

"THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT"

There are two ways of looking at life: the long view and the short view.

The Long View sees people and events not as isolated contemporaries and disconnected happenings, but as part of a great drama being played out on the stage of history. It is a story which may be centuries in the making, where the meaning of the plot will not become discernible until the very end, in which the actors are propelled by destiny and attracted by fate, and in which the trivialities of the moment are absorbed into the higher significance of the over-all pattern of events.

The Short View sees only the here-and-now, the immediate realities of biological, social, and economic life. It considers only what is right before us and nothing else.

Two examples of these views would be Moses and Pharaoh as they appear to us in this morning's Sidra. Moses is a man of the Long View. It is true that he does not overlook the Short View, the basic realities of his time, but he integrates them into a larger, over-arching view. All his deeds, Pharaoh's intransigence, Israel's impatience and its fears --- all these are part of the great drama of the Exodus, the redemption, and the giving of the Torah.

Pharaoh is a man of the Short View. He entertains no Long View at all. Everything is reduced by him to power politics without

purpose. The plagues are merely fortuitous accidents of nature. The Israelites are a bunch of lazy malcontents. Moses is nothing but the ancient version of an incendiary civil rights leader, an annoying trouble maker. This is the meaning of the phrase, so often repeated in this story, "and the Lord hardened the heart of Pharoah"-- God restricted Pharoah's vision and reduced his comprehension to a very short view indeed. The advisors of Pharoah eventually were educated by the plagues to a longer view; that is what is meant when they declared, commenting upon the scene of Egypt's devastation by the plagues, that it is "the finger of God." But Pharoah would not learn: "and he heeded them not."

The Long View has been a characteristic of the Jewish people from the very beginning. Abraham became the father of our people with a dream for the future. Since then, we have been endowed with an awarness of the past and a sensitivity for the future. The Jew, bearing a long history, knows that events are purposeful, that the present is a bridge from a meaningful past to a significant future. The Jew has always been able to view events, to use the Latin tern, sub specie eternitatis, under the aspect of eternity. Only because of this long view have we been able to survive bitter exile and miserable persecution; we were able to see them in the perspective of many many generations.

The Long View, the perspective of eternity, lets a man see himself and his life and his problems in proper proportion; and this may give him hope and comfort as well as meaning and purpose. The Long View is a way of assimilating sickness and misfortune and death.

Tragedy has a way of isolating us, and making us all the more miserable for our loneliness. But under the Long View, we begin to see ourselves as part of the larger fraternity of the miserable. I am not alone; I am a member of the silent society of sufferers. No wonder that the traditional Hebrew greeting of condolence is that the Lord console the mourner *יְהוָה יְחַנֵּן*, "amongst all other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." The very feeling of being part of a larger group of mourners is in itself a source of comfort. Similarly, when we visit the sick or pray for them, we wish them a speedy and complete recovery *בְּרִיאות מְהֵרָה*, "amongst all the other sick of Israel." Illness becomes bearable when I am not the only one who is incapacitated by poor health. In both cases I have taken a longer view. I have gazed not only upon myself, but seen myself as part of mankind. And that Long View has helped me.

A remarkable example of the effect of the Long View is related by Rabbi Joseph B. Solovetchick, in his famous article of several years ago, *"אֵל הַחַכְמָה"*. He reports a conversation between his uncle, Rabbi Meir Berlin, ~~with~~ ^{and} his grandfather, R. Hayyim Brisker. R. Hayyim was in a resort, sitting on a balcony and gazing upon the setting sun during dusk. He was quite obviously in a state of profound meditation, and deep in melancholy. Rabbi Berlin asked him the reason for his moodiness, and R. Hayyim answered that he was saddened by thoughts of death. The feeling of man's finitude, his mortality, were deeply disturbing to him. When Rabbi Berlin asked what R. Hayyim

does when such moods overcome him, R. Hayyim told him that at such times he turns to the Code of Law of Maimonides and studies his *חזקוני*, the laws relating to the defilement that comes from contact with dead bodies. He explained that when he takes the Long View, and analyzes legally and objectively the halakhic principles relating to the death of all men, then the anguish of his own eventual death disappears and is sweetened. He has included himself in the larger vistas of all mankind, and therefore his own end becomes bearable.

A similar instance is given to us by Dr. Viktor Frankl, founder of that school of psychiatry known as Existential Anyalysis or *Logo-therapy*. Dr. Frankl tells of the time that he was in the concentration camp, when what he saw and heard was so degrading, so overwhelming, so agonizing, that he *felt* his sanity threatened. He then hit upon an idea which helped him to control his own mental health and survive the horrors of concentration camp life. He began to imagine himself ten or twenty years thereafter as a psychiatrist lecturing to his colleagues on the psychology of the concentration camp, and seeing himself as but one instance of such psychology. In other words, he looked upon himself from a larger perspective, he examined himself not subjectively but objectively, as one of many such objects. It is the Long View that enabled him to survive as a sane individual in an insane environment.

