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The sound of the Shofar, as we indicated yesterday, serves as the clarion call challenging its hearers to seek out the Truth. In piercing the Jewish heart, and penetrating the deepest recesses of our conscience, the shofar also dares our minds and challenges our souls to recognize the Truth--EMESS-- for its own sake.

But recognizing the Truth, is not yet achieving it. BEFORE a man can feel that he has grasped the EMESS of Torah and Judaism, he must know how to arrive at it.

And the best way to learn how to arrive at it, is by learning to steer clear from the wrong approaches, to keep away from mistaken ways. When Reb. Chaim Sanzer would preach to his Hassidim, he would preface his holy remarks with the story of two lost ~~travellers~~ who met in the middle of the forest. One asked the other, " Can you tell me how to get out of this forest?" and the other replied, " I cannot show <sup>you</sup> the right path which will take you home, but I can point out to you the wrong paths which will only lead you deeper into the forest ". We too, this morning, will try to point out the wrong path that most people are prone to take these days. Perhaps thus can we help, in some way, to find, each for himself, the real EMESS. On this sacred day of introspection and spiritual reckoning, ~~not~~ task seems more important.

This terribly wrong path, which attracts Jews even more than others, <sup>in a letter made public a short while ago</sup> has been correctly identified by one of the world's greatest geniuses, Prof. Albert Einstein, ~~in a letter made public,~~ issued an appeal for "non-conformism". Too many people, he correctly complained, express certain opinions, think certain thoughts, act in certain ways, only because everyone else does so too. Our average man is too quick to conform to whatever everyone else is doing, thinking and saying at a particular time. There is unfortunately amongst us a fear of being different and unpopular. The enlightened press has pointed out that the same fear exists in government and education, where it has become fashionable not to be different. A certain Senator, whose name we shall not mention out of respect to the dignity of <sup>this</sup> the pulpit, has made it his duty to ferret out all those who disagree with the policy of the present. Even in literature do we have this tendency. So much so, that last year the great philosopher Bertrand

Russell published a short book which he called "Unpopular Essays"; a challenge, as it were, to this fear of being different and unpopular. The wrong path, then, the great danger to the acquisition of truth, is the fear of being different. It is the Peril of Conformity that demands our attention.

A leading scholar summed up that attitude with great clarity recently, when he addressed the following question to his colleagues: "How common," he asked, "must the common man become?" Gone are the days when an ordinary man would strive to become extraordinary by reading the Bible or Shakespeare in his spare time. In our days the pulp magazine of a dime and a quarter are the vogue, and no man dare depart from the smart set. For to-day the common man has become even more common for fear of becoming uncommon, for fear of being dubbed an "intellectual" or "book-worm" or "egg-head" or "turning religious". Gone are the days when a Jewish father and mother would pray and work and sweat so that their son become a "landan" or "goan", or a doctor or professor or scholar of some sort. There is the fear of being different. Let him be normal, adjusted, standardized. We are raising a generation of robots, who will laugh when others laugh, cry when others cry, and sin when others sin. We try to keep up with the Joneses, when the Joneses are heading straight down.

This peril of conformity. This great danger of losing sight of the EMESS because we are afraid to identify it if it means being different and unpopular, this primitive desire to blindly and sheepishly follow the lead of others and conform to their tastes, and beliefs, and institutions, was already hinted at in the Bible. For the Peril of Conformity, though especially pertinent to-day, is older than the twentieth century. It is in fact as old as man himself. The first man, Adam, fell prey to this very weakness.

We must again make reference to the Garden Of Eden and the Tree of Knowledge. You will remember that it was the sin of eating of the forbidden fruits of the EITZ HADAS which lead the first human couple astray and away from EMESS, TRUTH. THE serpent was the first to think of sinning and eating the fruit. He then convinced Eve of following his example. When Adam then saw that all intelligent creatures had decided upon this

course of behavior, he did not want to be different. Not that he wanted to sin, mind you; just that he wanted to conform. And so Adam too ate of the forbidden fruits, and thereby lost sight of Truth.

When G-d Almighty demands of Adam an explanation for his sinful behavior, Adam tells Him just that. I only wanted to conform. HA'ISHAH ASHER NASATA IMADI, the woman You created gave it to me; she and the snake were doing it, why should I be different? Not only Adam spoke those words. An ailing humanity, descendants of Adam, crushed by the dead hand of conformity, constantly re-echoes those words—with the same feebleness and spinelessness.

G-d's answer to Adam, as to all men, is sharp, unrelenting and biting in its sarcasm as well as in its outright condemnation. KI SHAMATA L'KOL ISHTECHA, "FOR thou has't obeyed the voice of thy wife ". Not, our Rabbis emphasize, LE'DIVREI, but L'KOL; not " TOTHEE WORDS" of your wife, but " to her voice". O foolish Man, cries G-d, your sin was not even an intelligent one, it was a silly one. For your desire for conformity is not even a reasoned one, you did not listen to Eve's words, to rational and meaningful persuasion, you merely followed her voice, blindly you follow the crowd, debasing yourself by mouthing the same meaningless slogans, the same empty phrases. By submitting to conformity, says G-d, you first of all prove your own foolishness.

