

"A Change of Face and a Change of Pace "

I ^{imagine} ~~maintain~~ that if this afternoon Abraham should come walking down Park Avenue, this would cause a sensation. Of course, ^{some of} our local Jews would be shocked beyond description. Their sense of propriety would be outraged by his ^{oriental} ~~bedouin's~~ attire; ^{by his flowing white beard, and by his deep-set, sparkling eyes;} most would take him for ^{an eccentric} ~~a queer~~ who has ventured outside his native ^{Williamsburgh} ~~Greenwich Village~~, and very probably, some would waste no time in calling the police and having Abraham arrested for disturbing the peace.

Whatever it may be, and I invite you with me in this fantasy, I venture that as shocked as we would be, Abraham would be more shocked. And not by our skyscrapers or penthouses or automobiles - an Abraham is not startled by such things - but rather, he would be taken aback by the change of face that our generations of Jews has undergone. He would be so astounded at our change of face that he would not even extend to us the courtesy of a "Gut Yom Tov". Rather, he would peer at us intently, he would stare at us with his black desert-dweller's eyes and say with dismay, "But are ye not my children? I recognize ye not!" Indeed he would not recognize us. For we have had a change of face.

Now, what do we mean when we say that this generation has experienced a "change of face"? We do not mean that our modern Jews do not have long beards. Today we may trim our moustaches, shave our whiskers and shorten our ^{שניב}, our sideburns. But that does not account for a change of face. The modern Jew may dress differently and speak in English rather than in Hebrew or Aramaic, yet this too is not a change of face. Also, a "change of face" does not imply a "change of heart". No, the modern Jew, despite all his metamorphoses and shortcomings is still endowed with a great Jewish heart. He is a ^{מחנך}, a merciful, kind man. He leads, on the average, an excellent family life, and when he comes to worship in his synagogue his heart is really in his prayers. No, there has been no change of heart. Abraham would not accuse us of that. But he would be amazed by this mysterious change in more superficial characteristics; qualities, which while not being the most basic, are yet fundamental enough - as symbols of something deeper.

מיד נהפך קלסטר פניו אל יצחק

זאָתה לער אהרן: אַררעכ בויליג אג וזחך. Then, the townsfolk -

Getting back to our fantasy, I repeat, Abraham would demand of us the same change of face that his son - our grandfather- Isaac experienced, if we are to lay claim to being his children, if we will insist that we are Jews. For it is not enough to feel like

a Jew, and it is not even enough to act like a Jew - one must also look like a Jew. His life must have פנים | של | יידיש , a Jewish face, his community life and functions must have a Jewish appearance. מ' | פ | נהפך | ל | אדם | גוי | , a bit of plastic surgery is the order of the day.

Let me give you some examples of what is meant by this change of the Jewish physiognomy. Take the synagogue, for instance - not this synagogue, but hundreds of others all over the country. First of all, I may add in passing, they are no longer known as "synagogues" - they seem to have outgrown that name - but they are called "temples". In these temples there has been introduced what we now know as "mixed pews". Men and women sit together. Now, no one is casting any aspersions on the sincerity of these worshippers in these temples. For the most part, they are honest, well-intentioned Jews. But let us face the issue frankly: these Jewish houses of worship have lost their פנים | של | יידיש , they have changed their faces and no longer look Jewish. What with their mixed pews, organs, mixed choruses and changed form of prayers, their פנים | של | יידיש , their face, their appearance, is no longer that of an Abraham, no longer Jewish - one is sometimes inclined to believe that they differ from the houses of worship of any other denomination only in architectural design. These poor people have been told by their leaders that the issue at stake is the status of woman in Jewish life; they have been seduced by the red herring of democracy for the weaker sex. And in their ignorance, these well-intentioned but misguided people have taken to reshaping the face of contemporary Judaism's holiest institution, the synagogue. Unaware of the basic equality of the sexes in Judaism, and possibly even of the preferred treatment given women, they have mauled the indiginously Jewish appearance of the Jewish house of prayer. Ignorant of the fundamental understanding of human psychology and the desire to retain the organizational construction of the Holy Temple which motivate the שני | חצוצרות | or separate-pew system in Traditional synagogues, our up-to-date and Protestant-imitating coreligionists have mutilated the Jewish face of the synagogue until it no longer resembles the sort of place where a Jew feels like praying. Abraham would meet many such Temple-worshippers on Park Ave. this afternoon, and he would

demand a complete change of face before he would consent to say to them "a happy new year, my children".

