

"THE MULTI-STRESSED"
RCA Convention Address--June 5, 1997

A) INTRODUCTION:

Title: "The Rabbi: Multi-faceted, Multi-talented, Multi-stressed"; Multi-talented--I grant...

- Multi-faceted--I question; can be misinterpreted (מעוט רבים שנים)="two-faced"...
- Multi-stressed--*that's* worthy of elaboration...only there can I claim some expertise...
- But *Purpura*: pressure-diamond; irritation-oyster...

Multi-stressed: 3 sources-- all real, troubling: Human-existential....will leave that to philos's & psychol's; Professional-rabbinic...will leave that to sociologists
Religious--both general Jewish, Orthodox, and esp TUM/MO.... Let's discuss...

This: 2 Levels: *Internal*: ideological/existential; and *External*: communal/political

B) EXTERNAL STRESSES

Our generally exposed position, common to almost any centrist group, results in an existential angst, stressful psychological tensions. Our adversaries (& media) know this.

Nothing new: ~100 years ago (in an article in 1899) the great Mizrahi orator, R. Yitzhak Nissenbaum: אנחנו הציונים החרדיים [כלומר: הדתיים] נמצאים בין הפטיש והסדן. אין אנו יכולים ואיננו חפצים לוותר על אות אחת שבתורתנו ולא על סעיף אחד שבציונות. And R. Meir Berlin, complained that אנחנו המזרחיים נמצאים במצב הבלתי-נעים לעמוד בין שתי החזיתות. That groan, I am sure, you recognize quite well; we are no strangers to it--because it reveals a a spiritual stress point, a psychic agony, a split in one's consciousness. It is a dilemma to which we are condemned--and also the source of our moral strength and ideological courage and glory. We remain unimpressed by the supposed benefits of peace of mind, which often is little more than peace-of-mindlessness.

C) INTERNAL STRESSES

(1) Our identity crisis, to fundam'l source of tension: we ask selves: איכה--who are we MO? Which world welcomes us as our "home?" Is there any sol'n to our basic feeling of loneliness in J scene? (Hirshians asked same Q.)

Answer: yes, Torah as response/correction. It alone can ease feelings of lonel'ss, isol'n: א"ר: "מ"ת כתיקון לחטא אדה"ר" (*Torah itself=ans t איכה: is exactly wht Yahadut asks of us*)
Franz Kafka: ST: 1/2-lamb, 1/2-tiger...Comfort, banish lonel'ss whn jump int Master's lap
Presence of שכ"נה in Torah=our warrant/strength/consolation

SO: NO APOLOGIES, NO STRESS-RELATED DIS-EASE: WE =TORAH-BASED....

(2) Example: Torah Umadda--Right or Wrong?

הוריות דף י ע"א-- כי הא דר' גמליאל ורבי יהושע הוו אזלי בספינתא, בהדי דר"ג הוה פיתא, בהדי ר"י הוה פיתא וסולתא, שלים פיתה דר"ג סמך אסולתיה דר"י. א"ל: מי הוה ידעת דהוה לן עכובא כוליה האי דאיתית סולתא? אמר ליה: כוכב אחד לשבעים שנה עולה ומתעה את הספינים

מהרש"א: ר"ג ור"י הוו אזלו בספינתא בנבכי ים הגלות עד שהוצרכו להתווכח עם הצדוקים... ואמר דבהדי ר"ג הוי פתא שהיא חכמת התורה בעצמה שנקראת לחם... כמו שהלחם הוא עיקר חיי נפש, ובא להתווכח עמהם כפי חכמת התורה, אבל אמר דר"י היה עמו דבר נוסף על הפת שהיא התורה, כי היו עמו בויכוח חכמות אחרות שהם דומות לסולת כמו שהסולת אינו רק הקדמה ללחם ע"י מים ושאר אמצעים, כך חכמות אחרות... הם הקדמה לתורתנו... ואפשר דר"ג לא הרגיל בחכמות אלו כמו ר"י. ואמר דשלם פתא דר"ג, שנשלם לו הויכוח בחכמת התורה, שלא היה יכול לנצח אותו בה, כי הם לא יודו בכולה, הוצרך ר"ג לסמוך עצמו להתווכח עמהם ולנצחם בשאר החכמות שהיא סולתא דבהדי דר"י...

(3) Add'l Example: Moderation: Ought we submit t all those nw/ excessive חומרות?

