

"THE LODGER'S LIGHT"

The Shulhan Arukh codifies a halakhah or law which is ~~of~~ not only of practical importance to those who wish to observe Hannukah properly, but also, as we shall later see, <sup>is</sup> of ~~gr~~ wider significance.

The law concerns an akhseinai or lodger, a traveller, who is away from home during the Hanukkah holiday. How is he to observe the ~~holiday~~ kindling of the Hanukkah lights? We read, akhseinai she'ein madlikin alav be'veto, a traveller who knows or suspects that his family has failed to kindle the Hanukkah candles for him at his home, and who cannot therefore fulfill his obligations through them from a distance, can do one of two things. Im yesh lo petah patuah le'atzmo, tzarikh le'hadlik be'pitho, if he has his own apartment, with its own entrance, let him light his menorah at the entrance to his rooms. If, however, his accommodations are not so adequate, if he has but a small room without a separate entrance, then tzarikh la-tet perutah le'baal ha-bayit le'hishtatef imo, <sup>be'shemem shel ner Hanukkah</sup> he should give a coin, some money, to the innkeeper and thereby participate with him, the owner of the house, in his lighting of the Hanukkah menorah. By giving him this monetary gift, the akhseinai or lodger becomes a partner, as it were, with the baal ha-bayit or owner in the mitzvah of the Hanukkah lights (Sh.A., Orah Hayyim, 677:1).

This is an important law, especially for us American Jews who, because of our economic position and the availability of transportation facilities in modern times, have become akhseinaim like never before. Our travels, both for business and pleasure, are unprecedented -- and Jewish Law teaches us how to remember Hanukkah no matter how far from home we are.

But there is a larger sense in which we can all be regarded as lodgers.

Some two thousand years ago, the Greek Jewish philosopher Philo taught that ~~xxx~~ every human being is an akhsehai, a traveller on the face of the earth. Man is essentially a "citizen of heaven," a divine creature with heavenly aspirations, and this celestial origin, his divine roots, make him only a temporary dweller in this world. He merely stays a while in this world; it is not his real home, he does not "live" here. We are all, Philo teaches, merely lodgers who temporarily reside on earth.

There is a more immediate sense, however, in which the term akhsehai applies to us who are here today. For we are relatively newcomers in this country. Despite the fact that we celebrated, not too long ago, our tercentenary, few Jews indeed can trace their ancestry in ~~xxx~~ America for 300 years. The majority of us are second-generation American Jews; a goodly number were born overseas. Certainly our cultural and sentimental affiliations, our folk memories, many of our mannerisms, go back to the lands where our families lived for so many generations --- for hundreds of years. It is for good reason that, despite our love for America, our dedication and loyalty to the United States, so many of us speak nostalgically of der alter heim, "the old home." Nine or ten centuries of European Jewish history cannot fade from our collective ~~character~~ <sup>memory</sup> without a trace. They leave even the most Americanized of us with the feeling that here we are akshenaim, lodgers, and that our personalities, tastes, our spiritual image was forged in the various lands of Europe which we respectively think of us as "the old home."

This is more than sentiment and psychology. In our own generation and the ones immediately preceding it, American Jewry was immeasurably enriched by the spiritual wealth that Jewish immigrants from Europe brought with them. Our greatest organizations, our foremost schools, our most eminent yeshivot, were built, inspired, developed and sustained by Jews

born and raised in Europe. American Jewry would be a tragically impoverished community today were it not for the splendid and mighty resources that European Jews contributed to our lives. Europe, until the times of the Nazis, was not only der alter heim, but one that overflowed with vitality and vigor.

Today, however, we can no longer look to European Jewry to provide us with reenforcements in our battle for the survival and ultimate triumph of Torah. Only two or three weeks ago a guest speaker at The Jewish ~~Center~~ Center described the tragic plight of the remnants of European Jewry.

Today, my friends, we are in the position of the lodger described in the Shulhan Arukh --- the akhsenai she'ein madlikin ~~i~~ alav be'veto, we are travellers in whose homes no light burns. It is dark, very dark, in der alter heim. In Lithuania, there are no yeshivot and there is no intellectual ferment that once characterized the Jewish religious aristocracy. In Poland and Galicia and Hungary the great luminaries of Torah and Hassidism and piety no longer shine with their old brilliance. The enlightened Orthodox Jewry that once populated the cities of Germany and galvanized generations of modern Jews who remained true to Torah, is no more. Ein madlikin alav be'veto -- the light of Torah, of Judaism, is extinguished in our "old home," and darkness --- a deep, tangible, deadening darkness <sup>^</sup> has settled over that continent and will keep it Juden-rein for all eternity.

What, then, shall we "lodgers" do? Shall we be satisfied with empty complaints about the spiritual poverty that has engulfed us? Certainly not. In the words of an old proverb, recently quoted widely, "it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." We must do something on a wide scale to assure the continued life of the light of Torah, symbolized by the Hannukah menorah. And, to follow the Shulhan Arukh, there are two ways

open to us. One is, mi she'yesh lo petah patuah le'atzmo; one who has his own resources, let him light his own lamp. He who has the intellectual capacity, the will and initiative, and the freedom from mundane worries, must himself become a Torah scholar. There are those for whom the petah or entrance into the world of Torah is clear and open. Such people must devote themselves heart and soul to holding aloft the light of Torah.

But such people are few indeed. Would that there were many more! -- but realistically we know that their number is limited. Of course, every Jew without exception is required to study Torah to the fullest extent possible. There are no exemptions. Yet full time devoted to creative study of Torah is, in our country and under our circumstances, the exception rather than the rule. The conditions of life for most of us are not the petah patuah le'atzmo -- we cannot do it by ourselves.

