to find that much of it they do not want and the rest of it they do not need? What's basically wrong with them or with us?

Well my friends! I cannot give the entire answer, certainly not here and now. But as a teacher of Judaism I think I can offer a partial explanation.

Part of the trouble stems from our seeking the happy life rather than the good life. When a Jew greets his neighbor on Rosh Hashanah, his salutation is *לשנה טובה*, or "good year". That is what a Jew wishes for his friends and seeks for himself: a "good year", not a "happy year". And yet when we meet one another, the colloquial expression we use is a 'happy' new year.

You will probably say: "What is the difference between a 'good' year and a 'happy' year?". But there is a difference. The good life is rooted in convictions, discipline and loyalty to ethical standards and moral law. A good life means adherence to a design for living which is not subject to the whimsical, frivolous and transient impulses. A happy life, popularly defined, is achieved by the pursuit of satisfactions and the fulfilment of drives.

A happy life means adventure and excitement. This is reflected on both our outer and inner life. Our incessant change of styles, fashions and fads is one expression of it. We are either on the move, or we are painfully bored. This explains some of our inconsistencies and contradictions. We love our homes, yet flee from them. While the home is being planned and built, we are delighted with it. Why? Because everyday brings something new, something different, and these changes keep us happy. But when the home is completed and furnished, it loses its glamour and glitter. With all its elegance we are bored, bored to the degree that we seek to run in pursuit of fresh adventures and novelties.

Before we criticize and condemn our youth, let us realise that our youth is both the product, and reflection of our lives. Our youth mirror, perhaps in an exaggerated form, our frailties and inadequacies. The truth is in our Jewish life we too rock n' roll, swinging and swaying with the shifting currents of the hour, observing this precept, ignoring that Mitzvah, embracing this ritual, and violating that precept, as whim and mood dictate. Unless we achieve a meaningful and consistent philosophy of life, let us not be harsh with our youth for doing in their juvenile way what we do on a more mature level.

Our conflicted and contradictory life can be clearly seen in this simple story told of a soldier in the last war who was stationed in Burma. This soldier received a series of tantalizing letters from his wife thousands of miles away. His patience exhausted. He finally wrote: "Dear Jane. Why must you annoy me with all your petty troubles. You know I can't do anything for you from thousands of miles away. So please don't bother me any more and let me fight this war in peace".

My friends! In our life we cannot love peace and war at the same time. We cannot enjoy the rewards of a religious life without commitment to religious disciplines. We cannot achieve inner stability and peace if we remain addicted to adventure, excitement and change. We cannot secure the blessings of a good life if we pursue the transient and mundane pleasures of a happy life. We cannot rear a generation of God fearing, law respecting youth unless we show the way by the sublime example of our own lives.

Rosh Hashanah: Spiritual Sleep and Spiritual Awakening

Since the first day of Rosh Hashanah was Shabbat, the shofar will be sounded today for the first time. But whether the shofar is blown or not, a good deal of Rosh Hashanah's thought and sentiment is focused upon the shofar. The shofar in ancient times was used to sound a call to the people to assemble. And some philosophers would have it that the purpose of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is to rally our people to the colors against Satan, who personifies temptation and to mobilise the forces against every type of sin. But according to most commentators, the shofar is the symbol of the Akedah. It would remind us of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice, and of Isaac's willingness to be sacrificed, in submission to the will of God. The ram's horn should bring to mind that singular episode and impress upon us that self-sacrifice is one of the essentials of our Jewishness. But according to Maimonides, the purpose of the shofar ceremony is to awaken us from our sleep. It is the annual alarm clock.

Sleep has been highly praised by poet and sage, and any physician will tell you that while a person can do without food for a number of days, he could not possibly survive without sleep for than about three days. Sleep is such a wonderful gift to

man that the psalmist has said **בְּן יִתֵּן לִידִידוֹ שְׁנָא** - “God gives his beloved sleep”²⁸⁹, and Shakespeare seconded that thought when he said, “Our foster nurse of nature is repose”²⁹⁰. A similar thought was expressed by the Roman poet Ovid: “Sleep, though most gentle deity.” However, sleep may not always be put in the category of the Divine.

There are two kinds of sleep. There’s the physical sleep which is constructive to our wellbeing and life giving, and there is the spiritual sleep which is not only soul destroying, but life destroying. This spiritual sleep is tantamount to spiritual suicide.

This kind of sleep was probably referred to by the ancient poet of the Greeks, Diogenes when he said, “Sleep and death are brothers.” For in that case, sleep is indeed the antechamber of the grave. And it’s this kind of sleep from which the shofar comes to awaken us!

The sleeping sickness of the spiritual variety often proves fatal, whether it strikes individuals, or peoples. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Rome and Greece and all the other mighty Empires of antiquity - gone are they and every trace of them. But they didn’t just die suddenly. They were seized at first with the sleeping sickness - morally and spiritually. They lost every sense of right and wrong, of true and false and then their Empires came down crumbling all about them. Our people is the only exception in the history of humanity that has been able to survive this sleeping disease. Our people, too, fell a victim at certain periods of its existence to sleeping sickness, but it possessed enough vitality and resistance to shake off the stupor.

Recall for a moment the story of the Book of Ezra, which contains the story of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild the Second Temple and Commonwealth, is one of the brightest chapters of Jewish history. There is hardly another nation in the world that can point to a similar experience, of having been driven from their ancestral land for a long period of time, and then return to rebuild their national homeland. Israel alone has accomplished this miraculous feat, and the story of this adventure is related in the Book of Ezra. It is the story of pioneers, of men and women, who even though beset with all types of difficulty, yet succeeded in making history with their plows and plumbines. It was in those days that the glorious psalm was written. **שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים**. “When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were likened to them that dream.” (Psalm 126:1)

Recall also the story of Choni Hamogel, the Rip Van Winkle of the Talmud. The sages of the Talmud²⁹¹ told the story of the saintly Choni Hamogel who, all his life,

²⁸⁹ Tehillim 127:2

²⁹⁰ ‘King Lear’

²⁹¹ Ta’anit 23a

long was troubled by this verse: “When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were likened to them that dream”²⁹². Did anybody ever sleep seventy years without interruption? This question perturbed him so deeply that he formed no satisfaction in life, until God Almighty intervened to show him the truth of the verse.

And so, one day, while walking on the road, he saw a man bent with age planting a carob tree. The carob tree takes 70 years from the time its seed is planted in the ground before it yields fruit. Choni Hamogel asked the man: “Tell me, do you expect to live another 70 years to eat the fruit of this tree?” And the man simply answered, “No; but my forefathers planted for me, and I plant for my children.” Choni Hamogel therefore fell into a deep sleep by the road, from which he did not wake up until seventy years later. When he did rouse himself awake, he saw a man picking the fruits off the carob tree. He asked him, “Are you the one who planted the tree?” “No,” the man said, “my grandfather was the one.”

Choni Hamogel is the symbol of the entire Jewish people that fell asleep for about 70 years during the Babylonian exile. But miracle of miracles, the people did awake! How was this achieved? The Rabbis of the Talmud explain it to us in their symbolic language. The individual did not live only for the present. The grandfather did not focus his eyes exclusively on the past. Instead, he looked to the future and labored for it. He planted the seeds, seeds of Torah, of loyalty and devotion in the rising generation. Here is the clue to the mystery of a people that had apparently ceased to exist, and then burst forth into new life. The same process repeated itself time and again.

Rosh Hashanah: The inner voice

Every festival in the Jewish calendar has a religious symbol which characterizes it. For example, Passover is symbolized by Matzah, Shavuot by the greenery with which we decorate our homes and synagogues, Sukkot by the sukkah and etrog. The dominant symbol of Rosh Hashanah is the shofar. No wonder that the laws of the shofar - its shape and the kinds of sounds it produces - have ever been interpreted to contain important lessons.

This morning, I would like to discuss one law concerning the תְּקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר and its application to life. The Talmud rules **נתן שופר בתוך שופר: אם קול פנימי שמע יצא, ואם קול חיצון שמע לא יצא** - “If one shofar was placed inside of another, the law is as follows. If the voice of the inner shofar was heard, the מצוה was performed, but if the voice of the outer shofar was heard, the מצוה was not fulfilled.”²⁹³

²⁹² Tehillim 126:1

²⁹³ Rosh Hashanah 27b

This law serves as a pointed commentary on life. Many people are concerned with the **קול חיצון** - with externals. They are impressed with outward appearances, which frequently camouflage an inner emptiness and void. People fail to understand that it is the **קול פנימי** - the character, the heart and soul of things - that is of primary significance.

Several years ago I visited a beautiful estate. It was gorgeous in its setting. The home was magnificent, the furnishing lavish and in good taste. I said to my friend who took me there: "The people who lived here must have been extremely happy." To which he replied, "I am sorry to disappoint you, but the truth is that the people who occupied this beautiful mansion were very miserable." He went on to explain while the owners - husband and wife - were worth millions, they despised each other and would communicate only through their servants or their lawyers.

Think of it! They had taken the trouble to build such a lovely house and to furnish it with costly decorations, but they had taken no pains to maintain the most basic human relationships, "a thing of beauty and a joy forever"²⁹⁴ namely, confidence, respect and love.

Similarly, there are people who pretend to be friends! Outwardly, they act as if they are interested in and devoted to us. They call us "darling" and "dear" and "pal". But the time comes when we have a rude awakening and realise that these endearing words, are only a **קול חיצון**. The **קול פנימי** - the heart and soul of friendship - were missing when we really need them and they are not there.

Consider for a moment the world scene as it is today: Pakistan, India, China. With one sentence they talk of peace, and with the other sentence they talk of the need to support them with atom bombs. India threatens that unless we help her with the supply of atom bombs, she will seriously consider leaving the British Commonwealth of Nations. Here you have for the gap that exists between the **קול חיצון** and the **קול פנימי**. On the one hand, they talk about peace, and on the other hand, they want to us the most destructive method of destroying mankind.

Take another example, the United States. For a country that proclaims itself the champion of freedom in Vietnam and other countries, the acts of violence, segregation, race hatred and inequality which has dominated the American scene during the past year shows a direct conflict between the pose and the reality, between the **קול חיצון** and the **קול פנימי**.

As Jews we would also do well to learn to distinguish between shadow and substance, between externals and internals. Not so long ago several Jewish authors were interviewed. They were successful playwrights and novelists. The exterior was

²⁹⁴ John Keats, 'Endymion'

fine, but when they spoke with callous derision of Judaism and Jewish values they revealed not only an abysmal ignorance of their people's tradition and history, but an emptiness of the soul. The קול חיצון was so lovely, but the קול פנימי was so disappointing and sad.

It has become very fashionable these days for young Jewish girls to wear a locket with a Magen David around their necks, and for boys to wear a miniature mezuzah. This trend, which emphasizes one's Jewishness, is most admirable. But the fact is that in many instances this represents the sum total of their Jewishness. All of their Yiddishkeit seems to be concentrated in that trinket! No synagogue attendance, and no observance of mitzvos, just an identification tag. But no external Magen David, or Mezuzah, can substitute for the קול פנימי - for the need of Jewish knowledge and inner devotion to Jewish values.

We possess literally thousands of learned books that were written by the great teachers of Israel. Our love for and veneration of sacred books is profound. When a sacred volume is torn and its page are worn with age, we don't throw it into the dust-bin, into the refuse heap. We give it a decent burial, as though it were human. It is with a great deal of sorrow that I observe the kind of books people bring to me and to the synagogue to dispose of. In most instances the volumes are in good condition, books that could still be used. And they are not of the scholarly variety which the average layman cannot read. They are usually ordinary sefarim: סידורים, סידורים חמושים, מחזורים - books that belong in a Jewish home. It hurts when people say, "I have no room for these books in my house." There's room cheap paperback books, magazines, joke books and knickknacks of dubious artistic value, but not for the poor סידור or מחזור.

A colleague of mine told me not so long ago that when members of his Ladies Guild were sorting out old garments donated by people for the annual jumble sale, they found a beautiful tallit that was practically brand new. It was brought to my colleague's attention and he thought that it must have been placed among the old schmatters by mistake. When he called the woman who contributed that particular bundle of jumble, he learned - much to his regret - that there was no mistake. The good lady assured him that it was a tallit her husband had received for his Bar Mitzvah some twenty years ago. It had been lying around unused ever since they were married, and she didn't know what to do with it. She thought that the Synagogue could use it or sell it. One thing was certain: she did not want to have it in her house.

Now let us come a little closer to home. Here we are on this sacred day in the House of God. It's true that in most Synagogues we continue to repeat the same words of

prayer as did our parents and ancestors before us. But to be frank, do we feel the prayers as they did?

Take the שמע קולינו prayer. I can still recall the services I attended when I was a youngster. When the שליח צבור began to recite the touching plea, אל תשליכנו לעת זקנה - “Do not cast us aside in our old age; when our strength is gone, do not forsake us,” his voice was drowned out by the sobs and cries of the entire congregation. Who can forget the sacred awe that gripped young and old when the sobering passage of ונתנה תוקף was reached? The words, “On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.... Who shall live and who shall die?” stirred us to the very depths of our being. There is still sufficient reason to pray fervently for a healthy and serene old age and to be concerned about the future, but prayer doesn’t seem to move us anymore. Yes, we continue to repeat the same words, but it is only a קול חצון, a mechanical and superficial recitation. The קול פנימי - the deep emotion is not there.

At one time Jews were known not only as the “People of the Book”, but also as the “People of the Prayer Book.” Alas that this great distinction does not belong to us anymore! And if I were asked which talent above others, I would want my people to regain, I would say that it is the art of prayer. Said the poet of old:

“Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of the eye.
When none but God is near.”

There are those who have a mistaken notion that prayer is merely petition in which we ask God to do something for us. The truth is that our prayers are at their noblest and best when we attune our souls to listen to God to learn what He wants us to do for His people and His faith. “I will hear” said the prophet, “what the Lord God will say”²⁹⁵.

When large ships, like the Queen Elizabeth, have to dock, sturdy cables and powerful ropes are cast from the boats and fastened ashore. Because the docks are immovable and strong, the ships are able to pull themselves safely into harbor. Similarly, we can draw ourselves nearer to God through the cables and ropes of prayer and mitzvos, providing they are done with heart.

My message is therefore directed to the קול פנימי - to the heart and soul of each of you. Practice the tenets of our faith with feeling. Return to the ancient “harbor” of

²⁹⁵ Tehillim 85:8

our people with love. In the words of the Psalmist, “Taste and see how good is the Lord”²⁹⁶. Taste the pure waters of our faith and you will realise that it can be a source of strength and comfort to all. Then indeed will we be worthy of being inscribed into the Book of Life for a year of happiness, prosperity and good health.

Rosh Hashanah: What we do with our hands

On numerous occasions I have spoken to you on the significance of the human heart as a symbol of feeling and emotion, and as the seat of pity and compassion. Due to the lofty teachings of the Torah, and because of our people’s history of suffering and oppression, the Jewish heart is unique. It is responsive to every call for help, and sensitive to the anguish and pain of suffering humanity. From this pulpit I have also discussed the mind. There’s much to be said about the sublime position of the mind in Judaism. A ‘Yiddishe kop’ is a phrase that is familiar to us all. But I do not recall ever delivering a sermon on the hand, and this is precisely what I plan to do on this Rosh Hashanah morning.

Did you ever stop to consider what a beautiful instrument the human hand is? The hand feels, the hand acts. It can hold the brush of the artist, the pen of the writer, and the controls of a modern jet. It can kill, or save. It can steal or give. It can bless or bruise. It can caress the face of an infant, or strike a blow of a neighbor. The same hand that holds the plow, can set off an atomic bomb, or throw a grenade.

The hand is a masterpiece indeed. It reflects numerous character traits of a person, and even reveals the career of a man. It tells us whether he is vulgar, or refined, efficient or lazy, easy going or tense. All these traits are reflected in the hand. There’s certainly a marked difference between the hands of a Yehudi Menuhin and a Jerry Downs, or between the hands of a surgeon and those of a coal miner.

Frequently, hands have a fascinating story to tell. The famous story teller and playwright, Luigi Pirandello has a story on the hand. In it he tells that when he was a patient in a hospital, there was another man lying in the next bed. His neighbour was in a serious condition and the author never saw his face, but the hand that was hanging on the side of the bed gave him a glimpse into the chequered history of a human being. That hand told him the complete story of the man’s life. The colour of the skin, the protruding joints, the thick veins and a missing thumb told him that here was a man who had worked hard all his life with little reward or joy for his efforts.

The hand can teach. The famous author Helen Keller, the woman who has been deaf, dumb, and blind from birth, tells that the only way she learned about the world was through the hand of a dedicated teacher who reached her heart and mind,

²⁹⁶ Tehillim 34:8

despite the blindness and deafness that engulfed her. Even a handshake can give a clue to the personality of an individual. Sometimes a person will offer only fingers, as if he were reluctant to give you his hand and heart. Other hands are limp and make you feel like you are shaking hands with a fish, or a dish cloth. Once a woman shook my hand and it gave me the feeling of holding an assortment of rings and knuckles. But then you grasp a hand that is soft and warm, one that expresses sincerity, appreciation, and good fellowship. It is a hand that gives you a lift.

No wonder that hands play so important a role in the Bible. Abraham stretched forth his hand for the sacrifice. When Isaac was blind, he was able to distinguish his two sons, Jacob and Esau, by feeling their hands. Jacob blessed his grandchildren with his hands, and Joseph took an oath with his hands.

Our sages tell us that the story of a human being, from the cradle to the grave, is told in his hands. כשאדם בא לעולם ידיו הן קפוצות כלומר כל העולם כולו שלי הוא אני נוחלו - "When a person comes into the world his hands are clenched, as if to say: The whole world is mine and I will inherit it. But when he departs from the world, his hands are open, as if to say I did not inherit a thing from this world."²⁹⁷

Yes, hands certainly have a fascinating story to tell. Do you recall the story of Moses in the desert? God appeared to him and told him to return to Egypt to redeem the children of Israel. Moses hesitated and was reluctant to obey. Then God asked Moses מה זה בידך - "What is in your hand?" And Moses replied: "A staff." And God said: "Cast it to the ground."²⁹⁸ When Moses did as he was ordered it turned into a snake. The lesson is simple and to the point. Moses was told by this symbolic act, that the fate and the future destiny of his people were in his hands. If he would but use the staff of leadership that was given into his hands, he would perform wonders for his people: lead them into freedom, give them a moral law, and make of them a "Kingdom of priests and a holy nation."²⁹⁹ But if he would let it slip from his hands, if he would shun his responsibility, the staff would turn into a serpent which would poison and do irreparable harm to his people, and doom them forever, to be the slaves of Egypt.

My friends, in our hands we all have precious gifts such as love, honour, and opportunity. The happiness of our families, the future of our children, the good name of our people, are in our hands. It all depends on how we will use these blessings. We can drop them to the ground, and poison our lives, or we can lift them high, and enter the Promised Land of nachas and joy. The choice is up to us.

²⁹⁷ Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 5:1

²⁹⁸ Shemot 4:2-4

²⁹⁹ Shemot 19:6

We have time on our hands. It has been said, and rightfully so, that time is the most precious gift of God. We live in an age when we have more leisure time than any previous generation in history. The five-day week, the time saving gadgets, the frozen foods, and the barbequed chickens, automation, and planes, flying, at twice the speed of sound have provided us, with extra dividends of time.

But how we squander it! Think not only of the lost weekends, but of the wasted months, and years! Just consider the things we could have done and didn't do – the books we could have read, and didn't read, the friends we could have kept, and didn't keep, the places we could have given and didn't give.

Let the mother consider the time she keeps back from her children, and wasted in gossip, on idle chatter, on the telephone, or on the 'narishkeiten'. Let the father think how little time he spends with his family, claiming he is too busy or too tired! For the life of me, I just can't understand why a chat, or a walk with one's son or daughter is not as relaxing as a game of cards, or bingo, in a smoke-filled room. How many parents allow their teenage children to waste time, hanging around coffee-bars and street corners, instead of channelling their leisure time into productive and useful purposes? In short, my question is: What are we doing with the time at our disposal, as the hands of the clock keep racing us by?

Maurice Samuel, a famous Jewish writer, relates that once he took his small son to a zoo. As they entered the zoo they were attracted by a big sign hanging outside one of the cages which read "See the Elephant that is 400 years old"! As they were both gazing at the animal the little boy remarked, "Daddy, they say, that this elephant is 400 years old?. But tell me, Daddy, what has it been doing all those 400 years?" Yes, that is the kind of question that we ought to ask ourselves at times. What have we been doing all these years of our lives?

"Ah" cried the Hebrew poet. **אדם דואג על איבוד דמיו, ואינו דואג על איבוד ימיו. דמיו אינם** - **עוזרים, ימיו אינם חוזרים** - "Man worries about the loss of his money, but, he's not worried about the loss of his days. His money cannot help him, his days will not return". God has given money into our hands. Some have more, some have less. All of us have a little in our hands. We want it, because we need it. It takes money to enable us to enjoy the ordinary comforts of a good home and to provide our children with a fine education. The question is how are we using the money that God has put into our hands?

I have seen people grow arrogant and obnoxious because they suddenly came into great wealth. A young and struggling artist, brought a painting to the home of a rich man. The wealthy man said, he didn't like it and wouldn't buy it. When the artist attempted to explain, the colour scheme, the design, the significance of his work, the rich man brushed him aside saying: "Show me the car in which you came to see me."

The poor artist pointed through the window to his old broken-down Ford. The rich man when he saw that 'shmatterdike' car became furious: "Do you see that brand new Rolls Royce over there? That's my car! And you have the nerve, you have the audacity, to contradict me in matters of art?!" There are men who alienate their friends, divorce their wives, and ruin their children because of money. Even when a person passes into the great beyond, his money can cause trouble. The children can fight and squabble with each other on account of the legacy.

Recently two items appeared in the press. The first dealt with a legacy of £100,000 left to a dog. That creature has the distinction of being the wealthiest dog in the world, and the poor dog doesn't even know it! And what's more isn't even a pedigree dog – just an ordinary mongrel who hasn't even orbited in space!

The other item concerned an American millionaire Mr. J. C. Penny. When he celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday he was interviewed by a newspaperman. Now one of the things the reporter wanted to know was how much money the magnate possessed. To which Mr. Penny is said to have replied: "Please don't ask me how much money I have. That is of no particular consequence to you or to the public. Ask me instead what good am I doing with the money that the good Lord has seen fit to put in my hands". In the same way the future and welfare of our community lies in our hands. We can lift it high, or God forbid, bring it low. Its future destiny is entirely in our hands.

This morning I have been asked to make an appeal for our newly acquired building, the Dollis Hill Lane Hebrew School, which we purchased recently and which was consecrated by the Chief Rabbi. Now whether this newly acquired building becomes a blessing for our community or a burden depends entirely upon us. In our hands we have the opportunity of making it a centre not only for the young, but for all branches of the community. But in order to do this, we need funds and I shall like to relate to you a true story, which I read in last week's Jewish Chronicle.

An article was written on Eddie Cantor's Golden Jubilee. In the article, we were told that as a youngster, on the lower East Side of New York, Eddie used to run errands for local housewives, and he noticed that every one of these housewives sent him to the same grocery shop which was ten blocks away. Now Eddie Cantor was curious to know why all the housewives chose this particular shop when there were five or six other similar shops near by who sold exactly the same provisions. He was curious, he couldn't understand, what was so special about this shop? And then he discerned that this grocer always gave "a little something extra." Instead of twelve rolls he gave thirteen. He poured a pint of milk into Eddie's jug, and then added a little more "for good measure." Instead of six bananas on Eddie's shopping list, the grocer gave seven. Eddie Cantor pointed out these mistakes to the grocer, but the grocer replied that they were not mistakes at all. "It doesn't hurt", he said, "to give a little something

extra. This, my boy, is the secret of life”, the grocer explained, and we are told that Eddie Cantor loved to tell this story on every occasion and he always used to say to himself. “Eddie, it worked for him, why not for me.” If that old Jewish grocer got the business by giving a little something extra, why not do just the same? Mr. Cantor’s close friends and associates recall that those five words – “give a little something extra” gave him the success of his life.

I too, would like to ask you this morning – all of you, “to give a little something extra” for our School and Community Hall. Remember! The little something extra, we are giving this morning, is not for some remote charity, or outside cause – it’s for us, and for our children.

May the New Year bless you and your families, with good health and happiness. May we who are gathered here and all of Israel be blessed with the greatest blessing of all – the blessing of peace. **אמן**.

Rosh Hashanah: On being grateful

George Bernard Shaw once remarked that the only intelligent man he knew was his tailor who would take a new measure of him every time he ordered a new suit, and would not assume - as others did - that he always remained the same George Bernard Shaw.

What is Rosh Hashanah, if not the day when we take our character measurements to determine whether our garments still fit us, or whether we must tailor new ones for the coming year? Rosh Hashanah provides us with the delicate instruments for spiritual measurement, and with the means of ascertaining anew our religious stature. Have we grown or diminished in our inner life? Have we become flabby because of the lack of spiritual exercise? Have we provided sufficient nourishment for our souls, are we able to rebuild our used-up Tissues of the spirit?

Rosh Hashanah is the time for a conscientious spiritual stocktaking and the time when we rededicate ourselves to our Torah, the basis of Jewish life and living.

The Rabbis in the Midrash tell us that before the Torah was given to Israel, God offered it to the other nations of the world. Every one, however, refused it for one reason or another. One group would not accept the “Thou shalt not kill”³⁰⁰ (**לֹא תִרְצַח**). Another could not accept **לֹא תִגְנוֹב** - “Thou shalt not steal.”³⁰¹ Yet a third could not accept **לֹא תִנְאֹף** - “Thou shalt not commit adultery,”³⁰² and so on. But when Israel was asked to receive the Torah, they replied, **כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע**

³⁰⁰ Shemot 20:13

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

= “All that the Lord had spoken, we will do and we shall obey.”³⁰³ The Ten Commandments seem to encompass all the thinking that goes on within the mind of man. The last of the Commandments **לֹא תַחְמֹד** - “Thou shalt not covet”³⁰⁴ is important, because it can more than any of the others, lead to the destruction of the individual.

The last of the Commandments reads **לֹא תַחְמֹד אִשֶׁת רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ וְשׂוֹרוֹ וְחֹמְרוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ** - “Thou shalt not covet your neighbors house. Thou shalt not covet your neighbors wife, nor his man servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbours.”³⁰⁵ Rabbis and commentators have attempted to understand well this entire concept of covetousness. They understood that the individual, in coveting or desiring that which is his neighbour’s, may eventually be brought to greater sin. “The man who does not covet his neighbours goods,” comments Dr. Hertz, “will not bear false witness against him. He will neither rob, nor murder, nor will he commit adultery.” It commands self-control, for every man, has it in his power to determine whether his desires are to master him, or he is to master his desires. Without much self-control, there can be no worthy human life; it alone is the measure of true manhood or womanhood. **אִיזְהוּ גִיבּוֹר** - “Who is strong?”, ask the Rabbis, **הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יִצְרוֹ** - “He who controls his passions,”³⁰⁶ is their reply.

There’s a very interesting story told about a little boy who lived in a house on top of a hill. Every morning when he would step outside and look across the horizon to a house upon another hill in the distance, he would notice that the other house had beautiful golden windows. Whenever he would look at the house with the golden windows his heart would yearn: “If only I could see this house with the golden windows. How beautiful it must be!”

One morning he got up early, stuffed some fruit into his pockets, and started out down the hill across the valley, towards the house with the golden windows. His heart pounded faster and faster as he came closer to his goal. And the closer he came, the faster he ran in order to reach this beautiful house and to see the golden windows. At last he reached his objective. But, lo and behold, the house was just like any other, and possessed ordinary windows. How disappointed this youngster must have been! He stood there dejectedly and downhearted and then turned to return home. On his way he noticed in the distance another house with golden windows. Quickly, he ran down the hill across the valley and up the next hill, when he arrived at his objective, he noticed, that the house with the golden windows, was his own house, the very house in which he and his family lived so happily.

³⁰³ Shemot 24:7

³⁰⁴ Shemot 20:14

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Avot 4:1

How true this is of so many of us who see the greenery and the brightness way off in the distance, while we fail to take notice of all the joy, happiness and glitter, which is always in our very own home.

There is much that glitters in the world today. We are all familiar with the old adage, that the grass is greener in someone else's garden. We all believe that the problems which we possess, the battles which we encounter, and the difficulties which we have, do not exist elsewhere. Across the road, across the mountain, or over the sea, life is peaceful and serene, calm and quiet. Yet upon close examination we find that our problems exist elsewhere, that our difficulties are encountered by others, that our tasks are as common to others as they are to us.

But, like the little boy in our story, we must say that in the long run, the golden windows are at our very own house. That which we covet, or desire, because we see it in the possession of another, is in reality better in our own backyard. Thus, our Sages were correct when they maintained that within this concept of covetousness, all the other commandments must be embodied. For one who covets can sin by stealing, or by killing, for that which he desires. One who does not covet will, in all probability, not fall into the pitfall of sin and corruption.

This concept then embodies practically all the thinking that is found in the Ten Commandments. When the children of Israel accepted this, they in reality accepted as well, all the other aspects, both positive and negative, that were enumerated in these ten great words spoken by God.

It's one of the sad, unhappy part of my duties as a Minister to stand, quite often, at an open grave and watch as family members sit there shocked and stunned, deeply stricken by their loss. After the funeral I return home and I find myself thinking about life and death, about people and their lives, about our limited stay on earth and how we treat each other in the relatively short period while we are here. I find myself asking the question without adequate answer; "Why is it that we are so shocked and stunned when the gift of life has been withdrawn as we know inevitably it will be?" Yet we all whittle away and destroy God's gift of life – ours and others, through thoughtlessness and inconsideration, day after day, and we do not feel any sense of shock at all, at that life wantonly being wasted, dissipated and destroyed.

During my weekly visits to hospitals I came across a member who had been involved in a car accident and he had broken his leg. "Rev," he said, "if I could only a walk, how well off I would be. You don't realise what a blessing it is just to be able to walk." I nodded my head in agreement. I assured him that God's choicest blessing in life is good health and I left that sick man with a feeling that the hospital is the infernal region, and outside in the world, of work-a-day people, where almost all enjoy good health, that world is paradise.

Needless to say I was rapidly disillusioned. People outside the hospital were unaware of their blessing. Indeed, the very patient who so vehemently advocates health as the supreme blessing, when he was able to walk again, instead of jumping with joy and being happy, he remained just as miserable and unhappy as before.

In the last few years there have been several thrilling stories of mine rescues, but one report in particular in a newspaper comes to my mind. A man is buried in a mine. For fourteen days, competent mining engineers, with equipment flown in from all over the world, supervise men who dig, day and night at the risk of their lives, with very little sleep, all at the point of exhaustion. They finally get him out, and save his life. What words of gratitude does he utter? He says: "If they knew what they were doing, they could have reached him in five days."

Later the family issued a different kind of statement, but it was too late. The damage had already been done. One begins to understand why Dante reserved a place, right in the centre of his inferno, for the grateful. In the words of Shakespeare. "Ingratitude thou marble hearted fiend"³⁰⁷.

The Orthodox Jew is bidden to recite a minimum of a hundred blessings of thankfulness a day. The observant Jew cannot start the day with a sour perspective; he must start it with a prayer of thanksgiving for his life and the renewed life of his dear ones on that particular morning. The observant Jew cannot end the day with a sense of futility; he must end it with a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings of that day.

But our modern society, it seems, is moving in other directions. We have become a society of complainers and malcontents. We are so prone to complain, to reluctant to comment and approve.

How meaningful the words of Amieus in "As you like it," when, in the forest, exposed to the elements, he says:

"Blow, blow thou winter wind
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude."

Ex-President Eisenhower was recently asked what he would consider his most thrilling moment. He answered "Those moments after my heart attack recovery, when I was first able to sit up in a wheel chair and move about."

Here's a man who has experienced all the glories and honours, as well as truly great achievements, who recognises in the latter part of his life that the greatest blessings,

³⁰⁷ 'King Lear'

are the ones that God gives daily, not to Presidents, Kings, or leaders alone, but to every human being, and which most of us take for granted.

Many people cast envious eyes upon others. As the story of the boy with the golden windows, they are unaware of the rich blessings they themselves possess. How grateful and consequently joyous we should be for the love that surrounds the happy homes we live in; for the tender care of wife or husband; for the joyful sound of children; for the blessings of the land; for the very food we eat; for the warmth; for the cheer of our friends; for our health; for the security of mind; for peace in our country. For all these things, material and spiritual, how contented we should be.

To all of you I say: **לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו** - I offer you the blessing that you shall have a year of health and happiness and let us thank God for all the things he has done for us. **אמן**.

Rosh Hashanah: Don't give up

Every Rosh Hashanah I ask myself what should be the topic? I ask myself what thought is most appropriate to be the central message, of the New Year Festival Sermon? And each year I am reminded of the story of the Jewish Minister who was elected to a new congregation and was naturally most anxious to make a favourable impression with his first few sermons. The first week he delivered a Spiritual Sermon about Sabbath observance, but after he had finished the leaders of the congregation went up to him and they asked him not to speak any more on this subject, as many members were not Sabbath observers and his remarks offended them.

The second week he spoke about Kashrut. Again the leaders of the congregation voiced their disapproval. Many of the congregation, they said, didn't observe Kashrut and the Minister ought not to cause them any embarrassment.

The third week he decided to speak about Jewish Education. Here - he thought to himself - he would be on sure ground. He would not step on anybody's toes. But alas, when he finished the sermon he was again rebuked for choosing such a controversial topic and thereby causing discomfort to those of the members who had assimilationist leanings.

The poor harassed Minister could not bear it any longer and cried out in desperation: "I spoke to you on the importance of the Sabbath and you didn't like the topic! Then I addressed you on the subject of Kashrut and you were again not pleased! Finally I spoke to you on Jewish Education, and you will still not satisfied. Tell me - what do you want me to talk about?"

"Reverend!", replied the congregants. "Speak about Judaism!"

As a matter of fact, only the other day a congregant of mine came up to me and complained that he had occasion to go to another Shul for a Bar Mitzvah, and the Minister there told off the congregation very bluntly. He told them too much **מוסר**, and he didn't think that was the right thing to do to insult people to their faces like that. So I told him a story which I think is appropriate to repeat to you this morning:

There was a very ugly man with a face so distorted that he couldn't even bear, to look at himself in the mirror. He removed all the mirrors from his home to spare himself the agony they caused him. Even his friends after a while removed the mirrors from their walls on the day of his visit. One day he happened to visit the shop of one of those friends. To his amazement and astonishment, wherever he turned, he was confronted by a shining mirror that reflected his ugly features.

He became furious and rushed over to his friend shouting: "What do you mean by this outrage! Why did you leave the mirrors there, when you knew I would visit you?" The friend replied, "In my own home, you are my guest, so I must suit your taste. Here, this is my business. Can I help it if I see mirrors?"

"The same thing applies here", I told my congregant. "You complain that the Minister has criticised too many and too much. At home they are his guests, and he theirs. In the Synagogue, it's his business to promote Judaism. He must tell the truth, as he sees it, even if he mirrors the faults of his best friends."

On this solemn day I should like to draw your attention to the Haftorah reading taken from the Book of Jeremiah which we read on the Second Day of Rosh Hashanah. This great prophet was the tragic witness of one of the most disastrous and heart-rending moments in the history of our people. He saw the sacking of Jerusalem, the burning of the Holy Temple, and the forced exile of the nation. In this chapter he describes how Rachel rose from her grave, and wept before God: "A voice is heard in Ramah – lamentation and bitter weeping: It's Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted."³⁰⁸

Our Sages add a touch of drama to this sad event. They say that Rachel was not the only one who wept in that tragic hour. The Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – also rose from their graves to intercede for their descendants, but God did not hearken to their pleas nor answer their prayers. He said: "It's a decree from me! This is final". Only Rachel was able to evoke a positive response and to exact a promise from the Almighty, for God said to her: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears. Your work shall have its reward, says the Lord ... the children shall return to their border" - **וְשָׁבוּ בְנֵי לֵבְיָאֵל**

³⁰⁸ Yirmiyahu 31:14

The question naturally arises: why were the pleas of the patriarchs ignored, while Rachel was successful in obtaining a promise from God, for the eventual redemption and salvation of her people?

The answer is provided for us in two key words in the Haftarah: **מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם** - “She refused to be comforted”. Rachel simply would not accept the decree of exile and slavery as final. She would not make peace with what seemed to be the doom of her nation. She just refused to take no for an answer!!

The phrase **מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם** is a crucial one indeed. Our Sages inform us that a person will accept words of consolation and comfort only when he’s convinced that there’s no hope. But, when he feels that the things he cherishes and holds dear are not beyond reclaim, he will not listen to words of condolence but will lend every effort to save his loved ones from a terrible fate. He will move heaven and earth to come to their rescue and to bring them aid. This truth is expressed in the Talmud and is quoted by Rashi with reference to the saga of Jacob and Joseph. **אין מקבלים תנחומין על החי** - “One does not accept words of consolation for the living”³⁰⁹. Jacob refused to listen to words of sympathy, because there was a glimmering hope in his heart, that Joseph was not dead, even though all the evidence pointed to the contrary.

I knew the case of a mother who had received a telegram that her son was missing in action. A few months later she was informed that her son was killed in enemy territory. The mother refused to believe it and she wouldn’t permit anyone to speak of her son as dead. She spent the savings of a lifetime in an effort to trace the boy, but it was all in vain. This continued until she came face to face with the pilot of her son’s plane. He told her how they were shot down, and how her son had died from his wounds. He produced snapshots to prove it: It was then that the mother broke and wept. She now believed the cruel truth and was prepared to listen to words of consolation and comfort.

The fact is that behind every great human achievement, there stands the spirit of **מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם**. Cures were found for Yellow Fever, and Polio, because there were determined men who would not give up in their search for a method, to vanquish these scourges of mankind. The same thing is true with the men who were responsible for the tremendous strides of progress that were made in the field of science. The miracles of our age were brought about by people who would not throw in the sponge in the face of seeming defeat, but they fought with stout hearts in the face of heavy odds.

Even in our own personal lives, the spirit of **מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם** can make a big difference. Think after the poet, John Milton, who was totally blind, but refused to make peace

³⁰⁹ Sofrim Ch. 21

with his handicap and wrote the great masterpieces “Paradise Lost” and “Paradise Regained” in spite of the darkness that engulfed him. Consider Charles Steinmetz who, though deformed, poor and friendless, was able to reach a position of leadership in the field of electrical research and engineering. Beethoven, who composed his greatest symphonies while he was stone deaf; Franklin Roosevelt, who became paralyzed in the prime of his life but refused to come to terms with his crippling disease and he became a world leader in a crucial period of history. The world was against Columbus. People laughed at him. His friends forsook him. His crew mutinied. But he refused to give in! Day after day during his voyage he made the following entry in his diary: “This day we sailed on.” Columbus wanted to find the northwest passage to India, but fortune held even a greater reward in store for him. All because of his indomitable will.

Throughout the centuries of our dispersion it was this slogan that kept us alive. We simply refused to accept the “Galut,” as the final chapter in Jewish history. The following few lines are particularly applicable to the pioneering men and women who helped to bring about the miracle of the birth of the State of Israel: “Got any rivers they say are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can’t tunnel through? We specialise on the wholly impossible, doing the things that no one can do.”

When Ben-Gurion issued his call to the masters of Eastern Europe to permit the Jews to emigrate to Israel, he was merely giving voice once again to Rachel’s **מֵאַנָּה לְהִנָּחֵם**. As a spokesman for world Jewry, he served notice that we do not consider our brethren in Russia and its Satellites as lost.

Illustrative of this spirit of **מֵאַנָּה לְהִנָּחֵם** is the following incident which is reported to have occurred during the Spanish Inquisition. Jews were given the alternative of expulsion or conversion. Many conformed outwardly. Secretly, they continued to practice Judaism. One Yom Kippur eve, the Inquisition caught a Minyan chanting Kol Nidrei in a secret subterranean Synagogue. They were sentenced to be burned. Among those sentenced was a prominent member of the Royal Cabinet whose services were indispensable to the Crown. The King and Queen pleaded with the Cardinal to spare him. Their plea was rejected. The royal couple then begged the Jew to convert and save himself. He refused. Both the Cardinal and the Jew remained adamant.

As they were leading the Jew to the fire, the King once more beseeched him to save himself by conversion. The Jew replied, “I can’t - the chains, the chains.” Immediately the King ordered the chains removed. He turned to his loyal subject and asked, “Now will you convert?” Again the response was, “I can’t - the chains, the chains.” “But, there are no chains!” the King remonstrated. Proudly, the Jew proclaimed. “I am not referring to the chains that bind my hands and feet, but to

the chains that link me to Moses and Abraham! Here again, it was his indomitable spirit of **מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם**.

But our obligation does not end here. It's our duty to forge the next link – our children. At this time during Rosh Hashanah, when we take a **חֲשׁוֹן הַנֶּפֶשׁ** as a community and as parents, we must ask ourselves: “Are we doing enough to forge the next link for our children?”. We must ask ourselves to what extent are we preparing our youth to carry on the great traditions of our past? Children live by example, and if we fulfill our religious requirements, they in turn will do likewise. If we come to the Synagogue and respect it, then they too will show their respect.

Our ancestors provided the world with religious, moral and social concepts, and yet we and our children have neither taken the time, nor made the effort, to enrich our lives with our traditions. In this community, too much emphasis is made on the Bar Mitzvah Certificate. Too much emphasis is placed on the portion the Bar Mitzvah boy reads, the bigger the portion, the better Jew he will be! In our Bar Mitzvah's, I am afraid there's too much “Bar” and not enough “Mitzvah”!

Do we ask ourselves does the Bar Mitzvah really understand the meaning of Judaism? Will he be able to follow and understand a Service? Will he be able to conduct a Seder in his home? Will he be able to follow a Talmud Shiur and to understand the simple act of Synagogue worship.

I once had the occasion to worship at a Synagogue where a Bar Mitzvah was in progress. One of the members of the family - he was obviously a man who was not too familiar with the ritual - was called up for **הַגְבָּה** and didn't know what to do with the Torah. The Shamas went up to him to explain how it was done. First to lower the Torah slightly, and then to use the table as a lever in lifting. The man did exactly as he was directed, and as he held the Torah high up for everyone to see, he turned to the **שַׁמַּשׁ** and asked: “Now! What do I do with it?”

We too must ask ourselves “we have a Torah, but what are we doing with it?” “What are we doing as a community to transmit our hallowed traditions to posterity, to assure continued life of the spirit of the Jew?”

When a family lives to derive real Jewish nachas from their children, there are those who call them lucky. No my friends! Luck alone cannot do it. Mazel has its place, but without effort it's seldom, if ever, creative. It's the firm resolve on the part of parents that does it. When fathers and mothers leave no stone unturned in an effort to bring up their children properly, to make observant and distinguished Jews of them, they are entitled to a harvest of nachas.

I wish that Rosh Hashanah will imbue us with the spirit of Rachel, of refusing to come to terms with conditions as they are, but rather with a determination to make

them as they should be. What a great day it would be for us and the community! What added glory there would be for God and for Israel, and what a turning point.

Rosh Hashanah: It's never too late!

With the help of God, and with His everlasting kindness, we have arrived again at the turn of our calendar year to celebrate Rosh Hashanah. With fervent hearts and deep gratitude, we thank Him for having kept us alive to reach this solemn moment.

We have all come to seek atonement, forgiveness for our sins, and we all pray for a year of life and happiness.

Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the Jewish year, is not only a day of prayer when we come together to ask for a healthy and happy year for our nearest and dearest. It's also a day when we pray for the happiness of the world that humanity and Israel should have everlasting peace.

But Rosh Hashanah is also **יום הדין** - a day of judgement. On these days, not only the Jew or the individual, but all humanity stands in judgement. In such a critical time as this, when men and nations are being tested at the judgement-bar of history, the temptation is very great to discuss vast world issues such as Suez, Cyprus, Israel and her Arab neighbours, International tension, Economic injustice and poverty.

More than ever, we feel that as individuals we are merely puppets moved by the invisible strings of history. This morning, however, let us put aside and let us forget world-shaking and newsworthy problems, and let us approach the New Year with the two key words of the season: Teshuva and Selicha - repentance and forgiveness, two words closely related, one essential to the other. Two words which our world seems to have forgotten, and to this failure of memory, we may ascribe much of today's confusion and insecurity.

Our Sages, however, recognized the importance of these two words, and for this reason the whole month of Ellul was set aside for the purpose of putting us in the mood for penitence, meditation and spiritual edification.

Our Sages divide the process of Teshuva into two parts. The first sept, they say, is **חרטה לשעבר** - regret of past misdeeds. An honest person ought to take stock of his life, analyse his thoughts, motives and deeds, and when he recognizes anything in his record which was wrong, he should be man enough to admit it and to be sorry for it. That is the first stage of Teshuva.

The second step of Teshuva is **קבלה להבא** - a resolute decision on the part of the individual to begin all over again; to turn over a new leaf and to lead a new kind of life that will be free from errors and the sins of the past.

These two steps may sound simple and easy, but past experience, however, teaches us that despite the elaborate preparations and repeated exhortations to Teshuva, very little of it is ever achieved. And the question is why? Why do we remain the same, year after year? The answer to this important question is to be found in the weekly portion usually read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah.

For 40 years Moses led his people through the wilderness and knew them well. He knew their strength and their weakness. When he realised that his days on earth were drawing to a close, he addressed words of admonition and guidance unto them and advised them how to face the trials of the future. Listen to Moses as he utters the last testament to Israel: כִּי הַמְצֵוָה הַזֶּאת אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מְצִוֶּה הַיּוֹם לֹא נִפְלֵאת הוּא מִמָּוֶה וְלֹא כִּי הַמְצֵוָה הוּא כִּי קָרוֹב, וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם - "For this commandment which I give you this day is not far from you"; - רַחֲקָה הוּא לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא - "It is not in heaven" and not across the sea", - אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבְלִבְבְּךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ - "it is within your reach, it is in your mouth and in your heart to do it"³¹⁰.

Many people are kept from Teshuva by the feeling that they are too far gone, they have a feeling that they have wandered away from God to a point of no return. During the last war, a colleague of mine a Chaplain told me the following incident which illustrates this state of mind.

While examining a list of critically wounded soldiers, he came across a name that aroused his curiosity and interest. The name of the soldier was Malcolm Cohen and his religious was marked as Protestant. The Chaplain wondered to himself: was that soldier a convert or a product of a mixed marriage? So he went to see the soldier at the hospital.

After talking to him for a while the wounded young man admitted that he was Jewish. Then there followed a painful pause of silence and embarrassment for both. Finally the soldier said: "I am sorry, Chaplain, but you are just too late for me. As you can see for yourself, I am about to die and there isn't a thing that you or anyone else can do for me now", to which the Chaplain replied: "My friend, life and death are in the hands of the Almighty. We can only pray to God."

The soldier smiled back a cynical smile and said: "You ask me to pray? I, who never prayed in my life, who never observed a holiday, and never fasted on Yom Kippur. I should pray? I who was never Barmitzva and was even ashamed in my Jewishness and gave my religious as Protestant - I should pray? Oh No! Prayer is not for me!"

"No", said my friend the Chaplain. "I cannot agree with you. You are not so far removed from God that you can't turn and pray to Him. You are a child of God.

³¹⁰ Devarim 30:11-14

Will a mother scorn her child even when he has become estranged from her? Malcolm, you too are a child of God. Turn to Him and pray.”

Rosh Hashanah: Unetaneh Tokef (1962)

One of the most solemn prayers of Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur is the prayer Unetaneh Tokef. In that prayer we are told in simple words the essence of the holiday: On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur the decree is sealed. Who shall live and who shall die; Who shall come to a timely end, and who to an untimely end? After enumerating what is tantamount to a catalogue of catastrophes which may overtake a person, suddenly the prayer continues with the words **מִי יִשְׁקֵט מִי יִתְיַסֵּר** - “Who shall enjoy tranquility and who shall be confused? Who shall be at peace and who shall be tormented by anxiety and fear?” Evidently, the author of this solemn prayer considered a life troubled with anxiety and confusion as hardly worth living, for he included it in that dreadful list.

But who is there who is totally free from the agonies of anxiety and confusion these days? Most of us dread the possibility of disease and pain; most of us dread the possibility of failure and economic want. We are concerned about what will happen to us in our old age and the welfare of our families. The whole world is, in fact, in the throes of confusion and fear. The very fact that so many varieties of tranquilising drugs are on the market and in such great demand, this fact alone shows and illustrates the tragic state of confusion of mind that threatens the health and the sanity of the nation.

And if the entire world is deeply troubled by an anxiety and confusion, how much more so the Jew! As human beings we share with the rest of humanity the torments and confusion which characterise our age, but we have an additional list of anxieties all our own which can be labelled “for Jews only”. It is of these specifically Jewish fears that I would like to speak to you on this holy night of the year.

There is a striking and picturesque chapter in the Book of Ezekiel which predicts the doom of one of the most beautiful cities of antiquity - the city of Tyre. The prophet puts the entire blame on the leaders for bringing that great and magnificent harbour city to the brink of utter ruin. He compares Tyre to a ship and its leaders to sailors, and he cries **בְּמַיִם רַבִּים הֵבִיאֲוֹךָ הַשָּׂטִיִּים אֲתָךְ** - “into deep waters have your sailors brought you” (Ezekiel 27:26).

As we contemplate the precarious and dangerous situation of the world today, the paralysed powers of the United Nations and the annihilation that faces mankind, the dramatic phrase of Ezekiel comes to mind: “into deep waters have your sailors brought you”. Let us consider this verse from a personal and intimate point of view as it affects us as individual human beings.

The fact is that at one time or another in our lives, we feel that we are in deep and treacherous waters. A bad investment which threatens financial ruin; failing health, or the loss of a loved one, makes us wince and conscious of our utter helplessness. It makes us feel as if we are over our heads in churning waters.

From childhood to old age, we seem to be standing with reluctant feet and shaky nerves at the edge of the great ocean of existence, apprehensive and fearful of the future. Think of the emotions of the five or six-year-old on the first day of school, profoundly shaken at this critical juncture in his young life. Such a mood comes over us more and more often with the passage of time. As we grow older, and the responsibilities grow heavier, the need for deeper understanding and greater reserves of courage and vision can sometimes become overbearing. Only the shallow and the brash do not experience such a desperate mood. Intelligent and mature men and women, capable of serious thought and deep emotion, come upon situation after situation in their experience when they cry with the prophet: "O God, thy waters are so deep; thy waves so mighty, and I am so weak and small! Life is so complicated and my understanding so limited; my duties so heavy, and my strength so weak; the tide so powerful and my arms too tired to reach the shore".

During the holiday I met a young student who told me that at his University he comes into contact with minds that are deeper than his. In and out of class he is debating issues that have to do with life and death; God and immortality; freedom and inequality, problems that have occupied and baffled the great minds of the ages - and he feels that he is in deep waters intellectually. "Rev. Landau," he said, "there is so much to learn, and my mind is so shallow! How can I possibly grasp these eternal truths within the years allotted to me!"

During the course of years I have had many young couples stand before me under the Chuppah. We joke about the nervous bride and the forgetful groom. The truth is that they are more than nervous and forgetful. The poor youngsters are frightened and confused. Almost all of them share the feelings of passengers on a luxury ship when they are forced to step into open lifeboats to face the ocean and the storm alone.

Did you even stop to consider why they were tears in your eyes when you kissed your children goodbye as they left for their honeymoon? You may have scolded yourself for being over-sentimental and foolish, but the fact is that tears did come rolling down your cheeks. Why? Because you felt unsure about the future of your child and sorry for yourself knowing that there will be many a time when you will be lonely for your dear son or daughter.

Those of us who have passed through the valley of bereavement know full well the words of Ezekiel, "into deep waters have your sailors brought you". Think of it! A

couple is happily married for 20, 30 or 40 years. Suddenly, one is taken away and the other is left alone to face the four walls of their home alone to spend the leisure hours alone and to cry in the night alone.

Chores that were before easy, and decisions that were made as a matter of course, have suddenly become burdensome and weight. The days that used to fly like the wind have become tedious and slow, the nights filled with loneliness and despair, and the years with emptiness and sadness.

Permit me to insert at this point a personal observation. I am always pained by the behavior of friends of the bereaved, particularly those of a bereaved widow. During the week of Shivah, they flock to her home to give her solace. They bring cakes and chocolates and they sit in the house and chatter for hours. The trouble comes at the conclusion of the ordained period of mourning. The widow is seldom visited after that time, and is left to look after herself.

In those trying and lonely days, when she makes a heroic effort to pick up the broken threads of her life, she begins to feel that not only has she lost a dear husband and a wonderful companion, but that she has also lost status in the eyes of her friends. She begins to question the sincerity of her friends and the depth of their earlier expressions of interest and concern. And the cry that reaches me from these aching and lonely hearts, whether in the privacy of my study or when I meet these poor souls in the street, is "O God, how deep are thy waters and how frail is my strength".

But of all the agonizing cries, none is more heart-rending than the one that emanates from the mortally wounded souls of bereaved parents - of those who had the dreadful misfortune of losing a son or a daughter. What hours of trembling and shock the human soul is made to endure! And the question is how shall we meet this immutable fact of our lives? Where shall we look for the stamina and fortitude required for us in the face of the turbulent waters and the powerful tide of life? I recommend three sources as outlined for us by the Machzor, namely: repentance, prayer and charity.

תשובה involves an accounting and stock-taking of oneself. We must realise who and what we are, and be honest with ourselves. This involves an acceptance of the facts of life. We must realise that the days of our years move on, and that the clock of time will stop for neither prince nor pauper. Those who try to ignore the changes that occur in their own physical structures as things roll on are in for a great shock. When sixty-year-old grandmothers try to imitate their sixteen-year-old granddaughters, they make fools of themselves, and when grey-haired men in their fifties try to rival men in their twenties, they make a sorry picture. But, beyond being foolish and ridiculous, they harm themselves. They deny themselves the dignity and serenity which comes to those who accept the facts of life.

The second source as outlined for us in the Machzor is תפילה. Tefillah accentuates the significance of faith in God. It inspires us with courage and gives us strength to meet our duties and responsibilities even in the face of the raging sea. It makes us sturdy and tough. It provides us with power and stamina far beyond our estimation of ourselves. No wonder our parents used to say to us when we are afraid “Leyn Kiras Shema” - read the Shema, for prayer means conviction that God has given us bodies and minds sufficiently sturdy to reach the harbor of safety and peace.

I know individuals who had a very difficult time in life. They lost dear ones and are in failing health themselves, and people noting their suffering exclaim, “I don’t see how he/she can go on!”. Tefillah is one of the curative values in life.

Last, but not least, is צדקה which directs our thoughts and attention to others. The best cure for a lonely heart and a depressed spirit, we are told by modern psychology, is to stop brooding and being sorry for oneself and to become involved in an act of צדקה by the willingness to give and support, and by helping others. The Machzor gave this advice long before! Those who ignore it, the selfish, the thoughtless, deny themselves the curative values of צדקה.

This brings us to a subject that ought to be discussed on this most sacred night of the year, when we are alone with our conscience, when we face our Maker without camouflage or pretense, when we are eager to be completely honest with ourselves. I refer to the greatest single Jewish undertaking of our time, namely the State of Israel, and the relationship to this undertaking by us, the Jews of England.

Since the establishment of the State 14 years ago, over 1,000,000 Jewish immigrants have arrived in Israel. Who can assess the different fates of our fellow Jews who sought a new life in the land of their fathers? Has there ever been a country that has, in the course of 14 years, increased the number of children receiving education by 500%? Has there ever been a country that has been called upon to take immigrants on a scale that would have crippled the economy of any other nation in the world?

Last year, the Jewish Agency budgeted for 25,000 Jews, but this figure has become pure fiction in the light of the 10,000 Jews per month who are now reaching the shores of Israel, which will mean a total figure exceeding 100,000 persons over the year. Unfortunately, it’s not possible to speak of their countries of origin because, if undue publicity is given, the governments of these countries may terminate their immigration.

The immigration of every individual Jew - man, woman & child - including taking them out of their countries of origin, transport, temporary absorption in Israel on their arrival, the first week’s food, hospital treatment, schooling for children and housing, costs £600 sterling per head. The citizen of Israel accepts the responsibility

of bringing his brethren to his homeland, and he faces an almost penal tax system to help meet these astronomical costs.

This year the Joint Palestine Appeal (JPA) has set for itself a three-million-pound target which, in reality, can be translated as the saving of 15,000 souls. For every £200 raised, a Jew can be recued from degradation, intolerance and sometimes death. But the reverse is also true. For every £200 that we fail to raise from the target of three million pounds, a Jew will be left sitting on his suitcase somewhere in the world looking in vain to his brethren for the rescue and succor that does not come.

This is the human drama in which we are involved, connected with the rehabilitation of the Jewish people which must be accompanied by love and self-sacrifice. So long as new immigrants continue to arrive in their National Homeland, so long as the people of Israel can populate new agricultural villages and towns, so long as Israel serves as a haven of redemption for Jewish communities throughout the world, then we shall be able to fulfil our task.

These are the reasons why, on Kol Nidrei evening, we are being asked to contribute and to give the maximum of our capacity. Nothing less than 100 percent response can make any kind of impact upon the huge financial problem which is facing the government of Israel and the Jewish Agency at this moment.

You are the contributor, the instrument, by means of which the cry of the Jewish people, the cry of every individual clamoring for his right to live a free life, is sounded. The decision is yours!

May we all be blessed by the Almighty with health and strength to do our utmost for the people of Israel, the State of Israel, and the Torah of Israel.

Rosh Hashanah: Decisions for the undecided

Our Sages tell us that **שלושה ספרים נפתחים בראש השנה** - 'three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah, **אחד של רשעים גמורים ואחד של צדיקים גמורים ואחד של בינוניים**, - 'one book is for the righteous, one for the wicked, and one for those who are in-between'. **צדיקים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר לחיים** - 'the righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life'; **רשעים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה**; - 'the wicked are inscribed in the book of death', **בינוניים תלויין ועומדין**, - the fate of those who are in-between remains hanging in the balance until after Yom Kippur. If by then they become meritorious in their conduct, they are inscribed in the book of life. If not, their names are included in the book of death.³¹¹

When we talk about people, we often divide them into groups of **רשעים** and **צדיקים**. But the fact is that only the rare individual is either a perfectly good person, or the

³¹¹ Rosh Hashanah 16b

personification of evil. I know you well and I doubt very much whether there's anyone in this congregation who actually considers himself to be a **צדיק גמור**. I am equally convinced that we have no **רשעים גמורים** in our midst; wicked people are not in the habit of attending synagogue services.

The plain fact is that you and I are neither angels nor devils, but a mixture of both. We belong with the **תלויין ועומדין** - with those who are in-between, with those who are nearly pious, nearly good, nearly right. Most of us are so close to the good life for which we pray so fervently during these days of awe, during this period of penitence, that one single, decisive step, that's all, just one single step, could carry us over into the camp of the righteous.

One of the most dramatic and heart-rending stories of the last war was told by a Jewish Chaplain. In a cell of a huge concentration camp, the allied army of liberation found half a dozen Jewish inmates who showed signs of a terrific struggle before their death. Frightened by the on-rushing and approaching British armies, the Nazi jailer fled and, in his haste, he dropped the keys. There, in the doorway, lay the keys which to these six men meant freedom and life itself. And six hearts began beating faster and six pairs of hands stretched full length in a desperate effort to reach those precious keys. But, alas, what tragedy! For just a little beyond their reach lay those keys. And so they fought, and shrieked, and tore their flesh in madness until they expired. And there lay the keys nearly within their reach.

Several months ago, a five-year-old boy wandered from a mountain road and lost his life. Had he walked only a few yards away from the spot where his body at last was found, he could have seen his home in the valley below, and then could have easily reached it.

Well, life is like that. Only God knows why it must be so - why accidents of fate should be permitted to play havoc with the lives of the innocent. But there are areas in life where we can do something about it; there are areas in life where we enjoy **בחירה**, the freedom to choose between alternatives and to decide for ourselves. The trouble is that many fail to exercise the divine gift of free will, and the trouble is that we do not take the one decisive step which would carry us over into the camp of **צדיקים גמורים**. Instead, we are satisfied to forever remain in the category of the **תלויין ועומדין** - of those who hang in the balance. Here we are: I take it for granted that we know why we came to this House of Worship on this sacred day. We came because we have an abiding faith in God and a deep love of our people. Why then do we evince so little regard for Jewish observances and for Jewish interests during the rest of the year? Why don't we manifest and demonstrate a greater interest in Judaism? The answer is that we are simply too indolent to exercise our willpower to take the once decisive step that would promote us to the class of the loyal and the faithful.

The keen observer of the Jewish scene will tell you that the religious life of Anglo-Jewry is weakened dismally by the dreadful blight of indecision. Thousands of people permit the pendulum of their enthusiasm to swing from one end to the other. Year after year, they attend divine services during the High Holiday season, but failing to act decisively and resolutely about the matter of תשובה, they remain for the remainder of the year, in the camp of תלויין ועומדין, drifting lazily along in the company of those who are 'Nisht ahin un nisht ahir'.

There are others who fail to extricate themselves from the 'in-betweens' because they are afraid to face the changes in their daily habits and routine of life that such a decisive step would entail. Our Sages have recognized this fact when they said: מקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין - 'the place which the penitent occupy, the perfectly righteous are unable to occupy'³¹², meaning that they considered the penitent to be even greater than the righteous because they appreciated how difficult it is for a person to break with an evil past and face a new life.

Few people realise what goes on in the hearts and minds of people when life presents them with a major problem requiring concentration, analysis and weighty alternatives. All we see in the result. We do not see the conflict that preceded it. There are those, for example, who think of a man like Moses as one who was destined to be the liberator of his people and the prophet of a new faith and a new era. But standing in the desert before the burning bush and struggling with his soul, whether or not to return to Egypt, Moshe came very near to remaining a shepherd for life.

As we read the biography of Theodor Herzl, whose name is synonymous with Political Zionism, we discover that he experienced a severe emotional strain before he accepted the idea of the Jewish State. It was the Dreyfuss Affair - with all the furor that it generated - that set Herzl's heart on fire. Mind you, that was more than half a century ago! It took a great deal of courage and strength of character at that time to proclaim that there is but one solution to the Jewish problem, namely a Home for the Jew in the land of his fathers.

The same is true of Albert Einstein. Many are under the impression that he was predestined to be the greatest scientific genius of his century. That just wasn't so. His biographer tells us that Einstein became a scientist by an amazing exhibition of grit and willpower.

So we can see that even the great have found it hard to make the crucial decisions of their lives. But, by the same token, it was those decisions that made them great. Had they failed to choose right, or had they refused to make a decision, probably no one would have known their names today.

³¹² Brachot 34b

Finally, there are those who think that they can remain neutral and undecided about the crucial issues of life. The moral slackness in the field of politics and human relationships today can largely be attributed to this attitude on the part of the many. Someone ought to acquaint such people with the pertinent fact that life is not “neutral”; that it cannot and will not wait for us to make up our minds. You and I can remain undecided as far as our attitudes and opinions are concerned, but our lives cannot be held in suspense. We live them one way or another, either like angels or devils or both.

In the ancient city of Athens, there was a law that in case there was a revolution or an insurrection, only those who remained neutral and took no sides in the conflict were to be punished.

Indeed, how wise you were, men of Athens! You know that indecision and so-called neutrality can ruin a city.

My friends, the world we live in is engaged in a great conflict between the forces of right and wrong, freedom and slavery, light and darkness. This has always been so. The struggle runs through the ages and across the frontiers of every race and creed.

The ramparts may change, the lines may alter, but the fight never ceases. There are those who are in the thick of battle. The saintly are on one side, and the wicked on the other. My sermon is directed to the **תלויין ועומדין** - to the undecided. Shall we continue to stand on the sidelines and refuse to help those who are fighting for God and for the survival of our faith and our people, or shall we take that one decisive step and join the ranks of the righteous and thus inscribe ourselves and our families in the Book of Life.

Shabbat Shuva: Alone with God (1964)

The Nobel Prize is an international honour, bestowed upon a select number of individuals with outstanding contributions to humanity. It was, therefore, a sensation when Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous French thinker and writer, rejected the Nobel Prize for Literature. He refused not only the honour, but also the £15,000 that accompanied it. What kind of ideas motivated him in this fashion?

The Chairman of the Swedish Academy's Nobel Committee hailed Sartre as “the father of the existentialist doctrine, which became this generations intellectual self-defense.” In his book, Sartre summarised the ideas behind existentialism in these words:

“Man can will nothing unless he has first understood that he must count on no one but himself; that he is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite responsibilities, without help, with no other aim than the one he sets himself, with no other destiny than the one he forges for himself on this earth.”

As some journalists have explained: “for the existentialist, God does not exist and the world is just a phenomenon without any meaning other than what man may attach to it. Man is always faced with the responsibility of choice between good and evil, and man makes that choice not only for himself, but for all humanity”.

Judaism, too, accepts these basic ideas. But with certain modifications. Man is alone - that is true. But he is alone with God. In the 27th Psalm which we read twice every day during the High Holiday season, we say: **כִּי אָבִי וְאִמִּי עָזְבוּנִי יְהוָה יֹאסֶפְנִי**. This verse is one of the most significant and moving prayers in the book of **תהילים**: “For though my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.”³¹³ All may forsake me; but not God!

