

"EVERYBODY IS A SOMEBODY"

I would like to center my message to you this morning about a story which apparently has nothing to do with Yom Kippur, but which in fact captures the whole essence of this sacred day. It is an episode in the life of King David which we normally read in the Synagogue as the Haftorah for the Shabbat before Rosh Hodesh.

The incident took place in the time when King Saul, the first King of Israel, was half-crazed by jealousy of the young hero David, whose popularity he considered a threat to his throne. Saul was so embittered at David that he wanted to kill him. David did not know whether or not it was safe for him to appear in the palace, and whether or not to flee. Now the eldest son of Saul and heir-apparent to the throne was Jonathan, who was the dearest friend of David. Torn between loyalty to his royal father and affection for his cherished friend, Jonathan was ultimately to give up his own claim to the throne in order to allow David to become the successor to his father, King Saul. At a particularly critical period, David asks Jonathan what to do. Jonathan tells him that he will sound out his father and see if he really intends to harm David. Meanwhile, says Jonathan, go into hiding. Tomorrow, after the Rosh Hodesh feast in the palace,

I will come out into the field ostensibly to practice my archery. You hide behind the big stone Azel, David, and wait there. I will have with me a naar, a boy or servant. I will shoot three arrows in your direction, and send the boy after them. If I shoot the arrows so that they fall short of where you are, you will know that all is well, and you can come out of hiding. But if I shoot them beyond where you are hiding, then that is the signal that my father seeks to destroy you, and you must quickly flee in order to save your life.

In the palace that next day, things did not go well. Saul created a terrible scene in which he accused Jonathan of plotting with David, and condemned David to death as a traitor. So Jonathan left and ve'naar katan imo, he took the young boy with him. He aimed his arrows well beyond where David was secretly stationed, and he called to the boy and said, go farther, hurry, the arrow is still farther on. When David saw the lad running, he knew the bad news. Ve'ha-naar lo yada me'umah, akh Yehonatan ve'David yad'u et ha-davar -- only David and Jonathan knew the meaning of all this; the lad knew nothing. And so David and Jonathan bade each other farewell, and David went into hiding, to emerge eventually as the man upon whose head was placed the crown of Israel.

Such is the beautiful story of a noble friendship in a time when our nation was young. Yet the moral of loyalty is not the reason I have chosen to repeat it to you this morning. My reason

is quite different. Allow me to explain.

Yom Kippur seems to impose an impossible burden upon us. By bidding us confess to our sins, as we do when we recite the al heit and the ashamnu, the Jewish tradition drives home the awesome theme of responsibility. We are responsible for every one of our moral and ethical failings. We are responsible for the neglect of Torah and Judaism. We are responsible too for the low spiritual and moral estate of our families. Even more, we are in some measure responsible for the sins of society: for the Bomb and its threat of mass-death, for the corruption that festers in government and in business, for the filth that inundates our libraries and newstands and theaters, for lethal dust that <sup>OS+</sup> chokes our children; for brutality in Vietnam.

What a huge load to carry! In defence we sometimes feel like saying: Ribbono shel Olam! -- what do You want from us? We are humble people. We work as hard and as honestly as we can just to keep our families going and leave something for the children. We are not famous, we have no great power, we are not in authority. If You have complaints about the Bomb, talk to the famous physicists and engineers and the international diplomats. Corruption? -- speak to the President and the Judges and the

heads of the great corporations. Immorality? -- address Yourself to the giant publishers and Attorneys General and movie magnates. But we -- ~~we never get our names in the papers,~~ we are without influence, *to change the course of events.* We are small people. We may make some money, but can have no lasting effect on our own destinies, let alone that of the world. We can do nothing.

If that thought has occurred to you, friends, as a way out of the terrible responsibility urged on us by Yom Kippur; if you have had the feeling that we are just numbers, just puny statistics, just a series of holes punched on an IBM card, just helpless and anonymous blobs of protoplasm, pushed and pulled and crowded by the impersonal forces of society and nature; if you have concluded that life nowadays is such that you, as the "ordinary" man or woman, can do nothing about the really great and momentous issues in the world in general and in the Jewish community in particular; if, in other words, you are willing to proclaim your irresponsibility and to issue a declaration of impotence -- then the story of David and Jonathan sharply reminds you that such excuses are not only unbecoming and undignified and un-Jewish, but false and malicious!

