

"The Inside Story"

Our Sages, who normally adhere strictly to principle and are unconcerned with popular reactions and public opinion, show a remarkable divergence from this method in a comment that has relevance to this morning's Torah reading. The end of our Sidra tells us about the מילואים, the consecration of the Priests for their service in the Temple. In addition to the various ceremonies that had to be performed, they were commanded ומפתח אוהל מועד לא

and from the door of the tent of meeting shall ye not go out for seven days." For a full week they were required to stay within the "tent of meeting," that miniature sanctuary which was later to become the institution of the Temple. The Talmud (Yoma 2b) derives therefrom other laws as well, among them that the כהן גדול, the High Priest, had to remain within the Temple for seven days before Yom Kippur. Every year he was to set aside this week and remain completely within the Sanctuary, in a chamber known as לשכת פרהודרין, there to prepare himself for the holiest day of the year.

Now, as we all know, any room or house which serves as a residence requires that we afix a mezuzah to the doorpost. Nevertheless, for certain reasons, the Temple rooms were exempt from this obligation of a mezuzah. Hence, the לשכת פרהודרין did not require a mezuzah. However, R. Judah (Yoma 10b) is of a somewhat different opinion. He maintains, together with his colleagues, that no chamber of the many within the Temple required a mezuzah. The לשכת פרהודרין the chamber where the High Priest stayed for seven days, similarly

did not require the mezuzah insofar as the law was technically and officially concerned. However, R. Judah maintains that the Rabbis promulgated a special decree requiring only of the לשכת

פרהדרין that it be adorned with a mezuzah. The reason offered by R. Judah is amazing: שלא יאמרו כהן גדול חבוש בבית האסורים

so that the people will not say, "the High Priest is imprisoned in the Sanctuary!" R. Judah feared that when the people congregated during the High Holy Days, around the Temple, they would notice that after the Priest went in to the Sanctuary until after Yom Kippur, he did not emerge for seven full days. Not noticing a mezuzah on the doorpost, and therefore not considering the לשכת

פרהדרין as his personal residence, they might be led to the fantastic conclusion that as a result of some inner court politics the High Priest was incarcerated in the Sanctuary! Therefore, in order to avoid such a public misinterpretation, let there be a mezuzah afixed on the doorpost on the לשכת פרהדרין, so that the people will consider this chamber as the High Priest's residence and not regard him as a prisoner within the Temple walls. This decree, according to R. Judah, was made, as we moderns would be wont to say, to safeguard the "image" of the Priesthood.

More remarkable than this rare example of the concern for the opinion of the unlearned masses, is the vast difference between the real facts and the distorted impressions. Here was the כהן גדול, the cynosure of all eyes, the focus of the attention of all Israel as they gathered in Jerusalem on the holy days, representing his people Israel before his Creator in Heaven, engaged in spiritual exercises of the highest order, reaching the very zenith of his career

in this marvelous consecration of his whole personality to the great spiritual tasks that lay ahead of him on Yom Kippur -- what greater joy, what more poignant delight? Yet, an uninstructed public that cannot emancipate itself from its petty and prosaic prejudices, comes to the bizarre conclusion: **כהן גדול חבוש בבית האסורים**! They do not see the High Priest engaged in the normal insignificant details of their own trivial lives, no going in and no going out, no rushing to work and no coffee breaks, no entertainment and no luxuries, and so they assume that the High Priest is locked up within! Were it not for that mezuzah on the doorpost of his chamber, the public indeed might consider the High Priest imprisoned!