In the final analysis, we are born alone, die alone, and in our most trying moments - despite the presence of others - we are uniquely alone. But God is always with us.

This is a basic motif of Shabbat Shuvah which is emphasized by the story of the **עקידה** which we read on Rosh Hashanah. God command’s Abraham to take his only, beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice. To whom can Abraham turn to advice? With whom can he discuss this? Who will understand him? People will laugh at him and his God. They will make fun of his belief in a God of mercy and justice who could command such a cruel act. Abraham is truly alone.

Abraham has cast his lot with God, and he must go through with it, though he could have refused. God does not command Abraham. Notice the language! He says: **קח נא את בְנֶךָ** - “Please take your son”³¹⁴. This is only a request. Avraham has the option of refusing. Yet Abraham obeys. He is the true “Knight of Faith”.

It is with this perspective of faith, courage, and resolve that we can face life and its trials; come closer to God, and better appreciate the three elements which can make this possible: **תשובה ותפילה וצדקה**.

What is **תשובה**? Not simply repentance, says the saintly Lubavitcher Rebbe. If it were this, then the word **חרטה** would be employed. It is rather a return to one’s self potential. Utilizing the best within us for a courageous existence.

What is **תפילה**? Not simply prayer. If it were this, then we would use the word **בקשה**. Instead, it is attachment to God. It is elevating oneself from where we are upward to God. It is coming close to Him.

³¹³ Tehillim 27:10

³¹⁴ Bereishit 22:2

What is צדקה? Not simply charity. If it means this, then it would be expressed by רחמים - lovingkindness and mercy. צדקה means the right thing to do. It is just that we act this way. It is required of us as human beings.

May we be strengthened in our moments of trial and affliction by the realization of the closeness of God. May the future be a bright one for us. But regardless, like Abraham, let us move forward with our faith and our determination to meet life and to conquer it.

Shabbat Shuva: Redeeming the land and the people

Twice a year - on Shabbat בחקותי and כי תבוא – the תוכחה is read in the synagogue. On two occasions Moses told the Jews how they would be punished if they violated God's laws. The punishments he described I will not dare to summarise. If you are not already familiar with them, you should read them, for no summary can possibly do justice to their overpowering eloquence.

Yet, one has cause to wonder: Why did Moses utter the warnings twice? And why did he did it differently each time? Do the two תוכחות in Leviticus & Deuteronomy refer, perhaps, to two different situations in Jewish History? Or do they perhaps refer to two different kinds of crises?

The great Nachmanides tells us that the first תוכחה is prophetic of the destruction of the First Jewish Commonwealth in the year 586 B.C.E when the Babylonians conquered Judea, reduced Jerusalem to ashes, and exiled the Jews to Babylon.

The second, he says, is prophetic of the destruction of the Second Jewish Commonwealth in the year 70 C.E., when the Roman's burned the second temple and hastened and brought on our dispersion to all the corners of the earth.

While Nachmanides' suggestion is very intriguing, the question remains whether once can support his opinion from the texts. And to this question the greatest preacher of the last generation, Rabbi Amiel - formerly Chief Rabbi of Tel-Aviv - gives a truly brilliant reply where he explains that the texts bear out and fall in line with Nachmanides' suggestion.

Rabbi Amiel teaches that there are two kinds of national disintegration and there are two ways in which a nation tends towards collapse. One way is for a nation to lose the earmarks of nationhood. For example, it can lose its land, its statehood, or its independence. There is another way, however, which is even more tragic, which is when the individual constituents of the nation lose their pride in their heritage, in their faith, and in their ability to create things worthwhile. The nation then disintegrates; it disintegrates because its constituents have individually given up the fight.

The first תוכחה, says Rabbi Amiel, deals with that type of national collapse which comes from the loss of land and statehood, and that can be seen from the verses of the text in Leviticus. The warnings are all given in the plural, because they refer to the collective collapse of the nation. The warnings also refer to the destruction of the soil and the devastation of the cities. The emphasis is on the devastation that will come to the national shrine and all the national institutions.

In Deuteronomy, however, the warnings are directed principally to the disintegration of individual Jews. That is why the verses are all in the singular, and that is also why there is such a great emphasis on the collapse of individual faith: “Thou shalt have no faith in thine own existence”³¹⁵. And historically, that is what happened.

After the destruction of the first Temple, Jews lost their land and statehood, but with the guidance of the prophets, Jews even in their exile turned closer to their God than ever before. Babylon became a tremendous center for the revival of Judaism. The Synagogue became the great creation of our people, and the institution of the Synagogue became a model for all of the western world and one of the greatest contributions to civilization.

After the destruction of the Second Temple, however, our greatest loss was the spiritual disintegration of most individual Jews. They lost faith in themselves and their heritage. A few remained loyal, but the overwhelming majority were dispersed, they embraced Christianity, or they assimilated altogether. It's true that there were times in the past 2,000 years when Judaism thrived in the Golden Age of Spain and in Eastern Europe. But generally speaking, in the year 70 C.E. there were at least five times as many Jews as there were in 1789 when the French Revolution began. This indicates a sad breakdown of the morale of individual Jews following the destruction of the Second Commonwealth. And that is why Nachmanides regarded the two sets of warnings in the Bible as prophetic of the two great destructions. The first in the plural referred to the loss of land and state, but the second - in the singular - referred with the disintegration and “failure of nerve” of individual Jews.

My friends! There's much that he can learn on this Shabbat Shuvah from this comment of our sages. We have been privileged in our own day to behold one recovery - the recovery by Jews of their land and statehood. We have been privileged to behold גאולת הארץ, a miraculous and speedy rehabilitation of the soil of Israel, the reconstruction of its cities, the reforestation of its hills. The creation of the State of Israel was an historic and momentous event which our generation does not, perhaps as yet, fully understand.

It's told that the illustrious Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev used to write in his children's engagement documents that the “wedding will take place in Jerusalem, the

³¹⁵ Devarim 28:66

holy city”, then he added **וְאִם חָס וְשׁוֹלוֹם מֹשִׁיחַ לֹא יָבֹא הַחַתּוּנָה תִּהְיֶה בְּבֵרְדִיטְשֶׁעוּ** – “If God forbid, Moshiach does not arrive, the wedding will take place in Berditchev.”

This was typical of the fervent hope and prayers of the righteous throughout all centuries after the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet it was our generation that witnessed this historic event. Perhaps this was a form of compensation for the unspeakable suffering and agony which we experienced during the war years.

Yes! We have been privileged to behold & to witness **גְּאוּלַּת הָאָרֶץ** the recovery by Jews of their land and statehood. But, unfortunately, we are very far from witnessing **גְּאוּלַּת הָעָם**, the recovery of the people, the restoration of universal Jewish morale, the restoration of the faith of Jews in themselves, their heritage, their future. How it will come about this second recovery, this spiritual recovery, I cannot say. On this Shabbat Shuvah, we ought to give serious consideration to this great problem of ours.

I pray fervently that the day is not distant when we will give serious thought to the recovery of our faith, in our own heritage, just as we have been privileged to witness the recovery of land & statehood. I pray fervently that you & I, in particular, will resolve this coming year to give more of our time to **גְּאוּלַּת הָאָרֶץ** & to **גְּאוּלַּת הָעָם** – the redemption of our people’s land & the redemption of our people’s faith. **אָמֵן**.

Shabbat Shuva: The meaning of Teshuva

שׁוּבוּהָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֵלֶיךָ כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעֶוְנֶךָ - “Return, O Israel,” says the prophet, “to the Lord thy God, for you have been humbled by your iniquities. Take words with you and return to the Lord”³¹⁶.

These immortal words of Hosea are heard today in all places of worship, wherever Jews assemble. Shabbath Teshuvah, the Sabbath of repentance, is the call to Israel during the sacred days to return to God. During these sacred days records are reviewed.

A businessman takes inventory at the end of the year and checks to see how much a profit he realized for a year’s work. So too, the Lord takes inventory of our deeds, to see whether we have profited from another year of existence. Should the business man find that he has not succeeded as he had expected, he seeks all means to improve his lot quickly by running a special sale, to get costumers to visit his place of business, and thus sell as many of his goods as possible.

The ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur are special “sale” days. The bargain offered to us is our very lives. We can buy it “reasonably” - if only we knew

³¹⁶ Hoshea 14:2

how. Some of us believe that fasting, praying and giving charity during the **עשרת ימי תשובה** will do the trick. However, there's yet one more ingredient without which the job remains unfulfilled, and that is **תשובה** - which means repentance.

The dictionary defines repentance as an act of “turning with sorrow from a past course or action.” According to Maimonides, this definition is only half correct, for besides feelings of sorrow for a past action, there must be a promise not to repeat such action in the future.

How are we to understand the words, “turning with sorrow?” How sorry should we feel? Can we measure this sorrow?

A student once asked the famous Rabbi of Belz, “How can I know for sure whether I am truly sorry for my past wrongdoings?” The Rabbi said to him, “I will tell you a story”:

“Once, a merchant arrived in the market place very early with his goods which were very much in demand. That same morning a heavy rain began to fall, and all the other merchants who ordinarily sold that same material were unable to come. All the townsfolk had to buy from this one salesman. He was no fool! Knowing that he was the only one with this type of material, he raised his prices and even then, he was not too anxious to sell, hoping that if the rain persisted, he would raise the prices even higher the next day. And so it continued for a number of days. The rain kept coming, and the merchant still didn't sell but kept raising the price. Suddenly, during the night, the rain stopped and when morning came, the market place was full of other dealers, selling the same goods for a fraction of the price the first man was asking.”

“My dear student,” the Rabbi continued, “if you think that you feel as much regret in your heart for not having acted according to God's wishes as that merchant felt, for not having sold earlier, then you can be sure you are truly sorry for your past sins.”

Our sages considered penitence the greatest of all moral forces. Penitence refines the person, elevates his spirit, and forces him to be social within the community of his fellow human beings. The Talmud advises each man to consider the world half good and half evil, with himself standing in the middle. If he intends to commit a wrong, he should consider that he will thus tip the scales to the negative side. Because of him alone, all human society may go out of balance and off the path of righteousness. But if he performs a good deed, he will add might to the positive side and mankind will maintain its balance. If, however, he sins unwillingly, he should repent.

The Talmud teaches: תשובה מקרבת את הגאולה - “Penitence hastens the redemption”³¹⁷, and so, through penitence, he will not only relieve himself of his heavy burden of wrongdoing, but he will also help bring redemption to his fellow man. It also states: גדולה תשובה שמביאה רפואה לעולם - “Great is the penitence, for it brings a cure to the world”³¹⁸ because without penitence, man would become a wild beast. In fact, the Talmud goes so far as to say: גדולה תשובה שמגעת עד כסא הכבוד - “Great is penitence, for it reaches to the very throne of the Almighty”³¹⁹. Therefore, when a man brings to reflect upon all his deeds and becomes fully conscious, his soul ascends progressively, until it attains the most sublime heights.

When Jews repent and achieve awareness of their obligations to their people and faith, then נתעטף הקב"ה בשליח ציבור - God Himself becomes the Emissary of the Jewish Community.³²⁰ The verdict is cancelled and Jewry attains the prime of Godliness. **אמן**

Our God and the God of our Fathers

This morning I should like to call attention to an interesting thought suggested by a phrase, which we are reciting – almost like a refrain – during the High Holy days and during the Festivals.

Throughout the holy-days and Festivals Jewish prayer usually begins with אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ - “Our God and God of our Fathers”. We repeat this simple phrase so many times in the course of our prayers without realizing that its rather strange. Why “Our God and God of our Fathers”? Is he not the same God? Actually, one of the two, would be sufficient – either our God, or God of our Fathers. Why both?

There are two kinds of people who believe in God. There are basically two types of believers. There is one who believes and observes, because his father before him believed. This is the life he saw in his parents’ home, and this is the way he was trained. This man has taken over and absorbed the faith of his fathers in to his.

There’s another type, on the other hand, who has unfortunately not seen too much religion in the home of his parents. His background is devoid of the rich Jewish associations, and the beautiful childhood memories of Jewish living, which can serve as a foundation and source of emulation in his own adult life. This person has arrived at his faith independent of his parents. His faith comes to him through his own efforts, through thinking and study and by dint of intensive soul searching. This man, while he cannot lay claim to the “God of our Fathers”, can most certainly claim, that we has come to know “our God”. He can honestly say, “While this may

³¹⁷ Yoma 86b

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Rosh Hashanah 17b

not be the God of my fathers, this is my God". What is the difference between the two types? Each has an advantage and disadvantage.

The first, the man who has absorbed the faith of his fathers, has an enormous advantage. His faith is strong, because it's an integral part of his upbringing and a way of life, to which he has become accustomed. Regardless of the arguments which may be brought to bear, or doubts which may assail him, his faith remains unshaken. His faith is firm, because he took it from his fathers.

There's however one flaw, one shortcoming. He has acquired his faith without studying or thinking for himself. He may observe but he does not always know why, nor does he care. This is religion, but its religion mixed with ignorance.

The individual, on the other hand, who has arrived at his beliefs through diligent study and meditation, has the advantage of a religion based on knowledge and reason. But he is also at a decisive disadvantage. If he is someday confronted by arguments which he cannot answer and doubts which are unresolved, his faith is easily shaken.

That is why we pray, "Our God and God of our Fathers." We want our God: an understanding of our religion that we have arrived at through study and education. We also want the "God of our Fathers," a way of life that has been inculcated and instilled within us, by our parents and by childhood training. If we have both, our faith is invincible.

Each one of us is not only a parent, but also a teacher. As teachers we must make every effort to help our children to find "our God" by giving them a rich background in the meaning of our customs and the inspiring tenets of our faith. As parents we must help our children find the "God of our Fathers" by providing homes where these teachings can find fertile ground to grow and develop. **אמן**.

Kol Nidrei: The miracle of Israel (1968)

We have just seen the Sifrei Torah carried through the hall and we chanted the verse: **אור זרע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה** - "A light is implanted for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart"³²¹.

In each of our homes tonight, before we came here to pray, we kindled yartzeit candles in memory of our dear departed, as a symbol of the light which is implanted for the righteous. Have you ever wondered why a light was chosen to represent the memory of the dead? What is it that makes a light suggestive of a human life?

³²¹ Tehillim 97:11

It is told that one of the ancient Rabbis was expounding the verse נֵר ה' נְשִׁמַת אָדָם - “the lamp of God is the soul of man”³²². One of his disciples asked him: “Why a lamp?”. To this the master answered that a light is the mightiest thing in all the world. Not all the darkness in the vast expanses of the universe can quench even the tiniest flicker of a light. It sends out its rays into the distance, straight unbending rays, piercing the uttermost recesses of light.

But a light is also the weakest thing in all the world. Even only the breath of your mouth will put it out. A blast of nothingness extinguishes it. What all the powers of darkness cannot accomplish can be done by הבל פה, by the seeming nothingness that comes out of the mouth. So, too, it is with the soul of man.

Of course, man possess the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. But animals possess these too. All our bodily functions, though differing in detail, are essentially the same as those of the animals.

What is it, then, that makes a human being radically different from the animal? What makes man the crown of creation? Is it intelligence? The fact remains that animals have also understanding, although of a limited nature. Is it not written, “The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master’s trough”³²³? Recently, scientists have shown that animals can be taught amazing tricks. What then makes man more than just a clever animal?

It is written: רֵאשִׁית חֲכָמָה יְרֵאת ה' - “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord”³²⁴. Physical senses, native intelligence, animals also have. But חֲכָמָה - wisdom - is something which distinguishes man alone. This חֲכָמָה is not just understanding. This חֲכָמָה is יְרֵאת ה' - reverence and awe. These are characteristics of man alone. The sense of יראת הרוממות - the ability to stand awestruck before the mighty and glorious works of the Creation - is something only man possess. “When I see the heavens, the work of God, I feel in every limb of mine His presence”.

The animals care only about that which has immediate reference to it. Is it food? Is it shelter? Is it pleasant for me, or is it perhaps an enemy? The yearning to be aware of the מקומו של עולם - the all present and all transcending reality of God - that is the faculty of the human soul.

רֵאשִׁית חֲכָמָה יְרֵאת ה', the beginning of human wisdom is the fear of God - this is the essence of the soul of man.

This power of the soul is likened to a נר, a light. On the one hand, it is the mightiest of all created forces in the world. But just as a light, it is also the feeblest of all things.

³²² Mishlei 20:27

³²³ Yeshayahu 1:3

³²⁴ Tehillim 111:10

נֵר ה' נְשַׁמֵּת אָדָם - “The lamp of the Lord is the soul of man”. In its strength there’s light. In its weakness, there’s darkness.

On this sacred night, we can do more than just kindle a light for the dead. We can actually kindle the lamp of the Lord and illuminate the souls of the living.

Yom Kippur is a time of introspection, when it is natural for us to look back over the past year or so. Let us ask ourselves what even has most illuminated the Jewish world in the last 16 months. Beyond any shadow of a doubt, the greatest event that happened to the Jewish people was with Israel.

In 5727 our generation saw clearly what countless other generations did not see. We saw the hand of God intervening in human history. We have, in a word, witnessed a great miracle.

On the morning of June 5th, Israel was faced with extinction. Not only the State of Israel, but Israel as a people of God. I remember the words of a prominent Jew during those days of awe: “We are not fighting a battle just for ourselves, or even for the State of Israel. We are fighting for Jewish self-respect and dignity all over the world. And, in fact, the end of the Jewish people was more imminent than ever before. Guided missiles, modern jet bombers, gas warfare were in readiness to destroy Israel on that fateful Monday. Two hours later, it was over. If Israel had been destroyed, what kind of Judaism would we have had, even here, in England? We would be a scattered remnant, defeated, demoralized, frightened, ineffectual. A people destined for extinction. The end of the Jewish people! And it might have happened! It could have happened! But it did not happen.”

It did not happen because God was not ready for His people to go under. And so, God looked down on His small, embattled people, in a tiny corner of the universe, and he took pity on them, and the Lord of mercy remembered.

He remembered that just two and a half decades ago, His people has lost six million men, women and children, and the world had begun to say that there is no God. And in early June, when the six million souls approached the holy throne and pointed to another holocaust which was about to take place, God remembered and He took pity. And He said, “No, my people shall not be destroyed; Israel, My Holy Land, shall not be profaned. Jerusalem, My Holy City, shall not be desecrated.”

And the Lord of Hosts, the Mighty Warrior, cast a fiery glance at the hordes of the enemy roundabout the Holy Land, and as He glanced at them on that morning of June 5th, Iyar 26th 5727, the instruments of war of the enemy of Israel suddenly ceased to function. The radar did not work. The tanks did not ride. The missiles did not fly. The bombs did not fall. The fighters and the bombers went up in smoke.

The soldiers of the enemy were frozen and paralyzed, and could not fight, and they fled in fear and panic before the army of the Lord of Hosts.

And the God cast His merciful glance at Jerusalem, and Jerusalem - for two thousand years under foreign dominion - returned, in one day, to His children. And the Western Wall, the last vestige of the ancient glory of Israel and its Temple, the wall from which God's spirit never departs, the wall of great limestone, held together by the tears and wailing of forty generations, the wall which for 2,000 years was little more than a dream for exiled Jews, returned - in one day - to the people of God.

And God glanced at Bet Lechem, the birthplace of King David and the burial place of Mother Rachel who weeps for her exiled children, and God gave Bet Lechem and the tomb of Rachel back to his people.

And God glanced at Hebron, burial place of Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah. And God gave Hebron, and its caves, and its patriarchs, in one day, to the soldiers of Israel.

And God looked about Him, and He was exceedingly pleased. His land was one. His people throughout the world was united. All the inhabitants of the earth pointed to the miracle that had taken place, and all Israel saw what God had wrought. For God was not ready for His people to go under, and God took pity upon them and God remembered.

This is how it would have been recorded in the Bible, how it happened three thousand years ago. But it happened in our time! It happened to us! We saw it on our own television screens. We read it in our papers. We heard its sounds and saw its movements. Shall we be blind to the miraculous, just because we are witness to the events? Have we grown so sophisticated and jaded that we cannot sense a miracle when it occurs to us? Have we grown so cynical that we cannot sense a miracle when it occurs to us? And having witnessed the miracle, and having sensed the presence of God, can we ever really be the same again? Can the transfigured soul ever return to its original dimensions?

Jewish tradition tells us that any man for whom a great miracle has been performed must be exceedingly cautious, for he is under close scrutiny, his every act is watched and examined. We have no right to think that God will continue to perform miracles for us without reciprocity. Remember that the same generation which saw the miracles of the Red Sea also saw the destruction of much of its own people a few years later.

If now, after experiencing the bounty of God, if now we do not turn to Him but continue to serve Him as in the past only in sadness and in desperation, then we are deserving of the severest retributions which are mentioned in the Scripture reading

of a few weeks ago. There the Torah gives the reason for the tribulations which might some day befall the Jewish people. “You did not serve the Lord Your God in joy”³²⁵.

In six days, God created the world, and God made the seventh day holy. “Six days shall you work and do all your labour, and the seventh day shall be a Sabbath to the Lord Your God”³²⁶. The purpose of the six days was the seventh day. In June 1967 God created us anew as a people. In six days, from June 5th to June 10th, He rebuilt our shattered hopes and created new dimensions of historical possibilities. However, the seventh day is yet to be won.

At a recent convention in Jerusalem, General Yitzchak Rabin, Israel’s chief of staff, said: “Although the six-day war is over, the seventh day of rest has not yet been gained.” He was, of course, referring to the shaky ceasefire which now exists in the Middle East. He was referring to the loss of life incurred through the El Fatah since the end of the war, and the efforts Israel was making to prevent this loss of life.

She is now building, he said, a double fence with an electric eye, which will cost hundreds of millions of pounds. General Rabin was thinking of the vast replenishment of armaments even greater, and better, than those held by the Arabs before the 6-day war, given to them by Russia.

Nasser does not believe in miracles. He believes that there are three factors which enable Israel to survive: First, American Presidential support which he thinks will diminish after the Presidential election. Second, the Home Front - that is the psychology of the Israelis. He thinks they will become demoralized after a certain period of time. Third, the support given to Israel by World Jewry. Nasser thinks that World Jewry will grow tired, and then he will be able to crush the State of Israel.

Our great danger is not the strength and will of the Jewish people. We want peace, and there is no people who want peace more than the Jewish people. But it must be a peace which will secure Israel’s boundaries and which will give her the chance to live in peace as a nation. The Israeli is not only prepared to give his life to this end, but through taxes and compulsory loans he is already providing £2 for every £1 which comes from British and American Jewry. During 1968, thirty thousand immigrants are expected to arrive in Israel. The Jewish Agency estimates that the cost of transporting a family of four, and integrating that family in the first six months of living in Israel, costs about £1,200.

Because of the hostility of Israel’s neighbours, Israel is forced to spend one of the highest proportions of the world on defence.

³²⁵ Devarim 28:47

³²⁶ Shemot 20:9-10

Is it fair and just on the part of the world Jewry to expect Israelis to bear the burden of both defence expenditure and the absorption of newcomers?

Tonight, we are called upon to express our identification with the people and the State of Israel in a tangible way. We are called upon to obtain a maximum response to the Kol Nidrei appeal. For their triumphs are our triumphs. Their ordeal is our ordeal. Their fate is our fate.

May God hear our prayers, and grant each of you a year of life and peace. **אמן**.

Kol Nidrei - No shortcuts (1954)

A Hassidic Tale is told that when the founder of Chassidism, the Baal Shem Tov, who lived 200 years ago, sought to obtain a request from God, he used to go to a certain hidden place in the forest where he made a fire with incantation of mystic prayers and meditated elevating thoughts.

The Baal Shem Tov, which means 'The Master of the Good Name', was thus able to receive his most demanding requests from God in this manner.

Later, when his disciple Dov Ber, the Mezeritzer Maggid, who was born in 1772, brought his petition before God, he too went to the same place in the forest, meditated the same lofty thoughts and recited the mystical incantations, his prayers were answered, though he knew not the secret of making the fire.

One generation later, when Reb Moshe Leib Sassover, born in 1807, found it necessary to offer his supplications before God for his needy flock, he used to go into the same forest and say:

“O God, we do not know the secret of the Baal Shem’s fire. We do not know the secret of his meditations and thoughts. All we know is the secret place in the forest and this must be sufficient. Let the **זכות** - let the merit - of the sainted Baal Shem who prayed here in this place help us and let our prayers be acceptable before thee.” Of course, the Sassover’s petitions were also granted.

After another generation went by, and even the secret place in the forest was forgotten. When Reb Yisroel Riziner needed the aid of God, he merely sighed in his prayers and said: “**רבנו של עולם** - we do not know the secret of the Baal Shem’s fire. We do not know the secret of the mystical meditations he uttered. Neither do we know where the place in the forest is to be found. However, we do know that the Baal Shem Tov’s prayers were answered; the Mezeritzer’s petitions were granted, and also the Sassover’s requests were fulfilled. We know all this transpired in that great forest of the sainted Baal Shem. We tell you all this, O God of Israel, with great faith and we beg you that in the **זכות** of this story alone You should listen to us. I know this story alone is not enough - but it must suffice.” And it was good enough. The Lord answered the prayers of Reb Yisroel Riziner.

Now we come to our generation. We are alienated and estranged from the mysterious fire and we do not know how to make it glow in our hearts. We have forgotten how to recite the holy meditations and ancient prayers. Even the holy place of prayer seems to have escaped us. All we remember and know is that on the night of Kol Nidrei, our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents for a hundred generations knew the mystery of how to kindle the fire of holiness, recited ancient prayers which were answered, and uttered petitions which were granted! This we believe and know.

Tonight, we come before God in the same spirit. “We know not how to kindle the flame of holiness. We have forgotten how to pray the ancient prayers. We have gone astray from the holy forest. All we remember, O God of Israel, is that our forefathers knew these things. May this memory of our ancestors piety be sufficient to arouse within us a feeling for prayerfulness and repentance.”

It is my conviction that these sentiments are expressive of our time and temper! Jews everywhere are standing on the threshold of the synagogue. Many have entered its doors after a long absence. Some have even entered tonight for the first time; others have rejoined the synagogue after many years of absence. There are still a few wavering in indecision.

The greatest Hebrew poet of our modern period, the poet Laureate of his people, Chaim Nachman Bialik, wrote a poem 57 years ago which expresses the mood and mode of our people today and is particularly fitting for Jews coming to the Synagogue on Kol Nidrei night. Even its title aptly describes the Jews on the night of Kol Nidrei. The poem is entitled: על סף בית המדרש - “On the threshold of the Beit HaMidrash”. This poem is a monologue of a student who left the walls of the Beit HaMidrash for the great strange world. He left Judaism for worldliness. After his illusions about the world were destroyed, he returned to the Beit Midrash and declared his loyalty to the god of Israel and the Torah of Israel.

This poem is remarkable because it was written fifty-seven years ago, and yet it describes very minutely and distinctly the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere of the Jew in our day.

Why did the boy leave his Jewish world? He studied in a Cheder and later in a **ישיבה** and grew up with God in his heart. As he grew older, he felt that his religion as an obstacle in his life. It tied him to the past, whereas he sought his life in the future. It prevented him from obtaining a modern education and learning modern manners. His religion prevented him from immersing himself in the opportunities offered by the wide world in business and social life.

As he looked around he felt his religious life to be very narrow. He wanted knowledge in the world philosophy, world literature, and the new sciences. He

curriculum of the Beit Midrash excluded all worldly knowledge. Because of the great poverty of the whole Jewish community living in persecution, the religion was reduced to a mechanism of “do’s” and “don’t’s”, while all student in Bible, Philosophy, History, Poetry and Hebrew Language was discouraged, if not forbidden.

But history does not stand still. Things happened in the world that caused these former **חדר אינגלעך** and **ישיבה בוחרים** to return to the Synagogue. Our poet, Bialik, in the poem **על סף בית המדרש**, gives five reasons why some of our wayward sons have returned.

First, the Jewish student who left the Shabbos and Kashrus behind for the promises of worldliness found that he didn’t benefit anything, neither materially nor spiritually. He lost the “Jewish values” but he found nothing to replace them. He discarded his possessions without obtaining anything new. This left him devoid of everything. In the course of time, a man must return to the rock whence he came.

Secondly, our student standing upon the threshold of the Beit Midrash, recalls the **מחשבה פריה**, the fruitful thought, **הגיון רענן**, the verdant logic, **לב שלם ובטח**, a full and secure heart, a way of life. It offered a system of thought, a philosophy of life. It equipped him to confront life in all the aspects Judaism offered - spiritual satisfaction and intellectual enjoyment.

Thirdly, in this portion of the monologue, our student tells us he didn’t come back willingly, but he was thrown back. He offered the world his love in return it gave the Jew hatred, insults, and embarrassment. The student decided that he did not belong where he was not wanted. He says **אשוב למנוחתי** - “I will return to my rest”. Most Jews understand this reason very well.

Fourthly, our student confesses, that with all the wealth and influence he could have found by leaving the Beit Midrash, he still felt an inner compulsion driving him back. His conscience wouldn’t let him rest. He could never sell his birthright of a Jew for a bowl of political and economic security. In the last analysis, he would rather be among the sheep than among the wolves; among the hunted, than among the hunters.

Finally, after living in the outside world, our student is rudely awakened from his dream. He realized how wide the gap was between his Jewishness and the worldliness outside. In fact, this wasn’t the worldliness or humanity he was seeking. His Jewishness was peace, justice, and righteousness. Their worldliness was force, physical power, and licentiousness. **כל כח לאלקים - אלקים חיים** - “All my strength is to God; the living God”. **לא הכות באגרופ את ידי לימדתי** - “I never taught my hand to

hit with a fist". The strength of the Jew is moral power, not physical force. He could never cross the gap, he has no desire to cross it. He would return to the Synagogue.

A measure of each of these reasons holds true for every one of us. These are the feelings and motives for our being Jewish; for our worshipping in a Synagogue on this Kol Nidrei night. Bialik in his poem tried to teach us that of all the peoples, the Jew cannot without his Judaism.

My friends! If you were to ask me what is wrong with the Jewish world today? My answer would be, "that we are seeking too many shortcuts". We seek shortcuts in religion, shortcuts in education, shortcuts in human relations, shortcuts in every avenue of life.

How often do we hear people complaining that they don't get anything out of it. It doesn't "do anything" for them. Most people regard religion as some kind of a tap that can be turned on and off at will.

The story is told of an Engineering Company that was doing some work in front of a Synagogue. During the week a large sign was displayed which read "Spraying Machine at Work". On Friday night it rained heavily and the first letter on the sign was obliterated and was wiped out, so that when the people came to the Synagogue on Saturday morning, they were amused to see the sign read "Praying Machine at Work". Alas, how close this reading came to a true characterization of the condition that exists in many of our houses of worship today.

How often do we see men and women as they enter the Synagogue for services! One would think that they would utilize the few minutes at their disposal to take their seats quietly and to meditate for a while. One must, after all, make a conscious effort to bridge the gap that admittedly exists between the secular mundane existence outside the Synagogue, and the sacred atmosphere that pervades the Sanctuary. Instead, we see them congregate in small groups and indulge in **דברים בטלים**, or worse still, **לשון הרע**.

Now let us look into the Jewish home of today. There was a time when the Jewish home was the crown of our religion. There was a time when the Jewish home was considered as a mighty fortress against internal and external enemies. A nation rises no higher than the level of its home life. It was Goethe who said that "the home is the origin and summit of civilization". The home is the first playground, the first school, and the first synagogue of the child. The parent is his first companion, teacher and preacher. The influence of the parent is lasting.

Frequent is the testimony given by some great man: All that I am, I owe to my Mother. It was in the Jewish home where the child leaned at his mother's knee his first blessings. He learned the beauty and value of Judaism.

What about the Jewish home of today? Is this true of our homes today? The home, the institution upon which all civilization must be reared, is now fast becoming a thing of the past. The Jewish home, as an institution, the Jewish home as a civilizing force, hardly exists in our day. The influence of our parents, the respect with which children looked up to their elders, the reverence for authority that marked the home life of a child, nay, more the ideals of morality and charity upon which the home life was built - all these are crumbling before our very eyes.

No wonder that our children are growing up with a concept wholly distorted and with ideas completely disfigured, unaware in the least of the blessed influences that the Jewish home, beautiful in the past, exerted on the lives of its inhabitants. Only recently we read in the newspaper that story of a little boy who was asked on a school examination to define, in simple language, certain words essential in basic vocabulary. For the word "home" he wrote "a home is a building in front of the garage". Even at that early age, uppermost in his mind was the mechanical angle involved in the garage and the means of transportation which could whisk him speedily away from his home. His home was not a refuge but a shortcut to the world outside.

What about reading? The books of the great philosophers and thinkers of today and yesterday? There are many magazines and newspapers to save us time. Wealth? Try the pools, go to the races. Shortcuts!

What do we observe on the Jewish scene re: education? Again, shortcuts. Jewish education is trimmed down to its minimum. Instead of a well-integrated course of study, the Jewish boys and girls think it quite enough to come to the Talmud Torah on Sunday mornings only. Parents come to the Talmud Torah with their twelve or twelve-and-a-half-year-old sons seeking for them a Bar-Mitzvah education. Like the non-Jew who came to Hillel, so they come to the Minister and ask him to teach their children the Jewish heritage "on one foot".

In this age of the capsule, they are seeking for their children a "capsule" education. How many parents would welcome the opportunity to receive from the Minister a specially prepared pill, sugar-coated, to give to their children at home without the need of attending Hebrew Classes. How wonderful it would be! Just think - no Cheder, and no tuition, and no time waster. How stupid all this is. There are no shortcuts to Jewish knowledge and learning.

In many congregations can be detected an inaudible under current for a change in the standard prayers. Shorter services are demanded; removals of so-called repetitions. Selections are proposed; Yizkor and Yahrzeit are highlighted! Shortcuts to heaven! At a wedding ceremony, at a funeral service, at a religious function, the cliché: "Make it short, Rev" is continually heard. Always shortcuts.

A son, burdened with the reciting of Kaddish for his dead parent - a shortcut. It's alright, I'll call upon the Shammes to take care of the Kaddish. Yahrzeit? I'll ask someone else to observe it for me.

You know the story told among the young Jew who engaged the Shammes to fast for him on the day of his father's yahrzeit: That same day, as he entered a restaurant, he found the Shammes eating a very hearty meal. "What do you call this?" shouted the young man. "Look here, I'll be frank with you," replied the Shammes, "You know the Gabbai of the shul also hired me to fast for him. Now, I ask you, in all fairness, have I got the כח - have I the strength - to fast for two people? So I made a decision. I'll fast for you, but for the Gabbai I'll eat."

There are no shortcuts to Jewish observance and practice. It took God six days to create the universe though He could have achieved this in one instant, with one word. God did not seek shortcuts. He took the acts of creation very seriously. He planned it with care and with wisdom. He planned each creation - each creature - with its own distinctive characteristics. He wished to impress upon us with the importance of proper planning and devoted toil. If this is so, how much more so is the fact that there are no shortcuts to Jewish Statehood!

My friends! Six years ago, Israel achieved her independence. We need the State of Israel, and the State of Israel needs us. We need the State of Israel which constitutes the beginning of the redemption both of Jewry and the Holy Land. We prayed for it for thousands of years and every Sabbath we proclaim in the Synagogue that Zion is the home of our life. We need the State of Israel for that State safeguards our future, wherever we may be, and the future of our children. It safeguards the existence of the Jewish people after that terrible slaughter in which six million of our best brethren perished, and the best seats of Jewish learning and Jewish culture were destroyed.

Israel's acute problems at the present time are well known and need no re-emphasis. Israel needs our financial support for its defense and for the settlement of hundreds and thousands of Olim. Thousands of Jews from North Africa, where their lives are in danger, are flocking to the Holy Land. A frontier war is continuously being waged by the Arab States, who boast of their intention to wipe out Israel. The sons and daughters of the Yishuv are always ready to defend our Holy Land! Let us all heartily respond to the call of the Chief Rabbi and contribute as much as possible to the Kol Nidrei Appeal.

I know that a lot of you have been making weekly contributions to the J.P.A. but this does not exempt you from giving tonight. Tonight's appeal is a comprehensive one covering children and youth, Aliyah, the United Jewish Relief Appeals, the friends of the Midrashia, Ort, The Friends of the Magen David Adom, and the

Friends of the Anti-Tuberculosis League in Israel, all of which are deserving and worthy of every encouragement and support.

I am confident that you will respond wholeheartedly and generously. Will you please put the string through the amount you wish to give and my Honorary Officers and members of the J.P.A. Committee will collect them.

May, then, the melody of the Kol Nidrei resound in us, throughout the coming year and inspire us to a new love and devotion to our Jewish heritage.

Yom Kippur: Support the needy

I wish I had a television set to give every member in my congregation. The set which I would like to give to you all has not yet been invented. It will be long before man will discover it, for by means of the machine which I have in mind not only single objects but whole continents would be seen from a distance at once, and distinctly. By means of this wonderful device we would see the renaissance of a people, the building of towns and villages, new Kibbutzim, new settlements. We would see the battered remnants of once powerful Jewish communities in Europe, the victims of terror and massacres, men, women and children arriving home at last. We would see the proud sons and daughters of well-to-do British and American families arriving too, to play their part in defending and building up the national home. We would see that foreign invading armies are still on the soil of the Holy land. We would also see the tremendous task which confronts the new State and we would realize how much the new State depends upon each one of us here in the diaspora for our help.

By means of our marvelous television sets, we would see hundreds of thousands of Jews in the camps of Germany, Austria, Italy and elsewhere throughout Europe who need our help. We would see these remnants, these victims of terror and massacre, men, women and children, who three years after victory, three years after so called liberation, still languish behind barbed wire in refugee camps without liberty and hope. These people are not beggars throwing themselves as unwanted burdens on the mercies of the world. They wish to be citizens of a Jewish society in which their capacities and ideals will be fully at home. Help for them lies in the prospect of their transfer to the State of Israel.

There are also possibilities for a number of them to be settled in the United States, and other countries in Europe and overseas. Many have already gone, and many more will soon be on their way. But meanwhile they must be kept alive wherever they are. They must be given food and clothing, medical aid, child care, vocational training, and Jewish teaching to equip them for their new life. As the Chief Rabbi says, we must provide them with the means to set out on their journey, decently clothed and equipped and with a feeling of self-respect, to reconstruct their lives and to play their part wherever they settle.

Now, by means of the apparatus I have in mind, I would like to come nearer to home and I would like to show you, and particularly the mothers of this community, two kinds of canteens. In one, your children are eating hot kosher meals, in the other, they are eating either sandwiched or treif dinners.

I am telling you this because I know how hard most of you work to keep kashrut in your home, and I know what an effort it entails these days. I know that if the choice were given to you to choose between kosher and treif meals for your children, you would choose every time that they should eat kosher meals, for you know that kashrut has not only become an integral and indispensable part of the Jewish way of life, but it has also in its turn preserved Judaism.

School meals, as you know, have come on strong, and therefore its our duty to see that kosher meals are provided for our children.

And finally, I do not need my television set to show you that here, in Neasden, we need to start a Building Fund to enlarge our synagogue and to build a Ladies Gallery. Our membership is increasing week by week, and at the rate we have growing we shall not have enough seating accommodation for all our members.

My friends! In ancient days our Jewish people normally donated 10% of their wheat and grain and cattle for religious purposes. I know that many calls have been made upon you and are being made upon you, and I also know that the past year has not been such a prosperous year for some of you.

Our nation is a workshop, and each one of us can play our part in the tremendous task which awaits us by giving as much as we can afford. As you see my friends, there is much to be done, and although I cannot give you the television sets I have in mind, through your vision, through your kind hearts, you can help to remedy the needs of our people wherever they may be.

May God bless you all and grant you peace and happiness for the year to come. אמן.

Yom Kippur: Our marriage with the State of Israel (1958)

It may appear strange to you that I have chosen for my subject for discussion on this, the holiest night of the Jewish Calendar year, none other than the theme of love and marriage.

On Yom Kippur, the Minister usually limits himself to such subjects as repentance, atonement & introspection. But I feel, however, justified in my decision to consider such a mundane topic, because I love a precedent to follow.

We are told in the Mishna by Rabbi Simon ben Gamliel that Yom Kippur afternoon בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יוֹצְאוֹת בְּכֵלֵי לֶבַן שְׂאוּלֵין - the eligible daughters of Jerusalem would

borrow white garments from their friends.³²⁷ They would then proceed to make their way to the vineyards where they would dance & make merry. Not only did the poor girls go out in borrowed clothes, but the very wealthy, and those from the best families too, would borrow clothes for this occasion.

The **בת מלך** - the king's daughter, the **בת כהן גדול** - the High Priests daughter, the general's daughter, would all appear dressed in borrowed garments. The reason given for this unusual custom was **נְשֵׂא לְבִישׁ אֶת מִי שְׂאִין לוֹ** - so as not to embarrass those girls, who couldn't afford to buy their own clothes!

While they danced, the young women would seek out eligible young men. Once a young lady would see a man whom she thought she loved, she would approach him with a proposal. The Mishna goes further and describes in detail the exact technique employed by the young women to win a husband: She would argue as follows: **שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה, מָה אַתָּה בּוֹרֵר לָךְ. אֵל תִּתֵּן עֵינֶיךָ בְּנוֹי, תֵּן עֵינֶיךָ בְּמִשְׁפָּחָה** - "Lift up your eyes and see whom you consider for your wife". Look not merely at the physical beauty or the physical grace of the one you choose. **תֵּן עֵינֶיךָ בְּמִשְׁפָּחָה** - Look rather at the Mishpachah; look rather at my background; Look at the training I have received; consider my humane qualities; consider my character and my religious views as the only basis for a successful marriage.

Now, some of us will no doubt wonder why, of all days, Yom Kippur was chosen by our ancestors to arrange prospective marriages between their children. After all, there are many other days in the Jewish Calendar Year which might have seemed more suitable? Why pick out this one day dedicated to spiritual investigation?

My friends! Judaism is a religion which is concerned with people & their everyday living. Our ancestors knew that the type of family life, which developed, would determine the type of Jewish who came to pray to God on Yom Kippur. Our ancestors knew that more than outward beauty was necessary for a happy home, they knew that it is the Mother, who exerts the greatest influence in the home. The choice of Yom Kippur, therefore, was to integrate the human with the spiritual, each being the necessary compliment of the other.

As a matter of fact, there's a lovely little story told in our Midrash which reveals the deep Rabbinic insight into the spiritual element of matrimony.³²⁸ A Roman Matron in ancient times once asked Rabbi Jose ben Halafta a rather startling question: "Granted" she said, "that God created the world in six days. But tell me, what has He been doing since creation?"

Rabbi Jose answered that "God makes marriages".

³²⁷ Mishna Ta'anit 4:8

³²⁸ Bereishit Rabbah 68:4

“Is that all?” exclaimed the matron. “Why, I can do that!”. She then proceeded to have a thousand of her male slaves lined up in single file, and opposite them she lined up a thousand of her female slaves. She then declared each opposite pair married. She had performed one thousand marriages with one stroke! “You see”, she said to the Rabbi, “I, too, like your God, can make marriages.”

The following morning, this matron was awakened from her sleep by a great outcry in the courtyard. She looked from her window and she saw her male and female slaves all in an uproar, shouting and crying out. “I do not want this woman for my wife!” “I do not want this man for my husband!”. Some had broken limbs. Some had blackened eyes. Some had torn hair. All was confusion!

It was then that she admitted that divine intervention is necessary for suitable and successful marriages. This Midrash only points out that Jewish life has always emphasized the spiritual side of marriage as the only basis for a successful marriage. And that’s why on Yom Kippur all appeared in borrowed garb – rich and poor, educated and ignorant, great and small, so as not to embarrass the unfortunates who were not blessed with material wealth. When choosing a mate, the young men were challenged to employ a measure of values, Mishpachah and Yichus, which were basic.

This strange custom has been abandoned ever since Israel was wrecked by the Romans, and today young Jewish men and women meet under different circumstances. You rarely find a young girl today borrowing a dress! On the contrary! Some girls are upset if they see another girl wearing the same dress!

Mishpachah! Yichus! Character! Spiritual perspective! These no longer play an important part in the choice of one’s mate. Today, there are other more important factors to be taken into consideration i.e. a nice car. If the young man has a sports car, especially a convertible one, so much the better.

The young man must be a good dancer, a good social mixer, he must have a good sense of humour and he must know influential people. Above all, he must know how to give a girl a good time. Marriages are made in heaven, yet sometimes we wonder whether or not the celestial Matrimonial Bureau is keeping in touch with the times.

My friends! Although the personal aspect of matchmaking as it prevailed in olden times has lost its meaning in our day, there is a national form of marriage which still can be practiced on Yom Kippur. I refer to the marriage of interests between the Jewish of Britain and the Jews of Israel. It seems that the identical techniques common in the days of old may be employed to arrange the marriage between the British Jews & the Israeli Jew.

If you recall, young eligible women went out to meet their prospective husbands in borrowed clothing which they afterwards returned. The reason this practice was institutionalized was not to embarrass those who could not afford to purchase their own garments.

What is Israel asking from us? She's asking us to loan her the necessary economic garments which will make her presentable to us and to the world at large. She is saying to you and to me, "We want to be as proud and as self-sufficient as you are! We are young. We are just entering our eleventh year of existence, and we just cannot afford the wherewithal to meet the growing demands of a flourishing community. Invest your confidence in us. Behave like our ancestors did on Yom Kippur, so that we should not be embarrassed before the whole world. We merely wish to borrow your money, and for every pound you loan us, we will render you a good return. We require your help at this time, to integrate our old immigrants & to prepare for the large numbers still to come. Our foremost need is people who can strengthen & support the land. We need your help, to develop the Negev, to promote railroads, shipping, mining, atomic & solar energy. We want to balance our economy, we want to maintain an open-door policy for all our brethren. Loan us the wherewithal, to appear presentable & appealing to the world."

Not only does the modern daughter of Jerusalem ask that we loan her the economic garb. She points to herself and says, "Look at my Mishpachah, examine my Yichus, my background and my training". Symbolically, she says: "Do not have any qualms of conscience about this union, because it will produce fitting and inspiring children. We are a country of sound possibilities. Read the statistics and you will see for yourself."

Is there any better way that you can express your sense of love and dedication to God on this Day of Atonement than by sharing our future? Is there any better means by which to honour the memory of your dearly deceased, who the Sages tell us come to us on Yom Kippur, wise naked souls, seeking our compassion, so that we may clothe them with positive deeds.

The young bride - that is Jerusalem - asks us to recall one of the moving scenes which took place in one of our oldest Synagogues in Jerusalem, on the day that the State of Israel was declared independent. There, in the dark corner of the candle-lit synagogue, stood an old Jew weeping with his tallit covering his head. His bearded and wrinkled countenance was drenched in tears. When he was asked why he was weeping on a day that Israel had waited for nearly 2,000 years, he answered "I, too, am very happy dear friends! But I am driven to tears when I think that my grandparents did not live to see this miracle come to pass in their day."

Thank God we did live to see this great miracle! No other generation was granted the privilege. Indeed, when it comes to the international marriage of interests between ourselves and Israel, let us recall a remark an usher made to a guest at a formal wedding which was held recently in this country. As he was directing the guest down the aisle to a seat, he asked the usual question "Are you a friend of the bride or of the groom?" "I am a friend of both" replied the young lady. "I am very sorry" said the young man, "I am afraid that you will have to choose a side. You see I haven't any instructions where to seat neutrals".

My friends! One whose side are you? You cannot remain neutral at this wedding of interests between Israel and ourselves. The Chief Rabbi has designated Kol Nidrei evening for a National Appeal to help those who, during the past year, have sought and found shelter and the chance of a new life in the Jewish State. No Jew may rightly call himself happy if he knows that another Jew elsewhere suffers.

The State of Israel is involved and concerned with the condition of Jewry throughout the world. And when Jews suffer, the Government and people of Israel act. They open their gates and bring in the homeless and suffering. They provide them with homes and work. They heal the sick; they provide schools. They care for the aged. They do all these things and more! The citizens of Israel pay one of the highest rates of tax in the world, and they do so cheerfully in the knowledge that their fellow-Jews are being given assistance.

Let us take just one small example of this assistance. To bring one destitute immigrant into Israel costs about £500. Before a suitcase can be packed with meagre belongings, £10 has to be found for travel papers! The fare for the journey to Israel, medical care, food & lodging on the way, costs up to £100.

When the newcomer arrived in Israel, he has to be given a home, and basic necessities, until he can become self-supporting – if he's at all able to work. The basic expenditure on one person is more than £1000. Multiply this by the figure of 35,000 Jews who entered Israel in the past year alone, and then add the cost of building homes for them all, medical treatment for the chronically sick, schools for children, hospitals, the care of orphans and the elderly, and then ask yourself if you can stand aside? That's what I mean when I say that there must be a marriage between Israel and British Jewry.

Between us we are building a nation. Is this to be a nation of which all Jewry might be proud? Will it truly become a source of light to shine over the world? The choice is there, and it's a choice in which each of us must stand up and be counted.

Please make this evening, which is the most sacred in the Jewish year, a time of special meaning to you. Play your full part, as a member of the family of Jewry. Give while there's still time, for those children, who are like our own children, and for

those mothers, who are like our own mothers. Give for their happiness and for the happiness of all of us.

May we all be blessed by the Almighty with health & strength to do our utmost for the people of Israel, the State of Israel & the Torah of Israel. **ימן.**

Yom Kippur: On the value of prayer

A short while ago I read a very interesting survey made by a well know Yiddish writer, comparing the fundamental difference of the Jew of today, with the Jew of yesterday. He described his conclusions in the following ingenious manner:

The Jew of yesterday, he said, lived by the four letters of the Hebrew Alphabet **א.ג.ד.ה.**, while the Jew of today, follows the first 4 letters of the English Alphabet A. B. C. D. In other words, the Jew of yesterday formulated his life on **א.ג.ד.ה.** while the Jew of today, basis his life on the A. B. C. D., and the writer went on to explain what he meant.

Today, Jewish social life he writes consists mainly of “A” - Amusement. People get together socially, not for mutual enrichment and honest fellowship, but to enjoy themselves and to have a good time. Gone is the leisurely pastime, of sitting around a table and engaging in conversation. Ours is a generation of constant pursuit of entertainment and the empty vanities of the hour.

In the Synagogue, the emphasis is on the “B” - Bar Mitzvah. The entire religious educational structure is geared to Bar Mitzvah training, and the best gurantee for good attendance at Synagogue worship is a Bar Mitzvah. Congregations compete with each other in the production of the Bar Mitzvah. Only last week, I read an account in the Jewish Chronicle of a well-known Synagogue in London boasting that they had produced 10 or 12 Bar Mitzvah’s last year, and very often when you walk into a Synagogue on Shabbat morning, you can tell at a glance, by the attendance, whether there’s a Bar Mitzvah or not.

“C” stands for cemetery. The members of Synagogues are for the most part burial society members. Many would not belong to the Synagogue at all if it were not for the fact, that membership of a Synagogue is an Insurance Policy for burial.

Finally, the home is able to retain its identity as a Jewish home, because of “D” which refers to Diet.

There was a time when every article in the house and the behaviour of every member of the family, revealed the Jewish character of the home. There were books, religious symbols, the celebration of the Sabbath and the festivals, and the observance of Kashrut that marked the home as a miniature sanctuary. Now, the only distinguishing mark left in a Jewish home is the diet of gefilte fish, cheese blintzes,

and a few other typical Jewish delicacies that one may now buy in tins. The Jew of yesterday, asserted the Jewish writer, followed the first four letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. Every merchant had a sign, upon which was inscribed the letters א.ב.ג.ד. When it was time to go to the Synagogue for מנחה, the merchant closed his shop, hung the sign on the door, and the customer knew where the merchant went and when he would return.

My friends! On this Kol Nidrei evening, the holiest night of the year, we make an exception to our ordinary mode of life, and like our forefathers, the Jew of yesterday, we too, have closed our shops and although we have not put up the sign אבגד we too, have come to the Synagogue to pray. All of us have come to daven, for davening, is the central yearning and religious inspiration. Tonight is the one time when the Jew enters the holy of holies of his inner conscience. No nation, ancient or modern, has an institution, that can even remotely approach the religious depth and the spiritual heights of this sacred day. On this evening a true brotherhood is established in world Jewry. Every Jew can say with the Chassidic teacher, Rabbi Michael of Zlotzov: “In prayer I unite myself with all Israel, with those greater, and those smaller than myself. With the great ones, that through them, my prayer may be raised on high, with the smaller that through me, their prayer may ascend to the heavens.”

I know that we do not always get what we want, but that does not prove that our prayers are not answered. In God’s higher wisdom, often His answer is ‘No’. We may sometimes, in our pain and heartache, question His judgement. It is in prayer that we learn humility and resignation. Prayer teaches us to say with the Psalmist כִּי אֶרְאֶה שָׁמַיִךְ מַעֲשֵׂי אֶצְבְּעֹתֶיךָ יְרַח וְכּוֹכָבִים אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנְנֹתָ - “When I behold the heavens which are the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have established”³²⁹, מָה אָנוּשׁ כִּי תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ וְבֶן אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֶנּוּ, - “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You think of him?”³³⁰. Prayer enables us to bear grief. It reassures us, that beyond our immediate sorrows, there’s a larger plan and greater purpose.

Prayer teaches us what is good and what is bad. It helps us to discover what is important and what is not. A man who prays cannot help finding out that the things of this earth are empty, vain, and insecure. “Money is coined in round shapes”, says an old proverb, “for it rolls constantly from one to the other”.

There are no pockets in shrouds. Despite the bewildering variety of things that we have produced, we can be certain of very little in our day. Times and conditions are changing too rapidly.

³²⁹ Tehillim 8:4

³³⁰ Tehillim 8:5

In prayer we are reminded that the only things really worth having are personal values. It is far more important to cultivate our inner decency, to ennoble our family lives with love, to give of ourselves in friendship and service to all men. If a man finds his life on these principles, then the Lord is His rock and his Fortress. If a man is rich in these values, all of us, no matter who we may be, are paupers beside him.

Prayer is the greatest lesson in human brotherhood. We Jews, through the long years of exile and persecution, have been welded together as a people through the medium of prayer.

Tonight, in an atmosphere saturated with holiness and Godliness, we have ushered in the soul – moving prayer of Kol Nidrei, preceded, by that significant and illuminating verse אור זרע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה - “Light is sown for the righteous, and for the upright of heart there’s joy.”³³¹

Later in the evening, we give expression to Israel’s greatest prayer שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, the verse which is so expressive of the spiritual unity of Israel.

On this occasion, therefore, it is proper to recall a very solemn episode experienced by our Patriarch Jacob, which bears a deep relationship to the service of this sacred evening.

It is related by our Sages that when Jacob was on his dying bed, and had summoned his children to tell them what would happen to them in the end of days. We are told that Jacob intended to reveal to his sons the Ketz, the end of their misery and sufferings. However, we read, that he was prevented from doing this, because the Divine Glory departed from him. Noticing this, Jacob remarked: חס ושלום יש במטתי - “Is there God forbid, some impurity in my family? The children of Israel replied “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” Upon hearing these assuring words, the Patriarch was satisfied and exclaimed ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד - “Blessed the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”³³²

Although our Patriarch Jacob could not reveal the final outcome and plight of Israel, yet one thing which he did see, pacified and calmed his spirit, namely, that as long as his children proclaimed the שְׁמַע, they would continue to live. That is why upon hearing these words, Jacob exclaimed. ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

It is similarly true with us. All the year round, some of us proclaim the שְׁמַע and some do not, some understand the full meaning and significance of this statement, and some do not. However, on this holy night, the night of Kol Nidrei, when Israel

³³¹ Tehillim 97:11

³³² Pesachim 56a

the world-over, gathers in Synagogues not only for prayer, but for meditation, we are duty-bound to express by mouth and action, our sacred convictions. The basis of this meditation is still the ancient and ever-new proclamation, which has filled the heart of many a Jew, with so much faith and loyalty to all that is sacred in the life of Israel. Indeed, if all the year round, we recite the **שְׁמַע** quietly, this night we must recite it aloud and with full intention and meaning. If all the year round we are bidden to recite the sentence, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever,” silently, on this night when we are united in fellowship and love of God and Israel, we must recite it in a loud voice – thus attesting to our loyalty and faith in Israel’s unity and in his survival as an eternal people.

As a people we endured many hardships and untold persecution, yet we kept our unity intact through prayers.

A true story is told of Dayan Grunfeld who, after the last war, went out with a youth leader, to try and recover the children of Jewish parents who had been brought up by gentile families in Western Europe. These children, together with many others, were brought to English camps for rehabilitation, and Dayan Grunfeld, accompanied by the Jewish Youth leader, went among the children and first tried speaking to them in Dutch and German, but they could not find out which children were Jewish. At last, the Dayan and the youth leader decided to walk among the children and recite the **שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל**, and the response was indescribable! Like a flash from another world, these words pierced the hearts of a number of children who bore the Christian names, of their foster parents, and the children crowded round the Dayan crying “Mama, Mama! We are Jewish children, take us back to our mothers!!”. The **שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל** which they learned in their early childhood, linked them to their people.

In prayer too, we are linked to Israel. Throughout our travails, throughout the last two thousand years, we never forgot the exhortation of the Psalmist, **אִם אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי** - “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand fail.”³³³ We took the oath of allegiance at the waters of Babylon, and affirmed it at the Rhine.

It is for this reason that the Chief Rabbi has designated this sacred evening as the time for us to think of the needs of those who, during the past year, have sought and found shelter and the chance of a new life in the Jewish State. He has done this because he feels that all of us are building a nation; all of us are part of this nation-building effort – an effort which has drawn the admiration of the world and the envy of every other newly established nation.

³³³ Tehillim 137:5

Think of the 50,000 immigrants who have recently arrived and are not yet integrated in the life of the State. Think of the schools and hospitals which are not yet available for the children of the newcomers. Think of the empty wastes that await the flow of water, that must irrigate them. Think of the forests that must be planted, and the new roads that have still to be laid, and the crops that must be grown and the industries, which urgently need to be established. Ours is the power to perform great things and with so little effort. For at last, the destiny of our people is held within our own hands. Must we not measure up to this great responsibility? Chaim Weizman used to say that the world was divided into two parts: those countries that wanted to throw their Jews out, and those that refused to take them in.

But this situation has changed. Our fear today is that with the savage conditions of yesterday gone, the Jews of the world may grow apathetic. This apathy is another form of our callousness. It means that for the needs of others, we have nither mind nor heart. This would be a betrayal of the very essence of our faith.

Yom Kippur: Seek God

There is a strange contradiction to be found in the prayers of this Holy Day period. On the one hand we are told to search for God **דַּרְשׁוּ ה' בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ קְרָאֵהוּ בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ קְרוֹב**, - “seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near”³³⁴. On the other hand, we are informed that God searches for man and says, **שׁוּבוּ בָּנִים שׁוֹבְרִים**, - “return, you children who have wandered”³³⁵, **שׁוּבָה אֵלַי כִּי גִאֲלֶתִיךָ**, - “return to Me for I shall redeem you”³³⁶. One source tells us to make an effort to find God, the other advises us that God seeks us. How is this to be resolved?

The Torah tells us the beautiful yet tragic story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They sin and they disobey God, as a result of which they go into hiding when God calls them - **אֵינְךָ**, “where are you”³³⁷?

When Adam was asked the reason for his hiding, he made up excuses that he was not properly dressed; it was the woman’s fault etc. He refused to admit his guilt. As a result, he was punished and driven from Eden. God no longer spoke to him directly as He had previously. He became hidden. The relationship was changed. Man was condemned to labour by the sweat of his brow, to search for food and a livelihood. He now required sacrifice to approach God. But God was hidden and could no longer be seen. Evil and strife came upon the world.

But there is one time during the year that God comes closer to man and calls to him. That time is Yom Kippur. He is more easily approachable. Like the distant planets

³³⁴ Yeshayahu 55:6.

³³⁵ Yirmiyahu 3:22

³³⁶ Yirmiyahu 44:22

³³⁷ Bereishit 3:9

which at certain periods approach close to the orbit of the earth, so today we are in closer proximity by reason of this Holy Day period to the Almighty. We can hear the “radio waves” from outer space. They call us to repent. “Don’t lie”, “Don’t conceal”, “Admit the Truth”.

There were three men who sinned, the Midrash tells us. Adam sinned refused to confess, and lost paradise. Saul sinned, refused to confess, and lost the kingship. David sinned, confessed his error, and was granted the kingship eternally. How great is the power of confession, how destructive the sin of denial.

On Yom Kippur we confess and itemize our sins “for the utterance of the lips, for wronging a neighbor, for arrogance and pride, for the sin of envy, for causeless hatred, for the hardship for the heart” etc. We admit our errors. Only then can we go on to say עֲנֵנו ה' עֲנֵנו - “answer us, O Lord, answer us”. If we want God to answer us, let us in turn answer Him and respond to his call. Only then can we hope and pray that He in turn will respond to us, when we call upon Him, for life, happiness and well-being.

Yom Kippur: Brotherhood and supporting Israel (1967)

There is a beautiful legend in Hebrew literature about the site upon which God chose to build His temple. One night, during the harvest time of the year, King Solomon heard a voice calling him and telling him to go out! He dressed quickly and went out into the streets. He walked up and down the city but he saw nothing. Then, just as he was about to go back to the palace, he heard some movements. Quickly, he hid behind a rock and watched.

There lived in the city of Jerusalem two brothers. One was a rich man, who had many children to support. The other was a poor man, who had no children. Both these brothers were unable to sleep that night. The rich brother kept thinking to himself: “I have so much and my brother has so little. How can I give him a gift? Surely, he will not accept any charity from me. Perhaps I can put some grain into his loft while he is asleep.” At the very same time, the poor brother was lying in bed thinking. He said, “I have no family and so I have no need for grain. My brother has a large family and so he needs much more than I do. How can I give him a gift? Surely, he will not accept any charity from me. Perhaps I can put some grain into his loft while he is asleep.”

Both brothers went into their lofts and filled their arms with grain. Silently they moved through the night, into each other’s lofts and they gave each other some grain. No one saw what they did- no one, that is, except Solomon, who saw the whole scene from his hiding place behind the rock. Solomon went home and that night he slept soundly for the first time in many months. In the morning, he summoned the two brothers to appear before him. The two brothers came before

the King in fear, for they could not guess why the King wanted to see them. When they arrived, the King told each one, what the other had done. Then, he offered to buy their properties for enough money to provide for them both, for the rest of their lives.

The brothers were astonished! They could not understand why the King should want to purchase their properties. The King explained, that the holiest place on earth is the place where the brothers live together in peace. It was for this, that the Lord made man. It is this, that the Temple is intended to teach. Therefore, this site, where the two brothers demonstrated genuine friendship, will be the site of the Holy Temple. King Solomon realized that this site, where such brotherly love had been shown, God had chosen as a fitting place for the site of his temple.

In this ancient legend there's a moral lesson for us all that what we need today - more than ever before - is this spirit of brotherhood. On this sacred evening, as we listen to the haunting chant of Kol Nidrei, we also become united with the generations of Jews before us and a true brotherhood is established in world Jewry. Every Jew all over the globe, no matter what language he employs in daily life, no matter what station of life he belongs, at this moment all are gathered, for one and the same purpose, and in the same form, in the same language, we all make supplication to the one Father in Heaven. On this evening, every Jew can say with the Chassidic teacher, Rabbi Michael of Zlotzov: "In prayer, I unite myself with all Israel with those greater and those smaller than myself. With the great ones, that through them, my prayer may be raised on high, with the smaller, that through me, their prayer may ascend to the Heavens." This brotherhood of Jews, marches together, the small and the great, the fortunate and the less fortunate. The great raise the small, the fortunate assist the unfortunate, but all together are united in prayer to one God, in faith and confidence. Kol Nidrei links centuries of Jewish life and brings to mind a vivid panorama of Jewish history.

It brings to mind a congregation in Spain during the Golden Era, when Jews - cultured and learned, comfortable and secure - repeated the legalistic formula, concerned with a pure and sinless life, during the coming year. Kol Nidrei brings to mind another group of Jews in Spain 500 years later, hidden secretly in a basement, chanting the sad melody, their eyes filled with tears, as they seek absolution from the Christian vows, extracted from them, by murderous inquisitors. The same Kol Nidrei takes us to a little wooden synagogue in Eastern Europe, just a generation or two ago. There we can see our grandfathers wrapped in their Taleisim, chanting the Kol Nidrei night prayers, asking God for a year of blessing, peace and פְּרוּסָה טוֹבָה, success and prosperity.

What emotions did Kol Nidrei evoke in the hearts of our grandparents and parents, when they first came over to this country, from Eastern and Central Europe? What

did they feel like, when they faced their first year in a new country? What did the Kol Nidrei sound like, in the cattle trucks, speeding Jews to the concentration camps and gas ovens? What fate did they look forward to, during the New Year, as they cried the plaintive chant, by the light of a single flickering candle?!! The first Yom Kippur in the new born state of Israel! What the Kol Nidrei that year must have meant to the heroes who brought the State into being, and what it must have meant to those who survived the Kol Nidrei in the cattle trucks! What a fateful year they must have looked forward to. A year of hope; a year of joyous work, a year of building, a year of pride and determination, a year of life. Yes, Kol Nidrei must have meant many things, to many Jews, in different times and different places.

