

PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT

Our Sidra of this morning begins with a verse that is obviously meaningful, and, equally obviously, mysterious: אלה אברהם אלה יצחק אלה יעקב באל-ע ואלה ה' "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as Sh-D-Y, but by My Name Havayah I did not make Myself known to them."

What is the importance of these Names, such that the Patriarchs knew only the first, whereas Moses knew the second as well?

Rashi answers this question by ascribing the name Sh-D-Y to the concept of נחש or promise, whereas Havayah is related to פ'י or fulfillment. The Covenant that God sealed with the Patriarchs included a promise which would not be realized until the dim future: that their descendants would return to this land and become the people of God. The making of this promise to the Patriarchs was an act of God which became known to them under the name Sh-D-Y. Moses, however, on the eve of the redemption, would be privileged to witness the fulfillment of that ancient promise, and this fulfillment is symbolized by the name Havayah.

Jewish history is a drama of Promise and Fulfillment. It is a story of the tension between havtachah and kiyyum, the interplay between the two Divine Names Sh-D-Y and Havayah.

Two questions, however, present themselves. First, what is the relation of these specific Names to the concepts of Promise and Fulfillment? Second, so what? Surely, if Divine Names are associated with these ideas, they must be more than just a convenient tool for the analysis of Jewish history, but they must have practical consequences.

Permit me to endeavor to answer both questions at once.

The name Sh-D-Y, according to our Sages, comes from the Hebrew word which means to wreck or smash: שד"י שד"י שד"י, it is the aspect of God Who is above and beyond nature, Who sets the laws of nature and can at will smash them and overcome them. God is not subservient to nature; it is nature that is His creation and therefore must submit to Him.

What, then, is the relation between Sh-D-Y and Promise?

To live with nothing more than Promise, even a Divine Promise, is a trying task, an arduous experience. It taxes one's imagination and resolve. God promised our ancestors that some day we would be restored to the Land and there return to achieve the dignity of independence and the development of our role as the Priest-Teacher to the world. Yet, surveying the very real conditions of exile, that Promise seemed so far-fetched, the Fulfillment so unreal, so remote, almost impossible -- as if Fulfillment will require of God that He be שד"י שד"י שד"י, that He smash the framework of nature, that He transform nature and alter

the principles of history. To believe in the Promise of Redemption, therefore, means to believe despite all that my reason and my experience tell me. It means to question my own skepticism. To be committed to the Promise means to see God as Sh-D-Y, to await the radical transformation of facts and events in order for that Promise to be kept. Promise, therefore, obligates the Jew to faith, to confidence, to hope.

Havayah comes from the Hebrew root which means "to be." It is the Name of God which philosophers call ontological, which refers to existence itself. Havayah is related to Fulfillment, because at the time of fulfillment, when fortune smiles on us, when redemption seems at hand, when things are going our way, we tend to forget past adversities -- indeed, to forget the Promise itself. At such times of fulfillment we imagine that our happiness, our independence, our success are part of the very fabric of existence. We assume that it is natural and normal that conditions be as favorable as they are. We imagine that they could not have been otherwise. We forget that the felicity of the present is actually the Fulfillment of the Promise of the past.

Fulfillment as Havayah, therefore, obligates us to an appreciation of our blessings as a special gift, as the keeping of God's Word, as the vindication of the Covenant in which He promised us the Redemption. The experience of Fulfillment lays upon us the obligation of humility, to realize that we are not

necessarily deserving of what has come upon us, that we have not wrought our good fortune with our own hands and wisdom, that it is God in His goodness Who keeps His Word to generations past and by virtue of which we now prosper.

Have we discharged these moral-spiritual obligations?

Unquestionably, generations of Jews of the past have.

They lived under and with Promise. It is that and only that which sustained them during the bitter and dark days of exile. Our presence today, our very survival as a people, is testimony to their fealty to the Promise, to their faith in some distant Fulfillment. The very texture of their lives and their determination bespoke a commitment to the truth and validity of the Promise. Every single day of their lives, every act that they performed which spoke of God or Torah or Jewishness or Jewish existence, was an act of loyalty to the Promise. The very fact that Jews for generations have lived as Jews and have refused to "drop out" of the peoplehood of Israel, was a contribution to the perpetuation of that Promise.

