

THOU SHALT NOT FORGET

One of the many names given to this present holiday is YOM HA-ZIKARON, the day of Remembrance. It is so called because on this day of Rosh Hashanah, G-d remembers us, He takes special cognizance of us as He reviews the facts of our lives this past year and passes judgment upon us. But there is also another reason for the name YOM HA-ZIKARON. It is the day we humans are called upon to remember. It is the day we are reminded by all that we do and all that we say, "thou shalt not forget."

Science is fascinated not only by the phenomenon of memory, but also by ^{of forgetting} ~~the fact of forgetting~~. Scientists ~~who are engaged in the study of how people remember, are also intrigued by why they forget.~~ The whole of psychoanalysis and its depth studies of the human mind and personality begins with the problem of forgetting. But while the mechanics of forgetting may be a matter for scientists, there is an ethical and moral and religious aspect to ^{forgetting} ~~forgetting~~; and it is that spiritual question of forgetting which ought to occupy our attention on this YOM HA-ZIKARON.

On the one hand, there is a positive and beneficial quality to forgetting. The great Rabeinu Bachya has told us that were it not for the ability to forget, a man would never be free from melancholy. If not for this remarkable ability to forget, we would relive every moment of pain we ever suffered; ^{always be mourning} ~~we would never finish mourning the death of loved ones, for the grief would never be forgotten;~~ we would never have a friend, for we would constantly bear a grudge, ^{never let go} ~~never forgetting any time a friend may have slighted us.~~ To "forgive" and to "forget" are closely allied. So that ~~forgetting~~ may serve a good purpose.

And yet, aside from these incidental virtues, there is no doubt that forgetting is considered a major sin in Judaism. ~~We are told the story of Amalek and its attack on Israel -- and we are commanded IO TISHKACH, thou shalt not forget.~~ We are given the Torah and told, "thou shalt not forget these words." ~~There is a covenant between G-d and Israel, and the people is warned, "do not forget."~~ Moses recalls to them the Revelation at Sinai, and he says, "RAK HISHAMER LECHA USHEMOR NAFSHECHA ME'OD PEN TISHKACH ES HA-DEVARIM ASHER RAU EINECHA - "only take care and be extremely heedful lest thou forget the things thine eyes saw." The phrase HISHAMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH - take care not to forget - is ~~like~~ a recurrent theme punctuating the messages of Torah after each important passage. Our Rabbis continued in this tradition, and they even declared that a man who forgets his studies deserves to pay with his life! And the Halakhah declares that while a man who forget a law and committed a crime unwittingly cannot be punished, nevertheless he is morally responsible, and therefore the SHOGEH, he who sins because he forgot the law, must offer a KORBON CHATAS, a sin-offering.

I am sure that with a little thinking all of us will agree that every sin is, at the bottom, a sin of forgetting. Very few of us ever do wrong because we want to disobey G-d and conscience rebelliously. We just forget good-naturedly. ~~The first sin set the pattern for all others. When Adam -- whose birthday today is -- and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, it was not an act of open rebellion against G-d. It was a matter of being so absorbed in temptation by that luscious, sweet, pleasant fruit -- that they forgot all about G-d's words.~~ When even the democracies treat Israel just like another oil-starved state, it is because they have forgotten the reason Israel was recreated -- the refugees from Hitlerian massacres who had nowhere to turn but homeward. They forgot the way they -- the democracies -- closed the door in the faces of the shiploads of DPs. They committed the unforgivable crime of forgetting their own complicity in the great destruction of European Jewry when they treated Hitler then as they are treating Nasser now. ~~Russian rocketry is another example of what forgetfulness did to America. We forgot that Russians are as clever as Americans, that they had manpower and brainpower and books and universities. We forgot -- and so laughed at their science and believed the stupid~~

illusion that Russia was a primitive nation far inferior to our Thunderbird culture. Now look at the panic in science and government and education this last year -- because of forgetfulness! How could an anachronism like Faubus survive today if not that Southerners forget -- forget that only recently they too sent soldiers to die for the Four Freedoms. When, personally, we fail to give our children sufficient Jewish education, is it that we make a conscious decision against Judaism and Torah -- or that we forget the many times we ourselves blame our parents or childhood teachers for the neglect of our Jewish education? When we go on vacation and fail to bring along Tallis or candlesticks -- is it because of rebellion, or because we merely forgot all about it? When we lower our contributions to a charity, are we deciding to be mean -- or simply forgetting our own humble origins? When on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we feel inspired and determine to come to shul more often, and then not do so -- is it a rejection of our firm moral resolutions, or mere forgetfulness? And what is ingratitude if not forgetting all that a friend has done for us and meant to us? HISHAMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH, take heed that Thou shalt not forget! The great late Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Rabbi Kook, told us that the worst effect of sin is that man forgets his higher existence; he forgets G-d and so lives in the illusion that he does not need G-d. HISHAMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH!