But Conformity, the fear of being different, the desire to do what others do even at the expense of the Truth, is more than silliness. It is dangerous; a peril indeed.

G-d mentions three distinct curses which follow from Adam's sin, and from the sin of conformity when practiced by any man. First of all, ARURAH HA'ADAMAH. The entire earth becomes accursed, The more people who ascribe to a falsehood, the more will be attracted. Let an Eve follow the Serpent, and an Adam will too. Let an Adam conform, and his children and children's children will. The entire earth is accursed; everyone is victimized by this anonymous tyrant, public opinion, who vulgarizes men and dilutes Truth.

The second evil consequence is VE'KOTZ VE'DARDAR TAZMIACH LACH, ( translate). Man's labor is wasteful. When all men do the same and think the same, initiative is killed and originality disappears. Brain-power is down to a minimum, and creativeness is out. Look at Russia to-day, where conformism is a must, where no man dare think differently

from the official "line", where everything is as they say, "<sup>lyric</sup>monothelie". What is the result? Production is wasteful, and real scientific creative thinking is on the wane. When men become robots, their labor produces thorns, not fruit. And lastly, G-d warns adam, KI AFAR ATA VE'EL AFAR TASHUV. For thou art dust, and to dust will you return. Dust, we know, is homogeneous. That is, all particles of dust are the same throughout, there being no difference between one piece and the other. If man will act like a piece of dust, G-d warns, if he will be no different from his society and conform for the sake of conformity, then EL AFAR TASHUV, man will be treated no better than dust, he will be ground into undifferentiated dirt by any tyrant <sup>who</sup> will arise. For men afraid to be different are ripe for tyranny, the sort of tyranny which can step on them like dust and consign them to the same graveyard of oblivion.

What a message to our modern parents that lecture to Adam contains. I know, says G-d, that you're ashamed of being different. You prefer to send your child to Public School or some swanky private academy. You don't want him to be different and attend a Yeshiva or Hebrew School. You want him to be the same as every other child on the street, and send him to the Saturday matinee rather than to shul. That, says G-d, is a sign of stupidity. You're following the voice of the common crowd, and you are not listening to words of reason and education. What are the results? First of all, because of you another Jewish parent may follow suit, and the earth can become accursed. Secondly, your child's education as a rounded personality will be incomplete. Instead of blooming into a flower of Jewishness, you are raising thorns and weeds who will be marked by ignorance. Finally, you are preparing barren AFAR, easy prey for any cruel "ism", which can tyrannize the empty souls of ignorant children, from atheism to communism to materialism.

Thank G-d, that tendency to conformism is letting up just a bit in recent days. Not only are ordinary Jews in N. Y. and out-of-town, daring to be different by sending their children in increasing numbers to Day Schools, and themselves turning to Traditional Orthodox Synagogues, but even some great American Jews are of this kind nowadays. Last year it was my pleasure to lunch with Herman Wouk, the Pulitzer prize author of "Caine Mutiny", who is a devout, pious Orthodox Jew. He told me a remarkable story worth repeating and remembering. The summer before he had been aboard ship sailing for

Rome, looking at the passenger list, he noticed the name of Sholom Ash, the author who has strayed from the Jewish fold. He looked him up in his cabin and then invited him to lunch with him in the kosher kitchen. "You eat kosher, Mr. Wouk?" asked the older man. "Why certainly I am an Orthodox Jew". "Surprising", said Ash, "in my days a young author was a revolutionary, a rebel who rose up against tradition and society and blazed new trails. How come you conform to tradition, Wouk? "you're mistaken" answered Herman Wouk, "you see, I am a revolutionary and non-conformist too. In our day it is stylish to scoff at religion and tradition. And so I refuse to conform to the scoffers and I blaze a trail right back to the beliefs of my ancestors. I too am a revolutionary". A revolutionary indeed. To conform with Truth, with the word of G-d, with Torah and Tradition, you have got to be a fighter and defy the vulgar effect of the majority. Don't be different just to be contrary. BE'VEIS ELOKIM NEHALECH BA'RAGESH, in the House of G-d do we go with the throng. Do follow the throng-if in the House of G-d. But usually to follow the throng to the House of G-d, to the Shul and Beis Hamidrash, you have to defy the greater throngs demanding conformity to their Halacha of <sup>bridge</sup> ~~canasta~~ on Friday nights and their minhag of Golf on Shabbas. It has occurred to me that it takes more courage and heroism for a man to eat kosher or daven Mincha in public than for that same man to jump into a <sup>communist</sup> ~~Chinese~~ foxhole north of the 38th parallel. in Indo-china

