

A-360"THE OLD AND THE NEW"A-360

- I. 1) One of the great problems that Judaism has to face in the modern world, one of the major blocs we have to overcome, is the human desire for change, for novelty and new fashions. In an atmosphere when people strive for the novel and the change needed to produce it, religion is not given a chance, not the merest entree into the human soul. Instead, tradition, or traditional Judaism, is declared to be hopelessly static, unresponsive to the creative urge for something new, and so it is disregarded and scrapped in favor of the newest fad of the day. All Mizvot, observances, customs -- all prayers, studies, readings -- are dismissed as "The Same Old Thing," and ignored.
- 2) Now this horror of "The Same Old Thing" is a very real reaction of the human being. A man does not want to read yesterday's news, tune in yesterday's programs, wear yesterday's style hat. "The Same Old Thing" cannot hold him, therefore, in Religion as well.
- 3) So that this instinctive reaction against "The Same Old Thing" -- a reaction which keeps newspapers and the communications and textile industries in business -- is responsible to a great extent for the spiritual breakdown of modern man. But it goes further than that. The horror of "The Same Old Thing" accounts not only for heresy in Religion, but for deterioration in many another vital aspect of life. We give up old and dear friends -- because we want a new face, not "The Same Old Thing." We lose interest in our professions or in our businesses -- we do not wish to face, every day, "The Same Old Thing." We hear of infidelity in marriage -- our desire for change and novelty and dislike of "The Same Old Thing" leads us into the strange by-ways of immorality. *infidelity*

- II. 1) Well, what does Judaism have to say to this? It will not do merely to condemn it. It is an innate feeling, a deeply rooted part of human psyche. You cannot banish the desire for change and newness merely by denouncing it. Yet you obviously cannot submit to it. What then?
- 2) In order to meet this problem, Torah understands that there is yet another deeply implanted instinct that goes in the opposite direction to the desire for change, and that is: the desire for Permanence. Both of these coexist within each of us: the wish for the new and the wish for the old. G-d in His wisdom has given us the wherewithal to achieve harmony in our lives by balancing off within us the drive for newness and novelty with the desire for the permanent and the unchanging, the familiar and homy. Just because we live in a world that is moving so rapidly, changing so quickly we want some measure of continuity, some feeling of being rooted, some element of permanence and changelessness. So that these are two seemingly antagonistic instincts to be accounted for.
- 3) And what Torah has done for us is ingenious: it has solved both problems, satisfied ^{both} ~~as~~ penchants, in one bold stroke. Torah has given us the rhythm of the Jewish calendar. It has prescribed certain mitzvot for certain times. It has scheduled them to reappear and recur at clearly defined intervals. In this pulsating rhythm of the Jewish year, we find both the old and the new. Pesach may be old -- you may have celebrated it twenty or thirty or fifty or seventy times before. But this year it is brand new. It makes you feel comfortable in its permanence, reminding you of the Seder in father's or grandfather's home many a year ago. But you wait for it anew each year as for something excitingly novel. This particular Pesach is a new one: there is a new

face at the Seder table, a new accretion during the year, a new insight in the meaning of Pesach, a new appreciation of freedom, a new note of encouragement in the universal striving for cherut. The very fact that we observe it every 15th of Nisan satisfies our desire for the permanent and familiar. The very fact that this holiday, in all its unique individuality, has not been observed for twelve months, makes it refreshingly new.

III. 1) I believe that this idea is implicit in a ^{Key} ~~key~~ phrase in the Hagadah which otherwise would be most difficult to understand. Towards the end of the Hagadah, after telling of all the miracles God performed for us, we raise our cups and announce לפניו נשתחו ונזכיר "Therefore ought we thank and praise and exalt God." We conclude on this climactic note: ונחמך לפניו שיר חדש "Let us sing before him a new song." We breathlessly wait for the new song we have just said we will sing. A new melody from Israel? New lyrics by a great Hebrew poet? Brand new verses created for 1960 by some latter-day Yehudah Halevi or Jewish counterpart of Rodgers and Hammerstein? -- Not, not at all. Instead: the old, tried, worn Hallel!! The same Hallel that you and I have been reciting for decades, the same Hallel your fathers and grandfathers, and their fathers and grandfathers before them, back to the days of King David, have been reciting every single year at the Seder table as well as on Festivals and Rosh ^HChodesh!! And yet we introduce Hallel with the grand flourish ונחמך לפניו שיר חדש -- a new song!!

2) So puzzled were some commentators on the Hagadah by this apparent anomaly of announcing a new song and singing an old one, that they suggested that the words Shirah Chadashah were a mistake, perhaps put in by an over-exuberant copyist and ought to be omitted in a correct

* who have the opportunity of working in the way we wish in this blessed land of freedom - '726 - and not 1889/1912 so that we are not amongst the 2 million Jews behind the Iron Curtain who were denied this ¹⁹³³ the right to make their own way or to import & export. Thank God we are spared that misery - & we know that in way soon say '3 1918/1919 with together with them, so that they too may next year eat the bread of affliction instead of experiencing affliction itself. That they may next year prosper the ¹⁹³³ over 11M the blessings of our bitterness, rather than suffer the excruciating et cetera of bitterness itself.

3) And yet the Jewish tradition as such has not accepted these suggestions. It has experienced no perplexity and has refused to be puzzled and confounded by the presentation of the old Hallel as a Shirah Chadashah. For our people throughout the ages have instinctively understood that the rhythm of Torah combines the old and the new; that it allows us to recognize the familiar in the new, and the new in the familiar; that in the old words of the Hallel and the familiar melody in which we chant them, we can indeed find elements which are tantalizingly new: not only the newness of rhythm, ~~but~~, the fact that for a year now these words were not recited in this mood, at this table, and in this manner. But new insights are possible, insights that come with age and wisdom and experience.

