

"Observation and Calculation: Two Sources of Sacred Knowledge"

The special portion which we read on this Sabbath of Parshat Hachodesh is centered about the Mitzvah of Kidush Hachodesh, sanctification of the new moon. Now, the moon and its revolutions about the earth have always held an important position in the Jewish scheme of things. All our holidays are identified, in the Torah, by a number of a day in a specific lunar month. Therefore, all our festivals, all the ceremonies and sacrifices and devotions, depended and do now depend on the beginning of the month as determined by the Molad HaShvanah, or the first appearance of any part of the new moon.

Many years ago, before the preparation of the calendar by astronomic calculation, which was able to foretell every Molad almost unto eternity, the Jewish court announced the new moon and declared the Rosh Chodesh "al pi ha'reiah", by "sight". That means, that witnesses would testify in court that they had seen the appearance of the new moon with their own eyes. It was the era of intimate knowledge of G-d's world, when people would be witnesses to the birth of the new month, and the Beis Din - the G-dfather of the new moon. Kid a-p reiah, sanctification as a result of sight, of first hand, intimate observation.

After the power of the courts was weakened, after exile struck at the roots of our people, after the beginnings of the advanced science of astronomy, a new method of KH was introduced - "Kid a-p cheshbon"; sanctification, not through observation, but by calculation. It was, as it is even today, a fool-proof method, intellectually conceived by using the tools of mathematics. No longer was it necessary, indeed possible, to perform kid a-p reiah. It was now kid a-p cheshbon, *an alternate route to sanctity.*

Now, my friends, I have no desire or intention of going into a mathematical evaluation of these two systems. But I do want to comment on the moral content of the symbols which Reiah and Cheshbon really are. What do these two represent to us, and what is the significance of the replacement of Observation by Calculation? Reiah, observation, represented Man's intimate contact with real life. The complexities and the superficialities of modern life were still a long way off. A Jew, in these early days, was able to be a good and dynamic and wonderful Jew even without being a scholar. He was able to feel and see and touch the life-stream of Jewish life. He was at one with the quintessence of Jewishness. Modern thinkers use a big word for that - they say that such people had an intimate "existential acquaintance" with the life they so loved. But then the trunk was severed from its roots, the Jew was uprooted from his native Jewish soil, both physically and culturally. He was in all senses suddenly in exile. Jewishness by feeling it, life by actual observation, Kiddush al pi Reiah, was now only a glorious ideal. Life was becoming complex, the atmosphere they breathed was intensely un-Jewish, a thick pea-soup fog of strange isms and ideologies blurred their reiah, their vision and powers of observation. And once Reiah was ruled out, the Jew had to rely upon a new method to preserve his identity, to remain loyal to his heritage. And so he devised a new way by which to perpetuate the K'dush, the sanctity of Jewish life. He invented Kid a-p cheshbon, calculation, intellectual exercise. He wrote and read his profound religious experiences. If he could not quench his thirst for Judaism thru Reiah, then he took to the giant tomes of the Talmud, where Cheshbon, calculation, the sublime intricacies of detailed logic, reigned supreme and gave expression to his innermost yearnings. It was cheshbon which now gave sanctity and holiness to life. Once upon a time a complete Am Haaretz, an abysmal ignoramus, was also able to be a good Jew, because he was able to see, to observe. Today reiah is obsolete. How much Judaism can one contract in Times Square? Did the Chassam Sofer ever tread on the streets of Park Avenue? Was the voice of a young scholar expounding "a Rambam" ever heard in the chambers of the 42nd St Library? Can one indeed observe Jewishness in The Yankee Stadium or the Polo Grounds? If, therefore, Reiah is a thing of the past, then Cheshbon, study, becomes the issue of the present and safeguard of the future.

