

A BORDERLINE CASE

Our Sidra of this morning records the dramatic death-bed scene in which Jacob prophecies concerning his twelve sons, the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel, as they stand about him.

A similar scene occurs at the very end of the Bible, where Moses, before his death, blesses the tribes and prophecies concerning them. The comparison between the statements of Jacob and Moses makes for a fascinating study.

One interesting example is that of Dan. Jacob says concerning his son Dan: יְהִי בֶן דָּן נָחֵשׁ עָלַי דָּרָק שְׁפִיטָן עָלַי אֲרוּחַ  
הַנֶּשֶׁךְ עֲקֹבִי אוֹסִי וַיִּפֹּס רֶכְבּוֹ אַחֲרָי. עֲשֵׂה לִּי קוֹיֵת ה',  
"Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that biteth the horse's heels, so that his rider falleth backward, I wait for Thy salvation, O Lord" (Gen. 49:17,18).

Moses, however, said the following concerning the tribe of Dan, descendants of the original son of Jacob: בֶּן דָּן אֲרִי  
לְבָשָׁן דָּן מִן הַנָּחֲשִׁים "Dan is a lion's whelp, that leapeth forth from Bashan" (Deut. 33:32).

We are then confronted with two problems: First, why does Jacob refer to Dan in the metaphor of a nachash, a serpent, while Moses refers to him as an aryeh, a lion? And second, why does

Jacob append to his prophecy the prayer

וְאֵלֵינוּ יְהוָה

"I wait for Thy salvation, O Lord?"

My grandfather, of blessed memory, who raised this question, answered it in his own way -- one that is subtle and poetic. This morning I would like to suggest, as an alternative solution, a slightly different approach.

Dan was the border tribe of Israel, the one that was most exposed. Beginning from the exodus from Egypt, Dan was in an exposed position as the הַיְנוֹנָה דַּן Polka, the hindmost in the line of march, and therefore the one most liable to be attacked. When the Israelites settled the land in the days of Joshua, Dan was assigned the northernmost area of Canaan, that unprotected border with Syria and Lebanon. Therefore, Dan was always on the firing line, and had to be prepared to defend itself and the entire country by fighting. What is true of the kibbutzim today in the Northern Galilee, having to contend with terrorists coming down upon them from Mt. Hermon, was true of Dan in ancient days.

Now a battle, especially by a harassed border settlement, can be fought in one of two ways. It can be fought by direct confrontation, by face-to-face challenge, by charging the enemy in an immediate encounter; that is the way of the lion. Or, it can be executed through sly maneuver, by shrewd strategy of furtive attack and crafty defense, in which cunning takes the place of

strength, and clever schemes and stratagems of stealth supplant the forceful and fearless exercise of power. This is an equally deadly and effective method, but it is surreptitious; it is the way of the snake.

Not all techniques are appropriate to all situations. In the cruel battle for survival and triumph, one must be trained in the art of the lion and in the art of the serpent as well. One must know when to choose direct challenge, and when to use artifice. But to fight like a lion leaves one with his dignity intact and his self-respect enhanced. And to fight like a serpent leaves one unsatisfied even if victorious; he may be triumphant, but never heroic. And often, he feels debased.

So, Moses saw Dan in his leonine role, as a גור אריה  
as a young and powerful lion. But Jacob saw Dan in his alterna-  
tive, serpentine role -- בנחש לאי צרם. Hence, Jacob was  
moved to pray on behalf of Dan: ד' שועת קויתי ה', O Lord,  
let Dan -- who lives on the border, in constant peril -- be safe  
and at peace; but if he must fight, allow him to fight like a  
lion and not like a snake. Granted, there are times when direct  
and heroic confrontation is inadvisable, and only the strategy of  
the snake is available; but I am unhappy about it.

This difference and this teaching is of more than passing interest to us here. Our people has been a "borderline case" for a long time, for perhaps a major part of its history. Our exist-

ence and our survival, spiritually and physically, are on the line again today. The fate and the role of Jews amongst the nations is marginal. Israel today is surrounded by enemies, and, even worse, abandoned by friends, walking the very boundary-line of crisis. Our circumstances are such that we must struggle and strive in order to prevail. Preferably, we would like to do it like lions, as Moses prophesied. But sometimes we shall have to follow the prophecy of Jacob, and achieve our ends in a more serpentine fashion. We shall have to do both, including the latter -- but if we do, it will be accompanied by a silent prayer:

וְיָיִן.

פס' 12'8

One example where we must use both techniques is that concerning Russian Jewry. A surprising change has come over the attitude of many Soviet Jews in the last two years. A new spirit has seized a Jewry that for half a century seemed to have given up its Jewish ghost. This is an encouraging development, but also a dangerous one. For in a deep sense they are borderline cases: they are neither in Russia, nor out of it. The Soviet authorities allow them neither to leave nor to live like Jews.

