

November 1970  
Ten Nov '72

WEEKEND  
CARMEL COLLEGE SEMINAR.

It was an unexpected surprise to be invited to join the J.F.S. seminar at Carmel College. Nearing the end of my second term at L.S.E. it came as a welcome and pleasant break from my legal studies to spend Shabbat in the company of a friendly and intelligent group of sixth formers. The food was excellent, the accommodation good, the singing and davening was inspiring. Above all, the atmosphere that ~~surrounded~~ the seminar was a most enjoyable experience that I shall always remember. The initial barriers between staff and students soon disappeared and I found a host of new friends.

The idea of the seminar was that those participating should be presented with food for thought about traditional Jewish values. Simultaneously it was hoped that by experiencing what a Shabbat is like, with its seemingly demanding discipline, it can be both physically and spiritually satisfying. The tenor of the Shiurim, lectures and informal discussions that went on continually between periods of relaxation, was not that of either sermons on the dogmas of Judaism or of condescending platitudes that, alas, characterise some orthodox thinking. There was give and take, a mutual exchange of ideas, a genuine dialogue. No-one was interested in scoring points in argument or debate, but rather a genuine mutual searching to find how ~~the~~ Torah can be relevant to a sensitive thinking Jew or Jewess today. This is the real challenge to orthodoxy today; not the detached problems of the superficial conflict between religion and science. Whether Torah is addressing man in his totality and is cognisant of man's many needs: physical, emotional, intellectual and last but not least the spiritual yearnings and aspirations which flow from the depths of man's very being. If we cannot show Judaism is concerned with all of man, then we have failed terribly, because then the greatness of Torah is dwarfed by incompetent presentation.

The students in the discussions touched upon many fundamental issues which stimulated and challenged the staff to articulate and clarify in their own minds exactly what they did believe, and whether there were really grounds for entertaining such views. There was not really sufficient time to explore in depth many of the points raised and I personally hope that I shall have the opportunity of continuing the discussions at some future date. Nevertheless, I feel that the valid question as to the scope and jurisdiction of Torah living was discussed at quite some length. At the end of the weekend I am sure everyone was at least appreciative of the many different facets to this vital topic. Therefore I would like to give some of the conclusions we came to.

The word "Torah" means guidance and instruction. It is a guide to how man who, faced with a seemingly meaningless world, should endeavour to live, let live and help others live. Unlike Eastern religions and some versions of Christianity, it demands an involvement with the physical world - to make it a better place. The Torah also recognises the needs of man's inner life and attempts to satisfy a deep and intimate relationship with Infinite G-D. If one conceives of Mitzvot like learning Torah, donning Tephillin or observing Shabbat or Kashrut as directly connected with the running of society or how to all alleviate the plight of the destitute, then there is an inevitable confusion. Man does not live by bread alone.

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Certain it is that perfecting the condition of the physical world is of the utmost importance. G-D is acutely concerned with the human situation within society as a brief perusal of the tirades of the Prophets will reveal. Life is full of contradictions, paradoxes and tensions.. Any thinking person has conflicts and these can exist between the demands of Man's inner and outer life. If one concentrates on the former, then one leads a stunted ghetto existence. The result of following the latter to an extreme is that one loses all sense of identity with the particular Jewish spiritual heritage. The ideal is the synthesis but this required a maturity to see the wood for the trees on both sides - a perennial problem.

Thus as regards the question of the Torah's message to the world, we must first see what it means to us - in our totalities not just in one aspect of our lives. Once it has become a source of inspiration to us, then it is our duty to go forth into society. By trying to be balanced, integrated and well rounded personalities, we can make our contribution to the betterment of the world in every way. As Chassidic philosophy says so poetically, "To redeem the sparks of holiness that he scattered around the world everywhere."

How Torah can become a source of inspiration is a challenge. Under the guidance of dynamic dedicated teachers like Manny Klein, many more will have the privilege of really appreciating our wonderful heritage whose teachings are the quintessence of a deep and comprehensive philosophy of life.

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