And what is all of Torah if not an attempt to make Jews remember G-d and not forget? Dietary laws, prayer, tallis, Shabbos, circumcision, holidays, Kiddush -- all these are reminders, all these tell us: don't forget there is a G-d in the world. And act accordingly. It was a non-Jewish thinker, Macmurray, who pointed out that this insistence upon being aware of G-d at all times is a uniquely Jewish feature. Christianity expects its communicants to be G-d-conscious only at certain holy times and in certain holy places. But Judaism is different, he says. He calls it "The Hebrew Consciousness," this ability to recall G-d's presence always. That is why other people only have a religion, whereas Jews are religious. HISHAMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH is the basic reason for all our mitzvos and rituals. It is what makes Judaism Jewish.

And if it is so extremely important to remember and not to forget -- ASHREI ADAM LO YISHKACHECHA, happy the man who does not forget Thee -- then on this YOM HA-ZIKARON, this Day of Remembrance, we ought to investigate the reasons why people forget, and show how Rosh Hashanah offers the cure to this lapse of religious memory. There are three causes for this forgetfulness which prevents us from being ASHREI, happy and fortunate, three reasons why we as individuals and as a people often fail -- and forget,

One is the fact that we some of us are prosperous, We live in an economy of abundance, in a land of great natural resources. We have more than we need and more luxury and leisure and trinkets and expensive toys than our grandfathers ever dreamt of. How hard to remember G-d in the midst of all our stylish possessions! We reserve remembering Him and appealing to Him to moments of crisis and need and danger. Otherwise we are too busy indulging ourselves to think of Him or study His words, We are too proud -- look at how well we have done for ourselves! -- to shed a tear before Him in contrition and broken heart. Pride and plenty is one cause of forgetting G-d, of not being religious.

It is told of Rabbi Elazar b. Arach that he left the great academic center of Yavneh, where the scholars lead a rather austere life, and moved to two cities renowned for their good lake-bathing and the free-flowing quality wines there served. And the Talmud relates that he so threw himself into self-indulgence, that he forgot his studies. So much did he forget that when he left, after a number of years, and was asked to read the Torah beginning with the words HA-CHODESH HA-ZEH LA-CHEM, "this month (of Nissan, the month of freedom) is for you the beginning of months", he could not read the letters any better than a mere beginner! So much had he forgotten that he mistook the DALED for REISH, the ZAYIN for YUD, and CHAF for BEIS, and so instead of HACHODESH HAZEH LACHEM, This is your month of freedom, he read HA-CHERESH HAYAH LIBAM -- their heart was dumb!

reasoning, in short, why people are irreligious.

Can you see how real, how contemporary, this situation is? R. Elazar might have lived in the U.S.A. in 1958 -- and moved from his Jewish surroundings to the suburbs, with a private swimming pool and near the finest clubs. All conveniences, all luxuries, all entertainment -- but not a word of Torah. And so pride and prosperity and plenty and self-indulgence make him forget his studies, his Torah, his G-d. And what happens when a Jew forgets? -- why then the whole Jewish yearning for freedom, for HACHODESH HAZEH LACHEM, the whole Jewish aspiration for glory, for spiritual eminence -- all this is reduced to HACHERESH HAYAH LIBAM, to a mute heart, a ^{silent} dumb soul, an insensitive spirit. What a tragedy when a Jew forgets because of pride and plenty -- his heart becomes dulled!

For those of ~~thus~~, therefore, who are the modern counterparts of this phase of the life of R. Elazar b. Arach, for those of us who forget G-d because we are busy caring for our own desires and appetites, ~~for those too proud hiring and firing and controlling others to think of the Controller of all the world, for those who through prosperity have lost the spark of Jewish religion and have converted the Jewish dreams into a muted heart and dimmed spirit~~ -- there comes Rosh Hashanah with its theme of MALCHIYOS, to tell us that G-d is King over all Creation, that we are only mortal subjects, that to Him is pride and to Him is mastery over the world. MALCHIYOS -- the first third of the Mussaf Service -- shocks us into the realization that all comes from G-d; how can we then ever forget Him? It brings us back to our senses, for, in the words of the poet George Meredith,

Tell the grassy hollow that holds the babbling well-spring,
Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled.

