

The events of the past several years and months, and especially of this past week, have confirmed in all of us the feeling that something is dreadfully wrong with the currents running in our civilization that can no longer be suffered with amusement as the passing fad of young people.

He who has eyes to see and ears to hear and brains to perceive and interpret, will recognize that just as the reactionary Right, in the days before World War II, proved to be no mere collection of crackpots, so the radical Left, with its revolutionary rhetoric, invitation to violence, and permissive morality, must be identified as a danger to survival.

For me as an individual, the whole cultural arena -- from politics to pot and morals to medicine -- reminds me of a simple but incisive insight of my late grandfather, of blessed memory. In one of his last discourses to his people, Moses reminds the Israelites that they had come from Egypt, a land of idolatry, to Canaan, another land of paganism. He warns them:

[illegible]

"And you shall see their detestable fetishes and loathsome idols, made of wood and stone, gold and silver. I warn you lest there be amongst you a man or a woman... whose heart turns this day from the Lord our God in order to serve the gods of those people... the Lord will not be willing to forgive you" (Dt. 29:16-19).

Now, that is a most strange remark. One can understand that Moses is concerned lest the Israelites abandon the service of the Lord in order to indulge in the cult of idols that are made of gold and silver. Gold and silver are at least attractive. But אֱלֹהִים אֲגֻלִּים וְאֱלֹהִים יָסוּדִים -- detestable fetishes and loathsome idols? Why should any Jew leave Judaism for that which is abominable and obnoxious?

The answer is that this indeed is the nature of idolatry: it evokes moral filth and loathsomeness within the human breast; it arouses the passion for the ugly, the hideous, the repugnant. This is a reversal of the usual formulation, for according to the conventional wisdom, paganism represents beauty and art and esthetics, while monotheism is plain and severe. But what we

learn from this verse is, on the contrary, that paganism opens man's soul to the disgusting and the abominable, and teaches him to like it! It shows him אין אלוהים -- and his heart turns toward them.

The Torah teaches us that before idolatry corrupts a man morally, it desensitizes him esthetically.

It is in this sense that one can say of our culture that it is idolatrous. For the pendulum has swung to the extreme. Literature began by celebrating the anti-hero, by plumbing the depths of human depravity and exploring the far reaches of sadism and violence, and these literary devices heralded the complete perversion of values by which decent men once lived -- and which indecent men once knew they were flouting, thus never pretending to saintliness because they were sinners. We have embraced the אין אלוהים, the detestable and the loathsome, and learned to admire it.

The Talmud (Pes. 50a) tells us that Rabbi Joseph was dying, but then he suddenly revived. His father, Rabbi Joshua b. Levi, who was sitting at his side, later asked his son: what did you see when you were already half way in the other world? And the son answered: אין אלוהים, אין אלוהים, אין אלוהים. "I saw a topsy-turvy world, where up was down and down was up." Whereupon his father responded: אין אלוהים, אין אלוהים; son, that world that you saw, the world of the spirit -- that is the upright, normal, right-side-up world! It is this world this is אין אלוהים.

We have sustained a dreadful inversion of values, where up is down and down is up. We live in a society where pornography is celebrated as art, obscenity is hailed as literature -- and "liberating" because it is "honest"; where euthanasia is a cause advocated by physicians who are committed by their oaths to the preservation of life; and abortion (no matter what one may think of the various individual problems concerning this issue) has become the symbol of women's liberation, when nature specifically endowed women with the capacity to bear life. Indeed, it is אין אלוהים, one in which we have learned to reverence אין אלוהים.

Shakespeare, in the opening scene in his Macbeth, depicts the witches who, in common chorus, proclaim:

Fair is foul and foul is fair,  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

This is a true prophecy -- not only because the phrase concerning "filthy air" is literally true in our polluted times, but because Shakespeare was anticipated by a true prophet who many centuries earlier uttered a strikingly similar passage. The prophet Isaiah (5:20) tells us:

הוי האומרים ערע טאג אנטאג וו, איהם חשק לאור לאור  
 חשק, איהם אר לאהוק איהוק לאר.

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who turn darkness to light and light to darkness, who turn bitter to sweet and sweet to bitter!" To which we may add: and those whose hearts turn from the values of Judaism to the cherishing of אגותיהם אגותיהם, the detestable and the loathsome.

