

## "PURIM'S THIRD MORAL"

The festival of Purim, and the Book of Esther, seem to have a three-fold message for us Jews. ~~that is, there are three distinct areas of thought which are affected by the holiday;~~ there are three individual morals to be learned from it. ~~- the religious & the national~~  
The first two are, more or less, well known. ~~The first is, the religious element.~~  
Here was a people, Israel, dispersed in exile amongst the Persians and the Medes, their very existence threatened by the anti-semite Haman. There was no way out except through the intervention of G-d, Who finally did redeem His people. It has been pointed out that the Name of G-d, does not appear even once in the Megillah. However, this does not indicate a lesser religious spirit than one finds in other religious writings. On the contrary, the fact of G-d is so urgent and real and self-evident to these Persian Jews, that there is no need to mention Him by name. Thus it has been pointed out that Reform Rabbis are more prone to speak about "G-d" than Orthodox Rabbis who stick more to practical observance of the Mitzvos; because to the Orthodox, G-d is real enough and there is no need to remind one of Him. So too to Mordecai and his generation, it is certainly G-d who saves them, and it is because of G-d that he refuses to bow to Haman, and therefore Mordecai's reference to G-d is "Makom Acher", help will come for us, not from "G-d", but from "some other place", as Mordecai says to Esther.

The second moral is the national. Israel is a people torn from its homeland and very much weakened in the land of its exile. Take a foolish king, give him a cruel and arrogant vizier, and apply a liberal dash of anti-semitism, and you have jeopardized the existence of the entire people of Israel. The antidote to this poison is, of course, concerted action. Love your fellow-Jew, work against your oppressing enemy the anti-semite. A simple lesson in national solidarity.

It is the third moral, however, which is usually overlooked and which is of great importance; ~~since it also contains the elements of national fraternity and religious motivation.~~ And that is, the individual character of Mordecai as a leader. Mordecai is by all means the undisputed hero of the Book of Esther. He is the acclaimed hero of his people. He saved the day - nay, the generation - for his cherished people.

And yet our epic story of a hero who helps his people and is acclaimed by them is so unlike those of the Greeks, for instance. Because with us it is not brute strength that counts, but rather the finer and more intangible qualities of Leadership. And it was effective leadership on the part of Mordecai - and Esther - which saved Persian Jewry. Leadership is the third moral of Purim.

But just how is Leadership, in the Jewish sense, to be achieved and made effective? There are three conditions to be met before such enduring leadership can be accomplished.

First of all, the person on whose shoulders falls the grave responsibility of leadership must be willing to accept that responsibility. Leadership is frustrating, disappointing and heartbreaking. The temptation is all too great for anyone jettied into this position to throw up his hands and say, "Let them do whatever they please. I'm going to retire or going into business or going to enjoy a life of freedom for a change". But there is a moral duty which binds those chosen to do what they must in guiding their charges. That Mordecai was such a person is immediately evident. His secret instructions to Esther when she is taken into the King's household and his careful planning even before Haman hatches his actual plot, all point to a feeling of responsibility on Mordecai's part. Our Rabbis saw this even more clearly in the listing of his genealogy. We are told, in the beginning of the Megillah, that Mordecai was the great-grandson of Kish, who was the father of King Saul. And our Rabbis seem puzzled: that is impossible, they say, for there were many more generations between these two. Actually there were nine generations between Mordecai & Kish, not four. And, they answer, the name "Kish" is important not as an ancestor of Mordecai, but as indication of his character, "SHE'HIKISH AL DALSEI TEFILLAH U'PASCHU LO", for Mordecai would forcefully knock on the legendary Gates of Prayer which were then opened to him. Mordecai pushed himself to the fore; he, so to speak, demanded of G-d that something be done for his people; he was not satisfied with remaining in the background. "KISH" is related to "HKKISH"; he forced his way through the Gates of Prayer, accepting the burdens of national leadership, and he was therefore successful,

so that UFASCHU LO, those prayers of his were accepted.

The character of Mordecai, in this respect, seems to be opposite that of another Biblical character, Noah. Noah in his personal life was an ISH TSADIK, a pious and good man. But when the time came for him to assert his leadership, he failed by default. His generation was sinful, and G-d was planning great destruction for them. But G-d is not merciless, and so He had planned for them a leader who would be able to help them find their way out of their sinful existence and prevent the terrible flood from ever coming. It was Noah's duty to warn and lecture and preach and lead. But what does Noah do? He goes off to a side and builds himself an Ark. He is oblivious to the entire world, unconcerned with the problems and fate of those he was destined to lead. He will save himself, and the Deluge take the world. As a result, in the words of the famous grandson of Rashi, Rabenu Tam, G-d told Noah, "Since you refused to lead and live amongst your fellow men, go now into that Ark, and for 40 days and nights live with animals and beasts". The Leader who would not lead men must live with beasts. Noah's Ark, therefore, was symbolic not so much of Divine Grace as of the Failure of Leadership.