The grassy hollow cannot forget the spring that nourishes it. The moon cannot forget the sun who gives it light. The ~~tool~~ cannot forget the artisan who weilds it. So cannot man forget the G-d Who created Him. Rosh Hashanah dispels our fanatasies and our sense of security, reminds us we are only human, and calls upon us not to forget Almi G-d. HISHAMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH.

But if some slip ~~int~~ away from Judaism and forget G-d because of pride and prosperity, others forget Him because of the opoosite reason -- because of worry and poverty and the struggle for their daily bread. How hard to free one's mind and heart to thoughts of G-d -- or study or worship or work for a shul -- when from morning to night ~~th~~ I must work for a living, feed a family, provide for their ducation, fulfil elementray social obligations and domestic responsibilities. Life crowds us in -- how are we to remember G-d?

And in answer there comes the SHOFAR, the second theme of Rosh Hashanah, the SHOFAR call which was interpreted by Maimonides to mean ZICHRU BORACHEM EILEH HASHOKECHIM ES HA-EMESS BEHAVLEI HA-ZEMAN, re,ember your Creator, you who forget eternal truth in the trifles of the times. What Shofar tells us is that while we mudt certainly pau attention to these worldly necessities, yet we must not allow ourselves to become just economic statistics and no more. We must not allow our worries and struggles to overwlgelm us and dominate our personalities and spiritas. It reminds us that we have a higher self, a soul, a spiritual existence, an Image of G-d within us. Jews have always been distinguished by their ability to remember G-d and study His Torah even in adversity. Jews have been able to regard the need for money and food and other wants as something to be cared for, but essentially as HAVLEI HAZEMAN, as inferior to spiritual aims, as of a lower level than the needs of the soul, only trifles of the times. Look at Israel today. Do you know who the national hero of Israel is these days? The 30-year old Amos Chakham who, as Israel's representative, won the International Bible Quiz and brought glory to the State of Israel. Partly paralyzed, barely subsisting on his wages as a clerk in a Jerusalem Institute for the Blind, friendless, who when his father was alive and lectured on Bible over the radio never heard him because he could not afford a radio -- this man showed himself to be an outstanding Bible scholar. Because he realized that his ~~phya~~ material needs were essentially HAVLEI HAZEMAN, and worked at not forgetting his G-d and His Torah.

This last month the atomic submarine Nautilus performed the historic feat of crossing the North Pole submerged under the Arctic Sea- Ocean. How did the skipper know he was at the pole, since magnetic instruments do not work there and he was underwater and so could not read the stars? The Sperry Co. developed an inertial guidance system, an instrument they call a "Celestial Recorder" - - which allows the navigator to read the stars even while he is under water!

SHOFAR tells us that each of us is created with a Celestial Recorder, that each of us has a YIDDISH NESHAMAH, a soul, which allows us to read the stars and scan the heavens even though we are submerged in the coldness of life, where it is dark so often, even though the mighty waves of toil and struggle and worry break over our heads. Rosh Hashanah reminds us that even when we think we can barely hold our heads above the water - - we can still reach out for the G-d of Heaven. HISHAMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH

Finally, there is a third reason why Jews are not religious. Jews often forget G-d because to remember Him is too great a burden. As individuals we too often try to forget what is too troublesome if we remember. We ~~see~~ eat to forget, travel to forget, read to forget, drink and smoke to forget. What psychology teaches us about individuals - - that we forget because it is too burdensome to remember - - holds true for us as a people. If a Jew remembers who he is, that he is the chosen of G-d, then he has placed upon him the OLE HAMITZVOS, a heavy yoke. He must act G-dly, speak G-dly, think G-dly. He must present to his non-Jewish neighbor the example of G-dliness - - thus, he must possess an ethical character, modest personality, forgiving ways, and a spotlessly clean record as well as a paragon of religious devotion. And so we find it difficult to keep this burden upon us for very long. We chafe under it - - and prefer to forget G-d and His demands and commands. ES IZ SHVER ZU ZEIN A YID. In that case - - just forget all about it.

What is the answer of Rosh Hashanah to this attempt to make of us a nation of voluntary amnesia victims? ZICHRONOS, the third part of the Mussaf reminds us - - reminds us who we are, where we come from, what stock we stem from. It reminds us of our tremendous capacities for being witnesses to G-d. ZICHRONOS gives us the picture of historical Jewish greatness, that we may know that we too are strong enough to bear the burden of G-d and His prophets throughout the world.

