

"DIFFIDENCE AND INDIFFERENCE"

Years, decades, even centuries seem to have passed since we last assembled here for Kol Nidre services. What a difference between last year and tonight! Last year at Kol Nidre, things seemed so normal despite the intermittent crises, so innocent despite the occasional scandals, life so secure and danger so remote. We did not even know how lucky we were. Tonight however, in the State of Israel, parents and children of some twenty eight hundred young men will rise at the end of the service to recite Kaddish at the occasion of the first yahrzeit of their children who fell in battle.

The Jewish tradition tells us that one of the fundamental differences between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is that Rosh Hashanah is יום הדין, the day of judgment, whereas Yom Kippur is יום הרחמים, the day of mercy or compassion. While each contains an element of the other, these are the major emphases. Thus, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapiro, author of "בני יששכר", complained that the מי שברך, the special prayer recited for those who receive Torah honors on Yom Kippur, mentions לכבוד יום הדין, "in honor of the day of judgment." He ordered that these words not be inserted in the prayer, because Yom Kippur was a day of love and compassion, not judgment and justice. I confess that for a while I was planning to do the same at The Jewish Center.

But no more. Yom Kippur, of course, remains a day of mercy and compassion. But, alas, the stamp of יום הדין (day of judgment), is indelibly impressed on it as of 2 P.M. last year on Yom Kippur day, and so it will remain forever. A new and ominous dimension has been added to the historic character of this day.

Never before in my adult life did I recite the words of the תורה ונחמה prayer with such feeling and conviction as I have since the outbreak of hostilities last year.

מי יחיה ומי ימות, מי בקיצו ומי לא בקיצו -- who knows? Who is destined to life and who is destined to death? Who to an early end and who to survival? מי במים מי באש מי בחרב -- who will drown in the Suez Canal or the Mediterranean, who will be incinerated in a burning tank or a crashing jet, who will be the victim of the enemy's sword or napalm or missile?

ועל המדינות בו יאמר, איון לחרב ואיון לשלום and on this judgment day it is decided which nations are doomed to war, and which will be graced with peace.

We have achieved a new awareness of the fragility of our

lives, of the marginality of our existence, of our vulnerability, of the extent to which we are pawns and not players in the games of life.

But, Jews are Jews! And Jews never let any experience of life pass without squeezing out of it some lesson, something that they can both learn and teach, some insight into securing survival.

What were the lessons of that traumatic experience a year ago? I am not speaking of the military and political reevaluations: these themes neither fall within my competence nor are they appropriate for this holy night. Rather, I ask the question in the spirit of the Jewish tradition, which from its beginnings insisted that every cardinal event must become a springboard for self-examination, for teshuvah (repentance). Our question, then, is: where have we gone wrong, not as soldiers but as people, as Jews? Certainly, Yom Kippur, the time of introspection and confession, is appropriate for such soul-searching.

There are two problem areas which cover all our lives: the spiritual and the social. Or, to use the classical formulations of our tradition, the realms of בין אדם למקום (between man and God), and בין אדם לחברו (between man and man).

These two areas are alluded to in the amidah just concluded:  
כי אתה סלחן לישראל ומחלן לשבטי ישורון בכל דור ודור

"For Thou art the Pardoner of Israel and the Forgiver of the tribes of Jeshurun in every generation."

Rabbi Baruch Epstein, author of "ברוך שומר"<sup>2</sup>, asks: why do we in one case refer to our people as "Israel," implying an organic entity, and in the second phrase as "the tribes of Jeshurun," implying a divided people?

He answers by referring to a Kabbalistic idea which is not at all overly mystical. The Kabbalists ascribe all sins and failings to two primal sins committed by our people in the dim past. These are, the Golden Calf, when the people of Israel made themselves a calf and worshipped it, and the selling of Joseph by his brothers. The Golden Calf is paradigmatic for all sins בין אדם למקום; all spiritual failures derive, no matter how indirectly or remotely, from that of the Golden Calf. The selling of Joseph is the source of all sins בין אדם לחברו; all social injustices reflect, somehow, some aspect of that cardinal crime of treachery early in our history.

Therefore, on Yom Kippur we pray that God be a סלחן לישראל-- that he pardon Israel for its crime of making the calf, and for all

sins against God that derive from it; and that He be a מחילן לשבטי ישראל, that He forgive the tribes of Jeshurun, the brothers who sold Joseph into slavery and thereby accepted responsibility for all wrongdoings of one Jew against another for all generations.

