

"ANTISEPTIC RELIGION"

We read this morning of the strange rite of the Parah adumah, the ashes of the red heifer which were used to purify one who had contracted levitical impurity by contact with a dead body, but which ceremony at the same time defiles the priest in charge of the act of purification. Parah adumah has thus always been accepted as a mystery, a hukah or imcomprehensible law that defies reason in its paradoxicality. It is therefore an annual reminder that important as reason is in the life of religion, it is not the totality of religion. If man understood that all that religion and God demands of him, he would not need Divine revelation; indeed, man would displace God as the center of life, and all authentic religion would thus come to an end.

Parah adumah therefore tells us that intelligent as man is, and as much as he must endeavor at all times to exercise that intelligence, his intellect nonetheless remains limited. God, as Creator and Source of all intelligence, transcends human intellect. Life conceived only in terms of reason or logic is shallow. It is even monstrous, like a man with an oversized head and an undersized heart.

The idea that pure reason is a sufficient guide for man through life is sophomoric, it is an index of intellectual adol-

escence. One might even describe it with that worst of modern epithets; it is non-modern, medieval. Modern science emerged only when it denied the omnipotence of reason, when it cut itself off from the tyranny of pure reason. Natural science does not at all come to its conclusion on the basis of logic, but on the basis of empirical evidence: testing, experimenting, investigating. Indeed, one of the greatest theories of modern physics, concerning the nature of light, embodies a logical contradiction, it violates the principal of reason that a thing cannot be two opposites at the same time.

This does not mean to say that science affirms faith and religion. It does mean that shallow rationalism is a thing of the past. The Rabbis told us that the law of parah adumah was a source of vexation for Jews in their confrontations with the non-Jewish world: umot ha-olam monin et Yisrael, the nations of the world would taunt and deride the Jews because of the apparently unreasonable nature of parah adumah. Today, such tauntings sound silly indeed.

However, we must be prepared for the challenge in response to such an assertion: "Is this not an instance of blind faith?" Most Orthodox Jews, rabbis or laymen, have had to put up with such reproach, at one time or another, when trying to explain that we observe even if we do not understand the reason for every observance. What do we answer to this charge of "blind faith?"

First, let us always remember that such pejorative and emotion-laden terms always confuse, rarely clarify. Who is to say which faith is blind and which not? Usually, what is one man's

blind faith is another's fearless determination; what I believe is far/sighted vision, and what the other one believes is silly superstition...

Of course, faith can be blind -- but it also can be luminous and enlightening and insightful. The emunah that transcends reason, as symbolized by parah adumah, is founded on a sense of confidence in the Divine intellect, on trust that God, in His infinite wisdom, knows what I in my limitations can never know. Thus, the first time I send a child away from home, I do so on a basis ~~be~~ which is usually irrelevant to reason. Is this blind faith -- or is it confidence? Or, I submit to a medical doctor for a very serious and delicate operation, though I know almost nothing about the technicalities of surgery and medicine. Is this blind faith or confidence? It is blind faith if I only project my own wishes irrespective of the objective situation. It is confidence if I use a wise intuition, an overview which integrates all the nuances of the situation, and hence is more than merely the facts and reason. Ezehu hakham, ha-roeh et ha-nolad, our Rabbis taught: "Who is the wise man? -- one who sees the consequences that will be born# from the present situation." A computer cannot do this; only a wise man can.

Certainly, then, man does not live by reason alone, even though reason helps to make order and sense out of life's experiences. Love, hate, fear, ambition, sentiment, friendship,

passion, desire, suffering -- these are not matters of reason, yet they are the stuff of real life. Similarly, man possesses a religious dimension to his personality, one that cannot be reduced merely to reason or to psychology. This is what Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Ha'Ba' Hasidism, called ahavah tiv'it u-mesuteret, the natural but concealed love for God that inheres in man, and what the great German-Jewish thinker, Isaac Breuer, referred to as ha-tzad ha-hazoni, the prophetic dimension of human personality. And parah adumah reminds us that this religious or spiritual or prophetic dimension is not subservient to reason or any other aspect of personality; it is separate, independent, and autonomous as a feature of human life. Without it, we deny man his very humanity and reduce man to nothing more than a biological computer. And religion as such, if it is based only on reason, becomes anti-septic and lacking in drama and depth. Furthermore, it is the kind of religion that cannot really survive a crisis. The great author of "Ore ha-Hayyim" has told us, from his personal experience, that when Spanish Jewry was expelled in the fifteenth century, those Jews who observed the Torah and the mitzvot out of faith alone, the simple Jews, were able to demonstrate remarkable heroism and prefer exile and banishment to baptism, whereas the sophisticated Jews, who prided themselves on their knowledge of philosophy and their use of "pure reason" instead of "blind faith," were the first ones to submit to Christian pressure to kiss the cross.

But if so, we face a direct and troubling challenge:

does this mean that reason has no role in Judaism? Obviously it does. Furthermore, what of the Jewish rationalists, such as Saadia and Maimonides? Did they not insist that Judaism not only can but should make use of sekhel, reason? In fact, the saintly Rabbi Bachya maintained that if a man has the capacity to use reason and philosophy in his religious thinking and does not do so, he commits a sin in the eyes of Torah. How shall we fit this emphasis on reason into the context of a Judaism which proclaims a law of parah adumah, which speaks of the importance of bukah, which declares the autonomy of emunah?