But have any Jews, at any time in our history, ever chanted the Kol Nidrei at so fateful a time as tonight? What must our fellow Jews in Israel tonight feel like, as they chant the Kol Nidrei prayer in a Jerusalem, under Jewish control, unified for the first time in 2000 years. The miracles we witnessed this summer, have shown our people the guiding hand of the Guardian of Israel. Many hearts are open now, to a new appreciation of the Eternal message of our Torah and Prophets. In our moment of great trial, Jews the world over, were united as never before, like one family. Never before have the Jewish people been united as one man and appreciated, that the fight in Israel, was their fight and that the danger which threatened Israel, threatened all Jews, wherever they are, threat of the total annihilation assumed an absolute reality, within the minds and hearts of our people. It was as if the nation of Israel collectively was passing through the valley of the “shadow of death” in its full magnitude. We would have to go back many many centuries, searching the annals of Jewish history, in order to find an event, similar in its universal impact, on our people. Differences of opinion, political, social and even religious lost their immediate importance, and faded into the background, Zionists and anti-Zionists, orthodox and non orthodox, young and old, adults and children, liberal and Reform, all of them shared the same experience, though perhaps in different degrees of intensity.

I recall what an intelligent lady said to me at the time: “Somehow we have come to realise these days, even those who are non-Zionists, have come to realise, that we all live by Israel.” The days of crisis formed one great Kol Nidrei night for our community.

I recall meeting a man in a chemist shop, who approached me saying, “I am Jewish, my place,” he said, “should have been in Israel. I regret I am not there. I cannot read my prayers, but I say, every night, one verse of שמע ישראל and add one short prayer of my own in English, ‘God save Israel.’” I felt humble in the face of the common man, articulated in a most telling prayer, combining as he did, his faith in the oneness of God and his prayer for the people of Israel. People of all ages, searched for ways in which they could be helpful. Young people, hurried to offer voluntary service,

limited only by restrictions, placed by the Israeli Government. Quite a few of my Bar Mitzvah boys, from Neasden, sons of local communal workers, Ronnie Mitchell, Charles Woolf, Raymond Wicksman, Warren Ginsberg, Dudley Leigh, Peter Sheldon to name a few, hurried to offer military service. I have received moving correspondence from them, I wish there was time to read their letters to you tonight.

Men and women in all walks of life, offered their financial contributions, very often in excess of what they could comfortably give. I even remember when we launched our emergency appeal in Neasden, a young member present, took out of his pocket his full days taking, without even counting it.

I recall women and children in Neasden, knocking at doors collecting blankets, tinned food, Green Shield stamps- there are still housewives making weekly contributions from their housekeeping money. I will never forget one morning during the crisis, when a continual stream of young Jewish housewives and mothers knocked at my door to include their names in the list of blood donors and offering accommodation. These and similar scenes were repeated all over the world.

However, Israel's struggle for her rightful place in the Middle East is not yet over, peace has to be won. Victory has brought with it many problems. In the diplomatic field, a strong offensive is being launched against Israel, by the Arab world. Pressures will be brought to bear on Israeli government, to give up territory which are vital to Israel's security. She must be prepared militarily and politically to withstand these pressures. However, the most tragic outcome of the war has been the loss of life. Out of 3,000 families, the official reports tell us that 1,000 families have lost husbands, fathers and sons. In another 2,000 homes, there are maimed and crippled soldiers. We cannot, we dare not, let them down! We have a responsibility to see that the suffering and poverty of those, who may be left penniless, and without work, as a result of the disruption of war, are helped.

That is why Anglo Jewry is now asked on this Kol Nidrei for an extra effort. Israel's emergency continues. Without the support of world Jewry, Israel cannot succeed.

May we be given the health and strength to do our utmost for the people of Israel, the State of Israel and the Torah of Israel. ׀ןן

Yom Kippur: Why we recite Yizkor on Yom Kippur

Did you ever stop to consider why we observe Yom Kippur on the 10th day of Tishrei? Why not on the 15th day of the month like Pesach? Those who are concerned with the income of the Synagogue will tell you that it would have been far better for Anglo Jewish Congregations if Yom Kippur were to occur five or six months after Rosh Hashanah. The shuls could then sell tickets twice during the same year, once for Rosh Hashanah and a second time for Yom Kippur. It would also be

better for the Jewish housewife, for it would give her a well-deserved rest between the holidays.

But the Rabbis offer a valid historical explanation for the choice of this particular date. When Moses descended from Mount Sinai and found that the Israelites had fashioned the golden calf, he was very depressed. Forty days did he work with his people, punishing the ringleaders and bringing the rest of Israel to the point of **תשובה** - of repentance. He then ascended the mountain for another forty days to plead with the Almighty to forgive his people. On the fortieth day, which occurred on the 10th day of the month Tishrei, all the people- men and women, young and old, fasted and prayed from sunset to sunset. It was on that day that God forgave the Israelites for their sin. Whereupon Moses said, “Since this is the day on which I behold my people in all their presidential glory, this day shall forever be marked as the day of fasting and prayer, as the day of Yom Kippur.”

In a few moments, my friends, we will recite the Memorial or Yizkor Service to remember the departed souls of our loved ones. When we begin to consider them and their lives, we start also to think of ourselves and our lives. We contemplate life and death and immortality, not only as things in relation to our dear departed, but as phenomena in relation to us, the living. **מה אנו? מה חיינו?** What are we? What is our life? What is permanent? What is lasting in this world?

This flesh, is it permanent? Things of the flesh, are they lasting? Eating and drinking, money and clothes, beautiful furniture and new cars, do they remain forever? Or are the lasting things found elsewhere, in intangible, untouchable things, in ideas. In concepts, in beliefs?

Today, when we stand at Yizkor, these are the important considerations we want to catch on to the permanent. We want to be part of the things which remain. All the year round, thoughts such as these never intrude upon us, unless Heaven forbid, serious sickness strikes us or those near to us. Is it not peculiar how a man seldom considers his latter end?

Whenever we think of a funeral, it's always the other fellow's funeral, not our own. Few of us can reach the stage of the poet who heard of a funeral bell ring and cautioned: “Ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.” The bell never tolls for us, always for the next fellow.

However, four times a year Yizkor comes. We are caught up with a start, and we realise for whom the bell tolls. Today, we ask ourselves the questions **מה אנו? מה חיינו?** What are we? What is our life? What is lasting? What is permanent? We want to know. We want to become part of the immortal.

And I want this morning to draw your attention to a famous passage in the Talmud. The Talmud tells us **בשנת פטירתו של אדם** when a person dies, his hands are generally spread wide open to indicate that he carries nothing away.

This Talmudic observation sheds light upon the Biblical injunction read this morning. **וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן כִּי פָתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ** - “Do not shut your hand from your poor brother, because there will come a time when you will have to open your hand widely and leave all accumulative possessions behind. Better open your hand now while you are still alive”³³⁸.

Somebody once remarked very thoughtfully, “I can pass this way only once.” Have we ever realized how this note of oneness strikes through everybody’s life in the world? A person is only once a baby, once a child, once a youth. That person becomes only once a young man or woman, once in the vigor of maturity, once in old age when he lives that long, and once he dies. We pass through all the stages only once.

This observation should make us realise that our chance in this world is quite narrow. If twice-ness or thrice-ness were the rote of our life here, a failure once or twice would not be such a great matter. But that grim fact of oneness renders life a mighty serious matter. The question how to make this one life of ours in this world, nobly effective, is a very practical question for every one of us.

The purpose of Yizkor is twofold. First, it’s to recall those pleasant memories of our loved ones who have gone to their repose and to pull at the strings of our hearts into a real sense of **תשובה** and introspection. It is not true that, as each of us thinks of his parents, we can always remember not only the wonderful things our parents did for us, but also the many things we did to hurt our mothers and fathers. How many times were we unappreciative of the great sacrifices they made on our behalf? How many times did we raise our voices in speaking to them? How many times did we inwardly resent their presence? How many times were some of us even ashamed of our parents? How many times did we tell them, that their beliefs and traditions were old fashioned, out of place and out of date? How many times has a son told his religious father to forget his religion and become modern? What hurts even more is the fact that we remember how each time they swallowed their dignity, overlooked the pride that was justly theirs and forgave us with the sweetness and affection that only a parent can have. What pains us even more deeply is the fact that none of these things meant very much to most of us until we lost our parents; until we saw them lowered into the bosom of Mother Earth; until we came to the Synagogue the first time on a holiday and instead of kissing them “Gut Yom Tov” or “Happy New Year” as always, we were forced to take our places amongst those who can only say

³³⁸ Devarim 15:7-8

Yizkor for their parents and weep over the misgivings of the past, over the fact that they could have given their parents so much more honor, so much more pride and so much more nachas - if only they have known in time.

The other purpose of Yizkor is to remember our own souls and the nature of our own lives. We are to remember the brevity of the drama of life and its climax when the hands are opened widely to indicate that we take nothing away. Four times a year the Yizkor prayer is recited. Four times a year we are to remember the souls that have already passed away and our souls that will join them in the future. Four times a year we are reminded of our journeys end, of the principle of oneness that prevails throughout our lives, of the necessity to prepare ourselves for eternity and of the Biblical request not to shut our hands, for there will come a time when we will spread our hands wide open and take nothing away.

A story is told of the childless couple who for many years yearned and prayed for a child of their own. After visiting many medical specialists, the woman conceived. When she was about to give birth, the doctor informed her husband that only one of the two could be saved, either the woman or the unborn child. The husband favored saving the mother, but when the mother heard of her husband's decision, she was furious. Life, she said, was worthless to her without a child. If the baby would not be saved, she would commit suicide. So reluctantly and with deep misgivings the doctor saved the baby and let the mother die. In time the baby grew up to be a strong and fine-looking boy but he was of a nasty and mean disposition. When he was of age, his father sent him to a fine school in the hope that new contacts and a different atmosphere would better his character.

But the reports that he received were very discouraging, for the young man spent his time in bad company and was wasting his life. One day his father sent him a telegram to come home immediately as some urgent matter had arisen. The young man fearing the worst, took the first plane and returned home. His father met him at the airport, but instead of explaining to him the reason for asking him to return home, he drove to a remote cemetery and stopped at a well-kept grave. Here, he told his son for the first time, the story of his birth, and how his mother had died. After finishing the story, he said to him, "My boy, now that you have heard that your mother died in order to give you life, turn around and face the tombstone of your mother and tell her whether it was worth it!"

Tears streamed down the cheeks of the young man. He broke down, buried his face on the shoulder of his father and shook with tears. "Father, he cried, "I have failed you, that's bad enough. But I have failed my poor mother and that is much worse."

At this Yizkor day let us face the souls of our dearly beloved parents and grandparents and tell them whether all their toil and sacrifice for us were worth their

while. Those of us who cannot answer in the affirmative, let us beat our breasts in penitence and resolve on this day of days to live in such a way as will give an affirmative reply to that all-important question.

This Yizkor moment is one of the few golden chances of which life is made up. This Yizkor moment presents an opportunity to do good. We should remember the prevalent principle of oneness. One opportunity to do good when lost, is lost forever, If we fail to do a kindness to a friend or a neighbor, we can never to that kindness again. If we have a chance to speak a pleasant word and we fail to do it, we can never have just that word to speak again. If we skip a Yizkor opportunity to assure our Synagogue's existence, the further development of the Synagogue may be jeopardized. Every opportunity that passes is passed forever and takes with it something that cannot be called back. Let us abide by the Biblical command **וְלֹא יִדָּח יְדְךָ תִּקְפָּץ אֶת יְדְךָ** - "Do not shut your hand tightly." **אמן**.

Yom Kippur: Procrastination & self-scrutiny

Yom Kippur is the most solemn festival of the Jewish Calendar year. It is solemn, because it is a day of truthfulness! Frankness is its keynote, and its foremost function is self-scrutiny.

On Rosh Hashanah, the spiritual spotlight of the Jew is turned outward towards God and the world. On Yom Kippur, however, it reverts back towards man himself.

On this solemn evening I want to discuss with you a passage which I feel will help and guide us in the task of self-scrutiny:

‘Rabbi Yossi, the talmudic sage, remarked “If Israel after crossing the red sea, on their way from Egypt, would only have said **ה' מלך עולם ועד** ‘God rules forever’ using the present tense instead of the future, no nation in the world would have been able to dominate them. As it happens, they said **ה' ימלך לעולם ועד** ‘God will rule³³⁹ - at some future time.’³⁴⁰

This comment of our sages at first, appears unintelligible. What did they mean when they said, ‘If the Israelites had used the expression “God is King” instead of “God will be King” no nation would ever have had power over them?’ It is a puzzling statement, and yet upon more careful contemplation we discover a beautiful and striking thought which our sages wish to convey.

They wish to emphasize the danger of procrastination. The children of Israel said, **ה' ימלך לעולם ועד** - “God will be King” that is, at some future date, we will accept Him as our King and subject ourselves to His authority and act in accordance with

³³⁹ Shemot 15:18

³⁴⁰ Mechilta on Shemot 15:10

His will. But they did not say “God is King”, to imply that now, from this moment on, we recognize the Kingship of God.

What happened was that the Jews put off acceptance of divine authority because they believed that certain conditions had first to be realised. They thought, “We shall have to wait until we reach our land, then we shall recognise and establish the the power of God and obey His will.” It was their notion that the present was not favourable enough, and conditions not ideal enough for such action at that time.

This great error of procrastination i.e. putting off for tomorrow those things which should be done today, of which the Israelites were guilty, has always been a common failing among men throughout the ages. Human beings have a tendency to glorify the past or to paint the future in brilliant colours, but the present is always spoken of disparagingly. We talk about the “Good old days” and the opportunities those days presented! How wonderful were the truly great men of the past!

Our Sages remark, “If the past generations, were angels, we are but men, but if the past generations were men, we are like unto dumb animals”³⁴¹. I am always meeting people who speak with pride of their Jewish backgrounds. “My father”, one will tell me, “was a very learned and pious man”; “My father was a well-known Rabbi in the old country”; “My father is so frum, so orthodox, that when he visits my home he won’t even drink a cup of tea”. And when I ask and what about yourselves? They hum and haw, “you know how it is - but I certainly had a frum mother. She used to light candles on Shabbat; she used to fast regularly and give charity...”

In the same way, the world paints the future in brilliant, dazzling colours. It is always the future that is glorious; it is always concerned with the future peace, but the present appears discouraging and dismal. This is not the right time. Conditions are not ripe for accomplishing the things we would like to do. Therefore, we continually say, “Let us wait, let us delay until certain conditions are realised to clean the obstacles from our path, and enable us to proceed unhindered”. But that time never comes!

The same thing applies to us as individuals! We put off things, from day to day, we indulge in procrastination, that “thief of time,” with the result that days pass, weeks, months, and years. Our enthusiasm wanes, our energy lacks, our ambition is destroyed, and when the inevitable summons comes to us to depart this life, we are sadly disappointed. A life has passed and nothing has been accomplished.

Many of you might be tempted to interrupt me at this point and question the truth of my assertion. “Are not men ambitious? Won’t we utilise every moment of the present time in business? Won’t we strive continuously to increase our incomes, to

³⁴¹ Shabbat 112b

make our lives easier? Look at the mechanical world! Men are making new inventions every moment and discovering new worlds! We now have flying machines which span continents almost in the twinkling of an eye. There is hardly a physical task which some contraption does not do for us and do better than it has ever been done before. We need not entertain ourselves, for we have invented the films, television and wireless. It is not even necessary to form our own opinions. They are suggested to us by the newspapers and magazines! Who says man is satisfied with the past, or waits till a remote future to accomplish his plans?"

These protests are true - but only partly true. As regards the mechanical, the physical, as regards the accumulation of wealth or obtaining personal comfort, man has lost no time. But let us pause to look into the world of spirit and see what happens there? Our sages spoke about the spiritual world, the recognition of the authority of God. In the matter of obtaining mead or meat or water, the Israelites lost no time and complained bitterly against Moses - **וְזָכְרָנוּ אֶת הַדָּגָה אֲשֶׁר נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם**.³⁴² Our ancestors did not rest until their passion for food was satisfied, until their thirst was quenched. But when it came to the recognition of God, then, there was a different story, then they said **ה' ימלך** "God will be king" - for that, there's time. Let us wait until we enter the Promised Land, when we dwell under our own palm tree and fig tree. Then we shall think of these things. This is not the time. Can we not find an analogy in our present-day Judaism?

There was a time, when the greatest hope and dream of a Jewish Parent was to make of his child a **תלמיד חכם**, a Hebrew scholar, and when a child was born, the parents were congratulated by their neighbours, with the words. "May the child grow up, in Torah, in traditional Jewish family life, and in the doing of good deeds. Torah and Ma'asim Tovim were the goal of every parent.

But today, what do we find? When a child is born, parents begin to think of his career, Talmud Torah, Hebrew Classes! What use will he have of Hebrew? A Minister he will not be, nor do I want him to be, and as for him becoming a Talmid Chacham, who wants a scholar these days? He is looked upon, more or less as a Shlemiel! The most important thing is the child should become a wealthy man. In the past, children saw books of Jewish interest in their homes. Talmud or Mishnayot or a Chumash. On the wall they saw a "Mizrach" picture.

But today what do we find? We present-day Jews have availed ourselves of all the mechanical and physical advantages of our age, but of our Torah and Lord, of our Talmud, Chumash and Mishnayot, only the Jewish Cookery Book has been retained on our shelves. And judging by its popularity, we are indeed an observing people. "On Shavuot most Jewish housewives still continue to serve "Milchige Blintzes."

³⁴² Bemidbar 11:5

Purim is observed by eating “Homentashen and Kreplach. And who doesn’t eat delicious Knedlech on Pesach, and Gefilte Fish on Shabbat? But how many of us observe the spirit and comprehend the spiritual values of the Sabbath and Festivals? ה' ימלך - “God will be King” - that too, is our excuse for procrastination, for not utilising the present.

You speak of Jewish Culture! And many will say, “Oh in my young days I studied! When I was young I used to have a Rebbe, I used to learn at the Redmond’s Road Talmud Torah. But now I have no time. I am too busy. When I can afford to retire, I will read and study. It is nice to know these things, Bible, Jewish History, but really, I can’t attend lectures, Friday night services, Sabbath afternoon Study Circles,” and so time passes. Today is not the right time; such a tomorrow never comes. We forget that to develop spiritually every moment counts, and postponements ruin our chances forever.

The same holds true regarding our display of public spirit. How often will you hear, “Oh, yes, this cause is worthy. It deserves my support, but now I can’t afford it. Wait till I earn more money. Then I shall give charity.” But this delay gets us into the habit of not giving, we become callous, and when we are wealthy, we have become thoroughly hardened and are deaf to the pleas that rich our ears. I have often spoken to people and asked them, why they do not attend the Synagogue? “Oh I don’t like the building I’ll wait until we build a new Shul and then I’ll come.” But how can we have a new Shul if we don’t take an active part and attend the services?

The same thing holds true of our Centre! Everybody agrees, we must have a Jewish Centre, a meeting place for all. But what do we hear? I don’t like the way it is run! I don’t like the programs! I haven’t the time to bother I come home too late from business! I’ll try and come along another time, always tomorrow! But in the name of reason, how can we expect to have a centre, if we don’t all pull our weight?

The same thing applies to the Ladies Guild. Everybody cries we must have a Ladies Guild, but what do we hear? What does the Ladies Guild do? I have got a family! I have got a home to attend to! I haven’t got the time! The result is, the work of collecting parcels for Israel, and sending cakes for the Children’s Kiddush each Saturday morning is left to a gallant few.

The same thing is also true of Modern Hebrew! Time and again I have been approached to start a Modern Hebrew Class, after all now that we have our own state, it’s important for us to learn the mother tongue, and here again the class is started and then dwindles away through lack of support

When I hear these excuses! I am reminded of a story of a foolish peasant, who came to a river which he wished to cross. Instead of attempting to pass over, he sat on the bank and waited. What are you waiting for? asked another peasant.! The first man

remarked, "I am waiting till the entire stream has flowed past, and then I'll walk over dry footed. "Fool" joined the wiser man, don't you know that the stream will flow on forever, that you will spend years here and perish? Do not delay a moment; do not sit on the banks; be up and doing; make a decent effort to cross the flood."

Aren't we very much like that foolish peasant? We defer the spiritual work for the betterment of our community from day to day; We are not bold; we do not venture; we wait for the whole stream to stop flowing, so that we may then pass on dry land.

The well-known writer, Somerset Maugham, has of late popularised and has written a story, which no doubt you have read the famous tale "Death Speaks"

In it there was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to the market place to buy provisions, and in a little while the servant came back white and trembling and said; "Master: just now when I was in the market place, I was jostled by a woman in the crowd, and I turned I saw it was death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Lend me your horse and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra, and death will not find me."

The merchant lent him his horse and the servant mounted it and rode away and as fast as the horse could gallop. Then the merchant went down to the market place, and saw death standing in the crowd, and said: "Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant, when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, replied death. It was only a start of surprise! I was astounded to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

Yom Kippur: Removing shoes

On this sacred day of Yom Kippur one of the most solemn moments is reached in the service of Yizkor when we pause in our prayers for life to remember our beloved departed who have gone to their eternal reward.

It is in the spirit of this hallowed occasion that I would ask you to analyze with me a most interesting observance of Yom Kippur.

All of us are familiar with the fact that Yom Kippur is a day of fasting. But perhaps not all of you here are acquainted with another law of the Day of Atonement. This law has to do with the prohibition of נעילת הסנדל - of wearing shoes. You probably have noticed that all those who take part in the Synagogue Services, and a good number of congregants too, do not wear their customary everyday shoes on Yom Kippur. Did you ever think of the reason why they don't wear shoes? Did you ever wonder what reason lies behind this prohibition?

There is yet another occasion during the Jewish calendar year when we find this same prohibition, namely, on Tisha B'av - on the ninth day of Av - which is also a day of

fasting commemorating the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem and marking the catastrophic termination of the First and Second Commonwealth in Palastine.

A third time, we often find this observance is, God forbid, in the **בית האבל**, in the house of the mourner during the week of Shiva, when the bereaved sit without shoes upon their feet.

On all three occasions – whether it be in the moments of grief during **אבילות**, or during the lamentations recited on Tisha B'av, or on Yom Kippur – there probably arises in the minds of men and women the question: Why this strange observance? What significance does it hold for us, that it has become part of the ritual of the House of Israel? Is there some intrinsic connection between Tisha B'av, Yom Kippur, and the house of mourning?

To find an answer I will ask you to go back with me in Jewish History to a time over three thousand years ago, to the peninsula of Sinai, between Egypt and the Holy Land, where a Shepherd by the name of Moses is tending his flocks. Suddenly, this man stands bewildered by a remarkable sight: he sees a bush completely surrounded in flame, but the bush is not consumed by the fire. And Moses exclaims: **אֲסֹרָה נָא הִזֶּה** - “Let me come closer to examine this strange phenomenon”³⁴³! And when the Lord God saw that Moses turned aside to see, He called out from the midst of the burning bush: **אַל תִּקְרַב הֵלֶם שֶׁל נַעֲלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ** - “Do not come closer! Cast off thy shoes from on thy feet”³⁴⁴!

The rest of the story is familiar to every one of us. Moses becomes consecrated as the leader of the children of Israel; he galvanized the Hebrew slaves of Pharaoh to a sense of their own responsibility, he leads them forth from bondage; he brings them to Mount Sinai where they receive the Law, and out of the rabble of former slaves, Moses creates a Kingdom of priests and a holy people.

But let us ask ourselves - what significance is there to be attached to the Divine Call to Moses to cast off his shoes before he could approach the **אֲדָמַת קֹדֶשׁ**, the sacred precincts of Mount Sinai?

We shall attempt to answer this question this morning, and in doing so, we may discover the meaning of taking off our shoes in the house of mourning, on the day of Yom Kippur, and on the fast of Av. And we may, in addition, learn what Jewish life expects from us - not only during the High Holy day season, but throughout the whole year.

³⁴³ Shemot 3:3

³⁴⁴ Shemot 3:5

All of us take shoes for granted as part of the normal wardrobe of our life. We consider shoes as a blessing of civilisation. Yes, shoes are part of our world and one of the many symbols of our progress. Without them, in bare feet, we would find it quite difficult to walk and run. And yet, shoes may be symbolic of a certain weakness of our civilised era. Without shoes, we are sensitive to everything around us. We are close to nature; we are able to feel every furrow in the ground, every pebble underfoot, every blade of grass, every thorn, and every bit of earth. And then civilisation comes and bids us to put shoes upon our feet, and we become insensitive to all the little variances which would cause us, even the minutest sensations.

And the same holds true in the realm of the spirit: How often do we place shoes upon our spiritual life? How many devices has modern man devised to make himself insensitive to whatever spiritual motivations there may stir within his soul! **שָׁל נַעְלֶיךָ** – Cast off thy shoes! This was the first lesson taught to Moses by the Almighty Himself. Moses, do you want to alleviate the sufferings of your people? Do you really mean it when you proclaim **אֶסְרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה** – I want to see why the bush will not be consumed; what makes the flame of Judaism glow eternally; what makes Jewish life tick, so to speak. Then before you can approach the sacred soil of Jewish Life, remove your shoes. Cast away whatever artificial barriers you have set upon yourself, which separate you from that soil, which blunt your sensitivity.

In a house of mourning we are told to take off our shoes. Grief and the sorrow of bereavement possess a strange power which removes all artificialities and barriers. An individual, a dear one, whom we may have taken for granted all through his life, to whom we may have been indifferent! To whose needs, wants, hopes, and dreams we may have been insensitive suddenly that person is no longer with us, and is deeply missed. We take off our shoes, not only in the physical sense. It is a symbol that here, during the period of mourning of Shiva, we are removing all those artificial barriers. We feel closer to the deceased now, in bereavement, than we have ever felt when he was with us. Grief and sorrow and mourning command and demand that we cast off our shoes – **שָׁל נַעְלֶיךָ!**

On Tisha B'av, the traditional day of mourning, we take off our shoes too. It's a time when we contemplate the tragic history of our people and begin to sense every bit of pain sorrow and anguish of that history to which we have become insensitive, by means of countless artificial shoes.

And on Yom Kippur day, we are commanded: **שָׁל נַעְלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ** - “Cast off thy shoes”! For when, if not during this 24-hour period, can we be more honest with ourselves? If we are to reach the **אֲדָמַת קֹדֶשׁ**, if we are to elevate ourselves upon a spiritual plane, we must cast off these shoes, which we have fashioned for ourselves and which separate us, from the needs and demands of our people.

There is another aspect to the ritual of removing our shoes on Yom Kippur day. This second aspect has even greater bearing on the problems of life today. It is illustrated most clearly by a statement we find in the Talmud. **שאלו תלמידיו את רבי** - Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua, was asked by his disciples: “Tell us – how did you achieve your old age”? And the sage replied **מימי לא עשיתי** - “I have never made of the Synagogue a public thoroughfare.”³⁴⁵

How can we achieve long life for ourselves, our people, our faith? Why was Judaism able to survive in the past and to surmount all odds? Why did Jews live and exist as Jews and transmit that heritage to their children? The answer is **מימי לא עשיתי** - The Jews never brought the thoroughfare, the street, the base influences of the life, which surrounds him, into his sacred precincts. This lesson, too, was driven home to Moses: **שֶׁל נְעָלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ** - If you want to reach **אֲדָמַת קֹדֶשׁ**, then take off your shoes. They contain the dust of the desert; don't bring that dust with you when you enter God's sacred precincts of Mount Sinai.

The Jew, although hounded and persecuted throughout his entire history, nevertheless remained the bush that could not be consumed. The survival of the Jewish people was assured against all threats, internal and external, because Jews never brought the dust of the public street into their homes, their Synagogues, the sacred precincts of their **אֲדָמַת קֹדֶשׁ**. This second phase of our perplexity today is a natural corollary of the first, which is that because we have become insensitive to Jewish living, our homes and most sacred places have become the **קפנדריא**. There was a time when we Jews could boast of the highest standards of virtue and morality. No longer is this true. Studies have shown that the further we remove ourselves from Jewish loyalties, the more does our way of life – our ideals of purity, virtue, holiness, and morality – begin to coincide with the standards of the civilization about us. Once we forget the Divine call **שֶׁל נְעָלֶיךָ**; once we leave our shoes on, once we become callous and insensitive to the heart and pulse of Jewish dignity – then we drag all the pitfalls of modern life into our sanctuaries.

During this solemn moment of **הזכרת נשמות**, the spirit of Yom Kippur proclaims **שֶׁל נְעָלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ**. This was the call that was headed at all times by our parents and grandparents whom we are memorialising today. Why was their Judaism a rich source of hope and strength? Because they cast aside every artificial shoe and remained always alert and sensitive to the needs of their people and their God. Why was their Judaism an ennobling experience? Because they cast off their shoes and refused to drag the dirt of the roads into the sacred premises of their life.

³⁴⁵ Megillah 27b

Let us heed the Divine Call which beckons us to feel close to our people. Let us cast aside our shoes – Let us cast aside very shown and artificial device which has kept us away from our Jewish loyalties – so that we shall respond **הֲנִנִּי**! I am ready at last to ascend the **שְׂדֵמַת קִדְשׁ** for my people and my God - **אָמֵן**.

Yom Kippur: The Book of Job

One of the greatest, and most impressive books in our Bible, is the Book of Job. Many Bible students and literary critics, regard it as a most fascinating creation of literary genius. It is a philosophical work, dealing with the problem of the suffering of the righteous. Why should the just and the innocent suffer? How is it that the wicked often prosper? But though it deals with a major problem of philosophy, it is not written as a dry philosophical thesis. It is composed in the form of a drama, brilliant in style, and executed with great skill. As a literary production, it compares most favorably with the great classic Greek plays.

This is not the occasion to give a detailed analysis of the problems posed in the Book of Job. Just the barest outline of the content will suffice for our present purpose.

Job is a righteous man, blessed with every gift from God's storehouse cornucopia of plenty. One day, during a session of the Heavenly Court, God asks Satan, whether he noted the saintliness and faithfulness of Job. Satan is ready with a cynical reply. "Strike him, and see, whether in misfortune, his faithfulness endures." God accepts the challenge. Job is stripped of his wealth, his dear ones die, other misfortunes befall him. But Job remains true to his faith and his ideals. Satan does not admit defeat so readily. He argues, that Job will turn against God, once his own body is stricken. Again the challenge is accepted. Job is afflicted with leprosy, but, though lying in pain and in anguish, he refuses to surrender his faith in the righteousness and the final victory of his ideals. His wife urges him to curse God, to accept the apparent victory of injustice. But Job in answer cries out: **הֵן יִקְטְלֵנִי לֹא אֶיָּחַל** - "Even though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!"³⁴⁶

At times he is bitter at his faith. He cries, he curses the day of his birth: **כִּי לִפְנֵי לַחְמִי** **אֲנַחְתִּי תָבֵא וַיִּתְּכּוּ כַּמַּיִם שֶׁאֲגַתִּי... לֹא שְׁלוֹתַי וְלֹא שְׁקֵטַתִּי וְלֹא נַחְתִּי וַיָּבֵא רָגְזִי** - "Sighs are my daily bread, and groans pour from me like water.... I am not at ease, get no rest, have no peace, for trouble keeps coming."³⁴⁷

The philosophy is developed later when his friends visit him and argue the whole problem of suffering. Many skeptical thoughts are expressed, but, at the same time, Job remains steadfast, and clings to his faith, in his ideal of Justice. The end we all know. There's a happy conclusion. Satan is defeated; Job is the victor. He's restored

³⁴⁶ Iyov 13:15

³⁴⁷ Iyov 3:24, 26

to health and joy and prosperity. This drama has become the classic example of faith, and patience, in the ultimate triumph of right and of truth.

It's interesting to note that in the Temple days, when the priests functioned in Israel, the Book of Job was among those books of the Bible that the High Priest had to read, or to have read to him, during the night of **יום כפור**, in order to keep him awake for his sacred duties on the holiest day of the year. Evidently there was something vital and essential in the story of Job for the High Priest, the representative of all Israel, to remember in the day of days when we are to achieve atonement with God. And today, with Temple and High Priest no more, we Jews may still find in Job a message of deep import for our life.

Some Rabbis see in this book not the story of one individual, not the record of an isolate happening. In fact, one Rabbi tells us: **איוב לא היה ולא נברא** - "Job never was and never existed"³⁴⁸, but is only a **משל** - it's only a parable." We do not know the author of the Book. One tradition, however, which is recorded in the Talmud, tells us **משה כתב ספרו ופרשת בלעם ואיוב** "Moses wrote his own book, and the portion of Balaam, and also the book of Job"³⁴⁹. He, who in the mountain of Sinai proclaimed God's law to the world, was also the one who conceived this tale of a man, ready to endure every pain, rather than yielding his faith to his noble ideals.

Another tradition goes yet further and tells us that originally the Book of Job was placed in the Bible not where it is found now – in the third of Scripture section of the sacred volume, but immediately following the Pentateuch, immediately following the five books of Moses and preceding the Book of Joshua.

What a fine truth is revealed to us in these ancient traditions, and how meaningful for our day! What insight they reveal into the struggle for high ideals, for the kingdom of God on earth!

Moses gave the world a Law of truth and justice, of love and righteousness – a law which, if man observed it, would transform this earth of ours, into a veritable Garden of Eden. The Torah is the blue-print of happiness for the world. But Moses knew, that it would not be easy to achieve that Law. He knew that Satan, would often appear, and bring to those who strive for the triumph of God's Law, disappointment, and disillusion, suffering and anguish, tempting them, to forsake the path, which Moses had revealed. Nay, more, he knew that, like Job, men would frequently see wickedness triumphant, the cruel and the arrogant successful. How important it is to have the Book of Job closely attached to the Divine law – to remind us, of the courage and the strength needed, to hold us fast to our ideals. At times we do become despondent. We see those who trample underfoot, the ideals of the truth

³⁴⁸ Bava Batra 15a

³⁴⁹ Bava Batra 15a

and honour, apparently achieving success, scorning those, who attempt to live by Gods Law. How often are we urged, to curse God and live. How often, do the words resound in our ears – the effort is not worth while, forsake your ideal!! But, Moses warns us, hold fast to your faith. Learn to say with Job: Even though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!” When more than now, was there a greater need for such a message? We have recently fought a war for democracy and justice, at the price of sweat and blood and tears. We thought that victory achieved, it would be a simple matter, to transform our hopes, our dreams, and our ideals, into reality. But we see, Satan is tempting us again. Hatred and suspicion, prejudice and fear, have raised their heads anew. Darkness once more fills the world; all is confusion. This messy and muddled world, is racked with fear, distracted by suspicion, and embittered by hostility. How many wars – cold or hot – can one generation endure? From the Congo to Cuba, from Russia to the United States, rage the hurricanes of hate and terror. The heavens above us, blink with ominous satellites and the earth below, is stockpiled with Atomic war-heads.

Mankind is now in the middle of one of the greatest crisis in history. Civilised man stands today in dire danger, for he’s on the verge of a precipice, over which he may plunge into ruin, from which there might be no recovery. From all sides, we are told: Give up your ideal of universal peace, your dream of one World. Man is a beast; he will always fight; the battle is to the strong, the race to the swift! Just in such a time, we need to read the Book of Job, to keep us awake to the holy task before us. Despite all odds, let us not surrender our ideals. In a world where many have lost their faith in what is good and noble, let us cling to such faith with all out strength and thus bring new hope to a despondent mankind.

The Book of Job, according to the second tradition, not only followed the Pentateuch, but also preceded the Book of Joshua. Again, what depth of meaning this statement has for us. The Book of Joshua tells the story of the gradual conquest of Eretz Israel. God promised that land to the children of Israel. But Moses wanted the Israelites to know that in the attainment of this goal, there would also be a test of faith. Even though, the land was promised them, it would not come to them easily. Many battles would have to be fought, the land would have to be won through – effort and will. Again, when hope seemed lost, when despondency had taken hold of them, they were bidden to remember Job – how he refused to surrender his faith even in his darkest moments. How well, we have learned this lesson in our day, in the struggle to win the Promised Land. What treachery has been perpetrated by officials and governments, to thwart and oppose is, in our efforts, how they have hounded us, tortured us, hoping that we would abandon and sacrifice our ideals.

There were years, when darkness enveloped us, when everything appeared hopeless. There were years when a Weitzman was forced to cry out. “Hitler may have lost the

war, but as far as the Jews are concerned, he won a complete victory.” There were years when Byron’s sad and mournful lines – “The wild dove lost her nest, the fox his cave, mankind their country – Israel but the grave”³⁵⁰ seemed to have been fulfilled in all their literal horror. But, like Job, when all was apparently lost, when the fortune of Israel appeared to have reached the zero point, deliverance came. The Jewish State was born. The people what walked in darkness saw a great light, they that dwelt in the shadow of death, upon them did the light shine. How true it is, as our sages put it כל זמן שישראל בירידה התחתונה הם עולים - “When Israel has drained the cup of love woe to its dregs, when troubles have grown too great to be endured, deliverance is at hand.”³⁵¹

We recall the touching parable told by the Rabbis. A father and son, were wandering their way to a distant land. Exhausted by fatigue, the son turned to his father, asking: “Where is the land toward which we are traveling”? The father replied. “My son, a large cemetery intervenes between the place where we now find ourselves, and the goal we seek to reach. As soon as we shall have passed that cemetery, the land we are bound for, will be in sight.” My friends! We have left behind us a vast cemetery, strewn and scattered over with the tortured bodies, or rather ashes, of 6,000,000 Jews, men, women, and children, representing about 35% of the total Jewish population in the world. But those martyrs did not die in vain. They inspired the inhabitants of Palestine with the solemn determination, the sacred resolve, to bring about the realization of Israel’s age-long hope. To us too, are addressed the words of the prophet, “Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: they are all gathered together, and come to thee.” I will bring the seed from the east and gather thee from the west, I will say to the north: ‘Give up’, and to the south: Keep not back, bring my sons from far and my daughters from the end of the earth’.”

We are witnessing the homecoming, the reunion, קיבוץ גלויות - the ingathering of the exiles, a prerequisite - according to the Rabbis - of a thoroughgoing redemption - מסורת אגדה היא, שאין ירושלים נבנית עד שיתכנסו כל הגלויות.³⁵²

Despite all obstacles, despite the opposition of all Arab States Israel won a notable political victory. Israel won brilliant success on the battlefield. Like job it too saw the triumph of its faith.

But Israel has a still more formidable foe to contend with. Satan is still on the alert, he’s still hoping to force us, to give up our ideal. Israel is now engaged in a life-and-death struggle on the economic front. Her future depends to a large extent, on the outcome of this struggle. Israel appeals to us, saying. Yours is the duty, the responsibility of privilege. I am doing your work. For myself I ask nothing, for the

³⁵⁰ ‘Oh, Weep for Those’

³⁵¹ Shemot Rabbah 1:9

³⁵² Brachot 49a

Jewish people I ask everything. We must respond to the appeal. We must discharge our obligation to her. Israel needs us. And let us not forget that we need Israel. For if the Israel experiment, God forbid, were to fail, it would not be Israel alone, that would suffer. Jewish prestige everywhere throughout the world would fall. Jewish honour, Jewish dignity, would be bankrupt. And there would be no way of escaping the stigma.

Kol Nidrei night, this sacred night of the year, when we are above with our conscience, when we face our maker without camouflage or pretense, is when we are eager to be completely honest with ourselves. Let us respond to the call of Israel. I know that you will do all in your power to contribute to the success of the appeal.

And may we all be blessed by the Almighty with health and strength, to do our utmost, for the people of Israel, the State of Israel, and the Torah of Israel. **אמן**.

Yom Kippur: Appreciation

There is a prayer in our Siddur which we recite upon opening our eyes in the morning. After a night's restful sleep, we give thanks to Heaven for the privilege of being able to see the light of day again.

People are in the habit of taking the good things in life for granted. For example, when we have good health, we take it for granted. When we rise in the morning refreshed and rested and ready for the new tasks of the day, we take it as a matter of course.

People are grateful to their friends and neighbors, for little favours they can often do without. Some of us are at a loss for words, with which to express our gratitude to our fellow men for some thoughtful attention or consideration. Yet, we accept the real blessings in life without stopping to think for a moment whether or not we are entitled to them. We accept life and love and good fortune as though they are ours by right, as thou the Almighty is under contract to deliver these bounties to our door-step each morning as the day dawns.

It is for this reason, that our faith requires us, to give thanks each morning, for the blessings, of being able to rise and to behold the light of another day.

This ancient morning prayer of thanksgiving is the first lesson our youngsters are taught at their Hebrew Classes. It is perhaps the best-known Hebrew prayer among our children: **מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם** - "I give thanks unto You, O King Who are living and enduring forever, for having restored my soul unto me in mercy: Thy faith is very great. Blessed are You, O Lord King of the Universe Who opens the eyes of the blind, and who givest strength to the weary."

The name 'Jew' - which is derived from Judah - means "thanksgiving". It was invoked by a Jewish mother in gratitude for her newborn son. When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she was so overwhelmed by gratefulness that she called him Judah, which means "Thanks to God." And she said: וַתֹּאמֶר הַפַּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת ה' עַל כֵּן קָרָאתָהּ - "This time will I praise the Lord, therefore she called his name Judah."³⁵³

Unfortunately, many of us approach God when we find ourselves אֵל צָרָתִי. We are like the man who was walking across an old and dilapidated bridge that spanned a deep valley. He proceeded carefully, step by step. Suddenly, the bridge seemed to sway under his feet. Frightened and short of breath, he whispered the following vow as he came near the middle of the bridge: "God," he said, "if you will allow me to reach the other side safely, I will give twenty five percent of my earnings to my Synagogue." When he passed the middle of the bridge, it began to sway again. In a state of panic he repeated his vow, but this time he changed the figure and said: "God, I made a mistake, I meant to say that I will offer 50 percent of my earnings, if You will allow me to cross over safely." The wind then abruptly subsided and he walked more rapidly, for now he felt a bit more secure. Whereupon he once again uttered: "Thinking it over, O Lord, I don't think that I can offer more than 25 percent of my earnings to you." When he finally rested his feet on land, he called out triumphantly: "Now that I am across the bridge, God, the deal is off."

As we are about to recite the Yizkor service and remember our loved ones, let us ponder on these facts. Let us not wait for the crisis, for the emergencies or trouble before we come to God with our thanks. Let us approach him daily with the מוֹדָה אֲנִי prayer, and let us resolve to dedicate ourselves wholly to great and noble ideals, as did our parents in days past and thereby make our own lives truly worthwhile.

Yom Kippur: Israel and the pursuit for peace

If now – after experiencing the bounty of God – if now we do not turn to Him but continue to serve Him as in the past - only in sadness and desperation – then we are deserving of the severest retributions which are mentioned in the Scripture reading, of a few weeks ago. There the Torah gives the reason for the tribulations which might someday befall the Jewish people. "You did not serve the Lord your God with joy."

In six days, God created the world. And God made the seventh day holy. "Six days shalt thou work and do all thy labour, and the seventh day shall be a Sabbath unto the Lord thy God." The purpose of the six days was the seventh day.

³⁵³ Bereishit 29:35

In June 1967 God created us anew as a people. In six days, from June 5th to June 10th. He rebuilt our shattered hopes and created new dimensions of historical possibilities. However, the seventh day is yet to be won.

At a recent convention in Jerusalem, General Yitzchak Rabin, Israel's Chief of Staff said, "Although the six-day war is over, the Seventh day of rest, has not yet been gained." He was, of course referring to the shaky cease-fire which now exists in the Middle East, he was referring to the loss of life incurred through the El Fatah, since the end of the war, and the efforts, Israel was making to prevent this loss of life. She is now building, he said, a double fence, with an electronic eye, which will cost hundreds of millions of pounds. General Rabin was thinking of the vast replenishment of armaments even greater, and better, than those held by the Arabs, before the 6-day war, given to them by Russia. Nasser does not believe in miracles – he believes that there are three factors which enable Israel to survive. First: American Presidential support which he thinks, will diminish, after the presidential election. Second. The home front – that is the psychology of the Israelis – He thinks they will become demoralized, after a certain period of time. Third the support given to Israel by world Jewry, Nasser thinks that world Jewry, will grow tired, and then he will be able to crush the State of Israel.

Our great danger is not the strength and will of the Jewish people. We want peace, and there is no people who want peace more than the Jewish people. But it must be a peace which will secure Israel's boundaries and which will give her the chance to live in peace as a nation. The Israeli is not only prepared to give his life to this end, but through taxes and compulsory laws, he is already providing £2 for every £1 which comes from British and American Jewry.

During 1968, thirty thousand immigrants are expected to arrive in Israel. The Jewish Agency estimates, that the cost of transporting a family of four and integrating that family in the first six months of living in Israel costs about £1,200. Because of the hostility of Israel's neighbours, Israel is forced to spend one of the highest proportions of the world on defense. Is it fair and just in the part of world Jewry to expect Israelis to bear the burden of both defence expenditure and the absorption of newcomers?

Tonight, we are called upon to express our identification with the people of the State of Israel in a tangible way, we are called upon to obtain a maximum response to the Kol Nidrei appeal. For their triumphs are our triumphs, their ordeal is our ordeal, their fate is our fate. This year, you are all seating in unnumbered seats, and for that reason, stringed cards, were sent to you personally by the post to your homes, with the request, that you hand these cards to the stewards tonight. If there are any among you, who have forgotten to bring these cards, will you please tell the stewards the amount you wish to give.

May God hear our prayers and grant each one of you a year of life and peace.

Yom Kippur: Ben-Oni vrs. Benyamin

As I rise to speak on this solemn occasion, there comes to mind a very dramatic and gripping scene described to us in the book of Genesis concerning the birth of the youngest son of Jacob.

While the Patriarch and his family were journeying on their way to Bethlehem, Rachel gave birth to a son. As a result of her excruciating labour-pains, her condition was serious, and she had a feeling that she would not long survive the agony of her severe ordeal. In her final moments, Rachel looked down on the new-born infant, with tenderness and profound emotion, and with the last ounce of strength left in her weary body, she named him Ben Oni – “The son of my sorrow.” But Jacob was dissatisfied with that name, for we are told – And his father called him Benjamin.”

My friends, many times have I read this story in the Bible, and I could not find a plausible excuse for the uncharitable conduct. Previously, whenever a child had been born unto him, whether son or daughter, Jacob was content to leave the selection of an appropriate name for the baby to its mother. Why then did he find it necessary to intervene in this instance, and to refuse to comply with the last wish of a dying mother, and a beloved wife. Surely, he must have been stunned and grief-stricken, at the untimely, and sudden passing, of his devoted companion, for whom he had serviced her father Leban, for fourteen years! Why then did he not make her last moments happy, by agreeing to call his son Ben-oni as Rachel had named him?

Of course, in these days, naming a child is a relatively simple procedure. One chooses a dead relative and gives the child, its Hebrew name, after the deceased person. Usually the English name, does not closely correspond with the Hebrew one. For example what has *שלמה* to do with Stephen, a *חיה* with Henrietta? But we feel, that this is the least we can do for our beloved dead, and we let it go at that.

The other day, I heard of a young father who came to the Synagogue, to name his first child, a baby girl. To a man who was sitting near him, he confided that he was very upset about the name. “You see” he said, I know that the right thing to do is to name the baby after a deceased parent or after another close member of the family. But our people all alive and I don’t know what to do! The neighbor shook his head sadly and promised to try to be of help. So he walked up to the Minister and with great feeling said Rev. the poor young man is in trouble. He has, *nebach*, no dead relatives to his baby after. What should he do? There will soon come a time, when people will say. “Blessed is the man who has a sufficient representation of his family to choose a name from.

But my friends! There is something far deeper to this strange incident, than which appears, to the cursory reader of this text. In Biblical days, the names given to children were not mere identifying tags, to which they have been reduced in our own times. In those days names meant something. They expressed a philosophy of life, and an ideal, to which the bearers were expected to dedicate their best efforts and talents. They served as mottoes, and slogans, which kept reminding, those who bore them, of their obligations and responsibilities to God and man. Thus Abraham knew that he was to be an **אב המון גוים**, “the father of a multitude of nations” when his name was changed from Avrom to Avrohom, and Jacob learned, that his mission in life was to be a champion of God, by the new name, Israel, which was given him at Jabbok. The parents of Moses, the greatest teacher and prophet of all time, were called **עמרם** and **יוכבד**, the name **עמרם** is comprised of two Hebrew words: **עם** meaning nation, and **רם** elevated. At a time when Pharoh and his followers attempted to degrade and to dishonour the children of Israel, **עמרם** did everything in his power to uplift, to elevate and to bring honour to his people. **יוכבד** is likewise composed of two words. **יו** is an abbreviated form for the name of God, and **כבד** signifies honour. **יוכבד** dedicated her life to bring honour to the religion and to the God of her people. Go through the Bible and analyze the names of people, and you will see, that each one had a specific meaning and purpose.

When Rachel felt that her last moments were approaching, and that her child could be reared by hands other than her own, she feared that he might grow up oblivious to the sacrifice she had made in order to give life unto him. And so she selected a name, which would serve him as a constant reminder of the tragedy, which overtook his mother when he was born. “And she called his name Ben-oni, the son of my sorrow.” That singular name, she was certain, would always keep her son from ever forgetting her. He would try to live up to the noblest standards of his mother, as a debt of gratitude to the sacred memory of a martyred mother. But Jacob, heartbroken and griefstricken at the passing of his beloved wife, could not agree to such a name. “No,” he said, I do not want a son of mine to be known as Ben-oni – to remain true to the ideals of his bearers, only because, of the tragic fate, which overtook them. I do not want suffering and sorrow, to prompt him to remember them. I want my son to be known rather, as Benjamin – the son of my right hand – who in loving devotion to the teachings and principles of his parents is willing and eager to lift his right arm in order to champion the cause of his people and their ideals. I want the youngest son of mine, to stand at my right side in good times, as well as in bad ones, in moments of rejoicing, as in those of affliction, in periods of security and peace, as well as in those of turbulence and war. I want “the son of my old age” to dedicate his right heart, to serve the welfare of the House of Israel, and the God of Israel always.”

Friends, these words of Jacob, are so timely and of such tremendous import for us today. Unfortunately, you and I know of so many Ben-onis among us today, men and women, who think of their people, only in times of “Oni”, in moments of sadness and misfortune, in times of adversity only. Their Judaism begins, when trouble begins, and it ends when their troubles are over. A story is told of a young Jewish student who was brought up in the poverty and privation of the Russian ghetto and who ran away to seek his fortune. Many years later, his old father found out, that his long-lost son, was now an eminent physician in Berlin. The old man made the long, tedious journey to visit his son – perhaps to derive some Nachas in his old age. But, alas, he didn’t have the nachas he had anticipated, for he couldn’t find one sign of Jewishness in his son’s home.

My son, he said, “I can see that you don’t lack wealth, honour, or social position, but what about Yiddishkeit? Have you remained with anything to remind you that you are a Jew? “Yes, father,” the son answered sheepishly, “I have retained one thing that is a constant reminder to me that I am a Jew.” “What is it my son?” the old man asked eagerly. “Remember, father, in the old home town, when I was a child – every day when I would walk to Cheder, I would be frightened by dogs. Well, I still tremble, when I hear a dog bark”.

Is this to be the bond that unites Jews – the bark of a dog, the sneers of a guttersnipe, the attacks of Amaleks, Hamans, or Colin Jordan? Can such a Judaism survive or perpetuate itself?

Jacob is displeased with such Jews, with those who show up only in times of adversity. No! these are not the son’s and daughter’s, for who he hoped and prayed. “Benyamins” and so do we. We need men and women whose philosophy of life and of Judaism would be exemplified by this one word “Benjamin” who would remember their people and identity their fate with the destiny of Israel in good weather, and bad weather, in prosperity and in depression, in moments of happiness, as in those of misery and sorrow.

Benjamin, we are told, gave Israel cause to rejoice, for he was the progenitor of a long line of ardent and courageous Jews. It was the tribe of Benjamin, who was privileged to have had the Temple in Jerusalem built on its territory. We too, need fearless and courageous Benjamins, sons and daughters to pan for the future of our people and be part of that future themselves, who will bend their energies to redeem our Holy Land and thus redeem themselves, who will not only fast on Yom Kippur, but also feast on Simchat Torah, who will flock to the Synagogue, not only on D-Day, but also on V-Day, Sabbaths and Holidays. To our great dismay, you will agree that we are still far from that goal.

There's a remarkable legend told about that mystical and saintly personality Rabbi Isaac ben Solomon Ashkenazi Luria, commonly known as the "Ari", Founder of modern Kaballah. After the Kol Nidrei service, one Yom Kippur night, the Rabbi found himself all alone in the Synagogue of Safed, Palestine. All the people had left long ago, but the "Ari" was still rapt in deep meditation on that sacred night. Suddenly, he saw in the distance near the Ark, a tall, thin and awe-inspiring figure, dressed in black. Despite the fear and apprehension which gripped the holy man at the sight of so dreadful a being, the "Ari" made his way in the direction of the Ark. As he came closer and looked deep into the eyes of that strange creature, the "Ari" recognized the identity of the stranger, and he exclaimed, "You are the מלאך המות Aren't you?" The gaunt figure nodded his head in assent, I have come, he said, "to take the lives of those who appear on my list." The Angel of Death held the list in his hands and showed it to the Rabbi. The holy man was horror stricken, when he saw the names of the most illustrious people of Safed on that death list. Like Jacob who struggled with the angel at Jabbok, the Rabbi began to wrestle with the "מלאך המות" in an effort to get hold of that list. As dawn began to break, the "Ari", bruised and battered, managed to snatch the list out of the clutches of the Angel of Death. And in the corner lay the "Malach hamoves," defeated, but with a diabolic smile on his ugly face, for in his clenched fist, he still held a torn piece of that paper which was inscribed with the name of the "Ari" himself. Thus the Rabbi saved every one of his people but failed to save himself.

My friends, is that legend not reminiscent of the tragic history of the Jew? Like the "Ari," we have struggled with the Angel of Slavery and Death for all the peoples of the world. We fought for Russia and Spain. We died on the battlefields of Poland and Flanders. We helped save the finest בעלי בתים of the world from the clutches of tyranny and oppression. But we have failed to save ourselves. When there was still time and golden opportunities to save a good portion of the Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, we procrastinated and failed. We did little for the upbuilding of our National Home in Eretz Yisrael.

You recall, no doubt, the phrase inscribed on the labels of certain foods "No good if detached." This is a motto for you and me. It should become the slogan of our people. "No good if detached." On this sacred evening, as we prepare ourselves for another year, I ask this question. Detachment or Attachment, which shall it be? Shall we forever remain Ben-onis and thus endanger the life and the spirit of our people, or shall we become the Benyamins of Anglo Jewry, and thus assure the continuity of the Torah civilization and mode of life?

My appeal is for attachment to Israel. On this Kol Nidrei, on this the most solemn evening in the Jewish calendar our thoughts turn to our fellow men our thoughts turn to our brothers and sisters in Israel. During the past year, immigration has

continued increasingly, from North Africa, and various parts of Eastern Europe, bringing with it the familiar, but nevertheless arduous problems, which the resettlement, and reintegration of large numbers of men, women, and children, must, of necessity, entail! The agencies and institutions concerned with immigration, have to overcome enormous problems of absorption, rehabilitation, and settlement. These problems include housing, transportation, medical care, the training of breadwinners, and the adaptation of skills to the specific needs of the country. I therefore appeal to you for your wholehearted cooperation in obtaining a maximum response to the Kol Nidrei appeal for Israel.

May God hear our prayers and grant each one a year of life, and peace a true **שנת אמן - חיים ושלום**.

Sukkot: Dedication to mitzvot

One of the famous Sukkot stories concerns the Jewish community of Vilna that had no etrog. As is known, the Vilna Gaon was very strict and scrupulous with respect to the observance of all the laws connected with the festival of Sukkot. He was particularly careful that his etrog should be of the finest quality. In those days, the train service was not yet in existence, so every major community sent off special emissaries in the middle of the summer to buy proper etrogim.

It happened once that the emissaries from Vilna returned empty-handed. This affected the community deeply because they were very much concerned that their beloved Gaon should have an etrog; otherwise, this could cause him great sorrow.

The heads of the community held meeting after meeting. Letters were sent off to various towns, and it was decided to send a special emissary whose job was to get an etrog at any price.

This time, the emissary was successful. Quite by accident he met a Jew who had bought an extraordinarily beautiful etrog. He tried to bargain with him by offering him a huge sum, but for no money in the world would he part with his etrog.

Seeing that he could achieve nothing with money, the emissary - having no alternative - revealed to the man that he wanted to buy the etrog for the Vilna Gaon. Hearing this, the man became very excited. "Good," he said, "I am ready to give the etrog away for free!" - but on one condition: that he be paid with the Gaon's share of Olam HaBa - with the Gaon's share in the world to come.

The emissary was stunned. What should he do? he thought to himself. How could he possibly bind the Gaon to so unusual and exorbitant a demand. But there was no time to be lost, and with a heavy heart the emissary agreed to the barter and got the etrog.

When he returned to Vilna with the precious article, he was hailed as a real hero. Everybody envied him. The town was in a festive mood. All were happy, except the emissary. He was miserable and worried because of the promise he had given the man who gave him the etrog. His sadness grew from day to day until one day the Gaon insisted that he should explain the cause of his tzoros.

With tears in his eyes he related the transaction. The Gaon smiled and said, "I do not know the value of my Olam HaBa, but of one thing I am certain, that the joy of this mitzvah is well worth the price you paid for it."

This story gives us an incling of what a **שמחה של מצוה** meant, not only to the select great ones, but to the humblest Jew of yesterday.

This story makes us stop and think. How valuable is the mitzvah of Lulav and Etrog that a man should be willing to give away his share in the world to come for it? In the pages of Midrash and Talmud, our Sages have left us with many interpretations of the symbolic significance of the Arba Minim which we take on Sukkot, and one of the most interesting interpretations of the Etrog and Lulav is that in which our sages compare the Arba Minim to the various portions of the human body.

The Etrog, they tell us, is **דומה ללב** - is likened to the human heart, both in shape and significance it resembles that all important organ. The Lulav is **דומה לשדרה** - is compared to the spinal column of man. The Lulav has also the construction of the human spine and is meant to represent the foundation of the body.

The hadassim are likened to the eyes; the shape of the leaf of the fragrant myrtle is similar to that of the eye. And the Aravot are **דומה לפה** - likened to the human mouth; the long leaf of the willow is not dissimilar to the human lips.

Our Sages, in making this comparison, intended to stress the fact that just as the Arba Minim are consecrated to our service and devotion to the Almighty, so must the human body be similarly consecrated.

Sukkot: The Jewish conception of beauty

Of all the festivals in the Jewish calendar, it seems that in ancient times Sukkot - or Tabernacles - was the most popular. It was regarded so important as to be known as **החג** - the festival.

The festival of Sukkot differs considerably from those we have been celebrating for two weeks. In the first part of this month Tishrei we observed **ימים נוראים** – solemn days and periods of introspection when we concentrated all our thoughts upon the serious things of life. But now this festival of Sukkot tells us of the happiness of life when we are to rejoice over the products of our labour and partake of the good

things this world provides. And the symbols too, which are used for these different types of festivals, are also expressive of the significance of each.

While the symbol of Rosh Hashanah is the shofar which addresses itself to our conscience, to our innermost thoughts and to the searchings of the heart, the Etrog appeals to our sense of beauty. While the שופר recalls to us the self-sacrificing spirit of our fathers, the etrog recalls the Jewish sense of beauty. While one points towards the ethical concepts of our religion, the second indicates the esthetic concept as is understood by Judaism.

These are the two streams in the culture of mankind. The two greatest elements of world civilization are Hellenic (or the ancient Greek culture), and Judaism.

Greece was the outstanding contributors to the aesthetic, the sense of beauty, while Judaism is the source of the ethical concepts of mankind.

However, one must not make the mistake of thinking that Greek civilization had a monopoly on beauty, and that Judaism concentrated its attention solely upon the serious phases of life and had no eye for those things which captivate the senses. The Jew, too, recognised beauty when he saw it, but he had a different conception of beauty - one tempered by his moral sense.

While the Greek believed in beauty in and of itself, looking at חן & יופי, charm & grace, as ideas of life, the Jew said ³⁵⁴שֶׁקֶר הַחַן וְהַבֵּל הַיָּפִי, it's foolish and vain, אֲנָשָׁה יְרֵאתָ ה' - there must be something else, there should be יְרֵאתָ ה' in connection with beauty. A beautiful statue to the Greek was an object of admiration and adoration. To the Jew it was only a פסל, an imitation of something above, but not the real thing.

This difference is most clearly indicated in the symbols of the Sukkot festival. The four species which we use on this day, and particularly the etrog which is described as the פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר “the fruit of the splendid tree”³⁵⁵. We are told וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם... פְּרִי... הָדָר, take the symbol, the fruit which is expressive of your sense of beauty, not that which other nations regard as beautiful. The אתרוג answers that description. It must have four qualifications: gidul, mareh, taam, rayach – beautiful form; beautiful colour, but also food taste and pleasant odor.

Other nations designate as beautiful those things which are externally pleasing. To be beautiful, a thing must fulfill the first two requirements of form and color. But the Jew must also see taam and rayach – a practical value in life. To the Greeks, knowledge of food was enough; חכמה - wisdom was all that was required.

³⁵⁴ Mishlei 31:30

³⁵⁵ Vayikra 23:40

To the Jew, תורה itself is not sufficient; it must be supplemented with מעשים טובים. Among the Greeks, knowing what was right was enough. To the Jews, doing the right was of greater importance. לא המדרש עיקר אלא המעשה – speaking about ideals is not all, effort must be made to realise them in life.³⁵⁶ While Greece produced diplomats, statesmen, orators and philosophers who speculated over human ideas, we produced prophets who waged the practice of an ideal life.

While Plato wrote about an ideal Republic, he permitted the institution of slavery. The Jewish prophet didn't tolerate injustice & oppression of any kind. He protested and condemned the oppression of the widowed and fatherless. He cried out against the grinding of the poor to dust.

It was our great singer and thinker Judah Halevi who said: "Greek civilization regarded the blossom, the thing of beauty which captivates our sight, but Judaism demands the fruit as well." It must be a פרי as well as הדר. We too like the יפיותו של יפת but it must be in connection with אהלי שם.³⁵⁷ It must be beauty for an ideal end.

³⁵⁸ פרי עץ הדר עץ שטעם עצו ופריו שוה - a beautiful fruit is one which tastes like the tree whence it comes. According to the Greeks, progress consists constantly in going away from the past! Each generation must make strides forward. The beauty of history to them is that the children go off from their ancestors; the fruit must be different from the tree which produces it. The Jewish ideal is the return to the old – פרי עץ הדר: זה, חדש ימינו בקדם; our beauty consists in the likeness of son to father, אברהם - the beautiful family tree is Avraham & happy is the father whose son is an Isaac.³⁵⁹ טעם עצו ופריו שוה - so like Abraham was Isaac, our sages tell us that only age distinguished them in appearance.

And still another difference exists between us and other nations. Beauty, to us, requires a harmonious combination of various elements: פרי עץ הדר אלא ישראל³⁶⁰ – the etrog is a symbol of Israel! The idea is to be like an אתרוג, to have taam and rayach and all the ideal qualifications. But it is not always possible to realise the ideal. We must have types that are like the כפות תמרים יש בו טעם ואין בו ריח that do well and mean well, though they lack the fragrant odour and Jewish consciousness.

We have also the ענף עץ עבת יש בו ריח ואין בו טעם - the type of Jew who is very religious according to his own conception; he prays & studies Torah, but does not מעשים טובים. His life in practice is an exact opposite of what he preaches!

³⁵⁶ Avot 1:17

³⁵⁷ See Megillah 9b based on Bereishit 9:27

³⁵⁸ Sukkah 35a

³⁵⁹ Vayikra Rabbah 30:10

³⁶⁰ See Vayikra Rabbah 30:12

And of course, we also have the ערבה type, that has neither Torah nor ma'asim tovim. What are we to do with these four strikingly diverging types? ומה הקב"ה עשה להם? לאבדם אי אפשר - we cannot destroy them, nor can we bring them to the ideal standard. אלא אמר הקב"ה יוקשרו כולם אגודה אחת והן מכפרין אלו על אלו - Let them be bound together, let them all be united & one will make up for what is lacking in the other! Thus, the Jewish idea of beauty is harmony of a very definite kind – a harmony which can include such different products as an etrog, a lulav, a hadass & the arovah. One is as different from the others as East is from West, yet together they form a beautiful combination. The finest orchestra uses not one type of instrument, but a dozen, which though diverging in tone, nevertheless produce a divine symphony.

פרי עץ הדר הלא באילנו משנה לשנה - Finally, we must not forget this important phrase. What we call beauty in the esthetic sense, is a relative term subject to changes of place & time, climactic conditions & various other factors. For example, in the Orient it's considered proper & beautiful to go with head covered & feet uncovered. In our Western civilization, it's just the reverse. And so, too, what may be considered good form & manners in one generation, many be bad form & ill breeding in the next. Not so, however, when we regard the ethical side of human conduct. Right is right, always, & wrong is wrong, always. The courthouses of one country may be different from those of another, but justice is justice everywhere. We must remember that the beauty of the blossom fades quickly ³⁶¹ יבש חציר נבל ציץ – “grass withers & the flower fades” but ודבר ה' יקום לעולם – “the word of God remains forever”. The great cultures & civilisations of antiquity have faded before the onslaught of time, but permanent & durable are the verities of the Torah.

