

"THE POTTER'S BOOTH"
Jewishness Inside and Out

There is a technical law in Halakhah relating to the Sukkah that is, in itself, not overly relevant to us in our technological age and the urban society, but which may serve as a symbol for a general principle that is applicable to all of us in our own times.

The Talmud (Sukkah 8b) records the following law:

אמר ר' יוחנן כל המגורין שיש להם סוכה חיצונית וסוכה פנימית
הם עושין סוכה פנימית וסוכה חיצונית

It was the custom in the days of the Talmud that potters would live in a "sukkah within a sukkah." In the inner, smaller sukkah, they would actually reside, take their meals, and make their home. In the outer, larger sukkah, they would do their work and sell their wares to the public. This was their custom all year long. Now, on the festival of Sukkot, the potter discovers that these booths in which he lives and sells technically qualify as sukkot to fulfill his obligations for the festival. The question is, is this inner sukkah in which he dwells all year long, and whose dimensions and covering qualify as a kosher sukkah -- can he use this as his sukkah for the festival as well? And the answer is, no, he cannot. What is the reason for disqualifying this inner sukkah? Rashi answers:

בגלל שאין זה מוכרז כסוכה

because it is not immediately recognizable that he is dwelling in this sukkah for the purpose of fulfilling the commandment.

What the Talmud teaches, then, is that technicalities alone are insufficient to qualify a man as having performed his Jewish duties. It is even not enough for him to abide by his own conscience. He must

also make it evident to others that he is performing his Jewish duty. To build and live in a sukkah, but have it לכבוד נוסח, that no one else should recognize what it is -- that is not good enough. It is simply not enough that I know that I am dwelling in it לכבוד נוסח, for the purpose of the sukkah and the festival; it must be recognized by all, it must be obvious to the world.

If I want to be a נבון -- which, in Hebrew, means not only "potter" but also to be creative -- I must be willing to be identified openly as a Jew, and not to hide it under the guise of every-dayishness.

That lesson is important to us because for too long we have been laboring under the burden of the slogan of the Haskalah: היה יהודי בביתך אדם בעולם, "Be a Jew at home but a man -- or mensh -- when you go out into the world." This was a malicious, pernicious formula which was based on the outspoken but very real assumption that there exists a dichotomy between יהודי and אדם, between the parochially and ethnocentrically Jewish and the universally human, and that somehow the Jewish is less than the human.

Of course, we must be fair to the Haskalah; in some measure we are all products of that movement, or at least influenced by it indirectly. The Haskalah was an attempt by the Jewish community to come to terms with the modern world and enter the stream of Western civilization. There is nothing wrong with that effort, and we are involved in it today whether we admit it or not. But the task as undertaken by the Haskalah was largely a blind one. They heralded Western enlightenment,

and welcomed and pursued political liberty as granted to individual citizens, Jewish or not; but they overlooked the fact that the Western world was not willing to grant autonomy to individual groups, that it demanded cultural suicide of minority bodies, that together with its much vaunted liberalism came an oppressive insistence upon cultural assimilation and religious-cultural conformism. So when the Haskalah decided to submit to this conformism and assimilation, when it told us to practice our Jewishness at home when no one is looking, but to be ashamed of it on the outside, when we must present ourselves to the gaze of gentile eyes, the Haskalah turned self-hating and degrading, and it has bedeviled us for these last 200 years.

So the law of sukkah teaches us: Learn from the potter's booth that you must possess your Jewishness both inside and outside. Let your Jewishness be not only a matter of your home, of your inner life, but also לפני הציבור, let it be recognizeable, evident, and obvious to everyone in the outside world. Be a Jew at home, and be a Jew outdoors as well.

I so often have cause to find fault with the State of Israel in its official insensitivity to religion and to religious tradition, that it is a pleasure publicly to commend Ambassador Tekoah, the Israeli representative at the United Nations. This past Shabbat Shuvah, the United Nations took up the Middle East problem. The meeting was scheduled for 5:30 p.m., but the Israeli Ambassador asked the United Nations to postpone the meeting for two hours so he not be forced to violate the Shabbat in coming to the meeting. Although his request was not granted, the Ambassador kept to his principles, and, in respect to our tradition

and our religion, he did not show up until 7:30 p.m., after the Sabbath was over. He showed his Jewishness not only בבית but also במלך, for all the world, in its official forum, to see and behold: Jewishness that is לכל העולם, for all to see like the sukkah.

If I may diverge for a moment: how unfortunately apt is the metaphor of the sukkah. The sukkah is known as בית זמני, a temporary abode, the symbol of the frail, the insecure, the ephemeral. And how that imposing building on 42nd Street has proved to be nothing but a tall sukkah, a בית זמני, something that crumbles at the first ill wind. How unreliable the friends of Israel have proved, showing once again that we are עם יחיד, a people dwelling alone. Israel asked for a merely two-hour delay on the basis of its inability to attend because of religious reasons. There was no emergency that made this request impossible to grant. There were no reports of Jewish pogroms against Arabs in East Jerusalem. The Russian Ambassador Malik said No. And the others went along with him and refused to wait.

Now, we have no שאלות, no special questions to ask of Mr. Malik. A man who could, from the rostrum of the Security Council, refer to the Israelis as using "Hitlerite tactics," taunt them for their Jewish doctrine of "chosen people," and reproach them in the best Streicher tradition, warning them to keep their "long noses out of the Soviet garden" and not raise the problem of Soviet Jewry -- thus, by his very expression and demeanor and use of anti-Semitic stereotypes, contradicting his government's official denial of anti-Semitism -- from such a vulgarian in striped pants one can ask nothing and expect nothing.

