

- I - The central idea of the reading from the Torah this morning is one which is of crucial importance in both the history & theology of our religion. It is the mitzvah - the covenant, or contract - which God made with Israel. It is by means of that mitzvah that the relationship between God & Israel was legalized, a contract whereby we are bound to observe the Torah and God is bound to make us prosper, with the added provision that if we should fail to live up to our obligations, God - in - is released from his.
- II. Now the nature of the mitzvah is, according to our Sages, that of a swear, an oath (shloshin). Our ancestors bound themselves, and their descendants - which means us - to by means of an oath, to the terms of the agreement.
- III. Furthermore, while in general the oath calls for us to observe all the Torah, it is directed primarily vs. Satan. We swore to believe in God, & not serve any idol.
- IV. So that essentially what happened in the episode related in today's Sidra, is that Moses made Israel give its word, by oath, that they would refrain from serving strange gods. Moses, acting under command of God, exacted a swear to refrain from Satan.
- V. That would seem simple enough. But there is a logical difficulty here that makes it difficult for us to understand what motivated Moses to this action; we fail to understand his psychology & his logic. And this logical criticism is leveled by the Tosafists, those the authors of that profound

commentary on the Talmud which took hundreds of years to compose & was first begun by the grandfather of Nachi. They ask (1165 to 1172) as follows: If Moses was afraid that some day his people would degenerate to the point where they would actually commit the worst sin known to man, the most crime conceivable, that of idolatry, how could he prevent it by an oath? Since Violating an oath is indeed wrong, but if a man will stop to idolatry, the worst of all sins, he surely will feel no compunctions about breaking his word, something which is wrong, but insignificant compared to idolatry? If Moses afraid they would serve idols, surely he should have suspected they would violate their ~~oath~~. Making his people swear, therefore, that they would not serve idols is an ineffective as well as unnecessary step. That is the question, the criticism, of the Tosafists, & one which may mention no solution.

- VI. And yet, despite the logical consistency of the Tosafists, despite their accurate analysis, history & the experience of our own times proves that Moses was right & the Tosafists were in error. The facts of irreducible & indisputable facts of our day prove that life is not logical, & that men have twisted & distorted & war-handed values, so that what is of lesser importance become paramount & what is of greater imp. becomes secondary. Moses was certainly right when he ventured that some day men would hold ~~oath~~ more important than ~~idolatry~~, when they would take the Torah's scale of values & turn it upside down.
- VII. Such, indeed, are our times. We have experienced a change in emphasis, a transvaluation of values, we have come to the wrong stress, the erroneous evaluation & the lopsided perspective.

X - But why blame our cities, why not take a deep, long look at ourselves & see how we have fared in keeping our proper perspective, if we have put <sup>during</sup> first things first. I fear we do not emerge any better or any clearer. The next several weeks we shall have 2 Yirkor services. Please observe, it you will, how many remain after the Yirkor for the messiah. Yirkor is important, certainly. But it cannot be compared to <sup>for</sup> Tora which is sanctified prayer. The substitute for sacrifice, sanctified by law & tradition, a holy obligation of man, a prayer which includes Shem & the blessing of the Kohanim. Yet so many Jew Jews are anxious to prove their rights & the Tosafists wrong. They reverse & invert Jewish values. They prefer sentiment to truth, emotion to tradition, custom to law. We pride ourselves, those who do, in our good hearts & in our honesty & integrity, yet we snivel & kneel & bow to way stamp god. The modern world offers, first & foremost to the ~~idolatrous~~ idolatry man himself to the unholy religion from day which tells us that every thing must serve man, his needs & his purposes, - everything - religion, Torah; even god was, so to speak, made to serve us. We keep <sup>1018</sup> - but we bow to the <sup>55</sup>.

XI  
Such examples could, of course, be multiplied a hundred-fold. A colleague of mine tells me that not long ago gave brilliant, profound sermons & that in announcements - <sup>very</sup> before Flag Day cited congregants to display flags. After that, walked behind two worshippers, one beast: "Brilliant sermon today". Two: "oh yes - real important message, sir! Brilliant sermon today". Is it that true? See us in so many cases? at the <sup>11:15 P.M.</sup> I see tens of people who would never think of coming to shul on Shabbat. Hundreds who violate Shabbat & <sup>1018</sup> & every great & sacred Jewish value with religiously & devoutly & most strongly insist on eating Hamantaschen Purim & latkes on Shabbat & honey on <sup>55</sup>. Those too are important - but how can they compare with the great & sacred institutions of Torah? alas, Moses was right & the Rabbis not.