Remember that in the Biblical story of David and Jonathan there are not two but three main characters. Remember that not only the noble and loyal Prince Jonathan is important, and not only the young David, who is to ascend the throne and change Jewish history

forever -- but also the naar katan, the young lad, the ignorant boy who lo yada me'umah, who knew nothing of the great drama in which he was taking part -- he too is a protagonist, he too deserves credit for the succession of David, for enthroning that man who was to unite the Shivtei Yisrael, the Israel of his day, and become the ancestor of the meleh<sup>K</sup> ha-mashiah, the Messiah of the future.

How prone we are to recall only the famous names and ignore the little people, without whom nothing significant ever happens! Imagine if that young, anonymous boy, about whom we know nothing else other than that he was the servant or archery-caddy of Jonathan -- imagine if he had said to himself: what do I count? What responsibility do I have to anyone for anything? And since I have no real importance in the world, why bother with such ideas as duty and loyalty? I might as well sleep late, or fail to show up, or go wandering off in a different direction! Imagine if he had been derelict in his simple duties -- like so many <sup>of today's</sup> waiters <sup>^</sup> who don't wait, and repairmen who don't repair, and cleaners who don't clean! How different -- and how much worse! -- history might have been!

Little did that youngster realize that a pair of eyes were secretly watching him that fateful day; that upon the proper accomplishment of his duty depended the future of his whole people and ultimately all the world; that his little task well done assured the safety of David, and the political and religious and spiritual destiny of thousands of his contemporaries and thousands of generations thereafter!

It is not only the princes and the heroes who play a role in history. It is not only the great and the famous upon whom the world rests. It is even a naar katan, a young lad, who, by carrying out his tasks loyally, briefly emerges from obscurity and helps redirect the course of history. He remains anonymous -- but so very important!

Of such stuff is the story of all mankind made. History is the accumulation of thousands upon thousands of "lads who know not" the significance of their own deeds. The great issues are decided, in the long run, not by those in the headlines but by the thousand "little people" who do or do not follow the dictates of conscience. David could not have become the great King he was without this little boy who signalled him, without another helpful stranger who gave him bread when he was starving, without a Prophet

who challenged him and a wife who inspired him and countless nameless soldiers who were ready to give their lives for him. The State of Israel was not built alone by the Ben Gurion's and Sharet's and the Eshkol's -- it was built as well by young men who died on the battlefield, and old mothers who let their sons and daughters leave the Russian Pale for the malarial swamps of Palestine, <sup>students of Talmud & loyal, religious Jews who were having the dramatic vision of golah,</sup> and anonymous hundreds who invested in Israel and the thousands who once collected coins for the JNF and the millions who contribute whatever they can to U.J.A. Everyone who did his best played a role in Israel.

For that is indeed all that is demanded of us by God -- <sup>do more than we can,</sup> not that we ~~personally change history~~, but that we do all that it is in our power to do. On that and on that alone are we judged. Sometimes we are called upon to make the supreme sacrifice. Usually all that Judaism demands is that we sacrifice just a little of our comfort, a little of our convenience and time and money and thought and consideration and energy. When the great Book of Life is opened in Heaven, as we read in the U-netaneh Tokef, it may be true that u-malakhim yehafezun, that sublime angels rush about and create a stir, but in the Book of Life: ve'hotam yad kol adam bo, each man's own personal, individual signature is recorded therein. Each has his own mission. That he must do: no more -- but no less. When we do what God requires of us --

and what is required of us is the sum and substance of the teachings of Judaism -- we have fulfilled our goals and we are important -- whether or not our names are inscribed on great monuments or in history books. ¶ That is the theme of responsibility taught to us by Yom Kippur. We each of us could have done more in our own little way; it is when we fail that we must say alheit and confess our failure. When we do that in all earnestness, we are responsible human beings. To be convinced that I am unimportant, that I simply don't count -- is to be dead even though I breathe. To strive to fulfill my mission and purpose in whatever way God has allowed me -- whether by raising a worthy family, charity, study, teaching, Israel, service to a great cause -- is to live on and have my influence survive my own limited life.