As a second example, let us take the form of expression a Jew gives to his religious feelings nowadays. I don't think the modern Jew has, inherently, less religious feeling than some other generations gone by. But that is not the question. The point is that our prayers - which are the vehicles by which we express our religious sentiment - are prayed in a different and inferior manner nowadays. Not that the words have changed - the words are the same as those prayed almost two thousand years ago. But the worshippers who utter the prayers do not give them the קולות פניו של אברהם אבינו, the Jewish face. Take, for instance, the שמונה עשרה prayer of שבת night. Who could fail to be inspired by the emotion that once went into אם תשליכנו אלהינו ואלהינו, "O G-d, do not reject us in our old age"? All of us remember how our fathers and mothers ^{grand-}and fathers and grandfathers used to cry and wail and amid a flood of tears ask for G-d's gracious help. Yet our modern synagogue-goers say the same words, possibly mean the same thing, yet they squelch their tears inside and are ashamed either of G-d or Man. How warm, for instance, was the שמונה עשרה of our parents, and how cold, by comparison, is ours. What a difference in religious temperature! I think that if Abraham were to walk into this synagogue for the Mussaf Services, he would look at our faces and, failing to find the sign of a tear, he would say, "But I remember with what spirit your fathers said this same prayer. Are ye indeed my children?"

No, it will not do. We need a change of face. And, my sophisticated friends, it will not be an indignity for us if we will shed a tear or two as we ask of G-d life and health for ourselves and our loved ones. אשר יתן לנו אלהינו ואלהינו. The facial features of Isaac were changed to resemble those of Abraham. והיה כי יראה אברהם את יצחק ויאמר לו מה עשית לי היום. At that moment it was recognized that Isaac was the son of Abraham. If we wish to preserve our Jewish identity we must begin to reshape the face of our lives - personal and community - and make it a Jewish face.

But if in the outward appearance of Jewish life we need a change of face, then

But it is even more than the tear of religious emotion that is missing from the Jewish face. It is something more intrinsic than that. It is the entire complexion of the Jewish face that is changed and all wrong. The modern Jewish face is discolored.

Our Rabbis have described the features of the Jewish face as follows: וְהָיָה פְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַחֲמִימִים וְנִינְיִים וְשֹׁמְיִים

וְהָיָה פְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַחֲמִימִים וְנִינְיִים וְשֹׁמְיִים "There are three features that are peculiar to this people: they are merciful, they are charitable, and they are shy". Certain of these features remain

indelibly on the modern Jewish face. We certainly are a merciful people. And no one will deny the charitableness of the Jew today. But, alas, the contemporary Jew is no longer a

| רַחֲמִימִים , a bashful, shy person. The Jewish face once was capable of turning crimson with the blush of shamefacedness; the Jewish face was once able to feel the warm blush of modesty and humility and shyness - but today it has forgotten to do so. A Jew

was once mortally ashamed of having it known that he was ignorant of the Torah; today he shouts the fact of his ignorance from the roof-tops. A Jew was once ashamed to face his Rabbi if he felt himself somewhat deficient in Talmudic knowledge. Today he takes his

abysmal ignorance of the most fundamental matters of Jewish life and lectures on it from lecterns and publishes it on the first page in the N.Y. Times in a lead article on the

Israeli Shemita Year. How discolored has the Jewish face become! Once upon a time, a Jew, even if he was non-observant, would quickly drop his cigarette to the ground if he met

a religious Jew in the street on Shabbos. Today he has lost his אֵלֶּיךָ , his shyness and modesty, and unblushingly says "Gut Shabbos" with his cigarette in his mouth. There

was a time when the Jewish face would turn scarlet if he were observed violating the Sabbath publicly. Today he thinks nothing of parking his car in front of the synagogue on Shabbos.

Yes, unfortunately, the Jewish face has lost its blush. Syas G-d concerning Israel: יְהוָה יִרְאֶה

יְהוָה יִרְאֶה - Let My fear be upon their faces so that they will not sin.

Certainly the greatest preventive of sin is the distinguishing feature of the Jewish face - the blush of shyness, modesty and fear of G-d.

life

But if in the outward appearance of ~~the~~ Jewish ~~face~~ we need a change of face, then

in the inherent, inward and fundamental matters of Jewish life we need - if I may borrow an expression from our national sport - a change of pace. Just as the ancient poet who wrote the beautiful *שבת היא לנו יום קדוש* conceived of Israel's battles against Satan in legal metaphors, so we American Jews might understand ^{it} in terms of two opposing teams in a baseball game. Satan is at bat, and Israel is pitching. And if she is to win she must pitch carefully and skilfully. And as you no doubt know, one of the techniques is a "change of pace" - either a sudden slowing down or a sudden speeding up of the ball.

So, if we are going to pitch to Satan, to all those forces which tend to confuse us and perplex us and foil our attempts at good constructive Jewish living, we must learn to apply the technique of "change of pace". In some things, in some phases of our life, we must slow down; in others we must accelerate our pace.