The Long View, then, by giving us perspective, both graces our lives with greater meaning and allows us to survive its vicissitudes.

However, there is another side to that coin. However helpful the Long View can be to a person, it can be dangerous to other people. If we overdo the Long View, we begin to see people as symbols, not as human beings. If we take the Long View to an excess, we do not behold flesh and blood individuals, but merely members of a despised race, an inferior community. Our fellow men lose their individual names, and they become instead: a Negro, a Puerto-Rican, a Chinese, a Jew. We Jews have been the historical victims of this pernicious Long View. For almost two thousand years, Christians have refused to see Jews as real, living, human beings; instead we were merely members of an accursed, deicide race. We were the incarnation of the Devil. That Long View almost destroyed us.

An even more agonizing illustration of the weakness of the Long View is given to us by Rolf Hochhuth, the young author of "The Deputy." In an interview shortly after the appearance of his play (published in The Partisan Review, and quoted in The Storm Over The Deputy, edited by Eric Bentley), Hochhuth reports that he was visited by an old Jesuit Priest who discussed with him the theme of the play. The priest said to him

Certainly it is frightful, what was done to the Jews and to the 56 million people of all faiths who were devoured by the Second World War, but then again it is not so frightful, because all of them are with God, not one of them was lost. They are all preserved. No soul is lost, not even that of Hitler or of Himmler. Before God this will all someday become unsubstantial and forgiven.

Hochhuth reports his reaction to this statement

I became cognizant for the first time of what bottomless cunning lurks in the Church's insistence on celibacy. That these priests are obligated to live alone, that they do not have a single human being to whom they can get thoroughly attached ... this gives them that unbelievable hardness, which enables them to reckon years not in the terms of a human life, but incommensurably under the aspect of eternity...

They do not think of the happiness of the living but of generations and generations to come -- that eventually things will become better. But it is always terribly inhuman to think this way.

What Hochhuth means of course, is that the Long View is responsible for so many evils in the world.

The Short View, therefore, has a great deal to commend it.

It means that we are to view our neighbors not as representatives of obnoxious racial groups or bad families or repulsive communities, but as individuals who have their own merits and their own faults, as living and breathing persons who laugh and who hurt, who exult and who suffer.

We must learn, therefore, to accommodate both views, the long and the short. At times we must have the Long View and measure things in terms of generations and eternity; at times we must adhere to the Short View and see things as they are, here and now.

R. Hayyim of Volozhin tells us that in this matter we must differentiate between different periods of Jewish History. Before Sinai, in the days of the Patriarchs, a man was permitted to live by the Long View. For instance, Jacob married two sisters -- although this was considered an immoral act after the Torah was

given. However, Jacob in his prophetic spirit was able to foresee that the House of Israel would be built only through this particular deed. Therefore, on the basis of the Long View, he was permitted to do that which the Short View would have prohibited. However, a similar act is condemned when it takes place after Sinai. Thus, the Talmud tells us that King Hezekiah refused to marry, because in his prophecy he foresaw that evil and wicked people would spring from his loins. For this he was condemned to death -- because after Sinai, the Torah combines for us the Short View and the Long View and we have no right to live our lives on the basis of the Long View alone.

Even Moses himself was permitted to follow the Long View only before the revelation Sinai. Afterwards he had to adhere only to Halakkah, which combines them both. Thus, we read last week of the incident of Moses and the Egyptian, *וַיַּרְא כִּי אֵין שָׁמָּה אִישׁ וַיִּסֹּךְ אֶת-הָעִיפְטִי* "and he saw that there was no man, and he smote the Egyptian." What does it mean, "and he saw that there was no man?" Rashi quotes the Rabbis: *וַיַּרְא כִּי אֵין שָׁמָּה אִישׁ וַיִּסֹּךְ אֶת-הָעִיפְטִי*, "he saw that there was no "man" that would spring from the loins of this Egyptian, that none of his descendants would ever convert to Judaism and worship God. But, asked R. Velvle Brisker, what difference does it make if his descendants would convert to Judaism or not? Either the man is guilty of a capital crime or he is not; either he legally must die or legally may not be put to death. R. Velvle Brisker points to another passage cited by Rashi which

indicates that Moses killed the Egyptain by a special means:

לְיוֹנָן פֶּלֶא יִמָּוֶה, he uttered the ineffable name of God and killed him mystically. This means, says R. Velvele, that the Egyptain would not have been punishable^{ed} by a human court for lack of evidence or other such technical reason; but he was guilty of פִּנְיָה בְּיַד הַשָּׁמַיִם, death in the hands of the Heavenly Courts. And when it comes to God's actions upon man, then such matters as the future must be taken into account. In other words, before Sinai, man -- meaning Moses -- was permitted to act on the basis of a Long View; thereafter, no one, not even Moses, may act towards his neighbor in a practical manner on the basis of a Long View alone. Here and now only the Short View counts. The Short View means respect for the Law, even when we are ignorant of its reasons or disagree with its conclusions.