As Benjamin Disraeli, the great Anglo-Jewish statesman once said in Parliament, “The world will be redeemed only, when all will come to recognize the truths passed down to Israel at Mount Sinai.”

And so, let's strive for the ideal, the אתרוג if we can achieve it; if not, יוקשרו כולם “let us harmonise our various elements & let one make up for the short-coming of the other.” Then we shall find ourselves nearer to the realization of our greatest ideals – **אמן!**

Sukkot: The four species & the united family

The festival of Sukkot, whose celebration we began last evening, is rich in symbolic ritual and ceremony.

Our sages have left us with many interpretations of the symbolic significance of the Sukkah & the 'daled Minim' - the four plants, which we take on Sukkot.

³⁶¹ Yeshayahu 40:8

The famed Rabbi of Manheim, Germany, was once asked by the ruling prince of his community why Jewish children are taught to ask questions on Passover Eve when an unusual ceremony takes place in the Jewish home. He felt that on Sukkot, when the Jew leaves the safety and the comfort of his home to dwell in the frail and insecure Tabernacle, such questions would be more in order. In other words, he felt that it was more appropriate for children to ask questions at the festival of Sukkot rather than at the Seder during Passover.

To this the sainted scholar replied that for the Jew, to uproot himself and to leave security for the unknown and the temporary is unfortunately almost natural, and such an experience does not call for questions and investigations. But to dwell in splendor, freedom and joyous exaltation is wholly unnatural in the life of the exile, and therefore on Passover the question automatically suggests itself: "Why is this night different?"

Yes, the life of the Jew in Galut for 2,000 years may be compared to a Sukkah. The Galut life was weak, frail and in constant danger from the ill winds and the floods of hatred and prejudice that surrounded us. But the Jew observed the Mitzvah of Sukkah, because in a way it was a reaffirmation of his faith.

Thank God, we are living in an age that we can say with a reasonable degree of joy that for those of our people who seek a permanent home in a Jewish land, the Seder existence will become the normal thing and the Sukkah experience the historic exception.

One of the most interesting interpretations is that is which our sages compared the 'daled minim' to various portions of the human body.³⁶² The etrog they tell us is **דומה ללב** - likened to the human heart, both in shape & significance, it resembles that all important organ. The lulav is **דומה לשדרה**, compared to the spinal column of man. The lulav too has the construction of the human spine & is meant to represent the foundation of the body. The 'hadassim' are like the eyes; the shape of the leaf of the fragrant myrtle is similar to that of the eye. The 'aravah' is **דומה לפה**, likened to the human mouth, the long leaf of the willow is not dissimilar to the human lips. Our sages in making this comparison intended to stress the fact that just as the 'daled minim' are consecrated to our service and devotion to the Almighty, so must the human body be similarly consecrated.

If I may be permitted, I should like to take this comparison and carry it just a bit further and apply its moral significance to our daily lives. It seems to me that these 'daled minim' may also be compared to the various members of the family.

³⁶² See Midrash Tanchuma, Emor 19

The etrog, which is **דומה ללב**, may be represented also as the mother of the family, who is the heart of the family. It is she who gives lifeblood to the family. It's she who feels most deeply & sympathises most readily with the problems & desires of the other members of the family.

The lulav, which is **דומה לשדרה**, may well be interpreted as the father of the family. It is he who support the family. It is he whose strength is the foundation of that group and upon whom the other members of the family are dependent.

The hadassim, which are compared to the eyes, may be taken to mean the sons of the family. They are the eyes of the family, particularly of the Jewish family. Parents look forward to the future through their sons. They want to see their sons advancing themselves, growing in stature and in importance beyond the present role of the family. The future of the family is seen through its sons.

The daughters of the family are aravat. The willow leaf, which is a symbol for the mouth, may similarly represent the daughters who are the mouth of the family, just as the mouth is the organ which makes possible social intercourse between human beings, so do the daughters increase the social levels and activities of our family. The family that has daughters is more likely to have visitors, guests who visit the daughters and who involve the family socially.

In other words, just as the future of a family is seen through its sons, so too the daughters bring joy, happiness and delight to a family.

The blessings for the 'daled minim', as well as the na'anuim, require that these four species be placed together, and the **יהי רצון** which we recite before the blessings over the lulav clearly indicates this when it says: **בפרי עץ הדר, וכפות תמרים, וענף עץ עבות, והיו לאחדים בידי** - that the four species represent the four letters of God's sacred Name, and that our prayer is to unite the letters of the Holy Name as we united the Daled Minim.

We can fulfill the Mitzvah of lulav only when all the four parts are held together and swayed in unison. This surely indicates the need for unity in the fulfillment of this Mitzvah. Similarly, the key to the successful Jewish family is in unified living & in united action.

Sukkot: The four clouds of Glory

For seven days we are celebrating the Festival of Tabernacles. We commemorate, with gratitude and thanksgiving, the protection that God bestowed upon our ancestors in those 40 years of weary wandering in the desert on their way back to the promised land. **בַּסֹּכֶת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים** - "You shall dwell in booths seven

days”³⁶³ says the Bible, and we observe the precept to this very day **לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם** - “In order that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.”³⁶⁴

There is a very interesting discussion in the Talmud as to what the word **סֻכּוֹת** means.³⁶⁵ One Sage says **סוכת ממש**, meaning that we must take it literally to refer to actual huts in which the Jews dwelt and found protection in the sun-beaten desert. But another Sage, Rabbi Eliezer, interprets the word figuratively and perhaps more truly. An actual hut of wood or canvas was not enough to assure that protection which our fathers needed on their long and difficult journey. And so he says **סֻכּוֹת** means **ענני הכבוד**, “Clouds of Divine Glory”. The Jews were saved in the desert because they dwelt in the protecting clouds of God’s glory.

And the sages, with their keen insight into the life of the Jew, go further and tell us that there were seven such clouds of Divine glory which enveloped the hosts of Israel and which served as their protecting shields. In fact, they describe them:

“Four of the clouds surrounded the Jew on all sides of him, one on the east, one on the west, one on the north, and one on the south.” These four clouds protected him against the constant attacks of the enemies who come from all sides and who were always eager to destroy him. All their efforts were of no use because they could not penetrate the Divine protection of God’s glory.

“There was a fifth cloud that accompanied him in his journey”, say the Rabbis. “It covered his head.” The rays of the desert sun would have scorched him. But God placed this cloud above him to shield him from the burning heat of the sun! And then there was a sixth cloud that “went before him” that paved and prepared the path on which he should go.

He could not stand still. He had to march forward. But what path should he take? This cloud God sent before the people of Israel to guide them, to lead them that they should not stumble but march every on toward the desired goal. “And finally”, our Sages say, there was a seventh cloud that went after him. For in the long and dreary march many fell by the wayside. They had not the strength, either physical or spiritual, to endure the hardships of the journey. What should be done with these weaklings? Should they be left to die in the desert? God therefore sent this seventh cloud of His Divine Glory to lift the fallen and to help the weary, to carry - if need be - those who could no longer stand on their feet.

³⁶³ Vayikra 23:42

³⁶⁴ Vayikra 23:43

³⁶⁵ Sukkah 11b

I am sure there's no need for me to tell you that in this beautiful legend we have the clearest interpretation of Jewish history all through the ages. For 2,000 years the hosts of Israel have been marching a long and weary journey through the wilderness of the world. How thankful and grateful to God we should be that we are the privileged generation, which to us the words of the immortal Bialik, **דֹר אֶחָרוֹן לְשִׁעְבֹד**, **וְרֵאשֹׁן לְגְאֻלָּה אֲנַחְנוּ** "we are the least generation of servitude, and the first for redemption". How can we explain this miracle?

We find the answer in this beautiful legend. To this very day, the 4 clouds of Divine protection have surrounded the Jew on all sides. Enemies! There were sufficient. From north & south, from east & west, have they rushed to destroy him. But he could not be destroyed, because the clouds of Divine glory shielded him & protected him.

There were times, too, when he lived in the Golden Era in Spain, when the sun of freedom and opportunity of enlightenment shone upon him. There was danger then, too, that some might become blinded by these sudden rays of light that their Jewish consciousness might be scorched by the heat of the sun of liberty. But God sent His fifth cloud of glory to protect them. He blessed them with sages, scholars and teachers who acted as the Guides to the Perplexed and who taught them the life that was based upon faith and knowledge, upon belief and understanding.

Furthermore, Israel never stood still. Israel always marched forward and onward on the road of progress. The people did not stumble; they didn't lose their way, because here again, in God's goodness, they were blessed with the sixth cloud of Divine Glory that always went before them! They were blessed with schools and academies that produced shining lights to guide them and to lead them on the true path of life.

And just as in the days of old, which we commemorate on this festival, so too throughout all these ages there were always those who lost their strength, who fell by the wayside, who had not the courage to continue the march through the desert of hate and persecution. But they were not left to die. The seventh cloud was there to save them. Jewish communal life was so organized as to give constant thought to devise ways and means how to give strength to the weary; how to put new courage into the faint-hearted; how to give new energy to those who were about to fall. "All Israel are brothers", and to win back the support of the erring the fallen was the sacred task of all Israel. Thank God, the four clouds are still with us.

We see these four clouds of Divine protection guarding our fellow Jews in Israel today. Israel, too, is surrounded by enemies in the North and South, from the East and West. Today, at a critical time in her development, oil has been found in the Negev and who knows, it may lead to further finds and it is possible that valuable minerals like pyrites and phosphates may exist in the Negev in commercial

quantities - since these are generally located in oil-bearing regions. Surely these must be the 4 clouds of Divine Glory protecting Israel today, as she protected Jews throughout the ages.

With the clouds of God's glory about us, above us, before us, after us, we shall continue our march – bringing glory to the name of God, honour to ourselves, and blessedness to all mankind. **ינא**

Sukkot: The secret of Jewish survival

On our flight back to New York from Europe this summer we chanced to sit next to a Lt. Commander of the Israeli Navy, and eight hours of flight gave us ample time to discuss many interesting subjects.

One of our topics was the unanswered question of Jewish survival. With all the persecution and hardship which we experienced for nearly 2,000 years, how was the Jewish people able to survive? My fellow traveler tried to explain the phenomena with a story which had heard from his father many years ago:

There was once a wealthy man who had 3 sons, one a doctor, one a lawyer, and one a scientist. As the father grew old, he called upon his oldest son and said to him: "Son, I give you my business as your inheritance". But the son answered: "I have enough. The only object that I want is your golden ring which has been a family heirloom for many generations".

The father called upon the second son, and then the third, and to each made the same proposal, and each in turn said all he wanted was the golden ring.

The father, faced with the dilemma, called a goldsmith and asked him to reproduce 2 additional rings of the exact same material, and with the identical engravings and ornaments. But the jeweler answered, "It is possible to produce the two rings. In design, they will be exactly as the one you showed me, but the identical material can no longer be obtained." Nevertheless, the father gave the order for 2 additional rings.

When the father received the rings, he called upon his oldest son, gave him one ring, and said: "you wanted only the ring. I give it to you on one condition - that you will not show it to your brothers until after my death." Then he called his next son, gave him one ring and instructed him also not to show it to his brothers before he, the father, had died. Finally, he called upon his youngest son, gave him a ring and instructed him likewise not to display it until after his death.

Sometime later, the father passed away and when the 3 brothers met at the funeral, each was wearing a golden ring - all three exactly alike. Astonished, they looked at each other. Could it really be possible that their father had 3 rings? After some time, they decided to find out which one was the original, and which two the imitations.

They went to a wise man and placed their problem before him. He told them as follows, “The three rings seem alike, but wait a number of years, then the real one will continue to shine, while the 2 copied ones will start to lose their luster. The material of which the original was made cannot be copied, nor can it be imitated. It will always keep its radiant beauty and splendor.”

We believe that not only does this story speak to us of the miracle of Jewish survival, but so also does our Sukkot festival.

For centuries, the Jewish people have lived in various countries of the earth. People have occupied big houses and small huts, sometimes richly decorated, and sometimes poorly furnished. But circumstances demanded that we move on to new places with new customs and usages. Regardless of where we were living, however, once a year we built a Sukkah, frail and weak - but the spiritual and material of which it erected cannot be imitated nor copied. Every Sukkot has an atmosphere which reflects our ancient faith - undiluted and pure. For above all else, the Sukkah represents our firm belief in God’s protection and safekeeping. The material of the Sukkah is a tradition which cannot be copied or imitated. Authentic Judaism will ever keep its shine and luster.

In our long history there have been many movements which set as their goal the destruction of our ancient heritage. All their work and persuasion have left no mark on the Jewish people. Why? Because there’s only one material which never fades, and that is the law of Moshe which we have promised to carry with us on all our travels.

Throughout the year we encounter many moments when we have to decide between the genuine and the imitation. Sukkot provides for us the real lesson from which we should learn. We must learn and work for that which has enduring value, and discard that which is only of monetary worth.

True enjoyment is the motto of this Yom Tov. Let “Simcha” reign, and may God give us wisdom to extend that joy throughout the year.

Sukkot: The love of Judaism

Ours is an age of specialists. As a writer once described it, it is a period when in every field of learning, the experts know more and more about less and less. However, long before we advanced to our present state of learning, we Jews also had specialists - but of a different kind.

Many of our saints and sages decided that they would become specialists in a particular Mitzvah. I need not tell you that they observed everything that the written and oral law required. But, from the thousands of ethical, moral and ritualistic

precepts that we have, they would select one with regard to which they sought to achieve perfection.

One saint might choose tongue control, and he would become an expert in moral speech. He would never utter a word that might even remotely be regarded as slanderous.

Another saint might choose benevolence, and he would spend days and nights assisting the poor.

Another saint would become an expert in the mitzvah of sukkah, just as our Ladies Guild are experts in decorating and beautifying the Sukkah.

However, the history of Jewish morality indicates that not only individual Jews would try to become specialists with regard to a particular Mitzvah, but Jews as a whole would find that at different period of their history, all of them would become perfect, or efficient to the maximum, with regard to a particular Mitzvah.

For example, at one period of Jewish history, the whole world was corrupted and contaminated with idolatry. As a result, Jews felt impelled to become especially militant in their fulfilment of the Biblical commands to destroy idols and the last vestiges of pagan worship.

At another period, Jews found that the world at large was suffering from clerical domination and the universal ignorance that the clergy hoped to perpetuate. Jews therefore became all the more inflamed with love of Talmud Torah - of study and the propagation of learning among all classes of Jews.

At still another period, Jews found that the world was suffering from a resurgence of nationalism which became the greatest cause for bloodshed, conquest and exploitation.

Jews therefore became experts in the type of nationalism the Propgets described - a nationalism which sought universal social justice as its goal. And if you should ask me what is the Mitzvah with regard to which Jews, in the present period of history, should become especially expert, I will give you the reply of the Gerrer Rebbe of blessed memory.

This age, he said, is the age when the world has sunk to the lowest level in the history of Anti-Semitism. In our day, more than in any other - Jews have been tortured and exterminated. In our day - more than in any other - the Anti-Semitism of the subtle variety which is definitely the most venomous dominates the hearts of almost all men in power.

Therefore, if the world is sick with the hatred of Jews, then it becomes the moral responsibility of Jews everywhere to become especially expert in the Mitzvah of **אהבת ישראל** - especially expert in the Mitzvah of loving Jews.

Everyone of us must so discipline himself that our every thought, our every utterance, our every deed, must be one that will reflect our love of Jews. Such experts were the heroes of our Sukkah “guests” of our Sukkah, the **אושפיזין**, the founders of the Jewish race.

I am not going to recall this morning their careers, or to tell you have they earned their immortality. All I want to say is this, that this Mitzvah of **אהבת ישראל**, of loving Jews - even Jews with whom we disagree, even Jews who do stupid or sinful things - is one of which our Sukkah festival must make us mindful.

We must follow the plea of the Gerrer Rebbe and the example of our Sukkah heroes - the example of our Sukkah **אושפיזין**, who cultivated in themselves the mitzvah of **אהבת ישראל**.

When we talk of Jews and Jewish organisations, we must so talk that even when we differ, it will not be in an ugly way. It will even be accompanied with an admission to the effect that the other side has a point too. The only Jews of whom we have our right perhaps to be intolerant are Jews who hate their Jewishness; Jews who are anti-Semites themselves, and there perhaps we might even blame it, in part, on their background.

But if we want to attract a younger generation to the fold to love the people of Israel, and all that the people of Israel have accomplished throughout the ages, then we can only do so by learning how to control that which we say about Jews and Judaism, and I tell you this on the basis of long experience.

I can tell you that more children learn to hate synagogue because of the things said at home about the Synagogue, rather than because of their disinterest in what takes place in the Synagogue. I can tell you that more children are estranged from going to Cheder because of what parents say about other Jews, than because of the worst instructors we could possibly have.

And therefore, I make this one plea, and it is a plea I direct to yourself and myself. Soon we shall recite the Yizkor prayers for our dear ones who have gone to the great beyond. On this occasion, therefore, when our thoughts are directed towards the Yizkor Service, let us follow the plea of the Gerrer Rebbe and the example of our honoured **אושפיזין**. Let us learn to be cautious with regard to everything we say about our fellow Jews, and as we induce a love of Jews in the hearts of our young, they will love Jews and Judaism, and return unto God with all their hearts, that our redeemer might come soon. **אמן**.

Shmini Atzeret: Anglo-Jewry and the kiss of death

We are now reaching a very high, and touching moment, in the service of this holy and solemn day – שְׁמִינִי עֶצְרַת, the eighth day of Holy Convocation. Soon we shall recite the Yizkor prayers for our dear ones who have gone to the Great Beyond, and tomorrow we shall read the last chapter of our Torah and celebrate the occasion as Simchat Torah, rejoicing over the fact, that we have finished reading the Torah.

On this occasion, therefore, when our thoughts are directed towards the Yizkor Service and towards the conclusion of this Festival by reading the final chapters of the Torah, I want to bring to your attention a legend which refers to the last moments in the life of Moses and which is the subject of the last verses of the Torah.

The Rabbis in the Midrash describe for us how Moses beseeched God in various ways to permit him to live a little longer - if not in the capacity of the great Moses, at least as an ordinary man, or even as a bird. But the Almighty refused, implying that “his time was up” and that he had lived his life. And when the last moment in the life of Moses came, the Rabbis tell us in their majestic language, how God called the angel Gabriel and said to him:

צא והבא נשמתו של משה - “Go and bring me the soul of Moses”³⁶⁶. And Angel Gabriel refused. Then God called the Angel Michael and said to him: צא והבא נשמתו של משה - “Go and bring me the soul of Moses.” The Angel Michael also refused. Finally, God, called סמאל הרשע - the wicked Angel Samael and said to him: צא והבא נשמתו של משה - “Go and bring me the soul of Moses.” Samael the Angel of Death, consented to do this. He came armed with a sword and ready to snatch the soul of Moses. However, Moses wrote the שם המפורש – the ineffable name of God - and was thus protected against the Angel Samael. Samael tried very hard, but he was unable to snatch the soul of Moses. Finally, God himself took upon himself the hard task of taking the soul of Moses. באותה שעה, נשקו הקב"ה ונטל נשמתו בנשיקת פה - “In that hour, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, kissed Moses, and took his soul by a kiss to the mouth.”

I see in this legend of the Rabbis concerning the death of Moses a great lesson and a vital message for all of us today. For, indeed, Moses symbolizes the people of Israel, as the sages remarked משה וישראל חד הוא - “Moses and Israel are one.” What happened to Moses also happened to Israel throughout the ages.

Similar attempts were made to harm, to destroy, or annihilate Moses and Israel. Indeed, different methods were employed to destroy Israel throughout the Ages. Sometimes our enemies desired to wipe us out through persecution, othertimes by forcing us to give up our religion. But all attempts of the enemies were unsuccessful.

³⁶⁶ Midrash Devarim Rabbah 11:5

For you can destroy bodies, but not souls. You can destroy a man, but not his spirit or ideals. Israel as a people was attached to the Eternal and therefore could never be destroyed, as it is said וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בַּה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים בְּלַפְּנֵי הַיּוֹם - "But you who cleave to the Lord your God are alive, everyone of you this day"³⁶⁷.

Unfortunately, in our day and age, a heavy cloud is hanging over our Jewish horizon in England. A great danger is forcing Anglo Jewry. The danger is due not to our enemies who are trying to harm or destroy us, but to our very selves. We, the Jews of England, are responsible for this impending danger in our way of life.

As in the legend concerning Moses no enemy, not even the Angel of Death was ever able to snatch our soul. There is however, one danger that is threatening us today, and that is, as indicated in the legend concerning the death of Moses – מִיתַת בְּנִשְׁיָקָה – death by a kiss, or killing by kindness.

It seems to me that the future of Israel in England, the very survival of Judaism in this country, is threatened by this potent method of killing by kindness. We kill our children with kindness; we destroy our way of life with kindness, we threaten our very lives as Jews. With this method of kindness, we are kind to our children, therefore we send them to dancing classes before we send them to Hebrew Classes. We will not send our children to Shul, because they need more recreation and especially fresh air, so football is preferable to Shul. Judaism cannot long survive through such methods of coddling. We are actually harming ourselves! We are indeed threatening our very survival as Jews. What can we, therefore, do to prevent such an impending danger that is threatening our very existence?

We must send our children to the Hebrew Classes at an early age. We must attend the synagogue services more often. We must sanctify our homes.

As we now call to memory the souls of our departed ones, let us attempt to emulate their virtues. Let us remember that it was their spirit of sacrifice and consecrations that made Judaism live. If we are in the synagogue today, it is because our forebears were exacting in their spiritual demands upon us. I ask you today, as you recite the Yizkor, to remember particularly this one trait in our parents and to emphasize it in our lives. Let us put a stop to the מִיתַת נְשִׁיקָה in the training of our offspring. Let us effectively set out to put our house in order, with methods that are resolute, and determined, and God will grant us וְכָל בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי ה' יִרְבּוּ שְׁלוֹם בְּבָנֶיךָ - "When all Your children will be versed in the knowledge of the Lord, great will be the peace of Your children"³⁶⁸.

³⁶⁷ Devarim 4:4

³⁶⁸ Yeshayahu 54:13

Shmini Atzeret: Yizkor and the Mourners Kaddish

For my theme I have selected a prayer with which almost all of us are familiar, and which I think is appropriate for this day of Shemini Atzeret when we have come to the synagogue to remember our dear departed ones. I refer to the mourner's Kaddish. I know that many of you have wondered about - or being less timid, have asked questions about its meaning, its purpose, its message. Why is this prayer recited for the dead? Why was it selected for mourners? How shall we account for its attraction, even for the unobservant Jews? Indeed, it is a confusing prayer when we realise that it has nothing to do with death or with the way the mourner feels. It does not contain words of solace which might ease the pain and hearts, nor does it hold out the hope of resurrection or immortality.

Instead, its theme is praise of God, its central core is the words **יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ** - **לְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵיָא** - “May His Great Name be blessed forever and ever.”

As we study the history of the Kaddish, we discover that its earliest mention as a mourner's prayer is in the 13th century Machzor Vitry Prayer Book. We also find that in the Talmud there is mentioned an incident connecting the Kaddish with an orphan. We read that Rabbi Akiva once met a ghost carrying a heavy and burdensome load of wood for the fires in hell, to which he had been condemned, for having exploited the poor during his life as a tax collector. He had only one hope for release from his torments. If his infant son could be taught to recite the Kaddish in public, so that the congregation could respond with, “May His Great Name be blessed forever and ever”, he would be spared further suffering. We read that Rabbi Akiva found the child and taught him to recite the Kaddish, and the recital of the Kaddish effected his father's release from Gehenom. But, does the Kaddish have a meaning and message for the grief-stricken?

The tendency of man in the face of great calamities is to do a number of things: First, we lose faith. When we see through our human eyes that wickedness seems to prosper, when we see that injustice is prevalent and that tragedy befalls the innocent and the young, we are tempted to explain **לִית דִּין וְלִית דִּיין** “There's neither judge nor judgment.” At such a time, we may be tempted to repeat the words, **זו תורה וזו שכרה** as found in our martyrology of the **אלה אזכרה** which relates the torturous deaths of the great Sages under Emperor Hadrian.³⁶⁹

Second, we develop a hatred for life itself. The depth of a tragedy is so shattering, the future seems so bleak, that we despise life and wish for our own death.

Third, we rebel against God. This third reaction of rebellion often causes us to throw off the yoke of Judaism, to turn our backs on everything that is holy and sacred,

³⁶⁹ See Menachot 29b

indeed, to defy God. I knew a man who was very learned as well as pious, but when his parents, to whom he was exceptionally devoted, were taken from him in a tragic accident, he renounced his Judaism and deliberately violated everything that he once held sacred.

It is told that at the graves of those who had been brutally murdered in the Kishinev pogrom, one of the religious leaders cried out **אין דיין אמת** - "God is not the true Judge," instead of the customary statement of **ברוך דיין אמת**. In the best seller "The Last of the Just", Ernie Levy - suffering brutally at the hands of the Nazis who treated him like a dog - begins to act like one, tearing out his human emotions and living in an undisciplined, immoral and hateful manner.

To offset and counterbalance these reactions, Judaism demands from the mourner the recitation of the **קדיש**. It calls upon him at this most difficult moment, when standing at the open grave of his loved one, to overcome the temptation of loss of faith in God by exclaiming **יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא**.

Shmini Atzeret: To sit in the house of God

During the whole month of Ellul and the greater part of Tishrei, we recite a special chapter at the conclusion of our services which is the 27th chapter of Psalms. With the services on Shmini Atzeret we discontinue to recite this paragraph and so, before we omit this psalm from our daily and festival prayers, it would be beneficial to evaluate and to assess its significance.

Obviously, the psalm is charged with devotional fervour if it was selected to be recited during the penitential season. Yet there is one verse in particular which requires some elucidation, and it is both the most striking, and the most perplexing, verse. In a prayerful mood David exclaims **אֶחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת ה' אֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שְׁבִתִּי** - "One thing have I asked of the Lord that I will seek for, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life"³⁷⁰.

This verse we recite twice daily. David - whose soul was attuned to the highest plane of living - expressed the desire that he might dwell in the house of the Lord.

David surely meant what he said - but what of ourselves? Are we really serious when we pronounce this wish? Who would like to spend all his time in the synagogue exclusively? Apparently, this prayer has another significance, a deeper implication.

We are all part of this vast span of space which we call the universe, the world. But what is the world? What part does man play in this world? The German philosopher Nietzsche compared the world to a battlefield. Life is a continuous struggle, a battle in which the stronger emerges victorious. Treitschke, the historian, went even

³⁷⁰ Tehillim 27:4

further and advanced the theory that a nation can preserve itself and make progress only if it possesses power and uses that power to subdue weaker nations.

Shakespeare, on the other hand, pictured the world as a stage, and all people of the world as its actors playing veiled false roles. The one who can masquerade most effectively and hide himself behind a smoke screen is assured of success.

Judaism, on the other hand, has conceived the world as a home - everybody's home. God's home and man's abode. In one's own home, one member does not aim to destroy the other, but to be helpful and cooperate. In one's home, it's not necessary to put on a mask - one may act natural and be oneself - one is at home - no make-up, no rouge or powder necessary to hide natural colour.

This has always been the ideal of Judaism as projected by our prophets and teachers. And this is the meaning of this verse: 'אֶחָת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת ה' - "One thing have I asked of the Lord...that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life". We pray that this world may in truth become a house of the Lord - not a battlefield, or stage, but a home where cooperation, friendliness, helpfulness abide.

Although the world appears now as a battlefield, tense with hatred, boiling with violence, whenever we turn we still see fighting and bloodshed, hatred & cruelty. At the least provocation, man seizes the gun, ready to shoot and to kill. Nevertheless, the Jew must continue to march with the scrolls in his hand. He must continue to make **אֶתְהָא אֲבִיבֵי שְׁבִיבֵי** holding aloft and proclaiming the eternal truth of **אֶתְהָא אֲבִיבֵי שְׁבִיבֵי**, and although in many parts of the world man is again forced to be the actor and employ every means of conspiracy in order to get ahead, we should continue to proclaim from our house tops that only after this world will become like a house will peace, security, tranquility be restored.

It's related in the Talmud³⁷¹ that Rabbi Akiva & Rabbi Gamliel were sailing on a ship. It was Erev Sukkot. Rabbi Akiva constructed a sukkah on the deck. The next day a fierce storm let loose and uprooted the Sukkah, whereupon Gamliel said, "Well Akiva, where is your Sukkah?"

Akiva, as you know, was a revolutionary - the determined, persistent unbending Israel who refused to be dismayed by political storms. Gamliel, who was more compromising, said to Akiva symbolically: Akiva, I'm afraid your course is a lost one. Don't you see the waves of hostility raging? How do you expect to erect your household, to rebuild Israel, in the face of impregnable opposition by Romans?!

But Akiva was persistent. No matter how dark the sky appeared, the ship must be steered to safety, the sukkah must be erected and preserved.

³⁷¹ Sukkah 23a

How typical is this episode of Israel's march through history! We have been sailing for many centuries in storming waters with heavy clouds hanging over the horizon. Our ancestors outlived the ancient empires that tried to destroy us. The crowded ghetto could not crush us. The Dark Ages did not put out the inner light of our courage. The gas chambers and the flames of the crematoria of the last generation could not consume us. Seven hostile Arab nations could not drive our present-day Israeli brethren into the sea. In spite of all the sinister forces ready to destroy us, we have built the Sukkah on the deck, giving expression to our attachment and loyalty to our ideals. Shall we then now stop building the sukkah on top of the tottering ship of worlds civilization.

This holiday of **שמיני עצרת** - the eighth day of the Holy Convocation, as we join together to recite the **יזכור** prayers for our dear ones who have gone to the great beyond, comes to give us courage, to continue undismayed, to erect Sukkat Shalom, to demonstrate to the world our ideal of transforming this world from a battlefield into a House of the Lord. Our ancestors were ready to pay the supreme sacrifice, to perpetuate our Torah idea. We must continue to hold our heads high and proclaim **כָּל יְמֵי חַיַּי אֶחָת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת ה' אֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית ה'** - that what I seek is to sit in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Shmini Atzeret: The value of simple moments

The festival of Shemini Atzeret is historically considered one of the most interesting of all our holidays, and the very name of the festivals is wrapped in mystery. We usually refer to it in English as the “Festival of Conclusion” because it marks the conclusion of the Feast of Sukkot or Tabernacles.

The message of **שמיני עצרת** is clear. It's a day set aside for communion between the Almighty and the Jewish people, without historical commemoration or ideology. We are not told what ancient event it commemorates, not are we told what religious ideals it memorializes. We are merely told that “it shall be a holy convocation unto you” - but no historical reason or introduction is given. It is simply a day of intimate communion with the Almighty in the manner of friends spending a day together enjoying each other's company.

The basic relationship between man and God is not one of extraordinary occasions or unusual demands. The basic relationship is daily communion, the daily normal fulfilment of our continuous and steady need of and dependence on God. It is this underlying relationship of God and man, the Almighty and the Jewish people, that makes possible and meaningful the special occasions, festivals and holy days.

In Anglo-Jewish life, Yiddishkeit has become, to a distressing degree, the observance of special occasions only. Gone for many is the daily relationship of a son to his

Father, of a people to their God. We come to the synagogue for the “extraordinary” occasion of the High Holy Days, or for a “social” Bar Mitzvah. We have to be reminded therefore through Shmini Atzeret that Judaism is not a faith for special occasions only, as important as they may be, but one demanding a daily relationship.

The prince of parable, the Dubno Maggid, comments on the passage in Proverbs: **וְתִפְרָעוּ כָּל עֲצָתִי וְתוֹכַחְתִּי לֹא אָבִיתֶם** - “and you have made nothing of all my advice, and you did not desire my reproof”³⁷². He comments upon it in the following manner:

A shopkeeper once became increasingly concerned about a man who passed by his shop every day, but did all shopping elsewhere. One day he hit upon the idea of inviting this person into his shop just to make friends with him, and eventually to make him his customer. He went up to him and said, “My dear friend, why don’t you come in sometime to have a chat? Your father, may his soul rest in peace, visited my shop quite often and I remember the pleasant time that we spent together.” In this fashion the man was prevailed upon to visit the shopkeeper from time to time. But although he dropped in frequently, he still bought nothing and showed no interest in his goods. Finally, in exasperation, in anger and fury, the shopkeeper admitted failure. “I had hoped”, he said, “that by inviting this person into my shop he would eventually buy something but he has defeated my plan and put to naught all my counsel.”

“Thus,” says the Dubno Maggid, “the Almighty invites us to the house of worship during the High Holy Season and Sukkot, hoping that while we are in shul we will acquire some **תְּשׁוּבָה** or some **יְרָאָה** or some **מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים**. Instead, too often, the Almighty is constrained to lament: ‘you have made nothing of all my advice, and you did not desire my reproof’”³⁷³.

The High Holy Day season, with its many occasions for visiting the synagogue and celebrating the solemn and joyous cycle, should have the lasting effect of bringing us to the synagogue more often throughout the year. For altogether too many, however, Shmini Atzeret, with its **יִזְכוּר**, is the last visit to shul until Passover, unless a special occasion arises.

Shmini Atzeret, coming at the close of the holiday season and making the beginning of the “rainy season” and the winter months, reminds us that we should not wait for special invitations, or extraordinary events, to come into the synagogue. The synagogue stands ready to serve us all the year round. Come in & partake of some simple intimate fare.

³⁷² Mishlei 1:25

³⁷³ Mishlei 1:25

Shmini Atzeret: Living up to our name

On this Shemini Atzereth day, as our Holy Day and Festival season reaches its conclusion, we pause to reflect upon **יזכור**, the memorial service for the dead.

This month of Tishrei has been filled with rich and varied experiences. Our thoughts have been directed towards the future: “What kind of year will we have?” “What will tomorrow bring?” As the holy day season now draws to a close, we begin to look back to the past.

It was Shakespeare who asked, “What is in a name”?, and at this moment of Yizkor, we ought to ask ourselves this same question but with a particular emphasis, with a specified stress in meaning.

Every person in the Synagogue today was given a Hebrew name at birth. That name, in practically every instance, was not selected at random or by mere whim. Following a time-honoured Jewish tradition, each one of us, was named, after a deceased member of our family. The purpose of this tradition, or Minhag among Jews, was, not only to retain a particular name in the family or to give honour to the deceased, the purpose of this tradition was to immortalize, it was to re-create the personality and life values, of the deceased, within the life of the newly-born.

If the original bearer of the name was a scholar of note, it was hoped that the infant now carrying on that name would grow-up to emulate the life of a scholar. If the original bearer of the name was a communal leader, it was hoped that this infant would also someday assume responsibility in his community.

In many instances, the names we bear come from the Bible, thereby creating a still firmer spiritual bond, between a newly-born infant and our people’s destiny. This warm association between the Bible and our people is reflected in the continued popularity among Jews, of such names as Avrohom, Moshe, David, **יעקב, שמואל, חנה, דבורה, רות,** and so on.

This custom of naming children after deceased relatives, has been maintained very faithfully. Indeed, most Ministers would agree that a large percentage of **שאלות** directed to the Minister today deal with questions related to the naming of children. But here is the snag! The external form of this custom is observed, the name is given, but the essential inner meaning and the heart of this **מנהג** has been forgotten.

How many of us are concerned at all about the individuals whose name we bear? What kind of people they were? What were their thoughts, their ideals and aspirations? What was their character? What type of personality did they have? We confer the names of our parents and grandparents upon our children. But, what will they know about our parents or grandparents, whose names we have tried to

perpetuate? There were many noble characteristics in these people - are these kept alive? There was much piety and religious awareness in their every thought and action. Is this kept alive? Is it ever recalled? Does it ever serve as an influence?

The story is told of a champion-runner who was presented with a silver cup upon winning a particularly difficult race. He concluded his victory speech with the following words: “By using my feet, I have won this silver cup! I hope that by using this cup I will not injure and impair the use of my feet.”

Today, at this moment of Yizkor, we form warm associations with our parents and grandparents. Today, as we call them to mind, we have come to assure them that we are keeping them alive and that all is going well. But is all well with us? Most of us are winners in the race of life. We are receiving silver cups. In most instances our economic position is much better than that enjoyed by our parents. But have we not impaired the use of our feet because of that silver cup? Have we not put that silver cup before our eyes, as the be-all and end-all of life?

Shmini Atzeret: A Blessed life

שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בְּשָׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל זְכוּרָךְ אֶל פְּנֵי הָאֲדֹן ה' - “Three times a year, shall they appear before the Lord Your God.”³⁷⁴

Today and tomorrow mark the conclusion of the שלש רגלים, of the three pilgrimige holidays of the Jewish year. During this month of Tishrei we have seen a pilgrimage of multitudes of our people, Ken Yirbu, who made their way to the House of God for prayer, penitence and for inspiration for a new life. During this month, we hearkened to the Shofar, went to Tashlich, we fasted, lived in the Sukkah, rejoiced with the Etrog and Lulav, smote the Hoshanot. It was indeed a month packed with celebrations, ceremonies and sermons!

This day is עֲצָרֶת – retention day³⁷⁵. It's the day when we are to ask ourselves in all sincerity, “What did we learn”? At the time of Yizkor we are to think of life, as when in darkness we think of light. Then let us ask ourselves, “What did these observances teach us about life”?

This morning we close the Tefillat Geshem, the traditional poetic prayer for rain, with the solicitation: לְבָרְכָהּ וְלֹא לְקַלְלָהּ. לְחַיִּים וְלֹא לְמוֹת. לְשׁוֹבַע וְלֹא לְרָדוֹן - “Grant us blessing, not curse, life, not death; plenty, not famine”.

The negative repetition brings the message into relief. We pray for Brachot (blessings) imploring God to grant us the good life of plenty and security.

³⁷⁴ Shemot 23:17

³⁷⁵ Vayikra 23:36

Let us pray also that it not arouse the klalot (curses) of envy. Let it be a blessing, but not at the expense of others. How many times do we pray inwardly for someone's job, or the elimination of a competitor, or like that child who prayed: "Lord, bless me, my daddy, mommy, and sister. Us four and no more"? Rather, let us pray: "God, in thy goodness, love and grace bring blessings and happiness to all. And please include me."

Our first prayer therefore is לְבָרְכָהּ וְלֹא לְקַלְלָהּ "Grant us God, a blessed life, but, let it not arouse the Klalot of envy. Let it be a blessing, but not at the expense of others."

לְחַיִּים וְלֹא לְמָוֶת - Someone has asked: Why is it that during the year, when we bentsh Rosh Chodesh, we pray for חַיִּים ארוכים, for long life, whereas on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the accent is on חַיִּים טובים a good life and we say וכתוב לחיים וכתוב לחיים - "Inscribe us, Oh God, for a good life". And the explanation is as follows: During the year when we are engrossed in the mundane and materialistic aspects of existence, we are satisfied with the goal of חַיִּים ארוכים - of long life. But on the High Holidays, when awe and reverence grip our hearts and saturate our souls, we come to realize that long life is not enough. Unless it's also accompanied by the blessings of חַיִּים טובים the good life, longevity can become a burden and curse.

The other day, I visited an elderly gentleman in the hospital, and he said to me "I have had enough of life and its tortures." Another time, an old woman said: "I live all alone, My children have forsaken me and hardly anyone ever comes to see me to find out, how I feel or what I need. What good is such a life to me? Who needs it, and who wants it?" Yes, not always is long life a blessing. As the Talmud puts it: יש שנים שאינם של חיים "There are years in a person's life which cannot be considered living at all." And the prayer לְחַיִּים וְלֹא לְמָוֶת, which we recite on Shemini Atzeret, reminds us that the measure of a man's life is not its length, but how he lives and what he does with the time that is allotted to him. How much service he rendered, how much kindness has he dispensed, how much joy has he felt? לְחַיִּים וְלֹא לְמָוֶת a life that is true living, not one that is akin to death.

Our third petition is: לְשׂוֹבַע וְלֹא לְרָחוּן. "We pray for plenty and not famine." On Shemini Atzereth we learn the meaning of plenty. What is the "plenty" we seek in life? Is it the plenty of wealth to fill each hearts desire? How elusive such a plenty is. We never seem to have enough. The wealthier people become, the further they are from saying, "We have enough" The craving for plenty is insatiable. אין אדם יוצא מן העולם וחצי תאוותו בידו "No man leaves this world with half of his desire fulfilled. He who has one hundred wants two hundred."³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 1:13

Sukkot teaches us the meaning of Sova, of plenty. It's found, not in the spacious palaces. It can be found in the frail Sukkah, in the intimate, integrated family circle that lives together beneath the starry heavens of God. It's found in the symbolic bond of the arbah minim, the four species of vegetation used on Sukkot. They teach us the basic need for unity in life as a prerequisite to the blessings of plenty. Plenty is to be found in the simple life lived in faith and carried on by children and children's children.

On this day of solemn 'assembly', our own lessons and the inspiration and guidance of those whose memory we help to immortalise during Memorial Services, teach us to pray. לְבָרְכָהּ וְלֹא לְקַלְלָהּ. לְחַיִּים וְלֹא לְמָוֶת. לְשׁוֹבֵעַ וְלֹא לְרָחוּן. אָמֵן.

Yizkor: Why is it recited on Festive occasions?

On each of the last days of the **שלוש רגלים** it is traditional that the **יזכור** service be recited. Even those who, for one reason or another, have not been in regular attendance at the Synagogue, gravitate to it at this time. There is a feeling of responsibility and respect for our forebears, which impels us to find out way to the House of God, to participate in this service.

It seems strange and paradoxical that a service of mourning and tears be included in the ritual for these joyous festivals. Yom Kippur, which is certainly a very solemn occasion, is an appropriate moment for the Yizkor service. The serious mood of the Day of Atonement, and the emotion of sadness evoked by Yizkor blend well together. But how are we to understand the **יזכור** service as part of the ritual of the **שלוש רגלים** which are holidays of joy? Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, though each has a different motif, are nevertheless similar in the underlying feeling of gratitude, thanksgiving and joy. Why then is the solemn and mournful service of **יזכור** incorporated into the **שלוש רגלים** ritual?

In considering this matter, I would like to call to your attention another occasion which is perhaps the happiest moment in one's life. That occasion is the moment of marriage when bride and groom pledge their undying loyalty and love to each other. This is truly a time of great joy. Yet there too we find a strange paradox. At the conclusion of the marriage ceremony, we break a glass. There are some who give as the reason for this anomalous custom the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple. But in tractate **ברכות**,³⁷⁷ we find another reason given. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Ashi had arranged a great wedding celebration in which everyone participated. Suddenly, at the height of the festivities, Rabbi Ashi appeared carrying in his hands a priceless glass vase. In full view of all present, he hurled the vase to

³⁷⁷ Brachot 30b

the floor and it was shattered into smithereens. The entire celebration was suddenly saddened at this spectacle and a hush fell over everyone. When the celebration was resumed, it was in a more quiet and subdued tone. The **תוספות** comment, **מכאן נהגו**, **לשבר זכוכית בנישואין**, this is the basis for the breaking of a glass at the wedding ceremony. What did they mean to imply?

I believe that this is indicative of the approach of our faith to the conflicting experiences of life. It is precisely this approach which is emphasized at this solemn moment of **זכור** and commemoration. Judaism has never tried to escape from life. The religious Jew is required to face up to life with all its joys and sorrows. In life, both experiences are to be found. They are frequent and interwoven. Yet since we are only human, we tend to be overwhelmed by our experiences at the moment and the emotions which we feel as a consequence. At the moment of joy, we tend to forget that there is such a thing as sorrow. And conversely, at the moment of sorrow, we tend to forget that there is such an experience as joy.

Our religion wanted to develop within us the capacity to withstand the overwhelming character of either of these powerful emotions. To be able to carry on in life on an even keel without being overturned and destroyed. To be involved in life and yet to stand above it and survey it from the plan of eternity and sobriety.

“Face life without being overwhelmed by it”. This is what our religion preaches to us. It is therefore precisely at the moment of one’s greatest joy that one is reminded of the fact that there are experiences of the other kind as well. That is why at the moment of one’s greatest sorrow, at the freshly dug grave of the loved one, the Kaddish is recited as a reminder to the mourner that life must continue. Though the mourned is shattered and crushed by the loss which he has sustained, though he may be filled with bitterness and accusation, he is commanded to stand up and recite the Kaddish, praising God and affirming his faith in the meaningfulness of life. There will yet be joy and there will yet be fulfillment. All is not over, though it may seem so at the time of the burial. Do not be overwhelmed! Carry on!

This is symbolic of **זכור**. At the conclusion of the holidays of joy, when we are in a happy mood, we are reminded that there are sorrows in life as well. Just as the breaking of the glass takes place at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, so does the recitation of the **זכור** take place on the last day of the holiday. Both of these occasions, the wedding and the **שלוש רגלים**, are moments of joy and should be observed as such. But there is always a constant reminder of the possibility of the other kind of experience.

Just as Yizkor teaches us to temper our jovial moments with solemnity, may the Lord help us tone down the sorrowful occasions of life with overtones of faith and confidence.

Chatan Torah/Bereishit: A personal accounting

How little human nature has changed in the past several thousand years! And because that changeless human nature is reflected in the Bible, the Torah is an eternal book. This morning's Sidrah's throws light on an aspect of human nature that could be illustrated with events from contemporary life. The Tabernacle in the desert was finished. It was their synagogue, their spiritual centre. This should have been an occasion for great rejoicing. The entire structure was built with free will offerings and so fine was the generosity of the people that the holy project was completed in a short time and people were so anxious to contribute that it was necessary to ask the people not to bring any more contributions - they could not be used. And no wonder that this undertaking was such a huge and unprecedented success. Look who the chairman of the Building Committee was - **משה רבינו!**

Moshe had reason to feel proud and happy at this accomplishment. It was a great tribute to his marvelous leadership, a tribute indeed to his genius as a teacher that he was able to educate the people to such noble deeds of generosity. Moshe should have waxed poetic and composed songs on this notable occasion. Instead, Moshe sat down to do a very prosaic thing - he opened the books and he gave the people a detailed report of income and expenditures: **אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן**.³⁷⁸

The sages were moved to search for an adequate explanation of this odd conduct. According to their analysis, people at that time, just as today, fell roughly into one of two classes. There were those who build; there were those who bore the yoke and shouldered the responsibility, and there were those who criticised and complained. So when Moshe Rabbeinu was busy building the shul in the desert as a spiritual centre for the people, there were those who accused Moses of fraud. Why should Moses be interested in building a synagogue at all? To their sordid minds, there was only one reason - he was getting something out of it. One would remark to the other, "Look at that Moses, does he not look fat and prosperous?" And the other one would say, "No wonder, a fellow who builds a shul is bound to get rich!". Moshe, however, didn't get angry. He understood human nature and he knew that some people are so constituted that they cannot help acting the way they do. So he opened the books and said: "Look here, every penny is accounted for." This, according to the Rabbis, is the meaning of the words: **אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן**.

To me these words have still another meaning. They suggest an idea which may be helpful to all of us.

Moses came not only to give an accounting to others, but chiefly to himself. Moshe built a Temple to God. That was his task. At the end of it, he had to answer the question to his satisfaction: "How well have I succeeded?". If one of us has a task

³⁷⁸ Shemot 38:21

or several tasks to perform. The thing that should concern me now and all the time is will I be able to answer the question: “Have I done well with my task?”. This is a serious question, and sooner or later every human being must face it. Nothing is more painful and agonising than when a person looks back and finds opportunities missed, realising that he had squandered the most precious thing in the world - time, which is an article which even in peace time is rationed.

You get so much of it and no more. The time does come when we are brought face to face with our own conscience. Happy is Moshe who can say, **אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן**. This is the manner in which I utilized the resources that were available to me, this is my achievements.

There is no greater feeling of happiness than having accomplished something worthwhile, the feeling that you have invested your life well.

This morning is a happy Shabbat for us. We are presenting certificates to our Chatan Torah Mr. Gleicher, and to our Chatan Bereishit, Mr. Gold, and I am sure that I speak for all of you when I say to both Chassanim that they have our blessings and congratulations, and that they have also the assurance of our prayers that they may continue vigorous, healthy and happy, **עד מאה ועשרים שנה. אמן.**

Chanukah: Of national hope and spiritual strength, message to Chatanim

Tomorrow night, we shall kindle the first Chanukah light. By kindling the Chanukah lights, we recall again and again the gallant Maccabees through whose self-sacrifice, and heroic achievements our faith was saved from the threatening hand of the Syrians.

A question is often asked on the eve of Chanukah concerning the traditional lighting of the Menorah. Why is Chanukah celebrated by lighting one candle the first night, and an additional one each succeeding night? Why not eight candles the first night and one less each succeeding night? Or eight candles every night? Or just one candle every night?

Indeed, our Sages were not in complete accord as to the proper procedure of kindling the Chanukah Menorah. According to the Talmud³⁷⁹, two great schools of Jewish learning - the disciples of Hillel and those of Bet Shammai – disagreed about this matter. Beit Shammai held the view that we kindle the lights **כנגד ימים הנכנסים**, “with a view to the days that are approaching”, while Bet Hillel says **כנגד ימים היוצאים**, “with a view to the days that have passed”.

³⁷⁹ Shabbat 21b

Bet Shammai looked askance, they looked with suspicion and mistrust, at the **ימים ההנכנסים**, at the days that were approaching. They recalled with pride the great past of Israel's glory and sorrowfully compared it with the tragic present. In despair, they saw little future for the stricken Israel. "Our glory was in the past!" they cried. Every day that approached finds the light of Israel shining feebler and feebler. And, to typify this despondency, they decreed that the Chanukah light- as if revealing the sad picture of Israel's fate in the **ימים ההנכנסים**, decrease in number every night.

The disciples of Hillel, emulating their master's optimism and dauntless faith said, "It's true that our past was glorious, it's also true that our present is shrouded in thick darkness. But, great as was our past, glorious as were the days of old, we have nevertheless the faith that the future has in store for us, yet greater glories, grander achievements than those that have ever been ours." To symbolize this spirit of hope and optimism, this faith that the future would yet outshine the **ימים היוצאים**, the days of the past, they decreed that the lights were to be increased from day to day until, on the concluding night of the festival, the entire candelabra should shine in full radiance. ³⁸⁰ **מעלין בקודש ואין מורידין** - "In sacred matters, in the realm of the spirit, we must always be on the ascent, we dare never permit ourselves to descend" the Hillelites proclaimed.

We know quite well whose opinion we follow. With remarkable unanimity, the Congregation of Israel adopted the ruling of the Hillel School and on each night an additional light is kindled to give cumulative strength and glow to our hearts.

It seems to me rather fitting and appropriate that we shall be presenting certificates to our Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereishit this Shabbat on the eve of Chanuka, because just like them, the festival of Chanukah is a symbol of our faith in our spiritual strength. Just as on Chanukah we recite Zechariah's prophetic reading **לֹא לְאֵלֵי כֹחַ וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי גְבוּרָה וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי מִגְרָה וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי מַלְאָכָה וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי מִצְרָה וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי מִשְׁרָה וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי מִשְׁלָה וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי מִשְׁלָה וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי מִשְׁלָה וְלֹא לְאֵלֵי מִשְׁלָה** - "do not emphasize power, do not stress might, but give primacy to the spirit"³⁸¹, so too the Chatanim this morning symbolize and affirm our faith in our spiritual strength the Torah.

I have already enumerated the wonderful qualities of our Chatanim on Shabbat Bereishith. But I know that I speak for all of you when I express our good wishes, that the Almighty will bless both families and grant them good health to continue the good work for many many years to come. **אמן**.

Chanukah: 166BCE - 1966 CE comparisons

Every festival in the Jewish calendar symbolizes an idea and tries to impress that idea upon our minds by means of rituals and observances. Passover - freedom; **שְׂבוּעוֹת** -

³⁸⁰ Shabbat 21b. It should be noted that this phrase literally means 'we go up in holiness, and we don't go down'.

³⁸¹ Zechariah 4:6

the primacy of Torah and divine revelation; Yom Kippur - the capacity of man to repent and change his ways for the better; Purim - Divine providence in the historical arena.

If we were to search for the central idea symbolized by חנוכה, we could find no better text than the dramatic and often quoted phrase in this morning's הפטרה: לֹא בְחַיִל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ פִּי אִם בְּרוּחִי - "Not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit"³⁸². חנוכה represents - in essence - the triumph of the spiritual over the material, the supremacy of the mind over the body.

Let us now shift our gaze from 166BCE to 1966CE of our own day. The miracle of חנוכה did not only consist of the unusual burning of the little cruse of oil, but also in the miraculous victory of the Maccabees.

It was indeed an unnatural event when a handful of Jews, poorly armed, could overcome the mighty Greek military establishment. That Maccabean victory is important in the history of the world because it represents the first time in recorded history that a nation went to war in defense of freedom of worship. In terms of Jewish history, it was an important victory because for the first time in several centuries the Jews had an independent state of their own. That victory parallels the establishment of the State of Israel in our own day.

Today, when nations celebrate the anniversary of their independence, they present military parades, patriotic speeches and exhibitions of their latest weapons. The Rabbis of the Talmud, by contrast, commanded us to celebrate our own independence by kindling lights. It was to be remembered as a spiritual, not a military victory.

Even though the festival of Chanukah is minor, its message to modern man is of supreme importance. To use contemporary terminology, we are neither doves nor hawks.

In this time of crisis, we are not doves. When our religious freedom is being strangled, when forces of evil attempt to overthrow the world, we have the obligation to fight. We fought and we will fight.

But the holiday of Chanukah also teaches us not to be hawks. To me, the hawk is symbolic of anyone who glorifies war.

We are all familiar with the dramatic story of חנוכה; how a handful of patriotic Jews, fired with the spirit of Torah or a love for God and Israel, drove the cruel persecutor from their land and rededicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

³⁸² Zechariah 4:6

One would expect the triumphal march of the Maccabees in the Holy city to be marked by a tumultuous celebration and the immediate celebration proclamation of a great festival. The Talmud relates, however, that the festival of Chanukah was actually not proclaimed until the following year!

There's a distinction between **גאולה** (redemption) and **ישועה** (salvation). Thus taught us our Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. The term **גאולה** is applicable to occurrences brought forth by Hashem; a **ישועה** may come through the medium of a **שליח** or **שליחים** whom Hashem has inspired to leadership in time of distress in our history. Thus we find no individual, not even **משה רבינו**, associated with **גאולת מצרים**. That redemption came about through the Almighty's direct intervention. So too we find the **בעל הגדה** emphasizing: **ויוציאנו ה' ממצרים... בכבודו ובעצמו: "The Lord took us out of Egypt³⁸³...in His glory by Himself!"**

Historically, **גאולה** happened once in our past, at **יציאת מצרים**. The only other event in the world **גאולה** applied that is yet to come when God will send **משיח צדקינו**. **ישועות**, on the other hand, occurred frequently in our history. One of the great **ישועות** happened more than 2,000 years ago when the Hasmoneans raised the standard or rebellion against the Syrians and were victorious. Ever since the Jews have celebrated the event annually in the festival of **חנוכה**.

Four Shabbatot: J.P.A. and building Zion

The festival of Passover is preceded by four special Shabbatot: **פרה, זכור, שקלים, וזמן חודש**. Each of these four special Shabbatot convey an idea, each one teaches a lesson and brings a message.

However, our Synagogue has added an additional special Shabbat. This morning we are celebrating a J.P.A. Shabbat. Quite fittingly, you will have noticed, that all the people called up for aliyot are the key J.P.A. workers in our community. We cannot present accolades and knighthoods on our most worthy congregants, but we can show our appreciation and gratitude by conferring and bestowing aliyot - calling up our most devoted workers to the reading of the Law. It's worthwhile therefore, on this occasion, to inspect a little more deeply the significance of this Shabbat according to the viewpoint of our Torah.

My friends! For 2,000 years Jews the world over, three times a day, every day, looked eastward and prayed for the restoration of Zion. This was the hope, the aim, the whole life of a Jew - to build not only a spiritual bridge, but a physical concrete bridge between himself and Zion so that someday, he might make the pilgrimage to the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

³⁸³ Devarim 26:8

In 1897, with the rise of political Zionism, under the inspired leadership of the great Theodor Herzl, we in our generation saw this revitalization of the Zionist dream that sought to do three things: (1) It emphasized the idea of the unity of the Jewish people everywhere, and unconditionally. (2) It stressed as the natural concomitant to the first Zionist ideology, the responsibility of each Jew for all Jews. No matter where Jews live, they are responsible one to another, for what touches one Jewish community, touches the entire people of Israel. (3) The principal aim of Zionism was the restoration of the Jewish national home in Eretz Yisrael, where God has returned the remnants of Israel to Zion. We worked, we spoke, we preached, we thought, we hoped, and we prayed. And then, on May 14 1948, the State of Israel came into being. The creation of the State of Israel was an historic and momentous event which our generation does not perhaps fully comprehend as yet. But we ought to realize that we are a most privileged generation. The State of Israel at present is beset by grave difficulties, constant strife and harassment at the borders, and many internal problems - economic, recession and unemployment. But all these problems should in no way diminish our faith and enthusiasm for the land and the people of Israel. What has taken place in Israel has truly been a miracle. The word for miracle in Hebrew is 'nes', and some people see two Hebrew words in it. The 'nun', they say, stands for נשק, and the second letter for סודי. נשק סודי - which means "secret weapon". If, as has been said, the people of Israel possess a secret weapon, that secret weapon has been the determination and dedication of its men and women.

I never saw a people with a more wonderful courage than the Israelis. No people on the face of the earth exemplified the courage that the Israelis did in fighting off 40 million Arabs. They were only a handful, 600,000, their backs were to the sea, and they fought with everything they had.

When I think of the heroism displayed by the Israeli's, I recall a pregnant remark made by the older Rabbis. They interpret the Biblical phrase to mean, ³⁸⁴ אֲבִיָּהּ בְּרָזֶל. ³⁸⁵ The builders of Israel manifest an iron will - firm, resolute, unyielding, unbending. That is the faith which animates our partners in מדינת ישראל. We too must be animated by a like faith, a like spirit. Mother Zion is calling. We must respond.

I therefore say to you, on this J.P.A. Shabbat. Let your strength and your courage not fail you at this all-important hour. חזק - Be strong! Be stronger than ever before, and let us strengthen each other. Then the God of our fathers will not fail us, but will hasten the day of victory and triumph. אמן.

³⁸⁴ Devarim 8:9

³⁸⁵ Ta'anit 4a

Purim: The light that the Jewish people shine

Once again we are privileged to read the familiar story of Purim and to celebrate one of our most joyous holidays – Purim. The message of Purim is: לְיְהוּדִים הָיְתָה אֹרֶה וְשִׂשְׁוֹן וְיִקָּר - “For the Jews there was light with joy and gladness and honour”³⁸⁶. It is in this spirit that I extend to you all a hearty welcome!

It’s unfortunate that the holiday of Purim has lost much of its hold upon the modern Jew. In olden times it played an important role in the life of our people and exerted a great influence upon them. It gave the Jew courage and strength to carry on in the face of all the hardships and obstacles thrust in his path.

In the Book of Esther, which we read in the Synagogue with much joy, he saw dramatized the story of the Jew throughout the ages. We should make more of this festival, because it’s a challenge to all the Hamans – past, present and those to come!

Professor Hugo Bergman, the able philosopher at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, makes the penetrating observation that “on two things does the Jewish world rest securely, on וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם - “It happened in those days”, and on וַיְהִי בְאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים - “it will happen in the end of days”.

The Jew was able to live because he not only recalled his past with all its difficulties, tragedies, defeats, but because he always had the hopes and beliefs of a future, that would be marked with triumph and glory.

The very first word of this ancient story is significant: וַיְהִי - “and it was”. Some may think that Haman is one isolated figure that happened long ago. But it happened again and again, and in almost every age and every land, we have had a “Haman”.

But we recall not only the וַיְהִי, “and it was” but also the וַיְהִי - “and it will be”. We know the end of the story, we know what shall be בְאַחֲרֵית at the end of all their efforts to destroy us.

Today may belong to the Hamans, but tomorrow belongs to the Jew, and that is the essence of our Eternal faith. Its embodied in these words לְיְהוּדִים הָיְתָה אֹרֶה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשִׂשְׁוֹן וְיִקָּר.

The Jews have always been, throughout the ages, the lamplighters of the world. Wherever the Jew went, there he lit some light of learning - whether in good or in bad, in freedom or in slavery, the Jews always managed to kindle a light of learning and knowledge. Is this message which the מגילה tries to convey to us.

³⁸⁶ Esther 8:16

Nissan and a new grandson to the president of the shul

Last Sabbath we blessed the new month of Nissan, which is the first month of Spring. And in connection with this month, the Talmud tells us that not only does it mark the onset of Spring, but the month of Nissan is also appointed the springtide of Jewish redemption: **בניסן נגאלו, בתשרי עתידין ליגאל** - “On Nissan, the Jews were redeemed; and in Nissan, they are again destined to be redeemed”³⁸⁷.

The month of Nissan must always be a month of hope for us, and the dawn of a new era, heralding the coming of a new life.

It's therefore not without significance that the first Shabbat of the month of **ניסן** we are having a Kiddush in our shul after the service to celebrate the arrival of a new young hope for the future. Perhaps even a future President for this shul. I am referring, of course, to the birth of a new Grandchild for the President of our shul, Mr. Angel and his wife.

I am sure the birth of a new grandchild should give Mr. Angel an added incentive in his work for the building of a new shul here. And it's our hope and prayer that Jonathan and his other grandson David, together with other grandchildren of the worshippers of this new shul, should grow up and enjoy the fruits of their grandparents labours.

May the parents, Peter & Margaret, have the **זכות לחופה** to bring them up **ולמעשים טובים**.

May I also take this opportunity of thanking you all for the generous donations you kindly supported my **מעות חטים** appeal.

Pesach: The strength of the Jewish nation

The Passover Holiday is the most delightful of the Jewish festivals. In spite of the financial expenditure involved during these days of inflation, and the physical exertion required of the house wife, the fact remains that Pesach brings much happiness to the father and mothers' heart. For at the Seder table the father fulfils the religious obligation **וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ** - “You shall tell your child the story of the Exodus, the liberation of Israel from the shackles of Egyptian bondage”³⁸⁸.

It's almost thirty-three hundred years since our people departed from Egypt and miraculously crossed the Red Sea on their way to the Promised Land. Ever since that time, countless upheavals befell our people.

³⁸⁷ Rosh Hashanah 10b

³⁸⁸ Shemot 13:8

Yet despite the antiquity of **יציאת מצרים**, the holiday of Passover is still the most cherished and most popular of all the holidays in the Jewish Religion. This is so because the message of Passover is timeless. It's eternal. It's as meaningful and true today as it was all throughout the centuries.

Passover has a two-fold message for the modern Jew of today. It speaks to him in terms of reason as well as emotion, in terms of sadness as well as joy. Above all it emphasizes these two thoughts: the Jew's insecure position in Galut, and his ultimate triumph over all his enemies who seek to destroy him.

Let's for a moment go right back, to the event which finally led to the liberation of our people. We find that our people settled in Egypt under the most favourable conditions. For decades they lived in peace, security, and honour. They became prosperous and mighty. One of their devoted sons Joseph became the most celebrated citizen of all Egypt. By his prudence and vision, he saved the country from utter ruin. And the Egyptians were grateful and appreciative of his services and rewarded the Jews in proportionate measure.

But suddenly, almost overnight, a great transformation took place. The very same Egyptians who were so kind and so grateful, suddenly turned into cruel taskmasters and pitiless oppressors of their former benefactors, the people they so highly esteemed only yesterday.

How can we explain this sudden change? What forces brought it about? Were the Jews of Goshen found to be guilty of disloyalty to the State?

The Bible in its own characteristic style supplies the answer to all these questions. In but a few introductory remarks the Torah solves the mystery surrounding the origin and cause of our enslavement in Egypt **וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף** - "And there arose a new king who knew not Joseph... And he said unto his people let us deal wisely with them."³⁸⁹

There were no great upheavals in the life of Egypt. The Jewish people were more loyal to the state than ever. But there occurred a change in the government of Egypt, perhaps a change of dynasty, and this quite predictable occurrence exposed our people to the very threat of national extinction. This brief account of the Bible emphasizes in most elegant terms the insecure position if the Jews in the lands of Galut. A mere change in the political structure of a country may find him confronted with the greatest problems. And since this experience in Egypt is not an isolated episode in our history but rather part of a recurring pattern – **בכל דור ודור** - we must remember it at all times and plan our future accordingly.

³⁸⁹ Shemot 1:8, 10

But while the beginning of the story of our sojourn in Egypt tends to introduce a note of sadness and discouragement, the triumphant conclusion of this great drama should breathe life into our spirit and fill our hearts with hope and unbroken faith in Israel's eternity. Pharaoh of old failed to destroy the Jew, and so will all modern Pharaohs always meet with doom in their open or hidden assault upon the Jewish people: **שלא אחד בלבד עמד עלינו לכולתינו, אלא שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכולתינו,** - "For not one tyrant alone has risen up against us to destroy us, but in every generation tyrants have sought to destroy us, and the Holy One Blessed Be He has delivered us from their hands."³⁹⁰

From our very birth as a people we were hunted and persecuted. Egypt enslaved us. Babylon crushed us. Rome led us captive. Spain burned us at the stake. Russia pogromed us. Germany gassed us. And yet, miracle and miracles, Israel today is alive, exhibiting courage and determination, energy and vitality. Do we need greater proof that Israel as a people is eternal and indestructible?

