



• RABBI NORMAN LAMM

THE PROFOUND CHANGE that has come over parent-child relationships in the last decade or two, and which has been ably documented and explored by perceptive sociologists, should be of more than casual interest to Orthodox Jews. If indeed the child is father to the man, then the radical transformation of these relationships is bound to have a tremendous impact on the kind of Jew who will soon build the synagogue, pay for them, pray in them, preach in them and perhaps stay away from them. More important, this change today will determine what kind of synagogue will be built and what kind of "Judaism" will be practiced tomorrow.

What is of concern to us here is not the upbringing of Jewish children per se. Our problem is solely, how will this affect their religious character as mature adults. Will the training they now receive—training, not necessarily education—predispose them to the genuine form of Jewish piety called Orthodoxy, or to a watery modernism with its progressive diminution of Tradition to the vanishing point?

The Father "Image"

There is no doubt that, generally speaking, there is a carry-over from the child's attitude to his parents, particularly his father, to his attitude to G-d. We disagree vigorously with the Freudian psychologist who concludes that Religion is nothing more than a "projection" of childhood fantasies and G-d is a "mere" father-image.

Rabbi Norman Lamm, spiritual leader of the famed Kodimoh Synagogue in Springfield, Mass., and active in the local Day School, is fast becoming a writer and editor of note. We are pleased to present here his stimulating analysis of parent-child relationships in modern society and their impact on religious living.

"A Child and his Fathers"

There is nothing fantastic about Religion, and the fact that its emotional strength is often enhanced by "projections" from childhood does not detract from its validity. Albert Einstein's inclinations for mathematics may have come from childhood fantasies and projections, but that does not give us cause for repealing the Theories of Relativity. And neither is there anything "mere" about G-d as a father-image. G-d, in Judaism, is many things: Judge, Liberator, Beloved, Lawgiver, Warrior—and also, perhaps primarily, Father. The fact that we graft onto our religious attitudes the feelings we had for our human father does not at all mean that G-d's only a convenient fiction for the satisfaction of certain psychological needs. It means, rather, that He really is a Father. He is "ovinu" as well as "malkeinu", and we are His "bonim" in a more profound way than the merely metaphorical or even biological.

But while we cannot go along with the radical conclusions of this school, we cannot gainsay the element of truth that led to these convictions: that there is a basic connection between childhood training and the religious character of the mature adult, between the child's reaction to his human father and the adult's approach to his spiritual Father.

This identification of Father with father has accounted for a good part of the defections from authentic Judaism in our generation. We are only too well acquainted with the stereotypes of Jewish fathers a generation ago. Add a dash of ideological elegance, a few grains of theological sophistication and recast into a more abstract mold, and you will find the G-d-concept of many of today's non-observant Jewish adults. Father couldn't speak English and had foreign mannerisms, and so the G-d of Israel too was regarded as outmoded, outlandish and "foreign." Father had difficulty adjusting to American ways and customs, so Torah too was declared irrelevant to the

modern scene and of no value in guiding the destinies of an American-reared Jewry.

Harshness and Coercion

Furthermore, father was more often than not coercive in inculcating religion in his children. He was afraid of this new country whose very stones were "*treifah*," and tried to preserve his heritage for his children by means of a strict, harsh discipline. The American environment often gave rise to questions which overwhelmed him. He was simply unprepared to explain away the conflicts between the teachings of Genesis and evolutionary doctrine, and a host of similar questions posed by his children whose secular education far exceeded his own. He feared the consequences of such probing not only because of an irreligious milieu and his own limitations, but he was painfully aware of the inadequacy of his son's Jewish education. To cope with this complex problem often proved just too difficult for the immigrant father. His answer was, at best, to dismiss all questions as trivial, usually to respond with a charge of heresy or, at worst, to exercise a stern and unrelenting authority, applied with the back of the hand to the back of the son.

