

"LIFE, LIVELIHOOD, AND LIVING"

Shemini Atzeret marks the end of the period of judgment. Be'rosh hashanah yekatevun, u-ve'yom tzom kippur yehatemun -- on Rosh Hashanah, God's decree is inscribed in the Book of Judgment, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. But, according to our tradition, there is yet one more period for final appeal, that from Yom Kippur to Hoshanah Rabbah, known as the Yom ha-hotem ha-gadol, the day of the great or final seal. All those cases which remain doubtful on Yom Kippur, those people whose repentance is still in question, have yet these extra few days until Hoshanah Rabbah, which we celebrated yesterday, to mend their ways and to determine the course of the year for themselves. Thus, Shemini Atzeret is the end of this complex period of introspection and judgment during which the question of life is determined: mi yihyeh u-mi yamut, "who shall live and who (Heaven forbid) shall die."

And yet, surprisingly, the Sages did not consider the rest of the year judgment-free. They did not restrict the activity of divine judgment only to this High Holiday season. The Talmud (R.H.16a) records two opinions. R. Yossi maintains that Adam nidon be'khol yom, man is judged every single day. R. Nathan goes even further: Adam nidon be'khol shaah, man is judged every hour.

But if man is judged every hour, why every day? and if every day, why every year?

A most interesting answer is to be found in the Jerusalem Talmud, which reconciles all opinions by telling us that Adam nidon be'khol yom refers to parnasah, that our judgment every day refers to our livelihood; whereas Adam nidon be'khol shaah refers to akhilah, that we are judged every hour on the fact of our eating.

What does this mean? What is the difference between parnasah and akhilah, between livelihood and eating or living?

It means this. There are three kinds of judgment to which man is subject: on the High Holidays, he is judged for his hayyim, Life -- whether he shall survive or not. Be'khol yom, every day, he is judged on his parnasah, his Livelihood, which means whether he will have available wealth, material goods, the means with which to progress in life. And then, be'khol shaah, every hour, he is judged on his Living, on his ability to use and enjoy the parnasah that God gives him during the course of his hayyim. Life and livelihood are not enough; every single hour one must also live -- in the full sense of the word.

For instance, a man has a lavish banquet spread before him, a table filled with every delicious kind of food. But if he suffers from a stomach ailment, then all the good food in the world is of no use to him because he may not eat it. Or, a child may be born overbrimming with the most marvelous talents. But if he has no parents to guide him, no teacher to elicit them from him, then he abuses them and they atrophy. He has plenty of parnasah, but no akhilah.

Helen Keller, on her 85th birthday, once said that "Worse than blindness is to have eyes and not to see." What she meant, in terms of our text, is that it is a greater tragedy to have parnasah without akhilah than not to have parnasah in the first place.

We are members of the most affluent society in all of history. We have parnasah galore. The great question, the question of the hour, of be'khol shaah, is: what are we doing to do with all this? Are we finally going to learn to be human enough and rational enough to learn the techniques of akhilah?

One of the most precious gifts that God gives us, an entirely free parnasah, is fresh air; but we pollute it beyond the possibility of healthy akhilah or use. He gives us fresh water in our streams and rivers, and we sully them. We in this great metropolis are blessed with all kinds of museums and libraries -- a cultural parnasah beyond the dreams of most human beings. But how many of us practice akhilah, and actually make use of these marvelous facilities?

There are two areas of special importance today where we have been judged favorably on our parnasah, but there is an open question as to whether we will be wise enough to apply akhilah.

The first of these is -- Russian Jewry. The situation today is far from optimistic. Yet this we do know: the USSR is sensitive to world opinion. It does take note of protests that

are issued against it. This means that we have an opportunity to do something. It means that we must not be over-sophisticated and act with hauteur and disdain towards our mere presence at various mass meetings. This is our opportunity, our parnasah. Now we must proceed to prove ourselves worthy of akhilah.

In yesterday's New York Times, we read of a forthcoming book by Arthur Morse in which, having had access to secret State Department files, he points out that the Roosevelt administration and especially the State Department delayed criminally, for months, information on the destruction of European Jewry, so that American Jews and others, and the American government itself, were not able to help rescue more of the unfortunate and tragic six million. Of course, those of us who have been aware of the situation need not have been shocked. Those who read the late R. Weismandel's Yiddish work on his tribulations as a leader of Slovakian Jewry, and those of us who have been involved with the State Department, past and present, know that there is much truth to the charge of anti-Semitism. But now it will be confirmed for those of us who were doubters until now. The complicity and duplicity of the State Department under the Roosevelt administration is of one piece with the criminal silence of the Deputy Pope, and the refusal of the Churchill administration of Britain to spare two or three bombers to destroy the death camps in which there took place the agony of European Jewry. Perhaps this is a good time to remember that we

Jews who have taught the world the abhorrence of idolatry ought not ourselves be guilty of political idolatry. We have a tendency, because of our inclination towards liberal and progressive politics, to view any such phenomenon with an excess of zeal that always redounds to our discredit and our disadvantage. The overwhelming majority of American Jews saw in Franklin Roosevelt the apotheosis of a modern Messiah. We should never have permitted ourselves such a luxury. Now we have confirmation of our later fears that we had overplayed our naivete. Perhaps had we been less overwhelmed we might have protested more, and more effectively.

More recently, some of us have begun to endow the United Nations -- which is at most a political instrument of varying degrees of effectiveness -- with the grace and halo of a Messianic fulfillment. We have imagined that the United Nations is the realization of the great vision of Isaiah -- as if any organization that contains a Federenko can be viewed as an extension of a prophetic dream! We must disabuse ourselves of such mythology in our political lives. The United Nations is a political instrument, no more and no less. We must make use of the creative opportunities it presents to us.

So too must we now realize that we have an opportunity to do something about Russian Jewry. Because of our ingenuousness during the Second World War, we failed when we had a slight opportunity to help European Jewry. We must not fail again with regard

to Russian Jewry. We have the parnasah, we must now proceed to akhilah.

Second, the whole lofty Jewish heritage and the blessing of freedom in which to practice it is one of our greatest instances of parnasah. The question is: akhilah. Will we use or ignore that heritage? Will we take advantage of or abuse that freedom? In the society in which we live today, we can no longer afford to be Jews who are Jews only by giving money to charity or even only by attending services or performing mitzvot. We must know what we do and why we do it. We must become intelligent and understanding Jews in Torah. Otherwise, our children will refuse to simply follow our ways without understanding. To this end, the Jewish Center provides its Adult Jewish Education Program to which all of us are invited.

The story is told by the sainted Chafetz Chayyim about an old lady selling apples on a pushcart. When several young rough-necks came along and overturned her pushcart, she began to cry and wail. When a passerby asked her why she was crying, she responded with the story of the loss of her apples. But instead of crying, he retorted, why don't you too bend down and pick up whatever you can of the apples?

The last hundred or two hundred years, the cart of Jewish fruitfulness has been overturned. Many of the greatest institutions and concepts have been cast about on the ground, and strangers have picked them up. Charity has been taken over by the welfare state, concern for the poor has been refracted through the prism of

Marxism. But there is much that remains. Instead of bewailing what has happened, instead of despairing, let us rather proceed, intelligently and resolutely, to pick up whatever we can, every available mitzvah, every available Jewish institution -- and above all, the most important, that of the study of Torah.

We are hopeful that during this Rosh Hashanah to Shemini Atzeret period, just ended, we have been granted the blessing of life. Let us daily pray that we shall be blessed as well with livelihood. And let us resolve so to live, hour by hour, that our existence will be one of genuine Jewish living.