

"THE NEW GENERATION -- A SUMMER VIEW"

Worry over the younger generation seems to be a characteristic Jewish preoccupation ever since ancient times. Already at the Exodus, when we first emerged as a people, the Torah made as many as four references to children and how they will interpret those historic events. As we all know, the Haggadah uses these four references to formulate a typology of Jewish children. And, significantly, three of them are certainly cause for concern!

So has it been throughout Jewish history. The Talmud is full of advice about how to keep the younger generation "in line," and some of the Sages of the Middle Ages often brood over the possibility of their children failing to follow in the footsteps of their elders. About three hundred and fifty years ago, the author of "*Trifles*," prescribed the proper parental attitude in a manner perfectly appropriate to our own days. Over two hundred years ago, Rabbi Moshe Hagiz complained that in his days children were ruling the roost, society had acceded to the autocracy of children in the family. And this -- a full two centuries before Dr. Spock!

In our days, the youth problem is exacerbated, as is everything else, but it is not unprecedented. The counter-culture,

the youth revolution, are facts of enormous importance for the history of our times. But it would be a mistake to speak of the younger generation as if it was cut out of whole cloth, as if that term described all young people. That would be no more accurate than assuming that all mature people share the same point of view. With regard to Jewish life, there is a large group of the indifferent in the middle, ranging from those to whom Judaism means absolutely nothing to those for whom it has a marginal meaning, and includes the extreme left of those young Jews who are actively anti-Israel and perhaps anti-Semitic. But it includes, as a counter measure, a far more significant and probably more numerous group of those who have brought their particular and peculiar youthful zeal to bear on a refreshingly new commitment to Judaism.

It is worth focusing on this segment of the youth revolution that is not revolting; that part of it which, while it may be annoying and irritating to us, is most welcome. The militantly pro-Jewish youngsters are critical of the adult Jewish community not because it is too Jewish but, on the contrary, because it is not sufficiently Jewish. They level serious charges at us of the mature generation: that we are hypocritical, empty, and diffident.

At the outset let me say that I do not uncritically approve all that this group says and does. I do not subscribe to the typical American youth cult, nor do I feel it proper to act out my own hidden guilt by embracing all the wild and reckless charges made against our generation, nor do I share that brand of primitivism according to which we must respect wisdom that comes specifically from the lack of experience -- the raw, native, gut-wisdom of young people, uncorroded and uncorrupted by facts.

Yet my point is that there is much we can be proud of in contemplating this generation, and even more, they are the cause of much optimism and confidence for the future.

Primarily, I refer to the attitude that informs this generation. This can best be explained in the form of a comment made by the great Kotzker Rebbe on a verse in the narrative concerning the twelve man delegation of spies that Moses sent into the Holy Land. Ten of them came back with a majority report that was depressing and discouraging. The climax of that report came after they described the giants and the enormous fortifications they had encountered during their mission. They said, *אנחנו ראינו את עצמנו בעיניהם כחגבים*, "We were in our eyes like grasshoppers, and so were we in their eyes." But, asks the Rabbi of Kotz, if it is true that in comparison with these giants the Israelites felt tiny

and diminutive, like little grasshoppers, what was wrong with them disclosing the truth? He answers: indeed, there was nothing wrong with them telling their fellow Israelites that they felt like grasshoppers in their own eyes. Their true sin came in the last three words: *אני כחולדה*, "And that is what we looked like in their eyes." Authentic Jews, authentic human beings, should not care how they appear in the eyes of others! A real person is concerned about conforming to his own highest standards, about being loyal to God, to morality, to Torah, to tradition, to whatever standards he sets for himself as the guiding principles of his life. He has no business viewing himself through the eyes of society, appraising his own life by the canons of someone else's taste, judging his own conduct and formulating his own destiny by the standards imposed by some powerful stranger.