Of course, this was not the ideal solution, no matter how honorable the motives. What resulted was a transference from father to Father. G-d was envisaged as an unbending tyrant Who insists upon punctillious observance of obsessive trivialities, and Torah Judaism was conceived of as an illiberal, un-American and authoritarian faith which demanded uncritical and unquestioning acceptance by its communicants, and damned reason and love as one. The rejection of one father led to the rejection of the other Father. "My father tried to beat it into me, that's why I never go to *shul*." We have paid dearly for such mistakes in the upbringing of our children.

Our problem today is the exact reverse. Again it involves the question of parental authority. But instead of the threat coming from an unenlightened and unreasoning strictness, it comes from a progressive abdication of and diffusion of authority, with "reason" promiscuously exploited at the expense of elementary discipline.

The "Others"

All of us are aware of this abrupt shift in the pattern of parental control in what Reisman has called the "other-directed" society. With forewarning as to the dangers of oversimplification, we may say that three things have happened to the authority over the child: the parent is no longer its source, or main source; it is diffuse and undefined; and it is always made to appear logical and reasonable.

For the greatest part it is no longer the parent who makes the independent decision on how far to go in satis-

fying a child's wishes and indulging his whims. It is rather, the "peer group"—the "other" children. The "crowd," and not the parent by the exercise of common sense, determines the amount of spending money, the propriety of freak clothing, and the hours a child must keep. "What other children do" is the ultimate standard for my children. Aside from exercising a minor restraining influence, the parent is anxious to have his child conform to the crowd. He is apprehensive lest he or his child will be dubbed a "card" or a "square" or even a "queer." The popularity of all kinds of books purporting to give the latest statistics on the standards of the peer-group attests to this abdication of authority by the parents. The occasional protest by a parent suddenly coming to his individualistic, non-groupist and maladjusted senses is like a hoarse cry in the wilderness. The "others" have taken over the reins and it is they who do the directing. And the parents? They are only interpreters of the mores of their children's contemporaries, the expounders of what these "others" do and think and feel and regard as good taste. And the children, blessed as they are with insight, recognize that their parents are only the *middlemen* of discipline, *brokers* of authority which is really vested in these "others."

Diffusion of Authority

A corollary of the shift in the *source* of authority is the *nature* of the authority. When it was wielded by the parent, it was clearly centralized and defined. When the child wanted to explore the limits of permissible behavior, he had only to test it on his father, and he discovered the limits by his father's reaction. No such easy test exists for the child of today, nor for his parent who must interpret that authority to him. The "others" are a highly diffuse source. There are variations and divisions and a flux within this amorphous mass. The society of youngsters is not monolithic, and its limits on behavior are therefore vague and shift. It is not easy to decide if it is "these" others or the "other" others one is to follow. A child, or his parent, can always appeal to a certain one of these sub-groups of "others" whose practice happens to appeal to him most at the moment. The children at the Junior High stay up to twelve on Saturday nights and take music lessons. Those in the immediate neighborhood stay up to one and think music is sissyish. Who wins? And how does a parent convince a child to accept the more stringent code?

"Reason"

Here the third element enters: Reason. In choosing between the fluctuating and sometimes conflicting standards within the peer group, and in mediating between the authority of these others and whatever residual au-

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thority the parent himself still exercises, the instrument of convincing is reason. A parental decision must not be accepted merely because it is a parental decision. It must first be explained, its motives given, benefits, outcomes and alternatives disposed of. "Reasoning" thus becomes a major instrument for the manipulation of children by adults in the attempt to enforce a vague authority whose mediators they are.

The trouble with "reasoning," however, is that it is a reversible process. The child is soon bright enough to wield it as well as the parent and ultimately may manipulate his parents by outreasoning them. Furthermore, this "reasoning," being manipulative, bears little resemblance to "reason." It is the misuse, not the use of the rational faculties. Most children brought up by "reasoning" do not appear to be any more logical, inquisitive or reasonable than their predecessors.

Breakdown of Discipline

The worst effect of this reliance upon "reasoning" is the subsequent breakdown of discipline—an old-fashioned but indispensable virtue. When a child has been trained to believe that his obedience is solely dependent upon his intellectual assent to the parental demand, he will become quite incapable of submitting to *any* condition which surpasses his own understanding or fails to receive his consent. He believes that what he cannot grasp is unworthy—yet a good deal in life that is most worthy will forever remain beyond his intellectual scope and will not wait for his considered consent. It is difficult to tell who is to be pitied more: he who is not aware of his own intellectual potential, or he who remains blissfully unaware of his serious limitations.

