

"The Process of Tradition"

ACHAREI

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The tractate of the Talmud known as Pirkei Abot ("Ethics of the Fathers"), which we read, chapter by chapter, every Sabbath from Passover to Rosh Hashanah, begins with a famous passage which is the simplest statement of the source and authority of the whole Jewish Tradition:

... משה קיבל תורה מסיני ונשחט ונעלה ונחלל ונעלה ונחלל ונעלה ונחלל

If we read this ^{Mosheh} passage carefully we discover two ^{recurring} words that correspond to the English word "tradition." One is Kabbalah, not to be confused with the technical term for Jewish mysticism. Divrey kabbalah means traditional law. Thus: Mosheh kibel Torah... The other word for Tradition is Masorah, from the next phrase: u-mesarah li-yehoshuah. So that these two words, Kabbalah and Masorah, both mean "the Jewish Tradition."

Why are two terms necessary? Simply because they represent different shades of meaning and different ^{viva} emphases, each of which is important if the process of Jewish tradition is to be genuinely effective. Kabbalah means "receiving," the act of learning, the passive acquisition of the insights ~~and~~ of the past. Masorah means "transmitting," the act of teaching, the active passing on to the generations of the future what has been received from the past.

From the statement Mosheh kibel Torah mi-sinai u-mesarah li-yehoshuah we learn that the ideal Jew, the highest link in the golden chain of the Jewish Tradition, is he who most closely approximates the character of Moses by practicing both kabbalah and masorah; one who is an authentic student, a willing and receptive heir to the precious treasures of the past, a practitioner of kabbalah; and an authentic teacher, one who, having received, is ever-ready to give, to instruct children and pupils and youth, a practitioner of masorah. This represents the mechanism by which Torah survives, the motion by which our Tradition perpetuates itself. Every Jew must be both learner and teacher, receiver and transmitter. The Jewish heritage survives only when we practice both kabbalah and masorah.

indicates

Each of these represents not only the spiritual opportunities for us to become part of the great Jewish Tradition, but also the risks and dangers and challenges to our Jewish heritage. For if either one fails, the other cannot carry on by itself.

Perhaps we can best explain this idea by way of the reasons our Rabbis gave for the tragic death of the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the event which serves as the prelude to this morning's Sidra. The Bible attributes their demise to their offering of a "strange fire." Yet our Sages looked for deeper reasons, for more fundamental explanations of why they ~~ventured~~ risked this bold infraction of the Divine command. Two of the reasons they assigned for their behavior are of special relevance to our discussion. One reason is:

The other states:

עירב עבודה לבינה (Eirav Eivoda LeBina)

. The first,

עירב עבודה לבינה, indicates a failure in their kabbalah. They were light-hearted and frivolous, sated with worldly pleasures. But Torah cannot be studied or fathomed except עירב עבודה לבינה, without sobriety and awe, seriousness and exclusive concentration. People who are half-asleep, stupefied by mundane pleasures imbibed without limit, cannot truly receive Torah. You must be dedicated to Torah to the very bottom of the heart and ^{your} aware of God to the/very fingertips. ~~Either one~~

עירב עבודה לבינה. Either one thirsts for and drinks of the clear waters of Torah, or he ~~he~~ drinks of the heady wines of self-indulgence with the resultant hangover of self-delusion and obsession with trivia. Nadab and Abihu nikdmesu le-mikdash, approached the sacra of Judaism, shetuyei yayyin, in the intoxicated state, in a frivolous manner. Their kabbalah was imperfect.

The second reason is that of mechusarei begadim. A great many of the laws governing the Temple service have as their reason, according to Maimonides, the impressing upon the worshipper and onlooker of the dignity of the divine service. No doubt the requirements for the kohanim to wear the proper ^{vestments} ~~off~~ garments of their sacred office ~~had~~ served this end well. The kohen was, after all, a teacher - עירב עבודה לבינה - and a good teacher must know that in order to be successful and effective, you must

not only impart knowledge impersonally, but you must reach out for the soul of the student, you must create an atmosphere of learning, and with your own dignity and bearing impress upon the mind of the student the inner worthiness of what you teach him. Nadab and Abihu failed as teachers, as kohanim, as bearers of the masorah, because they did not make an attempt to impress their people with the dignity of the Tradition.

If we now view our modern predicament from the vantage point of this analysis of the two-step process of the Tradition, we find that different groups fail in ~~or other~~ one or the other of these two areas. The non-Orthodox groups, by whatever name they may be known, are generally well/equipped for masorah. They do not lack the glamour and polish and glistening exterior, the bigdei kehunah. Their techniques of transmission are generally above reproach. But ~~despite~~ they are fatally weak in kabbalah. They have refused to accept the heritage of the past, and have rejected untold treasures of ages gone by. *111 11/12 137N/10J0J*. They broke into the sanctuary of Judaism intoxicated with passing fads and whimsical ideologies with only novelty to recommend them. As shetuyei yayyin they took a frivolous, unsober view of Torah, picking and choosing at random, rejecting fundamentals and ~~accepting secondary~~ basic principles. This they retained, that they rejected as antiquated. They remained with the curious and devastatingly ludicrous anomaly of a masorah without a kabbalah: salesmen with no merchandise to sell, teachers with no subject matter to teach, preachers with no message to preach.