The Hasidim once interpreted the Mishna in Avos, the Ethics of the Fathers, similarly Da mah l'maaleh mimcha - know what is above you, what has transpired in days gone by. "Ayin Roah", once it was possible for a Jew to see G-dliness in his everyday existence. Then, with the degeneration which is Time's, that wonderful faculty was ossified, and instead came "ozen shomaass", the hearing ear. People, though they saw not, at least heard from those who saw. Perhaps they left Europe when they were very young and never saw a great Rebbe, perhaps they never saw and experienced the beauty of the complete eve of Shevuos spent in study in the Beis Hamidrash, but anyway - they heard of it, they heard of it from people who themselves saw and understood and lived it, and by contagion they too contracted this love of things Jewish. But then this too passed, and a generation arose which neither saw nor heard. And to salvage what was left they resorted to "vechol maasecha b'sefer nichtavim", they read books voraciously, they study and learn and try to gain by Cheshbon, by intellectual incalculation what they were unable to attain by sight or hearing. If the home is empty of something for the Jew to observe, and the streets supply with nothing which he should hear, then he must turn to the Yeshivah and the Beis Hamidrash, to the Sefer and the Cheshbon.

Two prophets beheld visions, and they clearly represent these two facets of Jewish life of which we have been speaking. The vision of Isaiah was a vision of Reiah, whilst the corresponding vision of Ezekiel was one of Cheshbon. Both beheld the Merkavah, the vision of the Divine Palace, of G-dly grandeur. And each, in the lofty prophetic ecstasy, enunciated his holiest and profoundest feelings at that time. These two statements have been incorporated by us in our daily liturgy, and in one of the most sacred selections.

Isaiah, who prophesied to a people living on its own soil, serene in its security, at a time when the Temple was still in its glory, saw a vision much different from that of Ezekiel. Isaiah saw a stationary, grandiose Throne upon which the glory of G-d rested. And veshooluv melaim ess ha'haichal, the corners of G-d's garment filled the palace, G-dliness was everywhere evident, it could be sensed by even the most unsensitive. It was an era when the Reward and Punishment ordained by G-d was immediately evident, so that when a King Uziah defied the Torah and put his hand into the Kodesh Hakodoshim, the inner sanctum, it immediately turned leprous as an open and un concealed and immediate message that G-d was displeased. It was an era when ve'ha'bayis yimaleh ashan, the world was filled with the experience and knowledge of G-dliness as a closed house is thoroughly filled with smoke from a fire. It was a period of intense and intimate Reiah, observation. And so Isaiah exclaimed "Kadosh K K etc. melo chal ha'arets kvodo", the entire world is filled with His holiness. Wherever you go, wherever you reside and whither you travel, G-d is to be felt.

Ezekiel too saw a vision of the Merkavah, the Divine Chariot or Palace. It was an entirely different vision, however, for he preached in an entirely different environment. Ezekiel, first of all, did not speak to a people secure in its own homeland. He spoke to a people in exile, to the Jews in Babylon. He preached to a people who no longer were able to draw inspiration from a Temple, for in its place rose the heathen temples of Bel and Marduk. A people who were becoming thoroughly Babylonianized, and at best hyphenated Babylonians. And it was amongst such people that Ezekiel attempted to behold the vision of a Merkavah, a people whose "vision" was blurred, who had lost contact with the realities of Jewishness, who had forgotten the art of kid a-p reiah. And even then Ezekiel saw the great sight, he too, like Isaiah, beheld a Merkavah. But it was a different type of Merkavah! For the vision of Isaiah was stationary, rooted to the healthy soil of Israel, where Observ'n was still the mode of Jewish life. The Merkavah, the Chariot of Ezekiel, however had a new feature. It was fitted with Ofanim, with wheels. For great visions were not permanent in this sort of environment. Like an ordinary chariot on wheels which can go rolling down the hillside with one push, the Chariot of Ezekiel too represented this shiftiness, this ephemeral quality, this impermanence and transitoriness. It was not a trustworthy vision, which can survive the vicissitudes of life. 20 "Vatisaeni ruach", the prophet's heavenly vision is swept away from him by the strange winds which blow so menacingly in his exile.



