

1. Our Rabbis, in their comments on this week's Sidra, relate four specific laws to each other. These laws, which are seemingly otherwise completely unrelated, all deal with one common object - a BAYIS, or house. The four laws are:

a) NEGA: Among the laws discussed by the Bible in this week's Sidra which deal with ritual purity and impurity, we find one which deals specifically with the purity and impurity of a house. In the houses in which our ancestor's once dwelt - not brick or steel or concrete houses - it frequently happened that a certain type of fungus, or perhaps a type of parasitic insect, infected the walls of the house. This type of plague was contagious, and if not dealt with immediately and severely, jeopardized all other houses in its vicinity. The Torah therefore declared such a house as ritually impure, as TAMEH.

b) MAAKEH: A house which has a roof, the Bible teaches us, upon which people walk and from which they might fall off, offers a danger to life and limb, and therefore we are commanded to build a MAAKEH or fence about that roof. The reason for the law is clearly enunciated by the Torah - LO TASSIM DAMMIM B'VAYSECHA, You shall not cause blood to be spilt in your house. It is a law of safety. We must build fences as safety measures, and the violation of this rule entails more than a summons to Magistrate's Court - it entails the violation of G-d's sacred command. Architectural modes may change, and engineering techniques may come and go, but the eternal principle remains - our homes are to be properly protected to ensure the safety of ourselves, our wives and our children.

c) MEZUZAH: Every Jewish home must have, at the doorpost at the entrance, a small box in which is put a small piece of parchment. On this miniature scroll is written the SHEMA and the accompanying prayer. This box and its contents, called the MEZUZAH, is the symbol of the sanctity of a Jewish house, and the constant reminder that the Jew, in his home, is ever expected to live up to the precepts of holiness inscribed therein.

d) CHAZARAH ME'ORCHAI HA'MILCHAMAH: We Jews had a strange system of draft exemptions in times of war. Strange, that is, by modern standards. The prospect of serving in the armed forces faced the young man who was Moses' contemporary even as it so often faces the young man of this day. Actually, an explanation of the Biblical system of exemptions would take a long time. Let us, therefore, be satisfied with a bird's-eye view of the complex but sacred and honorable system of the Torah. In case of defensive war, called MILCHEMET MITZVAH, there were almost no exemptions. Even those who were physically incapable of executing the duties of war, were used in what we now call "defense work". The Biblical "4F" would prepare the arms, food and roads for those actively engaged in the military services. In case of aggressive war, however, the type of war known as MILCHEMET R'SHUSS, the exemptions were many indeed. They were so numerous that one feels that they were legislated for the express purpose of making aggressive war impractical. One of these laws of military exemption was that if a man had built a new house for himself and had not had the chance to renew it, that is, to live in it for a year, he was asked to leave the ranks. It was a mark of recognition and appreciation of human sentiment involved in the construction of a home. A man who built a house, therefore, was exempt from military service.

In what way are these four laws concerning the house - the laws of impurity, safety, mezuzah and war exemption - alike? They are alike, tell us the Rabbis, in the matter of the minimum dimensions of the house concerned. A doll-house, for instance, could not contract Tumah, was not required to have a fence built on its roof, nor a mezuzah on its doorpost, nor did it exempt its owner from military duty. And the exact dimensions, tell us our Sages, are ARBA AL ARBA AMOSS, four cubits by four cubits. (A cubit is approximately one and a half feet). A house whose area is less than ARBA AL ARBA is not regarded as being affected by the laws we mentioned, it is not regarded as a BAYIS, a real home. If, however, it is of that size, then all the mentioned laws are applicable.

Now, when our Rabbis set the rule of "Four by four", they were not being altogether arbitrary. Because that measurement, 4x4, is well known in the Talmud and other tomes of Jewish law as MKOMO SHE'EL ADAM, the "place of a man". The "sphere of influence" of a man, so to speak, is 4x4 cubits. Whether we deal with the matter of how far a man may carry an object on the Sabbath, or what area he naturally possesses as regards commercial law, the area of a man which is under his domination is always 4x4 cubits. And if, therefore, our Rabbis stipulated ARBA AL ARBA as the dimension of a house, it means that a house must be big enough for a man.

My friends, the principle of our Rabbis that these four laws are applicable only to a house of lx4 cubits may sound strictly legalistic - as it no doubt is; but there are certain moral implications which we can, by exercising our imaginations, derive from this Rabbinic assertion.

What our Rabbis mean to tell us, is that a house which is not big enough for an ADAM, for a man in the full, true and Jewish sense of the word, is not a house, and certainly not a home. And in this sense, we do not refer to the physical dimensions of a house, but to the moral dimensions of a home. One can live in a mansion in Westchester or in a pent-house on Park Avenue, his house may be as tall as the Empire State building and as wide as Grand Central Terminal, and yet it may be less than ARBA AL ARBA. It can be small and petty and restrictive.

