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The portions we read these weeks afford us an intimate glimpse into the society of the ancient Near East -- its manners and its morals, the values it cherished and those it ignored. Even more important, it acquaints us with the lives of the founders of our people, the three Patriarchs who flourished in that society and because of whom we are what we are today.

However, the Torah is not just an attempt to satisfy our curiosity about ancient history, and the Bible should never be considered as merely a kind of literary anthropology. The Torah is a living guide for all ages, and that is why the tradition saw in the narratives about the Patriarchs not just the recording of significant history but also the inter-play of symbols that are relevant to all times, including our own. Hence, the Jewish tradition considered the three Patriarchs as archetypes of some of the most important ideas and principles in human existence. Thus, Abraham was identified with the quality of hessed, that of generosity and love and charitableness. Isaac embodied the principle of pahad, which literally means fear, but is meant to indicate reverence or awe or piety. Jacob, the last of the Patriarchs, symbolizes emet, truth and honesty.

Now, Scripture certainly offers abundant support for this

identification of the Patriarchs with the specific virtues we have mentioned. But does this mean that Abraham, for instance, was exclusively devoted to hessed, and that he was not a man of pahad or emet? Do we not know that Abraham was distinguished by his God-fearing character, and that after the incident of the Akedah, the Lord said to him, "Now I know that you are God-fearing?" Did not, indeed, all the Patriarchs share in all three virtues?

Of course they did. Yet there is good reason why our tradition specifies one virtue for each Patriarch. This was explained by one of the great teachers of Musar, that noble ethical movement within Judaism in 19th century Lithuania. R. Simchah Zissel Ziv of Kelm tells us that each of the Fathers endeavored to emphasize for his contemporaries that one quality which they most lacked, and therefore which they most needed. Each of them exemplified in his own practice that virtue which marked him as different from everybody else, and that very differentness was the greatest lesson for his own generation, no matter how irritating or how annoying. So, Abraham lived in the time of Sodom, that city which became notorious for all times because of its cruelty. In an environment of this kind, Abraham stressed the quality of hessed, love and charity and generosity. Isaac lived among the Phillistines, about whom his father had already said rak ein yirat Elohim ba-makom ha-zeh, "but there is

no fear of God in this place." In a context of impiety, Isaac strived to emphasize particularly the quality of pahad, that of the fear of God, piety. Jacob was burdened with the company of an uncle and father-in-law, Laban, who was known far and wide as a ramai, a thief, a man of deception. Therefore, living in a culture of corruption and dishonesty, Jacob saw it as his mission to exemplify and preach the virtue of emet, truth and integrity. Each of the Fathers served his own time by being different, for only by embracing the burden of differentness and all the loneliness that this entailed, could he serve the larger needs of his fellow men.

From the very beginning of Jewish history, therefore, the Jew has opted for differentness in order to elevate all human beings to the fulfillment of their divine image. Abraham himself was known as Avraham ha-ivri, usually translated as "Abraham the Hebrew." But our tradition has seen in the second half of that title not the mere description, "the Hebrew," but a word derived from the Hebrew ever, which means, "the other side." Thus, Kol ha-olam me'ever zeh, v'Avraham me'ever zeh, Abraham was on one side and the entire world on the other side. Abraham, and his son and grandson after him, were not afraid of their own differentness from their fellow men in order to fulfill the tasks for which they had been brought into the world. And their descendants after them have embraced this same heroic life, so demanding

in the courage to be different and therefore to be alone. We, after all, are descendants, both physically and spiritually, of the fathers of the Talmud known as the Pharisees -- so unjustly maligned by classical Christianity. And the word "Pharisees" means nothing but separatists, those who decided to opt out of the dull uniformity of society in order to clarify and exemplify those qualities they believed were necessary for all mankind to survive. Indeed, Maimonides in the third part of his Guide For The Perplexed teaches us that one of the main functions of all the commandments of the Torah is to distinguish Jewish practice from the pagan cult. We are intended to be different, we must emphasize our differentness, we sanctify this difference in our life and in our way of life. Of course, this insistence upon Jewish differentness has caused us no end of grief. It has irked enemies of our people from Haman to Napoleon, through the leaders of Communist Russia. Yet this has never deterred us. From the very beginning of Jewish history, our Patriarchs preached the principles of our faith despite the perversions popular in their times.

Does this mean that we ought to pull out of society, that we ought to opt out of the world of men and affairs? No, of course not. To be different from the rest of the world does not mean to abandon all of society and mankind. Abraham, while counterposing his teaching of hessed to the cruelty of Sodom, nevertheless was deeply involved with his fellow men. Our tradition teaches us

that he and his wife were great proselytizers, who brought countless individuals to the truth of the belief in one God. Isaac, despite his piety -- or because of it -- was constantly engaged with the Philistines. And Jacob, who confronted Laban's deception with his own truth, lived with Laban for many, many years: im Lavan garti. Of all the Patriarchs we are told that in their travels they would build altars in many cities and va-yikra be-shem ha-Shem, they would proclaim the Name of God. This means that they would teach their fellow men, by whatever technique most available to them, what it is to believe in God.

