

DRAFT

1965

The Zohar (LEV. 98a <sup>f</sup>) offers a marvelous interpretation of the meaning of Shofar, and presents it in the ~~heartening~~ beautiful <sup>symbolic</sup> language of the Kabbalah. It is an immensely profound interpretation, which must not mislead us, because it is a ~~long~~ <sup>charming</sup> narrative, into accepting it as ~~really~~ <sup>merely</sup> a superficial "story."

The Zohar considers each of the first three series of sounds of the Shofar -- each series consisting of tekiah, shevarim-teruah and tekiah -- as having a different spiritual effect. The first series arouses Father Abraham, who awakens from his eternal slumber and proceeds to the Throne of God to plead for his people. The second series arouses Father Isaac, who proceeds to do the same. And the third blast of the Shofar arouses Father Jacob who takes his turn in joining Abraham and Isaac for the Divine Throne to plead for their mutual descendents. Then, the Zohar concludes, Abraham and Jacob go towards Isaac and they hold him by his arms: Abraham holds him by his right arm, Jacob by his left. <sup>(i.e. a yipe on either side of "l")</sup> As a result, the ~~heart~~ <sup>harsh</sup> decree of judgment against Israel cannot be issued. The three together thus form one unit of appeal before God for Israel.

What does this mean?

What an intriguing and strange explanation! /Much more than ~~is~~ apparent at first blush. For Abraham, Isaac and Jacob each represents a different quality. Abraham symbolizes the quality of hessed, that of love. Isaac represents din or justice. And Jacob is identified with the theme of emet, truth.



In order for Israel to survive on the Day of Judgment, Abraham and Jacob, or hessed and emet, love and truth, must surround Isaac or din -- justice -- and thus appear before the Divine Throne. Justice must be subdued and surrounded with love and truth, <sup>+</sup> ~~its~~ divine compassion for Israel is to prevail.

To appreciate the Mahar's insight, let us try to understand what is meant by din or justice. Justice is more than just an abstraction discussed by philosophers, analyzed by jurists, and debated by lawyers. It is a way of looking at life -- a critical, ethical, profoundly moral way. It is the way of reward for virtue and punishment for vice. It is the way of fairness.

"Life," said the late John F. Kennedy, "is not fair," Balancing the favors life bestowed upon him -- riches, influence, <sup>a fine family,</sup> ~~a good~~ mind, attractiveness -- against the tragedies, the illness, the agonies ~~to~~ which it dealt him, he concluded that this world does not give man a fair, just deal.

<sup>also</sup> The Rabbis too were puzzled by life's injustice, ~~They were~~ who as heirs to the great Prophetic tradition -- and the Prophets too ~~brooded~~ brooded over the disturbing phenomenon of tzaddik ve'ra lo, the righteous man who suffers, and the wicked man who prospers. Death, misery, earthquakes, holocausts -- who will say that these are just and fair? <sup>9</sup> And yet who dares to say that life, created by God, is unjust! Therefore the Rabbis <sup>that</sup> concluded sekar mitzvah be'halal leka, the reward for obedience to God is not given to man in this world. There is another world beyond us and beyond our comprehension, in which justice is ultimately done: the righteous are rewarded, and the wicked are punished. ~~the~~ "Life,"

may not be fair; God is. It is an act of faith on our part that ultimately din, justice prevails.

But before we rush to premature conclusions, complementing ourselves on our righteousness and wallowing in self-pity at the injustice in which we are victims, let us take stock. The Prophets and the Sages spoke of tzaddik ve'ra lo, of the righteous man who suffers. But who here is willing to declare himself a tzaddik? There is a tremendous difference between tzaddik ve'ra lo and the complaint of each individual. Not every man and every woman is a Job who can successfully challenge his God to prove the injustice of the Divine decree against Him.

The whole tenor of this season, from selihot to the end of Yom Kippur is: ein anu azei panim ... lemor tzaddikim anahnu ve'lo hatanu, we are not so impudent as to maintain that we are righteous and have not sinned. We know, indeed, that by the standard of din and justice we will be found wanting, lacking, we will be ~~found~~ discovered to be moral failures. Ki lo yizku b'einekha ba-din. No mortal can be found guiltless when measured against the standard of din or justice.

Is there here any person who does not have some skeleton in his closet? Take out the Jewish community. Could it survive by the standard of din? Why, even when compared to our non-Jewish neighbors, we discover -- and know full well inwardly --



that we look pale by comparison, that they are more loyal to their faith, than we are to ours!

Does the world deserve to survive, measured by din? We have science; we have misdirected it to the construction of machines of death rather than elixirs of life. We have the gifts of writing and we have produced a pornographic literature far more extensive and influential than that ~~literature that~~ which inspired man to moral heights. We have vulgarized culture and cheapened the civilization.