I would analyze that a bit more carefully. The sin of the Golden Calf is recorded in the Torah after the following prefatory words: the people saw כי בוטש משה, that Moses was delayed. Our tradition says that בוטש comes from בא שש, "six hours had passed." By this they mean that Moses had promised when he went up to receive the Torah that he would return in 40 days. The people thought that meant the 40th day, whereas he meant the end of 40 full days. Because of a difference of six hours, the people became exasperated, frightened, impatient, anxious, nervous. Because of this they made the calf and proclaimed: אלה אלהינו ישראל, this is your God -- or, preferably, your leader -- O Israel. Their fundamental insecurity lead to impatience, to search for a leader, to impulsiveness, and this is always the cause of man's sins against God.

The selling of Joseph into slavery came from just the opposite characteristic: from over-confidence rather than from diffidence, from insensitivity rather than from insecurity and anxiety. The tribes or brothers were too independent, too contemptuous, and therefore developed disrespect and enmity for their brother.

The illusion of weakness results in alienation from God, and a search for ersatz gods, for substitutes whether for Moses or for the Lord. This was the essence of the sin of the Golden Calf. It holds no less true today for young Jews who, in their exasperation and in their unwillingness to learn the difficult and demanding road of Judaism, thus find their ways into ashrams, into Jesus-freaks groups, into Buddhism and Christian Science and -- some four thousand years after our ancestors repudiated moonworship -- to this new evangelist from Korea, Rev. Moon.

The delusion of power leads to the alienation of man from his fellow man, of Jew from Jew. It leads people to sell their brothers down the river!

These, then, are the two primal sins for which we beg forgiveness and pardon on Yom Kippur: diffidence and indifference, impatience and impudence, nervousness and "nerve," insecurity and insensitivity.

Before last Yom Kippur our major problem was: the selling of Joseph. We were too much the "tribes of Jeshurun." We were

over-confident to the point of arrogance, and not only Israelis but American Jews as well were cocky, secure, and -- divisive! Israel had become a powder keg of internal strife. The tribes of Jeshurun were at each other's throats: Black Panthers, economic scandals, political infighting, hatred, were tearing apart the fabric of Israeli society.

Since last Yom Kippur, our major problem is not the selling of Joseph, but the Golden Calf. We have become nervous and weak, too pessimistic, on the brink of hopeless. The voices of despair and self-doubt are abroad in the land. Some Israelis ask: maybe we should never have built a state, maybe we should give up what is asked from us, maybe the Arabs are not wrong after all. The alienation of Torah and God as the source of our national dignity has affected our claims and rights to the land. Our alienation from our history and past jeopardize our very future. As with the Golden Calf, insecurity leads to infidelity.

Not only does this hold true for Israel, but for the United States as well. Our whole community suffers from these two weaknesses.

This was brought back to me with stunning clarity last Friday morning when, with a group of colleagues, I met with Senator Jackson in his office in Washington D.C. The Senator is truly one of the **הסידים האומות העולם** (noble gentiles). He is the prime mover, despite the absence of any obvious political motivation, in the effort to tie in credits for the Soviet Union with the rights of Jews to emigrate from Russia, and an end to their harrassment, in the famous "Jackson Amendment." We met him immediately before he was to meet with President Ford at the White House, who was to meet thereafter with Ambassador Gromyko on the same problem.

We came to tell the Senator not that we support him -- we are not politicians -- but that the Jewish community has a sense of gratitude and that we approve of and applaud what he is doing. He told us that he had trouble with two groups of Jews. One was the American Jewish leadership which, devoted though it was to the cause of American and world Jewry, was overly-nervous, too fearful, and buckled under too quickly to pressure. Every time Secretary Kissinger felt a cold coming on, American Jewish leaders sneezed. They allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the Executive Branch. They were too ready to compromise too much, even before beginning negotiations. The second group were the American Jewish intellectuals, especially the leftists, who were so concerned with advancing their abstract concept of Détente, who were so committed to their liberal dogma of friendship with Russia, that they were willing to overlook the vital interests of Russian Jews or Israeli Jews or any human rights.



There they are! One group -- the impatient, insecure, nervous Jews, who are willing to compromise whether it be with the Golden Calf or with the Soviet Union. And the second group, Jews who are guilty of contempt and indifference towards their fellow Jews; "tribes of Jeshurun" who are willing to sell Joseph to every passing band of Medianites or Egyptians -- or Russians -- in the name of liberalism!

So if we ask God to forgive us these sins, to be the סלחן לישראל ומחיל לשבטי ישראל, we must make every effort to rectify our failure, whether in Israel or in communal life in the United States.

But it is not sufficient, on this holy day, to speak about communal leadership problems in which we do not have much of a voice. Permit me to speak rather directly and personally as well about two areas in our life here at The Jewish Center. In both of these, I urge you to overcome the sense of alienation, both in the area of man-God relationship, and in the area of our social life.