Thus, we too, who desire to continue the tradition of differentness, have no wish to forget about the rest of mankind because of this differentness. When the Rabbis complained that Torah munahat be'keren zavit, that the Torah lies neglected in some forsaken corner, they did not mean for us to crawl in that corner and turn our backs on the rest of the world. They meant for us to go into that corner, to take the Torah, to bring it into the center of the stage and in the midst of the maelstrom of men's daily affairs in order that all human beings may benefit from its eternal teachings.

Yet, involvement does not imply mimicry, and participation should never be confused with assimilation. It means that in our involvement we must teach hessed where we find cruelty, we must

proclaim pahad where we find irreligion, we must abide by emet where we are everywhere tempted by dishonesty.

Now that is no easy task. It is a great burden to be different from others. People prefer to throw off burdens, they would rather blend into the sameness of their environment. That is why, as the world gets smaller and communications increase and trends in society and intellect are spread immediately to all corners of the world, the task of being an Orthodox Jew becomes increasingly more difficult. Few people can bear the strain of differentness and non-conformity. Furthermore, many of our opponents use the same terms to condemn us: they charge us with conformity to the Jewish tradition, they accuse us of an uncritical attitude because we accept the norms of the past.

Whenever I hear this, I remember the story told to me by novelist Herman Wouk who, as you know, is an observant Jew. About 15 years ago he was going by boat to Europe. Upon entering, he noticed on the passenger list the name of Sholom Ash, the great Yiddish writer who had long ago abandoned Judaism and had flirted with Christianity. After getting settled, he received a note from Ash who said that he wanted to talk with him. Wouk went to Ash's cabin and there spent quite some time in conversation with him. In the course of this discussion, Ash turned to Wouk and said to him, "Herman, I don't understand you. You are a young man -- yet you act like an old fogey. When I was young, my colleagues and I

decided that we were going to be revolutionaries, we were rebels, we were not going to be strangled by the dead hand of a tradition whose time had passed. We threw off the shackles of the past, we abandoned Shabbat and Kashrut and all else that Jewish society wanted to impose upon us. Where is your spirit? Where is your toughness? Why do you accept everything without questioning?" To this Wouk answered what to my mind is the only legitimate response: "Mr. Ash, you could not be more mistaken. Apparently times have passed you by. You are still living in the past. You do not know what is happening today. You do not realize that your attitude is today the mark of the most abject conformism. It is I and those like me who are the rebels, who are the critics, who are the revolutionaries. For in our generation when Shabbat and Kashrut and all the other miztvot have been abandoned, it is we who observe the Shabbat and who abide by Kashrut and who proclaim our loyalty to mitzvot, who are the trail-blazers, the revolutionaries, the non-conformists. You, Mr. Ash, are no different from the great majority of other Jews for whom Jewishness is a meaningless ethnic identification. It is I and the few like me who remain in the twentieth century and who yet refuse to bow down to the idols of our time -- it is we who are the revolutionaries, not you!"

To be a Jew, then, means to be an honorable rebel, to be a man of conscientious dissent. Indeed, to be a Jew means to be a **dissenter**, and this enhances not only one's Jewishness but

one's very humanity. Ecclesiastes declares u-motar ha-adam min ha-behemah ayin, which is usually taken to mean that man is in no way superior to animal. But one of our commentators has taken that verse more literally and discovered in it a principle of abiding significance, namely, the principle of differentness, of dissent. He translates: u-motar ha-adam min ha-behemah, in what way is man superior to animal? And the answer is the last word of that verse: ayin, "no!" The superiority of man over animal lies in his ability to say ayin, No. An animal follows other animals, the sheep is only part of the flock, the goat will never leave the herd. The beast says, "Yes" to his instincts, to his society. But it is man, if he truly be man, who retains the capacity to say No to his instincts, to his fellow men, to the inexorable and impersonable pressure to conform to the styles of the day and the fashions of the generation. Only when a man has learned to say ayin, No, when he has learned to retain the dignity of being different, is he truly a man. And then -- he is truly a Jew.

There is hardly a more vital lesson for our time. Only one who naively deludes himself into thinking that the world is normal and tolerable and satisfactory can do away with the necessity for differentness and for the assertion of man's negation. Yet read any morning's newspaper and you will discover how right Erich Fromm was when he questioned whether our society is indeed sane. Can any world be normal when it contains a Federenko? Can

any society be tolerable when it allows a DeGaulle to deliver himself with impunity of his disdainful fantasies? In this kind of world all of man will survive only if one people devotes itself to its ethical and spiritual aspirations by willingly embracing differentness and, with it, the courage to say No to so much of modern life.

We who are loyal and observing Jews are especially called upon in our generation to assert Jewish differentness. Our fellow Jews would prefer, apparently, to vanish painlessly and smoothly in the dull uniformity of the rest of society. Nowadays, in fact, assimilation has been structured in the form of "dialogues" -- that inane institution whereby uninstructed Jews and uninformed gentiles meet in an atmosphere of antiseptic pleasantness in order to indulge in the reciprocal exchange of mutual ignorance. In these times, therefore, it is we who retain our sense of differentness who perpetuate the teachings of our Patriarchs. It remains our duty to proclaim time and again, as we do in our daily prayers, that alenu le'shabeiah, we thank Almighty God, she'lo asanu ke'goye; ha-aratzot -- that He has made us different and separate. We must forego the temptation to worship at the altar of adjustment in the cult of mediocrity.