The great Israeli writer, Shay Agnon, has the narrator of one of his great novels (OREIACH NATAH LALUN) musing as follows: What is the reason G-d chose us Jews and placed upon us the yoke of Toeah and Mitzvos - - are they not hard and difficult to observe? But I will explain it with a parable. It may be compared to a king who had a crown made of gold and diamonds and pearls and all sorts of gems. When he wore the crown - all knew he was king. When he took it off - not everyone knew who he was. Do you think the king took it off because it was too heavy? - on the contrary, he wore it constantly and gloried in it. Why does the king desire all this glory? That I don't know. I don't know because I am not a king. Do you say that I ought to know because if I am not a king I am a BEN MELECH, the son of a King? You are right. That is the trouble with me and all my fellow Israelites, that we have forgotten that we are the children of kings. In the holy books it is said that the greatest evil of all is when a BEN MELECH, the son of a king forgets he is the son of a king.

There is the answer, friends, for those who do not observe because they find it too difficult, too heavy a burden. To those who chafe under the weight of the Crown of Torah and thus seek to forget G-d, ZICHRONOS reminds us of the fact that we are each a BEN MELECH, we are the children of kings, and we have it within us to stand up under the weight of the crown. We shall be able to bear the burden of YIDDISHKEIT and remember G-d if we recall who we are and where we come from. Do you know who you are, my friends? You are the grandchildren of Abraham who stood out one man against a world and wrested the secret of G-d from the Heavens themselves. You are the descendants of an Isaac whose self-sacrifice challenged the very angels. You are the scions of a Moses who defied the might of empires to declare the freedom of a nation, who pronounced the Oneness of G-d to a world which laughed at Him. You are the spring from the loins of a R. Akiva who became a scholar though he began to

read at age 40, whose tender love for a wife became a model for Jewish life, who fomented a rebellion against the Roman Empire, who taught Torah from within the prison walls where he was led to his death. In your veins courses the blood of the fearless Isaiah, the lofty Amos, and of Ezra who singlehandedly recreated the people from the Babylonian Exile. The cells of your heart are akin to those of Yehidah Halevi, the gentle poet who sung of Zion. In the marrow of your bones ~~there~~ you inherit the characteristics of grandparents who were heavenly mystics, and from the mystical city of Safed sent their rays of glory over all the world. You are descended from ~~the~~ Maimonides, the greatest genius of the ages, from saints and scholars and prophets and philosophers. You are the children and grandchildren of ordinary Jews and Jewesses who survived by stubbornness and strength of spirit alone, from people who combined iron conviction with charm and sweetness. There is amongst your ancestors people like RASHAISH of Vilno, Chasdai Ibn Shaprut of Spain, R. Yehudah Hanassi of Palestine -- people who combined great business and political careers with eminence in Torah scholarship and spirituality. You are the sons and daughters of such people -- you are BNEI MELACHIM, the children of kings, princes and princesses of the House of Israel. With such ZICHRONOS with such memories and knowledge, who says that you cannot bear the burden of Torah? Who says that Judaism is too heavy a load for your shoulders, too tough a discipline for your spirits? Remember that you are BNEI MELACHIM, and you will bear the burden of G-d easily. Remember that you are JEWS, and you will not forget that the Lord is G-d.

These then are the cures Rosh hashanah offers to modern Jews who leave Judaism, who forget G-d. To those who forget because of pride and prosperity, R.H. offers MALCHIYOS, that G-d is King and we are weak, inadequate and dependent upon Him. To those who forget Him because of the difficulties and toils of daily life, SHOFROS remind us that we have a higher self, a "Celestial Recorder", that seeks fulfillment. And to those who leave Judaism and forget G-d because they find it too difficult to observe, ZICHRONOS remind us that we have the ability to bear the burden with pride and dignity.

The sin for forgetting G-d is the greatest tragedy of all -- to be forgotten by G-d, to be abandoned by the Divine Father and left to fend for ourselves. On this Holy Day we pledge to heed the call HISHMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH, and we affirm that we shall not forget. And in return we pray that G-d not forget us, but that ELOKEINU VE'LOKEI AVOSEINU, ZACHREINU BE-ZIKARON TOV LEFANECHA UFAKDEINU BE-FEKUDAS YESHUAH VE-RACHAMIM MISHEMEI SHEMEI KEDEM, Our G-d and G-d of our fathers, remember us favorably, and grant us merciful deliverance from the eternal high heavens above. Amen.

You are of one people with those who anonymously heroically revolted against Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto, & those who transformed molten swamps to the garden forest of modern Israel.