

## THE SECOND CHANCE

A-81

In reading today's Biblical Portion concerning Noah and the flood, we cannot fail to be stirred by the pathos, and moved by the intensely human drama, of Noah's predicament. Here was Noah, a pious, gentle soul, who had seen much of life and civilization in his day. He knew intimately the people who were his contemporaries, whether good or bad, and he was ~~part of the great civil~~ in touch with the major trends of his day, whether he liked them or disliked them. And in his old age, G-d sends him and his family into an ark, windowless and cut off from the world, and keeps him there for forty days and nights. During this time a great flood rages and destroys all life, levels mountains and hills and changes all. Now think of the plight of Noah as he emerges from the ark; listen to his heartbeat as he steps out and beholds the terrible scene. What was once his home is no more. His property and that of his close friends is no longer recognizable. His old friends have died in the ravaging waters. <sup>The very landscape has changed.</sup> The landmarks with which he was so acquainted since childhood are no more. The world he once knew is no more. Here before him is a strange desolation. No doubt there welled up in his soul bitter feelings of melancholy and despair. Sadly he thinks, "Yes, I and mine were saved. But if this is what we were saved for, to be the sole witnesses to complete and utter ruination, I don't think life is worth <sup>perished</sup> ~~drowned~~ living. Perhaps it would have been better if I too had ~~drowned~~ in that Deluge. Why live, why hope, why work? All is gone, and there is nothing to look forward to."

And at this point, our Rabbis tell us, G-d appears before Noah and does not allow him to continue this moroseness and despair and hopelessness. For G-d showed Noah three worlds. He showed him, first, OLAM BE'YISHUVO, the world as it first was, in its "normal" days. He showed what Man could have accomplished: a Paradise, a Tree of Eternal Life, a Tree of Knowledge. He showed Noah the chance men had to attain health and wisdom and happiness. Then he showed him OLAM CHAREV, the world destroyed - the degeneration of his generation where men practiced deceit and theivery and immorality. A world which lost itself into a whirlwind of sin and crime and then drowned in a whirlpool of destructive waters - the MABUL, the great Deluge, the world in utter ruins.

But G-d did not stop there. For ~~he~~ had He stopped with the OLAM CHAREV, Noah would have been justified in his despair. Rather, G-d injects in him new hope and cheer. He also shows him, say our Sages, the third picture: OLAM BE'SIKUNO, the reconstructed world, the world which can be recreated and rebuilt. "You and your race, Noah," says G-d, "failed miserably in your first chance at making something of Life. You gave up Paradise and Life and Knowledge, you surrendered to CHAMASS, to deceit and looseness, and ended in miserable failure, in watery graves. The Flood has destroyed all that Man has done in these many generations. Man fumbled his First Chance. But do not despair, Noah, for just as you have seen a world in operation and that same world destroyed just as you have seen the failure of the First Chance, so will you see a world rebuilt, so will you be given the opportunity for a great Second Chance." And, indeed, NOACH RA'AH OLAM CHADASH, Noah beheld a vision of a new world, he began to understand that G-d had really offered mankind a Second Chance. He knew and understood that out of the smoke and dust of desperation and bleakness and tragedy would rise the vision of new worlds and new opportunities. Yes, he foresaw the dangers of drunkenness and avarice and cruelty; but he also foresaw the contributions of Abrahams and Isaacs and Jacobs and Moseses. He grasped the new opportunity to start all over again - the Second Chance. He sensed G-d's goodness, and learned that G-d gives to a world, to nations to communities, to families and to individuals - a Second Chance.