But what of the other delegations? Why did they have to go along? Why do they have to show such utter contempt not only for the State of Israel, but for Judaism as a world religion? Would they have done the same, scheduling a meeting on Easter Sunday or any Sunday if there were no emergency? Would they not have respected the Moslem festivals? If the interest of the smallest African nation came before this august body on a day that that nation was celebrating some primitive pagan rite, and requested postponement on religious grounds, would they have not abided by the request? Yet the American delegate -- was silent. This country of enlightened democracy and civil liberties -- was tongue-tied. Ambassador Bush -- had nothing to say. Great Britain, the land of "liberté, égalité, et fraternité" -- found itself struck dumb when it had to apply liberté to the Jews, égalité to the State of Israel, and fraternité for the Jewish religion. All of them proved vulgar, crude, and hypocritical. Here they were accusing Israel of Judaizing Jerusalem, discovering that they cannot abide Jewish rule no matter how enlightened it is, but they will not respect the religion of a member state.

Perhaps the Israel Ambassador should not have attended the UN meeting at all, but come into the lobby of the UN at 7:30 p.m. and called a press conference exposing the vulgarity of the powers. Nevertheless, his actions and answers were dignified and reflected gloriously upon the State of Israel and the Jewish tradition. He was not ashamed of his Jewishness. He was not embarrassed at his sukkah. What occasion this gives us to smile at all those benighted Jews who still would want to blend, chameleon-like, into the general scene!

But this tendency to hide one's Jewishness in one's private life

and act like a WASP in public, is a legacy of past generations and a few weak-spirited Jews who, no matter how young or how old, and despite the show of their personal self-confidence, are essentially frightened within -- the type that cringes at any public manifestation of Jewishness, and would like to disappear when such Jewishness becomes *לפני הציבור*, evident to the non-Jew.

Today's problem does not concern so much those who follow the Haskalah slogan and want to be Jewish on the inside and not on the outside. Rather, as Prof. Nathan Rottenstreich has said, we have in our times taken the Haskalah slogan and set it on its head, turned it upside down, as if we today proclaim *היה צדיק ויחיה צדיק*, be a Jew when everyone is looking, but your home can be empty of Jewishness and can be the depository of total assimilation!

Consider what we do in this new style of assimilation. We celebrate the Seder publicly, with great fanfare -- although so many of the participants have *פאן* at home.

We rush to join the Purim party, whether in a synagogue or elsewhere, but how many of us, in our individual homes, fulfill the obligations of the *מנחה* (festival meal), of *החלוקה*, of exchange of gifts and contributions to the poor?

We have taken to wearing the kippah, the skullcap, at all kinds of public demonstrations, whether for Soviet Jewry or for civil rights in Birmingham, Alabama. It has become a mark of honor, in contradistinction to only a short time ago when even Orthodox Jewish leaders, or at least some of them, were more anxious that we remove the kippah in public than that we wear it indoors! Yet, many of the young people who so

demonstratively wear the kippah in public, do not wear it at home when they eat and when they pray -- if they do. I know of one young man who is so proud of his Jewishness that he wears his kippah to every class and seminar in his Graduate School -- and takes it off as soon as he crosses the threshold of his home...

We have no compunction, any longer, about using our fractured Yiddish in mixed Jewish-Gentile company, trying to advance the process of the Yiddishization of English, and of singing Israeli songs, or at least a few primitive ones that everyone seems to know. But how many of these poeple make any effort to speak or read Hebrew or Yiddish at home?

God has become an officially accepted visitor at all great Jewish functions in this country, Can you visualize a UJA or Bonds or any other banquet without a rabbi intoning the invocation? Yet despite these priestly, sonorous invocations -- how many of the participants in these banquets ever recite a שמונה עשרה at home over breaking bread? That is one of the reasons that I have personally refused, for many years now, to accept any invitation to recite an invocation or a benediction at these public dinners.

We are all of us anxious to recite the Grace, the השם שבראנו, at a synagogue dinner, or on Shabbat when we have guests at home. But how many of us realize that the recitation of השם שבראנו has nothing to do with demonstrativeness, that it must be recited whenever we conclude a full meal in which we eat bread?

So, our generation needs a reverse reminder -- that the Torah demands Jewishness inside as well as outside...

Sukkot is, then, the time to do away with all schisms in the Jewish soul, with our cultural and religious schizophrenia. Jewishness should be neither a matter of furtiveness nor ^{of} over-assertiveness.

A Hasidic teacher once said that he loves the sukkah more than any other mitzvah. Other mitzvot refer to only one part of the body or one's being -- either the head or the mouth or the arms or the feet or the pocket. But the sukkah is the only mitzvah into which one can enter fully, completely closed, with everything about him, with his very boots on! It is Jewishness inside and out, wholly and wholesomely.

The sukkah, the symbol of Jewish wholeness, often seems weak and frail in our days. Now, therefore, is the time to pray -- and to assist in realizing the prayer -- that

May the Merciful One help restore to us the sometimes weak and falling sukkah of David. And may we, learning the lessons of the booths of the potters, learn to act in the other definition of that term: may the sukkah of our Jewishness be created ^{ive} and thereby grace our lives, both at home and abroad, both inside and outside.