This faith in the eternity and deathlessness of the Jew is very much emphasized by our sages in the Midrash³⁹¹: When God appeared to Moses in Midian commanding him to return to Egypt to liberate his people, He revealed Himself to him in the strange sight of a burning bush, a thorn-bush engulfed in flames and yet not being consumed. This sight was chosen by God deliberately in order to impress upon Moses the indestructibility of Israel. For just like the bush, Israel in Egypt was engulfed by fires of hate and persecution. At times even Moses lost faith and was despondent and pessimistic about their future. But the marvellous spectacle of the burning bush reassured him. He was made to understand that Israel though despised and tormented will never perish, because God had chosen him for a glorious future!

The eternity of Jewish life is further illustrated by our wise men in a beautiful legend. A legend is told that once a heron built its nest along the shore of the sea. One day, when the heron returned from her daily flight, she found no trace of her nest or of her little ones for the billows of the sea had swept away her nest together with her young! The heron grew angry at the sea, and in her great anger exclaimed: "O you mischievous sea! I am going to take revenge on you! I will dry up your proud billows." And she immediately started out upon her great task. She took a mouthful of water and pilled it on the sand, and she then took a mouthful of sand and spilled it in the water. Thus she continued, repeating the process steadily without allowing time to either eat or drink. Another bird noticed the heron at her labour and inquired: "Please tell me what you are trying to do?" "This proud haughty sea has destroyed my children," answered the heron, "and I will not rest until I dry up its waters." The bird smiled sadly and said to the heron, "You foolish bird! Don't you know that even

³⁹⁰ Pesach Haggadah

³⁹¹ Shemot Rabba 2:5

if the creatures of the whole world should come to your aid, you would be unable to accomplish your task.” The moral of the legend is obvious. Just as it’s impossible to dry up the ocean, so will it be impossible to destroy Israel, because God’s design calls for our perpetual existence. **וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנֵנו אַתּוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ** - “The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and spread out”³⁹² has, in the course of history, become a proven phenomenon. In every age the restrictive measure of the tyrants served only to reinvigorate the spirits of our people and to spur them on, to higher aims and nobler achievements.

Pesach: The message of the Maror

Passover is the oldest festival of the Jewish calendar. The first Passover was observed over thirty-one centuries ago, commemorating them as it does not, the birth of a free & independent people. Since then, Israel has never failed to gather year by year on Passover eve, in family groups to retell the ancient story of the birth of liberty.

There is a famous passage in the Haggadah which needs interpretation: **רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הִיָּה אוֹמֵר: כָּל שֶׁלֹּא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים אֵלּוּ בְּפֶסַח, לֹא יֵצֵא יְדֵי חוּבָתוֹ, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: פֶּסַח. מַצָּה וּמָרוֹר** - “Rabbi Gamliel said: “He who has not said these three things on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation, namely: The Paschal lamb, Matza & Maror.”

What prompted Rabbi Gamliel to reverse the chronological order of events? Logically, the chronological presentation would have been more appropriate. The statement should have read, “**מָרוֹר פֶּסַח וּמַצָּה**”. After all, **מָרוֹר** preceded the Passover story & the exodus experience? In the Book of Exodus, long before the liberation is mentioned, the Bible characterizes the Egyptian task masters & their relationship to the children of Israel by **וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת־חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעִבְדָּה קָשָׁה** - “And they embittered their lives with hard labour”³⁹³. And yet Rabban Gamliel puts **מָרוֹר** last!

The answer to this question may be found in an old Talmudic maxim **אֲחֵרוֹן אֲחֵרוֹן חֲבִיב**. The thought Rabban Gamliel deems most significant he places last in order, in order to give it lasting importance and make its message timeless.

Modern man pathetically yearns for happiness. He may possess all that he needs, and he may possess all that he wants. But he still seeks peace of mind which is not so easily attainable. He is frequently disappointed because he cannot reach it, not realizing that this very fact is the greatest source of human progress. If the thirst for knowledge could be so easily quenched and the quest for happiness so easily fulfilled, then man would lack the drive that motivates his advancement.

³⁹² Shemot 1:12

³⁹³ Shemot 1:14

The weariness and restless unhappiness that one experiences when he realizes the imperfections of his environment leads him to creativeness. The **מרור** of constant strife that is within him impels him to work for the betterment of society and the creation of a better social order. In other words, Maror is the great incentive.

And what is true with the individual is also true with the community. We often speak of Klal Yisrael, as if it were a united Jewish community. Not realizing that it is only wishful thinking. The fact is that the Jewish community is split into many factions, groups & organisations, each one aiming for its own goal and objective and is not mindful of our common good & our collective welfare. The only time when we do unite is when we face national calamity & encounter **צרות רבות**! It is the **מרור**, the bitterness that befalls us from time to time, that brings about a spirit of unity in our midst.

This is not a new characteristic developed in recent decades. It is as old as time itself. We find traces of it in the history of our people in the land of Egypt. At the beginning of their enslavement, when most of their material demands were satisfied, they strove with one another and couldn't get together at all. **וַהֲנִיחַ שְׁנֵי־אֲנָשִׁים עִבְרִים נֹצִים** - "behold, two Hebrew men were quarreling"³⁹⁴. Later, however, when conditions became worse and their very existence was endangered, the Bible states: **וַיֶּאֱחָזוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעֲבָדָה וַיִּזְעָקוּ... וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** - "and the children of Israel sighed from the labour, and they cried out... And God saw the children of Israel"³⁹⁵.

Our sages ask **מָה רָאָה**? The answer given is **רָאָה שֶׁהָיוּ מֵרַחֲמִים זֶה עַל זֶה** – God saw that they began to deal mercifully with each other.³⁹⁶ It was a tragic experience that united their endeavors.

Another important lesson that Rabbi Gamliel teaches us is that one must never forget his past, even when the past reminds him of bitterness and slavery. In the days of freedom we must also recall the days of servitude. After Pesach and Matzah - which are symbols of freedom and liberty - Rabbi Gamliel mentions Maror which is the eternal symbol of the bitterness, experienced by our forefathers in the land of Egypt.

That this characteristic is typical of Jewish tradition may be seen from the Bikkurim ceremony as outlined in the Bible. On Shavuot the Jewish farmer brought his fruits to the ancient Temple as an expression of gratitude to God for his bounty. He gave the basket of fruit to the priest and read the **פְּרִשַׁת הַבִּיכּוּרִים** which begins "An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt"³⁹⁷. At the

³⁹⁴ Shemot 2:13

³⁹⁵ Shemot 2:23, 25

³⁹⁶ Midrash, cited by Torah Shelema on Shemot 2:25

³⁹⁷ Devarim 26:5

height of his happiness he recalled his humble beginnings and the Jewish landowner was to read the chapter **וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ** - “proclaim it that all may hear it”³⁹⁸.

We cannot disassociate ourselves from our past. It’s part and parcel of the warp and woof of our heritage. That is why our sages teach us **מברכים על המרור בשם ומלכות**, the same dignity and importance given to any other Mitzvah are accorded the Maror.

May the moral lessons expressed in the teachings of Rabbi Gamliel lead us to personal improvement through our strife and unrest. May the Maror be a constant incentive, for noble accomplishments for ourselves & our people & may our humble past pave the way to a glorious future.

Pesach: The secret of Jewish education and the failing of Jewish homes today

At one time the sages considered the possibility of relating the story of **יציאת מצרים** long before the Seder night. This discussion is included in the Haggadah itself. **יכול מראש חֲדָשׁ** - “Could it be that the Haggadah should be read on the first day of the month of Nissan?” i.e. that at the very beginning of this festive month we ought to rehearse the narrative of the Exodus? **תלמוד לומר ביום ההוא**, the answer is No, because the Torah states, “You shall relate it to your children on that day”³⁹⁹. This sentence implies that the Haggadah is to be recited on the anniversary of the Exodus.

The sages were still in doubt. **אי ביום ההוא יכול מבעוד יום** – “Could it be that the reading of the Haggadah ought to take place when it is still daytime, to resemble the time when the Paschal lamb was offered in the Temple of old?” Again, the answer was in the negative, for in commanding to tell the story of **יציאת מצרים**, the Torah employs the phrase **בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה**, ‘because of this’⁴⁰⁰. The Hebrew word **זֶה** is a demonstrative article, and is used almost exclusively when one points one’s finger at something. The sages deduced from this word that the Haggadah should be read **בְּשַׁעָה שְׁיִישׁ מִצָּה וּמְרוֹר מִנְחִים לְפָנֶיךָ** - at the time when there are Matzah and Maror displayed at the table, so that one will be able to point his finger at the Matzah and the bitter herbs when saying, “there are the symbols of the Passover holiday which remind us of the enslavement of our ancestors in the land of Egypt and their ultimate deliverance.” This is a wonderful lesson in pedagogy. You simply cannot impress a child by talk alone. The Haggadah must be supported by **זֶה** – by a demonstration of ceremonies and deeds.

Centuries before the inauguration of the modern methods in education, our sages have insisted that especially for children, the best way to learn is by doing.

³⁹⁸ Devarim 26:5

³⁹⁹ Shemot 13:8

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

The Torah, you see, does not agree with the cynics who say that words are unimportant, & that talk is cheap. On the contrary, it insists that there are times when **וְהִגַּדְתָּ** – it is a great & meritorious act when it is a mitzvah to talk.

There is a time when we are urged to popularize an idea & give prominence to an epic event in the history of a people. But the Torah stipulates one condition. The Haggadah must be punctuated with & illustrated by **וְזָה**. It must be accompanied by deeds so that the Haggadah will not be only heard by also seen **לְפָנֶיךָ מִנְחִים לְפָנֶיךָ**, displayed before your very eyes.

There are people who complain about Jewish Religious Education today. They compare the Hebrew Classes of today unfavorably with the Cheders of the past. They maintain that those who attended the old Cheder showed far better results than those going to the Hebrew Classes today. Of course, they don't compare favourably! But these pseudo educationalists either ignore or are not aware of the fact that the fault lies not in the Haggadah, but the **וְזָה**.

There was a time when fathers studied Torah with their loved ones. There was a time when fathers inquired what was happening at the Cheder & gave their children practice in their reading. They frequently recited the prayers which they learned in Cheder at home, and sometimes fathers would communicate a beautiful thought or memory from their fathers or grandfathers. It was quite a common practice to see fathers going to shul with their children on Shabbat morning, showing how to follow the siddur.

Today we have to contend with apathy and indifference in the home, leading to sporadic attendance in the classes. In the cold weather, we have to contend with flus & cold after all, you can't expect Moshele to come to Cheder in cold weather. In the fine weather, well poor Moshele has been in doors all the winter, he must have fresh air!!!

Of course, then comes the scholarship period, when Moshele has to have private lessons & these private lessons must coincide with the times of the Hebrew Classes. Then suddenly about a year or so before the Barmitzvah, Hebrew Education becomes of vital importance to Moshele and expects like Hillel's Heathen to learn the whole of Judaism and his Barmitzvah in one year to last him a lifetime.

Pesach: Forgetting what is most significant

We who have lived to behold the miracle of the rebirth of the Jewish State, on **שְׁבִיעִי** **שְׁל פֶסַח**, share the mood of our ancestors after they crossed the red sea. In that great moment of triumph and liberation, they chanted one of the most stirring songs known to man. The opening verse is: **אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי גָאֵה גָאֵה סוּס וְרֹכֵבוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם** - "I will sing unto the Lord, for He is great, the horse and the rider He cast into the

sea”⁴⁰¹. This is the refrain of the song also chanted by Miriam, when she danced with the women.

The sages of the Midrash were of the opinion that the first half of the verse was spoken by Moses, and the second half by the people. But this is rather difficult to comprehend. What prompted out wise men to divided the sentence in this manner?

A historic incident, just before the Russian Revolution, will give us a better understanding of this Rabbinic comment. Prince Koniev, one of the close advisers of the Czar and one of the leading generals, was blown to bits by the bomb of assassins. The magnificent carriage in which he was riding was completely demolished, and the horses ripped to pieces.

A few minutes after the explosion, a huge crowd gathered at the scene. Among them were members of the Imperial Guard who lamented the death of the great military leader.

A coach builder was heard expressing profound regrets at the destruction of one of the most artistic carriages in Russia. A horseman was almost in tears, because of the loss of the finest breeds of horses in Europe. The *Time* correspondent who was at the spot cabled the Home Office, the following comment - “The old regime is dead, a new order is about to be born.”

The interesting thing about it is this. Everyone saw the identical incident but what a difference in the interpretation! It took the trained eye of the seasoned observer to view the occurrence in its proper perspective. To the wise journalist, this was not a mere loss of good horses or a beautiful carriage. Not did it mean merely the assassination of a prince of the blood. The *Time* correspondent saw in it a turning point in history – he saw in it the death of one era and the birth of another.

With this in mind, it is easy to understand the midrashic comment. All our ancestors had experienced some redemption from the bondage of Egypt, and the same crossing of the Red Sea. The majority saw in it an act of vengeance: **סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה** - “The horse and the rider, He cast into the sea”⁴⁰². They were jubilant that the tyrants who had oppressed them were dead. Only a handful saw, with Moses, the true significance of those miraculous events. **אֶשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי גָאֵה גָאֵה** - “I will sing unto the Lord, for He is great” they chanted. God has triumphed over the forces of evil! He is Master of the universe and moulder of the destiny of men. It is He who brought about another turning point in history – namely, the collapse of the old order of slavery and the beginning of an era of freedom.

⁴⁰¹ Shemot 15:1

⁴⁰² Shemot 15:21

Many go through life failing to notice the things that truly matter. They are only the trivial and the incidental. They are typified by a famous character in Yiddish literature, **מנחם מענדל** who was noted for his letters. After writing a long letter about unimportant things, he would recall that he had failed to mention anything that really interested his correspondent. So it would add a postscript that began with the Hebrew phrase **עיקר שנחתי** – ‘what is most significant, I forget’. Nations and individuals often act like **מנחם מענדל**. That which is really important they either do not see or willfully ignore.

Let me give you a few examples. A garden is beautifully laid out; the lines and curves are perfect; the terraces are arranged with artistic taste, but no seed is sown.

The machinery is perfect, cylinder, valve & piston are in good order. There’s no flaw in the wheels, and no obstruction in the flues, everything is there but steam.

The watch has a golden case studded with gems, the dial is exquisite, the hands are delicate and well fixed; everything is there by the mainspring.

In each of these instances, the postscript is **עיקר שנחתי** – ‘what is most significant, I forget’.

The birth of the State of Israel and the triumph over the enemy of our own people have evoked great comment. Some have seen in these events the wisdom of the Jewish leaders. Others are convinced that the victories were due to the military genius of the Haganah and the Irgun. I am afraid that these represent a modern version of **מנחם מענדל** who gave heed to the trivial, and later confessed **עיקר שנחתי**, that he had forgotten to take cognizance of that which really mattered.

Let us join the ranks of Moses & Miriam, and see in the events of history the finger of God!

Pesach: The questions our children ask

One of the most offensive words in the Jewish vocabulary is the word **רשע**, which means a wicked person. In the Bible, Haman is referred to as **המן הרשע**, as Haman the wicked. When Moses saw a Jew lifting his hand to strike a fellow Jew, he branded him a **רשע** throughout the centuries, and we have used this term to describe an enemy of our people, or to denounce a member of our faith who brings shame and dishonor upon Israel, or one who is a renegade, and a detestable character.

It is therefore surprising to note that the Haggadah, which we recite at our Seder table, refers to the second of the **ארבעה בנים** to the second of the ‘Four Sons’ as **רשע**. What wrong did he do to justify such a dreadful title? We are not told by the author of the Haggadah that this young man had severed his ties with his people, or that he had cast aside all restraint and given free play to his lusts and passions. The

only thing the Haggadah tells us about him is that he asked the question: **מָה הָעֵבֹדָה** - **הַזֹּאת לָכֶם** - “of what value - of what use - is this service to you?”⁴⁰³. Now what’s wrong with asking a question? Why shouldn’t one try to broaden one’s knowledge of such an extraordinary and remarkable event as the Exodus from Egypt? After all, since when is honest curiosity held up to scorn among our people?

As a matter of fact, the sages of the Talmud were the staunchest protagonists of the question and answer method. Those friends who attend my weekly lectures will be familiar with such phrases as **איבעי להו** - “It was asked”, **מנא הני מילי** - “How do we know?”, and **איתיביה** - “It was questioned” which are repeatedly used to introduce a discussion or to probe deeply into a complicated subject of ethics or law.

Incidentally, this is also the method which is highly recommended by the leading educationalists of our day. Instead of lecturing, they urge that the teacher should ask questions. This will usually induce an animated discussion which will keep clarifying many points, and may inspire the student to search and to probe; to learn and to know.

But what is even more disconcerting and confusing about that passage in the Haggadah is the fact that there is very little difference between the questions posed by the wise son, and the wicked one.

The mystery, however, is solved and understandable when we turn to the Bible which is the source of the statements made by the ‘Four Sons’. You see, the author of the Haggadah took it for granted that we were well versed in the Holy Writ.

When the original text refers to the wise son, the words used are: **כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר** - **לֵאמֹר** - “When your son will ask you”⁴⁰⁴. When a son stands, brazen and defiant, and in a mocking voice says to his father: **מָה הָעֵבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם** - “of what use is this service to you?”, then that son is a **רשע** indeed!

If we really want to know the kind of children we have, whether they are wise, or God forbid wicked, we ought to stop and consider how they speak to us. Do they ask us questions, or do they tell us off?!

Several years ago, a young man came to my home to arrange for a small wedding. Dying the course of our conversation I asked him about his parents: where they lived, and why they did not accompany him to make the arrangements for the marriage of their son. To which he replied: “Rev, I want you to know that they never met my girlfriend, and they have no idea that I’m going to be married. I’ll tell them after it’s all over.”

⁴⁰³ Shemot 12:26

⁴⁰⁴ Devarim 6:20

Just think of it! Here was a young man who felt that it wasn't necessary for him to introduce his future wife to his parents, or to ask their opinion about the match. He was going to tell them when it was all over.

A little boy watched his father as he was wheeling his grandfather who was convalescing from a serious illness. The father's face was sad and miserable. The little boy asked: "Daddy; Why is it that when you wheel the baby you are happy, and when you wheel your father you are sad?". The father thought for a little while and then replied: "My son. You asked a very good question, and this is the answer. You see, when a father leads his son, there's happiness and joy in the hearts of both. But when a son leads his father, it's sad for both. Very sad indeed!".

Pesach is the festival of fathers and sons. As we gather around the festive Seder table, let us establish the traditional relationships between parents and children, and let us resolve to raise a generation of wise sons who will ask about the great teachings of our faith, rather than say to us: "of what use is this service to you?". That should be the ambition of every Jewish father and mother. **אמן**.

Pesach: The lesson of Passover

The Passover Holiday is the most delightful of the Jewish festivals. In spite of the financial expenditure involved during these days of inflation and the physical exertion required of the house wife, the fact remains that Pesach brings much happiness to the heart. For at the Seder table the father fulfills the religious obligation **וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ** - "You shall tell your child"⁴⁰⁵ the story of the Exodus, the liberation of Israel from the shackles of Egyptian bondage.

It's almost 33 hundred years since our people departed from Egypt and miraculously crossed the Red Sea on their way to the Promised Land. Ever since that time countless upheavals befell our people.

Yet despite the antiquity of **פסח**, the holiday of Passover is still the most cherished and most popular of all the holidays in the Jewish Religion. This is so because the message of Passover is timeless. It's eternal. It's as meaningful and true today as it was all throughout the centuries.

Passover has a two-fold message for the modern Jew of today. It speaks to him in terms of reason as well as emotion, in terms of sadness as well as joy. Above all it emphasizes these two thoughts: the Jew's insecure position in Galuth and his ultimate triumph over all his enemies who seek to destroy him. Let's for a moment go right back, to the event which finally led to the liberation of our people. We find

⁴⁰⁵ Shemot 13:8

that our people settled in Egypt under the most favorable conditions. For decades they lived in peace, security, and honour. They became prosperous and mighty.

One of their devoted sons Joseph, became the most celebrated citizen of all Egypt. By his prudence and vision he saved the country from utter ruin. And the Egyptians were grateful and appreciative of his services and rewarded the Jews in proportionate measure.

But suddenly, almost overnight, a great transformation took place. The very same Egyptians who were so kind and so grateful, suddenly turned into cruel taskmasters and pitiless oppressors of their former benefactors, the people they so highly esteemed only yesterday.

How can we explain this sudden change? What forces brought it about? Were the Jews of Goshen found to be guilty of disloyalty to the State?

The Bible in its own characteristic style supplies the answer to all these questions. In but a few introductory remarks the Torah solves the mystery surrounding the origin and cause of our enslavement in Egypt.

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף “And there arose a new king who knew not Joseph”⁴⁰⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עַמּוֹ... הִבְהֵה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ “And he said unto his people let us deal wisely with them.”⁴⁰⁷ There were no great upheavals in the life of Egypt. The Jewish people were more loyal to the state than ever. But there occurred a change in the government of Egypt, perhaps a change of dynasty, and this quite predictable occurrence exposed our people to the very threat of national extinction. This brief account of the Bible emphasizes in most elegant terms the insecure position of the Jews in the lands of Galuth. A mere change in the political structure of a country may find him confronted with the greatest problems. And since this experience in Egypt is not an isolated episode in our history but rather part of a recurring pattern, we must remember it at all times and plan our future accordingly.

But while the beginning of the story of our sojourn in Egypt tends to introduce a note of sadness and discouragement, the triumphant conclusion of this great drama should breathe life into our spirit and fill our hearts with hope and unbroken faith in Israel's eternity. Pharaoh of old failed to destroy the Jew and so will all modern pharaohs always meet with doom in their open or hidden assault upon the Jewish people: שְׁלֹא אָחָד בְּלָבָד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ. אֶלָּא שְׁבָבַל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ. מִיָּדָם - וְהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם “For not one tyrant alone has risen up against us to destroy us, but in every generation tyrants have sought to destroy us, and the Holy One Blessed Be He has delivered us from their hands.” From our very birth as a

⁴⁰⁶ Shemot 1:8

⁴⁰⁷ Shemot 1:9-10

people we were hunted and persecuted. Egypt enslaved us. Babylon crushed us. Rome led us captive. Spain burned us at the stake. Russia pogrommed us. Germany gassed us. And yet, miracle and miracles, Israel today is alive, exhibiting courage and determination, energy and vitality. Do we need greater proof that Israel as a people is eternal and indestructible?

This faith in the eternity and deathlessness of the Jew is very much emphasized by our sages in the Midrash. When God appeared to Moses in Midian, commanding him to return to Egypt to liberate his people, He revealed Himself to him in the strange sight of a burning bush, a thorn-bush engulfed in flames and yet not being consumed. This sight was chosen by God deliberately in order to impress upon Moses the indestructibility of Israel. For just like the bush, Israel in Egypt was engulfed by fires of hate and persecution. At times even Moses lost faith and was despondent and pessimistic about their future. But the marvelous spectacle of the burning bush reassured him. He was made to understand that Israel though despised and tormented will never perish, because God had chosen him for a glorious future!

The eternity of Jewish life is further illustrated by our wise men in a beautiful legend. A legend is told, that once a heron built its nest along the shore of the sea. One day, when the heron returned from her daily flight, she found no trace of her nest or of her little ones, for the billows of the sea had swept away her nest together with her young! The heron grew angry at the sea, and in her great anger/wrath exclaimed: O you mischievous sea! I am going to take revenge on you! I will dry up your proud billows.” And she immediately started out upon her great task. She took a mouthful of water and pilled it on the sand, and she then took a mouthful of sand and spilled it in the water. Thus she continued, repeating the process steadily without allowing time to either eat or drink. Another bird noticed the heron at her labour and inquired: Please tell me what you are trying to do? “This proud haughty sea has destroyed my children,” answered the heron, “and I will not rest until I dry up its waters.” The bird smiled sadly and said to the heron, you foolish bird! Don’t you know that even if the creatures of the whole world should come to your aid, you would be unable to accomplish your task.”

The moral of the legend is obvious. Just as it’s impossible to dry up the ocean, so will it be impossible to destroy Israel, because God’s design calls for our perpetual existence.

וַיַּכּוּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל - “The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and spread out,”⁴⁰⁸ has in the course of history become a proven phenomenon. In every age the restrictive measure of the tyrants served only

⁴⁰⁸ Shemot 1:12

to reinvigorate the spirits of our people and to spur them on, to higher aims and nobler achievements.

Pesach: Jacob Yeklis and happiness

There are some Jews who do not realize that to be a good Jew one must be happy. They think that to be a good Jew, one must be sad or melancholy. Some regard sorrow and depression as religious virtues. What an erroneous concept of our faith these notions are! Quite the contrary is true. Judaism in its richness and colour, it truly a religion of joy. Among the mitzvos of Pesach there is one which is often overlooked and disregarded, ie. the mitzvah of being happy. We are told וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּחַגְּךָ - “you shall rejoice in your festival”⁴⁰⁹. You will find that the Bible has repeatedly ordered us to rejoice, וְהָיִיתָ אִךְ שְׂמֵחַ, “And you shall be altogether joyful”⁴¹⁰. Likewise, you will find the injunction of the Psalmist עֲבֹדוּ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה - “serve the Lord with gladness”⁴¹¹.

The mitzvah of שמחת הלב - of happiness, cannot be overemphasized because it is of paramount importance to present day living. We are living in a restless and turbulent era.

A certain Jacob Yeklis of Cracow once had a dream in which he was informed that if he would go to Prague to the courtyard of the Kings' palace, and dig under the bridge that was adjacent to it, he would find a very great treasure that would make him rich to the end of his days. At first, this man paid no attention to the dream. A trip to Prague seemed out of the question. Instead of gaining money, he would probably lose, because of the considerable expense that was involved, as well as the time and effort. But when this dream kept on appearing to him night after night, he gradually began to think that his was not an idle dream, but rather, a prophetic vision.

And so, Jacob finally undertook the journey. After enduring many hardships, he reached Prague and took a room in an inn close to the kings palace.

The next morning, he visited the courtyard of the palace and found, that there was no possible way for him to dig under the bridge. The entire place was carefully guarded by police and army personnel. Jacob tried to visit the grounds on different days of the week, and on different hours of the day and night, but whenever he visited the grounds, he found guards there constantly. He began to realise that it would be absolutely useless and futile for him to try to dig under the bridge. He was greatly disappointed and regretted his foolishness for having undertaken this journey.

⁴⁰⁹ Devarim 16:14

⁴¹⁰ Devarim 16:15

⁴¹¹ Tehillim 100:2

One day, as he was standing by the bridge in a mood of deep depression, an officer who had seen him numerous times on the grounds approached him and asked him what he wanted there and why he appeared so downhearted and dejected. Jacob realized that he had nothing to lose, and so confessed to him the whole truth. He told him that he had come from a far-off city to Prague because of a dream that he would find a great treasure if he would dig under the bridge near the king's courtyard.

When he heard this story the army officer burst out laughing, "What a foolish man you are! Just because of an idle dream you made this long journey and you came here day after day looking for your fortune! Why, I also had a great for some nights informing me that I should go to Cracow and find a Jew there by the name of Jacob Yeklis and get into his home and dig under his kitchen stove where I would surprisingly find a very great treasure. Do you think for one moment that I am stupid enough to leave my good job here to go looking and hunting this treasure in Cracow?!" The officer continued to laugh heartily.

Jacob Yeklis, however, was startled. He heard the officer explicitly mention his name and the name of his city. Only then did he realise that the whole purpose of his dream was that he should receive this message from the officer. Jacob went back to Cracow and proceeded to dig under the stove of his own house, there to find a great treasure that made him rich. He later built a synagogue in Prague that is still called the Synagogue of Jacob Yeklis.

Who is this Yeklis? Is he not the personification of the average man and woman? Don't people always dream that their happiness is over there, just beyond their reach, over there in the king's courtyard?

Money - hungry people, dream of winning a large sum of money, drawing the lucky number on the premium bonds or perhaps winning the pools. Others dream of happiness in terms of valuable possessions: a new car each year, or new diamonds. Some think of happiness as a pleasure trip around the world that they cannot afford.

When Jacob Yeklis gave up his dreams, he was able to find happiness in his own home under his own hearth. It was then that he was able to apply himself diligently to work for an ideal that he held sacred. By hard work he was able to make his contribution in building a synagogue that gave him true happiness. We too can follow his example. We can give up our idle dreams of happiness!

Then may we realise that genuine happiness and joy can be found in our own homes, under our own hearths. We will find happiness in doing things we like, and especially in performing worthwhile activities in helping the poor and the destitute and the needling in the furtherance of our religion and its institutions, the synagogue and Talmud Torah.

Pesach: Are we free?

This year a new edition of the Passover Haggadah appears on the general market, to join hundreds of editions of Haggadot, which are available. A Haggadah of the Chinese Jews. A short while ago, Rabbi Menachem Kasher edited a new Haggadah which he calls "Israel Passover Haggadah". In it he brings to light variations of texts drawn from manuscripts of the Cairo Genizah, as well as from the Geonim and early rabbinic commentators.

The opening paragraph of the Haggadah usually reads: הַשְׁתָּא עַבְדֵי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרֵין which means "Now we are slaves, in the year to come may we be free men".

But in his new Haggadah, the opening paragraph reads: אַתְּמוֹל הָיִינוּ עַבְדִּים, הַיּוֹם בְּנֵי חוֹרֵין - "Yesterday we were slaves but today we are free".

In other words, one indicates that freedom is yet to be attained. In the other Haggadah, it reveals that freedom is already ours.

It is true that for the first time in many centuries, Passover this year is being celebrated in a completely free Jerusalem. Many parts of Israel's borders enjoy security for the first time since the creation of the State, although the threat of terror remains.

But if you look around our world today, can we truthfully declare that freedom is here, that the ideal of Passover has finally been realized in the 20th Century? The lesson of Passover is that the process of liberation from bondage, must continue in every age for every man. The most pitiful figure is the person, who cannot realize that he is a slave, who thinks that his slavery is freedom. If we look at the world, we see that slavery is rampant and dominant everywhere. In Saudi Arabia and in Ethiopia organized slave trade flourishes, and governments derive considerable benefit from it. In South Africa, four million whites, keep thirteen million non-whites enslaved, confining them to restricted areas, not allowing them to travel on the same conveyances as whites, and so forth. In some new nations of black Africa the military powers enslave white sections of the population. A small clique in China, keeps the Chinese people, one-fourth of the world's population, in political bondage.

Isn't the Negro struggle for civil rights in America, also a cry on the part of twenty million citizens, to be given spiritual freedom, together with political liberty?

The tragic and senseless murder of the Negro leader, Martin Luther King, and the civil disorders in the United States, which have not spared the Jews, aren't they a reminder that freedom is not yet here, that the ideal of Passover has not yet been realized in the 20th Century?

Jews in Eastern Europe are now suffering renewed persecution and threats. Gomulka, the General Secretary of the Polish Workers Communist Party, put Jews into three categories as far as Poland is concerned. The virulent anti-Semitic campaign being waged by Poland's ruling group, is a desperate attempt to divert growing dissatisfaction on to the traditional scapegoat and is in the forefront of Jewish Consciousness at the present moment.

But the ever-present apprehension and fear is for the Jews in the Soviet Union. As Jews we declare השתא עבדי three million of our brethren in Soviet Russia are not allowed to exercise the practice of religion. They can't teach their children Torah, or Hebrew. They can't train Ministers or Hebrew teachers. They risk their jobs by attending Synagogue services. Three million Jews are enslaved.

What about Anglo Jewry? In Russia, the Jews cannot study Torah, worship G-d, or practice the Mitzvoth. In England we can but we don't. Are we less enslaved to indifference.

In Russia one cannot train Hebrew teachers, in England we can. But do we train enough teachers? Do we give enough attention to Hebrew Education? Do we give enough attention to training our young adolescence?

We are all slaves in a multitude of ways-the man who is afraid to stand up for what he believes to be right because it may make him un-popular is enslaved. We are all slaves-slaves to habit, slaves to prejudice, to convention, slaves to convenience. We are far less free than we imagine.

No man is free who is not in command of himself. Unless a person can control his desires and his fears, he is not in possession of himself. Since a man's ultimate worth is determined not by what he does or what he has, but by what he is, it is imperative that we become masters of ourselves. The ability to do what we ought to do, and not as someone else wants us to do, is to be free.

Charles Kingsley, the famous philosopher said "There are two freedoms: the false, where a man is free to do what he likes; the TRUE where a man is free to do what he ought".

As Jews, we declare on Pesach לשנה הבאה בנני חורין, השתא עבדי.

Pesach: How to be wise

The four sons occupy a key place in the Haggadah. The author states their questions and then spells out the answers, both of which are based on Biblical texts. The Torah is realistic; not all children are חכמים. Life presents us with a variety of sons, ranging from the wise to the wicked. And parents cannot and should not ignore any of them. We have to listen carefully to the questions of all and seek to answer them. No matter

what the pressure or provocation, we must maintain our relationship to all kinds of children. For so long as they sit at the Seder, ask questions and lend an ear to our replies and the teachings of the Torah, there's hope and reason for optimism. This explains the rather unusual introduction to the passage of the four sons. **בְּרוּךְ הַמָּקוֹם**, **בְּרוּךְ הוּא** **בְּרוּךְ הוּא** **בְּרוּךְ הוּא**. Four times the word **בְּרוּךְ** is repeated. This is to show that each son, of the four, good or bad, is a blessing. Today's **רשע** may be tomorrow's **חכם**, and today's **תם** may very well become the wise disciple the following year.

This optimistic approach is given additional emphasis by the story of the famous sages who are gathered in **בני ברק** on the Passover eve. They were the leading men of the generation, the revered scholars in Israel. But they were all not originally so.

Rabbi Eliezer of whom it was said "He was like a cemented cistern which loses not a drop". He began his studies at the age of twenty-two.⁴¹²

Rabbi Akiva, the leading scholar of his age, was a total **עם הארץ** until forty. Here too, we are told - **אמרו, בן ארבעים שנה היה ולא שנה כלום?מה היה תחילתו של רבי עקיבא** - . Not only was he ignorant of Torah, he even hated the very sight of a **תלמידי חכמים**.⁴¹³ But Rachel, his wife with a woman's intuition, saw in him a great promise. She recognised his qualities of scholarship and leadership. She would not give up on him. How right she was! Years later, these were the same men to occupy the most revered positions in the Jewish community. Can we then measure the potential of people? Are we justified in becoming discouraged so easily? Of course not!

Let us then apply ourselves to our children – the bright and the simple, the devout, and the difficult ones – The light of Torah may well perform wonders.

They may all become a blessing. **אמן**

Pesach: Pesach & political ideology

The outstanding feature of the Pesach Seder, is the recitation of the Hagadah and the performance of the various rituals associated with it. We begin the actual recital of the Hagadah with the words: **הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהֵתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם כָּל דְּכָפִין יִיתִי וְיִיכּוֹל כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יִיתִי וְיִפְסַח** - "This is the poor bread that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let anyone who is hungry, come in and eat, let anyone who is needy, come in and make Passover."

As we recite these words, we might wonder at their particular significance and at the reason they have been selected. Why place all the significance on the "poor bread"? Do we not quote the statement of Rabban Gamliel further on: **רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָיָה אוֹמֵר**,

⁴¹² Avot D'Rabbi Natan 6:3

⁴¹³ Pesachim 49b

- כָּל שֶׁלֹא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים אֵלוּ בַפֶּסַח, לֹא יֵצֵא יְדֵי חוּבָתוֹ וְאֵלוּ הֵן, פֶּסַח, מַצָּה, וּמְרוֹר - “Whoever has not said these three things on Passover, has not fulfilled his obligation, namely: Passover Sacrifice, Matzah, and Bitter Herb.” Why, therefore, do we stress the לֶחֶם עֲנִי and disregard the other two, the פֶּסַח and the מְרוֹר which are equal in significance to the “poor bread”?

Then again, we state that this is the “poor bread”, let anyone who is hungry come in and eat. Do we invite them only to the “poor bread”? Is that of sufficient appeal, to the poor, and needy, that they should accept our invitation? Wouldn't it have been more advisable to inform them of the rich Seder repast we have to offer and invite them to that?

It appears on the surface, that we are inviting them only to the “poor bread,” what kind of an invitation is this? But actually, the הָא לְחֵמָא עֲנִיָא has always been of vital significance to mankind, and is even more so today. The world has always been divided into two basic ideologies, just as it is today. There is the ideology which stresses security at the expense of freedom. It tells mankind, that it can give food, clothing and shelter to everyone. It can satisfy all basic needs. But at a price. The price of individual freedom.

“Do what I do, speak what I speak, believe as I believe; give me your absolute allegiance and loyalty,” says the dictator of every type, “and I shall give you security.”

The end result is of course, that not only does the individual lose his liberty, but his security and very life as well. Bloodshed, persecution and war, have always followed in the wake of dictatorships. That has always been the course of events.

There is, however, the other ideology which stresses freedom of the individual. It preaches freedom of speech, of assembly, of religion, and freedom of the press. It proclaims the inviolability of the individual soul. It does not claim to guarantee security. But it says, that each individual, if unhampered, can work out and obtain his own salvation, economically, spiritually, and otherwise. This ideology, has always had a difficult time to perpetuate itself, because of the eternal vigilance and readiness to sacrifice for the common welfare, which is demanded of the individual.

Today, we find these two ideologies of conflict everywhere throughout the world. The hungry millions of China, the teeming masses of India, the hungry and the naked everywhere are caught up in this conflict. The regulation of Apartheid, and the carrying of passbooks; the wearing of a yellow badge, the subjection of nations – all of these are a denial of freedom they are denial to man's fundamental right. Apartheid has put the clock of History back to the days of Egypt.

Long before Winston Churchill enunciated the four freedoms, Israel understood them. Our people was the first in recorded history, to strike a blow, against the

enslavement of one people by another. On Passover, the Holiday of our freedom, the Jew preaches his message to the world

If you want to know which of these two ideologies to adopt? If you want to know, what course you shall pursue? **הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיָא** says the Jew, 'This is the "poor bread" which our father's ate in the land of Egypt on their way to freedom. They also had to make a choice. Our **ל"ח** tell us that four fifths of the Jews died in Egypt because they refused to leave. They preferred the "flesh-pots" of Egypt to the freedom that was offered them. Slavery meant nothing to them, as long as they had the nebulous security the Egyptians offered them. That sort of individual was not worthy of the name human being.

Only one fifth of the Jews left Egypt. They said, "Rather the poor bread of our freedom, rather the insecurity and trials of desert wandering, than the slavery and oppression of Egypt. "Give us liberty or give us death" they said.

The end result was that they went on to the land of Israel to found a new democracy, a new birth of freedom in the slavery and bondage of the Near God.

That is the message of **הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיָא** today, as it has always been. In a world which is so torn by strife and bloodshed, by persecution and slavery, the Hagadah teaches the world the proper choice to make.

"Let anyone who is hungry, come in and eat, let anyone who is needy, come in to make Passover." "Come in," the Jew says, "and learn with me the significance of the poor bread"

"With freedom you can have all; with slavery the end result will be, that you have nothing."

May that message of the Hagadah captivate the heart and soul of mankind, so that this world, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom. **וְכָל בְּנֵי בָשָׂר יִקְרְאוּ בְּשֵׁמֶךָ** - "And all sons of man shall call on Thy name"⁴¹⁴.

Pesach: The Spirit of Elijah

In many homes, there were guests at last night's Seder table. Children came to parents, parents visited their children, and friends were invited to share the festivities of the evening. The Seder is festive and enjoyable, when we share it with those we love.

There was one guest however, who came to the Seder, after a ceremonies invitation; but remained unseen. I am referring, of course, to the Prophet Elijah. The largest

⁴¹⁴ Aleinu prayer

and most beautiful cup was filled with wine, and the door was opened, and the ancient prophet was asked to enter our homes.

The question that comes to one's mind is simply this, why Elijah? Why wasn't Moses chosen to be our special guest on Pesach night? Moses had certainly more to do with the Exodus from Egypt than the prophet, who lived centuries later. Why then, was the seat of honor taken from Moses and given to Elijah?

I believe that the answer is as follows: Moses is the hero of the past. He's identified with the redemption that was. Moses stood out for freedom and helped to liberate our ancestors from bondage many years ago. Elijah, however, is the hero of the future. He's the symbol of the **גאולה העתידה**, of the total and permanent redemption that is yet to come. He was given the blessed role of ushering in the era of final emancipation and peace. On Seder night, therefore, when all Israel unites in repeating the time hallowed "*Ho Lachmo*" prayer, in which we express fervent hope that, "This year we are enslaved, next year in the land of Israel", it's therefore fitting and proper that Elijah be invited as our special, though invisible, guest of honour.

Now, let us see, who was Elijah and why was he selected to be the harbinger, why was he chosen to be the forerunner of the Messianic era of freedom and peace? Three incidents of his life will give us a clue, to the moral power of that man. The first outstanding event in Elijah's career as a prophet, was his triumph over the worshippers of Baal. Elijah appeared before the idolaters at Mount Carmel and challenged the false priests with the question - **עַד מָתַי אַתֶּם פֹּסְחִים עַל שְׁתֵּי הַסְּעָפִים**?⁴¹⁵ Elijah spoke certain memorable words to the people. He said, "How long halt ye between two opinions?", "How long will you sit on the fence?" Let's test, he said,, whether Baal or the God of Israel is the true God! The test was made, and the God of Israel won a great victory in the presence of his people.

How we need the spirit of Elijah these days! How we need it to lead us in a revolution against the hypocrites, who talk of God, but worship Baal, against the people who speak of mercy and peace, but practice cruelty and barbarism! This is one event in Elijah's career that made him outstanding.

Let's now proceed and examine another incident in his life - the story of Ahab and Naboth. The king coveted a vineyard that belonged to a man named Naboth. Ahab wanted to buy it, but Naboth pleaded that the vineyard had been in his family for generations and he couldn't part from it. Thereupon, Ahab hired false witnesses who testified that they had heard Naboth blaspheme God curse the King. Naboth was put to death and the King confiscated the vineyard for himself. Suddenly Elijah appeared before the king and castigated him for his crime in words that remained

⁴¹⁵ Melachim I 18:21

immortal. הַנְּבִי מִבִּי מִבִּיא - Have you murdered and also inherited?⁴¹⁶ אֵלֶיךָ רָעָה וּבְעֵרָתִי אֶחָרִיק - Behold, thus sayeth the Lord: I will bring evil upon you and will utterly sweep you away!⁴¹⁷ These were strong words to utter before a ruthless king, but such was the moral courage of Elijah. He was willing to speak what had to be spoken, ever if it jeopardized his life.

If you look at this episode in the light of events of today, you will quickly understand why the words of Elijah look so large. That man proclaimed the trenchant principle, that he commit and permit the Ahabs to grab from the Naboths, whatever they covet. Think of Israel, Vietnam and Alabama, and you will understand why the spirit of Elijah is needed today for this thundering charge הַרְצַחְתָּ וְגַם יָרַשְׁתָּ.

Let us now give our attention to a third incident in the life of our hero. It is the story of a widow whose son suddenly became ill and died. In the anguish of her maternal grief she cried to Elijah to help her and he told her: “Give me your son”⁴¹⁸. He carried the dead child into an upper room and breathed his breath into the boys lungs, and the child lived again. He then took the child to his mother and said רְאֵי בְנִי בָּרָךְ - “See your son is alive!”⁴¹⁹

There’s the familiar story of an ignorant man, who had difficulties with his sons. They didn’t behave well and he had no “*nachas*” from them. But the father was, at least, partly at fault for the defection of his children. He was a stingy and unscrupulous person who set a poor example for his family. One Pesach at the Seder, when he reached the section of the Hagadah that deals with the plagues, when it is customary to pour from the cup, a few drops of wine for each plague, the man began to chant דָּם, צַפְרֹדֶעַ, בְּנִים. At this point one of his sons intervened and said: “Father, you make a mistake. You should have said כְּנִים for בְּנִים meaning sons.” To which the father replied: “My child, each one recites the Hagadah and the plagues to suit his own particular conditions. In my case בְּנִים is indeed a plague.” “In that case,” replied the son, “We should pour out wine when we say עוֹד נֹגַע אֶחָד אֲבִיא, for a father can be responsible for many of the plagues that ravage his family.”

It had been said that Passover is the holiday for children. The “four questions”, the “stealing” of the Afikomen, the chanting of the beautiful songs, were all designed to entertain and hold the interest of our youngsters. In a sense, Elijah is the children’s prophet. That is why a child is sent to open the door for him.

As the child opens the door for Elijah, let’s also open our hearts to permit him to inspire us, with loyalty to the God of our fathers, with a nobler and more just

⁴¹⁶ Melachim I 21:19

⁴¹⁷ Melachim I 21:20

⁴¹⁸ Melachim I 17:19

⁴¹⁹ Melachim I 17:23

relationship to our fellow man, and with a deeper devotion to the interest of our children who represent the future of our people and faith. אמן

Pesach: Where we put the Oy

Passover is the oldest festival of the Jewish Calendar. The first Passover was observed over thirty-one centuries ago, commemorating then, as it does now, the birth of a free and independent people. Since then, Israel has never failed to gather year by year, on Passover eve, in family groups, to retell the ancient story of the birth of liberty. It would seem, that even those, who have drifted far away from Jewish moorings, are mystically drawn back to the Seder, and the Jewish Passover.

You may remember Israel Zangwill's chapter on "Seder Night" in his Children of the Ghetto. He describes quite poignantly the Jewish renegade, who thought, that he had successfully severed himself from his faith and people. Zangwill relates how even this משומד felt inner stirrings on Passover-Seder night and how he was overwhelmed by memories and reminisces of the Seder of his childhood. He describes the inner need, and the overpowering urge, that gripped the renegade to flee back to his home, and to experience once again, the Jewish Seder of old. I wonder, in thinking of Zangwill's tale, if Napoleon wasn't aptly correct, when he affirmed, that all religion is memory.

One of the interesting moments of the Seder service, which marks the observance of the Passover festival, is that in which we recount the story of the ten plagues, that came upon the Egyptians because of Pharaoh's refusal, to free the children of Israel from slavery.

The sages of the Midrash felt that the plagues, were natural consequences of the corrupt life of Egypt. That they came, as a result of a cruel philosophy of life, that glorified human slavery, and held the life of the common man in contempt. They predicted: "Just as the Holy One, blessed is He, brought the plagues upon Egypt, so will He bring them upon every wicked nation."

By this, they wished to express their conviction, by this they wanted to impress us with the fact, that the Universe is ruled with moral law, and that this law can no more be ignored than physical laws. Sooner or later, the wrongs we do, and the evil we perpetrate, catches up with us, to plague us. Any nation, or any individual, who chooses to live like Egypt, must be prepared to pay the price that Egypt paid.

When I was a little boy, I heard the old people describe the devil, as a מזיק - mischievous, shy, and destructive. One of the worst insults that one could hurl at a man was to say of him "He is as evil as the devil" Another common saying was "The Devil is mischievous and destructive." Think of it! He persuaded a great Empire like Egypt to oppress and enslave the children of Israel, only to bring plagues upon the

land. He induced a “civilised” nation like Germany to follow a mad leader, only to bring death and destruction upon itself and the world. But there was yet another common description of the devil. The same old people used to say of a foolish person “He is as mad as the devil, mad unto death.” Not only does the devil induce people to act wickedly and destructively, but he gets them to act with folly and madness. He fools them and leads them unto death.

Let me make myself clear. There are, it’s true, certain areas in life where we cannot control the things that happen to us. We must learn to accept them as part of the mystery of human destiny and divine will. But in most areas of our experience, we have freedom of choice, whereby we can, and do decide between alternatives of conduct and behaviour. The trouble with most of us is, that we fail to realise that it is just as difficult to be mean as it is to be kind, it is just as difficult to be a צדיק as it is to be a רשע - that it is just as hard to be a Pharaoh, as to be a Moses.

In a series of articles in Reader’s Digest, Willie Sutton, the notorious bank robber, told the story of his life, he wrote of the many years which he spent exercising his fingers, in order to train them to open locks of homes and banks. In the same magazine, Yehuda Menuhin, wrote of the many years he spent exercising his fingers, in order to get the finest and richest musical tones, out of his violin. When I read the two articles it struck me, after all, both worked hard to perfect himself in his own way, with one difference, the robber is in jail, serving a long sentence of imprisonment while Menuhin is serving the musical taste of humanity. The one has brought cursedness to himself and to others, while Menuhin continuous to bring blessedness to all. Why then you will ask, are people so foolish, as to allow themselves to be tricked and mislead? The explanation is simple. When an individual chooses the life of evil, he generally is able to get what he wants at once. The penalties and suffering come much later. But when one chooses the good life, the order is reversed. The hard work comes first; the rewards come later. A student at a University, can have a grand time right away. The failures and the heartaches will come later. But he who wants to get a first class degree, must work for it at once. The joy and success will come afterwards.

A pious Chassid woke up his son, early one morning, and took him to the cold Mikvah. As the boy immersed himself in the icy waters, he cries **אוי סאיז קאלט**, when he dried himself with a towel, and dressed in warm clothes, his father asked him. **חיימל**, “Tell me, how do you feel now?” To which **חיימל** replied: **סאיז אמחיה** - “Now dad, I feel wonderful” The father pointed his finger to his son and said **חיימל**, “Let this experience be a lesson to you, the significance of which you should carry with you for the remainder of your life. When one performs a **מצוה**, the “Oy” comes first and a **מחיה** comes afterwards. But when one commits an **עבירה**, when one does a sinful thing, the order is reversed. A “**מחיה**” comes first and “Oy” comes later.

Let us take this lesson to heart and be willing to invest our present for the sake of a better tomorrow.

Pesach: The Seder

I recently read a book of essays, by a modern writer, in one of them I came across this striking sentence. “If diamonds were as plentiful as pebbles we shouldn’t stoop to pick them up.” The words set me thinking. I couldn’t help wondering, how true the statement was, and how valuable! Usually we only set a high price, on what is rare, and difficult to obtain. What we can get easily, or for nothing, and the things which are abundant, we do not appreciate. According to the old story, Dick Whittington set out to walk to London, and seek his fortune there, because he had been told, that its streets were paved with gold. It didn’t occur to him that in a city which had golden pavement, gold would have no higher value than stone. There would be too much of it. Only because it is a rare metal, is it considered so precious. If, as our author writes, diamonds could be picked up on the sea-shores as numerous as pebbles, the price for them would be extremely low.

Now this is true of other things besides gold and precious stones, and that thought is brought home to us forcibly, by the Seder ceremony, which was conducted last night in Jewish homes all over the world.

The Seder table with its rich repast, and colorful pageantry, is a lovely glowing experience. Observant and non-observant alike, are joined together in their participation in the Passover Seder. It seems that even those who have drifted far away from Jewish moorings, are mystically drawn back to the Seder, and the Jewish Passover.

You may remember Israel Zangwill’s chapter on “Seder Night” in his *Children of the Ghetto*. He describes quite poignantly the Jewish renegade who thought, that he had successfully severed himself from his faith and people. Zangwill relates how even this **משומד** felt inner stirrings on Passover Seder night, and how he was overwhelmed, by reminisces of the Seder of his youth. He describes the inner need and the overpowering urge that gripped the renegade to flee back to his home and to experience once again the Jewish Seder of old.

Passover is without a doubt a season for singing, rejoicing, and cheerful festivity. We are grateful for our blessings and thankful for our bounties.

It’s therefore most puzzling to note the tremendous amount of emphasis which the Haggadah places upon the sorrows of the past and the privations inflicted upon our ancestors. In response to the four questions of the child, we read **עבדים היינו** - “We were slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt.”⁴²⁰ We partake of the bitter herb as a tangible

⁴²⁰ Devarim 6:21

reminder of the persecution of our people by the Egyptians. We recite ארמי עובד - "the Aramite would destroy my father,"⁴²¹ again referring to the difficulties of the ancient past. In fact, most of the Haggadah consists of this sort of reference.

Why is this so? Would it not have been better in this period of spring time and harvest, to extol the glorious present and its joys?

Why on this lovely evening, when parents and children are united in pleasant atmosphere, in pleasant Jewish comradeships, must we highlight our humble bondage in Egypt and give emphasis to the fact that we were slaves unto Pharaoh?!!!

But it is a most significant teaching that is herein implied. Its relevance is of significance not only to the story of Passover, but to our every day life as well. Its message is simply this.

We can appreciate the present and its blessings only, by remembering and contrasting it, with the past. Without the memory of affliction, there can be no song of redemption. Freedom is valued only, because we have suffered through slavery. Health is appreciated only, after we have struggled through illness. Life is valued only after we have approached the brink of death.

This is typical of what happens to us every day of our life. We are surrounded by blessings without appreciating them. When we are in good health and nothing ails us, we take it for granted and we do not consider our sound condition of limb at all remarkable. It never occurs to us, that we are in possession of a most precious treasure, and that we ought to thank God for it.

But, if God forbid, illness strikes, then we realise the value of our health and we resolve to treasure it. I could go on giving example after example, all proving the truth of the authors statement, "If diamonds were as plentiful as pebbles, we shouldn't stoop to pick them up."

[But if we were wise, we should learn to value the common things of life which are to be had, at a small price, or for nothing. Those men and women are so much happier and more contented, who go about with their eyes open, and can see the goodness and beauty of the ordinary things, that surround them! Life offers each one of us, many treasures for our enjoyment but it never dawns upon us, that they are treasures, because we haven't learnt to view them in that light.]

On Pesach, when we are full of joy at the pleasure of life and look forward to the blossoming of the summer and its delights, our attention is directed forcefully to the past. We are reminded of what we lacked then and what we have been granted since. "You have come a long way," we are told. Be thankful for the present and the

⁴²¹ Devarim 26:5

promise of the future. Be grateful for what has been bestowed upon you. Do not take it for granted. Only by contrasting what you lacked, with what you have since gained, can you grasp the difference and enjoy its significance. May our gratitude to the Almighty make us worthy of His continued blessings! אמן.

Pesach: Last day of Pesach & Yizkor (1957)

It's with a deep feeling of nostalgia and longing that we bid farewell to the joyous festival of Passover today. In spite of its exacting and restrictive obligations, Pesach is still one of the loveliest holidays in the Jewish calendar. How we used to look forward to the glorious days is our childhood! The Yom Tov had so much appeal for us. Rich in its symbolic significance and in its beautiful rites, it captivated our imaginations and hearts.

Who cannot recall the tender memories of waiting for father, to go wash his hands in order to go steal the Afikoman, and then bargaining with him, for the price of returning that piece of Matzah? Who doesn't remember the magical thrill of opening the door for אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיאַי, of singing the hymns and melodies of the Haggadah, or of falling asleep at the Seder Table and being carried by loving hands to bed, where you spent the night, dreaming of the angels, your parents and your little brothers and sisters?

But time knows no sentiment: Inexorably it marches on, changing seasons and events. Now it's the last day of Pesach, and *we* are hosts to our parents. They are *our* guests now; for their spirits are with us, at this moment of Yizkor. It's characteristic of our people, that we always mix sadness with joy. On the most happy occasions in our lives, a note of discordancy and sorrow is introduced.

We break plates at a Jewish Engagement Party, the Chatan breaks a glass at the conclusion of a marriage ceremony and on Pesach which is one of the holiest holidays in the Jewish Calendar, we have a Yizkor service. Sholom Secunda emphasizes this peculiarity of ours in his composition "Die Yidishe Lied." We are masters in the art of mixing laughter with tears.

Our sages tell us, that even Moses, the hero of this Yom Tov, wept on two different occasions. Once he cried as a child; when he was enclosed in the little ark and was drifting helplessly on the waters of the Nile, Moses wept. Pharaoh's daughter took pity on him and saved him from a watery grave.

The other time that Moses wept was when his brother Aaron had passed away.

Moses said: "When Miriam died, her children mourned after her. Now that Aaron has gone, it's his sons and I who are weeping after him. But when I will die, מי יבכה אחרי - who will cry after me? Who will miss me?"

By this saying, our sages have given us a fuller understanding of the personality of Moses. Moses was human, and he was sometimes given to tears. When he saw the stark tragedy of his people in Egypt, when he realised the helpless state of his brethren, when he saw how Jewish children were cast into the Nile, Moses wept.

Later on, when he stood near the body of his beloved brother and companion, Aaron the High Priest; a welter of thoughts flashed through the aching head of Moses. He thought of the years, he had spent in freeing his people and in moulding their character and their future destiny. And then he compared his life to that of his brother's. His was a more successful and a more brilliant career. But in one respect, his brother Aaron had surpassed Moses. When Aaron died, his son Elazar succeeded him in the priesthood. But Moses had to choose Joshua, a total stranger, to take his place. His own children were not qualified to inherit his position in life. They were unworthy to take his place. And so Moses stood there and wept, saying. When Miriam died, her children cried after her. Now that Aaron is dead, his sons are weeping after him. But **מי יבכה אחרי** - Who will cry after me? Who will take my place? Certainly not my own children.

My friends! We have also lived through a period of weeping. Pesach marks the anniversary of the revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto. In some homes, special mention was made at the Seder Table, of the heroes in the Ghetto of Warsaw, who fought the Nazis to avenge the crimes against their people.

It is our duty, to think of those martyrs this morning when we recite the Yizkor, because one of the first mitzvos given to our people as they entered holy land was **להכרית זרעו של עמלק**, to remember the atrocities and cruelties perpetrated by the barbarous Amalekites. Unless the people fully realised the menace presented by Amalek, their newly won freedom could not be made secure.

Today, only 12 years after the conclusion of the second world war, some of our people are beginning to show signs of forgetfulness with respect, to the cruel fate that befell European Jewry. It's therefore our duty, once again, to consider for a moment those dreadful days. So long as our people will remember the cruel annihilation of European Jewry, so long will we be vigilant and continually strive to protect our own freedom. But no sooner do we forget the mass destruction of European Jewry, then we begin to develop a false sense of security and we expose ourselves to the threat of dictatorship and slavery. But there's yet, another cause for weeping, which is with us today. With Moses we ask that heartrending question **מי יבכה אחרי**? Who will weep after me? Who will recite a Kaddish for us? Who will observe a yahrzeit? Who will come to the Synagogue to recite a Yizkor and to shed a tear? Who will take our places when we are gone?

Twice we are told in the Torah, כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ “Honour your father and your mother” Wouldn’t once have been enough? For where once doesn’t mean anything, a million times wouldn’t help. And so our sages wisely interpret the two injunctions to mean אחד בחייהם ואחד אחר מיתתם, “Once when they are alive, and once after they are gone.”

But what a vast difference there’s between the two types of honour? How greatly different! In fact, the manner, in which honour is supposed to be given to them after death, is directly opposite from that which we are duty-bound to show them in life. לא יעמוד במקומם ולא ישב במקומו “When our parents are alive we are forbidden to sit in their chairs, nor to stand in their accustomed places. But לאחר מיתתם, after they are gone. The greatest honour we can show them, the greatest tribute we can pay them, is when we take their places in life, when we succeed them in their devotion to the spiritual values of our people. This is the task of the Synagogue and the Cheder.

Bidding farewell to Pesach (1961)

It is with a deep feeling of nostalgia and longing that we bid farewell to the joyous festival of Passover today. Despite its exacting and restrictive regulations, Pesach is still one of the loveliest holidays in the Jewish Calendar. Pesach is rich in its symbolic significance and its beautiful rites it captivates our imaginations and hearts.

On the last day of Pesach, however, it’s traditional that the Yizkor service be recited. It’s characteristic of our people that we always mix sadness with joy. On the most happy occasions in our lives, a note of discordancy and sorrow is introduced. At the conclusion of the marriage ceremony which is certainly a time of great joy, there too we find a strange paradox - the Chatan breaks a glass. At the conclusion of Pesach, the holiday of joy, when we are in a happy mood, we are reminded that there are sorrows in life as well, and we have to recite the Yizkor service in memory of our dear departed parents and relatives. Just as the breaking of the glass takes place at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, so does the recital of the Yizkor take place on the last day of the holiday.

Our Sages tell us that even Moses, the hero of this Yom Tov, wept on two different occasions: אחת בתיבה ואחת כשמת אהרן - שתי בכיות בכה משה - once he cried as a child when he was enclosed in the little ark and was drifting helplessly on the waters of the Nile. Moses wept and Pharaoh’s daughter took pity on him and saved him from a watery grave. The other time that Moses wept was when his brother Aharon had passed away: אמר משה כשמתה מרים בניה בכו אחריה. כשמת אהרן אני ובניו בוכים - אחריו - Moshe said: “When Miriam died, her children mourned after her. Now that Aharon has gone, it’s his sons and I who are weeping after him. But when I will die, says Moshe, מי יבכה אחרי - who will cry after me? Who will miss me?”

By this saying, our Sages have given us a fuller understanding of the personality of Moshe. Moshe was human and was sometimes given to tears. When he saw the stark tragedy of his people in Egypt when he realized the helpless state of his brethren, when he saw how Jewish children were cast into the Nile, Moshe wept.

Later on when he stood near the body of his beloved brother and companion Aharon the High Priest, a number of thoughts flashed through the aching heart of Moshe. He thought of the years he had spent in freeing his people and in moulding their character and their future destiny. And then he compared his life with that of his brothers.

His was a more successful and a more brilliant career. But in one respect, his brother Aharon had surpassed and exceeded Moshe. When Aharon died, his son Elazar succeeded him in the priesthood. But Moshe had to choose Yehoshua, a total stranger, to take his place. His own children were not qualified to inherit his position in life. They were unworthy to take his place. And so Moshe stood there and wept, saying: "When Miriam died, her children cried after her. Now that Aharon is dead, his sons and I are weeping after him. But מי יבכה אחרי - who will cry for me? Who will take my place? Certainly not my own children!"

My friends! We have also lived through a period of weeping. This Pesach marks the 18th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto. In some homes, special mention was made at the Seder Table of the heroes in the Ghetto of Warsaw who fought the Nazi's to avenge the crimes against their people.

Consider for a moment those dreadful days. On the whole, there was nothing heroic about the catastrophe that overtook European Jewry. People were dragged by the thousands to gas chambers and crematoria or to die in mass graves. It was stark, grim and unrelieved tragedy and horror.

And then came the thrilling moment which we commemorate today. When all of Europe lay in submission under the Nazi heel, a few Jews who were left in the Ghetto of Warsaw raised the banner of rebellion saying: "If we must die, let us die fighting. Let us die with our boots on!"

When we think of those martyrs this morning, it is not merely tears of sorrow that fill our eyes, but tears of pride; pride in the spirit of the Maccabees that came to life again in our time.

Next Tuesday in Jerusalem begins the trial of Eichman, one of the great political and moral issues of our age. Those people, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike, who question the right of Israel to try Eichman, should remember that the crimes with which he's charged were directed against the Jewish people as a whole, without distinction, as to their citizenship or place of residence.

“World Jewry” was their object, limited only by the extent of their military conquest. Therefore, it’s an act of historic justice, and not of popular revenge. The Israeli’s have not captured Eichman in order to stage an vengeful show-trial, or to perpetuate emotions of grief and hate, however deeply felt these may still be. The actual fate of Eichman is almost immaterial, as Mr. Ben-Gurion has said.

The main purpose of the Israel Government and especially of Mr. Ben-Gurion when he gave the orders that launched this momentous enterprise was something different, as David Astor, the Editor of ‘The Observer’ last Sunday in his leading article has pointed out so strickingly and so impressively, “the civilized world,” he writes, “owes a duty to itself and to the martyred millions alike, to become as fully aware as possible as to how and why they died. Too much has been forgotten too soon. The great purposes of the trial are to revive the fading memory of a human catastrophe, to renew compassion at the anguish of a people and for all humanity, to declare its determination that these horrors shall never happen again. The main purpose of the trial will thus be, not only, to assess Eichman’s guilt and punishment. It’s true function will be to unfold the whole horrifying tragedy from its inception to its culmination and to assess where the guilt lies.”

David Astor’s eloquent article echoed our own historic admonition recalled at this Passover season that in every generation, **בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאלו הוא יצא ממצרים** - “In every generation it’s the duty of each individual to regard himself as though he himself had taken part in the Exodus from Egypt”.

It is no less the duty of every Jew, particularly the rising generation in Israel and in the West, to feel that he himself has shared in the martyrdom of his brethren.

But there is yet another cause for weeping which is with us today. With Moshe we ask that heartrending question: **מי יבכה אחרי** - Who will weep after me? Who will recite a Kaddish for us? Who will come to the Synagogue to recite a Yizkor or to shed a tear? Who will take our places when we are gone?

Twice we are told in the Torah **כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ** - “Honour your father and your mother”⁴²². Wouldn’t once have been enough?

The truth is that once is enough. For where once doesn’t mean anything, a million times wouldn’t help. And so our sages wisely interpret the two injunctions to mean **אחד לחייהם ואחד לאחר מיתתם** - “once when they are alive, and once after they are gone”.

But what a vast difference there is between the two types of honour! How greatly different! In fact, the manner in which honour is supposed to be given to them after

⁴²² Shemot 20:12, Devarim 5:15

death is directly opposite from that which we are duty bound to show them in life. When our parents are alive, we are forbidden to sit in their chairs, nor to stand in their accustomed places. But **לאחר מיתתם**, after they are gone, they greatest honour that we can show them, the greatest tribute and affection that we can pay them, is when we take their places in life, when we succeed them in their devotion to the spiritual values of our people!