David  
~~Victor~~ Reisman coined a most felicitous phrase to describe the psychology that motivated our generation during the fifties and sixties and even earlier. He referred to us as "other-directed," people who had invisible radar antenna that were sensitive to the currents of opinion and taste imposed by social leaders. We allowed the WASP majority to tell us what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil, what is proper and what is improper. We allowed them to direct our lives, and after our

radar picked up the signals from the social leaders of America, we internalized those standards and accepted them as the determinants of our own conduct and personalities. *אני רואה את העולם שלי*, our major concern was how we appeared in the eyes of others. That was what really counted.

However, today's militantly Jewish youth have abandoned such radars of personality. They do not want to share the painful self-consciousness as Jews that characterized our generation -- and probably still does. They refuse to live by the standards of *אני רואה את העולם שלי*.

I became strikingly aware of this quite recently in a discussion I had with a most intelligent young couple in the process of deciding about a day school for their child. One of the problems they raised was whether the child would be taught to wear his kippah or cap outside of school, in the streets. Let me make it clear that I am not now concerned about the din, about Jewish law. Strictly speaking, the law is quite lenient in this respect. What is important is the kippah as a psycho-cultural symbol. In my generation, even the most pious did not wear the kippah in museums or libraries, in theatres or universities or public places. And we impose our standards upon our children: we do not relish the kippah as a sign of our differentness, we want

to avoid the sneer or the smirk of the socially superior "American," we do not want to stand out too much, we want to keep our religion and our practices in our homes and not make it too blatant and too demonstrative. But this is the very reason that today's youth, not necessarily for religious reasons at all, insists upon wearing the kippah every place -- places public and private, streets or home, museum or library or movies, or wherever it might be. They are saying: this is my identity, whether you like it or not. I am who I am, and I shall not be someone else in order to please you. The kippah represents to me what I am in my eyes; I could not care less what it means to you in your eyes. I will respect you, I will be considerate of you, I will help you. But I will not modify my being and change my character and curb my own identity in order to satisfy standards that you think proper, but which I reject.

The Rabbis told us that the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt by virtue of three things: they did not change their peculiar Jewish dress, language, and names. Our younger generation has kept the kippah as a sign of Jewish dress, the outward symbol of Jewish identity. Their language, even if it is not Hebrew, bears the ideological accents of ethnic, national, and religious self-assertion. And their names are clearly different

from the names we were given by our parents and frequently still give our children. They use Biblical and modern Israeli names -- without English counterparts. This past week I returned from Minneapolis to New York after giving a lecture in that mid-western city. Sitting in the airport, there sat next to me a man who was obviously a New York Jew. A young woman was there with two children who, like the other children, were a bit noisy and rambunctious. She noticed that they had traveled a distance from her and so she called to them, "Moshe, Aryeh!" The man next to me blanched, then turned red, as if someone had cruelly and suddenly exposed him to shame and opprobrium. He was visibly annoyed, and even shaken. I thought to myself that he never would have reacted in this manner had she called to her children, "Maurice, Lionel!"

So the reaction of this segment of the new generation is a marvelously healthy one -- far healthier than ours. The Israelis would have called our attitude, the pattern of reactions of our generation, a Galut-Complex. Perhaps the Bible, to use the Kotzker interpretation, would have referred to it as a Grasshopper Psychology.

Where do these young people get this new pride, this inner certainty, this comfortableness with their own identity? Mostly, I suspect, they get it from Israel. After 1948 and 1956, and



especially 1967, Jews have learned that we are who we are, and we shall remain what we are, without satisfying criteria set for us by others. And perhaps it is part of the general ethnic self-assertion that is a world-wide phenomenon, especially in the United States, where Blacks, who cannot pass for Whites, have decided to find new pride in their identity and proclaim that, "Black is beautiful."