It is in this light that we may appreciate the wise insight of the Hasidic teacher, a man of both wisdom and wit, Rabbi Naftali Ropshitzer. He pointed to the astonishing statement of the Sages

(J.T. Yoma 1:1)

כָּדָר זֶרַח לְאִיּוֹן וְנֶחֱדָה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בִּימֵינוּ

מֵעַדִּין עַדִּין כִּאִילוּ הָיָה הַמִּקְדָּשׁ חָרִיב.

"Every generation in which the Temple was not built in its days, it is considered as if they had destroyed it." Does this mean that we must regard generations of Sages and Saints, during whose days the Temple was not

rebuilt, as destroyers of the Sanctuary? The Ropshitzer points to the one word **בְּיָמָיו** , and tells us that this must be translated not "in their days," but "by means of their days." Every generation must live so that their every day constitutes a contribution, no matter how small, to the eventual rebuilding of the Temple. If their days are made up of hours of despair and hopelessness, of giving up the good fight, they cannot be considered contributions to the eventual rebuilding of the Sanctuary, and such a generation must be regarded as destroyers of the Temple. Every individual Jew must live his every day, no matter how modestly, no matter how humbly, no matter how prosaically, in such a manner that that day becomes a fresh commitment to the great Promise of the Divine Covenant which will ultimately find its realization in the coming of the Messiah, in the full redemption, in the building of the Bet Hamikdash. This too is the meaning of our daily prayer, **בְּיָמֵינוּ בְּקִרְבָּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ** , which should be translated not as "build Thy House soon in our days," but as: "build Thy House soon by means of our days." We offer up as a gift to God our every day of loyalty to the Promise He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our acceptance of Sh-D-Y, our hope and our faith that He will keep His word even if He has to be **לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד** . It is by means of such days, graced with a thousand little acts expressing an underlying faith in the authenticity of the Promise, that the House of God will once again someday

be rebuilt -- soon, by means of our days.

So that Jews of the past have indeed been faithful to the Divine Promise, and their daily loyalty is what has led to our present condition and will some day lead to the complete Fulfillment.

The great question that confronts us today is: Can we discharge our obligations to Fulfillment as well as generations of Jews of the past have fulfilled theirs to Promise?

I do not mean that Fulfillment in its completion is upon us, that all is well, that the achievement of Statehood is the total realization of the Promise made to the Patriarchs. But certainly, there is a new quickening in the Jewish history of our times. The events that have filled our lifetime are, from the perspective of 3,500 years of Jewish history, most unusual: the ingathering of the exiles, the dignity of national independence, the relearning by Jews of the military arts, as has been amply demonstrated in the fantastic military exploits of the last two weeks.

The question that challenges us is: How shall we view our new favorable position? Shall we see it as simply part of Havayah, something natural and normal, as if we always were a State and always had our national dignity, as if we are entitled to the gifts which we possess, as if we achieved all this with our own might and power and wisdom and understanding? Or shall we understand our success in a different light, one that leads us to a

deepening historical awareness, to a connection with the past, to an openness to the Word of the Lord, to a readiness to return to Torah, to a deep and humane humility in the face of our own prosperity, to the understanding that a Higher Force intervened in the affairs of our time and that this Force obligates us to a certain mode of conduct? Do we see our present good fortune as simply part of Havayah, of existence, devoid of moral implications; or as הנהגת הבורא , as a Divine direction of history in the face of all natural indicators and historical principles that pointed to our disappearance -- and therefore something which lays upon us powerful and spiritual demands?

There was a time when I was much more pessimistic about the ability of our generation to achieve this spiritual understanding. But my recent experiences have left me with at least a modicum of optimism.

Permit me to share with you, however briefly, some of my experiences this past week in Kiljava, Finland, where I participated in the Ideological Seminar of the World Union of Jewish Students, the international body composed of Jewish Student Unions of countries throughout the world.