8/23/1955

viii Thus, for instance, the peaceful & constructive use of atomic energy, recognised though it is, is run a poor second to its destructive exploitation. The common yearnings of man all over the place are mentioned, but action rests on the assumption that his instincts of aggression & fear are more important - ~~the historian~~ This lopsidedness of values finds quite but excellent expression in the pose the situation in France where side-by-side there stand a grand, opulent tomb for Napoleon & a comparatively insignificant monument to Louis Pasteur, one of the greatest benefactors of mankind.

IX - English  
or take attitude towards Jew. The biased historian Toyubee compares the situation of 100,000 Arab refugees to the holocaust which wiped out 1/3 of the Jewish people. To the mind of this insensitive, heartless historian, they are exactly equivalent. No one maintains that it is tragic for 100,000 people to live in poverty & squalor on a narrow strip of land. But, very q-d, how blind & how narrow does one have to be to compare that to cruel, barbaric, premeditated & cold-blooded ~~butchery~~ murder of 60 times that number! Moses was, unfortunately right. Our world has lost its capacity to evaluate things properly. Our thinking is topsy-turvy. Our understanding is null, our logic is non-existent & our cons. <sup>a</sup>study dead when a man of Toyubee's repute can <sup>say</sup> dare to say publicly that the Zionists of Israel have sinned as wilfully & cruelly & as inhumanly as the Nazis!! Call him an intelligent anti-Semite if you will. But what about the thousands of his readers who naively & gullibly swallow this unmitigated unconstructed nonsense in one gulp?! Yes, Moses was right. We have allowed the serious to shrink to nothingness, & the secondary we have hallowed & sanctified.

123, 1955

XII. I was recently told by a practicals who gained entrance into a hardware store & decided to give expression to his distaste over the cynical. And so he did one thing - merely switched the price tags of <sup>Hanukkah</sup> display. So that customers who came to the store were shocked & amazed to observe that lawn mowers were 2 for 59, nails \$25 each and a gallon of paint cost 14. That is what has happened to us. We have switched the price tags on God's valuables. We have cheapened the dear, & have raised the price of the insignificant.

XIII. And in Moses' recognition of man's perverse nature, lies the solution. If they value the world more than the prohibition vs. sin, then use the former to sanctify the latter - make them swear not to bend the knee to an idol. Such must be our approach to those who have lost the perspective of Torah. Give them *Yizkor*, maybe they will stay for *Shabbat*. Let them wave a flag, perhaps they will rise to inspiration. Let them participate in a suyam, perhaps they will make a Seder. From the Hamantashen they will grow to the megillah; from the latkes to *Shabbat*; from the honey to sincere penitence, & *Shabbat*; from a midnight snack to <sup>100%</sup>

XIV. Yes, this a Torah-sanctified procedure. It is a method approved & used by Moses himself. However, that is only <sup>a last resort</sup> for those who are distant from Torah, more to whom the perspectives & values of Judaism are strange. For those of us who are <sup>100%</sup> for those who do come to mind and who do understand the values from faith, the approach must be different. We need no *Shabbat* to keep us from <sup>50%</sup> we shall, of course, keep with vigilance & honor - & without underemphasis all aspects of our Tradition, minus the Mayim. Without destroying on scale of values, we shall

include them within the framework of our serious, totally self-dedication to Torah. We will see them [in them] in the broad, clear & propitious view.] M.H.

XVI. We shall learn & learn well the law (ורית) from Talmud that ברכות פון ר' יונה בר גיון - bless the important & include the secondary - the law that when has before him two foods which require different blessings, & one is of more importance than the other, first he must recite the blessing over the זעיר, & that will cover the זוט as well.

XVII. Loyal to the זעיר - the important values - and mindful of the זוט, the lesser values, we shall recapture the זעיר, the blessing of Torah. No greater tribute can be paid to the memory of our teacher Moses than to prove that as far as we are concerned, he was wrong & the Tosafists were right.

1961: another example "first things first" - when war threatened world in 1939 & was uppermost in everyone's mind - League of Nations was debating - the opium trade!