

May 9, 1962
"Diamond Club"

ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY -

U.J.A. APPEAL

The occasion of the birthday of the State of Israel is one of great Simchah for Jews throughout the world. We recall, at this time, the birth agonies of the state, the anxieties as we counted votes in the United Nations, the agitation and the worry as Israel encountered the armies of seven Arab countries, and also the indescribable thrills we experienced when it emerged victorious and forged a state not only out of dreams and prayers, but blood and steel, as well. We remember all these vicissitudes of the state, and the goodness shown to it by the Almighty in miracles both apparent and hidden, from the moment of its birth through the Sinai war and until this very day.

Yet Simchah means more than just happiness or joy for Jews. Our tradition has made of Simchah a creative spiritual act. Maimonides taught, in the Laws of Festivals, that אין שמחה בלי תורה, ואין תורה בלי שמחה
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[אין שמחה בלי תורה, ואין תורה בלי שמחה] - Simchah does not mean vain merry-making of hollow party-going but rather that kind of joy which leads to an understanding of Providence, an appreciation of the presence of G-d in history. True Simchah must lead us to recognize our duties to our fate, and challenge us to our rendezvous with destiny.

And therefore at this time we must ask ourselves: do we Jews in the United States practice real Simchah? Is our celebration only empty and trivial gaiety, or does it participate in this higher and nobler joy?

I believe that too often too many of us are guilty, with regard to the State of Israel, of a historical sin. One of the words for "sin" in Hebrew is Avera. The origin of the word is Avor, which means: to pass by or pass over.

One of the great Averot that many of us American Jews are guilty of is that we have allowed history to pass^u over us and we have remained largely oblivious to and unaffected by it. Compared to the ages of most nations, the State of Israel, though ^ufourteen years old, is but an infant. It was born only yesterday. Our times are extraordinary; history is being made before our very eyes. Miracles abound. Yet so many of us act as if we were still living in the 1920's or early 1930's, as if life were "normal," as if the great tragedies and triumphs of our era never occurred. This is true Averah - to let the tides of Jewish history pass over us and remain unconcerned, unaffected, unchanged, untransformed. I believe that there are three categories of those who are guilty of this Averah. And if we turn to the "Ethics of the Fathers," the Pirke Avot which we shall read this week (Chapter No. 3), we will find the cure and the answer to those three classes of people who are guilty of insufficient awareness of what is hap^pening in our times.

Akavia b. Mehallalel taught: הנהניא אבא מיהלל

אמר ליה אבא מיהלל
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If you want to avoid Averah, sin, consider three things: know where you came from, know where you are going, and know before whom you must some day give an accounting. Where do you come from? - the lowly Seminal drop. Where are you going? - to the place of dust, worms, and maggots. And before whom must you give an accounting? - before the **King** of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed Be He.

The first category of Jew is one who feels himself distant from the State of Israel and those institutions which support it, because he has complaints about the religious character of the state. He is dissatisfied with the spiritual complexion of the State of Israel.

Let me tell such people that they are not alone. I too am most unhappy about certain things. I too think that much remains to be desired in the religious structure and life of the Holy Land. But let me remind you that every human institution, agency, or community is of necessity imperfect. Messiah is not here yet. I do not say that we must surrender our critical functions - that would be most unintelligent. Criticism, yes. But abandonment, never. You may find fault with your wife or your husband, but a mature person does not divorce his spouse merely because he or she is not perfect. You may find some defects in the character of your children, but if they are not 100% perfect you do not throw them out into the street. A tiny flaw in a diamond is no reason to throw it into the refuse can.

