

AS 13
RABBI NORMAN LAMM
THE JEWISH CENTER

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8th DAY PASSOVER

A-513

"THE UNIVERSAL APPEAL OF TORAH"

Outline Form

The source of indomitable Jewish optimism can be found in our Haftorah, in its Messianic vision. It speaks of the trust in the future, in a future greater than the present, and a future which will allow us to appear to the world as we really are and have never appeared before, in the beauty of our ideals and way of life, unencumbered by bigotry and bias of others and by the failings of ourselves. In this future, Messiah will usher in an epoch of the universal appeal of Torah, whereby all nations will turn to us to seek the word of God.

Now, while this vision is one for the future, either eschatological or Messianic, does it have any relevance for us today? In a word: will we endure? Do we have the right to be counted into the future of Torah and its universal appeal?

The answer is, Yes, the message of the Haftorah applies to us as well, even in the days where we only anticipate the Messiah. My affirmative answer is neither dogmatic nor hesitant, but thoughtful.

For I do not ask about the physical survival of the Jewish people. No answer is plausible today without considering the State of Israel. But I refer to the Diaspora, to USA. Many Israelis say No. But I feel today that they are less certain, that since last June they recognize the need for a diaspora of committed Jews.

We do have a future for Torah as we see it. We of modern Orthodoxy believe that Torah was given to apply in a real world, and that that world was given to us to elevate through Torah. Hence, we believe neither in surrendering the integrity of Torah nor in abandoning the world. We see no solution to the right or to the left of us.

The Left will not and cannot survive. When you give up Torah, the world swallows you up. With a constant attrition of values and precepts of Torah, you end with nothing, and you are caught up in the confusing cross-currents that presently prevail in non-Orthodox circles. I see as a symptom of this disintegration, the recent report of the Reform Rabbi who is the Chaplain of Columbia University students indirectly supporting as courageous the devious efforts of a young woman to defy the laws of her school with brazenness and get away with it by leading an immoral life. If this is the attitude of a non-Orthodox rabbi, there is no future for them.

Insofar as the Right is concerned, they certainly will survive as Jews; but not as a Jewish people, only as a sect. To reject secular education, to refuse to confront the issues of contemporary life, is not the way of the Prophets or the Talmud or great Jews, nor is it the way of survival of Judaism in the contemporary world. Of course, we must have this group. They are a tremendous resource of genuine Torah education and passion for Yiddishkeit. Never must we dismiss them. But, they must serve as part of a larger Jewish com-

munity, not as the exclusive survivors. They are the anchors, genuine components of a Torah community, but not a totality or even its major force.

We hold that Torah was meant to guide us in this world as we engage it. We hold on to both worlds out of principle, not as the result of expediency or vocational opportunism or prudence.

By the very nature of our effort, we are subject to tensions and paradoxes and difficulties. But that is both our travail and our pride, our burden and our joy. We make mistakes -- communally, educationally, personally -- but that is a sign of life. Dead people make no errors.

Do we then have a future? Where does it lie? How can we test it? And what can we do about it?

The answer, I submit, is the Yeshiva University -- our greatest achievement in the entire history of the diaspora. From four high schools to a medical school, to a graduate school of Talmud. At the very center of the school is religious studies, especially RIETS. Yeshiva today has nineteen schools, seventeen buildings, four campuses, 7500 students, and 2200 faculty. Its graduates -- Jewish communal leadership of the future as well as the present. Here at YU -- the future in formation.

In a completely different complex, Lincoln Steffens once said, "I have seen the future -- and it works."

You may be confident of that with regard to Yeshiva. For that reason, I invite you, as is our tradition on the last day of

Passover at the Jewish Center, to contemplate YU, to consider its major role in the universal appeal of Torah, to witness its future-- and to help make it work.

As one who has through most of his life been intimately connected with Yeshiva, I know that future. The future is ours if young men of this world would devote their talents to study of Torah and Commentary as they do in the Yeshiva proper in preparing for the rabbinate. I have seen the future -- and it works.

The future is ours if we can attract strong spirits from amongst those whose parents have already abandoned us, but they return as they do in the James Streier School of the University. I have seen this future -- and it really works.

The future is ours if we can educate our women as well as our men, as we do in Stern College and in Teacher's Institute for Women. That future really works.

The future is ours if we can educate a new generation of teachers who will transmit all of Torah and our heritage to another generation. That has been done and is being done in the Teachers Institute now called the Erna Michael College for Women, and one which now under its new grant is preparing for bold new experiments in changing the entire course of teacher education. When that happens, even more than at present, the future will be ensured. What I have seen of it so far -- works!

But faith alone is not enough. To believe that faith alone

can assure our future is frivolous. What we need is seriousness and responsibility. Better, earnestness.

Webster tells us that the word "earnest" (as a noun) comes from the Hebrew eravon -- a pledge, a security, a token of seriousness.

Earnestness means to give in earnest, an eravon.

A responsible, earnest attitude to the Jewish future requires of us not only an abstract and impersonal faith, but a sign of our personal stake, a down-payment on our commitment to that future.

All Jews are arevim one for the other. By granting our eravon - earnest, we demonstrate our faith in that future, and at the same time help bring it on for "all Israel."

Today we are given the opportunity to declare our eravon. This is our dream in prophets of becoming a reality. If it be Messianic, why we are a Messianic people!

Our future, the future of the universal appeal of Torah, rests in our hands.

Our appeal is for your eravon, for your earnest...