How does such a jarring discrepancy come about, that people can consider a man in jail when he is at the heights of his joy, that they behold a burden when he experiences a blessing? The answer, it would seem, depends on how you view the sanctuary of Judaism: as an insider or as an outsider. If you look at the Sanctuary from the point of view of an insider, you gain a totally different view from that of an outsider. If you are an outsider looking in, a spectator, you can never experience that which the insider does: the subtle joys, the daily delights, the sense of newness and rebirth. Viewed from without, the Priests appear as prisoners, when in fact they are the princes of the Lord! From without, all one can see is the High Priest **חבוש בבית האסורים**, incarcerated; whereas the High Priest as the insider experiences the feeling of being -- as the Torah puts it -- **לפני ה'**, "before the Lord" -- a rare opportunity for an ennobling and elevating awareness of God's ineffable Presence. But this an outsider cannot know, any more -- to borrow and modify a parable from the Baal Shem Tov -- than one who looks into a room from the street,

beyond sound-proof windows. He does not see the musicians who stand on the side, and he does not hear the music; he sees only people dancing. Inside, the dancers hear the music, and they respond with the joyous rhythm of their whole bodies. But he, the outsider, sees only meaningless gesticulations, and what appear to him as the weird convulsions of the demented.

This tendency to be an outsider is a fact of life in general today. Social thinkers from psychologists and sociologists to philosophers comment regularly about the phenomenon of "alienation." It affects every aspect of thought and activity of contemporary man. A recent philosophic conference, well reported in the press, came to this conclusion: today we know more than ever before -- but we understand less. We have become statistic dilettantes who peddle figures but are alien to life's profoundest experiences; who can quote prices and facts and costs and numbers, but who have failed to take the plunge into life's bitter-sweet mysteries.

And how eccentric and distorted is the view of the perpetual outsider! For instance, one who does not sense the historic drama of the struggle for human equality and dignity in our days, may view the Northern civil rights enthusiasms who travel to Selma to demonstrate as publicity-seekers or, at best, unfortunate young people who have foolishly traded in the conveniences of home for the discomfort and danger of a civil rights demonstration. He is completely oblivious to the thrill experienced by the insider, that joy of participation in a great human cause that penetrates to the marrow of the bone. Similarly, outsiders find it hard to understand why American Jews are so agitated about the lack of matzo's for Russian Jewry, about

the fact that 300,000 Jews in Kiev will this year have no matzoh. They fail to appreciate that this is more than merely a secular-democratic protest for the freedom of religion; were it but that, we would have many other things to object to, and not only concerning the oppression of Judaism. But matzoh, as an insider appreciates, is the awareness of being a link in the historical chain that goes back to antiquity; it is, as well, the symbol of fellowship with other Jews in the present, even those beyond the Iron Curtain; and it is the hope, that just as once before Israel experienced יציאת מצרים, so will it someday experience יציאת רוסיה, the exodus from Russia, and all other houses of slavery in modern days.

Indeed, when it comes to religion, especially Judaism, this difference between those within the Temple and Torah and those without it become more pronounced. More than once do I recall from my own experience being introduced to a well-meaning stranger as an Orthodox Jew or Rabbinical student, or Orthodox Rabbi. To my infinite annoyance there spreads on the face of the stranger the look of incredulousness, and he says: "Orthodox -- and you so young?" As if Torah were an affliction brought on by old age, a kind of spiritual geriatrics. How frustrating and often how futile to have to explain that to be "frum" is not to be a fossil, and to be religious is not to be a relic. How amusing and yet how tragic to have to explain that we observe Torah not because we are חבול בבית האסורים, not because parents force us or circumstances coerce us or because of habit of fear or need, but because we love and desire to live a meaningful Jewish life לפני ה' "before the Lord."