The last day of Pesach is also the occasion of the annual appeal for the Kosher Schools Meals Service, a service which plays a vital part in our Anglo-Jewish life. It's recent annual report is an adequate testimony to the scope and measure of its work, which aims at providing kosher meals for all Jewish children. Any attempt at Jewish education is doomed to disaster if the basic need of kosher meals is not provided.

Just as Yizkor teaches us to temper our jovial moments with solemnity, may the Lord help us tone down the sorrowful occasions of life with overtures of faith and confidence.

Omer: Using our time for the good

We are commanded by the Torah to count solemnly the forty nine days which come between the first day of the Festival of Passover and the holiday of Shavuot. **וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמִּחֶרֶת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבֵּיאְכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָּתוֹת תְּמִימוֹת תִּהְיֶינָה עַד לְכֹחַ מִמִּחֶרֶת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבֵּיאְכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה -** “And you shall count for you from the day after the day of rest, from the day that you brought the Omer of the wave offering, seven complete weeks they shall be; until the morrow of the seventh week shall you number fifty days.”⁴²³

The great Maimonides compares this counting to an individual awaiting the arrival of a dear friend on a certain date, who impatiently checks off the days and hours till his coming. So does the Jew count the days from the anniversary of the departure from Egypt till the festival of the Giving of the Torah. For the latter was the aim and goal of the exodus from Egypt.

In later times, these seven weeks come to be full of sad memories for Israel. Terrible calamities repeatedly befell the Jewish people at this time. Tradition tells of pestilence that destroyed thousands of Rabbi Akiva's disciples during this period. As a result of these tragic occurrences, the Omer season is observed as a period of semi-mourning; and during this time, Jews abstain from wedding celebrations except for certain specified days.

This morning I would like to draw your attention to one of the prayers which is recited immediately after we count the Omer each evening. We state:

⁴²³ Vayikra 23:15-16

רבונו של עולם. אתה צויתנו על ידי משה עבדך לספור ספירת העומר כדי לטהרנו ומטומאתינו... ובכן יהי רצון מלפניך יה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו ששבכות ספירת העומר שספרתי היום יתקן מה שפגמתי בספירה.

“Lord of the Universe, thou hast commanded us through Moses thy servant to count the Omer in order to purify ourselves from our impurities... and so may it be thy will, O Lord our God and God of our ancestors, that in the merit of the Sefirah which I have counted, there may be rectified that which I have impaired in the counting and may I be purified and sanctified with the heavenly sanctity.”

I consider that this is indeed a peculiar prayer to utter. We affirm that the purpose of our counting of the Omer is to purify ourselves of our impurities and to rectify that which we have impaired in the counting. But surely, we who count the Omer are committing no errors in the counting. If we were not to count, then we would be impairing the count. If we were not to count correctly, the same would be true. But we are counting every evening of the Omer! We recite the blessing for the Omer; which would not be proper if we had missed out in the count. If that is so, why do we need to purify ourselves? Then again, of what impurities do we purify ourselves by counting the Omer? After all, the Torah does not command us to count the Omer for the purpose of purification. The counting, according to Maimonides, expresses our impatience for the arrival of the Giving of the Torah. Why, then, do we state that we are commanded to count in order to purify ourselves?

But I believe that we express in this prayer a most significant idea. The counting of the Omer conveys a deep thought that the mere commandment to count. We express therein a philosophy of life.

During practically all of life we are busy counting. We count the amount of material possessions that we have amassed for ourselves. We are busy comparing our assets and liabilities with those of our neighbours! All the time we are engaged in census taking, of our advantages and material accomplishments as opposed to those of the next fellow. Even the most illiterate individual becomes an expert in keeping count of his possessions. With the invention of mechanical devices, we have facilitated tremendously both the method of counting and the amounts that can be counted.

But with all this, we have neglected, sadly, one vital element in our life. That is the element of time.

How many people are there who can truthfully say that they know how to count time? Isn't time rather an element that is squandered and frittered away on various pursuits that add up to nothing upon proper reflection?

Is it not true that for far too many people, time is something to flee and to brush aside, rather than to treasure and to store? We know that in arithmetic, twice two are

four. But in life, too few realise that twice too can equal nothing. Forty plus forty can equal nought. In short, the rules of arithmetic do not apply here. After all, what profit is there in a life that lasts for 80 years if they are years of spiritual and moral waste.

What significance is there to years whose sum total results in nothing substantial, nothing done to make the world a better place?

The Torah tells us concerning Abraham that: **וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים**, “And Abraham was old, advanced in age”⁴²⁴. The expression that is used is **בָּא בַּיָּמִים**, literally: he came with his days. This has been interpreted to mean that his days added up to a complete sum! None were missing, none misused. In his old age, he could look back over his life and see that his days and years were filled with acts of accomplishment and productivity for the benefit not only of himself, but for all mankind. They added up to a life lived well! How many of us can say the same of ourselves?

Today, our State of Israel is going through an extreme crisis, a crisis that threatens her very existence as a nation. You must have read and heard this week, pacts are being concluded between various Arab States and the Western powers. The latest pact between Britain, Turkey & Iraq means that Turkey is no longer a neutral country between the Arabs and Israel. The first effect of this pact has been to break the good relations between Israel and Turkey, because in signing this pact Turkey has not agreed with the Arab position that Israel’s present frontiers should not be recognised. Often Arab States can join in with this treaty but not Israel. The Arab States can have arms, but not Israel!

The purpose of all these pacts is to isolate Israel and to leave her alone and vulnerable to continued attacks which will eventually result in her dismemberment and annihilation. What do we do?

At home today, there’s before the House of Commons a private Bill, which if passed, will threaten Shechita and prevent us from keeping our religion. It threatens the fundamental principle of freedom of conscience and religion which we have enjoyed in this country. What are we doing about this?

The Kosher School Meals is crying out for funds. It wants to extend its services to ensure that all Jewish children in all areas should have Kosher meals.

These are gigantic problems which must concern every community. But what do we find? Big problems which threaten our very existence as Jews are being brushed aside and time and energy spent on unimportant and unessential things. We waste our energies in friction and quarrels over petty **כַּבּוּד**, and it’s very difficult for a Minister

⁴²⁴ Bereishit 24:1

today to see how much time is wasted on trivial matters when we could utilize our time and energy for the benefit of our people.

When we count the Omer, we count not only the days but the weeks as well. We state that today is so many days, which constitute so many weeks in the counting of the Omer. We add up the days and weeks into a meaningful total. We express, thereby, the thought that time counts! That time is to be so employed that it will result in a sum that is significant and constructive. And as we do so, we offer up our prayer to the Almighty and we ask of Him that He forgive us for our trespass and the misuse of the time which He has vouchsafed to us. We express the hope that in the merit of our counting of the Omer, in the merit of our understanding the importance of time and the vital necessity of living it, so that it will add up to something worthwhile. In that merit may there be rectified that which we have impaired in the counting of our days and years. May we be purified of our impurities and our unclean lives; for moral impurity and ethical uncleanliness are usually the result of mistakes in the spiritual arithmetic of time.

As we count the Omer, let us consider this message. Let us dedicate our lives to the ideals of our Torah and the traditions of our people. May the Almighty cleanse us of our shortcomings and help us to make our lives such as to merit His blessings and His forgiveness. **אמן**.

Omer: When we start to count

On the second night of Passover, we begin to count the Omer. We continue this count for forty-nine days, until the holiday of **שבועות**.

The Torah commands us: **שִׁבְעָה שָׁבְעַת תִּסְפָּר לָךְ מֵהַחֵל חֲרֹמֶשׁ בְּקֶמַח תַּחֵל לְסֹפֵר שִׁבְעָה שָׁבְעוֹת** - “Seven weeks shall you count for yourself, from the time you begin to put the sickle to the corn, shall you count seven weeks”⁴²⁵.

At first glance, there would seem to be some difficulty here. Why does the Torah command us to begin the count on the second night of Passover? Why not on the first night?

Since the purpose of the count, as the Rambam informs us, is to prepare us for the advent of Shavuot and the giving of the Torah.

The great Maimonides compares this counting to an individual awaiting the arrival of a dear friend or a certain date, who impatiently checks off the days and hours till his coming. So does the Jew count the days from the anniversary of the departure from Egypt till the festival of the giving of the Torah. For the giving of the Torah was the aim and goal of the Exodus from Egypt. If that is the case, if the whole

⁴²⁵ Devarim 16:9

purpose of counting is to prepare us for **מתן תורתינו** - for the giving of the Torah - would it not have been more fitting to begin the count with the beginning of Passover? Why is the counting connected to the bringing of the Omer on the second night? The events of recent history help to explain this point to us very clearly.

Many nations have achieved their independence in the past few years. In Africa, in Asia, and in other parts of the world. What was their goal in their nationalistic endeavor? It was freedom and independence, land and soil, fruit and corn, on their own fields and meadows. Economic, Social independence - this was their purpose.

For the communist-dominated countries of the world, the sickle became the emblem of freedom. It has become the new deity.

For the Jewish people this was not sufficient. When the sickle has already begun to cut the corn; when Israel has already reached the point which for other peoples represents the ultimate goal of nationalism; at the stage where others cease to strive further and to count - there Israel first begins to count both days, and weeks.

In the words of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, "It goes on counting up on the day when it celebrates the bestowal of that boon for the sake of which it has received freedom and independence, land and soil, crops and bounties. All this, the freedom and abundance, are only a means to develop a communal, collective, and individual life such as God has prescribed for us in the Torah."

When, in the course of time, Israel forgot this counting and ceased to see in Torah the principal element in its national existence, then it lost even the land itself. When, in the course of time, Israel imagined that it could dispense with Torah and retain bread and soil, freedom and independence without the Torah - this was a grave error! From the time that we deified the sickle, we lost the sickle.

In our generation, when we have merited to see the rebirth of Israel and national independence, in our own generation when God has again placed the sickle within our own hands, we must not cease to be Jews, but we must, rather, continue forward to God's Torah.

מִהַחֵל חָרַמְשׁ בְּקֶמָה תִּחַל לְסַפֵּר - "from the time you begin to put the sickle to the corn, you shall count". It's not the end, but rather the beginning. To this purpose and to this goal, let us dedicate ourselves. **אמן**.

Yom Yerushalayim: The six-day war and Jewish Pride (Barmitzvah - Brian, 1967)

בו יִשְׂמְחוּ וְיִגִּילוּ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה - “This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it”⁴²⁶

This week commemorates an event, which forms a turning point in the history of our storm-tossed people; an event which is charged with momentous consequences. Well may we rejoice and be glad. Well may we pour forth our thanks to God. שְׂהַחֲיֵנוּ הַזֶּה וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה “who has kept us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this glorious season.”

'הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הַזֶּה - “This is the day which the Lord hath made”. Let us be mindful of this truth. The people that walking in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shone. In a voice tense with emotion, Brigadier-General Chaim Herzog said the clock of history is advancing, and we are all living it.

A dream which has sustained Jews for 2000 years, he said, had come true, namely the capture of the old city of Jerusalem. The old city of Jerusalem, sacred to three religions, was the capital of the Jewish kings from the time of David. The wailing wall, the כּוֹתֵל הַמַּעֲרָבִי, is the last remnant of the Temple which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Now Jews have been allowed to worship at the wall since 1947. On Wednesday, Israeli soldiers prayed at the Western Wall. For the first time for almost 2,000 years, the site of the Temple is again under Jewish control. The sound of the שׁוֹפָר at the wailing wall this week must resound throughout the whole world. Throughout Jewish history, the blast of the שׁוֹפָר has been heard on all the most solemn occasions. Its message cannot be stated in mere words. It goes straight to the heart of man. This time it will have a special significance. Its not will be heard by the whole world. This was not always the case. Throughout the centuries of Jewish exile, the note of the שׁוֹפָר has been muffled. The trumpet was sounded, almost secretly in the synagogues of a scattered race. For the Jews, it symbolized their eternal hope of redemption. But now that Zion is being restored, the שׁוֹפָר need no longer be muffled. As the whole world learns of its note this week, let us hope that its message will be clear. Israel has no aggressive designs on any other people. The war which it has fought was an act of desperate self-defence against a foe which was threatening to put it to the sword.

Only a few weeks ago, we celebrated the festival of Passover. We recounted how the Jews had left the land of Egypt. You remember that story, of how suddenly they turned around and said that Pharaoh and his army are marching towards them to

⁴²⁶ Tehillim 118:24

bring them back to bondage in Egypt. They wanted to go further, but they could not. The waters of the Red Sea lay before them. What shall we do? What shall we do? they cried. At that moment God's voice was heard: "Speak to the children of Israel; let them go forward!"⁴²⁷. But how could they go forward, facing – as they were – the waters of the Red Sea? The Bible tells us that a miracle occurred; the waters divided and the Israelites passed on dry land. That is all the Bible says.

The Rabbis in the Midrash, however, tell us more. They tell us how that miracle took place. Miracles do not happen just by themselves. Do you know when the waters divided? **עד שבאו לתוכו עד חוטמן** Until the Jews first plunged into the waters ready to drown, to sacrifice themselves, for their ideal.⁴²⁸ Only when the waters were **עד חוטמן** – up to their very nostrils, and the Jews were almost drowning, then did the waters divide and the miracle occur! That is how miracles happen; when people are ready to make sacrifices for their idea, when they go forward despite obstacles and difficulties.

In these weeks, we are to give expression to our sense of sorrow to those who willingly made the supreme sacrifice on the altar of Jewish independence. They came from all parts of the world, these gallant men and women, to fight for the Jewish State. We shall cherish their memory and shall always acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe them, and we resolve like one man **כאיש אחד בלב אחד** to stand by Israel with all our heart and with all our might⁴²⁹. We shall continue to guard Israel's sovereignty with all the resources, physical, economic and spiritual, that are at our command.

My dear Brian, I am most happy to congratulate you on your excellent chanting of the maftir and haftarah. This is a proud ay for you and for those who love you, and indeed for all the members of this congregation, and I am very happy to extend a warm welcome to all your relatives and friends, who have come here to share with you in this joyous and proud occasion in your life. You are celebrating your Barmitzvah at a very important period in the history of our people. Just over a week ago, every wireless programme, every newspaper report, every TV newsreel, showed us the might and strength of the United Arab nations, and we were constantly told that all the forty-five million arabs were united in a Holy War to exterminate Israel and to annihilate our brethren. The Israelis were to be driven into the sea. Within a few days, Israel won brilliant success and smashed the Egyptian and Jordanian armies and air forces.

My dear Brian, if you saw the newsreel of these marvelous events you will have noticed that the first thing Moshe Dayan and his staff did when they captured the

⁴²⁷ Shemot 14:15

⁴²⁸ Midrash Shemot Rabbah 21:10

⁴²⁹ Paraphrase of Devarim 6:5

old city of Jerusalem was to go to the Wailing Wall and there the שופר was blown and prayers were recited, and we read that in spite of land-mines and shots still being fired and exchanged, thousands of Jews crossed the Mandelbaum Gate to go to the Wailing Wall, to pray – all this while the battle was not yet over. We also saw in the Sinai desert as the tanks were rolling by to battle, a young observant Jew in Tallit and Tefillin standing and praying. What other people have shown such faith in their God?

You, my dear Brian, should be very proud to become a member of such an illustrious people. I would say that the events of the last week has been as miraculous as the crossing of the Red Sea. In the last few days, we have witnessed an unparalleled demonstration of loyalty, dedication and sacrifice. In our own country, as well as in other parts of the world, Jews have shown a wonderful spirit of solidarity with Israel. Contributions to Israel have been great and generous. The Jewish people measured up to the occasion. On this day, Brian, you are commanded to live the life of a Jew. You are asked to observe the מצוות and to do the things demanded of every Jew.

Be a good Jew, a learned Jew, a proud Jew, who is not ashamed of his religion and his people, but who is proud of his faith and his ancestry, who fights to maintain them and transmit them to the generations to come.

For you Brian, this should not be too difficult. You have seen Communal Service from your own parents. Your father is a member of the Board of Management and has also done good work for the חברה ביקור חולים, “Friends of the Sick”. Your Mother does wonderful work for the Friendship Club. From the very beginning, she has been the Clubs “Welfare Officer”. She has visited sick members in their homes and in Hospital. She has helped to transport the less able to the club on Monday, and in addition to all that, she helps to pour out teas and make herself generally useful. Your parents have always responded very generously to every call made on them for the community. So my dear Brian, with the example of your dear parents, and with the events of world Jewry and what is even more important, your own personal integrity. I know you have taken the preparation for your Bar Mitzvah very seriously. I have been your teacher and it has been a pleasure to teach you, and you have been a regular worshipper in our shul for many years, and you have even brought other children with you. I have therefore every confidence that you will be a source of pride to your dear parents, and a source of inspiration to all Israel.

Shavuot: Celebrating Torah on Shavuot

Today is the significant holiday of Shavuot. It is the day which marks the occasion when Israel received the Torah at mount Sinai and we became a מְמַלְכֶת כְּהַיִּים וְגוֹי

קְדוּשָׁה - “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”⁴³⁰. This פְּסוּקָה, however, has an added significance. The Jewish people all over the world now celebrate the glorious victories of the Israeli Forces. This is an event of the greatest historical significance. The events of last week have evoked feelings and emotions beyond all expression. Amid all the rejoicing at the glorious victories which have this week been vouch saved to Israel and therefore to the whole Jewish people, none have moved us, in quite the same way, as did the capture of the Old City of Jerusalem. To religious Jews, this counts among the miracles which have been shown to us throughout our history. To all Jews it is an event which which arouses the strongest emotions. General Moshe Dayan’s declaration that Jerusalem will remain ours now forever, will have its echo among world Jewry. Monday on Panorama we had the joy of learning the שְׂחִיבוֹ beracha said at the wailing wall by soldiers, we saw young and old prostrating themselves and giving thanks to the Almighty for his miracles and His grace. The wailing wall of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, is simply a large, rather ramshacked piece of yellow stone work. As you know, the Temple was twice destroyed by fires set by the enemies of Israel, but the כּוֹתֵל הַמַּעֲרָבִי survived. It consists of but a few rows of old and moss-covered stones. It can neither offer protection to a city nor provide adequate shelter against the ravages of nature. But for many centuries, heartbroken and heavy laden Jews gathered there from all corners of the earth to pray and pour out their souls unto God. They came there by the hundreds and thousands to be inspired and consoled. At the sacred wall They were reminded of the deep faith of their forebears and of their abiding devotion to the teachings and traditions of Israel. It became the symbol of an undying faith

The modest כּוֹתֵל הַמַּעֲרָבִי still stands, while its adversary has gone down to utter ruin. It ended thus because God willed it so. Our sages tell us, that the verse “Behold he stands behind the wall”⁴³¹ refers to the כּוֹתֵל הַמַּעֲרָבִי, where God himself stands guard to shield it against all foes. As long as God watches over his people there’s no reason to fear.

Upon us, therefore, lies the sacred responsibility to see to it that the Festival of Shavuot, the great holiday commemorating מִתַּן תּוֹרָה finds expression and becomes part of this great celebration – a new reaffirmation that Torah and Israel are one and inseparable.

Let us pray that our efforts in this direction will be crowned with success.

Shavuot: Torah was not given to angels

A man who was able to quote the Bible by heart, had a questionable reputation in the community. During a conversation, he confided his secret ambition to his

⁴³⁰ Shemot 19:6

⁴³¹ Shir HaShirim 2:9

grandfather. “More than anything else,” he said, “I would like to go to the desert, which our forefathers crossed, and then to Mount Sinai where the Ten Commandments were given. I would then, like to climb the summit of the mountain, and from there, read the Ten Commandments aloud. That would be the crowning achievement of my life.” His grandfather after listening to him intently for a while, said to him. Grandson! Don’t you think it would have been better instead of going to Mount Sinai to read the Ten Commandments, to stay at home and observe them!

The most important aspect of Shavuot is of course, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The Torah and the Ten Commandments which we read on שבועות are perhaps our greatest contribution to the welfare of mankind.

The Midrash relates, an illuminating incident at Sinai, before the Torah was given to Israel. The angels on high, they tell us, did not want to surrender the Torah to Moses and to Israel, and they complained to the Almighty, “What is this mortal man doing among us? The Torah is too holy for him, and for his people. They are born, they live a few short years, they die. What have they to do with Torah?” Whereupon Moses replied, “What is written in the Torah? Does it not say “Who brought thee out of the thy house of bondage” were you angels ever in bondage? Were you ever slaves? The Torah speaks about hate, and envy. Do you angels hate, or have envy? The Torah speaks about stealing. Do you steal? We were slaves. We are frail, we have faults, and it’s we, not you, who need the Torah.”

This Midrash, though it’s very ancient, has deep meaning for us today, and it is extremely urgent that we understand it.

So many people have this attitude. Torah, they say, is for angels. Torah is alright for pious people; Torah is so abstract, so far removed from life, so other worldly, so heavenly, that how can I, an ordinary person, reach out for it? I am too great a sinner. I am too far gone. Torah is good, fine, noble, but I can never attain it. And the result is that no effort is made towards reaching it at all.

At this point the Midrash make sits message clear. The Torah was not reserved for angels. It was given to flesh and blood, to men and women, who have faults and temptations, and desires, and appetites, and greeds. Angels do not need the Torah, man needs the Torah. Because we are sinners, because we are subject to evil, because we have it in our power to descend to the level of a beast, do we have a Torah. For only Torah can purify us, elevate us, sanctify us and turn us into human beings. Because our natural inclination is to take that which is not ours, we have the Commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.” Because our natural desire is to possess, we have a Commandment, “Thou shalt not covet.” Because our natural instinct is to be selfish and to hoard possessions greedily, we have the laws of tithing, and of leaving

the corners of the field and the gleanings for the poor. Because we are tempted to be beasts, we are told “קדושים תהיו” “Ye shall be holy.”

Torah was not given to Angels, because angels are perfect. Torah was given to man, because man is not perfect – but can become so. This is the key, the perfectibility of man. We believe in God and God believes in us. And with His Torah He expresses His belief that we can become human beings.

Man should never say, “I am too far gone, I can never return to Jewish life.” We must not think that Torah was good for our grandparents, but not for modern life. We must never give up our God and Torah for He and His Torah have never surrendered us. We have the potential within us to become real Jews, full Jews, not because we are angels, but because we are not.

Shavuot: Shavuot, Ruth, and Torah today

On this festival of Shavuot when we celebrate the anniversary of the giving of the ten commandments to our people, our sages have fixed the reading of the Book of Ruth. It is a simple, though touching, little story, which tells of the condition of our noble young woman.

Ruth was a princess by birth - the daughter of a king, respected and beloved by all. Her husband belonged to one of the wealthiest and noblest Jewish families. In short, she had everything life could offer. Yichus and wealth, position and power, beauty and love.

But suddenly, all her good fortune changed and tragic days came upon this unusual woman.

One day her husband died and soon after that her wealth and her glory were gone. As long as things were running smoothly, Ruth seemed to have a host of relatives and friends. They knew her, they came to visit her, and they invited her to their home.

The minute she became impoverished and afflicted with mountains of trouble, her relatives were gone and her friends didn't seem to know her anymore.

Woe to the individual who has to seek the help and aid of another!

There was only her aged mother-in-law Naomi who stood by her and whom Ruth would not forsake. Generally speaking a shviger (mother-in-law) is held up to ridicule these days. So many cynical anecdotes are in circulation which make fund of the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law.

But listen to the words of Ruth as she refuses to part from her aged mother-in-law: In a beautiful exhortation she says, “Do not ask me to leave thee and not to follow

thee. For wherever thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me and more also if aught but death part thee and me”⁴³².

And so, poverty stricken and friendless, the two women, one old and sick at heart, and the other young and troubled, leave the land of Moab and go their weary way until they come to Judea.

In the beginning, nebach, Ruth has to go into the fields and pick up the gleanings, the left overs, that were left behind during harvest time.

Then Naomi advises Ruth to go to Boaz, a relative of hers, who would help her in her plight. Ruth obeys. She goes to this kinsman and she asks him to redeem her from her affliction, to which Boaz replied “It’s true, I am your kinsman. But first we must go to Tov who is a closer kinsman than I am, for we are duty bound by Jewish tradition to give him the honour of being the first to redeem you.”⁴³³

We are told that Boaz did not rest until he called on Tov and told him about Ruth and his obligation to her. But Tov had a ready answer for Boaz - לֹא אוֹכֵל לְגֹאֵל לִי, I am sorry by I cannot redeem her⁴³⁴, פֶּן אֲשַׁחֵת אֶת נַחְלָתִי, “lest I do harm to my possessions”⁴³⁵. Upon hearing this, Boaz offered his hand in marriage to Ruth.

In due time, this union was blessed with a son who became the ancestor of the most glorious dynasty in Israel; the kingdom of the house of David.

My friends, the story of Ruth is also symbolic of the Torah whose birthday we celebrate today. There was a time that’s not so long ago when the Torah was looked upon as a real **בת מלכה** - as a true princess and us a sovereign of our people. Every step taken by the Jew was guided by the Torah. At every move, the **בת מלכה** was consulted. Jewish mothers used to chant to their children the beautiful haunting melody **תורה איז די בעסטע סחורה** - that Torah was the best and finest commodity in life. Yes, from the cradle to the grave, Judaism was the controlling influence in our lives. But alas, today, Judaism is a picture of Ruth, shorn of its former glory and authority.

Many Jews today do not want to be Jews. They consider their Jewishness a burden. They either deliberately copy the Gentiles and try to appear as though they were not Jews at all, or else they avoid all contact with Jewish life. They hope that nothing will occur to make them conscious of the fact that they belong to the Jewish people.

⁴³² Ruth 1:16-17

⁴³³ Ruth 3:12-13

⁴³⁴ Ruth 4:6

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

Before our time Jews knew exactly who they were and what they stood for. Jewish life and the programme of Jewish living were clearly understood. A Jew might have neglected the customs which he was expected to observe, but at least he knew exactly what it was that he was breaking away from.

Today, there are many conceptions of what it means to be a good Jew. No longer is everyone agreed on this question. Some say that to be a Jew means to live in strict accordance with the traditional laws contained in the Torah. Others say that it means weekly attendance at the synagogue. Others still maintain that it's possible to be a good Jew 'at heart', and all one has to do is to live morally, not to lie, or cheat, or steal and that its not necessary to go to shul.

Some people feel that it is quite enough to contribute money to Jewish charities. Others feel that it is enough to help Israel.

To such an extent is this confusion felt, that many Jews do not know as to what distinguishes them from the non-Jews.

On this yizkor morning, the Torah comes to us and pleads **גואל אתה**, "you are the only redeemer that I have left. Redeem me! Restore my authority! Let my House be first in your plans and in your thoughts. Do not throw left-overs to me!! What will our answer be? Dare we, like Tov, use the flimsy excuse: **לֹא אוֹכַל לְגַאֵל לִי פֶן אֲנֻשְׁחִית** - "Things are not as they should be and I cannot redeem you"

Or shall we, like Boaz, come forward **להקים שם לאחיו המת** - to restore to a position of prominence and reverence the ideals of the beloved dead whom we came to memorialise on this occasion of Hazkarat Neshamot?

When the Kotzker Rebbe took his first journey in a train, thousands of his Chassidim came to meet him at the station. When he was asked about his experience and his trip, he told that that he had learned a great moral lesson from the engine. When asked for an explanation, he pointed to the locomotive and said: when the boiler is hot and the steam is going full blast, the locomotive is capable not only of moving itself but of pulling hundreds of passengers and a truck behind it. But when the boiler is cold, it cannot move an inch.

So it is with a human being. A warm and sympathetic heart can carry the burdens of his community and his people. But a cold heart, no matter what you will do to it, will never be moved.

Boaz or Tov, a warmhearted attitude of a person who recognizes an opportunity to serve, or a coldhearted and self-centred approach - which shall it be? Well - that is for us to decide! **אמן**

Shavuot: The Jewish contribution to civilization

Shavuot marks the birthday of Judaism. It was on Shavuot 3500 years ago that Israel received its national charter and dedicated itself to the promulgation of the principles of Sinai, for the salvation of mankind.

The story is told that after the 1st world war when President Wilson came to Versailles for the Peace Conference with his 14 points, a French statesman asked him: “I understand”, he told him, “that you formulated 14 points to make the world a more secure in a period of lasting peace, but how is it that Moses proposed only 10 points and you 14”?

Wilson replied significantly, “if the world would have kept the 10 points of Moses, there would have been no need now for my 14 points.” How strikingly true, how everlastingly valid.

The world has not as yet, and will never discover a substitute for the Ten Commandments, for the Moral Law proclaimed at Sinai. For these commandments form the basis of an orderly society, patterned after God’s will and based upon equality, human rights, and the essential dignity of man. As the famous French non-Jewish thinker Renan stated, but for the Torah, humanity would still be in the grip of barbarism and no moral progress would have ever been achieved.

It is the Torah which has made the Jewish people immortal, and this immortality is such that against it, the all-powerful hand of time is impotent. How many mighty nations have disappeared in the last 3000 years!

The small tribe which stood at Mount Sinai has alone, in spite of butcheries and persecution, survived all its oppressors and stood at the grave of all its enemies.

In an endeavour to win for them, the immortality for which they craved, the Egyptians erected mighty pyramids, and the Roman’s build a powerful empire and set up a most laborious legal system. The pyramids and the Roman laws still exist, but the Ancient Egyptians and the Romans, with all their institutions, beliefs and empires, have perished.

The Bible, however, not only exists but has made its people – the Jews – an eternal people – **עַם עוֹלָם**. The existence of that people is indeed the greatest miracle in history.

A small Semitic tribe left Asia for Egypt some 3,500 years ago. They departed from Egypt, more than 3,260 years ago, under the leadership of Moses, the world’s supreme lawgiver. Five hundred years after Moses, they gave the world David, Solomon, the prophets. A thousand years later, this race produced Hillel and the great Rabbis. In the next 2000 years there followed a continuous succession of great

men in Israel, Talmudic scholars and teachers, Gaonim and Philosophers like Rav Ashi, R' Hai Gaon, Rashi, Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, Caro, The Rama, the Baal Shem Tov, and the Vilna Gaon. In the strict line of succession came a glorious chain of secular geniuses, such as Heine and Marx, Einstein and Freud, Bergson and Chaim, Beaconsfield and Ehrlich, Bialik and Herzl, Weitzman & Epstein – poets, philosophers, statesmen, physicists, physicians, the founders of Marxism, of psychoanalysis, of aviation & the theory of relativity, of modern art & modern thought – all of them Jews. This people is as vigorous today in its advanced age as it was in its youth. It has re-established its state in the Holy Land and is, everyday, bringing about the well-nigh miraculous; it is undying.

Undying, too, is the hatred which it has provoked in other nations. Every page in history is stained with its blood. Egypt drowned its infant boys, Babylon slew them, Rome used them to fight the wild beasts in their arenas, the Catholics tortured them in dungeons of the inquisition; the Tzars destroyed them in their thousands, and the Nazi's massacred them in their millions. Yet the Jewish nation lives.

Anti-Semitism is not only hatred of the Jew, but hatred of the Torah itself and of the Jews as a people of the Torah. Anti-Semitism is in reality the hatred of the good by the bad, of the superior by the inferior.

May this festival mark the dawn of a new era in Jewish life.

Shavuot: Shavuot and the Six Day war (1967)

Today is the significant holiday of Shavuot. It is the day which marks the occasion when Israel received the Torah at Mount Sinai and we became a **מְמַלְכֶת בְּהַיְיָ וְגוֹי** **קְדוֹשׁ**.⁴³⁶ This **שבועות**, however, has added significance. The Jewish people all over the world now celebrate the glorious victories of the Israeli Forces. This is an event of the greatest historical significance. The events of last week have evoked feelings and emotions beyond all expression. Amid all the rejoicing at the glorious victories which have this week been vouch saved to Israel and therefore to the whole Jewish people, none have moved us, in quite the same way, as did the capture of the Old City of Jerusalem. To religious Jews, this counts among the miracles which have been shown to us throughout our history. To all Jews it is an event which arouses the strongest emotions. General Moshe Dayan's declaration that Jerusalem will remain ours now forever will have its echo among world Jewry. Monday on Panorama we had the joy of learning the **שהחיינו** beracha said at the Wailing Wall by soldiers; we saw young and old prostrating themselves and giving thanks to the Almighty for his miracles and His grace. The Wailing Wall of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem is simply a large, rather ramshackled, piece of yellow stone work. As you know, the

⁴³⁶ Shemot 19:6

Temple was twice destroyed by fires set by the enemies of Israel, but the **כותל מערבי** survived. It consists of but a few rows of old and moss-covered stones. It can neither offer protection to a city nor provide adequate shelter against the ravages of nature. But for many centuries, heartbroken and heavy-laden Jews gathered there from all corners of the earth to pray and pour out their souls unto God. They came there by the hundreds and thousands to be inspired and consoled. At the sacred wall they were reminded of the deep faith of their forebears and of their abiding devotion to the teachings and traditions of Israel. It became the symbol of an undying faith

The modest **כותל מערבי** still stands, while its adversary has gone down to utter ruin. It ended thus because God willed it so. Our sages tell us, that the verse “Behold he stands behind the wall”⁴³⁷ refers to the **כותל מערבי**, where God himself stands guard to shield it against all foes. As long as God watches over his people there’s no reason to fear.

Upon us, therefore, in this great day of rejoicing, lies the sacred responsibility to see to it that the Festival of Shevuos, the great holiday commemorating **קבלת התורה**, finds expression and becomes part of this great celebration – a new reaffirmation that Torah and Israel are one and inseparable.

Let us pray that our efforts in this direction will be crowned with success.

Shavuot: Heart & soul

Two traditions have come down to us concerning the manner in which the people of Israel received the Torah at Mount Sinai.

The Biblical tradition tells us in glowing terms the upsurge of enthusiasm that marked the Revelation. The Bible pictures the people as being eager to accept the Torah of their own free will. This point of view is, of course, based on the phrase **נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע** - “we shall do and we shall listen”⁴³⁸. In their passionate desire to receive the Divine Law, they even put the **נַעֲשֶׂה** before the **נִשְׁמָע**.

The Rabbinic tradition, on the other hand, would make us believe that the Israelites were not so willing at all to accept the yoke of the Torah. They tell us that the Israelites actually refused until God forced it upon them by holding the mountain over their heads, threatening to crush them, unless they accepted the Torah.⁴³⁹

Our commentators are puzzled by the obvious discrepancy between the two traditions. In a legal matter, they contend, it is quite possible to have two diametrically opposed opinions depending upon the varying reasoning processes of the individuals concerned. But in this instance, where an historical event is involved, it

⁴³⁷ Shir HaShirim 2:9

⁴³⁸ Shemot 24:7

⁴³⁹ See Shabbat 88a

could only have occurred in one particular manner. Why then this divergence of opinions? In other words, how can we reconcile these opposing statements?

Our commentators answer very strikingly, they say, that the Biblical tradition refers to the Written Law, which the people of Israel were eager to accept. But the Rabbinic tradition alludes to the Oral Law - the Torah **שבעל פה** - which they received only under compulsion & coercion.

The question still remains, however, as to why our Rabbis should draw such a distinction between the Oral & Written Law when, to us, both possess equal validity and are equally binding upon every Jew.

It seems to me, therefore, that what our interpreters meant was to indicate a point that strikes at the very heart of our religious problems. The distinctions drawn by our Sages between the Torah **שבכתב** and Torah **שבעל פה** is fraught with so much significant meaning for our time and age. For, in truth, is it not a fact that we are always amenable and responsible to a written law, but apprehensive and fearful of an Oral Law that has to be communicated to others and implemented in daily living?

A Torah **שבכתב** is perfectly acceptable as long as it remains a Written Law, on parchment or paper. Every nation is proud to possess exalted charters that glorify human rights and exalt humanity's sky-vaulting aspirations. Such written documents are usually admired and even held in reverence as long as they remain **שבכתב** - written on parchment or engraved on tablets of stone, obligating no one to anything. But when you demand that this Torah become a living Torah - a Torah **שבעל פה** - to be communicated from teacher to disciple, from father to son, from one generation to another, such a Torah becomes unacceptable except by coercion and compulsion.

We are living in an age that has seen the birth of glorious written charters. There come to mind the Fourteen Points of Wilson, the Atlantic Charter, the Four Freedoms, the United Nations Charter, which all mankind applauded as the harbinger of a new era of heightened idealism and universal peace. But is there universal peace? It is the same age-old shortcoming - a willingness to accept only a Written Law and a determined refusal to regard the Torah as a communicable life-pattern that must be implemented in the daily routine of living. We forget that our charters are not philosophical treatises, or works of art, or remain forever enshrined in our national museums. They remain to be translated into oral laws to govern man's conduct and behavior.

There's a story about a famous violinist who gave a concert one night. It was announced that he would play on his £2000-pound violin. In the audience sat little Miriam who had taken violin lessons for a long time and found it difficult and boring

to practice. She didn't play well of course. When the famous violinist stepped onto the platform, Miriam strained her eyes, whispering to her mother, "If I had a violin like that, I could play well too; but how can I get music from a £5 pound violin?"

Never had such music been heard before. The famous musician transported them to another world - until, suddenly, something happened. Something had gone wrong with the violin. In a rage, the musician smashed the violin over the back of a chair, and the audience went wild. After a moment, the manager came out on the platform and held up his hand: "Don't be alarmed," he said, the maestro paid only 35 shillings for that violin. He used it to show us that the heavenly music is not in the violin, but in his heart and soul".

The musician picked up another violin. As he played, Miriam repeated to herself, "Music is not in the violin. It is in the heart and soul."

On this day of Shavuot when we celebrate the anniversary of the promulgation of the Divine Law, let us remember that the effectiveness of this Law lies not in the parchment on which it is written, but rather in the hearts and soul that it will transform and regenerate and direct our lives, helping us to establish God's Kingdom on Earth.

Shavuot: There will be your end

Shavuot marks the birthday of Judaism. It was on Shavuot 3,500 years ago that Israel received its national charter and dedicated itself to the promulgation of the principles of Sinai for the salvation of mankind.

There are two Midrashim which seem to present contradictory pictures relating to the desire of the children of Israel to accept the Torah. On the one hand, we have the Midrash which tells us that when the children of Israel declared, "We shall do and we shall hear", the angels of heaven descended and tied two crowns upon them - one for the **נעשה** - we will do, and the other for the **נשמע** - we will hear. The Midrash leaves us with the unmistakable impression that the Torah was accepted willingly and wholeheartedly

On the other hand, the second Midrash conveys the opposite view. According to this Midrash, the Almighty held the mountain over their heads and declared: **אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם** - "If you accept the Torah, good. If not, then there will be your destruction"⁴⁴⁰. It appears that the Israelites had accepted the Torah only under duress; that - given the choice - they - like the other nations - would have rejected the Torah.

Our commentators are puzzled by the obvious discrepancy between these two Midrashim. In a legal matter, they contend, it is quite possible to have two

⁴⁴⁰ Shabbat 88a

diametrically opposed opinions, depending upon the varying reasoning process of the individuals. But, in this instance, where an historical event is involved, it apparently could have occurred only in one particular manner. Why then this divergence of opinion?

The answer to this discrepancy lies in a careful examination of the second Midrash. Grammatically, the concluding part of the Midrash should have read **פה תהיה קבורתכם** - “Here will you be destroyed.” Instead, however, the language of the Midrash is **שם תהא קבורתכם** which, correctly translated, means “there will be your destruction”.

Now it becomes clear that the second Midrash did not intend to tell us that the children of Israel accepted the Torah grudgingly, for indeed it was accepted freely and under no compulsion whatsoever, as our first Midrash informs us. The second Midrash tells us that in the future, as long as the children of Israel accept the Torah in each generation and observe it, then will continue their Godly existence, their Godly life. However, that generation that will not accept the Torah - that generation that will ignore its precepts and its laws - that generation will be cut off: **שם תהיה קבורתכם** - then there, at that time in the future, will you reach your end.

History has been a constant witness to the truth of this Midrash. Nations have arisen and nations have declined. But the Jewish people, as a result of their observance of the Torah, as a result of their commitment to Torah, have resisted the destructive forces of many nations, and still exist today, as a powerful moral force among all people.

Shavuot: The wisdom of Torah

The festival of Shavuot is dedicated to the Torah. It was on this day that God revealed Himself on Mount Sinai and proclaimed to us and to all the world the Ten Divine Commandments that, to this very time, form the basis of all civilisation.

The story is told that after the First World War, when President Wilson came to Versailles for the Peace Conference with his 14 points, a French statesman asked him: “I understand you formulated 14 points to make the world more secure and usher in a period of lasting peace, but how does it come? After all, Moses proposed only 10 points, and you 14”?

Wilson replied significantly, “Yes! If the world would have kept the 10 points of Moses, there would be no need now for my 14 points.”

How strikingly true! How everlastingly valid! The world has not as yet, and will never, discover a substitute for the Ten Commandments; for the Moral Law proclaimed at Sinai.

All the nations heard the challenge when the Almighty spoke through Israel to the world. 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'. He alone is the giver of human freedom and He alone decreed the laws of justice and righteousness, truth and mercy, which must govern society if man is not to perish.

There is a beautiful story in the Midrash about the proselyte Aquilas who translated the Bible into Greek. Aquilas lived in the second century, at a time when the knowledge of the Bible was spreading throughout the civilized world due to the dispersion of the Jews and the rise of Christianity.

The heathen world was in a ferment and tumult. Intelligent people recognised the Godliness of the ethical concepts of Judaism and compared them with the idolatrous paganism which they had inherited! There were many converts to Judaism from amongst the heathens.

One of these was Aquilas! Aquilas was a mature scholar, versed in the literature and philosophy, and he was also a high-ranking nobleman being a nephew of Hadrian, the infamous emperor of Rome who ruthlessly persecuted the Jews.

Now, when Aquilas decided to embrace Judaism, he went first to confide in his uncle the Emperor.

The Emperor on hearing of his nephew's decision was shocked! "Tell me," he said to him, "Why do you want to cast in your lot with the smallest of nations, the most despised of the peoples? Have you not seen how I have trampled them underfoot and have cast away their exiles to the four corners of my far-flung Empire?"

Aquilas replied, "Your Majesty. It is the wisdom of the Jews which attracts me! To them was revealed the Word of God!"

"If it's wisdom you seek," said Hadrian, "study their books; read their literature. But why must you take upon yourself the yoke of their laws? Look at me! I have studied the philosophy of the Greeks and their ethical teachings, but I have not allowed that to interfere with my living and my conquests. You desire Jewish wisdom - by all means. But do not fetter yourself with the bonds of their law."

Aquilas answered and said: "Sire. You have sipped from the cup of wisdom, but you have drunk from the blood of nations. You have learned the knowledge of the Greeks, but you have lived as a bloodthirsty Roman. You see, Greek philosophy is not like Torah. Greek philosophy and Roman living can go together, but not so the Torah. 'Behold, my world is like fire, said the Lord. Like fire which burns the soul burning deep into the heart of him who bears it. The word of God fills man with a new life, new thoughts, new hopes. The word of God must be lived, not only learned! That is why, having seen of that light which was revealed at Sinai, I can no

longer live as a conquering Roman! My place is with the Jews. Their task is mine, to spread the light of the Torah throughout the world.” And so it came to pass that Aquilas accepted Judaism, and through his translations of the Bible he helped to spread the word of God to all the nations.

But it’s not enough to think that we can all receive spiritual light from one great man in our midst. Each one of us is responsible in Judaism for his own spiritual growth through ethical deed and holy living.

There is a beautiful story about one of the spiritual giants of the last generation. In the little town of Radin, in Poland, electricity had just been introduced. Big transformers were set up outside the town, and cables and wiring were drawn into all the homes in Radin. At first the simple townspeople were greatly amazed at the great miracle of electricity. But after a while they got used to it, and they stopped being surprised and astonished.

One night there was a great storm. There was thunder and lightning and drenching rain. Through the windows of the little cottages of Radin, electric lights sent forth their rays into the darkness letting all the world know that man had conquered nature. Here was light and warmth. And then, suddenly, something snapped in the big transformers which controlled the town’s supply of electricity, and the whole town of Radin was thrown into darkness.

In the home of the great sage of Radin known as the Chafetz Chaim, there was excitement and fear. The household was upset. How can one conquer darkness? Then the Chafetz Chaim calmly, as ever, remarked: “You see, my children, in former times every family had its own kerosene lamp. It did not give forth a very bright light, but it served its purpose. And if it happened once, that in one home the lamp broke, that house was dark but all the other homes had their own light. Today, however, all of us rely for our light upon one central source, and if that fails, the whole community is plunged into darkness, and if there be a traveller on the road, he would be lost because there is no light to guide him.”

Now, the same thing applies with matters of the spirit! Every human soul is a lamp; every individual can light up his own way in the world, and every individual must light up his own way in the world. Each one of us must answer directly to his Maker. Ethics, Morals, Holiness and Godliness are our individual responsibility. Only if every single human being bears within him a spiritual light can we be assured that we will never be overcome by sudden darkness, but we will always have a sure light to lead us into the fulfilment of the destiny of man and the purpose of God. אמן.

Shabbat Nachamu: Comfort Ye (Barmitzvah - Brian)

The Sabbath of this week is honoured with a special title – “Shabbat Nachamu – The Sabbath of Consolation”.

“Shabbat Nachamu” marks the termination of the three weeks of sorrow which remind us of the glory of ancient Jerusalem & the Temple & their destruction. For three weeks, Israel mourned its national downfall. At last, with the departure of **תשעה באב** the veil of mourning is lifted, the clouds are dispersed, & the sun of hope shines again warming our hearts to fresh vitality, filling us with hopes for better days, holding out prospects for brighter times.

A reassuring note is sounded. A voice of comfort & sympathy is heeding us from days gone by, a calming, soothing voice healing the wounded, consoling the bereaved & breathing new life into the hearts of the despondent. From one end to the other end of the Diaspora, the cheerful message is read, solemnly & trustfully repeated: **נְחַמוּ נְחַמוּ עַמִּי יֵאמֶר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם** - “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people said your God!”⁴⁴¹

People ask these days: Why is it that we fast & mourn over the destruction of our land which took place over 2,000 years ago? Why is it that in our time, when we have lived to witness the establishment of the Jewish State & the upbuilding of the land of Israel, why should we still feel the sorrow of our past suffering? On the fact of it, it looks like a strong argument for discontinuing the observance of Av. Yet, the more thoughtful Jew will continue to observe it, & the sad memories it conjures up for the following reasons: We, the Jewish people, do not merely read our history, but re-enact it & live it through. Just as on Passover, we conduct our Seder & re-enact all the minute ceremonies of 3,000 years ago so as to experience the joy of the Exodus from Egypt. So too, do we live through the sad events of Tisha B’Av that our ancestors experienced. The attitude of the Jew has been well expressed by a statement in the Passover Seder Service.

“In every generation, it’s the duty of a Jew to imagine himself as if he were one of those who left Egypt”. We must imagine ourselves as having taken part in the Exodus & having enjoyed the sensation of liberation from Egyptian bondage. Following this practice, we should think of the tragedies our ancestors endured that we may better enjoy the joys of liberation & restoration of Israel. It’s that spirit that enabled us to survive as a people & prevented assimilation among the nations of the world.

The question has often been asked & is asked now, more than ever before, what has been the secret of Israel’s survival? After all, it’s the greatest miracle of all times. It has never happened before that a people exiled for 1,900 years, haunted &

⁴⁴¹ Yeshayahu 40:1

persecuted by Amaleks & Hamans & Hitlers, hated & despised, should yet survive & be restored to national existence after 1,900 years of exile.

One of the reasons, as already stated, is that the Jewish people remembered the tragic, as well as the happy occasions. The Jew wept at the tragedies & rejoiced at the triumphs. He felt himself as one who participated in the Exodus from Egypt & in the Revelation at Sinai. He also lived through the destruction of his Temple & the devastation of his land.

But he didn't permit the tragedies to weigh him down & break his spirit. Immediately after reciting the Lamentations, he arose from the ground and he began to think of the restoration of Zion. The lamentations that are recited on Tisha B'Av conclude with the beautiful poems of Yehuda Halevi, the famous poet of the Middle Ages, who sings of his love & longing for Zion. The week before Tisha B'Av we read the prophecy in which Israel is warned of the impending destruction. The week after Tisha B'Av we read Isaiah Chapter 40 that begins with the words נְחֻמוּ נְחֻמוּ עַמִּי - "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people!". Despair never overtook Israel.

Serious contemplation about the tragedies was encouraged to recall national sins & back slidings, but only as a means of correcting the errors & winning back the grace of the Almighty. Even though the present was bleak, the land devastated, the Temple destroyed, yet the Jew looked back to past glories & hoped for future triumphs. He recited the Psalmists words: גַּם כִּי אֵלֶךְ בְּגִיא צִלְמוֹת לֹא אִירָא רָע כִּי אֶתָּה עִמָּדִי - "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil for Thou art with me"⁴⁴².

With courage & determination he explained לֹא אָמוּת כִּי אֶחְיֶה, "I shall not die but live & relate the handiwork of God"⁴⁴³. Sitting at the rivers of Babylon he vowed אִם אֶשְׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי, "if I forget thee O Jerusalem may my right hand forget its cunning"⁴⁴⁴.

It was that spirit that was displayed by the defenders of the Warsaw Ghetto who while being led to gas chambers sang the plaintive but triumphant tunes of אֲנִי מֵאֲמִין - "I believe in the coming of the Messiah, & even though He delay in coming, yet I believe".

Those martyrs who were suffocating in the Nazi gas chambers visualized an Israel restored & even though they could not live to see it, they were happy that their children might reach the Promised Land. Such a people cannot die.

⁴⁴² Tehillim 23:4

⁴⁴³ Tehillim 118:17

⁴⁴⁴ Tehillim 137:5

Babylonians & Romans may devastate their lands, Nazis may beat their bodies and snuff out their lives, but their spirit goes on, their martyrdom inspires others to pick up where they left off.

My dear Brian! The lesson which our prophet Isaiah brings to us in this morning's reading of the Haftorah is one which is very important in your life as a Barmitzvah. You are starting in life now as a Jew who must assume & shoulder responsibility. You must help in the building of Jewish life here & in Israel. On this important day, we hope to impress this thought upon you. If you want to live a good life, a life that will bring happiness to you & blessedness to your fellow men, then live it in accordance with our Torah. For more than 3000 years it has brought happiness to men & women who lived by it. It is my hope that you will follow these words of mine & that they will go deep into your heart, that your life will be guided by Torah & will bring joy & happiness to you & blessedness to all those that are near & dear to you.

Rosh Chodesh: The blessing of life

We have this morning inaugurated the new month with the prayer of יהי רצון and the outstanding motif of our prayers for the new month is the plea for חיים. Practically, every phrase starts with the word חיים. This series of entreaties begins with the phrase ותתן לנו חיים ארוכים, “May we be given long life”. We might be perplexed at the continuous repetition of the request for “life”. After all, we prayed for “life” on Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur. We believe that God decides then who shall live & for how long. בראש השנה יכתבון וביום צום נפיר יחתמו. What point is there in requesting חיים on Rosh Chodesh when the decision about it was already made on Yom Kippur?

Furthermore, on Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur we pray for “life”. But nowhere do we mention “long-life” on those awesome days. Yet on each Rosh Chodesh we pray for חיים ארוכים, “long life”. Why is Rosh Chodesh more important in that respect than Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur?

Furthermore, is a person that has lived long not to pray for חיים ארוכים because he has already been granted it? Does his old age make his prayer meaningless?

The answer is one that is very appropriate for our day & age. We live in a period of startling change. One day a man may be wealthy; the next day his stocks may go down in value & he is poor. One day a person is healthy & well; the next day he discovers he has a terrible illness. Today, we may be at peace; tomorrow, we may be at war.

Things are continuously in a state of flux. All of us have seen families in which one generation, the parents, were very religious & observant, & yet the next generation,

the children, were completely estranged from religion. We are continually worried about the future and uncertain about the morrow.

And so on Rosh Chodesh, we come into the Synagogue & we pray for חַיִּים אָרוּכִים, “long life”. We say that although the decree for “life” was made on Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur, nevertheless we are not completely at peace. For who knows what sort of life it will be & what the morrow may bring.

וְתִתֶּן לָנוּ חַיִּים אָרוּכִים. May we be granted long life. May there be continuity between one month & the next, between one part of the year & the next. May the happiness of one month continue into the following one, the health & well-being of one period carry over into the other, the peace of one day be with us the next one. May we have not only חַיִּים, “life”, but חַיִּים אָרוּכִים, “Continuity of life”. May that prayer be answered, & may that be our portion next month & in the months to come. אָמֵן!

SPECIAL SHABBATOT

Shabbat Zachor: Remembering & the Four Shabbatot

Today is the second of the four special Sabbaths, the אַרְבַּע פְּרָשִׁיּוֹת, which precede the Festival of Passover.

Prominence is given to these Sabbaths by reading during the morning service an additional extract from the Bible which bears in the significance of each particular Sabbath.

Each of these four special Sabbaths conveys an idea, each one teaches a lesson and brings a message.

Two weeks ago, on Shabbat Shekalim, we were reminded of the old national contribution of the half shekel which every Israelite had to pay every year towards the erection of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Because the peoples spiritual centre, being a national institution, therefore everyone had to subscribe

כָּל הָעֹבֵר עַל הַפְּקָדִים... תְּרוֹמָהּ לַיהוָה - “Everyone that passeth among the numbered shall give the offering of the Lord.”⁴⁴⁵ It was also decreed that all should have an equal share the people’s sanctuary. הָעָשִׂיר לֹא יִרְבֶּה וְהַדָּל לֹא יִמְעִיט - The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel.⁴⁴⁶ And in order to remind the people that the time had approached for the payment of the shekel the custom was introduced of reading on the Sabbath, before the month of Adar, the passage of Exodus referring to the half shekel which Moses was ordered to take from each

⁴⁴⁵ Shemot 30:13

⁴⁴⁶ Shemot 30:15

Israelite when numbering the people. This is in the spirit of true Judaism אל תפרוש - "Do not separate thyself from the community."⁴⁴⁷ מן הצבור

Indifference to the lot of others, cutting oneself off from the camp of the community, always resulted for the Jews in מדת סדום. To other peoples it may have been a sign of morality "to live and let live alone", but to the Jews, the "each man for himself" philosophy of שלי שלי ושליך שליך⁴⁴⁸ type of life, was considered a מדה בינונית - a lukewarm, not a positive code of ethics. It was merely existing, not living.

A story is told of two Chelemites who were thrown into the sea, a few hundred miles from the shore during a storm. One of the Chelemites was an expert swimmer, the other was not. The expert swimmer in spite of all pleas from his fellow Chelemite, swam to the shore and reached land. Upon reaching land, he immediately jumped into the water again and swam back to his drowning friend and rescued him. His friend, as soon as he got his breath again said. Chaim why did you have to go through all that – swimming to the shore and jumping in again finally saving me. Surely you could have helped me the first place, instead of bypassing me"? "Narishe Kop"! Replied Chaim, "I had to save myself first."

In the erection of the sanctuary no one could play the role of Chaim and this was typified in the message which Shabbat Shekalim tries to convey. כָּל הָעֵבֶר עַל הַפְּקָדִים. תְּרוּמָה לַה'.... So much for the first Shabbat.

Today this second special Sabbath, which precedes the Passover has an even greater significance. It derives its name from the word זכור - Remember, which begins today's additional lesson from the Scripture. "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, as ye come forth out of Egypt."⁴⁴⁹

In our Biblical and Rabbinic Literature, the word זכור - remember, looms very large and significantly. We are asked to "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy"⁴⁵⁰ זכר למעשה - because God is the creator of the Universe - זָכֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ. We observe every holiday in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt – זכר ליציאת מצרים. Every Tisha Bav we remember the destruction of both Temples and repent. Rosh Hashonah is also called in our liturgy יום הזכרון - "Day of Remembrance"; so you see remembrance plays a vital role in our religion. Our Torah and Tradition are always stressing and emphasising the need to remember things of the past.

⁴⁴⁷ Avot 2:4

⁴⁴⁸ Avot 5:10

⁴⁴⁹ Devarim 25:17

⁴⁵⁰ Shemot 20:7

You will probably think why should we be asked to remember and to read the same story over and over again, year after year? It's because we believe that a people that hearkens intimately to its past.

Shabbat Zachor: The importance of remembering (Bar Mitzvah - Michael)

Many historians ascribe and attribute to the Jewish people a durable and retentive memory. As a people we never forget cruelties that were perpetrated against us, the tragedies that befell us, as well as the great miracles that brought about our freedom, or our great men who rose to our aid, are deeply chiseled in our national memory. The eternal people, it's said, is blessed with an eternal memory.

In our Biblical and Rabbinic literature, the word זָכוֹר, remember, looms very large and significantly. We are asked to "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" because God is the creator of the Universe. We observe every holiday in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt - by the Torah and its way of life. We must remember what the Amalekites did to us in the desert once every year on the Sabbath of Remembrance. Every Tisha B'Av we remember the destruction of both Temples and repent. Remembering plays a very important role in the Jewish way of life.

However, we must not assume that our memories are so infallible that we forget nothing. If the historians mean that the Jewish people forget nothing, they are mistaken. Jewish people forget more than they remember. There are whole epochs and generations of martyrdom, unknown to our collective memory. Were they not recorded in a few paragraphs in our history books, they would be completely unknown to us.

Even the events of the last 20 years of our recent past, the most catastrophic in the history of our people, have not fared much better in our memories. Jews do forget, and sometimes how quickly do we forget.

In a recent book בארג חורבן - Mount of Destruction, the famous author and patriarchal leader of the Poale Zion and elder statesman, Zerubavel, relates about a meeting he had with Dr. Chaim Weizmann in London.

Zerubavel remarked to Weizmann that Jews are beginning to forget the catastrophes of the last decade. Upon this, commented Weizmann: "This isn't so bad. After all, one can't live if one should not forget."

Zerubavel then told Weizmann, "Yes, but Jews are beginning to forget that this happened to themselves."

"This is different" said Dr. Weizmann. "About this I have a little story. Once a Jew accidentally met a friend of his, another Jew, eating on Yom Kippur. 'What is the meaning of this? Have you forgotten that today is Yom Kippur and a Jew must not

eat on Yom Kippur.’ He answered the other Jew, ‘That it is Yom Kippur, I have not forgotten. I have just forgotten that I am a Jew’.

Zerubavel concludes by making this point: What happened in the last war, the world remembers. Jews also remember it. Jews are beginning to forget only that this happened to themselves. They forget who they are.

The Rabbis comment on the Biblical verse which is read twice every day in our prayers: וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וְזָכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת ה' וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם - ‘You should look upon it (the fringes - ציצית) and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them’⁴⁵¹. Teach the Rabbis: רְאִיָּה מְבִיאָה לִידֵי זְכוּרָה וְזְכוּרָה מְבִיאָה לִידֵי מַעֲשֵׂה - ‘Seeing brings to remembering, and remembering brings to doing’⁴⁵²

On this Sabbath of remembrance, שבת זכור, may we remember our duties and responsibilities through holy ritual and do them.

My dear Michael! Today you become a member of an illustrious people. A people that has survived hardships, persecutions and exile for almost 2,000 years. What has given it the power and strength to survive? It is the will to live and the conviction that it had a purpose worth living for. This is perhaps best expressed by the Psalmist in the words: לֹא אָמוּת כִּי אֶחְיֶה וְאֶסְפֹּר מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה (‘I shall not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord’⁴⁵³). It’s because we had a reason for existence that we survived. It was because we were conceived as a people whose aim would be to establish justice and righteousness in this world that we are here today.

Your מפתיר, my dear Michael, commenced with one word which I would like to emphasize to you on this important day of your life, as a Barmitzvah. The word is זָכוֹר, “remember”, and I would urge you to bear this word well in your mind. Remember that you are a Jew and as a Jew you have certain responsibilities. Chief among which is the responsibility of carrying out the traditions of Judaism. For through you and other Barmitzvah’s like you, Judaism will thrive and flourish. You are a link in the long chain that binds us between the Jews of yesterday and the Jew of today.

You are privileged more than more Barmitzvah boys, for you have with you here in shul this morning a very strong link in that chain of Jewish tradition. You have the great זכות of having not only your dear parents and grandparents, but the Almighty has blessed you with the presence of two great grandfathers. May they be a source of inspiration to you and help you to grow up to be a good Jew who comes to shul

⁴⁵¹ Bemidbar 15:39

⁴⁵² Menachot 43b

⁴⁵³ Tehillim 118:17

regularly, continues his Hebrew studies, and takes an active part when you grow up in Jewish communal life.

Your father has been very active in the Board of Management and the Parents Association. Your mother has always supported the Parents Association and the Ladies Guild. Contribute your share towards attainment of that goal and you will be a Jew who will bring honour to yourself, to your parents, to your people and to your God.

Shabbat Parah: The four special Shabbatot (1958)

This Sabbath, is the third of the four special Sabbaths, the **אַרְבַּע פְּרָשִׁיּוֹת** that serve as the forerunners to the approach of the great festival of Passover. Today is **שַׁבַּת פָּרָה**, the Sabbath on which the law concerning the sacrifice of the **פָּרָה אֲדוּמָה** - the red heifer, and the purification with its ashes, is read from the second scroll. Four emissaries, four special Sabbath, prepare us for the reception of our expected guest, the Feast of Passover. Through the **אַרְבַּע פְּרָשִׁיּוֹת**, our minds become attuned to a right conception of the significance of freedom.

There are four conditions which are essential to the acquisition of freedom. The first of the special Shabosim is known as **שַׁבַּת שְׁקָלִים**. On that Shabbat every Jew is reminded of the ancient duty to contribute half a shekel for the maintenance of the **בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ** and the purchase of community sacrifices. Here we have the first preliminary step which prepares us for freedom, civic mindedness. A people will never attain freedom, unless every member composing that people, is willing to do his part, is willing to contribute his share to the general welfare. In a selfish society, where each one is interested in himself, where each one is indifferent to the plight of his fellow man, there can be no freedom.

The second step which prepares a people for freedom, is a clear awareness of its position in the world, a realistic appraisal of its history. A people ignorant of its past, will fail to provide for the future. A people which refuses to heed the lessons of history, in the imaginary belief, that what has happened in the past, cannot happen in the future, what has happened in one part of the world, cannot happen in another part, such a people, will fail miserably in its efforts to solve the problems that confront them.

This thought, is conveyed to us, by the second special Shabbat, which bids the Jews remember the atrocities and cruelties, perpetuated by the barbarous Amalekites. One of the first **מִצְוֹת** given our people as they entered the Holy Land was **לְהַכְרִית זֵרְעוֹ** של **עַמְלֵק**. Unless the people fully realized the menace presented by Amalek, their newly won freedom could not be made secure.

Today, only 13 years after the conclusion of the second world war, some of our people are beginning to show signs of forgetfulness with respect to the cruel fate that befell European Jewry. Some of our people are already on the way to forgetting the most terrible event in our history. It therefore becomes our duty to proclaim aloud once again: “Remember that Amalek did unto you.” So-long as our people will remember the cruel annihilation of European Jewry, so long will we be vigilant and we will be continually striving to protect our own freedom. But no sooner, as we forget the mass destruction of European Jewry, then we begin to live in a world of illusion, we begin to develop a false sense of security and expose ourselves to the threat of dictatorship and slavery.

Civic mindlessness, history consciousness, are two important steps essential to true freedom!! Before the absolute goal can be achieved, however, a third condition, equally important must be fulfilled. This condition is exemplified by the third of the special Shabbatot, Parshas Parah. This morning we read a chapter from the forth book of the Pentateuch which describes the ceremony of burning the red heifer, the ashes of which were utilized for ritual purification. This ceremony is known as the most mysterious ritual of the entire Torah. By its very nature it preaches the necessity for faith, in the supernatural, in the mysterious, in the heavenly. As a preliminary step in the preparation for Pesach, it teaches, that freedom and religion, are inseparable. Any revolutionary movement dedicated to the ideal of freedom which attempts to eliminate God from its midst, will eventually end in human enslavement instead of human betterment.

The French revolution was born amidst the shouts of liberty, equality and fraternity. But no sooner was God banished from its program, no sooner was religion of faith, replaced by what was termed “religion of freedom,” then it turned into a reign of terror and an age of the guillotine.

The Soviet revolution in 1917 promised to liberate the enslaved millions of that backward country. Today, forty years later, some 200 million people are shut off from every outside contact by an impenetrable iron curtain. These and numerous other historic experiences prove conclusively, that where there is no God there can be no freedom.

The fourth Shabbat is known as פרשת החודש. On that Shabbat we read החֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים - “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months.”⁴⁵⁴ The word “לְכֶם - unto you” is significant, and the sages derived from it a remarkable idea. There are some people who believe that man is not the master of his own destiny. They openly assert that man’s destiny, is predetermined and that nothing within our power can alter or improve it. In our age of atomic and hydrogen bombs, these

⁴⁵⁴ Shemot 12:2

people have turned prophets of doom and forecast the end of all civilization. Judaism rejects this philosophy. Man is the architect of his own future, as is stated in our Torah “I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse, therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, both thou and thy seed.” “This month shall be unto you,” our sages observe, “means that the month is fully within your control.” Thus the fourth preparatory step essential to the acquisition of freedom, is the acceptance of the philosophy, that man is the captain of his boat, and can steer it in accordance with his aims, convictions and aspirations.

We, in our age, have lived to see our people regain some of its freedom. We have, thank God, a free and independent state of Israel. Let us hope and pray that the marvellous qualities which led to the creation of the new State, will become the cornerstone of its national existence, and will bring to our people everlasting glory and perpetual freedom.

