

ON AVOIDING THE EASY SOLUTIONS

One would not blame Abraham for voicing such sentiments. And yet, Abraham returns from his soul-shaking experience, hears of Nachor's fabulous family - AND ABRAHAM DOES NOT OBJECT. ABRAHAM DOES NOT PROTEST. ABRAHAM HAS NO COMPLAINTS. ABRAHAM

IS SILENT. ABRAHAM HAS NO ENVY FOR THE EASY WAYS OF HIS PAGAN BROTHER. ABRAHAM RESISTS THE TEMPTATION TO ASK FOR THE EASY SOLUTION TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS. ABRAHAM HAS PASSED HIS DIVINE TEST: for Abraham realizes that "ESS IS SHVER ZU ZEIN A YID", that somehow the Jew does not seek the easy solution to his problems, solutions which come with such ease to the non-Jew. Abraham realizes that Nachor who had no problems and no agony and no difficulty ~~in~~ with his children - that all these children, from top down, would soon be forgotten and lie in eternal obscurity in the graveyard of historical oblivion. Nachor's easy life was not a worthy one or a permanent one. But he, Abraham, who had gone through all this agony, all this pain and hardship for Isaac, would see of Isaac a blessed people who would become the Chosen People of G-d and who would survive the ravages of time as a people even long after the descendants of the descendants of Nachor would be completely erased from the memory of this planet.

That is the essence of our Torah reading today: to shun the Easy solution, for it is often a cheap solution; that sometimes the hard and demanding solution is the only real and effective one, the one that lasts and outlasts. L'FUM TZAARA AGRA, our Rabbis put it: according to the pain and difficulty is the later reward.

What our Rabbis taught is that life's ills and the problems of existence that plague each of us cannot be solved so easily. A wave of a magic wand will not do - it requires EKEV, a hard and long and thorough and difficult and patient and sometimes agonizing solution. EKEV tells us that often before we can achieve the love and prosperity and blessing we seek for next year, we must be willing this year to be ground to the dust by the EKEV heel of experience, that the real and lasting and permanent solutions are often the hardest ones. EKEV means to us on this ROSH HASHANAH to learn once and for all that the problems of humanity and Israel and ourselves as individuals will not be solved by catch-phrases and cheap slogans and overworked cliches. LE'FUM TZA'ARA AGRA, our Rabbis put it: according to the difficulty is the reward.

And I tell you my friends, that there is hardly a more important message for us of this day and age as we stand on the brink of another year. Because ours is an age of constant problems and emergencies and crises. Our world is hurried and harried and always precarious. Condensed time and shortened space have lengthened tempers and ~~even~~ increased anxieties. A sociologist of note has said that our age is to be characterized not by the UN buliding or even the mushroom cloud of the nuclear bomb - but by the ulcer, the sign of all our psychomatic illnesses, brought on by our worries and crises. And how do we seek to solve all these heavy problems? One way - we have a penchant for the EASY SOLUTION. We look for the easiest way out. Ours is the age of the easy solution, not the ~~EKEV~~ solution.

And the best proof of our preference for the Easy Solution, ^{Abraham} rather than the ~~EKEV~~ ^{Abraham} way is: the national craze for Tranquilizers. In addition to consuming 45 million aspirin pills daily and 20 million sleeping pills nightly, Americans this year will have swallowed 40 million of these anti-worry tranquilizing pills. They will have spent over \$350 million for these round, little easy solutions to stave off fear and worry depression and problems large and small. So that we have made an INDUSTRY out of the easy solution, and have added a new and dangerous element to contemporary American culture where for 10¢ a pill you buy packaged peace of mind and at 25¢ a powder you can ease your way out of all your troubles.

This penchant for the Easy Solution dominates all strata of American life. In our economic life, a young man once dreamed of starting at the bottom and by hard work and fierce determination, working his way to the top on the Horatio Alger pattern. Today's young men shun the hard work, and look to make an "easy buck" by means of the easy "big kill". How to fulfill your obligations to parents? An easy solution: flowers on Mothers Day and a tie on Fathers Day. Problems of international diplomacy involving the fate of America and the future of the world? Easy: blast communism and forget the complexities of international life. Anti-semitism? Easy: convince your gentile neighbors that you're no different from them. I recall the story a professor told us when we were entering our freshman year at college. A mediocre student was preparing for crucial examinations, and was extremely worried. A friend advised him that the most important thing in studying was to concentrate, and the only way to do that is to avoid all distractions. He told him: get yourself a revolving desk, contoured arm-chair, perfect lighting and crane-necked desk lamp, acoustics to deaden outside noise, good ventilation, and a soft carpet. And when you walk in, take off your shoes and put on your slippers. The student followed all instructions - prepared the desk, the lighting, the acoustics and ventilation as ordered. He walked into the room, put on his slippers, sat down in his big arm-chair - - and promptly fell asleep!! That my friends is our danger: we trust in the deceptively Easy Solution, and are asleep to the real crying demands of life. We fool ourselves - - and by following the Easy Solution, fail the tests of life.

