

A-351

ON BEING TOO PRACTICAL

On this last day of Hanukkah, the second Shabbat Hanukkah this year, we direct our attention to a question concerning the entire festival itself. Why is it that we make such a festive holiday, filled with prayer and thanksgiving, with the lighting of candles and the singing of songs, for the cleansing and the purifying of the Second Temple, which was rededicated in the year 155 before the Common Era, and we have no equivalent or comparable festival to celebrate the initial building of the First Temple by Solomon many hundreds of years earlier? Was not Solomon's first great campaign, building the sanctuary which his father, David, had foreseen, at least as important as what seems a subsequent minor detail in the history of the temple?

And the answer, my friends, lies in the difference between building and re-building, between constructing and re-constructing, between dedicating and re-dedicating. When there is a new movement, a new campaign, a new idea, a new vision, anything that has with it the power of novelty, then it is almost assured of freshness and vigor and enthusiasm. The decision to build something new is not a spiritually difficult achievement. Everyone is anxious, everyone is aroused, everyone is excited. The people involved in such a project generally move forward with a great surge of strength and spirit.

But -- the decision to re-build, that is far more difficult. To approach a rubble and try to make of it a habitable home; patiently to pick up the pieces of the past and paste them together; to take the tattered ruins of a former majesty and somehow restore them; to patch together what time and circumstance have ravaged -- for this the masses have little enthusiasm, less spirit, and no patience.

Thus, when King Solomon took it upon himself to build a new Bet Ha-mikdash, it was a comparatively easy enterprise. He was able to ride on the crest of popular appeal and mass sentiment. But when many hundreds of years later the Maccabees returned to a desecrated temple, to a sanctuary that had been profaned in the eyes of the people, to restore to its old eminence a Bet Ha-mikdash which was already an old story to the citizenry of Jerusalem, when they had to re-consecrate what had been defiled, that was a great achievement; for they could not count upon mass movements and popular sentiments. Their project required enormous vision, tremendous courage, vast inner resources, and an iron conviction.

Hence the reward of the Maccabees is greater than that of King Solomon. Their task was more heroic because of the very prosaic nature which inheres in every task of re-building as opposed to the romantic, attractive enterprise of building for the first time. We therefore celebrate Hanukkah in honor of the Maccabean achievement of re-dedication, while we have no comparable holiday commemorating Solomon's achievement. We give historic rewards for the zeal of undertaking a task which would no doubt have frightened weaker souls and dissuaded them by the threat of faded glory, tired emotions, and secondhand sentiment.

This difference we have noted between the Maccabean and the Solomonic Ages is evident in all phases of life. Take the young Bar Mitzvah boy, when he is first called to ascend the pulpit and recite the blessing over the Torah. No matter how poor his background, no matter how inadequate his education, I have no doubt that in the heart of any young Bar Mitzvah boy with any sensitivity whatever, there is some kind of stirring of idealism, of devotion and dedication and love of Torah and love of God. But take the same young man after a number of years have gone by and he has gone the way

of all Jewish young teen-age men. When you approach the same youngster, when he is now in high school or college or shortly thereafter, how difficult it is to re-inspire him, rekindle in him the same love and devotion and idealism.

Or take a young couple on the eve of their wedding. The love of a young man for his wife and vice versa on the wedding day is by all means genuine and authentic. The romance of life is a very real thing in their lives. But that same couple after a number of years have gone by, and life has somehow become stale and routinized -- how difficult it is to recapture the sparks of an old love.

Or take for that matter the spirit that all of us felt in May of 1948 when the State of Israel was established. Do you recall that electric excitement and passionate loyalty that all of us felt, that sense of historic destiny and living through a great historic moment? How difficult a task to re-evoke from within ourselves that same excitement and loyalty today, after 11 or 12 years have gone by.

So, le-hachazir attarah le-yoshnah -- to restore the crown of Torah to its former eminence is a far more demanding, and therefore far more rewarding task than fashioning it in the first place.

And perhaps this will explain the strange Haftorah we read this morning, and the remarkable difference between the Haftorah of last week, the first Shabbat Hanukkah, and that of this week, the second Shabbat Hanukkah. The Haftorah of last week was full of vision, sparkling with the prophetic message, with overtones of song and undertones of greatness: Rani ve-simchi Bat Zion -- Shout with song and be joyful, oh daughter of Zion. The prophet announced: Ki lo ba-chayil ve-lo ba-Koach Ki im be-ruchi aonar ha-Shem Tsevaot -- For not by might nor by power but by My Spirit, sayeth the Lord of Hosts. And the Haftorah ended up on the great note of Tesuot chenchen lah -- shouts of grace and charm.



Compare that now to that unusual Haftorah we just read today: "And Hiram made the pots and the shovels and the basins ... the two pillars and two bowls of the capitals that were on top of the pillars ... ten bases, and ten laborers on the bases ... and the pots and the shovels and the basins ... and the lamps and the tongs and the cups and the snuffers and the basins and the pans and the firepans, and the hinges for the doors ... "

What do we have here? Is this the message of the Haftorah that is supposed to inspire us with a prophetic vision? Is there here by any stretch of the imagination, an inspiring message which is to send us, the worshipers, home with a renewed and invigorated spirit? Is there here anything more than a mundane list of dull details in the appointments of the temple?