A new cult of modernism and the mode of sophistication has pervaded the atmosphere of Babylonian Jewry, and these strange winds carry away the prophetic vision of glory. The Prophet now senses keenly the terrible emptiness of his people. They have lost their Merkavah, their sense of Divinity. "Vaeshma acharai kol raash gadol", he hears a great noise rushing in to fill up the void left by the vanishing Merkavah. Nature abhors even a spiritual vacuum. Instead of the Vision of Glory, there is now only Raash, noise, empty pratter, meaningless shouting. The soft music of glory has been replaced by the grinding of machines, the hollow bellowing of "civilization". How tragic! The strange winds of the Exile have torn away the vision of the Merkavah from the Jews, and they remain only with the loud noises of the then "modern" life, - empty, hollow, un-Jewish. There is nothing left for the young Babylonian Jew to see, for the Merkavah is gone, the sanctity of his Jewry is in jeopardy. And so, the Prophet worries, there is no longer Kid a-p reiah. Yet Ezekiel does not despair. For if Kid a-p reuahas proved impossible there always remains kid a-p cheshbon; if his people cannot personally, by their innate powers of observation, see Judaism, then they must study it in order to live it. And so, where Isaiah saw the spirit of G-d filling the entire Haychal, the entire land in its length and breadth, and exclaimed KKK...melo chal haaretz kvodo, Ezekiel announces "Boruch kvod hasem mimkomo", Blessed be the Name of G-d from His place, we must take to the place of G-d, to the synagogue and the school, for if we cannot see our heritage alive in our homes and our places of business, then the Beis Hamidrash, with its complicated cheshbon, must be our source of G-dliness. If not "melo chal haaretz" then at least "mimkomo"; if not kid a-p reiah, then kid a-p cheshbon. And how interesting is it that this very same Ezekiel is known in history - ~~as the~~ - as the founder of the institution of the Synagogue!

This idea of Mimkomo, of retreating to the Place of G-d, to the synagogue and the school, to the abode of Cheshbon, of intellectual activity, is a very moving and profound idea in human life. If one becomes, G-d forbid, a mourner, then those who visit him to comfort and console him recite the words "Ha'makom yenachem osecha...", which means "May G-d comfort you..." Literally, however, the word Hamakom means the Place. Many times one can comfort himself and ease the wounds of separation from a beloved relative, by revisiting the place where the deceased relative lived and worked and accomplished his life's task.

(give personal example: comfort from seeing Zeide's chair, where he sat and wrote both sfarim, composed his contribution to Judaism. The Makom was menachem).

Similarly, in the relationship of Israel to G-d, we many times feel that the strange winds which have borne us to these shores have also separated us from the Vision of Glory, we discover that G-dliness is not all-pervading in the milieu in which we live, that it is impossible to effect kid a-p reiah, Sanctification by Observation, then we turn to the Place of G-d, the center of intellectual Torah activity, the Beis Hamidrash, and we strive for Kid a-p Cheshbon, Sanctification by Calculation.

My friends, much as we love our country, we well know that by what we see and what our children see, in our homes and streets and market places is not enough or conducive to Kiddush, sanctification. We must turn to Mkomo, the place of G-d where we find Kid a-p Cheshbon. And, my friends, let the ~~we~~ proverbial word to the wise be sufficient, in such cases where some of us began to return to the Beis Hamidrash, where began to participate in Kid a-p cheshbon, where we returned to our Talmud studies, some of us have later faltered and desisted, we have failed to sustain this sanctification by calculation. It is discouraging indeed to notice the fact that we, who have no opportunity for Kid a-p reiah, are foregoing some excellent opportunities for kid a-p Cheshbon.)

Let us hope and pray that soon G-d will again allow His great spirit to rest all over the earth, He will emanate from Mkomo and fill Kol Haaretz, and that the Knowledge of G-d will fill the earth as the waters fill the sea, "kamayim layam m'chassin".

no finding in ... val pgs 11 & 21