But while others have their more serious -- and fatal -- problems, we Orthodox have for many decades suffered from the reverse illness: a full, strong kabbalah accompanied by a pale, weak masorah. We have embraced totally the great treasures of Judaism, from Moses and Joshua and the Elders down to the Chazon Ish and Chafetz Chayyim. But our ~~problem~~ has been a chronically feeble masorah. There has too often been a lapse in communication, a "transmission failure." *11322 1201NN 137N/10J0J*

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In the past we have much too frequently failed to -- and in the future must insist upon -- a modern vocabulary, an esthetic milieu, beautiful and clean facilities, dignified and decorous services, elegance and charm and attractiveness. Nadab and Abihu did not think these externals, these bigdei kehunah, were necessary. ^{For} Their failure in masorah was punished most severely. Both kabbalah and masorah are vital. Masorah without kabbalah is ludicrous. Kabbalah without masorah is tragic.

This is the goal towards which we are this day encouraged: the wedding of kabbalah and masorah; the union of inner sobriety and outer dignity to preserve and perpetuate all that is holy to us, on the pattern provided by Moses, the man of G-d.

For indeed thus do we begin, every week, the reading of the Perek:

וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַפָּרָשָׁה הַזֹּאת

All Israel has a share in our great Tradition, our spiritual gift. How? And why?

בְּיָמֵינוּ הַזֵּה הַכֹּהֵן מִשְׁמַרְרֵם

First, by the practice of kabbalah, by inheriting the precious heritage of righteousness, the raw stuff of which Tzaddikim are made. And second, וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַפָּרָשָׁה הַזֹּאת -- the practice of Masorah, the planting of Torah for the future, the preparation of the soil of Masorah by the use of tifferet, by endowing all that we do and say in our contents-rich tradition with beauty and charm and graciousness -- for this too is part of our sacred heritage.

I- This afternoon begin reading 1126. Begins with famous statement
 Yorigin Yall Yudaism - ... רבנו יוחנן בן זכאי ...

~~II- Two words stand out in this important introductory passage:
 יָדָבָר and יָסוּד. Their nouns are יָדָבָר and יָסוּד.~~

II- In simple form, this is a concise statement of the source
 and sanction of the Jewish Tradition. And if we read this
 passage carefully we discover 2 words that mean + that
 correspond to the English word "tradition." One is יָדָבָר.
 Not to be confused w. the technical term for J. mysticism.
 יָדָבָר יָסוּד means traditional law: יָסוּד יָדָבָר.
 And the other word for "tradition" is יָסוּד -
 from the next phrase, רַבּוֹתֵינוּ. So that these
 2 words, יָדָבָר and יָסוּד, both mean: The J. Trad.

III- These 2 words have different shades of meaning, + represent
 two different emphases, each of which is important if the
 process of J. trad. is to be genuine, effective, + authentic.

a) יָדָבָר - receiving - learning - the passive acquiring of
 the learning & weights of the past

b) יָסוּד - transmitting - teaching - passing on what we
 have learned to the generations of the future.

IV- In the statement רַבּוֹתֵינוּ יָסוּדֵינוּ יָדָבָר we learn that the ideal
 Jew, the ideal Yid in the golden days of the J. Trad., is one
 who practices both יָדָבָר + יָסוּד; one who is an authentic student,

a willing oneceptive ear to the precious treasures of the past,
a practitioner of *sh'p*; and an authentic teacher, one who,
having received, is now ready to give, to instruct children,
pupils, youth, a practitioner of *sh'lon*.

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pupils, youth, & practitioners of SHON.

This represents the mechanism by which Torah survives, the motion by which our Trad. perpetuates itself. Every Jew must be both learner & teacher, receiver & transmitter. The J. heritage survives only when we achieve both SHIP and SHON. ~~Without either one, Torah cannot~~

~~long survive.~~

... great spiritual opportunities to our tradition, also anti-

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long survival.
 VI - Each of these, while representing great spiritual opportunities to each
 Jew to become part of this dynamic transition, also contains
 the risk of crisis. For either one fails, the other is helpless.
 Perhaps best explain by the reasons Lin gave for the problem
 which introduces today's sidra. Nadab & Abihu
 died because of it. Yet Rabbi looked to deeper
 reasons. Two of the reasons they gave ~~represent~~ ^{are of great relevance} stress
 to our discussion. One: "ולא ידעו" (they did not know).
 The other: "והיו חסידים" (they were disciples).
 indicates a failure in their ^{spiritual} growth. They were light-hearted
 & frivolous. And Torah cannot be studied w/o sobriety & seriousness.
 concentration. People who are half-asleep, stupefied by random
 pleasures, inhibited w/o limit - cannot truly receive Torah.
 or are drinks of the heady wine of self-indulgence & delusions.
 If you drink the latter, you cannot have the former.

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IX.

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when we practice ΔP , we receive (inherit the heritage) righteousness
and also achieve ΔP -

plant for the future, by virtue of Transpiration,