Now, what can we predict about the future religious complexion of children raised in this manner, assuming the "father-Father" transference? The unfortunate results are already beginning to show. It is all too easy to trace the carry-over from childhood attitudes towards father to the adult's religious character.

Attrition of Divinity

First, the Divine Father is no longer considered the ultimate and absolute source of moral and religious authority. The "others"—society, the crowd, the ubiquitous Joneses in the religious sense—have become the pacesetters and the legislators of moral criteria and religious taste. Whereas classically G-d, the Divine Father, was Judge, He Who by His own authority established the norms for man's conduct and pronounced judgment over him when he departed from them, G-d has now become only the broker of authority. He is asked to approve *mores*, instead of sanctioning *morals*; to endorse what *is*.

instead of demanding what *ought* to be. It is in Kinsey and not in *Kedoshim* that one now looks for a standard of morality. Religion merely refracts the norms of contemporary society for the individual, so that G-d loses His "*midas ha'din*," His attribute of judgment, and becomes a benevolent "yes-man" for the standards of practice of the "others." And since G-d has become only a kindly source of approbation of the status quo, then a great deal of the magnificent tradition of Judaism falls by the wayside. How speak of awe and transcendence and the Infinite, or fear and trembling, before a G-d Who is Himself not the ultimate authority and is only a friendly Father who urges me to keep up my morale by adjusting to the happy crowd? Anyone who has given an adult education course today knows of the consternation of students who are told that Judaism requires the experience of the "fear of G-d" before the higher level of "love of G-d" is attained. The concept is utterly incomprehensible to those who were trained to think of father as a benign interpreter of authority rather than its source, and as one who counselled conformity to the "others" rather than one who judge by independent standards. "*Mitzvos* Yes, *Aveiros* No" reads the title of an article by a Conservative Rabbi. "*Mitzvos*" (in this sense) are the means of manipulating a benevolent, anxious and slightly confused father-image, whereas "*aveiros*" cannot be committed against a father who, essentially, has never commanded from himself and on his own say-so. A religion of this sort lays no claims on a man's life, and in turn does not deserve his loyalty. It has nothing to offer on the crucial issues of life and death, of suffering and immortality. It is an irrelevant religion.

Vagueness of the "Others"

Second, the indefiniteness and vagueness characteristic of the "others" make their appearance in the religious sphere as well. If Judaism is to be only a reflection of the authority of these "others," then it must reflect its diffuseness and nebulousness as well. This means that the prescriptions and proscriptions of Torah must be vague and imprecise. But the *Halacha* is the very opposite of vague: it is accurate, clear and well-defined. *Halacha* is the call of a G-d Who knows what He wants, and Who makes His wishes clearly known, for He is in full command. Hence, a conflict between the authentic nature of the Jewish tradition, as *Halacha*, and the sort of "Judaism" desired by those who as children never had authoritative fathers. *Halacha*, *Mitzvos* and *Din*, with their precise and authoritative claims, are eschewed, and substituted for them are Customs and Ceremonies and Rituals, where a total dramatic effect is desired while details are allowed to be blurred. Religion thus degenerates into pageantry, because the Voice of G-d has become nothing more than an *echo* of the "others."

• Limitations of Reason

Third, the child who had everything reasoned out for him has now grown into an adult whose estimation of his own rational ability is outrageous, excusable perhaps in the 19th century, but certainly not in the twentieth. Our new adult recognizes neither the limitations of reason itself, nor the limitations of the human capacity for knowledge, nor the existence of inscrutable mysteries where reason becomes not only inadequate but irrelevant. In this sense he is unscientific, for while the use of reason is important in Science, science is not rationalism, and the scientist does not presume that all that is incomprehensible is untrue or invalid.