Our generation, writhing in the agonies of pessimism and hopelessness, tossing restlessly under the shadow of atomic destruction, and grappling with despair and frustration and gloom, we too must behold a vision of OLAM CHADASH, the New World, the Second Chance, that G-d holds out to us. For we of this generation are as Noah of old. We have seen OLAM BE'YISHUVO, the world in its "normalcy", in comparative stability. We remember very well the prosperity which seemed to us a Paradise, the Tree of Life promised by Science and the Tree of Knowledge nourished by great scholars and thinkers. And then we saw too OLAM CHAREV, we saw the great destruction, World War Two. We saw one third of our people destroyed, we saw nations swallowed alive, families torn apart forever, old and established customs and traditions thrown overboard, and all that was holy desecrated. We saw Science perverted to experiments on concentration-camp

Inmates, Knowledge profaned and Paradise plundered. How tempting to despair! How easy to imagine that all is gone, that hope is only a figment of the imagination.

And yet the Bible bids us hope for an OLAM CHADASH, for a new world, try for the Second Chance G-d gives each and all of us. And so strongly did Judaism insist that Man is offered the Second Chance, that it incorporated it in as one of the thirteen fundamentals of our faith. And that is - TECHIYAS HA'MEISSIM, Ressurrection. For indeed the ultimate expression of hope and faith that G-d offers every man and woman another chance to do better, is the belief in ressurrection - that all of this life is, in a way, only a first chance; that it is at best impersfect, and at worst a total faliure; and that, therefore, G-d offers Man another life, beginning from scratch, a second chance to make something great out of his human existence. For Ressurrection is a concept which is broad indeed, and which includes more than physical rejuvenation of dead bodies. It entails, in its broader sense, the promise that you and I will get another chance and opprotunity to right what we wronged.

And this Second Chance, what in the metaphor of swimming is known as "second wind", is a matter of everyday occurence. A young student fails miserably on an examination. His school gives him a "re-exam". It is his Second Chance, his Ressurrection - if he can succeed and pass it. A man and his wife have made a mess of their married life for a good number of years. Under the guidance of their Rabbi or Minister or Psychologist, they decide to "give it another try". Here is their Second Chance, an opportunity to ressurect the dying embers of an early love and affectionate companionship. Here ~~are thousands of~~ is a Jew who has lost his wife and children, parents and brothers and sisters in crematoria and camps. Part of his life is buried in some anonymous mass-grave. He really has nothing to live for. But he settles either in a friendly democracy like ours, or he emigrates to Israel and begins a new life. Multiply that by five hundred thousand and you have the great Ressurrection of our age, the terrific Second Chance for Jewry.

Now, of course, you have the right to ask me: granted there is a second chance, but how are we to go about this ressurrection in the here-and-now? how is man to successffly revive his life in the second chance? Here we must rely on one of those quaint but profound statements our Rabbis sometimes make. In discussing the question of Ressurrection, they tell

us the method of revival of the body. Of course, they do not mean to outdo our modern scientists who are trying to pump life into dead organs. What they have in mind is not biology but ethics. They maintain that the Creation of Man, birth, begins with OR UBASSAR and ends with GIDDIM VA'ATZAMOS, that G-d first provides the embryo with flesh and skin, and later gives him blood vessels and bones. But when G-d will ressurect mankind, they say, the order will be reversed: first giddim VA'ATZAMOS, veins and bones and then OR UBASSAR, flesh and skin. A curious commentary, indeed, and one wonders why the Rabbis spent time and energy delving into things so distant and beholden.

Yes, the Rabbis' description of Ressurrection tells us much. In your first attempts, they want to say, in your first Chance at Life, the one in which you made your share of human errors and perhaps failed, and which you hope to correct with this "Second Chance Ressurrection", your first interest was OR UBASSAR, the skin and flesh- that is, the outside, the superficial, the seemingly attractive. You were attracted by color and flash and splendor. It was the exterior of things which attracted and fascinated you. Life was only skin deep. OR UBASSAR. Only too late did you discover that the substance of man is not his exterior. Only too late did you discover that it is a man's blood that counts- and even more, his ATZAMOS, his backbone, his resistance his inner self, that which is not overly glamorous, but upon which depends his whole being. Now, in this Second Chance which you are granted, the ressurection can be complete and successful only if you reserve that order. Start, this time, with the Giddim Va'atzmaos. Concentrate on the inner matter, think deeper and go to the core of life. Interest yourself in the soul which G-d gave you.-KI HA'DAM HU HA'NEFESH, blood, represents the soul. Develop your inner faculties of faith and goodness and sincerity and decency, and build yourself ATZMAOS, a backbone, the power to resist temptation, the strenth to swim upstream, the ability to speak out even for the unpopular. And then, when a man has proven that he has a back-bone and red blood, when he has made himself GIDDIM VA'ATZAMOS, will he automatically have obtained the OR UBASSAR, flesh and skin the glamor and glisten and glow of the external which reflects a substantial inside. Only thus, our Rabbis insist, can Ressurrection- the Second Chance- be a success. For G-d ressurects thus too.