When a man is married, he "builds a home". His family and friends wish him success in "building a true and complete house or home in Israel". A couple's entire domestic life is centered about and in the home, the BAYIS. Now this house can be, in the moral sense in which we speak, either more or less than ARBA AL ARBA. If a man and his wife find and broaden their interests in this house; if their home is opened to guests; if they make the poor hospitable-welcome in it; if it is a home in which both further their education; if they permeate it with love and sincerity and devotion; then their home is MKOMO SHEL ADAM, it is a home where real men and women can find security and attraction and humaneness. If their home is big enough to encompass all these, then the four laws of which we spoke are applicable.

a) First of all it can become impure. That may sound strange. Surely the ability to contract impurity is not a good thing. But, my friends, the reverse is true. For in the Jewish scheme of things only that which is important can become TAMEH. That which is unimportant is neither pure nor impure - we simply do not reckon with it. And conversely, only that which hazards impurity, only that which stakes a significant claim in life, can be regarded as important enough for consideration. A human being can contract impurity; an animal cannot. The first steps a child takes are fraught with danger - he may fall and injure himself. Yet if he does not take the chance and risk falling, he will never learn to walk. There are many risks in all of life, yet he who does not accept their challenge - does not live in the full sense of the word. Similarly, the home which is not big enough to risk TUMAH, the home not big enough for an ADAM, for what is known in Yiddish as a LEMENTSCH, that home is too petty and too narrow to be considered by the Torah. The home which is big only in the sense of number of rooms and up-to-date furniture, but small in the sense of "Lebensraum" for true men, that home is terribly insignificant, that home can never grow, it is doomed from the beginning.

b) Secondly, a home of this sort must be provided with a MAAKEH, with a protective fence. A home big enough for an ADAM, for a human personality, deserves all the protection it can receive. It is the safety of such a home in which people should interest themselves. If the high-class psychiatrists and social workers would move from their luxurious practices in Hollywood, where houses are mansions but less than ARBA AL ARBA, and pursue their professional ambitions in the slum areas of our country, areas which are slums only financially but actually greater than lx4, homes in which true and decent human beings dwell, they would provide the MAAKEH for the right BAYIS, the proper protection for the right home.

c) Thirdly, a home of this sort is a home permeated with holiness and saturated with sanctity. It is a home dominated by the MEZUZA. A home big enough for loyalty and devotion, for hospitality and charity, is a home where children will be happy and faithful and loyal to their parents. It is a home where children will be inspired by the message of the Mezuza. It is a home where children will develop Jewishly, and not some day have to despair of a child who plans to marry out of the faith.

d) Finally, a home of this sort, of lx4, will be saved from the tragedy of marital strife. A home big enough for both to develop their interests, where one does not wallow in boredom; a home big enough to contain differences of opinion and outlook in tolerance; a home of this sort frees the dwellers in it from the hazards of ORCHEI MILCHAMAMA, of war. It is a home of contentment, not conflict; of peace, not warring; of calm, not calamity; of conjugal bliss, not dissension. The torn and broken homes of our day could have been averted had they been big enough for the normal expansion of ADAM, of manliness and womanliness and humaneness.

The problem of the home is not only one for newly-weds. It is one for young and old alike, for the moral dimensions of a home, unlike the physical, are elastic; they have a way of expanding and shrinking, of more than and less than lx4, all depending on the type of ADAM inhabiting it. It must always be big enough, so that it may be important in the eyes of G-d and Man; that it be worthy of protection; that it be holy; and that it be peaceful.

criticism & Addenda

1. This sermon has potentialities, but was botched up in practice by attempting to squeeze in the interpret'n of all 4 in 18 minutes - should take ~ 35 min.
2. In practice, page one was kept in toto, but apphe'n, beginning from 3rd par., was switched from domestic home to National Homeland - ^{with 11/12} ("household of a people") since this ref preceded 7 1/2's - for. Incl. day. Y&J was kept mostly as it is - "talk - way way of getting importance." for. should not aspire to diplom. eminence alone; it cannot aspire to industrial expansion beyond certain limited borders. for's importance will not come from its science & social science. The 4x4 of foral is not intended to be as large as the dimensions of a physics lab or a lab for social experiments, not as storehouse of economic security or warehouse of 11 1/2's for immigrants. Its 4x4 must be ^{for 11/12} expression of indigenous J. genius for ^{for 11/12} life, humanness etc. Only this will give it significance in the world".

2781 - 9 - d's protection to a x-2-people

25154 - holiness etc.

25154 - Proph. dream always that peace in world will emanate from Temple Mount, source of J. learning. The Jew. can or can exempt

fr. from war only if it is big enough to contain the
archetypes of 23/4 etc. Agadda: Joshua forgets teachings
of Moses. People in unrest, want to depose him. G-d:
"Make war on Amalek, keep their minds occupied".
v.v. - where no Torah = war; Torah = peace. etc."

3. Can be worked into something decent,