

"A DAY OF GOOD TIDINGS"

Our Haftorah for this morning records one of the more fascinating chapters in the early history of our people. Four lepers who, in keeping with Biblical Law, were outside the camp of Israel, were hungry and found themselves near starvation. They decided that it was no use to try to reenter the community, because famine reigned in the Land of Israel at the time. Instead, they decided to take their chances and proceed to Aram, what is today Syria, and what was even in those days the sworn enemy of Israel. If they kill us, they argued, we are no worse off than we are now; and if they let us live, why then we shall survive. As they approached the fortified city of Aram, the Bible tells us that G-d performed a miracle, and the sound of their approach was in the ears of the Syrians like that of a great army on the march. The Syrians were dumbfounded by the thought that the Israelite king might have hired Hittites and Egyptian mercenaries to do them battle. Thereupon the Syrians panicked, and leaving Aram in the middle of the day upon a moment's notice, they all fled and deserted the city. When the four lepers entered the ghost city, they filled themselves with what they found and then they said to each other, we do not do right to care only for ourselves for yom besorah hu, v'anu mach'shim -- today is a day of good tidings, and shall we be silent? As patriotic Israelites, they returned to the Land of Israel and notified the guard at the gate that he should tell the king that they alighted upon Aram and v'hinei ein sham ish ve'kol adam -- behold there is no man there, neither the voice of a human being, ki im ha-sus assur, ve'ha-chamor assur, v'ohalim ka-asher hemah -- but the horse is tied to the stake, and the donkeys are tied, and the tents are as they were. Aram has suddenly been deserted and it is the perfect time for an Israelite attack against its mortal enemy. In this manner the four lepers were instrumental in achieving a victory of Israel over Syria.

This story is an interesting recollection from the Jewish past. But

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if it is included as a Haftorah which is read and re-read every year,
^{IT MUST BE MORE THAN THAT}
then it must have ramifications for all times and it must have a special
relevance for us of this day. Indeed, I believe that its message is most
appropriate to us of 1961.

There comes a time in the life of a man or the life of a people when
he or it realizes that the day is a yom besorah, a day of tidings, a day
when an important message makes him restless urging him to speak out.
At a time of this sort, when he feels impelled to say something signifi-
cant and urgent to the world, he has no right to be silent and to
suppress the message which restlessly stirs within him. And one of the
major things that we of our age must talk about, expose, and bring to
the attention of the world is this: that our life has become such that
ki im ha-sus assur, ve'ha-chamor assur, v'ohalim ka-asher hemah --
everything seems to be functioning smoothly, there is every evidence of
"business as usual" -- but unfortunately, v'hinei in sham ish ve'kol
adam -- the man is missing; the voice of humanity is absent. The whole
machinery of life and society seems to be so well lubricated but at the
center we do not find the humaneness; there is no feeling of compassion.
There is no voice of protest raised against injustice.

Our society is essentially based upon the pattern of Aram -- a
deserted ghost city. Everything seems to be functioning smoothly:
communications and transportation, business and finance, universities
and laboratories -- but at the core: v'hinei ein sham ish ve'kol adam --
instead of the warm heartbeat of individual human beings, there is only
the grinding of gears and the hum of electronic machines. One of the
basic ills of contemporary society is that it is so thoroughly
mechanized that it has become dehumanized. The individual human being
has been depreciated. Man as such has become depersonalized and has

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been reduced to a cog in a tremendous machine. We no longer think in terms of individuals; we think of individuals only as little units of society. We do not conceive any longer of patients, but of hospital beds. We do not concern ourselves with hungry children, we count the number of mouths we must feed. We fail to consider the unfortunate victim of an accident, and his widow and orphans; he is only one of the casualty rate ^{ON A HOLIDAY} ~~of a holiday~~. Man has been reduced to a statistic, a thing.

Even in the ideological sense, the ish and the kol adam have been banished from life. For the last three hundred years, since the onset of the modern era, a mechanistic philosophy has been dominant. According to this philosophy all the world is a machine, of which all parts function until they run down. Even man is a machine -- and he does what he does because he must do it, because he has no choice, because man is a creature of habit and circumstance and necessity. He may think that he does what he wants to do; in truth, however, he does it because he must do ~~so~~ and not otherwise. Man is not really a free agent; he is only another screw in the great machine of the universe. He must function in his capacity mechanically, just like the sus, and chamor and olahim. He has lost his humanity, his freedom. And as a result of this mechanistic philosophy which has banished human freedom, people have become confirmed in their irresponsibility and have learned to coat it with a respectable veneer of sophistry and sophistication.