How can we have both, the Long View and Short View? In attempting to accommodate both, how can we make sure that we will assimilate only their merits, and not their faults? It is told of Rabbi Israel Salanter, the founder of the Musar movement, that he once approached a wealthy man for a contribution for a poor family. The man replied to him, "Rabbi, I have faith in God, I have bitahon. I am sure and confident that God will help him even without me". The Rabbi answered, "In Judaism faith is a marvelous virtue -- but only for yourself; when it comes to someone else, you must have splendid lack of faith in anyone but you being able to help him."

The same is true in this case. For one's own vision and perspective and understanding of his own self and life, he must take the Long View, and see himself objectively. But when it comes to action, to real life, to dealing with other people, affecting their lives and welfare, we must always give them the benefit of the Short View.

In all ways, therefore, we must learn to adopt both the Long View and the Short View, perspective and personalities, time and eternity, what is before us and what is beyond us.

In every area of life, we are mistaken if we choose only one or the other exclusively. Personally, if we take only the Short View, we become overwhelmed with our daily trivial problems. Every petty annoyance becomes magnified, and we end as nervous wrecks. If we take only the Long View, we turn euphoric, we become impractical dreamers who are neglectful of the exigencies of daily life which alone can make our dreams realizable. We must therefore, include in our vision both the Long View and the Short View.

In the Jewish community, there are those who take only the Short View, Since, they say, most Jews in the United States are not kosher and do not observe the Shabbat, let us ignore them, let us make our great fund-raising dinners treifa. If New Years falls on a Friday night, let us have a dance! And there are those who take only the Long View. Since Israel is destined to be the people of God, all

who reject this thesis are not of our concern. Let us become a little, enclosed sect, for ultimately, in terms of generations, we will prevail and survive and the others must disappear. But both are wrong; we need both the Long View and the Short View. We must never abandon the Torah or ignore the metaphysical vocation of Israel; but neither must we ever give up on any Jew, no matter what his convictions.

This also holds true for the State of Israel. There are those who take only the Short View; all that counts is military and economic security. Ignore the Orthodox who are just medieval obscurantists. Let us be done with the Shabbat; if necessary, at most let us have a Saturday version of the American Sunday, a secular day of rest. For we are no different from other people. The opposite of this is the Long View only: the Jewish State is Messianic and redemptive. Hence, if the government is headed by secularists, we must not mix or mingle with or interest ourselves in them. Let us separate ourselves completely. But both are wrong -- we need both the Long View and the Short View.

The same holds true for education. There are those who take only the Short View: I must educate my child to the immediate circumstances of our present society. I must provide him with the training for a profession or a business career, and enough of dancing and music and other such things to make him or her adjust. Hebrew? -- only enough to make for a socially acceptable Bar-Mitzvah celebration. But more than that is useless to him and overly far-fetched. And of course, there are those who take only the Long View: the present realities of Life do not matter. I will discourage my son

from obtaining a college education. The aim of every Jewish child should be to spend all his time in a "Kollel" without any secular training. BUT both are wrong. Educationally we need both the Long View and the Short View. Of course, without thorough grounding in Torah we have abandoned our children to assimilation sooner or later. At the same time, ^{while} there is a great need for the Kollel, to raise great specialists in the Torah, ~~but~~ this is only for the chosen few, and not for all students, not even for all brilliant students.

What we call Modern Orthodoxy is the Long and Short of Judaism. Our commitment is, we hope, neither myopic nor so hopelessly far-sighted so that we cannot see what is in front of us.

What we ought to do is accept both aspects of God. At the beginning of the Sidra we were told that the Patriarchs had revealed to them only the Name **א-ל**, which indicates promise, the promise of the Long View, the great future. Moses had revealed to him the Name **יהוה**, the Lord, which indicates fulfillment, the realization of the promise in the present. The two names represent the Long View and the Short View. Both of these must become part and parcel of our lives. We must comprehend, within ourselves and within our lives, both of them.

שלום לרחוק ושלום לקרוב "Peace, peace to the far and to the near". True peace, true intergration and genuine harmony and serenity, can come only when we have adopted both the elements of **מרחוק וקרוב**, the far and the near, the Long View and the Short View.