

"THE THEOLOGY OF FUND-RAISING"

In this most diagnosed of all ages, it is inevitable that measure be taken of the disaffection from the synagogue and Jewish community by many young Jews.

First, however, it should be pointed out that this is not the first or even the most serious "Generation Gap" in Jewish history. Even before it was called a "gap," I remember brooding on it when I was on the other side of the great divide. And even then I was aware of the fact that my father, in his youth, was subject to even greater centrifugal pressures which threatened to pull him apart from his father. After all, my grandfather came from the shtetl, speaking only Yiddish and thoroughly immersed in that culture, while my father grew up as a youngster in New York and in its public schools speaking English. I have even seen reports of the Generation Gap in Jewish literature going back hundreds of years, and I suspect that one may even find hints of it in the Bible, especially the books attributed to Solomon.

Yet, whether the Gap today is more or less than in the past, we must take it seriously. For at stake is -- our future.

In feeling the pulse of the current spate of alienated youth,

one interesting and disturbing phenomenon appears in many reports: the harsh criticism by the young against the "materialism" of the Jewish community. Whether in sociological and statistical studies or impressionistic reports by rabbis and communal leaders, we learn that young Jews are being "turned off" by the emphasis on fund-raising and by the means used to effect it: card-calling, telephone squads, public appeals, breakfasts and lunches and dinners and banquets, tributes and plaques... The young hurl the charge at us, "hypocrisy!" They maintain that a man should give from the right motives: from inner feeling, from compassion and charity, for its own sake and out of his own volition. Money that is given should be honestly acquired, freely given without pressure, and it should be done privately and modestly. The fund-raising "affairs" which are the stock-in-trade of so many Jewish communities, are crass, commercial, vulgar, and a disgrace to our people.

So let us begin by admitting at once that their criticism is valid. All of us know the passage in Maimonides, the source of which is the Talmud, that one of the highest forms of charity is to give quietly and without fanfare, where the donor and the recipient do not know each other; and the very highest form is to give gainful employment to the poor so that they need not rely on charity.

In our Sidra of this morning, where we read of the contributions collected for the building of the Tabernacle, the Sidra begins with the words: וְלִקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה, "Let them take for Me an offering"; and Rashi, quoting the Sages, adds: נֶשֶׁא לִי, the word "to Me," means, "for My Name's sake." One should give to the Temple for its own sake, for God's sake, and not because of ulterior motives.

It was a great Jewish Talmudist of two generations ago, by profession a banker, Rabbi Baruch Epstein (the author of Torah Temimah) who, in his "מקור חיים", maintained that the reason the portion of Terumah, with its commandment to collect money for building the Temple, comes after the portions of Yitro and Mishpatim, which tell of the giving of the Ten Commandments and the righteous laws of the Torah, is that the Temple must be built by monies acquired in accordance with the spirit of the Ten Commandments and the righteous laws.

And a great teacher of Musar, Rabbi Yoel Barantchik, refers to the first word of the Sidra, וְלִקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה, "they shall take for Me an offering": the Torah uses the word "take" and not the word "give," to teach that at the time of giving, the donor must feel not arrogance and power and patronizing charitableness, but as if he were receiving the alms, as if he

were taking rather than giving!

Clearly then, funds should be acquired honorably, given "for its own sake," without arrogance or fuss, and without injuring the character of the donor even as we fulfill the need of the recipient.

And yet, having said all this in vindication of the complaints against the emphasis and means of fund-raising in the Jewish community, if I had to decide between a community that is cognizant of the sensitivities of its members, by protecting them from the materialism of campaigns and the crudeness of some of its methods, but which fails in its duty to Tzedakah; and a community which is less sensitive and which manifests many of these vulgarities, but as a result manages to feed its hungry and clothe its naked and educate its ignorant and house its refugees and strengthen Israel and support Torah -- I would without any hesitation whatever choose the latter.

Some of our youth -- who have gone down, step by step, the fateful road from criticism to being "turned off" to "dropping out" -- have been undone by their own idealism; they have been morally injured by their moral perfectionism. Perhaps this has happened because their parents have shielded them from the hunger they once knew and showered them with affluence. And people who

have not felt the pangs of hunger and have not seen the refugees, who believe that Auschwitz is only something in a history book, cannot appreciate the desperate need for charitableness in the community. They fail to relate these means to the historic efforts of our much maligned Jewish community and what it has accomplished. In their absoluteness they have failed to note how many fine, decent, modest, heroic ladies and gentlemen lent themselves to many of these techniques not because they liked them, but even though they abhorred them, because this was the only way to help those in need and in distress.

I do not mean to say that much cannot be done to civilize fund-raising procedures. Fund-raising can be efficient without *being vulgar*. Of course, it is essentially painful, but it can be anesthetized. But fundamentally, charitableness and philanthropy and fund-raising deal in the coin of money, and, human nature being what it is, the poor man's stomach will remain empty if we are overrespectful of the donor's tender heart and spare him the strong-arm methods that sometimes are our last resort.

I agree that we have, to an extent, encouraged and raised a breed of professionally one-sided Jews who imagine that the totality of Judaism is exhausted by U.J.A. and Bonds and Federation; for whom writing a tax-deductible check is the only surviving

sacrament of their faith. But I shudder to think what Israel would look like if not for these very Jews, if not for U.J.A. and Bonds; what condition the poor and sick and the aged of this city would be like without Federation; and how Yeshiva University and other Yeshivot would be in even worse financial condition if not for high pressure, low pressure, middle pressure, and other tactics of fund-raising.