In perhaps no other area is this perversion of values as prominent as in the realm of morality. This summer, Time magazine treated us to a full issue on "Sex and the Teenager." Decent and intelligent parents who may have once thought that they were sophisticated and alert, must have been shocked that they were so benighted and so much behind<sup>the</sup> times. For truly "modern" parents have capitulated and abandoned their parental roles -- probably because they first failed in their personal roles -- and have learned to yield to the desires and submit to the mores of their young teenage children who demand a free life without any moral restraints, and insist upon practicing what they practice in the very homes of their parents! Of course, some parents do not merely acquiesce reluctantly, but encourage such conduct as a principle -- turning their homes into what, in a quainter age all of us lived through, was once called "a house of ill repute." Indeed, it is an איהם היות, a crazy world, where foul is fair and fair is foul, where the air is filthy with the stench of אגותיהם אגותיהם.

Last week I was invited to a symposium on marriage to be held on a Saturday in October in a distinguished Kosher resort institution. I had to decline because I would not be away from Shabbat, and for other reasons. The man who invited me was depressed because, he said, he had such difficulty finding a speaker who was willing to advocate the classical and conventional concept of the institution of marriage! Praised be experimentation with fetishes and idols, no matter how repulsive, repugnant, and obnoxious! We have enshrined אגותיהם אגותיהם!

There are those who will argue that man was always immoral, that it is not the invention of the counter-culture. Of course I agree. The Bible taught us that unbridled passion is as old as man - איהם איהם איהם איהם. Koheleth observed that no man is completely guiltless - איהם איהם איהם איהם. And the Sages told us centuries ago that איהם איהם איהם איהם, there is no guarantee for anyone's morality, that every human being has a penchant for throwing off moral shackles. But I do not conclude therefrom that today's culture is less hypocritical because it brings its passion in the open. That every individual is driven by passion does not imply approval of public orgies.

Despite the self-righteousness and so-called "honesty" of the counter-culture, I hold the reverse to be true. Passion and moral weakness is as old as man, but it makes a significant moral difference whether he does what he does secretly or openly. If secretly, it means there is still restraint and inhibition, which may somehow call a halt to his appetite and concupiscence, and at least a furtive acknowledgment of objective standards. But if it is in the open, if it is shameless, if there are no holds barred, then man has polluted his atmosphere, he has brought down all standards. Then he calls the good evil and the evil good, and hovers through the fog and filthy air, besmirched by his beloved loathsomeness.

This, indeed, is the way Rashi understood the words of Moses הַסִּמְתָּ אֶת אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְאֶת אֲנִי וְאֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעֹלָם וָעֶד "the secret things are to the Lord our God, but the revealed are to us and our children forever." What does this mean? Rashi explains: when man sins in secret, it is a sin between him and God, and he must personally answer to God for himself. But if the infraction is one which is open and exposed and exhibited without shame and without restraint, if it is something which society learns to accept and even approve, then it is אֲנִי וְאֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, it is something for which we and our children must answer forever after. Every man individually must answer for his secret and private sins, but all the society, especially the children, must suffer for הַנֶּגְזָר, for that which is kept in the open without any shame or embarrassment.

On Rosh Hashanah we must each answer to God for הַסִּמְתָּ, our secret and private failures. But we must answer for each other, and for our children as well, for הַנֶּגְזָר, for allowing our children to grow up in an atmosphere of שִׁקְצִיּוֹת אֱלֹהִים.

I interpret a sorry religious phenomenon of our days in the same way: the allure of the repulsive. I refer to the Jews-for-Jesus movement which has recently gained some notoriety. We ought not panic over this, but it should worry us, because there are some cities on this continent where this movement has made shocking progress among young Jews.

Now, I have no argument with the Christian who believes; on the contrary, I usually prefer him to one who does not believe at all. But, Jews who believe that?! After centuries and generations untold where our ancestors were forced to kiss the cross or suffer death? After Crusades and inquisitions and pogroms and blood-libels, as integral parts of the history of

Christendom? And especially -- after Auschwitz, we have such Jewish freaks? For a Jew to submit to this is to yield to the allure of the repulsive, a symptom of the sickness of our time, the inversion of values, the new paganism rampant.