What then? The answer is: perspective. If you are unhappy with religious conditions in the State of Israel, then Akavia b. Mehallalel sharply reminds you:

Asce 111(N 83) - remember where you came from! None of us came here with the Mayflower. All of us come from Europe. And remember what Europe was like. Do not fall prey to the danger of over-romanticizing the "old home." Yes^S, there was sweetness and charm and holiness in many of the old communities of Europe. But life was also bitter. The government under which we lived regarded us as expendable. We lived in lands populated by Black Shirts and Green Shirts, by Iron Guards and Fascists, by Nazis and Communists. We were at the mercy of every petty politician who had a sadistic streak in him, and when a Jesuit Priest so wished he would inflame his flock on a Sunday, and a p^orogram would follow. Remember where you came from - it was this kind of life and this kind of community, lowlier than the fetid seminal drop. Can this be compared to the Jewish State of Israel?

With all our complaints about Israel, no one has ever coerced a Jew to violate his religious principles in that state. No one has ever beaten a Jew or made a ~~pogrom~~ or uttered an anti-Semitic remark in the State of Israel. With all the faults of the state, and with all the glory that we attribute in retrospect to the communities which we left in Europe, I maintain that Kiryat Tzanz is still holier and greater than Tzanz. I maintain that while Vilna and Lemberg and Pressburg were laden with Jewish sentiment and history, they cannot be compared to the cities of Modern Israel. For while the former were arim v'imahot be'Yisrael, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv - and even Haifa! - they are Yisrael itself.

"Remember where you came from," that accursed continent of blood, and compare to it the State of Israel and you will agree: Thank G-d for His goodness in giving us this state. Most of us left the hell of Europe only after the greatest difficulty in obtaining visas. No Jew needs a visa to enter the Holy Land today!

So that for those who are critical of Israel, *Asa / 11/11/11 83* will urge them to associate with the great and holy experiment that is Israel today and support it through the U.J.A..

The second group of those who commit the historical Averah of ignoring Israel, are those Jews who want to be 100% Americans - even more **American** than John Kennedy. They wish silently that Israel would quietly disappear. Every time they see the name of Israel on the front page of the New York Times they experience "butterflies" in their stomachs. They are frightened Jews. If Israel attacks or counter-attacks or if the Israeli delegate makes a speech in the United Nations, they flitter and they flutter and they are apprehensive unto death. What will their gentile friends say or think? The State of Israel reinforces their feeling

of Jewishness, and that is precisely what they wish to avoid. The state is a burden upon them, and they want to forget it as quickly as they can.

To such Jews, our Rabbis said ^{זכור ארצך} ~~remember~~ "remember where you are going." The Jew who takes this attitude is plunging headlong into oblivion. He is committing spiritual suicide for himself and his children. Even more, in the American society in which we live, one must identify himself not only as an American but as a member of a certain religion. For such Jews who are ashamed of and annoyed by the State of Israel, they come to America without a religious tradition, without a heritage, and they therefore are not real Americans!

To such people Akavia b. Mehallalel brings the sharp challenge: you and your children may want to forget that you are Jews, but the gentile world will never let you forget! All of Europe is one great "place of dust, worms, and maggots" holding the remnants of six-million Jews - no, the world will not let you forget where to go if you wish to abandon Jewishness and the State of Israel.

The Yiddish poet Tuvim once observed that, regretfully, we Jews are united not only by the blood that ~~courses~~ ^{courses} in our veins, but also by the blood that is spilt from our veins. Every Jew that loses his life because of his Jewishness; every Jewish child who goes hungry; every Jewish immigrant family in Israel or France or elsewhere that must live in impoverished conditions and in an unsatisfactory residence - diminishes part of us, must hurt part of us, must cause our sensitivity to become inflamed and our compassion, mercy, and feelings of empathy to become aroused.

It is only by a quirk of history that we are who and where we are, and not Algerian Jews so cruelly thrust between ^a fanatical Moslems on one hand and the Fascist O.A.S. on the other; that we are here and not in Morocco; that we are here and not Romanian Jews who - though this must not be announced in the press or on radio or on

television - are bought from the Romanian Communist Government like so many head of cattle - bought, incidentally, by the U.J.A..

