

THE CALM AND THE RAGE

After Pharaoh accedes to Moses, and tells him לכו עבדו את ה' אלהיכם, "go serve the Lord your God" (Ex. 10:8), he seems to have second thoughts, and asks: מי ומה יהיו עמכם - "but who are they that shall go?" (ibid.) To this Moses responds, בנערנו ובזקננו נלך, "We will go with our young and with our old" (Ex. 10:9).

Rabbi Shmuel of Slonim interprets this verse as more than an expression of the cooperation of generations who "go" together. Rather, he tells us that each, the young and the old, is a symbol of a special quality. Youth represent Zerizut -- industriousness, diligence, sedulousness. Age represents Yishuv Ha-daat -- thoughtfulness, pensiveness, deliberation.

עבודת ה' השם (the service of the Lord) requires both. If we are told לכו עבדו את ה' אלהיכם (go serve the Lord your God) and want to know מי ומה יהיו עמכם (but who are they that shall go?), the answer is: בנערנו ובזקננו נלך (we will go with our young and with our old) -- with both qualities, that which is representative of youth and that which represents old age.

Of course, these are pure types, and must not be assumed to describe hard realities. I know some old people who are impetuous, and some young who are impassive. But as general descriptions they are valid.

These two types, that of Zerizut (industriousness) and Yishuv Ha-daat (thoughtfulness), include a cluster of allied attitudes. If we are to seek historical analogies, with a full understanding of the dangers of over-simplification, then, we might say that the Galut Jew represents Yishuv Ha-daat, with his penchant for probing himself and his fear of action, whereas the Israeli Jew embodies the quality of Zerizut, of precipitate action. Alternatively, one might ascribe Zerizut to the Hasidim, who indeed made a great virtue of this quality of diligence and industriousness, even as the Musar movement is more characterized by Yishuv Ha-daat, by introspection and self-examination in the calm of one's mind.

There are certain times that circumstances call for precipitate and decisive action, for Zerizut. As an example, let us turn to the incident told in I Kings, which we study in one of our classes, the succession of Rehoboam to the throne of his father Solomon. After Solomon's death, the people are disaffected

and weary because of the heavy burdens that Solomon had placed upon them, (see I Kings, ch.12). The people decide to meet Rehoboam in Shechem, instead of Jerusalem -- already a sign of their protest against this father Solomon. The tell Rehoboam that they will accept his rule only if he will lighten the load upon them. To this Rehoboam replies, לכו עוד שלשה ימים... ויבנו העם "Depart yet for three days....And the people departed" (I Kings 12:5). Then, Rehoboam turns to his advisors for counsel. The older ones, the זקנים, advise him to do the bidding of the people and ease their burden. But the ילדים -- the children, the youngsters, the "boys" -- advise him to take a "hard line." Rehoboam decides with the younger ones. He takes the hard line, and the people -- secede from his kingdom. Thus begins the tragic split that was eventually to cause the downfall of both the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judea.

Abarbanel, in his commentary on this passage, tells us that Rehoboam did precisely the opposite of what he should have done. Initially, he should never have told them to wait three days. This was a kind of procrastination unworthy of a king, who should be more decisive. He should have said "yes" or "no," with Zerizut. But, having already waited, he should have used Yishuv Ha-daat and opted for a conciliatory approach, as he was counseled by the elders, and not the tough autocratic attitude preached to him by the youngsters.

But if at certain times Zerizut is called for, more often Yishuv Ha-daat, the advice of experience and age, is recommended. I say this in regard to two matters: that of decision-making, whether in our personal lives or communal matters, and as a general pattern and rhythm of life.

With regard to personal decisions, Yishuv Ha-daat means that we must always think before deciding or doing. The Slonimer maintains that the seductiveness of the Yetzer Ha-ra is not in dangling before us the attractiveness of evil, but in something much simpler and far subtler: It tells us whatever we wish to do, but above all to do it immediately and without thinking! It urges us to impetuosity, to act without Yishuv Ha-daat. It wants us to submit to the gut-feelings, to yield to instincts, no matter what their quality. Hence, the Slonimer says, even if it is a mitzvah that I perform without Yishuv Ha-daat, I am still far from God.

My grandfather, of blessed memory, in instructing his family before his death, told us that whatever we do must be done with Yishuv Ha-daat. The test of wisdom is to think before doing, so that you do not have to experience חרטה (regret) later on. It is only a man of חלשות (weak character) who is forced to regret what could have been avoided with a little more Yishuv

Ha-daat or forethought. Perhaps if I were to restate that in a more contemporary idiom, I would say: Being wise means not having to say, "I'm sorry"...

But in another sense as well is Yishuv Ha-daat all-important. It means that with regard to life as such there is a need to pull out of the rage of daily events, the tempestuousness of the twists and turns of prosaic life, and to find an island of mental and psychological calm in which to think and reflect. Yishuv Ha-daat teaches us that there is more to living than living it up. Years ago I mentioned something from this pulpit that bears repetition: The Hasidim of Brazlav used to recommend a "Dead Hour." By that they mean, that there should be some time during the day, whether ten minutes or a half an hour or an hour, during which a man is "dead" to the world, when he answers no phones and reads no books and has no conversations and watches no television. It is a period of time in which he is totally introspective, in which he thinks of himself and where he is going in life. Only by means of the "dead hour" can a man regain the vitality to live fully and meaningfully. That is Yishuv Ha-daat!