But, you say, did we not quote the Rashi which maintained 'נר ל', that the offering must be for its own sake, for God's sake? Let me then recommend to you the playful interpretation of this comment by the author of נ"ל, Rabbi Isaac Halevi Horowitz of Frankfurt. He interprets 'נר ל' ("for My Name") not metaphorically but literally. The Name of God is the Tetragrammaton, the name composed of the four Hebrew letters, Yud-Hé-Vav-Hé. The נ"ל sees the actual act of almsgiving as a reenactment of the divine Name. The coin, being a small object, is reminiscent of the Yud. The hand of the donor, with which he gives the money, has five fingers, the numerical equivalent of Hé. The outstretched hand of the recipient, ^{recalls} ~~is reminiscent of~~ the straight letter, Vav. And the palm of the hand with which the poor man accepts the gift has five fingers, again the numerical equivalent of Hé.

Of course, this is not the plain meaning of the text, and is

a fanciful interpretation. Yet, the fundamental idea is not fanciful at all but profoundly substantive: it is not the motive but the act and the results that are more important in philanthropy. The act of charity itself, automatically, becomes an act of *INQ* if it is effective, even without proper intention. Certainly, it is better to give in a mood of piety, morally, and with dignity; but it is better to give anyway than not to give at all. Our Sages were always concerned with motives, but Tzedakah is one of two mitzvot* where motive plays a minimal role, and acts and consequences play a maximum role.

Perhaps we can put it this way: from the personal point of view, from the vantage point of the moral health of the individual human being before God, subjective elements of motive and intention and manner are of the greatest significance. How the money was made, and how he distributes it, describe and effect his neshamah (soul). But from the communal-social point of view, when we are dealing with the hard nails in the social shoe, with the irreducible facts of pain and hunger and helplessness, sickness and ignorance, we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of considering motives only,

* The other is mikvah, which effects purification even without the participation of intent or awareness.

disappears completely if we accept not the reading as I have given it, but the variant offered by the North African Sage, Rabbenu Hannanel, and the French rabbi Menahem Meiri. According to these sages, the last four words of the passage read not *הרי זה לב צדקה*, such a man is a "complete saint," but *הרי זה לב צדקה*, such an act constitutes "complete charity." In other words, the Talmud is commenting on the objective nature of the act, not its subjective consequence. Objectively, such an act of giving, even though it is contingent and serves self-interest, remains *לב צדקה*, completely charity. Subjectively, such a man may be worthy, but not a saint; virtuous, but not excellent, not a *לב צדקה*. The difference is whether we view the problem from an overall vantage, including the perspective of those who are in need, or from the point of view of the morality and personality of the individual donor.

Sometimes it is profitable to learn from a non-Jew what the Jewish concept of tzedakah should be: the Jewish theology of fund-raising.

This past Fall, when I was in Israel, the press carried a small item which intrigued me. It was an obituary, which recorded that there had died, some month or two earlier, in Heidelberg, West Germany, at the age of 93, a Prelate (or Bishop) by the name

of Dr. Hermann Mass. He had been close to the Jewish people since he attended, as a delegate, the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1903. In 1933, when the Nazis took power, he publicly affixed a mezuzah to the door-post of his house, proclaiming publicly that this mezuzah is a sign that every Jew should know that he is welcome and secure in this house; I am told that the mezuzah is still there. At the age of 67, the Nazis sent him into a labor camp because of his friendship with Jews, but his spirit remained unbroken. After the State was declared, he made many visits (or, as he called them, aliyot) to Israel. Once, he attended a synagogue in Safed when the old rabbi asked him for his Hebrew name because he wanted to make a *פארע'ן* for him. Without thinking, Prelate Mass answered, *פארע'ן פאר אים* ... He was the first non-Jewish German assistant to be invited as an official guest of the Israeli government, and was awarded a special prize by Yad Veshem for his help to Jews during World War II.

All of this is prelude to the following incident: in 1966, at the occasion of his 90th birthday, the Yad Veshem in Jerusalem arranged a special ceremony in his honor. After this was over, he came with the dignitaries to a private party. In the course of this event, he put his hand on his chest and said to his host and all those gathered, "Do you know what I have here?" Puzzled,

and in order to break the embarrassing silence, the host said, "A Jewish heart!"

Dr. Mass laughed and said, "No, No!" Thereupon, he pulled out of his breast pocket a little bag, raised it, and told all present, "I have here IL 10,000 as my gift for this country, money that I collected from non-Jewish friends before coming to Israel this time..."

Contrast that, if you will, to too many Jews who, when approached to do something for their people, heroically put their hand on their heart and protest their big Jewish heart, saying, "I have it here!" It is not for nothing that such people are known today as "cardiac Jews" -- they put too much of a load on their poor hearts as if their good intentions alone can help anyone else, as if they make the world a happier place to live in because of it. This is a crude and an abysmally foolish misinterpretation of the Jewish theology of fund-raising, of the Jewish concept of giving.

Beautiful thoughts are good, but not without beautiful results. More important than lovely motives are lovely acts. The first step must always be tzedakah gemurah; only afterwards can we strive for tzaddik gamur.

Perhaps all this is best summarized in two words that we use

often to describe generosity and benevolence:

Hessed means love, as we all know. The word gemilat comes from the word גמל which normally means maturity, weaning, coming to fruition -- as in the verse פִּאֲרֵל גְּמִיל or גִּמְלֵה גְּמִיל .

Hessed alone is pretty, but such love that is inconsequential remains childish. However, when it is expressed in deeds, in behavior, in conduct, in acts of kindness and gentleness, of help and compassion, of charity and pity and sharing -- then it is גמל , it is mature, and we have $\text{פִּאֲרֵן גְּמִילָה}$.

All of us are possessed of the quality of Hessed or love. But each of us is charged with גמל , with ^{growing} ~~going~~ up -- and up and up and up... so that our Hessed matures as $\text{פִּאֲרֵן גְּמִילָה}$.