מקימי מוסד

מקראות

He will do so! *13 דבר יקרה* -- old words, but what refreshingly new thoughts we can bring to them! *וזה דבר חדש*
היה דבר נשגב "He maketh the barren woman to dwell in her house as a joyful mother of children." Those words are startlingly new not only for the mother who was blessed with a child this year -- but also to the parent who had been disappointed with children and grandchildren, and whose grieved heart was perhaps encouraged. A child showed signs of improvement in school. He changed his attitude from rebellion to friendship. He learned, finally, that

even parents are worth loving -- *הנה פירוש הנה* the mother of such children is happy beyond words. Hallelujah! To those who have not been fortunate enough to experience such "nachas" this year, the old words give new courage -- try harder, think clearer, love stronger -- G-d will help. *הנה פירוש הנה* We need not go through the entire Hallel to prove the point. It is, I believe, clear enough. The old and the new are combined in the rhythm of *Judaism*. Both instincts are satisfied. The ancient Hallel is indeed also a shirah chadashah.

- IV. 1) All of life testifies to this meeting of old and new in rhythm. Nature is the same every year. Springtime is as old as the earth itself. We go through it every year. We know just what it consists of. Yet is anyone ever tired of the first breath of spring? Do we recoil from it, sneering, "Oh, that same old thing again!" Indeed not! The old season is always new! *הנה פירוש הנה* Every day G-d renews the old work of creation. Old and new combined.
- 2) And does not Art follow Nature? Who but a Phillistine, a totally unesthetic and insensitive person, would turn aside from an old master's painting, an old and beautiful symphony, with the words "Oh, I saw that -- or heard that -- once before. Enough!" Indeed, there is much that is new in that which is old.
- 3) Our Torah is an old Torah. Its principles came down to us from Sinai. It is always the same Torah. Yet every year we reread the Joseph story, and no one but an obtuse and unthinking person, an eternal adolescent, would quarrel with its reading by saying "I already heard the end last year." For every year we each have some new aspect, new insight, new feeling. And so in Torah study we strive for chidush -- for new ideas, new interpretations. (And yet we full well realize that

לפי המסורת that, according to tradition, any valid new interpretation is not an invention but a discovery: it was implicit in Torah, what we think of as new was already known to Moses at Sinai.)

4) Prayer may be repetition of same words -- but there is *שינוי* new feelings, new insights; for prayer is not an intellectual exercise when, once learned, there is no need for repetition. It is a spiritual exercise which, like love itself, needs repetition in order to bring out new shades, new nuances, new hues of sacred thought.

5) In fact, take love itself -- married love. If the old and the new will not be combined, if there will be only the horror of "The Same Old Thing" -- there must be infidelity, unhappiness, breakdown of married life. That *is why* ~~only~~ Torah in its sacred wisdom has legislated laws of Taharat ha-Mishpachah. Love must never become stale, prosaic, routine, the "Same Old Thing.". So Torah sanctified the natural biological rhythm of life, it superimposed on it the rhythm of Torah, and gave the old and the permanent the challenge and freshness of the new and the novel. It taught married couples how to sing the old Hallel as a true Shirah Qhadashah, how to find both desires -- for the old and the new -- satisfied in love sanctified by God. For only so -- is love also lovely.

V. 1) Here there is the lesson of the *new song* of the Geulim, the redeemed. We are always to combine the old and the new -- to find new insights in the old, and relate the new to the permanent and unchanging.

2) For, on the one hand, if we abandon all that is old, as if life and and tradition and religion were just newspapers or TV programs made to tickle our fancies and provide us with an endless round of new entertainment; if we denigrate Orthodoxy and try to invent Judaism afresh each generation; if we lose our respect for Masorah and part

only after the latest fads; if we strive only for the new and neglect the old -- why then we are engaging in no more than unworthy sensationalism, then our Shirah Chadashah is not a new song but a cheap ditty.

- 3) And, on the other hand, we must never be satisfied to keep the old without adding to it any of the dynamics of one's own soul, any of the life throbbing in our spirits and pulsating in our hearts. We must never forget to sing the old Hallel as if it were truly a shirah chadashah. If we fail to strive for chudush, for the element of newness -- then we are at the mercy of Boredom -- the horror of that "Same Old Thing" -- that is the death of the spirit.

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- 5) Somewhere I read that Robert Frost once said that not only Sight and Insight are important, but also: Excite ... We must keep the old in Sight; perceive in it the new through Insight; and as a result ^{learn} ~~have~~ -- to Excite our souls, our spirits.

- 6) No wonder Hassidim speak of every Mitzvah, like every human, having its own Neshamah. When you meet a human being, endowed with a soul, with a vital personality -- he is the same person you met yesterday and the day before, ... yet, you always find a new aspect, a new facet. So, with mitzvot, you always can sing the old Hallel in a new key.

- 7) This, then is what the Geulim, the redeemed, teach us this Pesach. The Hallel was sung by the Geulim of Egypt. It will be sung by the Geulim when Messiah redeems us completely. Meanwhile those of us who

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Rabbi Norman Lamm

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have been slaves -- either to ~~slavish and~~ static conception of the old or to the unlettered, rootless pursuit of fashion and sensationalism -- we too, by virtue of this lesson, may regard ourselves as spiritually redeemed. For we have learned the great lesson of the spirit -- the fusion of old and new, old Hallel and new song.

- 8) O Lord, Chadesh yamenu ka'kedem -- "renew our days as of old."

~~germinal idea - from
The Screwtape Letter
by C. S. Lewis
rev. = T.erry!~~