But perhaps the most shocking expression of the sick discontinuity in our culture is in the realm of politics. The New Left, despite its officially small membership, is the avante-garde of the counter-culture and serves as the pace-setter for much of sophisticated public opinion in our country. And they have conditioned us to tolerate their perversions -- violence in the name of equality, war in order to achieve peace. If there are clear culprits behind the Arab terrorists in the Munich massacre, other than the terrorists themselves and the Arab states behind them, it consists of those radicals who have made heroes of bloodthirsty murderers, and adventurers of cowardly assassins, and nationalist patriots of cut-throats, simply because they use revolutionary rhetoric; it is the world liberal press which has shown more sympathy for the criminal than the victim, whether in regard to mugging or the massacre at Lod or the Sabena jet or the chase of terrorists into Lebanon; it is the United Nations which consistently censures Israel for its self-defense against and punishment of the accessories to international crime.

Our hearts go out to the families of the victims of the Munich massacre as we remember them on this Rosh Hashanah. And our hearts and sympathies go as well to the families of the victims of other Arab atrocities, including those Jews languishing in the jails of Syria and Egypt, and, as we just learned, those who have been pressed into white slavery in Algeria. They are, to a large extent, the victims of the new idolatry that sweeps the world and that approves Arab viciousness.

I could not care less whether Germany's attempts to restore its reputation to the Olympic games has been hurt or not, even though they tried in their clumsy way to save the situation. (Yet, how strange -- a country which 25 years ago was so eminently efficient in mass-murdering Jews is so pathetically sloppy in saving a handful of Israelis in 1972!)

I could not care less if the Olympic games continue or do not continue, although I believe it was a piece of unreconstructed callousness that they were allowed to continue.

I could not care less that the massacre occurred at the



I am concerned with and I do care about what the cynicism of the world is doing to me and to you and to our children; about the callousness of countries large and small, of newspapers and commentators and political scientists who are thunderously silent when Jews are killed, but delirious when they can attack Israelis who are responding to attacks; who, at most, offer Israel condolences, but give their votes to the Arabs.

ווי האלערע פאר אונזערע קינדער ! וועגן די וואס אינבערגלייבן דאס גוטע אלץ ערשט, און נאר דאנאך שרייבן זיי אויסגעצאלטע קאמפלעמענטן צו ישראל, און געבן זייערע שטימען צו די אראבער.

How shall we respond to the weird predicament, when the repulsive has become alluring, the loathsome lovely, the detestable delectable?

First, we must no longer be passive followers of every passing cultural whim and social fad. We must not be afraid of being dubbed "square," "not with it," "Establishment," "reactionary," "middle class," or "bourgeois." Let us, individually and collectively, slow down our breathless attempts to be young by stamping as "kosher" whatever youth happens to advocate at the moment.

Second, let us not turn to the other extreme, and assume that the values and standards and practices of America of, let us say, the 1950's, was the last word in morality. We must not turn reactionary or repressive or parochial or narrow. We must not act as if the adults have a monopoly on decency and truth, as if we are beyond criticism by the new generation -- because we are not. We must not feel that we are confined to the two alternatives of being either Jerry Rubin's or Archie Bunker's.

But most important, we must listen to the shofar and let it call us back to the timely and timeless message of the Torah and Judaism. Let us strive, each in his own heart and family and society, to reassert those values taught and demanded by Judaism -- values on which decent civilized life for all people is predicated.

We must learn, once again, slowly and painfully, what once upon a time came to us automatically and instinctively --

to abhor the repulsive and scorn the abominable; to admire the good and the decent and the moral.

Shofar, our Rabbis (Lev. R. 29:5) taught us, comes from the word יָדָל which means "beauty," and the message of shofar is therefore: כְּבוֹדֵךָ יִדְּלֶנּוּ, beautify your conduct, act beautifully. Shofar means that we must become "beautiful people," not in the half sardonic and sarcastic way that the word is sometimes used to characterize the aristocracy of our society, but in the way the Rabbis used it: כְּבוֹדֵךָ יִדְּלֶנּוּ.

Shofar is the call to return to the ways of God and Torah.

Shofar is the alarm to beware of the many guises of paganism and its cult of the abominable and obsession with the obnoxious and fascination with the ugly.

Shofar is an invitation to a life of נְקִיּוּת, purity.

And, shofar is, as well, our wordless prayer that we be granted a year of peace and tranquility, a year of true dignity and great creativity, a year which God will fulfill for us the prayer of David 'שְׂמֵחַ בְּיְהוָה יֵשְׁעֵנוּ הָאֵל הַיְּהוָה לְעַמּוּנוּ that we be privileged to hold the pleasantness of the Lord; for with Him is loveliness and beauty, majesty and sublimity.