Shabbat Parah: It’s all in the Preparation (Barmitzvah - David)

There’s a classical tale told of Laurence of Arabia. He once brought with him from Arabia five uncouth, uneducated Arabs on a visit to London. They stayed at a very fashionable West End Hotel while seeing all the sights of London.

After several weeks, as they were preparing to return to Arabia, Lawrence suddenly noticed that each Arab was taking with him more luggage than he came with. He was naturally curious and suspicious at this so he went up to one of the Arabs and asked him to show him what was in the extra case. To his utter amazement and astonishment, he found that the case was full of taps which the Arab had taken from the sinks and baths of the Hotel.

He asked the Arab why he did this? And the Arab told him! “We will soon be returning to Arabia where the dazzling sun heats down mercilessly by day, to parch the throat and to scorch the body. How wonderful it would be then, if while walking through the barren sands of Arabia, if we could just take out a tap from one of our packets and have a drink whenever we wanted to satiate our thirst and to invigorate our spirits.”

When he heard this, Lawrence laughed and replied. “How stupid of you! Don’t you realise that taps alone don’t give water. They have to be connected to pipes and the pipes have to be connected to a reservoir, that contains the water to supply the taps. In the deserts of Arabia, the taps are of no use without reservoirs!”

My friends! We are living in an era of revolution. Whenever we turn, whatever we do, we find now discoveries and new ideas, revolutions of all kinds are taking place

before our very eyes; Social dangers, nationalistic uprisings, differences in ways of living, economic clashes, great changes in the world of science.

Who would have thought, say 50 years ago, of the possibility of penicillin, Television, atomic energy and the conquest of space etc. No one however, would for one moment accept that all these changes are like the taps of Lawrences' Arabs, turned on just at will. They are all the result of intensive thought and preparation. They are all the product of serious thinking and careful preparation.

One has only to think of the amount of preparation, careful study, and patience needed in launching one space rocket. And yet, in spite of continued failure, man's unquenchable thirst for knowledge drives him to work harder and more intensely to achieve his objective. Yet when it comes to the realm of religion, our age seems to think, that religion is like a tap, you just turn it on for a while, and immediately it gushes forth with refreshing water if the spirit.

How often do we learn these days of people complaining that they don't get anything out of religion, that it doesn't do anything for them. Most people regard religion as some kind of tap that can be turned on and off at will.

Our sages fully understood the significance of preparation. Just as a Musician or any other artist, before he starts his work, he will endeavor to get himself into the proper mood and create the desirable conditions and favourable atmosphere in which to do his work, equally so, in the fulfillment of מצוות of Gods service and commandments, there's what we call the הכנה למצוה preparation for the מצוה.

It's necessary to prepare oneself properly, for without the proper preliminary preparation, the מצוה itself cannot and will not be performed thoughtfully, significantly or impressively.

Before the Jew commences the act of a מצוה he says הנני מוכן ומזומן לקיים מצוה "I am ready and prepared for the accomplishment of the Mitzvah.!!!". This idea that the proper preparation is necessary in order to perform any religious task, is found throughout Jewish traditional law and practice.

It's so with the observance of holidays and Sabbaths. We have an ערב פסח before Passover, and ערב שבת before the Sabbath, and an ערב יום טוב before each holiday. Without the preparations of the ערב יום טוב, the יום טוב itself cannot be celebrated properly. Therefore not only the מצוה, but also the הכנה - the act of preparation before doing the מצוה - is important. As a matter of fact, in Yiddish or Hebrew, we rarely hear the name for Friday used. It's almost always referred to as ערב שבת. For without the ערב שבת and the ערב יום טוב, there's no Shabbat and no יום טוב. The ערב שבת and the ערב יום טוב become integral parts of the holidays themselves.

Our Sages in the Talmud instruct us to prepare ourselves before prayer so as to get into the mood and pray with heart and mind, not only with lips. Hence, the פסוקי דזמרה are intended as a preface to the Tefillah, to the prayer, to put one into the spirit, to put one in the proper frame of mind which is required for the Tefillah.

One has to have also the proper atmosphere conducive to prayer or other services to God. That's why our Synagogues should be so designed, as to afford solemn and inspirational atmosphere. That's one of the answers to the arguments: Why go to pray in a Synagogue? One may ask, can we not pray in one's own home as well as in the Synagogue?

The truth is that besides תפילה בציבור, the inspiration of public service of an entire assembly, besides this there's in the Synagogue a more favourable atmosphere which certainly helps to bring one into the mood of prayer with fewer objects to distract one's attention. The object of the Synagogue is to prepare us to be in the mood for prayer.

We find an excellent example of the importance of preparation, in the four special Shabbaths, in the ארבע פרשיות that serve as the forerunners to the approach of the great festival of Pessach. This Sabbath is שבת פרה, the third of the four special Shabbaths. Through the ארבע פרשיות our minds become attuned to a right conception of the significance of freedom, in order to appreciate fully the purpose and meaning of the great Festival of Freedom. Only if we are properly prepared, will it enter our hearts and abide with us in the days that follow.

My Dear David! This is a proud day for you, for those who love you, and indeed for all the members of This Congregation. Today, you take your place as a full member of the House of Israel. When a boy reaches the age of thirteen, he is designated a "Bar Mitzvah." The term "Bar Mitzvah" is derived from the two Hebrew words: "Bar," meaning "precept." The young boy of thirteen thus becomes a "son of the precept," spiritually mature to assume his religious responsibilities as a full-fledged member of his people. I have commenced my Sermon with the story of Lawrence of Arabia and the Arabs because I wanted you to know that a Bar Mitzvah cannot just be switched on and off like a tap. A son of the commandments is a boy who prepares himself for this great day, long time before, but the preparation for the Bar Mitzvah is only the ערב יום טוב – the real test comes after the Bar Mitzvah by the application and implementation of all you have learned up till now.

You, my dear David, have made a very good start by your excellent rendering of the הפטרה and מפטיר. You have this reflected great credit upon us all. But my advice to you on this important day of your life is not to rest on your laurels, not to be content and satisfied with your splendid achievement, but to be prepared to add to your knowledge. From now onwards you must study hard, you must give plenty of time

and devotion to the Jewish side of your development, to Jewish culture, to Jewish ideas, to Jewish knowledge. You must train yourself in Jewish living, by Shabbat, Tefillin, and achieve Jewish service in some form or another. This should not be very difficult for you. You come from a very good Jewish family and we are pleased to welcome here in the Synagogue this morning your two Grandmothers, Uncles, relatives and friends as well as your dear parents and Brother. It is my fervent hope and prayer that these words enter deeply into your heart and soul, thus you will become a blessing to yourself, to your dear parents and a source of pride to all Israel.

MISCELANEOUS SERMONS

Tzitzit, Tefillin and Shul Attendance (Barmitzvah - Ian)

My dear Ian! Whenever a Bar Mitzvah boy stands before me, I find myself wondering what is in his mind.

This Bar Mitzvah day, and the Bar Mitzvah week preceding, is a very exciting time. The Bar Mitzvah boy begins to feel very important. Everybody pays him special attention. He receives many gifts, and he thinks of them. He receives many good wishes and he thinks of them too.

But I wonder whether, in the midst of these pleasant distractions, he has time to think of himself and of the duties to which he pledges himself on his Bar Mitzvah day. That is what a Jewish boy should do - think of his duties first, of his rights afterwards.

Within these few minutes that I shall be speaking to you, my dear Ian, I should like you to think with me of what your Bar Mitzvah day should really mean to you. From now onwards you are to put on your **תפילין** every day; they point out to you what Jewish duty is. They show you how to remember your duties. They tell you how to live up to them.

To be a Jew means to practice what the **שמוע** teaches, to love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might. To love God means to obey His will and honour His Torah all the days of your life.

As you grow older you may begin to question the necessity and the importance of being observant. As you grow older you may meet people who will complain that Judaism is burdensome, and that complete observance is too difficult in present times. I sincerely hope that you will never be influenced by the weakness of these arguments and realize that these arguments are only an excuse for not observing;

not the reason. Perhaps I can best illustrate what I mean by telling you an interesting little story:

There's an ancient story about a king who wanted to pick the wisest man among his subjects to be his Prime Minister. Finally, the search narrowed down to just three men, and he decided to put them to the supreme test.

He placed the three of them in a room in his palace, and on the door of the room he had fixed a lock made up of levers, buttons, curious numbers and symbols. The lock was the last word in mechanical ingenuity, and intricate looking in its complexity. The three candidates were then informed that the first one to succeed in opening the door should be appointed to the post of his honour and would be made Prime Minister. The three men immediately set themselves to the task of opening the lock.

The first man began to manipulate its complicated array of levers and buttons. His efforts, however, were in vain. The lock would not budge.

The second man resolved to attack the problem in a more systematic fashion. He began at once to work out complicated mathematical formulas, to discover the proper lock combination.

The third man, however, stared at the lock for a moment and then, without bothering, without any fuss and bother, got up, walked to the door, and turned the handle. The door immediately opened to his touch. It had been unlocked all the time.

That story illustrates, I think beautifully, the point I am trying to impress upon you this morning. Unfortunately, there's a tendency among many of us to look for excuses and reasons why it's difficult to be observant, and to discharge the obligations which membership in our people carries with it.

Like the first two men in the story, we sit back and search for all kinds of motives and pretexts, without even trying the lock; without even making an honest attempt to observe. And if you don't try, the door must always remain locked and Judaism must always remain a closed door to us. If we would only take the trouble of first trying the door, if we would only make an honest attempt to be observant, we would find that Judaism is neither as complex, nor as difficult, as many of us think it to be.

Coming to this Shul should be to you, my dear Ian, a pleasure and an inspiration.

As you know, your late Grandparents were regular worshippers in this Synagogue. Two beautiful curtains for the Ark have been donated to our Shul - one for the High Holy Days, and the other to be used all the year round. By this gift, their memory has been perpetuated not only in the hearts of their children, but also in the

community. By making these beautiful presentations, they have brought to our Shul much joy and happiness, because a פרוכת beautifies and enhances the ארון הקודש, and although they are no longer with us, nevertheless their spirit, their motives, their ideas continue to live and will inspire not only their children and grandchildren, but all who worship in this Synagogue.

Now Ian, you have already made a good start by reading the מפטיר והפטרה so well, you have thus reflected great credit upon your teachers and upon your parents and family.

But this is only the beginning of your Jewish life. I want you to remember the observances, for example, of putting on the תפילין and wearing ציצית. These are not protective charms. Their value is essentially educational and moral in order that you may remember and do all my commandments and be holy unto your God - למען תזכרו ועשיתם את כל מצותי והייתם קדושים לאלהיכם.⁴⁵⁵

I want you to remember also to continue your Hebrew Studies and to come to Shul regularly. Then your Bar Mitzvah will be meaningful and develop into a man and Jew who will be a credit to your family and a source of pride to your people.

The embroidered picture of life (Barmitzvah - Howard)

A little boy who was watching his grandmother embroidering a tablecloth. Standing at her knee, he watched her needle threading itself in and out. He saw the needle coming through the cloth in rapid stitches.

“What are you making Bubbe?”, the little boy asked.

“I am making a picture, my child”, said the grandmother.

But “Bubbe,” objected the little boy. “This is no picture! I can’t see any picture! I can only see a jumble of colours and loose ends of thread! Look - I can pull a thread out if I want to!”.

“Don’t do that!” said the Bubbe, “you will spoil the pattern. Have patience and I’ll show you the picture”.

The old lady then turned the cloth over on the right side, where a beautiful picture was taking shape. “You see, my child,” she said from the wrong side, “it looks, like a mixed-up mess of threads and colours, but it isn’t mixed up at all if you can look at the right side.”

Now! The whole of life can be compared to an embroidery. Some lives are coloured, showing joy and goodness. Others are shaded in sombre and darker tones. Some are torn short, and others dangle helplessly like loose ends. Many times we wonder if

⁴⁵⁵ Bemidbar 15:40

there's any meaning at all to this enigma which is called life; everything seems so madly haphazard. After all, what plan can there be in sudden tragedy, what plan can there be in agony and suffering, or for that matter in unexpected joy and happiness? We, who look at life from the vantage point of that little boy at his grandmother's knee, cannot see it. And sometimes in our blindness, we tug at a loose end, not realising that we may be upsetting a beautiful pattern which is taking shape on the other side. Only through faith, can we learn something about the true pattern of our lives. Only through Torah can we make sure that all the strands of our life will fit properly.

My dear Howard! Today, you have become a Bar Mitzvah. The term "Bar Mitzvah" is derived from the two Hebrew words: "Bar" meaning "son of", and "Mitzvah" meaning "precept." When a young boy reaches the age of thirteen, he becomes "a son of the precept" and spiritually mature to assume his religious responsibilities as a full-fledged member of his people.

I am sure that there have been many times in the past when you have thought that the Mitzvot like the teachings about putting on the Tefillin, Arba Kanfot, and coming to Shul, observing customs and ceremonies, coming to Cheder and learning Chumash, they all seem to be mixed up and remote from your daily life. I should like to remind you, my dear Howard, that all the Mitzvahs form part of the religious pattern which make up your life as a Jew.

Be strong (Bar Mitzvah - Garry)

My dear Garry! To you, who have today become a fully-fledged member of our ancient race, to you, who from today, must assume the full responsibility for your actions even as you must reap the full reward for your good deeds, to you who have today pledged yourself to honour and to observe the Judaism which it's your privilege, as a Jew, to cherish, to you, what more fitting lesson can I address, than the words which King David addressed to his son, Solomon. "וְחַזַּקְתָּ וְהָיִיתָ לְאִישׁ" "Be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man."⁴⁵⁶

To you my dear Garry! I would say this moment: "Be thou strong and show thyself a man." And in entering the period of your manhood, you can have no better method of achieving that ideal, than that expressed by King David himself וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת מִשְׁמֶרֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכָּיו לְשָׁמֵר חֻקֹּתָיו מִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו "Keep the charge of the Lord thy God to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His Commandments, and His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to that which is written in the Law of Moses."⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ Melachim I 2:2

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid. 2:3

You will note that these words follow upon the words **וְחִזְקֶתָּ וְהָיִיתָ לְאִישׁ** “Be thou strong and show thyself a man.”

Remember, always, that it is only by these means, that you may become a true **אִישׁ** and remember too, that only thereby, may you become a true Jew. For to be a Jew, is to be a member of a great brotherhood in which the safety, the welfare, and the honour, of all are in the keeping of each. **כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹרְבִים זֶה לַזֶּה** “All Israel stand surety for one another,” To be a Jew is to stand firm against temptation and corrupt example from far and near; it may entail sacrifices of comfort, pleasure, and convenience, it may entail, being content to suffer privation, and hardship, for one’s faith and people, to answer all detractors by a blameless life. To be a Jew means to love, to honour, and to respect parents, to revere teachers and to lead the upright life. To be a Jew, means that you are not Bar Mitzvah for today only, but a Bar Mitzvah for the whole of your life.

“Keep the charge of the Lord thy God... according to that which is written in the Law of Moses.” So may you be blessed as Solomon was blessed. **לְמַעַן תִּשְׁפִּיל אֶת כָּל** **אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר תִּפְנֶה שָׁמָּה** “that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest and whither soever thou turnest thyself.”⁴⁵⁸

Today we are fortunate in having a double Simcha. It seems to becoming a custom in this Synagogue and I may add a very good one, that we celebrate 2 Simchas at one time.

In addition to our Bar Mitzvah, we have a young man who so very long ago, also was a Bar Mitzvah boy in this Shul. I refer to David Minkoff, who this weekend is becoming engaged and like a true son of his father and Grandfather has come to offer a prayer of thanksgiving to the Almighty for bringing him to this happy day and I am sure, I am echoing the sentiments of all the congregation, when I convey to these two Ba’alei Simchas our best wishes for their future happiness and wellbeing.

The joy of mitzvot (Barmitzvah - Stephen)

My dear Stephen! This is a proud day for you, for those who love you, and indeed for all the members of this congregation. Today you take your place as a full member of the House of Israel.

There are some Jews who do not realise that to be a good Jew, one must be happy. They think, that to be a good Jew one must be sad, miserable, and melancholy.

But our Sages tell us, that the **שְׂכִינָה** – the divine presence - does not abide with him, who is unhappy. They tell us that God wants the Jew, and especially the Jewish boy,

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

to be jolly and full of the strength of happiness, all his life. The phrase which I should like you to remember is שמחה של מצוה which means “Joy of the Mitzvah.”

A Jew ought to be happy when he fulfills a מצוה. Every מצוה that you fulfil makes Jewish parents stronger and happier, for there’s nothing that makes Jewish parents prouder than good Jewish children, and there’s nothing which makes them sadder than children who are disloyal to our Holy Faith.

The Hebrew word for “children” is בנים which means “Builders.” They are called such, because the children build up, what their parents have started to build. Every child adds something to what his father has done. Nobody will build a house strong, if he’s not happy in building it, nobody will build a house well, if he doesn’t do his work with joy. God does not want us to think of מצות as burdens. They are not meant to be burdens to us. They are meant to be pleasures. A Jewish boy is happy when he fulfills a מצוה happy for himself, happy for his parents.

As you grow older you may meet people who will complain that Judaism is burdensome, and that complete observance is too difficult at present times. As you grow older, you may meet people, who will say, that they believe in the great truths of Judaism, but they find it difficult to understand why the small, ritual details are so important.

I sincerely hope, my dear Stephen, that that you will never be influenced by the weakness of these arguments. I hope that you will realise, that these arguments are only an excuse for not observing, not the reason. Perhaps I can best illustrate what I mean, by telling you an interesting little story:

There was once a thief, who although he would steal from everyone else, would never steal from a Synagogue. This he thought would be sacrilege. He would never commit such a crime. One cold winter night, he went out to rob a home. He was desperate. Too many people were in the streets and he was afraid that he might be seen. The temptation was great, but he promised himself that he wouldn’t go near the Synagogue. He wouldn’t start with God. As his strength was slowly sapped by the cold night, and still there was no prospect of gain, he thought to himself, perhaps there might be something valuable on the roof of the Synagogue. Surely, he thought to himself, that would be no concern of God’s. It would not be stealing from the Synagogue. He climbed up and began to feel around in the dark. Suddenly, he felt a chunk of rusty iron, it was a screw and a bolt. He unscrewed it slowly, when suddenly, there was a loud crash like a thunderbolt. The giant, golden chandelier, suspended from this rusty screw had fallen and shattered into a million pieces.

This story illustrates, I think beautifully, the point I am trying to impress upon you this morning.

There's an unfortunate tendency among many of us to look upon the small, ritual details as of no importance. I urge you to avoid such a conclusion, and through your loyalty to the mitzvot, both those considered large and small, I am sure that you will be a source of pride to your family, to our community, and to the Jewish people!

The light of the Jews

The story is told of a young doctor who recently embarked on a ship for China. His friends pleaded with him not to take the trip. "Look", they said, "You are absolutely helpless against the suffering of the giant nation. You will disappear in that vast mass of humanity. What can you do about epidemics? What can you accomplish against war, famine, flood?" As he stepped up the gangway, the doctor gave this significant answer: "When it's dark about me, I do not curse the darkness. I just light my candle."

Have you ever wondered why a light was chosen to represent the memory of the dead? What is it that makes a light suggestive of a human life?

It is told that one of the ancient Rabbis was expounding the verse **נֵר ה' נְשִׁמַת אָדָם**, "the lamp of God is the soul of man"⁴⁵⁹. One of his disciples asked him, "Why a lamp?". The master answered "A light is the mightiest thing in all the world. Not all the darkness in the vast expanses of the universe can quench even the tiniest flicker of a light. It sends out its rays into the distance, straight unbending rays piercing the uttermost recesses of night."

But a light is also the weakest thing in all the world. Even only the breath of your mouth will put it out. A blast of nothingness extinguishes it. What all the powers of darkness cannot accomplish can be done by **הַבַּל פֶּה**, by the seeming nothingness that comes out of the mouth & the breath of idle thought can quench the flames of the soul. So too is it with the soul of man.

Of course, man possesses the five senses: Sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. The animals, too, have these senses. All our bodily functions, though differing in detail, are essentially the same as those of the animals.

But what is it that makes a human being radically different from the animal? What makes man the crown of creation? Is it intelligence? The fact is that animals also have understanding, although of a limited nature. Is it not written "the ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's trough"⁴⁶⁰. Recently, scientists have shown that animals can be taught amazing tricks. What, then, makes man more than just a clever animal?

⁴⁵⁹ Mishlei 20:27

⁴⁶⁰ Yeshayahu 1:3

It is written 'ראשית חכמה יראת ה', "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord". Physical senses, native intelligence, animals also have, but חכמה, wisdom, is something which distinguishes man alone. This חכמה is not just understanding. This חכמה is 'יראת ה', reverence & awe. These are characteristics of man alone. The sense of יראת הרוממות, the ability to stand awestruck before the mighty and glorious works of the creator, is something which only man possesses.

When I see the heavens, the work of God, I feel in every limb of mine His presence. The animal cares only about that which has immediate reference to it. Is it food, or is it shelter? It is pleasant for me, or it is perhaps an enemy? The yearning to be aware of the מקומו של עולם – the all-present and all transcending reality of God, that is the faculty of the human soul. 'ראשית חכמה יראת ה', the beginning of human wisdom is the fear of God. This is the essence of the soul of man.

This power of the soul is likened to a נר, a lamp. On the one hand it is the mightiest of all created forces in the world. Impelled by his thirsting after God, man becomes but a little lower than divine. He becomes a partner in creation. Out of the raw materials of nature, he can fashion a world of good, of plenty, of trust and of beauty.

But just as a light, it is also the feeblest of all things. נר ה' נשמת אדם – "the Lamp of the Lord is the soul of man". In its strength, there's light; in its weakness, there's darkness.

How different is our Jewish attitude in this respect from that which has been displayed time and time again, by the tyrants who have ruled the world during various eras of history. The march of many nations, such as Rome, Germany & Russia has succeeded in extinguishing many of the lights of civilization. The German Fuhrer took pride in putting out the lights of learning by burning books, burning Synagogues, and suppressing various cultural and intellectual activities. The march of Roman legions across the plains of Europe & Asia was accompanied by the attempt to extinguish the lights of Judea. And our function throughout the ages has been נר ה' נשמת אדם, to kindle the light of Torah, the light of Judaism. This was the historic role & responsibility of Israel.

It is in this spirit that I extend to you this Shabbat morning a very cordial welcome in our temporary abode, and we look forward in the rebuilding of our new shul which will radiate light in our hearts & souls – אמן!

Peace in the community

One of the most beautiful sentences in our prayer book is the one which says: 'ה' עז לַעֲמוֹ יִתֵּן יְהוָה יְבָרֶךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם - "The Lord will give strength unto His people, the Lord will bless His people with peace"⁴⁶¹

This verse used in the Friday evening service assures us that the strength we derive from on high leads to peace which brings contentment to every human heart. Peace is one of the greatest gems in life. Peace in our hearts, peace with our fellowman, peace with the world, these are beautiful goals to work for. What greater blessing can there be for a nation than the blessing of peace! "Great is peace", say our Rabbis, "for it brings all blessings"⁴⁶².

All through Judaism we find a great hope for peace. The last of the eighteen blessings - שמונה עשרה - is a plea for peace - עוֹשֵׂה שָׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו, "May he who maketh peace in His high heavens, make peace for us all Israel."

The greeting of one Jew to another is "Shalom". Peace.

The Sages of old realized that although the word is a simple one, nevertheless it has many meanings. There is an inner peace which each of us must find "the peace of mind". If a man must fight with himself, if a person is torn apart by inner confusion, he can never be happy.

There is another peace - the peace of home. It is true that a man and wife are not expected to be of one mind or opinion at all times. Such things are impossible. In fact, it is just these very contrasts which go to make up the interest of sharing life together.

But contrasts do not mean that there can be no harmony. Many and wife may discuss many matters, try to persuade one another of the correctness of their attitudes, but this must not lead to war. The Jewish home has always been a peaceful one, where all problems have been solved peacefully.

The Sabbath candles, we are told, are symbolic of home peace. Because peace must come when husbands and wives always stand together in light, never hiding in the darkness of distrust and suspicion.

And finally there's universal peace - the peace of the community, which influences our lives and hopes.

⁴⁶¹ Tehillim 29:11

⁴⁶² Midrash Bemidbar Rabbah 11:6

Our Sages tried to express this ideal of peace by comparing it to three things we see about us every day: rivers, a pot, and a bird. The sages say when a man dreams of these things - a river, a bird or a pot - it symbolizes peace.⁴⁶³

The question which goes to the heart of the matter is simply this: How is this possible? The rivers, symbolized universal peace to the sages, because they are symbolic of unity. All waters flow into the rivers and finally find their way to the oceans. True peace comes when all men can find those common factors which are necessary to our well-being and unite around them.

The bird is symbolic of self-peace. The bird is unconsciously a symbol of contentment and the determination to adjust one's self to conditions. Whether it is in the cage, or on a tree, the little creature continues to sing and chirp. That is what we must all do - learn how to find inner peace of mind and contentment to achieve happiness.

You find the same thing in the life of people. There's a kind of inner "sunshine" that we call spiritual light. It is hard to describe. You cannot see it. But you can feel its warmth.

You know that it is present in your very soul. It is a kind of inner light that no money can buy. People who are religious usually know what this light is. Religion brings it to the heart. We feel that light within us, when we pray, when we do good for others, and when we help our fellow man. How fortunate are those who know what this inside sunshine is.

The pot, however, is a symbol of peace that exists between differences. It contains water, it boils over the fire and yet it creates that harmony between two different elements which permit both to cooperate and give us our food.

So must be learn how to harmonize our differences and achieve the goals we seek. I therefore welcome this Shabbat to celebrate שלום in our community.

WEDDINGS & WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Wedding drasha

You are standing today under the Chuppah about to be joined together in marriage according to the Laws of Moses and Israel.

The moment for which you have long been waiting and preparing is here. In a few moments your dreams of many years will become a reality. Soon you will be united in the bonds of holy matrimony.

⁴⁶³ Brachot 56b

On this sacred solemn occasion in your lives, we all wish you here every joy and happiness and the true fulfilment of all the desires of your hearts for good. It's our earnest prayer and wish that you will many years to come, look back upon this day, as the beginning of your ever-increasing great joy spiritual fulfilment and abiding happiness.

While you were awaiting the arrival of your bride, you - my dear Harold - empowered us to execute on your behalf a **כתובה**, or contract of marriage. This **קבלת קנין** was of the civil document which records your intention to marry this Bride and her acceptance of you. In a few moments you will place a ring on her finger and in our ancient formula, you will make her your Bride according to the Laws of Moses and of Israel. This act which you do is not merely symbolical. It's the ancient legal formula of our people going back to Biblical times. It means that you are married by civil contract.

But in so far as we are concerned there's no such thing as civil contract of marriage. The very act is described by the Hebrew word **קדושין** - sanctification. You now become one another's in a special relationship: you are **מקדש** your wife, and she becomes **מקודשת**; you hallow your wife, and she becomes hallowed. Could anything be more beautiful? There's no such thing as love, honour, and obey. These are all feeble terms in comparison with our ancient ideal of marriage. You are to hallow one another's lives. We all have physical desires and impulses, in marriage, in **קדושין**, these are now hallowed. We all make great friendships, in marriage, your friendship is hallowed. We labour together in many causes, your mutual efforts henceforth shall be hallowed. You will both act kindly, lovingly, and charitably towards your fellowman. You will live and mingle in human society -for sociability is the quality which marks man out of the brute, but to each other there's a special unique and personal relationship. You are consecrated, hallowed to one another.

What does that mean in actual life? Does it mean that you will each expect the other to be a sort of holy angel in life, never descending from a pedestal, never making a mistake, never deviating from some sentimentally idealistic standard? Nothing of the sort. Just as this hallowing in Jewish marriage arises out of a simple legal formula and act, so also the hallowing of life, arises out of the small mundane acts of everyday life. You will be kindly and considered towards one another. You will never let your relationships become stale or formal. You will be thoughtful, you will be faithful and constant. You will carry on your lives exactly as you did before, except for one fundamental thing, whereas before you only tried occasionally to love your neighbour as yourself **וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ** - now you will do it. You will always put your partner in your own place before you do anything. A great unselfishness will be the basis of your attitude each towards his partner.

Of course, it's not easy to find the simple secret of this hallowing of life. Some people in fact think that it's impossible to find in the level of everyday life. They imagine marriage must be a perpetual honeymoon a lifelong continuance of the passionate experience of early love and romance. But life is not lived on these rarefied levels, it's lived on the plains of existence and there develops best and most normally.

The way to find how to live the quiet life in holiness has been shown to us in the way of Judaism. Judaism finds its strength in the simplicity of its practical organization. It does not go in for the loud preachment of great ideals, though it has these ideals, it insists on Mitzvoth, on the performance of simple daily acts. The Sabbath candles on Friday Evening, the koshering of food, the dietary laws, the regular prayers, the hundred and one simple little acts of piety and love which gradually build up the hallowed and dedicated life. Therefore, my dear Bride and Bridegroom, I say to you, if you would find happiness and this sense of dedication of one to the other seek the way of it in a practice of Judaism in your home.

My dear Roselyn, I want you to feel that your attitude, your patience, your happy co-operation can make or mar the happiness of whose partner you now become.

My dear Harold, I want you to realize that upon you will depend the happiness of Roselyn now entrusted in your care. You are fortunate indeed in being chosen a Bride that is not only beautiful outwardly but has inner comeliness as well. A rare privilege is yours. You are marrying into a family that has a wonderful record of service to our community.

I am certain that love and companionship will be yours and the blessings that go with happy married life.

Commenting upon the words of the Psalmist "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, then I would fly and be at rest,"⁴⁶⁴ the Rabbis ask why does the Psalmist emphasize the Dove? They answer. "All other birds when tired rest upon a rock or upon the branch of a tree, not so the Dove, when the Dove tires she does not cease flying, she rests one wing and flies with the other."

So too can marriage be compared to the dove, when one partner is tired, weary, and depressed, then it's the duty of the other partner to be all the more cheerful, encouraging and helpful. The Jewish marriage ceremony is therefore of a dual character. It's a קנין a partnership agreement – "a matter of give and take", and also קדושין a sacred bond based on love and faith.

This then is the charge we would give you on this solemn occasion. May you find in each other the true fulfillment of all the desires of your heart. May those round about you also find in your marriage an increasing demonstration of the holiness and

⁴⁶⁴ Tehillim 55:7

sanctity of the Jewish home. May you both be blessed in each other, and in all your ways. And may God keep you and bless you both for many long years together אמן.

The four corners of the Chuppah

The hour of your standing under the canopy is the holiest and the most important of your lives. The day of Atonement is called the Holy Day, because it occurs only once a year. How much holier is your wedding day as it occurs only once in your life!

Our Sages have compared the wedding to the day of the giving of the Torah. There, under Mount Sinai, stood the congregation of Israel, and the Almighty made an everlasting treaty with them according to the Ten Commandments that contain all the laws and statutes of the Torah.

From then, Judah became His sanctity and He promised not to change them for another people, as it is written וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם - “And I will betroth them unto me forever”⁴⁶⁵. And here you stand under the canopy, entering the bond of marriage that is also termed holy because this covenant is holy and sacred, and will never be annulled or destroyed.

The marriage day, therefore, is compared to the day of the giving of the Torah.

The חופה - under which you stand now - represents the home and the house you propose to build for yourself. A house is made up of four corners. There must be corners in order to have a house. These four poles, or canopy pillars, represent the corners of your house. If both of you will hold two poles together, there will be the nucleus - the beginning of a home. In the words of the Psalmist: אֲשַׁתְּךָ בְּגִפְנוֹ פִּרְיָהּ - “Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine in the corners of your house”⁴⁶⁶; בְּנֵשֶׁתַי לִשְׁלֹחַנִי - your children “like olive plants, round about your table”⁴⁶⁷.

If two pillars will be held and supported by husband and wife conjointly, God will send down two angels to hold the other two pillars so as to make a complete home. But if, God forbid, you will not hold together the two poles assigned to you, there will be no semblance of a home, and there will be no use for God to send down His two angels. Such an edifice, if it can be called an edifice, must totter and fall. Therefore, my dear Chatan and Kallah, you must see to it that the four corners of your home be always upheld, two by husband and wife, and the other two by God’s angels.

⁴⁶⁵ Hoshea 2:21

⁴⁶⁶ Tehillim 128:3

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

Build your home upon morality, holiness and sanctity. Let love and peace reign in your home, so that you may become a blessing to your family and an honour to the household of Israel. Let a union of feelings of mutual understanding, mutual sympathy and love mark the tenor of your life. **אמן**.

Silver wedding anniversary Mr. & Mrs. Woolf

Today is a very happy Shabbat for our shul. For in our shul this morning we have a couple known to you all who this week are celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. I refer of course to Mr. & Mrs. Max Woolf. Max Woolf is known to all of us as the vigorous & energetic Chairman of the Rebuilding Fund, & is in charge of supervising the building of our new Synagogue. I am sure that he spends far more time in the new Synagogue than he does either at home or in his business. Ask his wife Millie if anybody wants to contact Max or if any friends come to visit him, she knows where to find him in the Synagogue in Clifford Way.

But her patience, encouragement & her forbearance, I am sure, will be amply rewarded in the knowledge that she & her husband are helping to build a sacred edifice which will serve future generations to come.

It's therefore fitting & appropriate that a couple who have given so much time & valuable service should come to our shul surrounded by family & friends to offer prayers of thanks to the Almighty for having brought them to this milestone in their lives.

To be born with a silver spoon in your mouth is counted as a blessing, but to have lived in happiness together for 25 years & to celebrate as does Max & Millie today a silver wedding anniversary is both a blessing and an accomplishment & I am sure that I am echoing the sentiment of you all when I extend to them both our heartiest felicitations and congratulations on this very happy occasion.

We in the synagogue are very proud of them & deeply appreciate all that they have done & are doing to help us in our sacred task in our community.

At the Kiddush following the service, I understand that a presentation will be made to them as a token of our appreciation, and as I do not wish to trespass in this field, I should like to conclude that its our fervent hope & prayer that the Almighty will bless them with good health & strength and to have nachas from their dear children & to celebrate in the course of time their Golden Wedding together – **באהבה ושמחה – וכל טוב אמן**!

Aufruf of Melvyn Singer

An artist who had painted many beautiful pictures was still not satisfied. He was still searching for the ideal - "the one". In his search along a road, he met a wise old man who asked him where he was going.

“I don’t know,” said the artists, “I want to paint the most beautiful thing in the world. Perhaps you can direct me to it?”

“How simple,” said the old man. “In any religion or creed you will find it. Faith is the most beautiful thing in the world”.

The artist travelled on. Later he met a young bride and he asked her if she know what was the most beautiful thing in the world.

“Love,” she replied. “Love transforms poverty into riches; it sweetens sorrow; it makes much of little. Without it there’s no beauty.”

Still, the artists continued his search.

Suddenly, a weary soldier crossed his path, and when the artists asked him the same question, he answered: “Peace is the most beautiful thing in the world. War, strife, discord is the most ugly. Whenever you find peace, you are sure to find beauty.”

Judaism, too, recognized that peace is the most beautiful thing in the world. No other word seems to be so precious in the Hebrew language as that of Shalom. Psalmist and Sage all speak of the urgency of שלום - Peace in the world. The greeting of one Jew to another is שלום עליכם - “Peace be unto you”.

In our day, in particular when individuals are overtaken by anxieties and frustrations, it is most essential for men and women to seek שלום. For after all, what use is there of material possession, physical wellbeing, and illumination, unless the mind of the individual is at peace with himself and the world?

In our tradition, therefore, the greatest blessing we seek for our grooms is peace because all mankind is constantly seeking that blessing.

This morning we have a שמחה in our shul - the calling up of a Chatan, and we are happy to extend a hearty welcome to the Singer family and the mechutanim. Mr. Singer, the father of the Chatan, is known to all of us for his work in the community. Melvyn himself was Barmitzvad in our shul, and our only regret is that his dear mother ע"ה is not here on this very happy occasion. But I am sure that her spirit is with her family today.

I know that I am echoing the sentiments of the whole community when I express to the Singers, and to Melvyn our Chatan, and his bride, and the whole family, our most sincere good wishes for the future well-being and happiness of this very fine young couple.

I pray that the parents will lead their children to the canopy with happy hearts. May they build homes which will bring joy and nachas to their parents, and glory and pride to Israel, and a blessing to humanity. אמן.

Aufruf of Geoffrey Collett

Today is a very happy Shabbat for us for two reasons:

The first is that this week will usher in one of the happiest festivals in the Jewish calendar, ie. the Festival of Purim. On Monday night we shall read the Megillah, and there's one sentence in the Megillah to which I should like to draw your attention this morning: לַיהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשֵׁשׁן וְיָקָר - 'For the Jews there was light, with joy, and gladness, and honour'⁴⁶⁸. This in itself makes it a Simchadike Shabbat!

And the second reason why this is a particularly happy shabbat for our congregation is because this is the first call up of a Chatan in our new shul, and I sincerely hope that this will be the forerunner of many many more for the children of our congregation.

I am particularly happy that the first Chatan be called up today is Geoffrey Collett, my Barmitzvah boy, because his father, Jack Collett, the בֵּהֵן, has devoted a lot of time to our synagogue over many years, and has always responded to any call made upon him by the synagogue or the Ladies Guild.

Mrs. Collett and her sisters, Sissie and Edie, have been members of the Ladies Guild for many years, and indeed the whole family have been loyal and devoted members of our shul.

It does not seem so long ago since I addressed you, Geoffrey, on your Barmitzvah day, and told you to follow the example of your parents to be as sweet and charming as your dear mother, and as sincere and good hearted and loyal as your father. I am very happy to see that you have grown up to be a gentleman: kind, understanding, and helpful.

We are delighted to know that you have chosen a beautiful bride - a lady who comes from a good Jewish home, and I am very pleased to welcome members of her family here this morning.

I pray that both your parents will lead you to the Chuppah tomorrow with happy hearts. May you build a home together which will bring joy and Nachas to your parents, and glory and pride to the whole congregation, and a blessing to humanity.
אמן.

IN MEMORIAL

Dedication of Parochet in memory of Mr. & Mrs. Granofsky

One of the most remarkable features of Pirkei Avot is the variety of views expressed by the authorities recorded therein. Each one of the ancient teachers had his own

⁴⁶⁸ Esther 8:16

particular approach to life's problems. In the Ethics of the Fathers which we read yesterday, Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi - the editor of this collection of spiritual gems - said this: **יְהוּי זְהִיר בְּמִצְוֹת קְלָה בְּבַחֲמוּרָה, שְׂאִין אֶתָּה יוֹדַע מִתֵּן שְׂכָרְךָ שֶׁל מִצְוֹת** - "Be heedful of light precepts as of grave ones, for thou knowest not the reward of each precept"⁴⁶⁹, and it is of the **מִצְוֹת קְלוֹת** - of the little things in life - that I wish to speak to you this afternoon.

Almost everyone these days stresses the importance of bigness. We speak of big business, big buildings, big mortgages, big synagogues and big people. And which one of us doesn't consider himself highly complimented when someone says of us that we do things in a big way?

Of course, the big things in our own lives are important - there's no questions about that. The philanthropist, the inventor, the scientist and the scholar are all doing big things! But what about you and me? What about those whose everyday lives revolve not about the big things in life?

Our Sages, however, had a different attitude towards things. They continued **אַל בּוֹ אֵל בּוֹ, תִּסְתַּכַּל בְּקַנְקָן, אֲלֵא בְּמָה שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ** - "Do not look upon the flask, but on what it contains"⁴⁷⁰.

How true that observation is! Of what good is a big mansion without happiness or a big shul without daveners? What is the use of big business that does little good for the community, or big organisations with petty politics?

In once knew a young man whose mother was a widow. When he was married, he asked her to live with him and his wife, but the mother refused. She preferred to stay on by herself. After a year of loneliness she agreed to live with her son and daughter-in-law. The Mother is now content. Is that a small thing?

A few days ago, a mother boasted to me that it was her perseverance and determination that helped her son to achieve the M.A. degree. She denied herself, she said, the pleasures of the theatre. She rarely attended parties. Her husband worked to provide for the family. He worked to enable her child, to attend the University. Is that a small thing that she was doing?

The other day I was watching a young girl leading a blind man across the street. Her deed went unnoticed by most people in the street, does it make it less big?

No, my friends! - a new and a vastly different conception of **גְּדוּלוֹת** is needed. Some people are bothered with the smallness of the size of the State of Israel; but that is not of supreme importance. That little country has already accomplished great things

⁴⁶⁹ Avot 2:1

⁴⁷⁰ Avot 4:20

for our people and is destined **בע"ה** to play an even more important role in the future history of the Jewish people and of the world. Yes, there are small homes that are heavens on earth, and small synagogues that warm us through and through.

The big things are going wrong all around us today. They have brought us a harvest of fear, hatred and war. What is needed is a new approach and a new emphasis, one that has been proclaimed by an ancient prophet of our people: **לֹא בְחַיִל וְלֹא בְכַח כִּי אֶם-בְּרוּחִי אָמַר יְהוָה יִצְבְּאוֹת לַיהוָה** - “Not by might, nor by power, but my spirit says the Lord”⁴⁷¹.

This afternoon we are witnessing the spirit of a family. This gift of a beautiful Parochet to our Synagogue as a memorial to dearly beloved parents reflects on the Jewishness of the family and on the piety of the parents. It's a demonstration of the love and affection of children for a father and mother who, by their constant care and small acts of devotions towards the children throughout the years, have endeared themselves to their family.

It was my privilege to know the later Mr. & Mrs. Granofsky. They were kind and devoted parents who thought more of their children's welfare than their own. But their kindness was not limited to the family circle and they were always ready to help whoever called upon them. By dedicating this beautiful Parochet which will be used on the holiest days of the year, the memory of Mr. & Mrs. Granofsky will be perpetuated not only in the hearts of their children, but also in the heart of this community. Everytime their children come here to pray on the High Festivals, this Parochet will be before them as a reminder of a dear Father and Mother. Let me read the inscription: **וַיִּשְׂמְחוּ הָעָם עַל-הַתְּנַדָּבָם כִּי בָלַב שְׁלֵם הַתְּנַדְּבוּ לַיהוָה** - “Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly because with perfect heart they offered willingly unto the Lord”⁴⁷². These words are fully applicable to you. “You too rejoice for that you offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly unto the Lord.” May the Almighty bless you & your dear ones, with health, happiness & prosperity. **אמן**

Memorial Window Unveiling: It's not bigness that counts

My friends! We have gathered here this afternoon to pay our tribute of affection and esteem on the occasion of the unveiling of three memorial windows in honour of our dear departed friends: **צדוק ב"ר מרדכי חוה מינדל-ברמטל, מאיר ב"ר אהרון רויזא ב"ר** **אברהם** who have been gathered unto their people, and I am happy to welcome you all here, with the traditional blessings of our people. **ברוכים הבאים** - Blessed are you

⁴⁷¹ Zechariah 4:6

⁴⁷² Divrei HaYamim I 29:9

who have come here this day, to pray in this house of worship, which is the house of God.

I am particularly pleased to welcome here Mr. Lederman, the President of the Federation of Synagogues, who although a very busy man takes a keen and personal interest in each individual Synagogue of the Federation. I am also pleased to welcome here this fine choir, which helps to beautify and enhance the Service.

On this occasion I should like to draw your attention to a very important significant statement which we read in this week's portion of the Law.

וַיְהִי כִּי זָקַן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְהַיֶּינּוּ עֵינָיו מִרְאֵת - “And it came to pass, when Isaac grew old and his eyes were dim that he could not see”, וַיִּקְרָא אֶת עֵשָׂו בְּנוֹ הַגָּדֹל, - “and he called Esav his big son and he asked him to prepare a meal for him”⁴⁷³.

In commenting upon this episode, our Sages inform us that the Almighty took exception to the word גדול, to the adjective big, which Isaac used in describing his son עֵשָׂו. God said to Isaac אַם גָּדוֹל הוּא בְּעֵינֶיךָ - Esav may be big in your eyes but בְּעֵינַי, in my eyes הוא ננס שבננסים, he is a veritable midget.⁴⁷⁴

Many centuries have elapsed since this rebuke, was given to that aging Patriarch. But the truth it expressed is particularly applicable to our generation.

We live in an age, when the stress is on bigness. Almost everyone these days, stresses the importance of bigness. We speak of big business, big buildings, big mortgages, big Synagogues and big people. And which one of us, does not consider himself highly complimented, when someone says of us, that we do things in a big way.

Our Sages, however had a different attitude towards things. They cautioned us: אַל יִבֹּטְךָ מִכֵּל בְּקִנְיָן, אֶלָּא בְּמָה שֵׁנִישׁ בּוֹ - “Do not look upon the flask, but on what it contains.”⁴⁷⁵ How true that observation is! After all, what good is a big mansion without happiness, or a big Shul without daveners? What's the use of Big Business that does little good for the community or Big Organizations with trivial petty politics? No my friends. A new and a vastly different conception of גדלות is needed. It's time that we switched our emphasis from bigness to greatness!!

A story is told of a humble Jew, who wished, to have his son circumcised!! Before the Bris, the Mohel turned to the father and asked him, what name he wanted to give the baby? The father replied by saying. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Solomon.” But why such a big name said the Mohel? “It's simple,” said the happy father. “You see, wealth and social position I wont be able to leave him, let me at

⁴⁷³ Bereishit 27:1

⁴⁷⁴ Based on Bereishit Rabbah 65:11

⁴⁷⁵ Avot 4:20

least, leave him, with a big name.” Jacob, “the small son” Jacob the **בן קטן** would scarcely fit into the modern scheme of life for he was not big in the commonly accepted sense of the word. But in the eyes of Almighty God, it was Jacob, who was really great, and it was Jacob who was chosen by the Almighty to build the soul of a people, and to be the father of the **שבטי יה** of the tribes of the Lord - Jacob was truly a great historical personage.

A story is told of one of the most famous of American lawyers, Max Steiner. When he was still a young and struggling lawyer he appeared, as a Counsel, in a very involved trial. The prosecuting counsel in the case was a large and well-built man of long standing and with much experience. Throughout the trial, this tall lawyer kept on sneering at Max Steiner, and he always sought the opportunity to ridicule and to intimidate the young man. At one point in the trial he shouted: “Why, you little squirt! You dare to oppose me? Don’t you know, that if I wanted to, I could stuff you into my pocket?!” to which Max Steiner is said to have replied. “Yes, I know you could. But if you did, you would have more brains, and more knowledge of the law in your pocket, that you have ever had in your head.”

Yes, my friends! We must realise that it’s not bigness that counts. We ought to teach our children that not size but quality counts. We ought to impress upon them, that the heroes of our people are not Tarzan other Universe, but men like **הפץ חיים** and the Vilna Gaon. Great men and spiritually strong.

Some people are bothered with the smallness of the size of the State of Israel. But that is not of supreme importance. That little country has already accomplished great things for our people, and is destined **בע"ה** to play an even more, important role in the future history of the Jewish people and of the world.

Oh yes! There are small homes that are heavens on earth, and small Synagogues that warm us through and through.

The big things are going wrong all around us today. They have brought of a harvest of fear, hatred and war. Our giants have failed to giant, and our mountains have turned to mole-hills.

Let me explain what I mean!

I once knew a young man whose mother was a widow. When he was married he asked her, to live with him and his wife. But the mother, preferred to stay on, and live by herself. After a year of loneliness she accepted the second offer, to make her home with her son and daughter in-law. The mother is now contented and happy.

Is that a small thing?

A few days ago, a mother boasted to me, that it was her perseverance and determination, that helped her son achieve the M.A degree. She denied herself the pleasures of the Theatre. She rarely attended parties. Her husband worked to provide for the family, and she worked to enable her child to attend the University. The degree was given to her son, but is the mother's achievement less significant? Not long ago, I was watching a young girl, leading a blind man across a busy thoroughfare. Her deed went unnoticed by most people in the street, does it make it less big?

I knew a little boy in my Cheder whose parents gave him a shilling for ice cream, and when he heard, that we were collecting money for "Jewish Childs Day" went back and told his father, that he decided to give the shilling, for Jewish Childs Day. That, was no little thing for the little fellow.

A short while ago, a boy had his Bar Mitzvah in our Shul, his father, was a bedridden invalid in an incurable home. His mother went out to work to keep the family together. But the boy had his Bar Mitzvah and what's more, he had a lovely party. Thanks to the generosity of our President Mr. Freedman and his wife who made the party in their own home. Recently, they opened their Home again for the מצוה of making a Wedding Reception. Is that a small thing?

When I look on the floor of this Synagogue I recall a scene that I saw before Yom Kippur. I have seen our Vice President and a chairman of the Parents Association Mr. Woolf come home after a hard day's work, and I have seen him with his sleeves rolled up and - together with other members of the committee - help to lay the Limo and carpet for the Synagogue and, working for several days without a proper evening meal, after a hard days of work in business. They worked with devotion and enthusiasm, helping to beautify the Synagogue. Is this a small thing?

Mr. Fishman, the third mourner this afternoon, is well known to every member of our community, for his generosity and good will. No function takes place, without a donation or gift, however tired and hardworked he is, no one is ever turned away. His motto is "To give". Is this a small thing?

In a few moments we shall be unveiling these windows. On the surface of it, consecrating windows is indeed a small way, of appreciating all the love, care and devotion, which the loved ones, thus memorialised on these windows, have lavished on their dear ones. A basic moral principle of Judaism is הכרת הטוב – appreciation. "Hakarat Hatov," is more than saying Thank You. It's a recognition of a debt of gratitude that we can never pay. No payment or gift would be commensurate with the act. If this service and these windows are designed merely to express a final thanks to the parent and loved ones then indeed, it's a small thing. If however, the purpose of this ceremony is to further the appreciation of the parents and loved

ones as a step and as a link in the dedication of our hearts and lives to God and to the community, in other words, if the aim and goal of this consecration of windows will be a spur and a valuable stimulus to the donors, to further Communal effort, then this Memorial Service, will have meaning and real purpose. May they rest in peace and may their memories continue to be a source of blessing. תהי נשמתם צרורם - בצרור החיים - May their souls be bound up in the bond of eternal life”

How to live (In memorial to Mr. & Mrs. Silver)

For many centuries, the great philosophers of mankind have tried to supply an answer to the following problem. What is the basic ingredient of the good and the happy life? In other words, what should be the aim, the true goal for a good and happy life?

The ancient Greeks maintained that knowledge is the most important element that man should possess. They believed that the proper use of the human intellect would induce man to lead a good and happy life.

The Epicureans disagreed with this theory. According to them, not knowledge but the quality of equanimity could bring man contentment and peace. “Banish fear” they conjured, avoid anxiety and pain and you will then enjoy the pleasurable bounties of life.

Then there were the Stoics, who argued that only the quality of “will power” was the chief virtue in life. He who could bend his will and control his appetite and desire, was worthy of emulation and praise. In other words, that man who can overcome, that man who can learn to discipline his primitive drives and impulses, that man will lead a good and happy life. As a matter of fact, this theory, falls in line with the teaching of our Sages. According to our teachers, there’s a constant battle going on in life between the forces of good and those of evil. These two forces are not only outside of us, but they reside within our very being. No honest person will deny this fact. There’s on the one hand the evil impulse, which stirs up the bad elements in our nature, causing us to perform deeds which bring sorrow and suffering to other people, and ultimately heap ruin upon our own selves. We refer to this impulse as the יצר הרע. And on the other hand, there’s the יצר הטוב, the force which prompts us to goodness. The Talmud therefore warns us to be constantly on the alert against the allurements and the temptations of the יצר הרע- the evil inclination.

Modern psychology prescribes a different ingredient for which a man should strive in order to enjoy the good life.

Only the other day I finished reading the book by Joshua Lieberman, the great psychologist, and in the opening chapter of the book, the author tells us that once as a young man full of fancy, he decided to draw up a catalogue of the things he

considered to be the most important things in life, and in his catalogue he tabulated a list of earthly desirables, “Health, love, beauty , talent, power , riches and fame”, and a few other minor ingredients which he felt would perfect his list.

When his inventory was completed, he took it to his old teacher and showed it to him. His teacher studied it carefully and after much thought he commented. “It’s an excellent list! Well digested in content and set down in not unreasonable order”. “But it appears”, he said, “that you have omitted the most important element of all. You have forgotten the one ingredient without which your list would become an intolerable burden”.

“What is that?” asked the author. The teacher then took out a pencil and crossed out the whole list and wrote down three syllables: “Peace of Mind”, for he said, this Peace of Mind can transform a cottage into a mansion and the want of it can make a Royal palace into an imprisoning nutshell. So you can see right from the very beginning of time they were discussing, arguing and debating this paramount problem of all time. As a matter of fact, in this week’s Ethics of the Fathers, we read of a similar discussion. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai turned round to his pupils with a request. “Go out and find out which is the best way a person choose in life?”⁴⁷⁶ He wanted them to study the various approaches to the good life, and report their findings to him. R. Eliezer said a good eye, is an eye that doesn’t turn green with envy because someone else appears to have more in life. A wonderful quality, but how difficult to master. R. Yehoshua said a good friend, the art of friendships. R. Yose said, a good neighbor, meaning that a person should cultivate a sympathetic understanding. The ability to foresee the future. Finally, R. Eliezer said, “A good heart”. The last is the best. It embraces all the other qualities. A good heart is the root from which all the other qualities may blossom. A good heart is a loving heart, is contented, harbours no jealousy, and has therefore room for genuine friendship.

If I were to characterize the qualities and virtues of the departed that we are honoring today, I could not find a more apt expression than the one I have just noted. Both mother and daughter combined in themselves the quality of **לב טוב**. Both were blessed with good hearts. Both were loved for their sincerity, for their piety and their wholeheartedness. Mrs. Silver was a most wonderful woman. A good wife, a good mother and a good daughter. Mr. and Mrs. Silver were a very devoted couple.

But the finest tribute to their exceptional characters, I think, is the knowledge that the wonderful children who they left exemplify in their lives the highest ideals for which they always strove. How wonderful is it to have children follow in the footsteps of the parent. How rare is such a phenomenon in Anglo Jewish life! Mrs. Dels does wonderful work in the community, she’s a leading light in the Ladies Guild

⁴⁷⁶ Avot 2:9

and gives valuable help to the friendship club. She was a deeply devoted sister and daughter. On the death of her father, her mother came to live with her and both she and her husband Mr. Dels who does invaluable work in our Synagogue as a warden and member of the Board of Management showed the mother every respect, kindness and consideration. They did all they possibly could for her in her lifetime. When her sister Mrs. Silber took ill and died, it was Mrs. Dels who bore the full brunt of responsibility. She took the place of Mother with 2 daughters left behind Ilana & Marilyn.

Stonesetting of a dear friend

A year has already gone since cruel death snatched from our midst a man dear and beloved by all, a man learned in the Torah and thorough in knowledge, ר' יעקב ב"ר ברוך דוב ז"ל. And we meet here, family and friends, on hallowed ground, to dedicate a tombstone and to pay tribute of affection and esteem to his memory. And as we approach our present reverent task of paying tribute to him, the words of yesterday's portion of the Law and the interpretation our Rabbis put upon it inevitably come to mind.

The opening words of yesterday's sidra is indeed significant: וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעֵר שֶׁבַע - "And Jacob went out from Beer sheba and went to Haran"⁴⁷⁷

It is with good reason that the Jewish people have been called not the children of Abraham or the family of Isaac, or the people of Moses, but rather בני ישראל, the children of Israel, or the sons of Jacob, because he, more than all the other patriarchs, personifies the Jew throughout the ages. Well have the Rabbis epitomized his life when they said "all that happened to Jacob happened also to his descendants". Rashi, the famous commentator, asks why does the Torah mention his departure from Beer sheba but the Torah intends to tell us that שיציאת צדיק מן המקום עושה רושם - the departure of a righteous person from his city makes an impression. As long as a righteous man is in his city, הוא הודה הוא זיוה הוא הדרה - he is its glory and splendor and beauty, but when he leaves it, there depart also its glory, its splendor and its beauty.

The passing of יעקב ז"ל to the Academy on high has also left a deep impression on our community, because he too, in a very true sense, was a righteous man, and has left a deep void in our shul.

The late Mr. Minkoff was a man of many qualities. He was excellent company, of noble character, of good nature, gentle disposition, quiet and unobtrusive, very modest and loved by all. He respected everyone and was respected by everyone. I always knew him to be a man of kindness and consideration. In the Neasden

⁴⁷⁷ Bereishit 28:10

Synagogue which he loved so well and in which he worshipped so regularly, he will remain unforgettable. We shall always remember him as a בעל שחרית. He was hospitable, a loyal and delightful friend. He helped me out occasionally as a בעל קורא in the reading of the Law. Every שמחת תורה he used to sing to us עד שיבוא אליהו עם משיח בן דוד.

In his seat we would find him every Shabbat greeting his friends with his genial smile and rejoicing in the service, and not only on Shabbat and Yom Tov's but on week days as well. He was generous and responded to every appeal made to him.

To me his passing is a personal loss and I miss him greatly at my Talmud shiur and Shalosh Seudah. He helped in every possible way to increase the light of Torah, to promulgate the faith of Judaism. It's a shame that he was not spared to witness the building of our new shul. How happy he would have been and how he would have responded to this holy and noble task. But his spirit, I am sure, will always be with us and kept alive. Because he left behind very good children who appreciate that the best way they can honour their dear father's memory is to honour the things he honoured, to cherish the ideals he cherished and to carry on his traditions.

May comfort and consolation in full measure be granted to those who mourn him. May his life be an example to us all and may he find eternal peace in the life to which he has been called. אמן.

Mrs. Spitzer

Mrs. Spitzer was an intelligent and deeply religious woman. She was a true אשת חיל, a woman of worth, a woman of infinite kindness, and pure character. She was a woman who knew the God of her fathers, and served him with all her heart, with all her soul, and with all her strength. She was a victim of Nazi persecution, at an age when most of us enjoy the fruits of our labour, she was obliged to leave her home, and the community of her birth, and to start a new life, in a new country, and compelled to learn a new language.

But she was a woman of strong character, with deep religious convictions, and in spite of the severe backache, as a result of a kick from a Nazi S. S. Guard, she successfully overcame all difficulties and continues to practice "מעשים and צדקה" These two pillars of טובים and צדקה characterised and symbolized her wonderful personality. If there was a person in need, or want, she was always ready to help. She never refused when asked to give a donation for a worthy cause even if it meant taking it out of her own Housekeeping Money.

She baked beautiful cakes for the סוכה and helped in the Kiddush on Shabbat.

But the finest tribute to her exceptional character, is the knowledge that her wonderful daughter Lyddian, who she left, exemplifies in her life the highest ideals for which she always strove. Lyddian was a wonderful daughter to her. Her loyalty, devotion and sacrifice was exceptional. She did all she could to make her life as comfortable as possible. This was true not only of Lyddian, but Eddie her son in law also looked upon her as Mother...

Our Synagogue has lost one of the noblest Sisters and I particularly miss her very much; She was always a great inspiration to me. Her hospitality and kindness I shall never forget.

The shadow of life (Funeral/Stone setting)

Much is spoken about human life in the Bible. In biblical as well as liturgical literature, the thought is often expressed that human life is brief and fleeting.

Man is likened to the grass, which sprouts in the morning sun and in the evening is already withered. He is also compared to the flower that blossoms in the morning and fades in the evening. Or life is a dream that passes quickly. But perhaps the most suggestive comparison is that which likens the human span to a shadow.

יָמֵינוּ כַּצֵּל עוֹרֵר - our days are as a shadow on the earth.⁴⁷⁸ Our sages add a more striking thought. “Would that our life were like the shadow of a wall or a tree. Alas! It is more like the shadow cast by a bird in flight”.

Our sages here give us a very interesting and significant thought. It's true that our life may be likened unto a shadow, but even in shadows there are distinctions. There are three kinds, they tell us, to which human life may be compared. Each one presents another aspect.

There is first the shadow cast by a bird in flight. A bird is a small creature and even on the ground its shadow is very small - it's hardly noticeable. When it's high in the air, the shade is even smaller, and as it flies it passes so quickly that before we are aware of its existence its already gone. We are hardly aware of its presence and we do not miss its absence. So is it with the wife of most men. Their life casts a small and insignificant shadow, they hardly leave any impression on their fellow men. When they are alive we are hardly aware of their presence, and when they die, we do not miss them.

There's another shadow - that cast by a wall. A wall casts a large shadow. But it depends upon the time of the day. In the morning the shadow is large, but as the morning passes, as we approach the noon hour, when the sun is directly over us, it disappears completely. So is it with some people. They exert considerable influence

⁴⁷⁸ Tehillim 144:4

upon their fellow men, but that too is of brief duration. We can see it and benefit by it only in the morning. In the afternoon it's no longer there.

But there is still another kind of shadow - that cast by a tree. That is the best and most useful of the three. It's there the whole day so long as the sun shines. Furthermore, it grows and grows as time goes on. The more the tree spreads, the more branches it sends out, the more foliage upon it the greater the shadow and the more comfort one can find in it.

When we travel to an open field, unprotected from the scorching rays of the sun, how welcome is the shadow of the stately and spreading tree. In the desert when we are unprotected from the hot sun above and from the burning sand beneath, how happily the weary traveler sights an oasis where there are grass, and trees, and the shadows refresh the wandered and give him new strength.

It's probably that kind of a tree that the author of the Song of Songs had in mind when he said, בְּצֵלוֹ חִמְדָּתִי וַיִּשְׂבְּתִי וּפְרִיּוֹ מִתּוֹק לְחֻבִּי - "in his shadow I delight to sit and his fruit is sweet unto my taste"⁴⁷⁹.

If I were to characterize the deceased that we are honouring today, I could find no more apt verse in the Bible than the one I have just quoted. A great consolation to her family is the wonderful name she has left behind and the example she has set for others to follow.

GENERAL SHUL EVENTS

The meaning of community (Installation of new Honourary Officers and Board of Management)

It is indeed a pleasure for me this morning to install my newly elected Honourary Officers and Board of Management for the coming year.

The installation of the officers of our congregation is in reality another golden link in that long and brilliant chain of induction into the holy offices of the Sanctuaries of our faith, which started thousands of years ago in Biblical times in the days of Moses.

Some of you may remember that after the Jews were liberated from Egypt and given the Torah at Sinai, Moses found it extremely difficult to shoulder all the responsibilities himself.

Moses, lawgiver and leader, recognized the immensity of the duties of leadership which have fallen to his lot: "רְאֵה", he says to God, "See how difficult is the task you have set me. אֶתָּה אָמַרְתָּ לִּי. You have given me the instruction. You have

⁴⁷⁹ Shir HaShirim 2:3

commanded me saying: הָעַל אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה, raise this people and bring them up to that destination which you have ordained for them.⁴⁸⁰ You have given me the instruction to raise this people to a recognition of religious loyalty, of submission to God's will, of allegiance to His law, of self-sacrifice in the pursuit of it of communal endeavor. "If I am to do all that", Moses says, הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרֹכֶךָ, "Show me, I pray thee, Your way" וְאִדְעֶךָ, "that I may know thee".⁴⁸¹ If I am to lead and to be followed; if I am to teach and to be heeded; if I am to do and to be initiated, "If I am to do that" Moses says, הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרֹכֶךָ, "Show me, I pray thee, Your way" וְאִדְעֶךָ, "that I may know thee". לְמַעַן אֶמְצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ, "that I may find grace in thy sight".

Furthermore, Moses realized only too well that along he could do but little, and cries out: וְאַתָּה לֹא הוֹדַעְתָּנִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁלַח עִמִּי - I must know who will accompany me on the road which lies ahead?⁴⁸² And it was then we read that God said to him: אֶסְפָּה לְיָשָׁרָאֵל לִי שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - Gather together a group of men who, by their wisdom and experience, can share with you the many burdens of leadership and help you in your great task.⁴⁸³

The Torah tells us that the Lord told Moses to bring all these men into the Sanctuary so that everyone would see those men who were chosen for leadership and then, the Rabbis say, that Moses was told to say to these new officers of the people: אֲשֶׁרִיכֶם שֶׁנִּתְמַנִּיתֶם פְּרָנְסִים עַל בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם - "Well may you be proud that you have been chosen to be the leaders over the children of God!"⁴⁸⁴.

And so it is my genuine pleasure to say to the new offices of our congregation those beautiful words which Moses said to the elders of Israel thousands of years ago: אֲשֶׁרִיכֶם שֶׁנִּתְמַנִּיתֶם פְּרָנְסִים עַל בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם - "Well may you be proud that you have been chosen to be the leaders over the children of God!".

On this Sabbath I would like to bring to you a message that I believe is of extreme importance to the life and the growth of our Synagogue. And, strange enough, this message for the lay leaders of our congregation comes to us through a glance at the spiritual head of the greatest congregation in the House of Israel, the בְּהַן גְּדוֹל, the High Priest in the בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, the Temple.

No one will deny that we are living today in an age of crisis. But it is also an age of unparalleled opportunities. Now! Let us ask ourselves what is the greatest problem facing Anglo-Jewry today? Because we must not lose sight of the fact that we are

⁴⁸⁰ Shemot 33:12

⁴⁸¹ Shemot 33:13

⁴⁸² Shemot 33:12

⁴⁸³ Bemidbar 11:16

⁴⁸⁴ Rashi on Bemidbar 11:16

part and parcel of the Anglo-Jewish Scene, and what affects Anglo-Jewry collectively is bound, eventually, to affect us individually.