The answer is that no Jewish thinker ever believed that man can <sup>fully</sup> understand God and Torah by reason alone, without any assistance from revelation. Parah adumah is the corrective for this, giving man the capacity for intellectual embarrassment, teaching him intellectual modesty. Hasidim used to say that that is why a man should cover his head. Clothing is worn for one of two reasons: either to keep one warm or because of modesty. Our heads are covered not because we fear the climate, but because it is an act of modesty: we cover the cranium to show that no matter how brilliant we are, our intellect nevertheless remains sorely limited before Him, the God of infinite wisdom. Parah adumah similarly teaches us this kind of modesty and prevents us from indulging in intellectual arrogance.

But if we cannot reach God by reason alone, why did the great Sages of Israel in the middle ages devise the classical proofs for God's existence? These proofs, truth to tell, were not potent enough to convince the agnostics, and they were essentially unnecessary for one who already believed -- as did these same Sages of Israel. Why then did they offer them? Why did they emphasize the role of sekhel, of reason?

The answer that I wish to commend to your attention is one that touches the very foundations of Judaism itself. It is an insight provided to us by the foremost disciples of the late Rav Kook, Rabbi Yaakov Mosheh Charlop, of blessed memory. He teaches us that man has many dimensions to his personality: amongst them, emotion, actions, ethical bent, intellect. Our sacred duty is to reveal God's presence, to make Him manifest, to bring Him into this world on every level and every manner. Man's purpose is: le'galot et hanistar, to take the potentialities for being aware of God -- potentialities and possibilities which inhere in every atom of matter and in every moment of life and in every aspect of personality -- and actualize them, expose them, reveal them, bring God to our awareness and to the consciousness of every human being. That is why we must use all dimensions of life to reach Him. We ought to experience Him with our emotions; we ought to act practically so as to build the malkhut shamayim, the Kingdom of Heaven, actualizing the will of God for man and his society; and so too we must understand Him rationally and therefore demonstrate His existence through

the use of intellect and philosophy. None of these alone is sufficient; all of them together constitute the human paen of praise to the God of all perfection.

This is what parah adumah does for us: by telling us that there is something beyond our reason, it challenges us to reach God by all means, by exercising every aspect and fibre of human personality. It does not deny the value of reason at all; but it tells us that it is not enough to feel Jewish, or to think Jewishly, or to act Jewishly; rather, we must do all three -- and even more; it reminds us that the human personality is infinitely rich and multifaceted, and all of it must rise in one great spiraling symphony of devotion to God. Kol atzmotai tomarna, all my bones, each and every aspect of my life and my energy and my time and my personality, must proclaim, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord?"

The great Rabbi of Kotzk once said: "Frum iz shlect<sup>h</sup>", to be pious is sometimes to be cruel, for a man of piety is liable to the weakness of self-righteousness which results in insensitivity to the feelings of others. "Gut iz ni'uf", excessive goodness and generosity can lead to immorality, for in my goodness I may try to satisfy the whims and passions of another without regard to moral restraint. And, "Klug iz krum", to be bright is often to be crooked, for brilliance frequently degenerates to mere shrewdness or craftiness. Any one of these virtues by itself can prove exceedingly damaging. However, he added, "Uber frum un gut

un klug -- dos iz a Yid!" -- but to be pious and good and bright -- that constitutes a Jew! No one aspect of personality should be overdeveloped at the expense of any other; all together must rise to the Creator of the world.

Parah adumah is thus not a doctrine of the denial of reason, not a proposition basing faith on absurdity. It appears now in a new meaning, teaching us the inadequacy of any single explanation of man, any single mode of life, any single way of reaching the Almighty. Parah adumah confirms man's marvelous complexity, it affirms the mystery of his personality, it assures us of a religion which is not flat and antiseptic but varied and colorful and deep and comprehensive, and even mysterious. It tells us that man and God meet on many levels, indeed on all levels. Therefore, no person is ever cut off from God because he was born inadequate in any one aspect of his personality. Some people may be impoverished in their intellect, some in their emotions, some in their ability practically to implement the Divine design for the world; but every one has some opportunity to reach out to Heaven.

It has been asked: should not our special portion of this morning begin with the words zot hukat ha-parah, this is the law of the parah adumah, even as we read elsewhere zot hukat ha-pesah, this is the law of Passover? Why does our portion begin with the word zot hukat ha-torah, this is the hukah, or law, of all the

Torah? I suggest that this is the beauty of Torah itself, that it includes preeminently hukah, the integrating element, the principle that no one aspect of life or character is sufficient, but that all together are required and demanded of us.

A Jew is not a disembodied intellect who does nothing but philosophize: not an ecstatic and ascetic, monastic mystic; not one who believes, and believes that his belief alone will bring him salvation; not an obsessive observer of ritual or ethics who does what he does without feeling or understanding. None of these alone is enough; we need all, and even more than all of these. Zot hukat ha-torah -- when we have a Torah, we have the principle of hukah, along with hokhmah and maaseh and reggesh, reason and action and emotion.

And when we have these, we have then achieved wholeness as well as holiness, for both holiness and wholeness are the goal of Torah. Torat ha-Shem temimah, the Torah of the Lord is whole, it is perfect and comprehensive. And through our study and observance of Torah we can achieve this wholeness and thus we will discover that Torah is also meshivat nefesh, it restores wholeness to the human soul and personality.

Having understood and experienced this, we shall then learn to appreciate the remainder of that verse: Pikudei ha-Shem yesharim, mesambei lev, the laws of the Lord are straight, they are meant for the ultimate benefit of man even if man does not under-

stand them at the present, and they make the heart -- and the  
mind and the soul and society -- glad and happy.