רבי יונתן אייבשיץ (תפארת יונתן)--על הרמב"ן ריש קדושים שכ' "קדש עצמך במותר לך", כ' שבמי בית שני היו אנשים שהיו מזירים שהיו מתבודדים ביערים וכו' (כמ"ש יוסיפון) ודעת הפרושים לא נחה מהם, וז"ל, כי עובדי ה' השלם צ"ל דבריו ועסקיו נח לה' ולבריות, ולא להפריע נימוס ישוב העולם וחברת בני אדם והנהגת המדינה, ואילו היו כולם מזירים כאלה לא נתקיים נימוס וסדר. הטבע ויכלה העולם ויאבד קשר האומה ... ולכן כל הפרישות... תהי' על זה הסוג שיש אפשרות שתקיים אותה כל האומה. אבל הפרישות שאפשרית רק ליחיד ולא לאומה בכללה, זה אינו בגדר השלימות, ודברים כאלה הרחיקו חכמי ישראל. וזהו כוונת המדרש "פרשה זו נאמרה בהקלה" כי הקדושה במותר לך רק מה ששייך בהקלה. עכ"ל.

(But question: Is our moderation a cop-out? -- In Christianity, Jesus to Peter,

"Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23), as if only effective evil is *behind* one;

whereas we pray--*both front and back*--והסתר שטן מלפנינו ומאחרינו--Hy Tuchman: why?

Now, over 40 years later, it occurs to me that the position of "Satan" relative to the human victim of his evil designs sheds light upon his function. In *front* of a person, the tempter misleads and misdirects him--into a life of sin and degradation. But when Satan is *behind* one, he does not direct or misdirect him, he merely pushes him harder in the direction he is already going. Why is this considered satanic? Because even if we grant that the individual was headed in the right direction, the "push" by Satan is intended to make him *go too far in the right direction*, to overdo his duty, to take virtue to an excess which (according to Aristotle) is the essence of vice: קולא המביא לידי חומר. Christians understood the danger of Satan in *front* of one, but not the damage he can do *behind* one. This the Jewish thinkers understood quite well. Kohelet (7:16) already warned against being over-righteous: ואל תהי צדיק הרבה, and Maimonides elaborated a theory of character which puts virtue and vice on the same plane, with virtue occupying the center, and vice the extremes.)

(4) Inclusiveness: One of most painful dilemmas with which we confronted, and which=source of so much of our existential stress/ideological malaise, is Q of extent to which we exclude/include certain classes of non-obs't Jews in the ranks of Jewry. Q of "Who is a Jew?" is rather simple f those who are not committed to halakhic system & fundamental principles of Torah on which it is based.

But for those of us who believe that Judaism is not a matter of taste/sentiment/nostalgia alone, that it implies ultimate destiny & powerful metaphysical standards, and who at the same time feel a profound love for all Jews and consider that love itself to be a מצוה מה"ת--such a problem is one that tears at our innards. We are torn between wanting to define membership in our people in a halachically valid manner; and we are concerned with the assimilatory tendencies of Jews as a cognitive minority in a post-modern world which is (in Sen. Moynihan's words) "defining deviancy down," corrupting the very air we breathe. We want to be loyal to Halakha. But we also experience a powerful reluctance to lose a major part of Jewish people. And isn't that a halachic imperative? *This=the most stressful problem we Jews face today.*

I believe there is no wholly satisfactory answer, but that we *must* make a choice, and the choice is to place *ahavat yisrael* at the top of our priorities. We have, in the lifetime of many of us, already lost one-third of our people in the gas chambers of the Shoah, and God knows how many more to the corrosive acids of assimilation. Now we must make every conceivable effort to keep as many Jews as possible within the Jewish fold, stretching the Halakha to the utmost permissible limits, to keep Jews *included* in *am yisrael*. We must exercise the same mentality that Chazal always did in expending every effort halachically to find the *heter* to escape the curse of her condition and live a normal life. We must search for a *heter* for Israel.

Indeed, the term *עגונה* is tragically appropriate to the situation into which we are sliding. On the phrase in the Midrash that Jerusalem "היתה כאלמנה," the Midrash says: שהיא יושבת עגונה ממתנת את בעלה שהניחה והלך לו בדרך רחוק, ולא אלמנה ממש,and the state of *עגונה* is worse than *אלמנה*...

It is possible for a whole nation to be an *agunah* --a nation half-married to its God and the other journeying far away from Him; or a nation divided against itself, one half "chained" as an *agunah* to the other half, but never permitted to live together fully.

The same attitude of avid searching for a *heter* to *עגונות* must prevail here--which is even more compelling than that of an individual *עגונה*. *Because if we don't, we shall become a nation of agunot, whereby we Orthodox Jews will be "married" to the rest of Jewry in the sense of having some elemental relationship--both in our eyes and the eyes of the world--and yet not being able to "live with them." What a calamity if we allow the personal tragedy of the individual agunah to be magnified onto a national scale!*

Congratulations to R. Rubenstein and new administration of RCA--they must continue in tradition of RCA and renew efforts of R. Grossman and colleagues, and recognize that we bear responsibility for the other 90% of Israel--even if they assert they don't need or want it. *חברים כל ישראל* is not descriptive nor even mere pious wish, but predictive-normative: *גאולה* will come and then we will treat every Jew, even *עם הארץ* as a "חבר"...