Have we been successful in asserting this differentness? Unfortunately, not too much. It is the bane of our age that even those of us who are willing to be different often do it the wrong way. We seem to have inverted our sense of differentness and to

have made it appear as an ossifying and fossilizing quality. We seem to use our differentness merely as a negative way, that of avoiding assimilation, instead of utilizing it as a sublime challenge to the rest of the community and the rest of mankind. Sometimes we appear stodgy and unconcerned with others, as if we were suffering from a hardening of the arteries of the spirit. If we do not bestir ourselves to understand our differentness properly, we stand in the danger of losing the sense of excitement and adventure and daring that is indigenous to the career of Jewishness.

We must emphasize time and again that to be a man of universal concerns does not mean to give up being different, and conversely, to be different does not mean to abandon our concerns for the universality of man. Our differentness and our universality are intimately tied up with each other. The late Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (see his "La-Perakim", p.61, -note) points out that Jews received their mark of differentness and their universal mission at one and the same time. When Abraham was just a local chieftain who had attained a great religious perception, he was known as Abram. When God awarded him with the mission of teaching this truth to the entirety of mankind, He changed his name to Abraham, to signify his career in bringing the message of God to all the nations. At what occasion was this change in name -- and therefore in career -- pronounced? At the very time

that Abraham was told that henceforth he and his descendants would be different from all other people, different not only spiritually but also physically, i.e., the commandment of berit milah, circumcision! Thus, ani hinei beriti itakh, ve'hayita le'av hamon goyim (Genesis 17:4,5) "And I hereby give you My covenant -- the covenant of circumcision -- and you shall become the father of many people; no longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for you are the father of many people." Our differentness is not mere isolation; it is the means whereby we address all of mankind and attempt to contribute to its elevation.

Therefore, all of Torah, all of Halakhah, should not be considered as a means of sanctifying the status-quo, but as a revolutionary ethic and a revolutionary religion. Thus, for instance, when the Jew says the kaddish and prays ve'yamlikh malkhuteih, May God bring about his malkhut shamayim or Kingdom of Heaven, he means this as a challenge to all earthly kingdoms: every nation must begin to pattern its conduct after the divine Kingdom, bringing happiness and relief to all its citizens, and conducting its affairs on the highest levels of morality. When the Jew declares his Shema, and proclaims the Oneness of God, he is an iconoclast who destroys the idols of the time, the idols of money and power and convenience and scientism. When the Jew observes the Sabbath, he counterposes his concept of leisure as

an opportunity for growth against the current concern with leisure as a danger for man who does not know what to do with his time. When the Jew insists upon the importance of the study of Torah he is different in that for him religion is more than a personal subjectivism, a matter of being moved by momentary moods. And when the Jew observes the mitzvot and refuses to yield to the charge of ritualism, he thereby insists, different from all others, that religion must never be merely a way of talking or a style of writing -- but a way of living.

We are different, and our differentness is our glory. We are not different in order to be conspicuous or disagreeable or to declare our non-concern with others. We are different in order to summon mankind to a higher vision, to inspire the world to new heights, to arouse the best instincts in all men to self-revelation, to the attainment of the immortal qualities of hessed and paahad and emet.

The event which brings us here is a very different kind of event. The values cherished by the Kelman's, the goals they set for themselves, the priorities they have established for the development of their children, mark them as people who are different from the run of the mill. A Bar-Mitzvah of this sort, which we have enjoyed during this glorious weekend, becomes a celebration of Jewish differentness.

Shalom, your mother Jean represents the quality of hessed, in her unselfishness, in her self-sacrificing friendship.

Your father Herbert is different in his quality of pa'ad, his piety. It is so unusual for a man who has attained distinction as a medical doctor to be as superbly and authentically committed to Judaism the way he is. Piety is something different for a member of a profession not heretofore distinguished by the religious excesses of its practitioners. Now, may you show that your differentness will express itself in the quality of emet, or truth; for truth in the Jewish tradition is identified with Torah -- and we look forward to your forthcoming greatness as a scholar of Torah. Our Torah is Torat emet, a Torah of truth. Remember too that your name, Shalom or peace, is also identified with Torah. Thus, the verse Ha-shem yevarekh et amo va-shalom, "The Lord shall bless His people with peace," has been interpreted in our tradition as meaning that the Lord will bless us with the study of Torah. So that you, Shalom, by exemplifying the quality of emet, and remembering the quality represented by your name, can make a perfect match between truth and peace -- in the study of Torah. Thus did the prophet Zechariah say, ve'ha-emet ve'ha-shalom ehavu, "And truth and peace loved each other."

It is a lovable combination for you. May this become your mark of differentness -- and your mark of distinction.