The first change of pace that we should consider is the slowing down of our rate of living. Our metropolitan, urban lives are so packed and so fast that we rarely have time to think of ourselves. The city-man is so busy saving time and making time that he has not a moment to spare for eternity, not a moment to spare for ultimate values. He is so busy with the business outlook, that he never considers the religious uplook. His daily prosaic events become so fast and furious that life passes over him like a swift stream, and he has not a single opportunity to taste of its sweet waters. How can we expect to feel religiously, if we refuse to slow down so that we can ^{feel} ~~taste~~ anything at all. It is true that you can practice religion in your office, with your check books and IBM machines. But you will not find the inspiration for religion in that office, because things go too fast there, and man is reduced to an automaton. If we, as individuals, are to find the Jewish feeling we so ardently desire, then we must slow down rather than speed up. We must have a change of pace in our daily living.

But the opposite is also needed. While our personal lives are being burnt out by their speed, there are phases of our community life which are too slow.

Take our charities, for example. Every nation will admit that we are the most charitable nation under the sun. No other people can boast of a UJA, or of an Israeli

You see, the same Abraham who would be so perturbed by our change of face, is himself also rather adept at a change of pace. There was a time in his life when everyone was in a hurry - but Abraham bided his time and tarried. You remember that Sodom was a wicked city, a city of evil and corruption and degeneracy, and that G-d had decided to vent His wrath upon this cesspool of humanity. And when G-d announced His decision to rain fire upon Sodom, it would have been expected of anyone who knew of this to take to his heels, to quicken his pace and get out of Sodom as fast as can be. ^{Who would be so unconcerned with his own personal} ~~Why, even the angels who had been visiting~~ safety as to remain in this G-d - doomed city which was tottering ~~Abraham in the guise of people actually left Sodom in a hurry~~ on the brink of destruction, being pulled down by ^{the} ~~its own~~ weight of sins? Yet, tells the Bible, וַיֵּשְׁבֶה אַבְרָהָם בְּסוֹדוֹם וְעַמּוֹרָה

Abraham did not run - he slowed down to a complete halt. "And Abraham was yet standing before the Lord". Yes, standing in holy prayer, finding time in his packed schedule to pray even for these demons in human shape. The pace is slow and easy - because someone else was in danger.

But the opposite is also needed. While there must, in some things, be a slower pace, in others there must be a quicker one. Abraham too knew when to hurry things up. He knew how to run when others would lie in bed. It was immediately after his circumcision - and remember that this was a dangerous and painful operation for a man his age - it was immediately after this that Abraham was sitting outside his tent and sunning himself. The pace, of course, was slow. Taking a sunbath. But then Abraham noticed three weary travellers - total strangers - passing by. Anyone's normal reaction would have been to retire into his house immediately and get into bed in the hope that the strangers will please go away and not bother a sick man. And justly so, very properly so. One is not expected to keep open house when he needs a nurse's attention. But what did Abraham do? וַיֵּשְׁבֶה אַבְרָהָם בְּסוֹדוֹם וְעַמּוֹרָה, he saw these weary travellers and ran toward them from where he had been sitting! What a wonderful change of pace! Despite a heavy operation, despite terrific pain, he hurried, because there were three hungry people who needed his attention.

So, then, we too must speed up our pace. While our personal lives are too fast, there are phases of our community life which are too slow.

Take our charities, for example, Everyone will admit that we are the most charitable nation under the sun. No other people can boast of a UJA, or of an Israeli

population accepting floods of impoverished immigrants as it does. Yet our American Jewish charities are time and again forced to get on their knees and cringingly beg the Jewish populace for donations. Oh, we give - - but so very slowly! If we gave the same amount, but more quickly and on time, it would accomplish as much as double the amount. Or for instance, take our local institutions, whether a Yeshiva University or other such institution. Had they gotten the same total amounts, but more quickly and on time, they would be twice as advanced as they are today. So what we need is a change of pace, we must speed up the vital processes of Jewish community life.

Education is another good example. Jewish parents have to an extent - though unfortunately not enough - been awakened to the necessity of a real Jewish education for their children. But what happens? The educational **tide** is as slow as molasses. Instead of accelerating the child's learning-pace and allowing him at least a five-day week in Jewish learning, it is chopped down to three by inefficient Talmud Torahs and to one by infamous Sunday schools. And furthermore, the modern child is for some reason believed more tender and more fragile than his predecessor two and three and four generations ago. He must not begin too early. Ten years, goes the popular superstition, is the right age for Jewish learning. People imagine that a child's mind comes in a glass case, marked "Handle with Care". And so the beginning is delayed and the whole process is slowed. ~~And so the beginning is delayed and the whole process~~ And what is the result? Look about you. The batter, Satan, has been hitting home-runs all over the American-Jewish ball park, and has knocked the learning out of the Jewish child's head before the first inning is over.

Certainly we must quicken the pace of learning. By experience we know that a more rapid pace will bring excellent results. Consider the state of education in this neighborhood. We can well be proud of our Ramaz School. The pace is fast and the ^{score} ~~result~~ terrific - and in our favor.

O Good and Merciful G-d, *אלהינו ה' יי אלהינו*, if there be no other aid for us in our battle against the witness of our transgressions, then teach us, O G-d, to strike him out. Teach us to change our pace - to slow down where necessary, and where necessary to speed like eagles in the clear morning air.