Do you ~~still~~ think you are without influence? Then remember that how you act towards your husband or wife at home is witnessed silently by your impressionable children. <sup>the naar katan, watched by</sup> Like David, <sup>watching the</sup> ~~naar katan~~, your conduct can be the signal which will change a life. How you as a Jew act in your business or profession can have the greatest effect on some non-Jew or on some young Jewish person who is wondering whether it is worth remaining a Jew. Never underestimate it! A kind word to a person who is lonely, a smile to someone who is friendless, a compliment to someone who lacks confidence, a bit of encouragement to a child unsure of himself -- you may not realize it, but it is from such little things that

who impart your own into  
their character & will someday  
act likewise.



the future is manufactured! All the more reason, therefore, to feel personally responsible when we forget to offer that word, that smile, that encouragement!

The sainted Hafetz Hayyim told of the first time he saw a train. Who, he wondered, guides this train? Who drives it? At first he saw very busy and official-looking people with big red caps carrying things to and from the baggage cars. Surely, he thought, these important people are the masters of the train. Then, when he discovered they were merely porters, "red caps," he noticed a big, dignified looking gentleman in an impressive uniform collecting tickets from people. No doubt, he thought, this official owns the train -- how important and solemn he appears. But when he learned he was only the ticket-collector, he turned to the man in resplendent uniform and of bushy mustache and booming voice who came marching stridently through the cars blowing a whistle. Certainly he guides the train. But no, he was merely the conductor. Perhaps, then, it is collectively owned and operated by all those aristocratic people in the parlor car who are so well-dressed and smoke expensive cigars? No, they

are only passengers. Then he came to the front car, the engine room. There he saw a man in over-alls, one who seemed bedraggled, who needed a shave, who looked impoverished and <sup>in</sup>significant, who appeared to be a manual laborer and shoved coal into the fire and pulled a few rusty switches ... And he -- this inconspicuous, anonymous, obscure fellow -- he was the master of the train, upon him depended the safety of the whole train and all its passengers! The naar katan often plays the great roles!

That, my friends, is the nature of the message of Yom Kippur. And that is my plea to you this holy day. Do not imagine that only the great and dramatic events are significant. In the eyes of God and in the eyes of history we too are important if we but do all we can. For nobody is a "nobody." And everybody is a "somebody" -- unless, of course, we choose to abdicate ~~that~~ role, that function, that responsibility.

The people we shall soon memorialize in the Yizkor may not have been famous people. Maybe they did not shake worlds. But each and every one in some measure, whether large or small, has influenced the world or some part of it. They influenced us. We influence our children, or others' children. And they, in turn, will influence others. The fact that we are here today is a tribute to them; had one link in the chain of generations been severed,

we would not be Jews congregating in this makom kadosh today.

~~We know this influence their lives had upon us, and the many other ways unknown to us. May we, in our turn, learn to exert a beneficent influence over the generations that will follow us.~~

*that direction of our footprints.*

That influence<sup>a</sup> will be spelled out not in wealth, not in power, not in worldly fame. It will be exercised in the manner and the responsibility with which each of us carries out his assigned tasks in life. Whether we are anonymous lads, playing a supporting role in some great drama, or shabbily dressed conductors, directly guiding the destiny of hundreds of fellow-passengers through life, we must be aware of our importance in the eyes of God *and those who shall come after us.*

Thus, and only thus, shall we emerge from death to life, from oblivion to significance. For everybody -- is a somebody.

In appreciating, therefore, the impact of the lives of our loved ones upon us, we must consider the kind of influence we shall have over the generations that will follow us. For everyone has some influence. We must, then, watch our step. Whether we like it or not, we cannot journey through life without leaving footprints, & others will follow where we go because we have marked the way.