

"HAPPY THOUGH HUNGRY"

In a famous passage, the Sages say, <sup>אם יראו בנים ישראל שבתות</sup>  
<sup>שבתות שבתות</sup>  
"if only the Children of Israel would observe two Sabbaths,  
they would be redeemed immediately."

This dictum has always proven puzzling. Why two Sabbaths?  
Which two Sabbaths? All kinds of answers have been offered.  
Today permit me to commend to your attention what one commen-  
tator has offered us: a cryptic response, laconically formulated,  
without adequate explanation. He tells us that the Sages  
referred to two Sabbaths which coincide, two Sabbaths which  
are observed simultaneously. Is that possible? Yes, it is,  
only when -- like today -- Yom Kippur falls on Saturday. <sup>Saturday</sup>  
is Shabbat, and Yom Kippur is known in the Bible as Shabbat  
Shabbaton, "the Sabbath of Sabbaths." So when we observe this  
double Sabbath, <sup>אם יראו בנים ישראל</sup>  
we are at the brink of redemption.

What does that mean? A meaningful interpretation is given  
to us by the great Hasidic master, the author of "דברי  
השם". Yom Kippur, he tells us, is fundamentally  
in conflict with the weekly Sabbath. Yom Kippur on Saturday  
presents, therefore, an immediate conflict, an inner contra-  
diction. The law of the Sabbath is that the commandment of  
<sup>אין עובדים</sup>, enjoying the Sabbath,  
is realized by means of <sup>אכילה ושתיה</sup>  
eating and drinking. Yom Kippur, however, is observed by  
abstaining from food. The <sup>קיום היום</sup>  
the sanctity of the day, is achieved through <sup>מצות</sup>  
or fasting. How, therefore, is it possible to observe both  
Sabbath and Yom Kippur when they fall on the same day?

The answer is this. It is true that Jewish spirituality  
does not require ascetic denial of material life and pleasures.  
Physical delight often enhances the spiritual experience. But  
what Judaism teaches us is that a higher level is held out  
to us: spiritual joy and religious experience can be attained  
without physical indulgence, when the total experience is no  
less satisfactory than if it did derive from material pleasures.

Thus, at the time of the sealing of the Covenant in the days  
of Moses, we are told in the Torah of the elders of Israel  
<sup>ויראו את אלהים ויאכלו וישתו</sup>  
"and they saw God, and they ate and they drank." Now, this  
verse is almost vulgar in its dissonance. To see God -- and

to sit down to a gluttonous feast! The Aramaic translator Onkelos, however, reinterprets that verse. He tells us that the elders were so happy that their offerings were acceptable to God, they were so overjoyed with the experience of the nearness of the Almighty, that they could not have been happier if they had celebrated with a great banquet! So that it is not that they feasted -- on the contrary, they did not -- but their joy in their spiritual experience was so complete  
 "as if they had eaten and they had drunk."  
 מלי בליל יום כיפור

Thus, under normal circumstances, it is true that Yom Kippur and Shabbat travel in opposite directions, and place different commitments and demands upon us. On the ordinary level, through *אכילה ושתיה* is expressed eating and drinking. But if we move to this higher level, to *מלי בליל יום כיפור*, to the transcending of physical needs, then we can resolve the dilemma and reconcile the conflict between *שבת ויום כיפור*, the two Sabbaths.

When we expose ourselves on this day to the Yom Kippur prayer; to meditation (not in an ecstatic sense, but in the very normal sense of asking ourselves the ultimate questions in the silence of our own hearts); to the meaning of the *התקוותה והתפילה*, the kneeling and the bowing, implying the sense of total submission to God; to the whiteness of kittel, symbolizing purity; to the atmosphere of saintliness that pervades the whole day -- if we can appreciate all these despite our fasting; if we can attain *אכילה ושתיה* on Yom Kippur without *אכילה ושתיה*; if, in other words, we can be happy though hungry, then we are simultaneously observing both Sabbaths, Saturday and Yom Kippur -- and this makes us worthy of immediate redemption. Indeed, to reach this level is already to be redeemed in some measure.

I must make it clear again: I am not preaching self-abnegation. Judaism delights in the material things of this world that are permissible. *אכילה ושתיה* is attained through food; *אכילה ושתיה* (the adoring of the Sabbath) through fine clothing; *אכילה ושתיה* (the sanctification of the Sabbath) through wine. But we reach a greater niveau if we can experience the joy and the honor and the santliness without physical crutches, *מלי בליל יום כיפור* -- when we can be happy though hungry.