The second guarantee of effective leadership depends not so much upon the Leader as upon his followers. My younger brother, in a discussion we recently had, put the idea into its most expressive form when he said that <sup>leadership rests on</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>+ fellowship</sup> fellowship rests on fellowship. No leader can be effective and inspired if his followers do not show the proper spirit of fellowship and brotherliness and fraternity. True, an inspired leader can help cement relationships among those who have elected him to his position. But he cannot <sup>his mission until "SHALOM BAYIS", peace and affection,</sup> accomplish <sup>his</sup> reigns among his people. A United Nations cannot be led to great heights if bitterness is the rule. A Congress cannot achieve its purpose, no matter how great the President, unless there is concerted and harmonious action. And how much more so is this true for a religious establishment. For Religion weilds no Big Stick. Leadership and success of any religious venture depend primarily upon the fraternal feelings of the members of that religion. We do not, in the overworked cliché of modern Rabbis, demand Uniformity. We do insist upon Unity. Otherwise, progress is nil. Our Rabbis of the

Talmud, discussing the Laws relating to the Reading of the Shma in the morning, the KRIAS SHMA SHEL SHACHARIS, say that one is not permitted to read the Shma in early morning until AD SHEYIREH ES CHAVEIRO BE'RICHUK DALED AMMOS, until it is so light that a man can see his friends from a distance. Rightly so! You cannot begin a successful religious life, you cannot start to say SHMA YISROEL, you cannot hope to express love for G-d, until you can see your friend from the distance, until you can love him ~~for~~ and feel for him and feel sympathetic towards him. A person who cannot see his friend, a person who is blind to the fate of his fellows, never sees the break of day in his religious life, he can never say SHMA in concert with others. Leadership must be preceded by fellowship.

Perhaps our Sages of the Midrash ~~had~~ had both these ideas in mind - the willingness of the Leader and the friendliness of the followers - when they relate, in extraordinarily symbolic language, the legend that when Haman wanted to hang Mordecai, it was Haman's son Parshandassa who took it upon himself to prepare the gallows and set the time of execution. Those anti-semites wanted to strike the Jew in his weak points. And so HEVIO MI'TELVAS NOACH VE'HAYAH OMER LE'MACHAR BE'SHA'AS KRIAS <sup>SHMA</sup> SHEL SHACHARIS ~~AND~~ ANI ESSLEH MORDECHAI ALAV, Parshandassa brought the gallows from a plank of the Ark of Noah and said, "Tomorrow, at the time of the reading of the Shma in the morning, I will hang Mordecai on it". By telling us of the plans of these enemies, the Midrash summarizes for us these two elements of Good Leadership. The Hamans thought that the Jews were vulnerable because their leaders were ineffective. They thought that Jewish leaders in Persia were like Noah of old, the Noah whose symbol of default ~~was~~ was the Ark he built for himself alone. And they suspected also that the Jewish masses were weak as followers, that they were ripped apart by inner conflicts and controversies. And so they planned the execution for the time of the morning Shma, the time when a Jew is bidden to see his fellow from a distance, to see him and feel for him and be with him. Fortunately, Mordecai was a real leader and they were good followers. By complying with these two conditions of Leadership, Haman's plans were frustrated and Israel was saved.

The third element of good leadership must be the understanding by those who follow that true leadership does not mean agreeing with everybody. If a leader is to

achieve his purpose he must sometimes oppose certain of those who follow. That, in fact, is the very essence of leadership. This intangible but very real quality must be divested of yes-manship and showmanship and flattery. The leader, be he President or Prophet, Rabbi or Teacher, must at times cut through to the heart of a problem even if it hurts some of those he wants to help. Medicine sometimes tastes bitter. And real preaching must sometimes lash as well as soothe.

Take, for instance, <sup>two</sup> ~~two~~ prophets of the Biblical era, Moses and Balaam. Balaam, in his oracles to the Israelites, praised them in most extravagant terms. This gentile prophet bestowed upon us the most flattering of epithets. MAH TOVU OHOLECHA YAAKOV, MISHKENOSECHA YISROEL! "How goodly thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwelling places O Israel". Just compare that talk to what Moses, the greatest leader man ever had, told his people. He broke the Tablets in disgust with their behavior. He set for them the highest and most difficult goals. He gave them a TOCHACHA, list of dire punishments which would follow upon the heels of their disobedience. He referred to them as AM NAVAL VE'LO CHACHAM, a crude and unwise people. He prohibited them from doing a host of pleasurable things, most of them without reason. He forced on them a trek of forty years in a forsaken desert. He reproached them with RASHA LAMAH SAKH REYACHA, Evil Ones, why strike your own friends. What a difference between Balaam and Moses! And yet we call Balaam the RASHA, Balaam the Evil, and Moses is MOSHE RABEINU, Moses our Teacher and Leader. You see, a leader or Prophet or Teacher or Rabbi must at times administer not only a pat on the back but also a shot in the arm.

How interesting, therefore, that this very Mordecai, whose exemplary leadership Jews all over the world hail this week, was just such a person who didn't try to please everybody. And in fact among the very last words of the Megillah, the document which is a testimonial to his courageous leadership, is the statement: VE'RATSUY LE'ROV ECHAV, Mordecai was accepted by most of his brethren. And, as our Talmud points out, LE'ROV ECHAV VE'LO LE'CHOL ECHAV, he was accepted by most, but not by all, of his brethren. Mordecai, the archetype of the great Jewish leader, knew that if he is to <sup>all</sup> set the people back on their feet, he must of necessity step on the toes of some of them.

To recapitulate, effective Jewish leadership requires: one, that the leader

be willing to lead no matter how great the difficulties; ~~two~~ two, that he cannot lead until his followers are bound to each other by feelings of sincere friendship and fellowship; and three, that both leader and followers must realize that leadership demands boldness and courage, at times contrary to the wishes and better judgement of many of the followers. This, then, is the Third Moral of Purim.

What is the result of such character? Let us read the entire concluding verse of the Megillah : KI MORDECHAI HA'YEHUDI MISHNEH LA'MELECH ACHASVEROSH, VE'GADOL LA'YEHUDIM VE'RATSUY LE'ROV ECHAV, DORESH TOV LE'AMO VE'DOVER SHALOM LECHAL ZARO.

"For Mordecai the Jew was the second in rank after King Achashverosh, and great among the Jews, and acceptable to most of his brethren, a promoter of good will to his people, and speaking peace to all its children."