Winston Churchill is perhaps the best example of a man who so proceeded

when he was given his Second Chance. In his latest biography, by Robert Lewis Taylor, we read of young Churchill at the sociable Harrow school which was and is world famous. It was his first chance at proving his real worth. But somehow the OU UBASSA had a supernatural attraction for him. He could not resist the glamour of <sup>pushing</sup> publishing a fellow student into the swimming pool, the attraction of loudly yawning in an extremely "DIGNIFIED" church, or the dubious humor of immediately buying two dogs upon learning that it was forbidden ~~at all~~. to own any at all. He childishly and immaturely strove for a dazzling exterior and cared nothing at all for essentials. He failed more examinations and was refused by more good schools than probably any other great man. He was graduated in his class in Harrow, after being "left-back" a number of times. Some years later, his father, Lord Randolph, confided to a friend that he urged Winston to join the army because he considered his son a little retarded and didn't think he would succeed at anything else. It took Churchill a long time to discover that all was not glint and shine, OR UBASSAR. When, however, he was accepted at the famous military school of Sandhurst, Churchill changed. No longer were his pranks the major topics of discussion. He withdrew into his own room and self, concentrated on the serious problems of Life and Living, got himself an education even if he didn't like it, and developed his famous character. Now he was resurrecting himself. He began with GIDDIM VA'ATZMOS veins and bones, he became a red-blooded person and studiously built his famous back-bone, a back-bone which was to hold firm in the face of Hitlers and Stalins. Sufficient elan and splendour, OU UBASSAR, surround this colorful leader today. But only because, when he got his second chance, he followed the right order for Ressurrection- GIDDIM VA'ATZMOS first.

The same holds true for institutions and nations, of course. ~~A synagogue~~ <sup>Korea must - propaganda affects negotiation vs. success</sup> may undertake a project and fail. Upon examination of the futile First Chance, <sup>attempt at establishing working peace.</sup> it may be discovered that so much attention was paid the skin, not enough to the backbone.

The way to a successful Ressurrection, a prosperous Second Chance, is clear enough- GIDDIM VA'ATZMOS. A state of Israel, despite all her great accomplishments in the first five years of her life, may still be considered wanting in the matter of GIDDIM

VA'ATZMOS. For after the glamor of playing at the game of international diplomacy after the heart warming fact of a Jewish Ambassador in Washington, after the beautiful OU UBASSAR what about the GIDDIM VA'ATZMOS? Is that soul sustaining blood circulating freely in Israel, or has perhaps religion been neglected just a little in Israel? Can the prime minister despite his own religious leanings, perhaps show a bit more ATZMOS, back-bone, in dealing with the atheistic left-wing? One hopes that the next five years will show a Resurrection of religious feeling in Israel, a second chance beginning with GIDDIN VA'ATZMOS.

The way to achieve and make the best of the second chance is therefore clear. Let us too, as individuals and as a community and as a people, use that approach to the second chances G-d makes available to us. And may we, constantly imbued and inspired with the vision of the OLAM CHADASH, of the new and great world which we can attain, be lead to the discovery of this OLAM BE'TIKUNO, the world reconstructed; the world where a truce will mean peace, where "prisoner exchange" will mean freedom, and where negotiations will mean not stubborn and aimless debate, but the meeting of free minds resulting in greater visions, deeper understanding, and greater love.