

"SHOW AND TELL"

One of the offenses for which the Torah, in this morning's Sidra, declares the korbon or sin-offering obligatory is that of shevuat ha-edut, that is, one who is under oath to testify and fails to do so. If a man ed o raah o yada, if he witnessed some significant matter, either seeing or knowing of some facts important to some other individual who asks him to testify, then im lo yagid, if he withholds his testimony and refuses to testify, ve'nasa avono, he shall bear the burden of sin.

To those many amongst us whose first reaction, upon witnessing an accident, is to escape the scene quickly so as not to be bothered by innumerable court appearances, the Torah addresses its reminder that offering up truthful testimony on behalf of another person is not only a legal obligation, but also a religious and ethical one. There are three types, the Talmud tells us (Pesahim 113b), whom God despises; and one of them is: ha-yodeia edut la-havero ve'eino me'id lo, he who withholds testimony needed by another. The truth is destroyed not only by outright falsehood, but also by failing to report the true facts.

In a larger sense, the sin of im lo yagid refers not only to a trial currently in session in some beth din or court-room, but to keeping your peace and remaining silent in the face of obvious injustice. To withhold edut or testimony means to suppress your righteous indignation when by all standards of decency it should be expressed and expressed vigorously. For even if there is no human court willing to hear the facts and correct an unjust situation, there is a Heavenly Judge before whom we are required to testify. He, therefore, who suppresses the truth and chooses silence in the presence of evil, shows his contempt for God, Who is "the King Who loves righteousness and justice." To a generation which lived through the Hitler era, and saw millions of Germans remain submissively silent while six million Jews were butchered, we need not stress the teaching of today's Sidra that im lo yagid, if one fails

to cry out and bear witness, then ve'nasa avono, he bears guilt and sin.

Need we look far for sufficiently compelling examples against which simple decency requires us to declare our protest? There is the ^{very} perennial problem of man's cruelty to man -- and on scales both large and small. In all these cases, ^o im lo yagid, if we fail to testify to our deeply held conviction that man is created in the image of G-d and hence sacred, we share in the guilt.

For instance: in the past year there were two cases, one of them only this past week, in which a prize-fighter was pummeled to death in front of large audiences who paid handsome prices to be permitted to ^{be} ~~act as~~ spectators to this act of athletic homicide. Is it not about time that our country civilized itself and outlawed this public barbarism? Is it not stretching the point, to say the least, when the Governor of this state defends this "sport" by calling it a "manly art?" Is it not a source of deep embarrassment to our country that the prize-fighter who dealt the death blow came to this country from Cuba --- because in that country, ruled by tyrants and infested by Communists, boxing is outlawed?

Or, more important: the Israeli government brought to the attention of the world this week the shocking news of West Germany/ Scientists working in Cairo ^{developing} in "un-conventional" weapons, including nuclear missiles. Dare the world keep silent and refrain from testifying ^{to} the sordid ⁱ story of what German scientists once did to the Jewish people? The West German government recently showed (in the Der Spiegel ^e case) that it can act decisively where its interests are concerned. It must do no less now. Im lo yagid -- if the Western countries, ours included, suppress their protests, then ve'nasa avono, they shall compound the guilt of two decades ago.

Most especially does this principle of im lo hagid apply to the Jew. Our very reason for being as Jews is to testify to the glory of the Creator. Our essential function as the people of Torah is to bear witness to the truth of Torah in word and deed. In the words of Isaiah at the beginning of today's Haftorah, am zu yatzarti li, tehilati yesaperu, I have created for Myself this people so that they

might relate my praises; or with even greater cogency, the famous words later on in the same Haftorah: v'atem edai, "you are My witnesses." That means that every Jew must ever be self-conscious; he must realize that he represents Torah, that everything he does and says is an edut, a testimony offered up on behalf of God and Torah. If the Jew acts shamefully --- he disgraces his faith. If he acts meritoriously --- he brings credit upon Torah and its Giver. Im lo yagid --- the Jew who, no matter how honorable his intentions, does not act with the dignity and respectability of a ben Torah, who fails to bear witness to the glory of Torah, ve'nasa avono, bears the guilt of having failed in his most important mission in life. To the Jew, all of life must be --- to use the name of the schoolchildren's game --- "Show and Tell", an opportunity to show by example and tell by words that Torah civilizes man and raises him to unprecedented heights of nobility.

