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YIZKOR, YOM KIPPUR 1959  
Rabbi Norman Lamm

add to middle p 7-

Jewish entertainers - Lambert  
Israeli performers who were willing  
to put on shows

This is a day when memory plays a great role. Throughout the High Holidays we ask G-d to remember us. We are soon to participate in the Yizkor Service, when we ask of G-d to remember the soul of our parents. We ourselves, in our striving for immortality, actually strive to be remembered after we are dead. Well, if it is to be remembered that we seek, we must first ask ourselves a far more fundamental question: Who is it who is to be remembered? That is, "Who am I?" Before we can ask others to remember us, we must first learn to identify ourselves to ourselves. This problem is one of the greatest in Jewish life today.

Modern psychologists speak much of self-identification. The self image that one entertains, the way a man pictures himself as if he were a third person, is of the most crucial significance in understanding the workings of a man's mind. As a matter of fact, some psychologists recently devised a test by which to detect the underlying motif of a person's personality. They approached a number of people and asked them for their immediate reaction to the question, "Who are you?" The answer is most revealing. For instance, the woman who says, "I am a woman," or the man who says, "I am a man," reveals a fundamental concern with his masculinity or her femininity. The one who answers, "I am so-and-so's son," or "so-and-so's daughter," reveals some kind of involvement, whether good or bad, with his parents. The Negro who answers, "I am Colored," reveals a strong feeling of resentment for racial discrimination, just as the Southern White who answers, "I am White," reveals a fraudulent superiority built on what is no doubt a deep feeling of inferiority.

And one of the greatest problems of Jewishness in America today is that of self-identification. It is therefore of interest to mention that

The man who answers, "I am a chemist," is obviously concerned with his professional career, and the man who says, "I am an American," is obviously more political minded. Self-identification, therefore, the image one holds of himself is a clue to a man's basic, fundamental personality. And when we have defined for ourselves who we are and what we are in our own image, then we will have experienced a self-revelation. We will have gained some insight into our own selves. Then, when we really intimately know who we are in our own eyes, can we approach Almighty G-d and ask him to remember us -- in that way.

How interesting that in that amazing book of the Bible which tradition has chosen to read on Yom Kippur afternoon, the Book of Jonah, we read of a startling incident -- startling because it tells of a question which is unusually similar to the question these psychologists we have mentioned used in determining personalities.

Recall that when Jonah first attempted to flee from G-d he went aboard a ship. G-d caused a great storm to blow and the ship faced grief. The captain and crew decided that they were going to throw lots and throw someone overboard in order to lighten the burden. The lot fell upon Jonah who was not known, who had kept in obscurity from the rest of the passengers and crew. They then decided to approach him and they said to him Mah Melakh <sup>a</sup>tekha umayin tavo mah artze<sup>a</sup>kh v'ay me-zeh am ata.

"What is your occupation? And, Whence do you come? What is your country? And, Of what people are you?" In one word: "Who are you?"

And listen to the answer that the Prophet Jonah gave: וְיֹאמֶר אֵלֶיָּהֶם יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ לֵבְשֵׁנוּ לְכָל אֲשֶׁר אֵלֵינוּ  
וְיֹאמֶר אֵלֵינוּ לֵבְשֵׁנוּ לְכָל אֲשֶׁר אֵלֵינוּ

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"And he said unto them 'I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the G-d of Heaven,  
Who hath made the sea and the dry land.'"

Here is a revelation of the character of the prophet, the personality of Jonah. In the midst of a raging sea, in the midst of the turbulent waves threatening to dash the ship to splinters, beset by a hostile crew and by antagonistic passengers who wish to throw him overboard into the raging waves, in this moment of crisis and emergency he is asked a direct question: "Who are you?" And Jonah answers without hesitation, "I am a Jew." I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord G-d of the Heaven."

Does this not reveal to us all we need to know about this man? He was a Jew through and through. He was a man who feared G-d to the very bottom of his soul and to the very tips of his fingers.