What then is our alternative? How then shall we make sure that Judaism survives, that the light of Torah illuminates the paths of our children and children's children, that it remains a "beacon unto the nation?" The answer is: the second alternative presented to us by Jewish Law -- tzarikh la-tet perutah le'baal ha-bayit, ve'yishtatef imo be'shemen shel ner Hanukkah.

We must open up our purses and with our monetary support participate with the owner of innkeeper in the mitzvah of lighting the Hanukkah candles. And my friends, if we were the akhseinim, the lodgers, then the owner of the premises, the innkeeper, is: Almighty God. It is His world in which we appear as temporary lodgers. It is He who is the Baal ha-Bayit, and his Hanukkah Menorah is the light of Torah as it is studied in the yeshivot. And if the lights have gone dark in "the old home"; if we cannot ourselves become full students, and if we, American Jews, do not want to live in utter darkness - - -

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then we must with the divine Baal ha-Bayit by contributing our perutah, and much more than that, for the upkeep of the sources of Torah in our day.

It is for this reason, friends, that it has become a tradition in The Jewish Center to make an appeal for the Yeshivot in Israel on Shabbat Hannukah. The Baal ha-Bayit of the universe calls upon <sup>us</sup> today to offer <sup>^</sup> our generous support in keeping alive the ner Hanukkah of Judaism.

It is, to my mind, most significant that the appeal today is specifically for the Yeshivot in the State of Israel. Torah is, of course, a blessing everywhere in the world. We have some great Yeshivot here in America. But there is some special importance to Torah in Israel that we must never overlook. For the welfare of the Yeshivot in Israel is a precise index of the spiritual quality of the country. Whether the Yeshivot in Israel prosper or not, whether they have to live constantly on the brink of crisis and insolvency or not, whether the State of Israel as such learns to develop mighty spiritual energies or not --- will be the test of the ages, the historical experiment as to whether our whole Tradition is or is not ~~not~~ vindicated. Our Torah implied, our Prophets boldly proclaimed, our Sages taught, that the mission of the Jewish people was to establish a nation with all the appurtenances of nationhood, that will yet retain in its fulness the spiritual quality of a people bound up with G-d -- a nation that will represent, to all other nations, the glowing spirituality that descended upon us from Sinai. If, therefore, we have in our days succeeded in erecting a state that is politically independent and viable, with the whole apparatus of statehood, but that is spiritually impotent, religiously weak, in which the menorah of Judaism is dim to the point of uselessness, then the whole experiment of Judaism throughout the ages will be declared by the world and by history to be a failure. If, however, we can succeed in the spiritual realm even as we have in the political; if ~~we~~ we can feed the shemen fuel <sup>^</sup>



to the menorah of Torah in Israel even as we have and are feeding the fuel of economic viability to its industries --- then we shall stand vindicated before the bar of history. Then all the world will acknowledge that the mission of Israel has not been in vain. Then all the Prophets of Israel shall be in our debt for we will have justified their faith that a people can live in this world and yet not suffer its inevitable corruption, --- and not the least of them, the Prophet Zechariah who declared, as we read in today's Haftorah, lo ba-hayil ve'lo ba-koah ki im be'ruhi amar ha-Shem tzevaot -- "not by power, neither by <sup>but by My spirit</sup> might, saith the Lord of Hosts," If we can keep alive that Spirit, that Light, through the Israeli yeshivot -- then the State of Israel as a whole is a success. If not, Heaven forbid, then the whole vast enterprise will have been a tragic failure. It will have proved that Torah was made for Galut, not for a free and proud people.

The story is told of a man who sued a railroad, because his car was crushed by an oncoming train and the flagman, whose job it was to warn away motorists, had failed to do so. The flagman himself, however, testified that he waved the lantern at the crossing, and the railroad was, on the basis of his testimony, acquitted. After the trial, the railroad's attorney asked the flagman why he was so nervous and jittery during his testimony, since everything appeared so clear and obviously in favor of the company. He replied, "because I was afraid they were going to ask me if the lantern was lit!"

Through UJA and Bonds for Israel, through the noble sacrifices of countless pioneers and young soldiers, we have forged in our day a great lantern: the State of Israel. It has all the requisite trappings of a modern state. Now let it not be said that we have made ourselves a lantern and have forgotten to kindle it. A dark lantern is as bad as none at all.

An unlit Menorah is not sufficient. If the light is missing, if there is no ruah, if there is no Torah -- then we are in des<sup>a</sup>prate trouble.

Today we call upon all members and friends of the Center Family to respond generously to this appeal to kindle the lights of Israel, to support its eminent Yeshivot. By doing so you will be giving the whole experiment of rebuilding Israel both meaning and dignity.

If we want God to answer our prayers for ore hadash al Tzion ta'ir, "make a new light shine upon Zion," then we must first make it possible for the old light of Torah to shine forth from Zion: ki mi-Tzion tetzei Torah u-devar ha-Shem mi-yerushalayim, "for from Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Akhsenai she'ein madlikin alav be'veto tzarikh la-tet perutah le'Baal ha-Bayit le'hishtatef imo be'shemen shel ner Hanukkah. The Baal ha-Bayit of the world waits for us to join Him in a grand and historic partnership of keeping alive the ner Hanukkah, the light of Torah, as represented by the great Israeli Yeshivot. Let us join Him without hesitation, so that light and happiness be our lot and that of our children forever after.