No doubt many of those here today have had similar experiences. Someone learns you are an observant Orthodox Jew, and he clucks his tongue in sympathy, feeling genuinely sorry for you, and responds in a half-admiring and half-pitying tone: "You observe the Sabbath, with all its restrictions? You cannot smoke or travel or write?" And we must explain: Sabbath is for us not a day of gloom and restriction, but one of **עונג**, unadulterated joy, when (without being an ecstatic mystic) an ordinary observant Jew can experience **נשמה** **'תר**, the "additional soul" that comes from a day of pure rest and re-creation, when we feel liberated from the tyranny of all the pettiness that surrounds us during the week. Or someone discovers that you believe in and practice the laws of "family purity." And again the incredulous reaction, with a mixture of pity and admiration: "You really practice these ascetic regulations denying your basic drives?" And we have to explain so patiently: No, it is not asceticism, but a healthy and vital self-discipline, which ennobles the animal within us and purifies and sublimates it, and makes of marriage a dream, not a nightmare. So, we observe Kashruth and we expect no awards and want no sympathy for it. It simply is part of our life of **קדושה**, the practical program of Jewish holiness and differentness. And the very fact of the observance of Kashruth away from home, with all the minor inconveniences it entails, that by itself gives us the feeling of being at home everywhere!

Indeed in every area of life, the outsider sees only size and number rather than content and quality, the conventional rather than the moral, the fashionable rather than that which is indeed dignified, opinions rather than ideas. He beholds a synagogue and can see only the membership and budget and activities and aesthetics. But he lacks that which the insider knows in the depths of his being: the heights

of joy, the touch of mystery and grandeur, the whisper of the echo of the sound of the voice of God. No, we are not walled in the sanctuaries; we are welling up with hope, with courage.

For 'לפני ה', "before the Lord," means that in this society which suffers such solitude we do not experience that oppressive loneliness, for even if man abandons and neglects us, we know that God is with us. In this automated society with its tyranny of numbers and progressive depersonalization, this means that man, unlike so many of our new products, is not disposable and replaceable. It means that we have a function in the divine economy and a purpose in life. This indeed is the secret and reward of a genuine Jewish life!

Therefore, in order to avoid this fallacious and misleading conclusion about Jewish life, to prevent people from thinking that the pious Jew is a prisoner in a jail called Judaism, what must we do?

First, we must affix the mezuzah on the לשכת פרהודרין; that is, we must do all we can to inform those not heretofore exposed to Jewish life, the outsiders, of the particular quality of Jewish experiences. We must present it as dignified, decorous, and esthetic.

Secondly, we who are insiders must reassure ourselves. For a minority generally tends to adopt a view of itself held by the majority, the outsider. While occasionally this is a healthy practice and restores perspective, it must never become the standard way of self-definition. It is self-destructive always to view oneself through the eyes of others. I know too many observant Jews who always prefer to see themselves as others see us: from the secularist and Reform to outright assimilationist Jews, from the benevolent anti-Judaists

to the vicious anti-Semites. When that happens, we begin to apologize for our beliefs, for our heritage, for our very selves; then we wallow in self-pity about the heavy burden that destiny has fated for us; then we begin to abandon real Judaism for what has been called "symbolic Judaism," with its few ceremonies for special events and an occasional synagogue attendance -- but nothing more. So let us remember: no apologies and no self-pity! We are not captives in the sanctuary of Judaism -- we are its custodians. Torah is for us not a burden but a blessing.

Finally, while we are not missionaries, we ought to invite our fellow Jews who look in from without -- to come in. A wine connoisseur does not judge the quality of a sample by the shape of the bottle or the print on the label or the personality of the salesman. There is only one test: taste it! To look is not enough. So does the Psalmist declare: 'טעמו וראו כי טוב ה' "taste and see that the Lord is good." It is not enough just to see -- one must also "taste." You cannot appreciate Judaism until you taste it and experience it and live לפני ה', "before the Lord." Then it is unnecessary to be stimulated by artificial enticements, by the unnecessary mezuzah, by the superficial prop.

ברוך הבא בשם ה' ברכנוכם מבית ה' , blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord, seeking the Lord; we bless you from within the house of the Lord -- and invite you in!

Here, לפני ה', before the Lord, you will discover that you are not in a prison, but in a palace full of pure spiritual pleasures and exquisite delights and the joy of life.

Taste and see -- and you will discover "that the Lord is good."