First, as "Israel." In times of such threats to the continuation of Judaism, we simply have got to be more vigorous in our practice and our observance of Judaism. We are a bit too smug. We look about each other, notice many people in shul, and think that it will always be this way. We are not sufficiently aware of the constant dangers and assimilatory pressures that surround us. And the answer must come not by what somebody else will do, but by what we ourselves are willing to do. It means that we, who are sufficiently sophisticated to read what we read and do what we do, must at least attend one she'ur of Torah study per week. It means that those of us who come only on the High Holidays must do more. Of course, I know you are good Jews in the sense that you support every Jewish cause so liberally; would that all of us would follow your example! But is it not necessary to recharge your batteries, to establish your contact with the synagogue and with the Torah, and with Jewish life, in order to gain something from all that you are giving? It means that those of you who come every Shabbat -- and that is the overwhelming majority of this congregation -- must come Friday night as well. I am often deeply embarrassed at the fact that this great synagogue sees only 40 or 50 people and hardly any children on Friday nights. Is it not possible to come home 45 minutes earlier and welcome the Sabbath the way it should be welcomed? It means that our women who have time for every cause, must not refuse to respond to the Center itself when it calls upon them for assistance.

Second, the area of "the tribes of Jeshurun." We often speak of "The Center Family." Sometimes I wonder if this is only a great ideal, and whether it is or is not a reality. For instance, if, Heaven forbid, there is a funeral at The Center, I look about me and wonder: where are all the friends, where are all the people who see each other every Shabbat? Why is it that when we have to have <sup>a</sup>minyan in the house of a mourner, we must use the telephone to invite people? That should never be necessary! Those who are friendly in times of happiness, must be friendly in times of need as well. It means that we must feel a closeness to every Jew, and if a stranger comes in to the synagogue and moves into our seat, we must not act aggrieved and upset.

Yom Kippur must teach us greater devotion to the Holy One, and greater love of Israel.

If we sincerely dedicate ourselves to this double program of avoding the sin of the Golden Calf and of the selling of Joseph, God will indeed be the "Pardoner of Israel and the Forgiver of the tribes of Jeshurun."

Last year at this time we rose and we prayed.

<sup>יְעֹלָה תְּחִנוּנָנוּ מִצֵּר</sup>, may our prayer rise at sunset,  
when we recite Kol Nidre; <sup>וְיָבוֹא שׁוֹעֲתֵנוּ מִבּוֹקֶר</sup>, may our  
cry arise before God at sunset on Yom Kippur day;  
<sup>וְיִרְאֶה רִינּוֹנוֹ עַד עֵרֶב</sup>, and may our song, indicating God's  
acceptance of our prayer, be seen and heard by sunset, by Neilah  
time.

Apparently, we did not pray hard enough or wisely enough or with enough sincerity and kavvanah. Even if we did, it did not help. Because while <sup>יְעֹלָה</sup>, while our prayer arose at sunset; while <sup>וְיָבוֹא</sup>, our cry came to God in the morning -- it stopped there. There was no <sup>וְיִרְאֶה</sup>. By Neilah time, no <sup>רִינָה</sup>, no song, was seen or heard. Instead -- the cold clash of iron and steel. No melody, but wail and lament. Fire and blood and tears.  
<sup>יְעֹלָה וְיָבוֹא</sup>, but not <sup>וְיִרְאֶה</sup>.

Tonight, chastened by a year of travail so cruelly and abruptly thrust upon us by the enemy last year on Yom Kippur afternoon, we pray with special fervor <sup>יְעֹלָה וְיָבוֹא וְיִרְאֶה</sup>.

O Lord, let Your help and goodness and salvation be Your answer by tomorrow evening.

Because, Lord, as Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev said to You one Kol Nidre eve, after a particularly vicious pogrom: "Master of the World, we need You! But Master of the World, You permitted

these pagans to murder us and spill our blood, the blood of our old and our young, of our men and our women. No more, O Master of the World! Because while we need You -- You need us! What, after all, will You do without Your Jews in the world? Who will speak of You? Who will keep the memory of You alive?"

So we say, O Lord, "how we need You! How You are needed by those who are sick and worried; by those who are disappointed, whether in children or in themselves; by those who feel economically threatened, their whole position in life jeopardized; by American Jewry; by the Jews of the State of Israel. But Lord, You need us too! Your prophet Isaiah said, 'אתם עדי', 'Ye are my witnesses.' And so forgive Israel and pardon the tribes of Jeshurun, because we must still witness to You in this world."

You need us, O Lord, so let all three of our prayers be answered this time.

יעלה תחנונו מערב ועלה שזעתנו מבקר ויראה  
רוננו עד ערב.

May our prayers arise tonight, may they come before Thee in the morning, and by Neilah time may they be answered with song and a promise of a year of health and peace and redemption.