In a world of this sort, all Jews must recognize a yom besorah, a time when their message is of the utmost importance if the humanity of man is to be salvaged. Israel dare not be silent. It must proclaim for all the world that man was created in the Image of G-d, that he is a thinking and feeling human being, not a thing; that it is not true that

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he is just a little more advanced than the animals -- rather, he is but "little lower than the angels." Man, Israel must teach the world, is unique. Every individual human being is absolutely irreplaceable. These are the good tidings that we must this day pronounce for all the world to hear. We must ^{RESTORE} ~~bring~~ the value of man up to its former dignity.

The historic trial that is now taking place in Jerusalem has fortunately gone beyond the question of merely what to do with one man who is the greatest murderer of all times. ~~Fortunately~~, The proceedings are beginning to turn on the crime, rather than the criminal. All the material is now present for a great lesson for our generation, the generation that has grown up and matured after the war: a new insight into man and his capacity for depravity and decadence. One would think that this impact would hit the world like a ton of bricks. Instead, ki im ha-sus assur, ve'ha-chamor assur, v'ohalim ka-asher hemah. Everything functions normally, the buses run and the elevators go, the radio blares, and the television records, newspapers are read and stock is exchanged -- v'hinei ein sham ish ve'kol adam, but the humanity of man which should ^{MAKE HIM} rise to new heights of indignation, has remained essentially muted. A mass circulation magazine has even begun to complain that the news from the trial has become boring.

And listen to this most amazing example of "business as usual": ~~a~~ a report from the "Osservatore Romano." One would have expected that with the revelation anew of the terrible depth to which our culture has descended, a culture raised in Christianity and in Christian concepts and categories, that the officials of the Church would bow their heads in shame and acknowledge their participation even if indirect, in the guilt for these crimes. If not an open confession, one might at the very least have expected a sense of humility. Instead, the Vatican's official newspaper had nothing better but in the same month of the

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trial to reveal that Titus, the Roman general who destroyed the Holy Temple and ravaged Jerusalem in the year 70, felt that the Jews deserved their punishment, and that he was the instrument for their destruction. "The Jewish people were so obviously struck by Divine punishment that it would indeed have been an impious action to spare them from destruction." To which "Osservatore Romano" adds wisely and sagely that they know what the sin of all Jews was: the rejection of the Christian witness and faith. At the very time that official Christianity should recognize their share in the responsibility for the horror and the shame of the twentieth century, they re-warm and re-hash the old theological nonsense which has caused so much anguish in the world, which has stained so many pages of history with innocent Jewish blood! The same horses, the same donkeys, the same tents -- but there is no human man, the voice of humanity is lacking in the Vatican.

At a time of this sort, when sensationalist magazines are bored and when pious journals are snickering, the State of Israel has a sacred historic duty to recognize that yom besorah hu, v'anu mach'shim, that it has an urgent message to tell the world and that it dare not draw a curtain of silence over itself; that no matter how unwilling the world is to listen, it must drill it in again and again like the proverbial drop of water which ultimately forms a hole in the rock. It must remind the world of ish, of humansness. Throughout Jewish history, we have been the ones to wake up the world to the message of humanity. From the time of Moses of whom it is said va-yiffen koh va-khoh va-yar ki ein ish -- that he looked hither and yon and saw that there was no man -- and therefore he became the man to execute justice and righteousness -- until the times of the rabbis of the Mishnah who proclaimed that be'makom she-ein ish, hishtadel li-heyot ish, in a place where there is no man, you must become that man, Jews have recognized that where others are

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remiss in their humaneness we shall assert our ~~humaneness~~. How appropriate a task for the State of Israel which this week celebrated its thirteenth birthday. Thirteen years is the time when traditionally a young lad becomes an ish -- a man. On this bar mitzvah year of the State of Israel, it too must proclaim for the world the message of ish.

