

At the beginning of the New Year and the end of the old one, one special and favorite verse of the Bible comes to mind: *ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד*, "May you be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out." May we be blessed as we leave 5730, and receive the Lord's blessing as we enter 5731.

In this phrase of deceptively simple benevolence, of the mere expression of good wishes, the Rabbis discovered a world of meaning which they expressed in their characteristically symbolic language.

The Jerusalem Talmud tells us that these words refer particularly to coming to and going from the Synagogue:

גדולוין חזון

גמול'יון בחות מדרשיון... גמפקיון נחית לאדרש'יון . May you be blessed when you come into the Synagogue and blessed when you go out of the Synagogue. And the Midrash expands and explains as follows:

אמר הקב"ה אל המלכות עתה נעשה אצל הוי' מלכותו ונעשה אצל הוי' מלכותו. אמר הקב"ה אל המלכות עתה נעשה אצל הוי' מלכותו ונעשה אצל הוי' מלכותו. אמר הקב"ה אל המלכות עתה נעשה אצל הוי' מלכותו ונעשה אצל הוי' מלכותו.

"Said the Holy One: when you go to pray in the Synagogue, do not stand on the outside threshold to pray, but intend to come all the way in, the door within the door. Said the Holy One: if you do that, know that you receive the Divine Presence for you stand in the Synagogue and the Holy One is above you. Furthermore, you will leave the Synagogue laden with blessing."

So then, the phrase "blessed art thou when thou comest in and blessed art thou when thou goest out," means that blessing can be attained only when you decide to break away from the periphery of life, to remove yourself from the margins and attain depth and penetration to the core. This

is the idea the Rabbis tried to teach us: the pursuit of excellence, of profundity, and the banishing of superficiality.

And how relevant that is! For the plague of Jewish life in America today, from masses to leadership, is an uncompromising superficiality. We seem to live on the thresholds of life, don't ever want to enter the door -- let alone the door within the door.

And in the first instance it applies to the Synagogue. I don't only mean the frequency -- three times a year instead of weekly -- but I refer to the quality of our service. Even those of us who pray in the Synagogue every day must not cease to aspire ^{to} ~~for~~ "the door within the door." Our service must not be mere recitation, but "davening" in the full sense; not merely to know the translation but to serve the avodah she-be'lev, the service or sacrifice or work of the heart.

Story of the Baal Shem Tov who wanted to enter a Synagogue which was empty and stopped, telling his students he couldn't enter because it was too crowded. Pressed for an explanation, he said, a proper prayer has wings, it soars up to Heaven, but an improper prayer rolls off the lips and lies dead. He intuitively felt that in this Synagogue people don't pray deeply, that the prayer just touched the periphery of our souls, and therefore they didn't take wing. Hence, it was too crowded for him to enter...

The same is true of the Sabbath. It does not mean simply a day in which you recognize somehow it is different, not even a day in which you only cease to work, but kiddush, havdalah, "the table," culture,

conversation...

The same holds true for Israel -- it demands our depth, not superficiality. It means our relation to Israel must be not only via contributions but by means of a profound personal commitment. It means that the Jew who goes to Israel must not go like a tourist^t seeing the sights, but like a pilgrim with his heart open to its depth, exposed not only to the exotic geography, but to the awesome dimensions of its history.

It is in this connection that I wish to tell you something that I recently heard from a man who is very active in the Jewish community. I confess to some hesitation in telling you the story, which sounds so much frivolous. But if I do tell it, it is not only because it is true, but also because it is relevant.

An American middle-aged couple went to Jerusalem and for the first time saw the Wailing Wall. The woman was especially taken by the scene on Friday evening: the thousands of Jews from all over the world, from various communities, various kinds of native dress and custom and tradition, mingling even with a few non-Jews (as it should be: *בית דין גויי חסידים וקראים וכו' תלמידי חסידים*) and appearing as the living symbol of *קדושת ישראל*. She noticed the Hasidim in their fervent prayer, stopping after the afternoon prayer, turning with their backs to the Wall, looking for the sun to set and then, as a man, returning to welcome the Sabbath in prayer. When the husband came to her afterwards, he noticed that there were tears in her eyes and through those glistening tears she said to him, "Sam, I have had the greatest

experience in my life. Sam, now I know what I want." When her husband inquired as to what that was, she replied, "Sam, I want you to make me a life member in Hadassah."

Now there is nothing wrong with Hadassah. On the contrary, would that every Jewish woman in the world were a member of Hadassah. But what it does indicate is the narrowness of vision, the superficiality of commitment, that allows a historic experience to be expressed in a contribution. It is illustrative of the tendency to remain on the pesah ha-bitzon and not even to be aware of a deles, let alone deles bifnim mi-deles.

All of Jewish life requires that we revise our attitude and reorient our approach from that of superficiality to that of depth. It means that our ^{life}lifestyle must be deeper, our loyalties more profound. It means that our own education must not be neglected and we must realize that we cannot proceed all our lifetimes on the strength of six or eight or only ten years of Jewish education.

We must accept the Shofar not as music, but as a dynamite blast that shakes the soul and makes the heart tremble and creates revolutions within. We must be done with tokenism. We must remember that depth is not one level but an infinity of levels: depth within depth, deles beyond deles. We must remember that if we keep up the threshold posture, we will lose our children who will come to believe that Judaism is all superficiality, all veneer, all externality.

On my way to Israel recently, I had the privilege of travel-

ing together with a dear friend who is a well-known personality in Israel, Col. Mordecai Bar On, popularly known as Morelle, who was the Education Officer of the Israel Defense Forces, and responsible for molding the army into a powerful educational tool. He was reading a book by a middle-aged New Left radical and he commented that this radical maintained that the purpose of his life was liberation, that he wanted to liberate himself from society, from the conventions of manners, even from friends and family, from country and from religion. How strange, said Morelle, that the course of my life has been just in the opposite direction. I try to civilize myself, and take on the responsibility of manners, of civility. I have always tried to remain loyal to friends, taking on the obligations of friendship. I got married and remain loyal to my wife and to my children, limiting my freedom once again. Later in life I came to religion, and have accepted the idea of God, submission to God, and various observances, and hope to take on even more as I go on. All my life has been a succession of giving up certain freedoms in an attempt to reach ^a certain goal. I have ^a my biography ^{that is} as [^] the opposite of his.

How interesting! One man has highly superficial views of liberty and freedom, and his ultimate goal is to become an overgrown, spoiled infant in an adult body; the other man, with a much more profound understanding of liberty, is willing to give up all kinds of conveniences and luxuries and opportunities in order to develop into a moral, responsible, mature human being. One man has remained at the pesah ha-bitzon of life and liberty, and the other has come in delet lifnim delet.

The same must hold true for the Jewish education we give our children...

The same is true for the family, where we must learn to give more attention to our children, because ultimately the happiness of the home counts even more than education in keeping our children within the fold...

I close with a brilliant and incisive comment by R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. The Talmud says:

אם תפתח לי כחוד שני, אפתח לך
כחוד שני, אפתח לך כחוד שני, אפתח לך

If you will open up to me the size of a needle prick, I will open up to you like the great doors of a giant hall... Said the Kotzker: that is true, all God demands of us is the opening the size of the head of a needle -- but, it must be "durch un durch", though and through. It is not sufficient merely to prick the surface of life, but we must go through and through, to the very depth, ^{beyond} both the pesah ha-bitzon to the delet lifnim mi-delet.

Let this message remain with us throughout the year, so that we will be blessed as we leave one year and blessed even more as we leave from the depths of the Synagogue, having encountered God in the depths of our hearts, and proceeding on to a blessed year 5731.