Now if we take a bird's eye view of our little world, we shall inevitably come to the conclusion that the problem which affects most deeply the Anglo-Jewish Community is the preservation of our heritage! Judaism is always in danger. Being an ideal, it must always live precariously. It is tried and tested anew in every generation. It goes on trial with every child that is born. This was true of Judaism in the days of the prophets. This was true in the ages of Philo, Saadya, Maimonides. Especially is this true in the modern world, when all manner of spiritual values rival each other for the attention of the emancipated mind of the modern man.

It seems that we have not yet fully realized to what extent the picture of Jewry has changed. New problems have arisen. The internal structure of the Jewish people has been breached, and we have still not been able to heal it, not find strength to recover. We must remember that the flower of the Jewish people has been destroyed in Europe, and the nameless graves of six million of our dead speak silently but eloquently of man's inhumanity to man. The great reservoirs of Jewish life and culture which nourished and sustained the Jewish world in Lithuania and Poland no longer exist. The great seats of learning, the Yeshivot and Seminaries and academies that were once the glory of European Jewry have been laid waste. Mankind bewildered and frustrated is bowed down beneath the weight of hatred, of greed, of misunderstanding. The peoples speak of peace, but prepare for wars to come. And over against this incalculable calamity, the State of Israel has risen, majestic, courageous, and filled with hope.

I am referring to all this, my friends, so that we may understand the immense responsibility which is imposed upon us as a community. All the more reason that we, today, accentuate the Jewish positive ideal of life. Upon this ideal hinges the salvation of humanity. For it is an ideal which proclaims the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It is an ideal which teaches 'Banim Atem Li'⁴⁸⁵, children are ye, every man, regardless of race, creed, colour & nation, children are ye of the Lord your God. It is an ideal which demands ⁴⁸⁶צדק צדק תרדוף, the establishment of Justice and righteousness in this world. It is an ideal which speaks of peace and love, of faith and hope. We must do away with clannishness, segregation and division.

A basic truth of Judaism is that moral man is subject to error: אין צדיק בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר - "There is no righteous man upon the earth who does good and

⁴⁸⁵ Based on Devarim 14:1

⁴⁸⁶ Devarim 16:20

sins not”⁴⁸⁷. The Psalmist expressed it when he prayed שְׂגִיאוֹת מִי יִבִּין מִנְסֻתָרוֹת נִקְנִי, “who can discern his errors of unconscious ones, hold me guiltless.”⁴⁸⁸

A basic requirement of the moral life is therefore to adjust oneself to a recognition of this truth, realizing that under no circumstances can one anticipate perfection in our fellowmen. And when the occasion arises that I find one committing an error, then it's my moral duty to minimize the gravity, rather than magnify it, by spreading it and capitalising on it. We must remember that the fundamental doctrine of the synagogue is love. חֲבֵרִים כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל - Israel constitutes one brotherhood.

And finally, this closing thought. The Bible relates the details of the first consecration of the kohanim into the service of the newly dedicated Tabernacle in the wilderness. After all the necessary and proper ceremonials had taken place, the Torah tells us: וַיִּשָּׂא אֶהָרֶן אֶת יָדָיו אֶל הָעָם וַיְבָרֶכֶם, “And Aaron, the High Priest, lifted his hands towards the people and he blessed them”⁴⁸⁹

The Rabbinic commentators tell us that Aaron blessed the people with the traditional three-fold priestly blessing for Divine protection, spiritual enlightenment and peace.

Now, if you will observe closely, you will notice something strange in the Hebrew text. The word יָדָיו is spelled without the letter “yud”. The Ktiv, the way the text is written, actually spells out the singular ‘yado’, which means “hand”. But the “Kri”, the way the text is read aloud, is marked יָדָיו with the letter “yud” and denotes the plural - “hands”.

This apparent strangeness in the Biblical text is filled with great meaning for you and for me. In order to realise the true blessings for the people of Israel, the spiritual leader cannot rely on his hand alone! He cannot rely solely on his work. To his hand, there must be added the helping hand of the congregation. An installation ceremony is complete when there's the mutual pledge of interaction to carry out our purpose and fulfil our program.

There's a beautiful little story which illustrates the message that I am trying to convey. There were once two very good friends. One of them was falsely accused of being a spy. The friend of the accused tried everything in his power to save his life, but in vain. The accused was sentenced to death. When his good friend saw him brought before the executioner, he ran forward in his despair crying loudly, “It was I who did it, kill me!”. But not, the other, seeing what a misfortune his friend

⁴⁸⁷ Kohelet 7:20

⁴⁸⁸ Tehillim 19:13

⁴⁸⁹ Vayikra 9:22

was bringing upon himself, called out “No! Do not believe him. It was I who did it!”.

The judged, all confused, didn't know what to do, and ultimately the matter came before the king. For him, the unhappy friends revealed the truth, that they were both innocent and that they only tried to save each other's life. The king, when he heard this, exclaimed enthusiastically, “What a wonderful friendship! May I be the third friend and share your precious friendship?”

In that community where there's the mutual pledge of reciprocal action; in a community where the heart beats with the dynamic force of unity, then God says “May I be the third friend in your friendship and we will succeed”.

May the Divine blessing rest upon our endeavours. May the “yado”, the share of work which I, as your Minister, will contribute to our effort, always be transformed into a “Yadav”. May it always find the closely-joined hand of the congregational family, so that together we may always realise that two hands are better than one, hands joined together for mutual and dedicated labour in the vineyard of God on behalf of Torah and Israel.

With perfect trust and confidence I install you in your offices. May the congregation prosper and progress under you. May God bless your work. **אמן**.

Friday night Oneg Shabbat Jewish Learning programme

I am very glad to see you here once again and hope you will look back on these Friday evenings as being happy ones. I hope you will use these evenings as a medium through which you can come together and ask and discuss questions on Judaism which affect your daily life. I want you should use these evenings as a means of discussing the customs and traditions of your people which have been handed down by your people through the generations and which you in turn will also hand down to the generations to come. You must remember that you are here today as Jewish boys, because in other ages, in the other generations, Jewish boys like yourselves also came together and discussed the Jewish faith and practice. It's true that the primary purpose of a study group should be of a cultural nature significance. But I want you also to make these evenings social evenings “an **עונג שבת** evening” a Sabbath Delight Evening. To bring all your friends and sing traditional songs. To feel freely to say what you think. In view of the fact that this is the first evening of our **עונג שבת** I would therefore like to impress upon you one or two things:

The vital necessity of preparation for the place you hope to fill in human society. I am sure that none of you wishes to be a failure in life. It has been proved over and over again that the life which is a success is the life of discipline and of steady purpose and obedience to higher things. And such success doesn't come overnight

and you can't dream yourself into it. A great medieval teacher tells us that "man is half angel, half brute and his inner life is a constant war between these two natures." Every day as you grow older, you will find that there will always be an inner conflict—a battle between your good inclinations and your evil inclinations. For example, your good inclination will tell you that you ought to get up in the morning and attend the service. On the other hand, your evil inclination will tell you, you went to bed late last night, tired, and one morning will not make all that difference. Right throughout the day, there is a constant battle going on between these two natures. Now you must say to yourself: "Why Should I have this constant battle, after all, I am an individual?! I belong to myself! Let the evil inclination get the better of me!". It's true that you are an individual, but every individual is only an atom, a particle of the whole! All of us are members of a family, a community, and a nation, and the training and discipline which we must undergo is to fit us to play our part nobly as members of our family, community, and nation. In the story of Moses' childhood we are told that he was raised at the Royal Palace, the scripture says. When he grew up, "he went out to his brethren." Many boys when they grow up and advance in life don't go out to their brethren but they go away from them. Therefore these Friday evenings are very important for you. You are young and your life lies before you like a blank sheet of paper. Write on it עברי אנכי - I am a Hebrew. Every one of you holds the honor of his people, in his hand. The last time we met I promised you a course on the Jewish Religion and I worked out a rough sketch of what form it should take. I intend splitting up the work of the evening into three types of study:

- 1) In the first part I want to deal with Jewish Customs and Traditions, their history and how we perform them. In other words, the practical side of Judaism.
- 2) In the second part, I want to deal more with the theoretical aspect of Judaism. I propose to deal with this in a series of 20 or so talks and afterwards hold a discussion on the points raised from the lecture. I worked out a rough sketch of what aspects these talks will touch upon and I will read them out to you. As I do, think whether you want anything to be added or subtracted from it.

So far I have dealt with the 2 parts of the former study. Now I come to the third.

- 3) In this part I propose to teach you some modern Hebrew songs and also talk on the Sidra of the week.

Any questions on Judaism let me know during the week so that I could incorporate the answers to them in the course.

Neasden Women's & Toddler's Club/Mrs. Brodie & Mrs. Montague

I am very pleased to have been asked to give a vote of thanks to our distinguished guests and all those who have helped to make this afternoon's function possible.

Mrs. Brodie: First, I should like to pay tribute to our guest speaker Mrs. Brodie who is known to us all not only as the wife of our revered Chief Rabbi, but has been rightly called the "First Lady" of Anglo-Jewry – a title which she has earned for herself. Her charming personality, her sympathetic understanding, and her wise counsel has earned for her a special place in the hearts of all Jewish women. During the past few weeks when the various Jewish women's organisations have opened up their years' activities with luncheons and receptions, I have as chairman of our Synagogue Guild attended quite a number of these functions and it was apparent from the tributes paid to Mrs. Brodie by the organisers of these functions that Mrs. Brodie is "the power behind the throne" of the great women's organisations which we have in England today.

Only last week I attended a reception at the Brodie's home and the magnificent response to Mrs. Brodie's appeal for Jew's College from the Ladies Guilds was a personal triumph for Mrs. Brodie, for without her initiative and inspiration I doubt whether the response would have been the success it was, and today I can see Mrs. Brodie has, with her sympathetic understanding and usual eloquence, won our hearts here in Neasden.

This is Mrs. Brodie's first visit to our community, but I sincerely hope she will find time to visit us on many more happy occasions.

Hon. Mrs. Montague: We are all deeply grateful to the Hon. Mrs. Montague for so ably taking the chair this afternoon and for sponsoring this fine project. I have not had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Montague before, but on your behalf I should like to congratulate her and the Union of Jewish Women for initiating what I feel to be a very welcome club. We all know that it is the function of parenthood to generate in childhood a sense of security, and that self-reliance is necessary at a very early age. One does not have to be a student of Psychology to understand that (a) a tired and harassed mother cannot transmit a sense of security, and (b) self-reliance cannot be taught to a child who is never apart from its mother.

This club, as previous speakers have said, will give the Jewish mothers in Neasden a chance of a short break and will enable the mother to return to her child refreshed. It will enable the child to meet other children and to learn what it must inevitably learn that there is another world outside the home. May I congratulate you Mrs. Montague on a very fine project, and now I should like to thank the backroom girls – first Mrs. King & her secretary Mrs. Rosemarin. Mrs. King & her husband are comparable newcomers to Neasden, but they have already displayed that zeal &

enthusiasm which is so necessary in communal life. Mrs. Kind already serves on several committees, and I know this toddlers club is very dear to her heart and I hope you will give her every support. And finally, a word of thanks to Mrs. Reuben, treasurer of the Union and Mrs. Core, a member of the Union Committee for their splendid help.

Are we doing all we can for Jewish youth?

Jewish life throughout the ages has been inspired by a remarkable spirit of continuity, but rarely has it known the blessing of tranquility. Challenge is writ large across every chapter of our story. In the present phrase of Jewish history, this element of challenge has assumed a magnitude that has few parallels even in the tempestuous context of Jewish annals.

We are passing through a period of transition. The old world of the Ghetto and the Pale of Settlement is fast receding. It was vitiated by many evil aspects but it was not without a cloud of glory. It was world that rested on deep spiritual foundations, it was culturally homogeneous, it stood resolutely embattled against the preserves of assimilation.

The present age of Jewish National Redemption is vibrant with immeasurable new-born energy, it is radiant with countless achievements and infinite hope. Yet the light is burdened by long and heavy shadows: our religious values are dissolving; tradition has lost its compulsion; Jewish culture outside Israel is all too often in retreat before the environmental forces of attribution. The old instrument of survival - the Bet HaKnesset and the Bet HaMidrash - the Yeshiva and the Home - have become blunted or have been destroyed in the Nazi holocaust and community blight.

A reappraisal of Jewish aims, spiritual assets and techniques of self-preservation are urgently called for. The State of Israel must be built and consolidated but the Diaspora - be it regarded as a temporary or permanent feature of Jewish life - must also be saved. And the main front, perforce, is our youth.

What are the needs of our youth? First and foremost, I would put Religious Faith. Torah-less Judaism is ideologically a horrendous monstrosity; in practice it is a form of Jewish nihilism that spells the irretrievable ruin of all that the Jew has ever held precious or that can possibly sustain his future national identity. Without Torah, the Jew is an historical anachronism, an ethnic fossil, a curious racial museum piece; he belongs to the world of the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians.

The second is Jewish knowledge or culture. If religion is the soul of Judaism, our literary heritage is the body, its vehicle of expression. Literature has a vital significance for every people; but for the Jew it has exceptional importance.

It is not only our artistic mirror or critique of life; it is an integral part of life itself. It has formative and creative power. It is at once the product and generator of the Jewish spirit.

The third requirement is a sense of national dedication that is translated into communal endeavor of the redemptive upbuilding of Israel.

It is an ideal of service flowing from Ahavat Yisrael - Jewish love and loyalty which, in turn, is fed by Jewish culture and inspired by Jewish spiritual values. This is the tripartite mould into which every youth programme - be it for our student bodies or non-university youth - must pour the content of its particular schemes. "These are programmatic considerations" - our youth.

It can be stated without hesitation that our youth compares favourably with any youth in any part of the Diaspora. Bat Mitzvah examinations have proved a helpful innovation. The Establishment of Jewish Day Schools. Only this can hold the fort in Chinuch today.

The most neglected age-group consists of the post-matriculants. On leaving school, the majority of our young people find themselves spiritually and culturally in the wilderness. Those among them who proceed to University fare best; they always some organized Jewish activity on the campuses of the bigger universities. Latterly, the establishment of student centres or Hillel Houses has tended to improve the position still further.

But the disconcerting fact remains that our student bodies comprise no more than a fraction of our available youth, and even their activities could benefit from a revision of their current programmes in the direction of deeper spiritual and cultural study.

Unquestionably, the greatest sufferers are our non-university youth. They have little organization and receive even less planned guidance. There's a dearth of youth clubs, and those that exist concentrate on entertainment rather than on cultural or religious studies. They appear more bent on turning our socialites than creating leaders or knowledgeable adherents of the Jewish way of life.

The most glaring lacuna in our community is the absence, to any extent, of Synagogue Centres. There are, it is true, a few institutions bearing that name and they provide accommodation for 'certain' "centre" activities, but they hardly bear comparison with the overseas prototype. In consequence, the existing youth programmes have a purely secular character. What now of the future? How can we strengthen the youth front?

Those currently functioning deserve the fullest measure of communal gratitude for the pioneering work that they have done in the sphere of youth organization and guidance. But the question arises whether the time has not come for a change of

orientation and sponsorship. Education, which in its broadest connotation includes every facet of youth training, is a major concern of the community. It should not, therefore, form a subsidiary function of bodies, primarily devoted to other matters. It is also a dubious policy to link education directly with institutions that have political interests. In any case, diversity of sponsorship is bound to lead to friction as recent controversies have shown.

The desirability of unitary control is incontrovertible. The obvious candidate for the task would be our Third Estate - the Jewish educational authorities. A sensible arrangement would be to entrust youth organization to the Board of Education in each area, with an overriding National Council on which the Zionist Federation, the Board of Deputies, and various confederations of synagogues would be represented.

The function of such a National Council would be to stimulate, coordinate and help to finance youth activity, not to translate the schemes into practice. The actual organization or implementation should take place on the local level. Its one of the graver weaknesses of centralisation that the gaps of its net are inevitably wide and it tends to overlook local problems and needs. Instead of creating a healthy indigenous movement, it engenders an attitude of passivity.

It's gratifying in this respect to note the robust determination of our university students to preserve their autonomy. A counsellor should be a gentle shepherd, not a slave-driver. In planning the raising of a new generation of spiritual inheritors, we must pay more attention to non-university youth. These will certainly provide the community of the future community and, let it be stressed, not a few of the leaders too. It is a complete misconception to imagine that all our leaders must be college-bred.

A vital consideration in all youth work is the problem of accommodation. The nature of a meeting place is of great importance. It must be attractive, it must be planned, it must offer all the requisite youth facilities.

We need specially built clubs run under the supervision of fully qualified leaders. This is an urgent necessity particularly in areas where synagogues have no affiliated youth groups. But even more important are synagogue centres where spiritual, cultural and Zionist values can be properly blended in a well-balanced programme carried out under the auspices of the House of Worship.

Overseas Jewries - notably in the USA - furnish convincing examples of the worth of such institutions.

In conclusion, let me revert to my opening thought. We stand at the threshold of a New Age. To meet the challenge of the new era; to solve its countless problems, we

shall need to equip our youth with much knowledge, with high ideals, with unquenchable faith.

If our children are to enter upon their full religious, cultural and national heritage and enlarge it - raising the Temple of our tradition still higher - we must endow them with love of Israel and of Torah, with a spirit of dedication and service, with an irresistible passion to build the people and the land in the process of which they will find personal renewal and salvation.

At such time each parent must know his own heart and each community is bound to ask itself: are we endowing our children with living values to guide them throughout their lives? Are we satisfied with the example which we set for them? These questions apply almost to all mankind.

The most important step is the direction has been made by the Jewish Day School movement which provides the younger children with a Jewish environment, within gentile society. This step could serve as a model for other age-groups as well.

Visit of the Chief Rabbi

שְׁמַע בְּנִי מִוֶּסֶר אָבִיךָ וְאַל תִּטַּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ - “My son, learn the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the Law of thy mother”⁴⁹⁰. תּוֹרַה צִוָּה לָנוּ מִנְּשֵׂה מוֹרְשָׁה קְהֵלֵת יַעֲקֹב. רַק - “Moses commanded us a Law, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob”⁴⁹¹. הַשְׁמַר לָךְ וְשִׁמְרֵךְ נִפְשֶׁךָ מֵאֲדָר - “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but make them known unto thy children and thy children's children”⁴⁹². יוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחֹרֵב. הַקֵּה לִי אֶת הָעָם. - “the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me”⁴⁹³. וְאַשְׁמַעֵם אֶת דְּבָרַי - “Assemble Me the people, and I will make them hear My words that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children”⁴⁹⁴. זֶה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה ה' נִגְיָלָה וְנִשְׂמַחָהּ בּוֹ. - “This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it”⁴⁹⁵

My friends! This is indeed a great day in the history of our community. Well may we rejoice and be glad, and I am happy to greet you with the traditional blessing of our people: בְּרוּכִים הַבָּאִים - Blessed are you who have come here this day to pray in this house of worship which is the house of God.

⁴⁹⁰ Mishlei 1:8

⁴⁹¹ Devarim 33:4

⁴⁹² Devarim 4:9

⁴⁹³ Devarim 4:10

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Tehillim 118:24

This is the second time in the history of our Synagogue that we have had an official visit from a Chief Rabbi. The first occasion was eighteen years ago when Dr. Hertz, the late Chief Rabbi, came to induct me into office as your Minister.

Well do I recall, as no doubt many of you do, the disheartening circumstances at that time, the difficulties of war, and the no less difficult period that followed. These problems have been increased by the happy spectacle of the evergrowing numbers of our community. We have not been able to progress as much as we should have liked because building restrictions have prevented expansion to meet the needs of this increase.

However, our work, thank God, is well begun. In the words of the poet, "happy, happy every one, whose work is well begun." But begun only.

In the new building which we have acquired, we shall be able to house all our children under one roof for religious instruction.

We have now reached a station but not a destination. What is our destination, our goal? It is to have a house of worship big enough to fill the requirements of a flourishing community. However, it is nevertheless with a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving that we meet here today, as a beginning of the achievement of our goal, and I should like to extend a special greeting to you my dear Chief Rabbi on behalf of our community. We deeply appreciate you coming here this morning.

If Anglo-Jewry makes any impact on the world of today, and I should like to think it does, then its due in no small part to the fact that it has as its spiritual head so wise and understanding and sympathetic leader as our Chief Rabbi.

His record of service and consecrated leadership is an inspiration to us all, and we are deeply conscious of the impressive contribution which he has rendered to the Anglo-Jewish community in the field of spiritual edification, cultural enrichment and communal service.

We pray the Almighty may grant him long years of consecrated service and that his inspiring leadership will be with us for many years to come. Will the congregation please rise for the Chief Rabbi.

Mothers & Teenagers

Ladies, I am delighted to welcome you all here this evening and to say how much we are looking forward to hearing Dr. Ongel, our guest speaker, discuss mothers and teenagers. There are I am sure many questions which are uppermost in our minds. As mothers and grandmothers, particularly Jewish ones, we should like to know how we can protect and keep our youth to grow up into a satisfying and constructive life? Why is it in a world in which our youth have been given more

privileges and opportunities than ever before, for no other generation has been so protective of their children - they are fed on nutritional diets, our teenagers are offered the advantages of universal education - they are provided by law against being made to work until they are in their middle teens, yet we hear of a lowering of moral standards and greater conflict between parents and teenagers - it is our fault, and if so, how can we remedy this defect?

Do we give our children too much freedom - after all, we would not dream of allowing our children to cross a road against the lights even though the child may want to do so - should there be outright prohibition and more discipline for the child's safety? Are there any special problems which Jewish teenagers have to face? These and many more questions spring to our minds and probably to the minds of our teenagers.

I remember reading in a woman's magazine a short while ago a letter from a teenager. She wrote, 'Dear Mary Page - I have two problems - my mother and my father. They are driving me nuts. They don't realise I am a grown woman of 15. I need more freedom. Please help me make them understand'.

Tonight we are privileged to have Dr. Ongel speak to us on this all important subject. Dr. Ongel is a gynecologist and has had considerable experience with teenagers in her practice. She is also a Jewish wife and mother and so she speaks to us as an authority with training and experience. It gives me great pleasure to call upon Dr. Ongel to address us on Mothers and Teenagers.

QUESTIONS ASKED OF DR. ONGEL:

1. How can we instill in our children a respect and regard for moral values?
2. How should we approach the question of sex with (a) our daughters, and (b) our sons and at what age?
3. What shall we tell our teenager who asks us is there any harm in having sex experience as an experiment and does it affect one's future capacity for making a happy and stable marriage?
4. Does a mother going out to business or pursuing a profession hinder or help the development of the teenager?
5. How can we best help to give our children a sense of responsibility and self-reliance?

The letter Bett

The Torah begins with the Hebrew letter ב which is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first letter of the Torah is a Bett. They make this interesting comment that the world was created with a ב and not with an א, the first letter of the alphabet,

for the ב implies blessing (nb. the word ברוך begins with a ב), while the Aleph implies a curse (the word ארור, to be cursed, begins with an א).

The א stands for one - it symbolizes the person who cares only for himself and exploits others for his selfish ends. We need the ב, the person who is always conscious that there's someone else - another person's life to be helped; another being to share with. This is not only true from the idealistic point of view, but equally so from a practical angle.

Our Sages wisely commented that the Torah begins with an act of kindness. Jewish mysticism has assigned numeric significance to the letters, and ב, as the second letter of the Torah, signifies two.

Bett, with its numeric meaning of "two", is meant to attract attention. Bett, meaning "two", exclaims to all - there's another message coming from the first letter of the Torah. The dual numerical value of the ב preaches "dualities". It's symbolic of all that God has created. Two Torah's two words, the male and female, the sun & moon, day & night, Moses & Aaron, Heaven & Earth, the body & soul.

Even the parts of man's body are doubled - there is two of everything.

The fact is that this is the plan of God's creation. Only God is one. Everything that lives came in pairs. The emphasis on "we", "our", not "I", or "me". Examine the siddur, the prayer book of our people. We pray רפאינו, "Heal us and we shall be healed", שמע קולינו, "Listen to our pleas O Lord".

The Koran says: God created all things in pairs, and that is taken as regards the animal creation, to mean that each individual is not complete - completion comes from the complementary part, whether we view that compliment in the matter of sex or unequal intellect or of unequal powers of instinct.

But it does not stop with man and animals. It embraces all things that are in the world created by God, whether it's the material things that we see around us, or the ideas around us, again we have the same duplication of pairs. In physical science we know that electrical energy is positive and negative, and neither is complete without the other. In ideas we know that there's truth and falsehood, good and evil.

Two clocks and two doors

The Besht, the founder of Chassidism, passed away on Shavuot 200 years ago. As his strength ebbed and the end seemed to be quite close, he said to his anxious and saddened disciples, "When the two clocks in my Bet Hamidrash will stop moving, you will know that my soul has been returned to its maker".

Not only did the Baal Shem Tov have two clocks to measure time, but each and every one of us lives and functions with two measurements of time. One clock records and measures the dimension of time from the very first movement of the world's creation. This clock does not entail any of our labours or any of our efforts. It is rather a passive operation which functions without our participation. You may designate it, perhaps, as the clock of eternity.

There is another clock which measures time, and this clock is very intimately related to us, for this clock measures not so much time resulting from the revolutions and constellations of the celestial bodies, as our own personal time. This clock functions as a result of our activities. It records our labours and our achievements. This personal clock, contrary to the clock of eternity, tells the story not of the sun and the earth, but of men and women who labour in the vineyard of God.

Because the Baal Shem Tov had two clocks in his life, he also had two doors. When his grief-stricken son began to cry at the deathbed of his father, the Besht comforted him by saying: "Don't cry my son, for I am passing through one door in order to enter another door."

What a remarkable statement! A clock which records refined thoughts, decent actions, and meaningful achievements, is the only clock which can guide one into the sublime timelessness of honour and glory.

RABBINICAL GATHERINGS

Meeting of Federation of Rabbis & Ministers

Let me begin with this passage from Brachot 28b. The Mishnah tells us that Rabbi Nechuniah ben Hakoneh, a great sage of the 1st century, היה מתפלל בכניסתו לבית המדרש וביציאתו תפלה קצרה

Rabbi Nechuniah ben Hakoneh would pray when he entered the בית המדרש (the house of study) and when he left it he would utter a short prayer. His students said to him, **מה מקום לתפלה זו**? "What sort of prayer is this?" He answered, "When I enter, I pray that no offence should occur through me, and when I leave, I express thanks for my lot."

Rashi, commenting upon this passage, explains that Nechuniah's prayer was that his colleagues should not rejoice over his discomfiture, over his uneasiness, and so bring errors upon themselves.

In the same way, I too would keep you from sin, for the subject which has been assigned to me is one which arouses a good deal of personal uneasiness and discomfiture.

כבוד הרבנים הנכבדים, רועי העדה של קהלות, מורי ורבותי אחי ורעי

May I first thank Dayan Dr. Krauss, chairman of this afternoon's session, for his admirable introduction and for his kind words about me. I should also like to congratulate Rabbi Cymmerman and his learned colleagues for the excellent and stimulating program and for the untiring efforts in organizing this conference.

I know that much thought and effort have gone into it, while it is true this conference is a small, modest beginning, it is small only in quantity, in כמות and not in quality, in איכות.

Today's conference reminds me of the custom which once prevailed among the Rabbis of Talmudical times. We read in מסכת תענית י: that it was customary among the Rabbis to meet twice a year, at the end of the winter and at the end of the summer, for the purpose of discussing scholarly and rabbinical problems. They met at Sura and Pumbeditha, in Babylon, where at that time Jewish learning and Jewish institutions were centered.

The conference lasted for a month at a time, and these periods were called the days of the Kallah. The Rabbis in their allegorical manner compared the Torah to a bride, the rabbinical scholars who convened, they compared to bridegrooms. The discussions, they compared to a wedding ceremony. Thus, the term Kallah became synonymous to a Rabbinical conference.

When Rabbi Cymmerman approached me to give a paper on A Quarterly Religious Publication, I saw the preceding agenda, I thought of the story of King Asa and his son Jehoshaphat. We are told that King Asa and his son Jehoshaphat had destroyed every form of idolatry in Judah. Why then, ask the Rabbis, is King Hezekiah, who ruled much later, why is he credited with having destroyed the brazen serpent – the Nehushtans – in the Temple.

It must therefore be, they reply, that his ancestors had purposely left Hezekiah something undone, whereby he might distinguish himself. מקום הניחו לו אבותיו להתגדר בו - His ancestors left something undone for him to distinguish himself.⁴⁹⁶

I suspect that Rabbi Cymmerman chose this subject for me to speak on, because he too wanted to leave me something by which I could distinguish myself. However, I would be sailing under false colours if I didn't tell you at the very outset that what I have to say in this paper is I am afraid not very original and not very new. But,

⁴⁹⁶ Chullin 7a

frequently, that which is neither original, nor new, needs to be emphasized. As the **מסילת ישרים** writes in his introduction:

החיבור הזה לא חברתיו ללמד לבני האדם את אשר לא ידעו, אלא להזכירם את הידוע להם כבר ומפורסם אצלם פירסום גדול. כי לא תמצא ברוב דברי, אלא דברים שרוב בני האדם יודעים אותם ולא מסתפקים בהם כלל, אלא שכפי רוב פרסומם וכנגד מה שאמתתם גלויה לכל, כך ההעלם מהם מצוי מאד והשכחה רבה. על כן אין התועלת הנלקט מזה הספר יוצא מן הקריאה בו פעם אחת, כי כבר אפשר שלא ימצא הקורא בשכלו חדושים אחר קריאתו שלא היו בו לפני קריאתו, אלא מעט. אבל התועלת יוצא מן החזרה עליו וההתמדה. כי יזכרו לו הדברים האלה הנשכחים מבני האדם בטבע, וישים אל לבו חובתו אשר הוא מתעלם ממנה.

“I have written this work not to teach men what they do not know, but to remind them of what they already know and is very evident to them, for you will find in most of my words only things which most people know, and concerning which they entertain no doubts. But to the extent that they are well known and their truths revealed to all, so is forgetfulness in relation to them extremely prevalent. It follows, then, that the benefit to be obtained from this work is not derived from a single reading; for it is possible that the reader will find that he has learned little after having read it that he did not know before. Its benefit is to be derived, rather, through review and persistent study, by which one is reminded of those things which, by nature, he is prone to forget and through which he is caused to take to heart the duty that he tends to overlook.”

I feel in a somewhat similar position this afternoon. Much ground has been covered in today's Conference with its interesting and various discussions. It was to me a refreshing experience. After listening to the four stimulating addresses I quote to myself the well-known Rabbinic discussion. As you all know, among the various ailments which render an animal trefah is one which is called **ריסוק איברים** which can be loosely translated as shock caused by a heavy fall. The Talmud discusses the symptoms of **ריסוק איברים** on the part of a bird which is thrown heavily on the surface of a river. If it swims, says the Talmud, it is proof that it still possesses vitality. But then, it enters the wise proviso ‘that is only if it swims against the current. If it swims downstream with the current, it shows no sign of vitality’.

There is a profound truth in that statement which applies to human beings. It is so easy and effortless to swim downstream with the current, but its no sign of vitality. The powerful swimmer shows his strength in his ability to face the current and swim upstream. It is in our ability to swim against the currents of the time, the currents of materialism, secularism, expediency and compromise which are the modern heresies, that we show our spiritual strength. I firmly believe that there's a great and unchanneled, if not untapped, reservoir of latent power, for the development of a self-reliant, positive Jewish Orthodox movement in this country.

We must begin with an **אני מאמין**, with an affirmation of faith. What is it that we stand for and what are the principles which we are pledged to uphold to which we have devoted our lives? Without that affirmation of faith, everything I have to say is meaningless and I am indebted to a local young Rabbi for this interpretation of a well-known prayer. We follow the reading of the Shema, the grand affirmation of faith, with the words **וְנֶעֱמָד... וְנֶעֱמָד... וְנֶעֱמָד** - “It’s true and established and confirmed and pleasant and good and beautiful”. First must come **אֱמוּנָה יָצִיב**, the fervent and winning conviction of the truth and immutability of one’s cause, and only after that conviction of truth can we turn to the question of the “pleasant and good and beautiful.”

We, the Federation of Rabbis & Ministers, stand for that Judaism which is the heritage of Israel throughout the ages, the golden chain, whose first link was forged by the Torah given by God to Moses upon Mount Sinai and whose successive links are the interpretation of that Torah by prophets and Men of the Great Synagogue, by the Tannaim and Amoraim, Saboraim and Geonim, Rishonim and Acharonim, that Judaism, which is not at the mercy of every wind that blows but which stands like the rock of Sinai, firmly in the midst of the shifting sands of prevailing ephemeral and transient ideas. We represent that Judaism alone of which it can be said - ⁴⁹⁷ **וְאַתֶּם יְהוָה הַדְּבָקִים בְּה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים בְּלִבְכֶם הַיּוֹם**.

40th Anniversary of American Synagogue Council (1966)

I am happy to be here tonight to join with all of you in the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Synagogue Council. Our sages say that at the age of 40 one attains greater maturity and deeper understanding. What is true of a human being is also true of an organization. It’s therefore in order in a few words to reevaluate tonight the position of the Synagogue Council in the life of the American Jewish Community. I recently read in the papers that this particular occasion for the reasons which I guess all of you understand - symbolizes the ecumenical spirit of the contemporary Jewish community. I, for one, beg to differ. Every religion functions within its own framework. We as Jews have been ecumenical; that is, universalists, from our earliest beginnings. The Jew was the first to proclaim a universal God who is concerned with the life and destiny of every human being, Jew and non-Jew alike. Our sages from time immemorial taught us that every human being in accordance with his meritorious deeds can attain a share in eternity. The uniqueness of the Jew, however, is that he always searches for a harmonious blending between his being a universalist and at the same time, a particularist.

In our daily worship we pray to the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob - and you! He’s my God who I discover through my own particular religious

⁴⁹⁷ Devarim 4:4

experiences through the revealed law of the Torah, and the divine disciplines and moral conduct demanded of me by God.

Hence a traditional Jew will not compromise either with his universalism or with his particularism. But to attain this end, we need not belong to a Synagogue Council.

Furthermore, some say that the main goal of the Synagogue Council is to help in creating a spirit of unity in the American Jewish Community. Here again I disagree. In the things in which we differ we can have no unity, nor should it be expected of us - particularly of Jews of orthodox orientation.

In the things which we fully agree upon, and in which all of us are deeply concerned, we are the most united people in the world.

If Russian Jewry is denied the religious liberty to bake מצה for פסח, or attend religious service, or give their children a religious education, all of us - regardless of the different norms of the synagogue to which we belong - are equally disturbed and ask ourselves what can we do about it?

If the borders of the State of Israel are threatened, all of us - with the exception of the Jew who practice self-hatred - synchronize our hearts, minds and souls and ask ourselves what can we do to help?

If anti-semitic movement generates in any part of the world, all Jews are united as one and we who enjoy security, religious freedom, feel even a greater responsibility. The anti-semite has no concern whether we lay תפילין every day or whether or not we observe the Sabbath and Kashrut. A Jew is a Jew!

“What service then can the Synagogue Council render for the welfare of the Jewish community?” In my humble judgement, whether 50 splinter Jewish groups, or one united group to represent the totality of the Jewish community, it matters in which we are of one attitude and of the same concern. Why not encourage one lay organization which can serve as an umbrella for the unanimous sentiment of the majority of the religious Jewish community?

I am not a separatist, and I firmly believe that regardless of our differences we should work together in unison where we think alike and feel alike for the good of Jewry as a whole. I thank you for the tribute which you have paid me.

I shall define to you my philosophy as an orthodox Jew. By any means, rebuke, demand, reprove and read for a maximum Jewish education for a greater Jewish consciousness, for better Talmud Torahs, for more day schools & yeshivot, for more Torah learning and greater Torah practice. But never in the spirit of hatred, vengeance or grudges but in the spirit of genuine love and affection.

No compromise with our sacred heritage, with the link in our golden chain of being. In this spirit we walk together.

PUBLISHED ARTICLES

The Sabbath

(Hamaor/The Light April 1968/Nissan 5728)

The institution of the Sabbath is one of the greatest creations of the Jewish genius and one of the richest contributions that Judaism has made to the world.

The Torah links the Sabbath with the creation of the world. In the Ten Commandments, it occupies the next place to the proclamation of the oneness of G-d, whose name must not be taken in vain or applied to false idols.

It reads: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the L-rd thy God. In it thou shalt not do any manner of work; thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the L-rd made Heaven and Earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefor the L-rd blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it”⁴⁹⁸.

It is the only festival observance ordered by the Ten Commandments. All our other holidays came as a result of historical events and not as part of the Creation. The Sabbath alone is thus distinguished, for it is in the ultimate, the very goal of the creation.

In our Sabbath prayers we say, “For it is a sign between Me and the children of Israel.” How is the Sabbath a sign between G-d and the children of Israel? In the religious philosophy of the Jew the world is conceived as belonging to G-d - “the earth is the L-rd’s and the fullness thereof”⁴⁹⁹. Everything we have: life, materials, possessions, talents - all belong to G-d. We are only the trustees who have been commissioned to hold them for a time.

To show our recognition of this relationship we have set aside a portion of everything and consecrated it to God. In the past we set aside one tribe, the tribe of Levi, to be devoted entirely to the service of G-d. A part of the harvest belonged to G-d - the ceremony of *Pidyon Haben* has its origin in this custom. In the same manner, one day out of seven was set aside for G-d.

⁴⁹⁸ Shemot 20:8-11

⁴⁹⁹ Tehillim 24:1

“It came to pass that a man went to market with seven coins. Seeing a beggar asking for alms, he gave the poor man six coins and kept one for himself. The beggar, instead of being thankful, followed the good man, and stole the seventh coin also”. What an abominable wretch that beggar was. But then, are we, too, not like him - do we not steal the seventh day after being given six?

Rightly observed, the Sabbath is the day when man throws off his weekday cares and worries, and refreshes his spirit for the entire week of toil. It is designed to rouse man's life to a higher level, by affording him a day of rest and imparting to him the idea of human equality.

In Deuteronomy we read, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy... and thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God brought thee out thence... therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day”.

From these declarations, we understand that man is expected to set aside one day a week, to remember that cruel enslavement of man by man, and to recognize the importance of social justice, freedom and understanding. As far as the Jew is concerned, the benefits of the Sabbath must be extended to all, “thy man-servant, thy maid-servant, thy cattle and the stranger within thy gates”, so that they “may rest as well as thou”. Here is the first expression of Jewish universalism and social justice.

There is an old Rabbinic saying: “More than Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has helped to keep Israel.” Who can estimate what part the Sabbath has played in the maintenance of the Jew? Remember his tragic status during the great part of the Middle Ages. Dangers beset him on all sides; he was the victim of relentless persecution, the pariah of the nations, defamed, degraded and despised.

Yet, he refused to accept the estimate his enemies formed of him. The Sabbath saved him from self-degradation. It was “an island of rest in a surging sea of persecution”. It created for him an atmosphere of serenity and peace. “The lamp is lit, all sorrows flit. Baah Shabbat, baah menuchah.”

It transformed the outcast into a prince, and enabled him to preserve his dignity and self-respect. The sweetness and fragrance of the Sabbath suffused his whole life. Denied economic, political, and social equality, he was aware of moral and spiritual superiority. During most centuries of Jewish life, the people of Israel observed the Sabbath to the fullest. The best foods, the best clothes, the best of everything were reserved for the Sabbath.

Many beautiful home customs and legends have arisen in connection with Sabbath observance. One such legend has it that a pious Jew on the way home from the synagogue on Friday evening is accompanied by two angels, an angel of good and a

demon of evil. If, when he enters his home, he finds it bright and cheerful with lighted candles on the table, and if his wife and children, washed and dressed in their best clothes, greet him lovingly, then the good angel is delighted and says: "May this be repeated next week and all the weeks to come", and the demon of evil is compelled to say "Amen".

If, on the other hand, he finds the house dark and dreary and his wife and children unkempt and shabby, the demon of evil chuckles and says: "May this be repeated every Friday night", and the good angel, with a tear in his eye, is compelled to say "Amen". This legend forms the basis for the charming little poem, "Shalom Aleichem", which is chanted by the family when the father returns from the synagogue.

After the children are blessed by both parents, the family is seated about the table, and the father sanctifies the Sabbath over a cup of wine. The elaborate meal is interspersed with cheerful conversation and the singing of *Zemirot*. These medieval poems are full of references and allusions to the Bible, the Talmud and the Midrash. The melodies are not standardized; every family has its own traditional tunes.

Friday evening should be devoted to the family in the home and anything that takes the family away from the home should be discouraged. It is the strengthening of the family unit which has enabled Jews to survive as a people, by giving them emotional, psychological and spiritual security.

On Sabbath morning, services are held in the synagogue. The rabbis in the Talmud stress the importance of attending prayers regularly in appointed houses of worship. There is a very good psychological observance behind this suggestion. The frame of mind necessary for prayer is more readily induced when one prays in a place that is associated in the mind with prayer. Sabbath worship is still the chief bond uniting Jews into a religious brotherhood. Neglect of such worship injures the spiritual life of both the individual and the community.

The noon meal is also preceded by Kiddush, and the third meal, *Shalosh Seudot*, is prescribed for a period between the afternoon (*Minchah*) and evening (*Maariv*) services. The three Sabbath meals, which are, of course, prepared by the housewife before the advent of the Sabbath, are a religious duty. The Hassidim attached special importance to the third meal which is consumed at sunset - *Shalosh Seudot*.

When the evening prayer is concluded after nightfall, the *Havdalah* (division) blessing chanted over wine, to mark the separation of the Sabbath from the week days, and the beginning of a new and, we hope, "good week" (*a gutte voch*). In addition to the blessing over wine, there are benedictions over spice kept in a special container, since spice was used at the end of a meal in the olden days, and over a

candle, since it is now permitted once more to kindle lights. At home Havdalah is recited by the father for the benefit of all the family.

Thus, the Sabbath is the keystone of the entire structure of Jewish life. Remove it and the whole structure of Judaism crumbles away.

One cannot deny, however, that this fourth Commandment is a painful subject to discuss, because among Jews today it is honoured more in the breach than in the observance. Unquestionably, one of the greatest factors in the breakdown of the tradition pattern of Jewish life is the loss of the Sabbath, as it was observed by Jews for many many generations. By the wholesale destruction of the Sabbath, we have lost one of the mightiest fortresses that the Jewish people had.

Today, in a world of turmoil and unrest, in a world where we are witnessing the breakdown of family life, and when the whole fabric of society is being torn down, we Jews have a sacred task to preserve that precious gift bestowed by G-d upon Israel - the Sabbath.

The Jewish woman was recognized even being the giving of the Torah as the major factor in the maintenance of the Jewish faith. Let her show the lead today by according Queen Sabbath the cheerful reception she deserves; by preparing the cooking before the advent of the Sabbath; by preparing a Shabbosdik table; by lighting the candles; by abstaining from all shopping, cooking and cleaning on the Sabbath day; and by urging the father to make Kiddush and to make a special effort to attend synagogue services with his family. For, in the words of Abraham Ibn Ezra, "If I keep the Sabbath, G-d will keep me".

Let is not be said that the people which gave the Sabbath to the world is becoming a Sabbathless people.

Prayer can help you

(Hamaor/The Light June 1962/Sivan 5722)

Some time ago a young man in trouble visited me in my study. He had lost his job and his domestic peace had been disturbed by quarrels and arguments with his wife. He himself seemed to be on the verge of a nervous collapse. After he had unburdened himself, I asked him, "Have you ever tried prayer as a means to help in your trouble?" He answered in the negative, explaining that he did not know how to pray. He had not received any thorough religious training in his childhood and in any case he had made no attempt to prayer because he thought that prayer could be of no help.

I opened a Bible and showed him two instances where great men had resorted to prayer when facing insurmountable difficulties and when all other human means had

failed. There is the story of Isaac and Rebecca, a childless couple. The Bible tells us **וַיַּעֲתֵר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְנִכְחַ אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֵקְרָה הִוא** - “And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord let Himself be entreated to him, and Rebecca his wife conceived.”⁵⁰⁰

The Rabbis give us a detailed description of how Isaac and Rebecca prayed. Isaac stood in a corner and prayed for children and Rebecca stood in the opposite corner and also prayed for children. And God answered their prayers. The again there is the story which tells of Jacob’s fears and anxieties before becoming reconciled with his brother, who had threatened to kill him because Jacob had taken his father’s blessing: “Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed... and said, ‘O God of my father Avraham, and God of my father Isaac... deliver me, I pray, Thee **הַצִּילֵנִי** **מֵיַד** from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, the mother with the children.”⁵⁰¹

In these two different human situations the Bible reveals the power and efficacy of prayer. Isaac and Rebecca could not hope for children, because Rebecca was barren. All human efforts and all medical science would be of no avail. They were condemned to a state of childlessness. But their prayers to God and their prayers were rewarded. The second instance deals with a fraternal relationship. Esau hated his brother and had vowed to destroy him. On Jacob’s return home after his long absence working for Laban, his messengers returned to say that not only had Esau’s hatred not diminished, but that he was actively engaged in preparing war against Jacob. He prayed and God answered his prayers. “And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept.”⁵⁰² It was the prayer that Jacob had uttered from the depths of his heart that was accepted by God, and that had brought about the brotherly reunion of Jacob and Esau. It was the prayer of Jacob that had transformed a former enemy into a brother.

It is significant that the Hebrew word for prayer is “tefillah”. Etymologically, this word is not “prayer” exactly, but rather “self-examination”. It is said of the ancient rabbis, men of great piety, that they required a period of preparation before every prayer. They did not believe in prayer as routine, as we read in The Ethics of the Fathers⁵⁰³, **וּבְשֵׁאתָה מֵתְפִלָּל אַל תַּעַשׂ תְּפִלַּתְךָ קִבֵּעַ**, - “Do not make your prayer a fixed, mechanical task, but an appeal for mercy and grace before the Lord, the all-present Father. For He is gracious, full of mercy, slow to anger, and abounding in love and kindness.”

⁵⁰⁰ Bereishit 25:21

⁵⁰¹ Bereishit 32:8, 12

⁵⁰² Bereishit 33:4

⁵⁰³ Avot 2:13

These ancient men of wisdom knew how to pray. They remained in solitude for a full hour before entering the Synagogue to join the congregation. This was a period of self-examination and clarification, of purification of the heart. The rabbis did not want to enter into communion with God unless they had removed all the obstacles that could stand between themselves and their Father in heaven.

In the classic textbook of Jewish mysticism, “The Zohar”, we find a profound definition of prayer. As the flame encloses the black, sooty clod in a garment of fire, and releases the heart imprisoned therein, even so does prayer clothe a man in a garment of holiness, evoke the light and fire implanted within him by his Maker, illumine his whole being, and unite him with the Lord and the higher world.

True prayer, prayer with devotion and fervor, or to use the ancient Hebrew phrase, with כוונה, is what can save a man, a country, even an entire age. For so long as we are able to pour out our hearts with כוונה no matter how far we have strayed or how deep into the dark depths of depravity we have sunk, we are not lost and our world is not lost.

There is no question that every human being has within himself the potentiality for prayer and carried within him a spark of the Divine. Every human, created in the image of God, partakes of the Divine through his immortal soul. Man can rise above himself and attain the blessings of spiritual joy through prayer.

Unfortunately, there are many people today who have reduced the divine gift of prayer to mere lip service - a matter of routine. Our world is passing through a great crisis. The hydrogen bomb, the launching of satellites have created fear and hypertension. Conference after conference attempts to re-establish the world upon a foundation of peace and security. Will they be successful? Will political action solve our human problem? Does our salvation lie in the sphere of economics? In a time like ours mankind must turn to prayer as the only effective means to surmount difficulties which ordinary processes of political and economic life cannot resolve. It is no coincidence that the sages of the Talmud declared על שלושה דברים העולם עומד, “Our world rests upon three pillars - Torah, prayer and the performance of good deeds.”⁵⁰⁴

The story is told in the Talmud that in ancient times two children, who were destined to become great sages, were studying together under the same teacher. Once he asked them, “Where is God?” The first child pointed in answer to the roof of the schoolroom. The second child took his teacher by the hand and led him out into the street. There he pointed to the heavens.

⁵⁰⁴ Avot 1:2

Many centuries later this story was told by another teacher to another child who grew up to be one of the very greatest of all Jewish Rabbis. As he concluded the retelling, the master asked: "Well, child, if I asked you where is God, how would you answer?" The child reflected for a moment and then said thoughtfully, "God is to be found in any man who chooses to admit Him."

The Jewish Home: Faith, Love, Peace

(Hamaor/The Light April 1962/Nissan 5722)

Judaism recognises the home as the most beautiful thing in the world, for the Jewish home contains faith (אמונה), love (אהבה), and peace (שלום).

Practically the whole of Jewish tradition and ritual is centred round the home and the family. When our people were exiled and scattered to the four corners of the globe, it was the home and family life which held them together.

A house is a place in which people eat and sleep. A home is where a family lives together. A house is a shelter against the elements. A home is a sanctuary for love and comradeship. The beauty of a house lies in the skilful arrangement of brick and stone without. The beauty of a home lies in the spirit of devotion and dedication glowing within. An attractive house pleases the eye. A beautiful home enriches the soul.

We Jews have always built homes, not houses. It is true that Jews have been nurtured on the Torah, it is also true that the Synagogue has been the chief bulwark in Jewish life, the fortress of our faith, hope and belief. But if Israel has lived by Torah, by faith and by worship, these have been made possible because of the home that has stood as their protecting guardian. The Jewish home is the soil in which everything else grows. Here is the ultimate source of the richness of our life, the variety of our tradition.

A Jewish home is first of all a place to hear words of Torah and Jewishness, where Jewish practices and customs are respected and obeyed. The home is the first playground, the first school, and the first synagogue, of the child. The parent is his first companion, teacher and preacher. The influence of the parent is lasting. We see the mother lighting the Friday evening candles with true devotion, the father making Kiddush - to create an atmosphere where children may learn reverence for Judaism.

The same thing can be said of other holidays. Chanukah with the lighting of the lights, Purim with its games and fun-making. Sukkot with the erection of the Sukkah. Passover with its Seder observance - all of them find their fullest expression through the home. Judaism is a religion of the home, the child finds the groundwork of Judaism; the child hears about the sacred Jewish laws; he hears words of honour and

kindliness, he learns from his parents reverence for G-d, respect for mankind and the feeling that every man is a child of G-d.

Parents must be sincere in their prayers, their observances, their attendance at religious service, so that they may teach their children the religious way of life. There is no other way to teach religion than through the home. It can influence, it can teach, it can inspire. In a truly Jewish home, parents should share Jewish interests with their children. And if they have none to share, their task is obviously to develop some. It is the tragedy of so many Jewish homes today that the only references to Jewish life are in words of mourning and sadness. Children get from their parents and from their homes no positive Jewish content, only the feeling that Jewishness and persecution are synonymous terms. Far too many parents today feel that their obligation to their children's Jewish education begins and ends when they enrol him in Hebrew classes for a few years. They do not realise how inadequate these Hebrew classes are without the active co-operation of the Jewish home.

Hebrew classes with their limited time, can only teach abstract text-book Judaism. How much meaning can that have if the child sees no evidence of Jewish living at home? In fact, without a truly Jewish home, the lessons the child learns in the classes can only confuse him.

He is taught how Jews should live and yet the Jews he loves most, his parents, do not live that way. Who is wrong - his parents or the classes? Obviously they cannot both be right, and the result is confusion in the child. In the end both the child and Judaism are the losers. Parents do not realise the far-reaching effects this has, for in failing to come to terms with his heritage, the child is unable in later life to cope with a situation where he may be penalised for his heritage. No parent would deliberately expose his child to the bitter cold winds of winter without adequate protection, yet they expose their children without a thought to the icy winds of intolerance without the necessary inner protection of Jewish values, Jewish learning and Jewish pride.

To sum up, in the words of Dr. J. Hertz, "Without a home-religion there is neither religion nor a true Jewish home for the Jew."

PULL-OUT QUOTES FROM SERMONS

Organized from A-Z

- [A Barmitzvah] does not mean] the beginning. It means that now you are old enough to know what you don't know.
- A basic shortcoming of mankind is the use of excuses.
- All of us, at one time or another, fights despair, battles our own conscience, and seeks to retain our humility in the face of success.
- All the great human accomplishments must be preceded by dreams.
- Crass & weeds may grow up overnight, but wheat & corn & fruit trees take much time & effort & energy to produce.
- Despite the persecutions, Israel has survived and has now revived. A new lease of life has come to that nation which was nearly consumed by Nazi flames. Can any history show a greater miracle?
- Each one of us is responsible in Judaism for his own spiritual growth through ethical deed and holy living.
- Every one of us must so discipline himself that our every thought, our every utterance, our every deed, must be one that will reflect our love of Jews.
- Everything in Jewish life is sacred and every Jew is precious. We love all Jews whether they do little or much, whether they embrace everything, or observe little. All Jews are part of **כלל ישראל**. But let us remember that Judaism is not a formula for specific days of the year, but a specific formula for all the days of the year; let us remember that Judaism is not a program for special aspects of life, but a special program for all aspects of life.
- Exile is an illness akin to no other. Exile is a sickness of Jewish identity, of broken people, of 2,000 years of inferiority and rejection. Israel, the new state, has begun the cure. Already the Jew walks erect, already the Jew holds his head high. Life has new meaning and purpose. The Jew has a place where he fully belongs.
- For despite all the material progress of the last decades, despite the amazing and remarkable achievements of science and atomic energy, the inner life of man is mute. Civilization has not risen to higher moral levels. Man has not found peace and contentment. Man is disturbed, restless and distressed. He's lonely. His soul is hungry, empty and vacuous. The achievements of the brain do not satisfy its guest. This is the very reason why men are seeking today, as they never have before, the solution to the mystery and mastery of life.
- From the days of our ancestor Jacob, down to our very own, we have witnessed the eternal struggle between the hands of Esau and the voice of

Jacob. We have been forced to go through fire and water. But we are here, still a living force upon the stage of history. We are here because it has always been the voice of the Synagogue that summoned us, and because our hearts have always responded to that voice.

- ‘God Is the beginning’ is a lesson which mankind needs today.
- God must find a place in our youth. Our synagogues dare not be מושבי זקנים, the gathering of old men and women only. Youth must participate in our religious endeavours.
- How is it we give our youth everything we believe they need and want, only to find that much of it they do not want and the rest of it they do not need
- I am not a separatist and I firmly believe that regardless of our differences we should work together in unison where we think alike and feel alike for the good of Jewry as a whole.
- I shall define to you my philosophy as an orthodox Jew. By any means, rebuke, demand, reprove and read for a maximum Jewish education for a greater Jewish consciousness, for better Talmud Torahs, for more day schools & yeshivot, for more Torah learning and greater Torah practice. But never in the spirit of hatred, vengeance or grudges but in the spirit of genuine love and affection.
- If our children are to enter upon their full religious, cultural and national heritage and enlarge it - raising the Temple of our tradition still higher - we must endow them with love of Israel and of Torah, with a spirit of dedication and service, with an irresistible passion to build the people and the land in the process of which they will find personal renewal and salvation.
- If you want to live a good life, a life that will bring happiness to you and blessedness to your fellow men, then live it in accordance with our Torah.
- In Israel the Jew works and lives free, out of the prison of fear of others, free of subjection to the will of others.
- In June 1967 God created us anew as a people. In six days from June 5th to June 10th He rebuilt our shattered hopes and created new dimensions of historical possibilities. However, the seventh day is yet to be won.
- In our Bar Mitzvah’s, I am afraid there’s too much “Bar” and not enough “Mitzvah.”
- In prayer we are reminded that the only things really worth having are personal values.
- In six days, God created the world, and God made the seventh day holy. “Six days shall you work and do all your labour, and the seventh day shall be a

Sabbath to the Lord Your God". The purpose of the six days was the seventh day. In June 1967 God created us anew as a people. In six days, from June 5th to June 10th, He rebuilt our shattered hopes and created new dimensions of historical possibilities. However, the seventh day is yet to be won.

- In the final analysis, we are born alone, die alone, and in our most trying moments - despite the presence of others - we are uniquely alone. But God is always with us.
- Israel wove the dream of a beautiful future out of the strands of its own grief.
- Israel's greatest contributions to the world were made possible through its little country. It was there that the prophets wrought their immortal works. It was there that the Bible was created. It was there that Prophets prophesied, and it was there, that the Psalmist sang his immortal psalmodies. It was there the men of the Great Synagogue laid the foundations of the Synagogue and Liturgy. It was there that the Mishna was created which became the basis of the Talmudic lore. It was that little land, that inspired poets like Yehuda HaLevi and Bialik. It was that little land that was the heart of the world, as our sages put it.
- It is the Torah which has made the Jewish people immortal, and this immortality is such that against it, the all-powerful hand of time is impotent.
- It is our responsibility to keep on kindling and kindling, lighting and lighting, until a spiritual flame will grow into brilliance and splendor of its own strength.
- Judaism cannot survive if there is no planning for the future.
- Judaism is rooted in the doctrine of human responsibility.
- Just as it is impossible for this people to live without its Torah, so is it impossible for this people of Israel to live without an attachment to its historic land.
- Just as the children of Israel of old had to fight a battle for survival, so must Anglo Jewry today.
- Justice, kindness, humility are three pillars on which the structure of Judaism rests. It is for this that you must work all the days of your life. To be a Jew worthy of the name you must act justly and kindly to everyone, and to be humble in the presence of God.
- Life is spelled out in terms of whole tablets and broken tablets. It is made up of our successes and our failures, of our frustrations and our fulfillments, of stepping stones and stumbling blocks, of our integrity and our compromises.
- Like Job, when all was apparently lost, when the fortune of Israel appeared to have reached the zero point, deliverance came [and] the Jewish State was

born. The people who walked in darkness saw a great light, they that dwelt in the shadow of death, upon them did the light shine.

- Loyalty to one's faith and to one's people shows strength of character which can withstand temptations and defy obstacles.
- Man fulfils his purpose...only in respect to the degree to which he develops his moral and spiritual potentialities.
- Man, from the earliest moment of history, had to choose between the temporal visible things, and the eternal unseen objects.
- No compromise with our sacred heritage, with the link in our golden chain of being. In this spirit we walk together.
- No Jew may rightly call himself happy if he knows that another Jew elsewhere suffers.
- Not by acts of aggression or dishonesty did we acquire land in Palestine, but by purchasing it sometimes at astronomical prices. Not only did we buy the land, but with superhuman labour we cultivated it. We sowed with tears and anguish. We built with the gun in one hand, and the trowel in the other. But plant we did and build we did and Palestine flourished under the Chalutzim and the Heroism of the Haganah.
- Only that man, who has been a force for human goodness and lives in the hearts and souls of those who have benefitted by his presence in this world during his pilgrimage on earth, of him only can it be said וְיָהִי. Only such a man is heir to immortality.
- Shall we be blind to the miraculous, just because we are witness to the events? Have we grown so sophisticated and jaded that we cannot sense a miracle when it occurs to us? Have we grown so cynical that we cannot sense a miracle when it occurs to us? And having witnessed the miracle, and having sensed the presence of God, can we ever really be the same again?
- The child of today comes to Hebrew School לְתוֹרָה, on a tour, for a short visit until Bar Mitzvah, seeking only the superficial and enjoyable!! The pupil of yesterday came to the "Cheder" לְחֵפֶר to explore all the precious, inexhaustible mines and all the ethical, judicial and spiritual treasure houses of the Torah, to dig deeply into the ideals and dreams of Judaism and come up with an abundance of scholarship, a glow of spiritual realities, and a soul thrilling reverence before the sublime epitome of all thought.
- The child whose education is being starved today will be less able to shoulder the burden of responsibility for community and national welfare tomorrow.
- The creation of the State of Israel was an historic & momentous event which our generation does not, perhaps as yet, fully understand.

- The Jew was able to live because he not only recalled his past, with all its difficulties, tragedies, defeats, but because he always had the hopes & beliefs ..of a future that would be marked with triumph & glory.
- The object of the Synagogue is to prepare us to be in the mood for prayer.
- The problem of what it means to be a Jew is a comparatively new one. Before our time Jews knew exactly who they were and what they stood for. Jewish life, and the program of Jewish living, were clearly understood. A Jew might have neglected the customs which he was expected to observe, but at least he knew exactly what it was that he was breaking away from.
- The power to overcome persecution & suffering, the strength to outlive and outlast our enemies, were acquired from the Synagogue.
- The sense of **יראת הרוממות** - the ability to stand awestruck before the mighty and glorious works of the Creation - is something only man possess.
- The spiritual progress of a Synagogue is in direct proportion to the rate of increase in the number of children and young people who frequent it.
- The struggle between the good inclination and the evil inclination is the great struggle of truth against falsehood, of good against evil, of beauty against ugliness.
- The Torah, when followed, brings joy and peace of body and mind.
- The true friend is he who will not hesitate to point out a fault with the clear objective of correcting it.
- The way to peace is only to be found along the high road of morality of our common humanity.
- The yearning to be aware of the **מקומו של עולם** - the all present and all transcending reality of God - that is the faculty of the human soul.
- There are small homes that are heavens on earth, and small Synagogues that warm us through and through.
- There are those who have a mistaken notion that prayer is merely petition- in which we ask God to do something for us. The truth is that our prayers, are at their noblest and best, when we attune our souls to listen to God to learn what He wants us to do for His people and His faith, “I will hear: said the prophet, “what the Lord God will say.”
- There are two basic reasons for human prejudice: one is a feeling of superiority; the other is a sense of inferiority.
- There’s a kind of inner “sunshine” that we call spiritual light. It is hard to describe. You cannot see it. But you can feel its warmth. You know that it is present in your very soul. It is a kind of inner light that no money can buy. People who are religious usually know what this light is. Religion brings it to

the heart. We feel that light within us, when we pray, when we do good for others, and when we help our fellow man. How fortunate are those who know what this inside sunshine is.

- To be a Jew is to stand firm against temptation and corrupt example from far and near; it may entail sacrifices of comfort, pleasure, and convenience, it may entail, being content to suffer privation, and hardship, for one's faith and people, to answer all detractors by a blameless life. To be a Jew means to love, to honour, and to respect parents, to revere teachers and to lead the upright life. To be a Jew, means that you are not Bar Mitzvah for today only, but a Bar Mitzvah for the whole of your life.
- To be born with a silver spoon in your mouth is counted a blessing, but to have live in happiness together for 25 years and to celebrate a silver wedding anniversary is both a blessing and an accomplishment.
- Torah was not given to Angels, because angels are perfect. Torah was given to man, because man is not perfect – but can become so.
- Torah-less Judaism is ideologically a horrendous monstrosity. In practice it is a form of Jewish nihilism that spells the irretrievable ruin of all that the Jew has ever held precious or that can possibly sustain his future national identity. Without Torah, the Jew is an historical anachronism, an ethnic fossil, a curious racial museum piece; he belongs to the world of the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians.
- Unless we achieve a meaningful and consistent philosophy of life, let us not be harsh with our youth for doing in their juvenile way what we do on a more mature level.
- We are all slaves-slaves to habit, slaves to prejudice, to convention, slaves to convenience.
- We must learn and work for that which has enduring value, and discard that which is only of monetary worth.
- We must learn how to regard our fellow men as our benefactors and as our comrades in the struggle for a better tomorrow. We must learn how to repress our small and selfish motives and to rise to the status and the dignity of humanity made in the image of God. Even when we disagree with our own brothers we must learn to respect them and the things they believe in. We must recognize that just as there are different types of children in a family, varying in appearance and in mentality, equally so there are various colors and races and creeds in the human family. We are nevertheless, but one family. The moment we begin to lose sight of this fact, we are all in common danger.
- We must not lose sight of the fact that we are part and parcel of the Anglo-Jewish Scene, and what affects Anglo-Jewry collectively is bound, eventually, to affect us individually.

- We were conceived as a people whose aim would be to establish justice and righteousness in their world.
- We, who lived to see with our own eyes the miracle of the rebirth of the Jewish State, are witness to the power of that dream.
- What the world needs today more than ever is the inspiration of the Bible. “Back to the Bible” should be our slogan!
- When our people were exiled and were scattered to the corners of the globe, it was the Synagogue that held them together. It was the Synagogue that marched with our people through the long and dark centuries of persecution. It witnessed Israel’s joys and sorrows. Within its walls the haunted soul of our people sought refuge, and in it, the prayer for his return to Zion.
- When a man brings to reflect upon all his deeds and becomes fully conscious, his soul ascends progressively until it attains the most sublime heights.
- Whenever we come across a new face, we study it hungrily in an attempt to penetrate beneath the surface, to locate the man’s soul, to read his thoughts.
- Without education we cannot expect observance; without learning we cannot expect loyalty.
- Without Torah we are an ordinary people. Without Eretz Israel we are a homeless people. Without the **חיי עולם הבא**, ‘a world to come’ we cannot rise about the average standard of nationhood.
- Without water, the most fruitful soil turns into a desert, so an age without Torah, be it ever so intellectual or prosperous, is doomed to spiritual aridity, to speedy disintegration and decay.
- You are the contributor, the instrument, by means of which the cry of the Jewish people, the cry of every individual clamoring for his right to live a free life, is sounded.
- Young people will inherit tomorrow the Judaism of today, but I am afraid that the legacy will be on the sorry side unless we do something about it today and not tomorrow.