Parents of young children, those who have the opportunity of seeing most directly the effect and influence of one generation upon another, know well the secret of edut. Children are not nearly as impressed by expression as they are by example; they emulate rather than obey. Only if a parent bears living testimony to his convictions will it be meaningful to a child. That is why it is of no avail to send a child to shul or school; you must bring him. Otherwise, the child may go through Talmud Torah or Yeshivah -- but the Talmud Torah or Yeshivah will not go through him. Im lo yagid -- if parents do not, in practice, live the kind of lives they want their children to lead, then ve'nasa avono, the children bear the burden of their parents' guilt.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch has maintained that the word ed, "witness," is related to the word ode, "yet" or "still." To testify means to continue, to keep alive, to make permanent. To be the edim for God means to keep alive faith in Him, to make the Torah ethic permanent, to continue the Jewish tradition into the future.

It is for this reason that we Orthodox Jews in particular ought to be so very concerned not only by the impression we make upon outsiders, but also by how we appear to our fellow Jews who have become estranged from our sacred tradition.

We have labored long and hard and diligently to secure an image of Orthodox Judaism which does not do violence to Western standards of culture and modernity. But at times the image becomes frayed, and another, less attractive identity is revealed. All too often of late we have been careless and coarse. Sometimes we have made it appear that we are barely emerging from the cocoon of medievalism. If we are to be witnesses to Torah, then Orthodox Jews must have a more impressive means of communicating with the non-observant segments of our people. Saadia pointed out a thousand years ago that the best way to make a heretic, an apikores, is to present an argument for Judaism that is ludicrous and unbecoming. Orthodoxy cannot afford to have sloppy newspapers, second-rate schools, noisy synagogues, or unesthetic and repelling services. When you testify for God and for Torah, every word must be counted --- and polished!

It is highly significant, in this connection, that the Torah groups two other laws together with the one of im lo yagid as requiring one type of sacrifice for atonement. The other two, in addition to the sin of withholding testimony, are: tumat ha-mikdash ve'kadashav, that of defiling the Sanctuary or other holy objects when we are in a state of impurity as a result of contact with a dead body; and shevuat bituy, the violation of an oath. What is the relation between these three?

There is, I believe, an inner connection that is of tremendous significance. The person who violates im lo yagid, who suppresses the truth, especially one who fails to proclaim by example and expression the greatness of Torah and the Torah life, is, as it were, acting as if all he believed in and all he represents were -- a corpse; a dead body of uninspired doctrines, irrelevant laws, and meaningless observances. The committed Jew who, by acting cheaply or meanly, withholds testimony to the holiness of Torah, acts as if Torah were a dead letter in so far as it has no influence on character and conduct. By concealing this testimony he has introduced an element of tumah, of deadly impurity into the community. Furthermore, he has also violated his shevuah; for every Jew, by virtue of his being born Jewish, is nishba v'omed or under prior oath to represent God, to stand for the Torah He gave at Sinai. We were commissioned to be a segulah, a treasure of God,

by being a manlekhet kohanim, a kingdom of priests, and that means, according to Seferno, that we must directly and indirectly teach the entire world to call upon God and be faithful unto Him. Any Jew, therefore, who acts disgracefully, unethically, or irreligiously, misrepresents his mission, and violates his sacred oath.

It is for this reason that the Halakhah was concerned not only with inner realities but also with outer appearances. A breakdown in our function as edim means the introduction of tumah and the violation of shevuah. It is for this reason, too, that the Halakhah establishes a special and more taxing code of behavior upon the talmid hakham or scholar --- and, we may add, what is true for the scholar amongst laymen is equally true for the observant or Orthodox Jew amongst the non-observant. That is why a Jew strongly identified with Torah must not accumulate bills but pay them at once; that he must not associate with unworthy people; that he must not be loud and abusive; that he must be respectful and courteous; that he must be scrupulously fair and ethical in his business; that he must be beloved and respected by his fellow men. When a Jew, especially a Torah Jew, or any Jew connected with a synagogue and especially an Orthodox synagogue, acts in conformity with this kind of code, he bears witness to the loftiness of Torah, to its divine origin; he acts as if Torah were a living reality, not a corpse which emanates tumah; and he keeps the millennial oath, administered at Sinai, by which he represents his God to the world. No wonder that Maimonides, in codifying the special laws of which we have mentioned several examples, places them in his Hilkhos Yesodei ha-Torah, the "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah" --- for indeed these are fundamental to the whole outlook of Torah!

Perhaps all that we have been saying is most succinctly summarized in two letters in the Torah. In the words Shema Yisrael, Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, ha-Shem ehad, the Lord is One, the ayin of shema and the dalet of ehad are written, in the Torah, larger than usual. These two letters spell ed - a witness. For indeed, just as im lo yagid ve'nasa avono, suppressing this testimony on behalf

of Torah is sinful, so if we are ed and do testify to Him by our lives --
that is the greatest tribute to the One God, Lord of Israel, and Creator of
Heaven and Earth.