How many of us can answer that question in the same way? At this point of my talk, most of you have probably begun to ask yourselves the question -- What would I answer under such circumstances? Well, who are you? If you can answer, "I am a Jew," -- then you are a proud son of your people, an honored member of our ancient race. You are not frightened and you are not beset by feelings of inferiority.

But more important is the second half of that statement. It is not enough to say, "I am a Jew," and to beat your breast with pride.\* To be a Jew means, in the words of Jonah, "And I fear the Lord G-d of the Heaven." That is the real definition of Jewishness. Is not that a self image and a self identification toward which each of us should strive? Is not that the way we would want to be remembered after we have left the scene of this earth? Is not that the way we would want to be remembered by G-d -- as true, loyal Jews, as devout and devoted sons of the Almighty, as tried and

\* To say merely "I'll not" and not mean (as you will find) "I will not" - is a fraudulent answer. Margaret means recently reported statements really govt asking Jews to defend their services - not: "not gentle"...

Israeli extortioners in 1934 who, it was to everyone's knowledge, were prepared to act "with or without" Jewish "not-worshippers"! g-d-less men would have no v. 14 but to "Israeli" - why it (as you will find) is...



tested partisans of Torah? Are not many of us proud, on this occasion of Yizkor, that our parents can be remembered by us and by their friends and ~~by their friends' children and our friends --~~ as G-dfearing Jews? Do we not often speak in lovely reminiscence and with romantic nostalgia of the Jewishness of our parents' homes, of the Jewishness of their conduct, of the simple and naive faith which buoyed them up throughout life and gave them a courage and fortitude which we more sophisticated moderns do not know but which we envy with all our heart and all our soul?

If that is so, then that must be our aim this year: To so live, so think, so act, so involve ourselves, that our personality will have been changed to one that is more fundamentally and thoroughly Jewish. For the change of personality is a theme of the High Holidays -- the theme of Teshuvah, of spiritual regeneration. We must so change our personalities, so re-direct our spiritual and mental energies, that we shall become the kind of people who will identify ourselves as Jews, that the image we will hold of ourselves will be "I am a Hebrew. I fear the Lord G-d of the Heaven."

*let us go one step further.*

But ~~even more important than that is yet one more point. And that is not so much the answer "Jew" as a noun, but "Jewish" as an adjective.~~  
To be a Jew is not a single profession in life. It is more than a career. To be a Jew means that the quality of Jewishness and the fear of G-d must color all our activities. It means that in every aspect of our humanity, no matter how intimate and no matter how remote, there must be some element which reflects our deep Jewishness and the G-dliness and nobility and high-mindedness which Jewishness implies.

At this Holy moment of this Holiest Day of the Year, therefore, we must decide and resolve that we will answer the questions properly. And here are some of the more detailed questions of self identification that we must pose to ourselves even as they are posed to us by the Divine Judge:

You are a father or a mother. But are you a Jewish father or mother? An ordinary general father or mother is guided in the raising of his children merely by social conventions. And if social conventions dictate that it is quite all right to have a nurse or a baby sitter raise the child with the parents assuming only legal and financial obligations and occasionally a good night kiss, then that is ~~quite all right~~ <sup>sufficient</sup>. But to be a Jewish father or mother, means to have the child's education, his health, his spiritual welfare, every aspect of his developing, blossoming personality as a matter of major, vital, most intimate concern. To be a Jewish father or mother means that from the very earliest infancy of my child I must make every attempt to help mold his personality into that of a higher level, to endow him with some of that nobility of soul, that highness of mind and that goodness of heart that has always characterized our people. To be a Jewish father or mother means to accept spiritual responsibility for our children, to understand, to know and to realize and to acknowledge that if our child ever grows up not knowing why he is alive and not knowing any meaning in life -- then that is our fault. To be a Jewish father or mother means, simply enough, to raise a thoroughly Jewish child.