Today's students
even of the most
with "easy
learning"

3/5/57

But if we are to survive as a people we must learn to follow Abraham, not Nachor; to seek the real and lasting solution, even if it is not the easy one. We could have perhaps sought easier solutions to the refugee problem after the war than the creation of a Jewish State. Yet we chose the way of hardship and war and austerity and crisis. But look at the result - the historic resurrection of a people! It is the way of Abraham. 40 and 50 years ago American Jewry could have sought the easy solution for the lack of scholars, and imported them all from Europe. Instead, some people took the Abraham, not the Nachor way, and built a yeshiva - and look at it now, that magnificent center of Torah and culture known as Yeshiva University.

Our beloved synagogue will build this year, with the help of G-d. I tell you now that there ARE NO EASY SOLUTIONS. It is a hard task. It is a gruelling task. It is a demanding task. It is a task which will involve every man and woman here and place demands upon both your time and money. It is a hard solution. But the success of our venture for Kodimoh depends upon whether you act as the descendants of Abraham, or take the easy way out of a Nachor. The Easy Solution leads to the end of all real Yiddishkeit in Springfield, The Hard Solution leads to a new flowering of genuine Judaism in this community. Which will it be? As businessmen you know that the hard way pays and the easy solutions lead often to bankruptcy. As professionals you know that you will be utter failures if you will prescribe aspirin for every conceivable illness or use one pat approach to every trial. As parents you know the easy solutions in raising your children does not bring you the ultimate Nachass you so desire. Why, then, be different with Judaism? As matter fact

If I were asked to point to the most glaring fault or weakness of American Jews, I would single out this predilection for the Easy Solution. For we have made not only an INDUSTRY but a THEOLOGY of the Easy Solution. American Jews do not want to work for their religion, They want it to be easy and convenient and pleasant; it has to be accommodating and full of luxury. They want the Rabbi to bend Torah and its requirements - "Rabbi, bend a little" - but they will refuse to bend themselves for the sake of Torah. They want to see the "beauty" of Judaism, without laboring and working and studying. It is the curse of the Easy Solution.

And do you know where this matter of the Easy Solution in Religion comes from? Its antecedent is - - Christianity. Christianity began just in that way. Judaism was too hard a religion to sell to the pagans, so they said: cut out the hard Mitzvos, and take the easy way: just believe, and that's all. And our modern brands of renegade "Judaisms" are therefore guilty of a Christian heresy. No wonder Maurice Samuel called Reform "amateur Christianity"! For they have abandoned the hard and demanding ~~EKEV~~ regimen of Tradition and have turned to the easy - and cheap - solution. When you make a theology of ease and convenience, then you are really a Christian in your orientation, and what you have left is not JUDAISM by any stretch of the imagination, but MILLTOWNISMS. It is a sleeping-powder religion. It means you have given up real Tranquility for the Tranquilizer.

Real Judaism, Traditional Judaism, tells us ~~EKEV~~ No! The blessings we seek cannot be won by Easy Solutions. They require regular observance, painstaking and careful attention to Torah, and a radical transformation of character! Orthodoxy tells you that ~~EKEV~~ - it is worth suffering and working for the principles you believe in and the blessings that follow. Orthodoxy dispenses no balm and does not permit your Rabbi to give you an Easy Solution to all life's problems. We preach a hard doctrine - but a worthy one! We believe in OLE HA-MITZVOS, that the observances are a yoke, that it is hard to wear - but that the yoke directs you to love and life and blessing and health!

- Take Prayer for instance. [New: 2nd half of paragraph next page].

