

"FEAR AND FORGETFULNESS"

There is a verse in the Psalms that we read every Shabbat morning as part of our services, and that we also recite, with special gusto, at the end of our Grace or

יְיָ יְיָ הוֹדוּ . The verse reads: יְיָ יְיָ הוֹדוּ
לְיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, "Fear the Lord, you, His holy ones; for those
who fear Him will suffer no חֵסֶד , no lack or want
or need."

On the face of it, this is a beautiful verse, but rather unexceptional: those who are God-fearing will be rewarded by not having to suffer need or privation.

However, on second thought this sentence appears somewhat puzzling and troublesome. Is this not basically an uninspired appeal to selfishness? Is it spiritually worthy to appeal for piety on the grounds that we will be handsomely rewarded for it? Is this not a classical case of what the Rabbis called, disapprovingly, the servant who obeys his master *וְעַל מְצוּתוֹ*, on the condition that he will receive a tip or reward?

A meaningful answer is offered by the great Hasidic teacher, author of the "נֶפֶשׁ חַיִּים" . Divested of its complex Hasidic terminology ^{his} he ^{is} answers that the fear of God, which is simply the Hebrew idiom for "religion," is

fundamentally different from any other kind of דבר. Every other fear is caused by a חוסר or חולשה, a lack that I recognize within myself. I fear the government because I know that I am powerless and weak by comparison. I fear the Internal Revenue Service, because I know that I lacked integrity in preparing my returns. I fear an examination, because I know that I failed to study and hence lack the learning to pass it. I fear exposure to disease, because my body lacks the strength to combat and endure illness. Every דבר is symptomatic of an inner, חולשה.

However, the fear of God is not the result of any personal חולשה. I do not fear God because I am afraid of Him in the ordinary sense. My religion is not motivated by some basic material or psychological needs that I experience and that cry out for fulfillment or care. I am not religious because -- as Pharaoh proclaimed to Moses -- פִּתְיוֹן לְפָנָיו "you are weak, therefore you say: Let us serve the Lord." Religion arises not because I am frail and need support against my enemies in nature and society -- a mistake which was converted by Nietzsche into a philosophy. I am not religious because -- as some modern psychologists maintain -- I am bewildered and need peace of mind, or frightened and am looking for a father-figure. I am religious not because -- as some secular nationalists in Israel maintain -- religion

was the cohesive force that kept our people together during the long exile when we lacked any other method of remaining united. Religion is not the response to any need, whether psychological or sociological, ethnic or national.

The fear of God exists because we are we and God is God; He deserves our ^ליָרֵא -- our fear, or reverence. Religion is to be pursued because it represents the truth; because it is objectively worthy, not subjectively necessary.

This is what is meant by the verse ^{אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְלֹא אֵלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים}. Those who aspire to holiness ~~ought~~ to fear the Lord for His own sake, not because ^{they} ~~we~~ experience any lack within ^{them} ~~ourselves~~.

This is a major difference between authentic Judaism and certain inauthentic varieties of Judaism. An ~~ina~~authentic faith cherishes virtue because of its reward and abhors vice because of punishment. An authentic-ally religious person fears God Himself and loves God Himself.

With this in mind, we may understand a puzzling passage in this morning's Sidra. We read that the Jewish farmer was commanded to offer his tithe, to bring it with him to Jerusalem, and there to recite a special passage of thanksgiving. Part of this recitation includes the verse: ^{אֲנִי לֹא עָוָנְתִּי וְלֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי}, I have not transgressed Thy commandments and I have not forgotten. Now, this appears somewhat redundant. If I have not violated God's commandments, certainly I have not forgotten them! Why, therefore, is it necessary to repeat ^{אֲנִי לֹא עָוָנְתִּי}, "and I ~~have~~ not forgotten?"

The answer is that the two halves of this verse do not refer to the identical subject. The first half, "I have not violated Thy commandments," refers to the fact of observance; the second half, "and I have not forgotten," refers to the reason or motive for the observance. The

first refers to the "what": I have fulfilled my obligation and given my tithe. The second, "and I have not forgotten," refers to the "why": my motives were right, I performed the Will of God not for any ulterior motive, not because of any extraneous reason, but because God willed it.

If I perform a mitzvah but for the wrong reason, for a motive which is not pure and selfless, I can sometimes forget the very God I am purportedly serving. When religion is inauthentic, when my fear of God issues from some *חיוני*, some personal lack within me, then God is forgotten and my act loses its spiritual character. If I turn to God only because I am hungry -- then I may turn away from Him when I have a full stomach: *סוף חיינו* -- Israel has often rejected God out of fullness and satiety. If I seek Him only out of pain, I may well ignore Him out of comfort.

Of course, this does not mean that one should not present his *חיוני* to God, that he should not bring his deepest pains and frustrations and agonies and present them to the Almighty. Many good people have come to Torah and Judaism in a most profound and genuine way, although they were first introduced to it because of inauthentic reasons, because of some illness or because they came to recite the Kaddish. Such people are today some of our most precious Jews. Certainly we know of the principle that *אדם יכול להתחיל בגוינות* that one may begin on the adventure of Judaism because of selfish reasons, but if he conducts himself properly in practice, then ultimately he may well learn to serve God for His own sake. However, at all times our goal and ideal ought to be authenticity to serve God for God's sake.