This WUJS meeting, attended by delegates from 18 different countries, was a microcosm of concerned Jewish student youth. It did not, in general, consist of those who are totally committed Orthodox Jews and whose affirmations are unassailable by any exter-

nal questions. Neither did it include those who have opted for assimilation and who are therefore likewise untroubled by any lingering doubts about their Jewishness. It did include that large mass of young people who are troubled by their Jewish identity and who do not want to relinquish it. Its ideological complexion was as broad as the whole spectrum of contemporary commitments, from sympathizers of the Neturei Karta to active Marxists.

In the great majority of them I detected a tremendous feel for social justice which included fairness to the Arabs and a readiness to criticize the State of Israel where they thought that it was wrong. Yet, they saw no inner contradiction between their idealistic universalism and their internally felt Jewishness. Many of them might be described as New Left youth -- but not the kind that sympathized with El Fatah, but young men and women who are positive in their commitment to Israel.

Most important, I detected in their contributions to the debate certain unspoken assumptions that left me quite happy. The sessions were dominated by a member of the Israeli Knesset who proved himself a brilliant demagogue and who attempted to persuade them that there is an unbridgeable cleavage between Israel and the Jewish people, that those who live in Israel are Hebrew nationals, citizens of a state, and that Jews throughout the world are excluded from this nationalistic community of Israel. He main-

tained that the only relation between Jews of the Diaspora and those of Israel is a vague affiliation, similar to the relations between the Germans in Switzerland and those in Germany, or between Australians and Englishmen. Jewish history, according to his opinion, very ably presented, began in 1948. Religion, together with Zionism, were considered by him beneath contempt. Both had had their day and were of no further use. This is the view that is advocated by those known as the Canaanites, an extreme view, and one that clearly identifies the present condition of Israel as natural and normal and unconnected to the entirety of Jewish history.

Yet the students were not taken in by all this glib talk. They instinctively rejected what was told to them and showed thereby their dim but firm awareness of contemporary Jewish history as the Fulfillment of an ancient Promise, as linked to a great past, as undivorced from what has gone on before us. They came out clearly on the side of the feeling that the Jewish people is one, and that all the subtle debates as to the distinctions between nation and people and race and religion were irrelevant, for Jews are one throughout the world, and we are one throughout history.

It is this affirmation that made me feel so strongly that they are open to conviction, that they are open to Torah, that from this point on it is up to us who are consciously Orthodox to transform their dim awareness to a rousing confirmation of Fulfillment.

This lays upon us very clear obligations. We must no longer remain cloistered in our communities and our synagogues, but must reach out to Jewish youth on campuses throughout the world -- but especially in the State of Israel. For the Israelis who were present -- and they came from communities throughout the Diaspora where they are studying -- confirmed the impressions that I had gained from previous visits to the State. It is incredible how deeply antagonistic Israeli youth is to the religious establishment, how hostile they are to the official Rabbinate and to religious political parties -- and yet, at the very same time, how thirsty they are for the spiritual content of Judaism, how they yearn for a word of Torah, how desperately they wish to view life through the spectacles of Promise and Fulfillment, without having to abandon their intelligence, without having to accept a political doctrine and especially political functionaries. They want to hear the Name of God as it erupts in daily life. And it is our task to bring them face to face with the One God Who appears both as Sh-D-Y and as Havayah.

We live in strange times. We might refer to our era as the razor edge which is the dividing line between Promise and Fulfillment. We cannot yet surrender either Name, either Sh-D-Y or Havayah.

Unfortunately, the complete redemption is not here yet, and so we cannot afford to dispense with the qualities of faith

and hope, with the continuation of living with Promise, with the light of Sh-D-Y.

But we are also close to Fulfillment, and we must begin to demand of ourselves the obligations that flow from Fulfillment, from Havayah -- the qualities of understanding, of perspective, of emunah, and above all, of a deep humility that Higher Force has responded to our own initiative in molding Jewish history and keeping God's Word to our first Fathers.

Our times can be described in terms of the last paragraph of the Aleinu prayer. For there we find the one concept tied to the other, Promise to Fulfillment, each flowing into the other. We pray to Him: יְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיִשְׁׁלַח מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, to rebuild the world on the pattern of the Kingdom of Sh-D-Y. And then we immediately go from Promise to Fulfillment: יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ the Promise of Sh-D-Y will be fulfilled by Havayah, and God, as Havayah, will be King over all the earth, and He will be One and His Name will be One, accepted as such by all mankind.