This principle of happy-though-hungry is one of the great, successful experiments of Judaism in its effort to create a reality by practicing a sacred fiction. That is just what we are doing: we close our eyes to the myriad trivialities that surround and distract us, we exercise a sacred fiction, and thus succeed in creating a new reality!

Take Passover, for instance. At the Seder table Jews practice all kinds of rituals, most of which are the tokens of freedom. Throughout the long and bitter exile -- not only in Jerusalem or in New York today -- we Jews have acted as if on this night each one of us is a prince or a princess. Really? Really. Despite the pogroms, despite the anti-Semitism, despite the ghetto and the mellah, the Jew exercised this historic-spiritual manoeuvre; he moved on to that higher level and, just as on when Yom Kippur fell on the Sabbath he was able to be happy though hungry, so on Passover he was able to be free though fettered.

The same holds true for every Shabbat. No matter how devastating his poverty, no matter how calamitous his social and political conditions, on Shabbat a Jew reestablished his own dignity. I remember that when I was a child my great-uncle showed me a <sup>הַשְׁמַרְתָּ</sup> genealogical table, to which our family was able to attach itself. About seven or eight generations before me, on my mother's side, was one name that intrigued me. It was written in two languages, Hebrew and Yiddish, as <sup>ר' יושע</sup> or <sup>ר' יושע</sup> -- Rabbi Joshua the Tall One, or Long One. How that fascinated me! I remember asking my uncle what that meant, especially in view of the fact that that branch of my family was usually quite short rather than tall.

He told me that, indeed, our ancestor, Rabbi Joshua, was quite a short man -- all week long. But on Shabbat, with the advent of dusk on Friday evening, Rabbi Joshua would grow a whole 12 inches!! Now that, I was assured by my uncle, was not a supernatural miracle, but a quite natural miracle. It was simply this: all week long, my great-grandfather Rabbi Joshua was physically bowed down under the enormous burdens he bore: the demeaning humiliations, the grinding poverty, the care of a large family, persecutions and fears of all kinds. But on Shabbat he threw off the burdens, he forgot his fears, he ignored the anxieties, and his new-found sense of dignity gave him the strength to unbend and stand up straight -- and so he "grew" a whole foot! On Shabbat a Jew can be rich though poor; happy though hungry; glorious though gaunt.

Because this idea of happy-though-hungry fascinates me, I think that today, when Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat, it is appropriate to emphasize the whole concept of <sup>הַשְׂמֵחָה</sup> simply enjoying your Jewishness, of taking a delight in Torah and the commandments. I refer not to observance as such, not to ecstasy, not even to ordinary <sup>הַשְׂמֵחָה</sup> or

intention. I refer, rather, simply to being happy with your Yiddishkeit, to deriving emotional and psychological and spiritual pleasure from your practice of Judaism <sup>פשוט ופשוט</sup> as if you were feasting at a sumptuous banquet.

Consider the problem of prayer, <sup>תפילה</sup>, for instance. It is a pity that so many American Jews are drawn to their Temples only by gimmicks of various sorts. Thank heaven, Orthodox Jews do not need them and come to pray of their own accord. But I am still not satisfied. I am not even satisfied with the practice of prayer in this congregation. I would like to see (and hear) my congregation enjoy their prayer more, do it with more life, with more love -- for what is prayer if not the expression of a deep love? For once I would like to see you come to this synagogue without your watch, that ubiquitous, tyrannical, neurosis-inducing, anxiety-spawning reminder that spontaneity is somehow sinful. I would like you to remember that love cannot be fit into a tight schedule. Another paragraph of <sup>תורה</sup>, another word of Torah -- is it not worth delaying the Shabbat lunch for ten more minutes? Can we not be happy even though hungry for another quarter of an hour?

The study of Torah should be enjoyed. Talmud Torah is an intellectual treat, a delightful aesthetic experience. It is not merely "adult education" -- something that a man goes to because he is dragged, kicking and screaming, by his wife. It must be -- I even hesitate to use the word on this holy day -- fun!, <sup>פשוט ופשוט</sup> much more of an intellectual challenge and cerebral stimulation than bridge or chess or putting together another deal. I would like to see the delight in Torah come to emotional expression on Simchat Torah without levity and without frivolousness, but with joyous participation in which we temporarily forget our bourgeois respectability in favor of genuine spiritual and emotional spontaneity and just learn to be happy with Torah.

Some time ago, an earnest and very successful young man was complaining to my wife and to me. He is a wealthy person, who travels in socially prominent circles and, thank God, "keeps Kosher." He described how at various times he must entertain guests, customers, and suppliers, and he was almost bitterly enumerating the gourmet delights that surrounded and tempted him at these various occasions. He concluded: "and I had to eat grass!"