That is why I have been recommending, for the past several years, that every boy or girl in our circle should spend at least one year completely devoted to Torah. Our children generally grow up with a double program of sacred and secular studies, a burden which causes additional pressure, more than other young people have. As a result, we are pressured all through elementary school, through high-school, and through college, and then we are thrust into career and marriage and post-graduate work, pulled along by the rage of events, never quite knowing where we are heading. One year ought to be <sup>הוא שנת קדושה</sup> completely sacred, a year-long "dead hour," a period of calm in which to study, in Israel, the Torah which we will some day have to hand on to our descendants.

I am to leave tomorrow for a two-week period in Israel, in a dialogue of American Rabbis with the intellectuals of the Kibbutz Ha-dati, for such a period of Yishuv Ha-daat -- a few days of calm in the peaceful countryside of Israel to discuss and mull over the kinds of theoretical problems which will not have any immediate effect on the course of events, but which in the long run may prove to be thoroughly decisive. It is the calm that may help us brave the rage.

Now, if both Zerizut and Yishuv Ha-daat, both <sup>זריזות וישיב הדא</sup> are necessary, how do we know when to choose which? Permit me to suggest the following very general guidelines.

First, there is no easy answer. That in itself is the function of wisdom -- to know when to choose which values.

Second, when we speak of the need to have both, we are setting parameters, indicating that never must we allow ourselves to choose one quality without consulting the other. It means that one must never follow a lifetime of Zerizut without ever consulting Yishuv Ha-daat; and never must one be so introspective that he never moves on to energetic action.

Third, it is in the process of coming to a decision that we must call upon Yishuv Ha-daat. But once we have mulled over a topic, then the implementation of the decision must be done with Zerizut, with energy and decisiveness, and without obsessive worrying and re-thinking.

These ought to be the guidelines for us both personally and communally. Sometimes I think that Orthodoxy in our country today is split between youthful over-enthusiasm and hyper-activity, Zerizut, on the one hand; and an aging hesitancy, apprehensiveness, and nervousness -- an excess of Yishuv Ha-daat -- on the other. And each is carried to a caricatured extreme! Some would convert us overnight into ecstatic sectarians, fired up by charisma, into shouting and prancing and protesting and praising and rebelling and innovating and experimenting -- and all in high decibels! Others in Orthodoxy today enshrine paralysis as a religious virtue, inertia as a Mitzvah, and endless reflection as a great good. The answer is that neither is correct. We need both -- בנערותו וגילויו the qualities of old age and of youth.

If there is anything we have to pray for today it is the wisdom to know how to merge both qualities. At a time of such crisis in Jewish life in Israel, in Russia, in America, and throughout the world, our leaders will have to know and know well how to act with both Yishuv Ha-daat and Zerizut. On the one hand we shall have to be open to new ideas, including ideas which we once rejected. Recently I read an article, the copy of a speech given by the almost ex-Senator Fullbright in Fulton, Missouri. He repeats the views for which he is well known, and they are generally antagonistic to Israel. Now, Senator Fullbright is a literate and intelligent intellectual. We oppose most of what he says, but in the course of changing events we shall have to listen even to our critics very carefully indeed. We may reject most or all of what he says, but we shall have to consider it. Yet there are certain things that he says, where Zerizut is called for by us. For instance, it is shocking and dismaying to see how such a literate and intelligent person can be so insensitive to Jews. Thus, he writes of the need to take Jerusalem away from Israel and internationalize it. His reason? Because, he explains very pendantically, King Feisal of Saudi Arabia is the leader of the Moslem Religion, and for him Jerusalem is the second most sacred city, and therefore to satisfy him Jerusalem must be internationalized. (One thinks of the King's recent statement that he



has but one ambition -- to pray in Jerusalem before he dies. I believe that the State of Israel would be ready to accomodate the King on both his requests...) No one has ever barred Feisal or anyone else from praying in Jerusalem, as the Arabs barred Jews from praying at the Wailing Wall during the time of the Jordanian occupancy. So here is a Senator, who is sensitive to the Arab claim on Jerusalem, and totally insensitive to the Israeli claim. He is willing to take Jerusalem away from Israel because it is the second most sacred city for Islam, quite conveniently forgetting how disparate the claims are, considering that it is Israel's and Judaism's first sacred city!

So when Senator Fullbright demands the internationalization of Jerusalem, I would consider this too with Yishuv Ha-daat. Then, after ten seconds of such profound deliveration, I would answer, with Zerizut, "absolutely no!" Not so much because of our religious claim to Jerusalem; not so much because of our historic association with it; but rather because of two points. One I mentioned -- the disparate interest of Islam and Judaism in Jerusalem. The second is, that even if it were true that we ought to give up Jerusalem to internationalization, there is no one in the world today who has the right to demand that of us -- not America, not England, not the Arabs, not the Vatican, not even Sanator Fullbright who was bashfully and uncharacteristically silent during the time that no Jew was permitted to come into Jerusalem, when the Jordanians made a "Judenrein" "יהודים אינם רשאים". If that is the case, our answer must be an emphatic, clear, sedulous, and vigorous NO.

In all of life, Moses was saying to Pharaoh, we have to consult both opposite דברים or characteristics. But especially when we talk of עבודת ה' השם, the service of the Lord, and ask מי יבנה את ה' ביתו, who is going, the answer must be: בנו יחד with our old and with our young, with Zerizut and with Yishuv Ha-daat, with energy and with pensiveness.

To sum it all up in the famous phrase of the great Supreme Court decision of two decades ago, we must proceed "in all deliberate speed."