And the reason for this distinction between both Haftorahs, lies in the difference in emphasis needed when building or re-building, when starting upon a new task or re-starting a task of reconstruction. When engaging upon a new campaign, you already are assured of idealism -- you need realism. Your spirit is then provided for, and you must therefore remind the participants not of the necessity of inspiration, but of the need to be practical.

Thus, in this morning's Haftorah, when all the people were thoroughly inspired, when their spirits were raised and reached the high point of excitement, at this time King Solomon had to remind his people: It is true that you have before your eyes a fiery vision, a glowing ideal, a glorious picture of a new temple to Almighty God -- but remember that all this fire, and this glow, and this glory will be nothing more than a flash in the pan -- if not for the pots and the pans and the basins and the shovels and the laborers. All the poetry of religion is without meaning and without the ability to survive, unless it is based upon the prose of hard work which

makes the foundations of a religious life. Religion cannot appear only in the beautiful white linen of the vestments of the high priests; it must also put on overalls and roll up its sleeves and lay the foundation for the real, good, honest, durable, ethical life. Our Haftorah therefore acts as a control and a check on the runaway spirits and unbridled enthusiasm. It complements the exhilarating idealism of which we read last week, by rooting it to reality. It reminds the idealist to be practical.

When, however, you are engaged in restoring something old, in a second attempt, in rebuilding -- then you know well enough the practical difficulties, then you must emphasize the romantic element, the nobility and the loftiness of the project. Hanukkah -- the holiday of rededication -- thus requires an emphasis not on the need of being practical, but the need of being spirited and enthusiastic and filled with zeal. If anything, in the enterprise of rededicating and rebuilding, people are often too practical. They are over-acquainted with the real practical difficulties. And that danger of being too practical, over-involved and over-entangled in mundane details, keeps them from submitting to the overpowering grasp of inspiration. Such people need not today's Haftorah, but last week's: Ki lo ba-chayil ve-lo ba-Koach Ki im be-ruchi <sup>an</sup>ar ha-Shem Tsevaot, Return to your youthful idealism! Overcome the inertia of the prosaic and latch on to the poetry of life! Forget for a while your practical needs, your chayil and Koach, the bricks and the mortars, the fund-raising, the managerial tasks, the whole long, dull list of actual practical needs, and concentrate instead upon Ruchi, upon the spirit of the Lord which activates the heart of each and every human being.

Both Haftorahs are therefore important for the total picture: the real and the ideal, the practical and the poetical, the inspiring aspirations of

Zechariah and the dull details of a Hiram. Each serves as a corrective, reminding us to restore to the proper balance the harmony of our emotional and spiritual lives.

For those of us who are still in the first flush of youthful zeal -- it is important to take to heart the message of this week's Haftorah; for those of us who are more mature, hardened by life's experiences, less possessed of romantic sentiments, overly inclined to be too practical, it is mandatory to remember the message of the Haftorah of the First Shabbat Hanukkah: the emphasis not upon chayil and Koach, but upon Ruchi -- the spirit. Such people must remember the message of that Haftorah: Open up your hearts and your minds once again to the blind and the mysterious, the lofty and the poetic, the beauty and nobility of life.

We American Jews at this turn of the decade are in need more of last week's message than this week's. We already know all that the Hiram's must do: the work, the expenses, the prosaic requirements, the inertia and the apathy with which we must contend. Ours is a historic duty to rebuild in the spirit of Hanukkah: to return to our sanctuaries and purify them from the defilements of the modern Hellenists, assimilation in a thousand different local accents. Ours is the historic destiny of reinvigorating religious feeling and rekindling the religious spark in Jews whose hearts have become encrusted with inertia and indifference, a reinvigoration and recrudescence, sufficient to rebuild the institutions of Jewish traditional life: kosher Shuls, day schools, Mikvaot, and most important -- kosher Jews. Our age is more like that of the Maccabees than like that of Solomon. We must take great care not to allow the practical to paralyze the poetical. We must not become too practical.

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2nd Shabbat Hanukkah, 5720 - 1/2/60

At the close of this festival of Hanukkah, when we read both Haftorahs, we remphasize for our day and our era what the Maccabees did for theirs: the power of purity, the adventure of faithfulness, the excitement and thrill of Torah. We recall to our contemporaries the excitement and suspense of each individual soul, about to rescale the slopes of the spirit, do we ascend the summit of Sinai where once our ancestors stood and said Amen to the voice of the Lord as it issued from the smoky mists. We too must be prepared to respond with a message of the supremacy of the spirit. Ki lo ba-chayil ve-lo ba Koach Ki im be-ruchi aonar ha-Shem Tsevaot.

For not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit sayeth the Lord of Hosts.