The second lesson to emerge from this historic trial is that without G-d, without Torah, without an ideal higher than man himself, man can be reduced to a very ^{clever} robot who will kill and murder efficiently as part of "obedience." He will be able to sit behind the desk, and with complete politeness to secretaries and underlings and callers, as part of his "orders" and "discipline," calmly press a button which will seal the doom of thousands and millions of his fellow men. In other words, it has revealed to us, to our new generation, that modern man has something rotten and mean in his soul, that he is the kind of being who can allow "business as usual" in utter disregard of the sanctity of ish, and without ever listening to kol adam.

We Orthodox Jews in a world of this sort, have a historic responsibility. We must break out of the bonds of our usual discord and wake up our fellow Jews and through them the world. We must educate -- first our own Jews, and afterwards all others -- that unless the Divine Image fills the human form, then man is better off dead than alive. We must teach all humanity that if you take the word ish, man, and ^{REMOVE} ~~take out~~ the middle letter, yud -- ^{WHICH} ~~would~~ stands for G-d -- what you have left is: esh -- a consuming fire, whether it be the powerful fire of the crematorium or the cataclysmic fire of the nuclear bomb. Through every available means, through school and through paper, through journal and through speech, through friendship and through example, we must teach the Torah way of life, which in practice for Jews and in its ideals for all people, can alone bring back to man a sense of dignity which comes from the

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Tzellel Elohim, the Divine Image in which he was created. Yom besorah hu, v'anu mach'shim. We must teach our fellow Jews both the grandeur of our own heritage and also the danger of a secularized G-d^{LESS} and culture. We must tell them that if they want to assimilate, let them first know the kind of world into which they are assimilating: a sick, sick culture, the very cradle in which Nazism was nursed and weaned. For men who ^{TRULY} believed in G-d could never let "orders" by mere creatures transcend such very basic and fundamental religious principles as "Thou shalt not murder." A misguided religious bigot will kill individuals in a rage of passion. But cold, white collar, wholesale murder with scientific efficiency is possible only in a secular society in which G-dlessness has allowed science to develop into deadly channels.

There is a nega, a plague, in the soul of modern man, man whose sus and chamor and ohalim are cared for, but whose heart is in disarray, whose spirit is in chaos, whose soul suffers from sickening cynicism, whose core of ish has been obliterated, who is like the ghost city: only a ghost of a man. And our Sidra tells us the one effective procedure for him who suffers a nega, and that is: ve'huva el ha-kohen -- he shall be brought to the priest. We must bring suffering man back to Torah, back to G-d, back to sense of the sacred. For the nega of our times is a disease of the soul and a plague of the spirit.

If the State of Israel is to serve its historic destiny, then it must assume the role of ish. On the year of its bar mitzvah, it must attempt to achieve religious maturity. Diplomacy, military marches on Independence Day, all this is good and well; but this is not the essence of the destiny of Israel. Israel must now rise to its full historic stature and begin to fulfill the religious role which destiny gave it. There is no doubt that religiously speaking, Israel has made mistakes in the past; only one who is

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blind will deny that. But, like the proud father next to his bar mitzvah son, we recite over Israel the Barukh she-petarani -- blessed is G-d who has let us survive those years of immaturity and weakness and mistakes. We now turn to the future, a future which Israel must return to its sacred origin.

The good wishes go out from the hearts of all Jews to the State of Israel. Like the young lad who, as his first mitzvah, learned^s to lay his tefillin, so do we wish Israel the blessings of tefillin. Just as the tefillin consists of two parts, the shel yad (the part that is wound on the hands) and the shel rosh (the part that is wound on the head), so do we hope that Israel will be strong in hand and dedicated in mind; that security and strength will be within its borders, and that dedication of mind and soul to Almighty G-d will be its religious greatness. In its dual capacity as a strong and peaceful nation and as a holy and noble people, may the State of Israel relay its message to all the world, that the G-d who dwells in its midst has given every man the Divine Image, and that every human being must assert the ish within him and articulate the kol adam, the voice of humanity which G-d granted him. For today is a yom besorah, a day of proclamation of this great message, on this day we shall not be silent.

And in return, in the words of the Grace, ha-rachaman yevasser lanu besurot tovo, yeshuot ve'nechamot - the all merciful G-d will proclaim to us good tidings, tidings of salvation and consolation. Amen.

alternate title:
"The Illusion of Normalcy"