

~~A.I.E.S.E.C. - N.Y.U.~~
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Rabbi Norman Lamm
c/o Jewish Center
131 W 86 St.
New York, N.Y. 10024

33 Wash Sq. W
New York 11, NY
April 20, 1965

Dear Rabbi Lamm,

I have been attending services at the Jewish Center on an irregular basis for many years, however your sermon on the first day of Passover is the first to stimulate me to comment.

I would like to comment at the start that I definitely agree with your theme. There is no question in my mind that prayer to most people today is little more than recitation of what is given to them in the prayer books, and sincere expression of emotion & devotion seems to be lacking. But I think that the powers that supervise the service ~~the~~ must accept a large amount of the responsibility for this situation. I will cite one example to illustrate my point as this has been bothering me for quite a long time.

Immediately following your sermon was the 'Shmona Esrai', one of the most significant parts of our service, although I read Hebrew, I understand very little (I would guess that many others are in the same position), therefore I read that prayer in English as it had more meaning to me. However, although I read relatively fast, and I was reading as quickly as I could, while still retaining some meaning, I found that the majority of the congregation had finished and the Cantor had started the repetition before I had finished. Now if you consider that most of these people were reading a prayer in what is but a second language to them, and yet finished in a matter of minutes, how can it be said that they are doing anything but reciting? How can you call a prayer read from a book, as fast as the reader can, in a foreign language a sincere expression of the thoughts of the person "praying"? I feel it would be consistent with the thoughts expressed in your sermon for you to encourage the congregation to take their time while praying & to read prayers in English if they do not understand Hebrew. Also, there is a point in the Rosh Hashonah service, when the Cantor says a prayer preparing for the 'Shmona Esrai' when

The Congregation is encouraged in the direction of independent meditation. I feel that this should not be limited to one occasion a year. How sincere can you expect a person to be if he is reading the same thing year after year?

You also discussed the A.J.C.'s criticism of the Aid to Education Law, and although I agree with you that the law is needed, good and Constitutional, I feel that ~~your~~ your criticism of the A.J.C. was unwarranted. Haven't we passed the point where we, as Jews, must guard every word we say because we are Jews? You indicated that if the ACLU had taken the same action, it would have been a satisfactory action. The test should be whether something is right, not whether ^{it is} expedient. Did the martyrs in our (Jewish) history always do the expedient thing or were they bound by their consciences? Why should a different standard be applied to the A.J.C.?

Please accept this as one man's opinion, not criticism, as I happen to agree with your conclusions.

Sincerely yours,

Lewis Miskin

P.S. If my name is not familiar to you, I am Mrs Frank Katzy's grandson.