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AN UN-ANNIVERSARY PRESENT

The calendar of the Jew, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch was fond of saying, is his catechism. Each holiday has its special significance and symbolizes some fundamental precept or concept of Judaism.

That statement is not only correct but quite important. It is a most valuable insight.

Yet, every great idea has ^{its} concomitant risks. The trouble with this system of regular reminders, this annual rhythm of spiritual and historical values, is that we focus only on those special days on which we celebrate specific ideas or events, and then tend conveniently to forget them the rest of the year. The festivals thus are in danger of becoming counter-productive: instead of changing us spiritually one day a year so that we may remember and observe until the year following, it lets us feel that we have discharged our moral obligations with one day, or a few days, of formal pieties and then may ignore it the rest of the time.

(This holds true for secular celebrations as well. I have an uneasy feeling that such institutions as Mother's Day and Father's Day are good for the children - it gives them

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a clear conscience; splendid for the merchants - no elaboration needed; and not necessarily good for Mother or Father! A visit or flowers or gift one day a year is a device for neglect at all other times!)

I am reminded of Lewis Carrol's Alive in Wonderland, in which Alice has a conversation with Humpty Dumpty. The latter, the famous egg, tells Alice that he doesn't like birthday gifts, because they come only once a year. He prefers un-birthday gifts, because he celebrates un-birthdays 364 days out of the 365...

So it is with our sacred Jewish calendar. Every festival is an "anniversary present" to us from God, ^{FROM} ~~for~~ the Torah. Purim is one kind of anniversary, Passover another, and so on. But if we want the Torah's teachings to be effective, and the calendar indeed to be our catechism, we must retain the lessons throughout the year -- as kinds of "un-anniversary" presents.

We are about to celebrate Shavuot, the anniversary of the Revelation at Sinai, the Giving of the Torah. Elsewhere in this Bulletin we describe the all-night Torah "teach-in" we

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are again planning for the first night of Shavuot. It is a great and sacred anniversary.

However, the most valuable observance of zeman mattan toratenu is the recognition that Torah is timeless; that it must be studied yomam va-lailah, day and night, all year long; that Torah is the finest "un-anniversary present" any people would hope for!

A Happy Un-Anniversary to all!

NORMAN LAMM