Our Rabbis in this request painted a somber picture of the days preceding the coming of the Messiah, but a picture which teaches much to the cowardly conformist. In that generation, says Resh Lakesh, the Land will be destroyed, the Temple a rubble and den of iniquity, VE'HA'EMESS NE'EDERESS UPNEI HAD'OR KI'FNEI H A'KELEV, Truth will be absent and the generation will have the face of a beast. And where will Truth go, he asks. And answers: HOLECHESS VE'YOSHEVESS LAH ADARIM ADARIM ~~AMID~~ BAR, Truth will wander in tiny groups in the desert. Ah yes, when a generation becomes beastly and teaches cynicism and looseness and convenience instead of principle, then Truth, will not conform, but Partisans of Truth will rather take to the deserts and in isolation practice Truth and refuse to conform to beastliness. For men and women of Truth would rather pitch a lonely tent in the barren desert rather than put up with a beast in a penthouse. The man of Truth would rather pray in a lonely corner in his own house, or in an impoverished and out-



moded "shtibel" rather than conform to the smart crowd and ride to a luxurious "Temple" on the Sabbath. Better be different in a desert than conform in a doghouse.

My dear friends, we have spoken long and hard about the necessity of recognizing EMESS and not conforming with SHEKER. Know that such matters go to the core of the Jewish heart. Know that such issues strike the center of the Jewish soul and sensitize his spirit. For when the Jew begins to conform, there invariably must come REFORM, and he fails to perform his Divine duties towards G-d, his fellow-man and himself.

On this Holy Day, let the clear call of the Shofar jolt every man and woman out of complacency. Let us each think deep into his own soul, where have we compromised or overlooked the Truth that is Torah because we were afraid to be different, because we preferred to conform to vulgar standards. For on this day of Judgment, when the lives of each of us and those dear to us hang in precarious balance, the Book of Life, opened before the Divine Tribunal contains CHOSEM YAD KOL ADAM BO, the individual signature of every person. Let no man claim that he erred because others did, for every man stands in judgment by himself and must answer for himself. For long after the clamor of the crowds has died away into a dim whisper, long after the shouting has abated and the empty noises have passed on, KOL DMAMAH DAKAH YISHAMA, the thin small voice of everyman's conscience makes itself heard demanding in no uncertain terms, a full accounting. No matter how sharp the difference, how embarrassing the unpopularity, how great the pressure to conform and submit to the common standards, after all is done, the thin small voice asks for an accounting from you, <sup>from me,</sup> the individual. And when G-d opens that great Book of Destiny, there are no signatures of the masses or society, only the lonely signatures of individual men and women.

Let each of us strive to present a good defense before the Almighty Judge. And may that still small voice of Truth penetrate deeper than the loud demands of Falsehood to conform. At the sound of the Shofar, may we all turn with pure hearts to G-d, and may he accept our prayers, and grant each according to his desires.

# Revision of "Perversity conformity" sermon for Kodimuh, 1954

P. 1) 1- line 18 - in place of "in a letter made public a short while ago", write: "when".

2- last line - in place of "last year", write: "not long ago".

P. 2) 1- line 5 - in place of "scholar", write: "thinker".

P. 3) 1- line 20 - skip from "g-d mentions" all the way to P. 4, line 5, "dust"; and substitute this into place:

"For conformity, when carried too far, evokes g-d's curse. Remember that it was this sin of Adam, this sin of conformity, that provoked g-d to utter that terrible pronouncement: KI AFAR ATA VE'EL AFAR TASHUV, for thou art dust and to dust wilt thou return."

(now continue P. 4, line 5)

~~P. 4) 1- bet. 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraphs. ← insert this paragraph:~~

~~Indeed, history repeats itself. Not long after Adam, there flourished 2 wicked cities, Sodom and Amora. And their sinfulness was depicted by Jewish legend, recorded in the Talmud, in most picturesque terms. They had a bed in Sodom. And every stranger who entered the city was first to lie in the bed.~~

P. 4) 1- line 19 - in place of "the earth can become accused", write: "and Judaism suffers another defeat".

2- line 26 - "in increasing numbers to Hebrew schools and Day Schools"

3- line 28 - "last year" change to: "Some time ago".

P. 6) 1- line 1 & 2 - "and make religion a matter of <sup>social</sup> luxurious fashion and stylishness"

2- line 6 - "... must <sup>invariably deform</sup> ~~not~~ REFORM <sup>(over)</sup> this noble heritage,"

A 5. Well - instead:

If we Americaners have gotten anything out of our 300-yr association w. America, it should be that pioneering spirit, that independence of soul, that rugged individualism which looks upon conformity as cowardice & upon principled insistence on Truth as the greatest virtue.