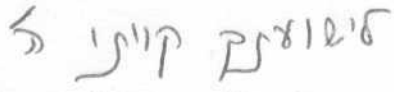
What must our response be to this situation? The following is advisable, based on the best information available to us at the present time.

American Jews must adopt the stance of the ארץ ארץ.

We must roar like lions. We must bring the predicament of Soviet

Jewry to bear upon the public awareness of the Western world. The Kremlin is sensitive to public opinion. So we shall sensitize public opinion to the crime of what is happening to Russian Jewry. I plead with you not to denigrate protests and demonstrations and marches. Anything that catches the attention of the public, that is conveyed through public media, and that is reported back to the Kremlin, is of great importance.

However, Russian Jews who have managed somehow to leave Russia, ought to keep quiet. From them no roar ought to be forthcoming. Recently, a certain organization, unauthorized by anyone else, has paraded two young Russian Jews who have recently left Russia, and have attacked the Soviet Government as Russian-Jewish emigrés. This goes against the very best advice that comes to us from people in America and Israel who should know. It is dreadfully self-defeating and dangerously irresponsible to risk the closing of the little crack in the Iron Curtain of Russia.

To roar when one should hiss, is to be even more in need of . Such efforts should not be encouraged by American Jews. It jeopardizes Jewish lives. We must never seek to satisfy our own moral hunger for activism at the risk of endangering the life and limb of the Jewish hostages in the Soviet Union.

This does not mean we can do nothing. Those American Jews who want to do more than engage in political protests and public demonstrations can do so. They can, in a serpentine way

perhaps, help Russian Jews in a manner that cannot be revealed publicly from the pulpit. They are subtle ways, surreptitious, but highly effective. Quietly and privately, we can do something; indeed, we must do something if we are to learn from the history of the Holocaust and to avoid being charged by our children with moral cowardice and indifference. But what can be done, as I have stated, cannot be explained publicly. Those who wish to help -- and I hope there will be many -- must take the initiative and inquire, and I shall be glad to let them know how they can be of service.

And of course -- Israel. This is the true borderline case in the international community. When one considers the situation today -- with Israel and the Arabs, with America and Russia and Britain and France -- one has the eerie feeling of déjà-vu. Except for Britain and France, who are now pro-Arab, the international scene appears to be an almost exact replay of 1956. Then too Israel had won a war, the Sinai war, and a morally outraged American President forced Israel to retreat, to relinquish its new-found security -- and this directly led in eleven years to the Six-Day War!

Now, a man who was then Vice President of that self-same Administration is now President, and his deputies speak of even-handedness. The Secretary of State urges not only that Israel give up Jerusalem -- perhaps one cannot expect him to understand the

depth of Jewish feeling, although one could expect him to learn from history and to remember what the Jordanians did to Jewish Jerusalem -- but that Israel essentially return to the very conditions which caused the war of 1967, conditions which made Israel so acutely insecure, a veritable reincarnation of the tribe of Dan, a perpetual borderline case.

So we shall have to use every means at our disposal to do what we can for Israel -- whether the method of the aryeh or the way of the nachash.

Let there be no question about the moral right of any group of citizens to attempt to influence the U.S. Government. The most basic religious ethnic and psychological feelings of five and one-half million American Jewish citizens have as much right to be considered as the economic affluence of a few barons of the oil industry.

Perhaps we shall have to use the way of the serpent, that of strategy. If the economic interests of certain industrialists are the cause of the Secretary of State's charming neutrality, then, as one Congressman has already proposed, we ought to strike back where it hurts most: their industries, their banks, their varied economic interests.

But we shall also have to act the part of the lion: a dignified, non-hysterical, but direct public education.

We shall have to make it clear that Jews have as much

right to petition their interests as the oil men do, those who identify the national interest with their own narrow interest.

We shall have to urge upon the Administration the lesson of a previous Administration's futile efforts to prevent war by causing the Israeli roll-back from the Sinai.

We shall have to remind the Administration that even-handedness, when your friend is being attacking by armed marauders, makes you an accomplice to the crime, and that no amount of protestation or friendship can erase the moral blot. American neutrality at a time that the Arabs are being armed to the teeth by the Russians is a violation of the Biblical principle of *אֵין חֵן לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע* *אֵין חֵן לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע*, not to stand idly while your friend's blood is being shed.

Hence, we shall have to speak out, and speak out strongly. It is my hope and prayer that every one in this congregation will inform the Administration and the Legislature of his keen disappointment with the new change and the new turn in American foreign policy regarding Israel.

It is sad that after a period of close friendship between Israel and the United States, matters have come to such an impasse.

Whether we act one or another, in serpentine or leonine fashion, it is regrettable that we must find ourselves in this position.



So we must pray that Israel, the modern Dan, will not suffer physically, and that our country, the United States, will not lose its soul.

In our days we still need the prayer of Jacob. Moses could dispense with it. We cannot.

ה' ש"ת תש"ח