Such is the new authenticity of the militantly Jewish younger generation. Our generation, no matter what we may have contributed to Jewish life, did not possess this healthy and refreshing psychology. We could not. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk ( in his " *אמון פשוט* ") alludes to this difference between the generations in a comment on the same incident of the meraglim (spies). Is it not strange that ten of the twelve princes of Israel had so lost courage that they no longer trusted God's promise that they would be able to conquer the land of Canaan? Rabbi Meir Simcha answers that they did not lose faith completely. They believed that the Israelites would conquer Canaan -- but that they, their generation, would not be able to do it; only their children would. Thus, part of the majority reads as follows:

והוא נשק אשר עמו עמדו על ארבע רגליהם כי חזק הוא מכל



"And the people who went up with him (Caleb) said, we shall not be able to go up to this people (i.e., conquer them), because they are stronger than we." The emphasis is on the last word *I/NN*, "we." What the ten princes said was this: We grew up amongst the Egyptians, as slaves. The dominant feature of our personality and attitude was -- submissiveness. We learned, in our formative years, to be fearful and uncertain and timorous. (That is why Ibn Ezra points to the anomaly of six hundred thousand strong Israelites frightened by every little tribe, afraid to fight.) Our generation will not be able to succeed in this conquest, because the Canaanites are stronger *I/NN*, than we are, considering our psychology. But our children, who have been brought up in the desert, without the yoke of a master upon them, free and even wild, they will be able to do it and carry out the Lord's mission.

They were wrong in yielding for their own generation. But they were right in accentuating the difference in the psychology that informed the two generations.

We, whose minds and emotions were formed before and during the Holocaust, before Israel and before the self-assertion of minorities throughout the world -- we failed to rise to Jewish authenticity. Because "they are stronger than we," we were anxiety-ridden by how "we appeared in their eyes." But that is no longer

the only attitude of Jews today. A new spirit has siezed the most creative segment of our Jewish youth throughout the world. In the Soviet Union they are risking life and limb to proclaim their Jewishness openly. In Israel they are ready to fight the entire world if necessary in order to protect their cherished independence. Even those disaffected and disadvantaged Moroccan youngsters from Katamon who call themselves the Black Panthers, despite their occasional violence, betray a proud Jewish spirit. In a letter I was recently shown, a man who attended a dialogue between students and Black Panthers comments, at the very end, about the remarkable self-restraint and idealism and Jewish discipline that is revealed in the revolt of these Black Panthers.

And in the United States, there are now Jewish youngsters who are willing to proclaim that "the Emperor is naked," that the Jewish Establishment has too often failed, <sup>that</sup> it has become an accomplice to assimilation and deracination. They are the youngsters who are sitting in in Federation offices and demanding that Jewish education no longer be neglected; that needs of all communities be considered, but that Jews come first on the list of priorities of Jewish charitable organizations; that while we must not neglect the poor of other peoples, we certainly must not neglect the Jewish poor -- and this week a report came out which shows that 15% of the population of American Jewry is on

or below the poverty line -- close to one million Jews!

It is true that this group is capable of escalated rhetoric, that sometimes they are way off the mark, that one requires a world of patience to deal with their extravagance and their exaggeration. But they are not embarrassed by their Jewishness, as so many of us were and still are. They possess no shyness, none of this painful Jewish self-consciousness that comes from always looking at yourself through other's eyes. They do not subscribe to *אין אדם בלי חטא*.

I therefore feel justified, at the beginning of this summer, in adopting towards them a "summer view." Let us not look at them with the usual, dismal, dark, wintery perspective that we have learned to adopt towards Jewish youth. When the Israelites murmured against God because of His demand that they move on to conquer Canaan, they protested that their children would be *אכזרי*, they would fall prey to the enemy. And when God answered them in anger, He said, *והאנשים אשר אמרתם כי יהיו לאכזרי*, "And your children about whom you said that they will be prey, them will I bring and they shall know this land which you rejected." Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk tells us that the word *אכזרי* here should not be interpreted as "prey," from the word *אכזר*, but rather it is derived from the word

1157 , and therefore it means: And your children whom you ignored, whom you deprecated, in whom you had no confidence and no trust -- they will be the ones who will reach far higher levels of ahavat Yisrael, they will know the land, and they will deserve to inherit it.

So let us not ignore, or neglect, or deprecate this new spirit in our youth. Let us direct it, and also respect it and let it give us courage.

As we enter the Summer, let us not begrudge ourselves this 1158 , this little consolation of a more sanguine outlook, of a bit of hopefulness. And let us regard this new trend not 528 , not ignoring it, but understanding it and trusting it as a creative omen for a greater future.