Most of us are husbands or wives. But can we, in response to a direct challenge, maintain that we are Jewish husbands or wives? To be a truly Jewish husband means to respect one's wife in the most tender way

known to the family of man. What a tragedy that so many of our Jewish couples both young and old are unaware of the truly amazing Jewish institution known as Tahrat Ha-mishpachah, the institution of family purity, which has always insured the integrity, ~~of the romance of Jewish husband and wife~~, of domestic love and peace and tranquility.

Through the institution of Tahrat Ha-mishpachah and the laws, observances and rituals that it implies for the most intimate aspects of married life, ~~and ordinary husbands or wives became Jewish husbands or wives, and Jewish husbands or wives experience a thrill and a love of a honeymoon every month of the year.~~ To be a Jewish husband means to act with tenderness toward one's wife, and to be a Jewish wife means to act with respect and understanding and encouragement toward one's husband. Can we answer "Yes" to the question, Are you a Jewish husband or wife?

There are here those who are workers. But are you a Jewish worker? Are you scrupulously honest with relation to the property of your employer? Are you absolutely certain at all times that you act with blemishness integrity with regard to his time and his possessions?

There may be here people who are employers. Are you a Jewish employer? Do you make sure that, regardless of union requirements, you are always fair to those in your employ? Are you certain that you are fair to your employees Jewishly, which means also in the intangible matters of attitude and spirit, that you do not in your personal relations with your employee demonstrate any kind of artificial superiority?

*can you identify yourself as a*  
Are you just a business man -- or ~~are you~~ a Jewish business man?  
Are you certain that you follow all the requirements of integrity and



fairness even in your competition with other business men? Have you made certain that in your business relationships you have eliminated cutthroat competition and unfair practices? [ You are a citizen, a member of the community, but can you identify yourself as a Jewish citizen? To be a Jewish citizen means to be public minded, to take an interest in the affairs that govern the general community. To be a Jewish citizen means also to contribute to the greatness of America by furthering the interests of your Jewish community. To be a good Jewish citizen means not only to take an interest in clean politics, but also to make sure that you belong to a synagogue and support one, that you further Jewish education, that you do all you can to add to the cultural richness of American life. ]

*Israeli  
entertainer  
(Name: "Israeli")*

And at this moment we come to a question which touches the heart of all of us. As we stand here in this synagogue on this Holy Day about to remember our parents in love and devotion we must answer yet this question: Are you a Jewish son and a Jewish daughter? Let us be honest with ourselves. It is not enough to be sentimental about our love for parents gone by. We must also be convinced of the great truth that if we have not followed our parents spiritually, if we have not kept up the traditions which they cherished, if we have not observed the customs which they held precious, and if we have not kept loyal to the great religious tradition in which they were reared and to which they gave heart and soul, then we have been lost to them spiritually even though we are theirs biologically. To be a Jewish child means to kindle candles as mother did. To be a Jewish child means to keep a Jewish kitchen as mother did. To be a Jewish child means to attend the

synagogue as father did. To be a Jewish child means to be charitable as parents were or would have been. To be a Jewish child means to keep up the integrity of the Jewish home and not allow the unity of the family to be destroyed by the strange winds that blow from lower levels, by the demands of friends who do not understand and peers who do not appreciate the subtleties of Jewish life. If we can identify ourselves as truly Jewish children, then we have a full right to appear before G-d and say Yizkor -- Remember Oh G-d the soul of se-and-se.

If we can, if not now then ultimately, truly identify ourselves as Jews, as people who fear the Lord G-d of the Heavens, then we will have come to know ourselves, to reveal our innermost secrets to our minds and consciences; and with that self knowledge and self identification we can then aspire to be remembered: to be remembered, that is, to be accepted and acknowledged by our **friends** for what we are, to be remembered by G-d on this Judgment Day for a year of goodness and life and health, even as these are the values that we try to enhance as true G-dfearing Jews; and, ultimately, to be remembered even after we have left as the kind of people who can in turn inspire their children to want to be Jewish.

Based on Meyer Strassfeld's sermon  
in RFA Manual 1957