The Talmudic Jew tries to understand all that he can, but does not peremptorily reject that which surpasses his comprehension. For the Orthodox Jew, intellectual probing is a "*mitzvah*," and the Talmudic literature is a quest for rational enlightenment in Torah and an exercise in logical inquiry. But the use of reason has always been *disciplined*. This archetypical Jew never presumed to understand all that there is to know about G-d and His ways or commandments. "For My ways are higher than your ways." To think otherwise is blasphemous—for if we can know everything about G-d, then we are His equals. This is what the Serpent told the first humans when tempting them to eat of the Tree of Knowledge—"and ye shall be like G-d." Of course, recognition of our limitations does not imply the abandonment of reason altogether, as we previously indicated. But we do understand that G-d created our minds as well as our bodies, and hence His commandment is to be accepted, if only because He is G-d and He commanded. If I can understand His motives—good and well; but I must submit to His discipline even where no adequate explanation exists. This is a thesis which even a rationalist can accept unequivocally.

Our new type adult, however, cannot go along with this view, whether in Judaism or science or the ordinary discipline imposed by civilization in everyday life. His human father disguised authority in the form of reason. Nothing was left to faith—the faith of a child in his own father that the parental command is based on sound values even if they are obscured from the child. Consequently, the child's acceptance of paternal authority was commensurate with his ability to reason out its validity. Any divergence by the parent from this norm was either a show of temper or a temporary lapse of enlightenment.

Extrapolate to the field of religion, from reasoning with father to reasoning with Father, and you have a fair picture of the new contemporary non-observant Jew. He will accept Torah—provided it can be simply explained on one side of a typed sheet, double-spaced. You can sell a "*mitzvah*" to him on the basis of "enlightened self-interest": it enhances health, makes for family cohesion, has "survival value" or sentimental worth. *Kashruth* is healthful, *Mikvah* psychologically satisfying (between

the two of them we can beat both coronaries and cancer as well) and "families that pray together stay together." But you cannot convince him to observe that which he cannot fathom or for which no easy explanation is handy. It is not so much intellectual arrogance and faith in his own unlimited genius, as his amazement that G-d isn't a perfectly reasonable fellow, just as father was.

The Great Danger

As a result, there is not only the danger of the abandonment of those *mitzvos* which are basically "irrational," but an even greater danger of the complete distortion of those for which reasons *are* given. This past spring one young man told me he was not going to perform the "*biur chametz*" before Passover. He had heard that this represents the search for and uprooting of the "*yetzer ha'ra*," and he was confident that he had had sufficient success against his own "*yetzer ha'ra*" so that he could dispense with the ceremony! Indeed, we have perhaps gone too far in attempting to explicate the "*taamei ha'mitzvos*" instead of teaching the fundamental principle of Divine authority: that G-d is our Judge, not we His judges, hence our obedience is not dependent upon our intellectual assent.

We are witnessing, then, a shift in the source of parental authority, its nature, and the manner of its application. As these children mature and carry over these same attitudes to religion, Orthodox Jews find a fresh problem with which to cope. Whereas a generation ago Orthodoxy was being accused of being too authoritarian, tomorrow it may be transformed into something unauthoritative. — This is not meant as a prophecy of doom. Far from it. We have faced problems in the past, and always will in the future. This is but an effort at defining one which is first coming into its own, one which is already stimulating and challenging, and can prove successful in evoking a great creative effort on the part of all of us. For educators, whether in Day Schools or synagogues, it is a signal to return to a more authentic interpretation of our tradition and specifically of Divine authority, away from the superficial rationalizations we have often substituted for the real answer. For parents it means recapturing the authority which they have largely forfeited, and its use in a manner which will be clear and purposeful as well as enlightened and progressive.

For all of us the solution lies, as I told my congregation this past Passover, in a new emphasis on the one-word refrain of one of our most charming Seder hymns: "*dayenu*"—enough. The word is not only an expression of gratitude, but also one of self-control and discipline and submission to Divine authority. Whether in family life or business or the upbringing of children or all of life, which is religion, there comes a time when we must call a halt to our expanding egos and whims, and cry out "*dayenu*"—enough is enough.