- And now take the matter of our own beloved Kodimoh.

that follow Abraham
of ease, comfort
happy
with Abraham that

omit

Today we stand face to face with the crises of life. Today the problem is presented to us: MI YICHYEH UMI YAMUS. There is the problem of life and death. Who will live through this year and who won't? MI VARAASH UMI VAMAGEIFAH - will our world survive the threat of nuclear cataclysm, or will it perish forever? MI YEI'ANI UMI YEI'ASHEIR - there is the problem of inflation and depression. Who will be solvent next year at this time- and who will have failed. What does one do to solve these crucial problems of existence? - and the answer is: U'SESHUVAH U'SEFILLAH U'TZEDAKAH MAAVIRIN ES ROA HA'GEZEIRAH - the solutions are Repentance and Prayer and Charity. And these, friends, are the solutions of an Abraham, not a Nachor. They are not Easy Solutions. Teshuvah or Repentance means nothing less than a complete and radical reorientation of all our character and way of thinking. It means a heroism of unequalled proportions that is required of us. And Tzedakah, or Charity - that means more than a token contribution to a good cause. It means that one must give until it hurts. It means the use of intelligent discrimination - giving to worthy causes, and not frittering away charity on any cause that calls itself Jewish even without justification. And Prayer - my G-d, how difficult it is to pray properly! Perhaps to some of our fellow Jews, Prayer has become an easy solution - a pleasant atmosphere, where Rabbi and Cantor and Organist do all the work while the worshipper merely looks glum or responds in an occasional monotone. But that is not TEFULLAH. Prayer is called AVODAH SHE'BA'LEIV, which means not only "service of the heart", but "WORK" of the heart. It is the hard work of a devout heart struggling with its conscience. Prayer means a feeling of emptiness at the emptiness of our lives, it means the perspiration on our brow as we struggle for higher spiritual attainments, it means a tear at our eyes at the realization of what we could have been and did not become, it means a sudden burst of ecstatic joy at the goodness of G-d to us and our wives and children. Oh no, no monotonous easy solution at all!! On Rosh Hashanah we remember Abraham and his hardships and shun Nachor and his easy solutions. On Rosh Hashanah we affirm that one Isaac far outweighed all the UTZES AND BUZES AND PIDLASHES AND YIDLAFS and all the other products of the Easy Solution.

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This is reason read 11:27 in afternoon study session 7/11/57

Some weeks ago a series of earthquakes rocked Mexico City, and while many older structures remained standing, some of the newest and most modern buildings collapsed with a great loss of life. Investigation showed that the builders of these new edifices had tried to get away with the least expense and so built poor foundations. They paid for their easy solutions in blood, pain, orphans and widows. The beautiful exteriors did not help them.

It is the same with us. We watch others erecting the glittering superstructures of their lives with such carefree ease, while we - as Jews and as individuals - labor away with sweat and blood to secure the foundations of our lives. Yet we must not complain and surely not imitate the practitioners of the Easy Solution. For there are earthquakes in every life when you can tell the deep from the superficial, the men from the boys, the Abrahams from the Nachors, those who dug deep and those who failed to dig. When these violent crises overtake a man, then his easy solutions turn to dust and fall to the ground in shambles, while the worthier and harder solutions remain standing as an eternal testimonial to his moral courage.

Whether in our community life or synagogue life, as Americans, as Jews and as individuals, Rosh Hashanah presents to us the hope and the challenge: THE CHALLENGE to bear hardship with patience and shun the expeditious and easy; and THE HOPE that the sacrifice is worth it; that the road of truth may be longer and harder than the route of least resistance. But ultimately it is the safer road; that as the children of Abraham we must take that road, for it leads to a bright and glorious destination, where on the sunlit horizon are emblazoned the words: LE'SHANAH TOVAH TIKASEIVU L'AL TER LE'CHAYYIM...

6/5/57

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(15) -

J.C. NOV. 18, 1967

"No Easy Solutions"

A-275-1

gave essentially same terms as on HH in Kramch.

Begin w. Ess. giving answer of Rev.

Then: goes against whole grain of modern experience
& temperament which sells out the easy solutions: students;
quick-buck; Horatio Alger now sounds comical; labor-saving & elevated
fun technology to a metaphoric. Mothers Day. Youth - Easy
Solution to Happiness = marijuana, LSD... Vietnam agony:
see - American history = unbroken success, & here there is no easy way out...

Then - but J. people didn't...

Then - Orthey - anti-Reform. Mentioned attached
JTA report as another Reform easy solution. And
Orthey is more diff't for than right-wing
segregationists. We embrace burdens of both worlds
for subjection E. Sol' as worthwhile? - No yes.
Short term - No. Long run - yes.

So after 13 1/2 appearances angel.
First (immediate) illness says: it is - i.e. no rewards
but taking of bearing down duty.

Second (long run) - 2125... 2012/11/12 is - specifically
and when Abraham passed test.

And blessing will be - like our burdens - of
both worlds, both heaven & earth:

and all will find easy 125100