When the farmer would come to Jerusalem, he knew that now his harvest was over, his granaries were full, he was blessed with plenty

and prosperity. He had not lack of joy and fulfillment in his life,

So, in gratitude, in love and in fear of God Himself, he proclaimed:

אני לא עברתי על מצוותיך, I have not violated Thy commandments;
and in addition ואלו לא שכחתי -- I have not forgotten that You, O
God, are the reason for my observance. I did the right thing for the
right reason; I did not forget the sublime goal of all Jewish observance.

No wonder that Rashi, quoting the Sages, comments on the words

ואלו לא שכחתי, "and I have not forgotten" -- ואלו לא שכחתי
אני לא שכחתי -- I have not forgotten to make the blessing over

the offering of the tithes. The function of the blessing is to remind

the man who performs the mitzvah of the reason for his performance;

It reminds him why he is doing what he is doing, and that is: ואלו לא

אני לא שכחתי -- because this is the way that man brings
down holiness upon himself, because the action is in response to the
divine command, because he thereby fulfills the Will of God. He does not
violate the commandment of God, he performs the Will of God, not because
of any אהבה within him, but because he loves and fears God
for His own sake.

By and large, when American Jews are observant, they are pious for
the right reasons: ואלו לא שכחתי -- they do not forget God. Yet
they could stand improvement; all of us can. The question of motive
is not a one-time affair. It is a high spiritual challenge and is
capable of execution on many levels. The purity of thought, as Hasidism
taught, is a life-long task, an educational process that lasts throughout
one's existence.

Let us take some examples from our contemporary life. There are
those who tell us that we must support and expand the synagogue in
order to prevent assimilation. Now it is true that attendance at

the synagogue will help avoid assimilation; but the cause and effect are reversed. Synagogue services may help prevent assimilation; but the very reason that we want to avoid assimilation is in order that Amn should rise to אנן 53128, to service of God!

There are those who have suddenly come to realize the importance of Jewish education, and the reason they give is: to stop the terrible trend towards intermarriage. Of course, it is true that a better and more intensive Jewish education will usually prevent intermarriage; but the very reason for our opposition to intermarriage is that it makes it impossible for any future generations of Jew to continue as Jews and thus frustrates the highest ideal of Judaism: Jewish education, the study of Torah.

Every now and then we hear the ritualistic pronouncements that issue from secular sources in the Holy Land urging the study of the Hebrew language in the Diaspora, because thereby we will make sure that in the future the Jewries of Israel and America will be bound to each other. But the reasoning is reversed! Our motive in desiring the continuing unity of our people in the future, is that our people everywhere shall learn not only to speak but also to think and live בשפה קדשה, which means not only Hebrew, the Holy Tongue, but also the tongue or language of holiness -- our very mission in the world!

Unless we appreciate Jewish values in their proper perspective, unless we elucidate the right motives, unless we learn to identify correctly what is the cause and what is the effect, intelligent and perceptive young people will come to understand that religion is nothing more than a lure, that the mitzvot are a bait, and that services are just a bribe. The results of this misunderstanding can sometimes

are perceptive, and they can discern when parents and teachers are themselves committed to what they teach, and when they are merely using it as a pretext, as the most handy instrument for some ulterior motive. Intermarriage will cease only when Jews are sincerely committed to their own Torah, to their own God. The study of Torah must be for the sake of God, not for the sake of some other reason -- not even to satisfy intellectual curiosity, for then it becomes (to use the title of one of Jacques Barzun's books) merely a "glorious entertainment."

This week American Jewry will participate in a vigil for Russian Jewry at Lafayette Park, opposite the White House. Now it makes no difference to us where or why support will be forthcoming. The important thing is to make every effort to arouse public opinion throughout the world in order to influence Soviet Russia to change its attitude to our fellow Jews behind the Iron Curtain. But, for ourselves and the integrity of our own moral stature and religious lives, we ought to know the right "why," the right motives for our action: our motives must be more than a civil-rights action or anti-poverty drive or humanitarian campaign. True, it is all these -- but it is much more than that insofar as we are concerned. For us, the Russian Jews are our brothers. They are the cream of our people of the last and of this century. Russian Jewry provided world Jewry with its great "Geonim," with its most distinguished Zionist leaders who are today the leaders of the State of Israel, with some of the most eminent benefactors of humanity.

For us the vigil is a challenge not to sleep, not to forget our own people. It is an act of rescue and redemption of a אמרי הברית

a remnant of unutterable preciousness. A man does not cry out for his brother because he is a humanitarian; he does not attempt to help his brother who is stricken by poverty, whether of body or soul, because he believes in the anti-poverty war. He does not seek to rescue his oppressed brother because he is a devotee of civil rights. He does these things because he is a brother, and a brother dare not be forgotten!

ואנחנו לא נשכח. Let us not forget that the Russian Jews are not simply another oppressed people; they are our flesh and our blood.

Even as we today read the portion concerning the tithes and we rededicate ourselves to the purity of our love of God, to אנחנו, so will we this week, beginning tonight, recite our Selichot=prayers. We shall ask God to answer us, to remember us and protect us and guard us, and to love us -- for His own sake, ~~even~~ as we love Him for His own sake. This year ~~we~~ shall recite those prayers with special care and concern, with special intensity and even anguish. Keeping in mind the old Jewish community of Russia, whose strength has been sapped by forty years of unrelenting oppression, we shall raise our voices to Almighty God and plead with Him: אלהינו אלהי אבותינו כחן ורחמים do not abandon us in the time of our old age, and do not forsake us when our strength is spent.

ואנחנו לא נשכח -- even as we rise to remember Thee, O Heavenly Father, for Thou art Eternal, so do Thou remember Thy compassion and Thy love for Thy Children of Israel; for they too are eternal.