So that if we remember *התורה והמצוה*, we will realize that the State of Israel is for Jews throughout the world a national insurance policy; and the pledge we make for the U.J.A. - that is our premium. And the bigger the premium, the better the policy.

The last class of Jews are those who have no feeling of alienation because of too much religion or too little religion. They are simply good Jews who are ~~simply~~ too involved in their own business and in their own work to pay too much attention to Israel or the U.J.A.. We are so involved in our own din and cheshbon, in trading and buying and selling, in commissions and discounts, in our business lives and family lives and social lives - that we forget that there is another kind of din and cheshbon for which we are responsible. We must remember, the Rabbis remind us, for whom we are atid to give this accounting, the future reckoning that every man must make before the Almighty.

The great Gaon of Vilna remarked that every act that a man does is regarded as both din and cheshbon. The act in itself - whether good or evil, right or wrong - is din: it is judged in and of itself. But, in addition, there is the element of cheshbon, the accounting. For every act has consequences that reach far into the future. What a man does effects not only himself, but his children, his family, his friends, his community, and therefore posterity.

My dear friends, the same holds true for us. Whether we give little or much to U.J.A. today is din. But - it is followed by a cheshbon, by a reckoning that may have far-reaching consequences that may either be disastrous or marvelous. If, through our contribution, an immigrant family can live under better conditions in Israel, then, as a possible consequence, that will encourage other Jews in uncertain countries to come to Israel. If not - we will discourage them, and

that might be tantamount to abandoning their lives when the doors suddenly close! Many Jews who are today in Morocco and Algeria had the opportunity to immigrate to Israel, but they did not do so because the Moroccan and Algerian Jews who came before them were forced to live in reprehensible living conditions. Therefore, they stayed where they were. Only G-d knows if we now shall be able to save them.

That is why this year the U.J.A. is announcing its "Opportunity Fund," for this may be the last year that we have an opportunity to save Jews in many countries, for who knows but that the doors may be closed next year in this time. It is therefore absolutely urgent that you cooperate with the ninety-five million dollar drive which, we hope, will enable another one-hundred thousand immigrants to come into Israel this year.

Let us not give our support to U.J.A. and to Israel because of an occasional crisis. With us, in the epoch in which we live, crisis is constant. We are obligated to keep a regular account in the business of saving Jews.

Remember that our burden is not as great as that of others. The immigrants who come to Israel are no more closely related to Israeli Jews than to American Jews. And the Israeli Jews, in addition to risking their lives on the battlefield and on the borders, contribute to the support of the immigrants in much greater measure than we, no matter how much we give to U.J.A.. For example: a typical American family of a husband, a wife, and two children earning \$10,000 a year pays an income tax of fourteen percent. The tax paid by the equivalent Israeli family is - forty percent! That extra amount is for the purposes -- security, immigration, development -- for which we Americans contribute to U.J.A.

Consider these three things my friends, and together we shall avoid the horrendous and unforgivable averah of remaining oblivious to the State of Israel.

I will close with this story. In a certain community, the Board of Directors of the Synagogue wanted to honor one of its cherished members who had contributed much to the welfare of his colleagues. They therefore decided to surprise him by building a home for him. They did not announce the name of the recipient, but engaged a builder, who was well known in the community, and gave him a certain amount of money with which to build a house. The builder, having already received his money, decided to skimp here and there: inferior plumbing, weak foundations, cheap lumber, etc.. When the day of the great testimonial and gift arrived, all the people of the community gathered together. The president then rose, announced that the Board had decided to present a wonderful gift to a wonderful man who will be completely surprised by the fact that he was chosen to receive this tribute. Whereupon he picked up the keys and turned to the man who had won the award - the builder of the building himself!

My friends, when we contribute to the U.J.A. we are building our own home, for the State of Israel is a national home of the Jewish people. Contribute to the best of your ability, build that home as well as you can, for you, for your children, and Jews in the great future will live there. Skimp on it, and you destroy that future. Build well, give generously, and you will be securing the future of all our people.