I agree that trefah sometimes can be quite delicious. Our Rabbis told us never to assume that non-kosher food is distasteful. But is this really a tragedy? Perhaps I am insensitive if I do not regard such deprivation as the

as the ultimate sacrifice, on the order of the Akedah of Abraham. I did tell him this: I know that if you continue to submit to the Jewish discipline, and do so with love and delight and not begrudgingly, that you will have Jewish grandchildren. But I cannot promise what will happen if you do not do so! Try to be happy though hungry -- and one need not really go quite that hungry if he keeps kosher!

I am even more concerned by the attitudes with which we perform the commandment of <sup>תן צדקה</sup> , charity. How insightful the Sages were when they said <sup>כפי כוסו, כיסו וקולו</sup> , you can measure a man's character by his cup, his pocket, and his temper. How a man deals with money is one of the great indices of his character and personality. I am not speaking now of amounts, but of attitudes. Usually, when I approach people for charities, I am impressed not only by the generosity of amounts, but by the generosity of spirit and character. But sometimes I meet a person who constitutionally is unable to part with his substance. How I pity the man who broods over the dollars he gives to charity as if they were a total loss! How my compassion is stirred over the man who genuinely suffers when he is called upon to contribute, who immediately pleads poverty, who tells you how much he is giving to others, who finally offers to strike a bargain, compromising between the sum you asked for and the little he is prepared to give! And then when he does -- how it hurts him!

But that is not the way to give tzedakah. We often speak of "giving until it hurts," but really tzedakah should never hurt! The Torah taught us <sup>אם אתה ענין וצדקה נתת לו</sup> you shall certainly give to the poor man, but never must your heart feel aggrieved when you give. It is important not only to give, but also to give in a certain manner. What you give is important to the recipient; how you give is important to you, the donor.

A man who has learned to observe <sup>שמירת מצוות</sup> simultaneously, to enjoy the delight of the Sabbath without eating, to be happy though hungry on Yom Kippur, such a man will give and love every minute and every penny of it. A man of this sort will say to himself: how fortunate am I that I can afford to give! How lucky am I that my basic needs are taken care of and that I have enough to part with! How great is it that I can be of service and help to my synagogue, to Israel, to a Yeshiva, to my fellow man! A person who can do that, who can apply the principle of happy-though-hungry to <sup>תן צדקה</sup> who can give without hurting, who can enjoy giving as if he is getting -- is truly redeemed!

Yizkor demands of us that we make an effort similar to the happy-though-hungry experience. Yizkor, of course, has an element of the melancholy that is prominent in it; old grief dredged up from long-buried layers of spent suffering. But that is not the aim and purpose of Yizkor. It must not be a repetition of the funeral or the shivah observance. If it were, we would be forbidden to recite it on holidays. Thus, the tradition tells us that mourners during their first year of their mourning must not recite the Yizkor, because the wound is too fresh -- and Yizkor must not be a mourning experience. Rather it must be a reunion, a loving report or account-giving of our selves and our families, of how we measure up to the standards of parents or grandparents or other relatives; a prayerful reaffirmation of respect and affection, of love and devotion. It must not be an occasion of sadness, but of bitter-sweet recollection. There is, indeed, some merit in the Hasidic custom of observing Yahrzeit (the anniversary of the death of a relative) while "drinking a פ"ד"ס," thus converting sadness into joyous memory. But no matter which tradition we follow, Yizkor means to undergo the happy-though-hungry experience by reaching the level where we can transcend the physical, where we can exercise a fiction and thus create a reality out of it. Yizkor means we must feel the presence of loved ones once again, though they are physically absent; that we can experience their psychological nearness though they are materially remote.

For indeed, this is part of what Judaism trains us to achieve. Without ever disdaining the material world, even while seeking to ennoble and consecrate it, we must also know how to emancipate ourselves from its often inexorable grip.

Judaism reminds us that it is within our power, each of us, to do just that. Even as a Beethoven can hear glorious music though his ears do not function; even as the Psalmist can hear the music of the spheres in adoration of their Creator פתח פהו ויבא עמו ויבא עמו ויבא עמו, though a sound is not uttered; even as Sages can be wise without books; even as lovers can speak though silent; even as the mystic can taste God -- ה' רבו כבודו ויבא עמו -- though God is incorporeal; even as the ordinary Jew can see the unity of God when he recites the Shema, though he shuts his eyes and shields them with his hands; so a Jew, especially when the two Sabbaths converge, can be happy though hungry, can attain ויבא עמו though fasting.

And so can we, on this double Sabbath that gives us a foretaste of liberating redemption, feel the presence of those we love, though we cannot touch them, as we rise to recite the Yiskor.