It is therefore presumptuous of us to approach God on this Day of Judgment and demand our vindication by the standard of din or justice. It is vain of us to protest to God on the basis that we deserved more, that life is not fair to us. Dr. Viktor Frankl, founder of logotherapy, a fascinating new interpretation of psychotherapy which, for the first time <sup>in the history of modern psychology</sup> takes the life of the spirit into consideration, has said that it is not we who ought to question life; it is life that questions us. It demands of us that we rise to new heights, to find meaning and purpose in what we do. <sup>By the standard of justice, man has no right to hurl a challenge at life; he must prepare to answer life's challenges to him.</sup>

If there is only din, only justice, then it is we who are unfair, not life and ~~not~~ not God. A mature individual, therefore, does not challenge fate; rather, he listens closely and then answers to destiny's challenge to him. If we make ~~demands~~ demands of God, we want help, we want luxury, we want comfort and convenience, on the basis of din or fairness, we are fools or even worse. <sup>By</sup> Din alone, we are doomed -- We, the world, our nation, and individuals.



So ~~that~~ the middle tekiot alone, in <sup>and ourselves</sup> by itself, Isaac without his father or son, spell tragedy: our sins remain exposed, our failures revealed.

But if din or justice finds us wanting, how then can we survive? How can we begin a New Year confident of God's compassion, of our own self-respect, of our moral integrity?

The answer is that we must surround din with ~~the~~ the two qualities of hessed and emet, of love and truth. All three can be encountered in Torah. But hessed and emet ~~prevail~~ prevail. For while the Torah contains the quality of din, it is known by the name of hessed (Torah ~~hessed~~) and emet (Torah ~~emet~~). Hessed is a quality of love, of social decency, of true character, of elementary human kindness towards our fellow men. Hessed refers to our consideration for others. The quality of hessed is that of overflowing generosity which is not withheld and restrained; it is our inherent <sup>love</sup> and intrinsic kindness. <sup>hessed</sup>

As such, as a sense of overflowing goodness, it knows no bounds. It must bless, with its beneficence, all the world, all men of different colors and different faiths, the stranger as well as the neighbor. This is indeed was the ~~quality~~ quality of Abraham: His hessed let him rise to <sup>the</sup> heights and <sup>+</sup> pleaded with God even for the wicked sinners of Sodom.

There are ~~thus~~ two tests of hessed: how we conduct ourselves to those who are distant, remote, and vastly different from us; and how we react ~~to~~ those who are closest to us, to those who <sup>we</sup> we see every day, to those who may compete with us for

This is the meaning of the Akedah & the reason we read it on Rosh Hashanah. It is the story of Abraham binding Isaac. Its symbolic meaning is the quality of hessed or love overflowing above all din ~~justice~~. Only when love joins with din can we survive. On R.H. we plead for God's love, His hessed.



affection and the center of the stage, for those who most irritate us, <sup>about</sup> for those who<sup>m</sup>, because they are close to us, we maintain ambivalent~~te~~ feelings, such as: husband, wife, brother, sisters, parents, children.

Hessed means we must ask with basic decency and kindness to both these extremes, each of which is more difficult to treat with goodness than those in between. Hessed to those most distant means that we, eastern, ~~we~~ urbanized, socially accepted<sup>able</sup> Jews must react with compassion even to the hungry, unemployed, <sup>N</sup>egro slumdwellers of the <sup>Watts</sup> ~~Watts~~ area in Los Angeles. Even while condemning lawlessness and plunder, we must react with compassion and understand what it is to feel a quiet anger all one's life, what it means for a youngster to grow up in a seething hot-bed of frustration ~~at~~ <sup>in</sup> at a world which denies him elementary rights to advance himself, which denies himself the opportunities that every human being deserves. And hessed to those closest to us is a challenge to each and every person here today to examine his own conscience. Have I <sup>at</sup> ~~answered~~ with enough<sup>se</sup> love towards my spouse? Have I treated my children with enough patience, or have I been overly irritable? Have I payed my parents only a token respect, or have I indeed been a decent son or ~~daughter~~ daughter? Have I learned to control my sibling rivalry for my brother or my sister, or have I <sup>allowed</sup> ~~aroused~~ myself to grow into maturity as one still tainted with the petty envies of childhood? <sup>Do I take my closest relatives or friends for granted, and sometimes treat them unwell, brutally, without hesitation?</sup>  
Din, therefore, must be hemmed in at one side by hessed.

If we are to survive our rightful doom on the basis on justice,



we must support ~~ourselves~~ ourselves on one side with the quality of love and kindness, *and social generosity.*

And on the other side there must be: emet, truth. By truth we mean our loyalty to the Will of God, even as Hessed means our consideration for our fellow men. No wonder <sup>that</sup> twice a day we recite a passage in which we combine two different elements, and we unite them as one: Ani hashem elokechem emet. I am the Lord your God -- truth. Truth is the acknowledgment in practice and in real life, that the Lord is God.

← Every mitzvah is a source of truth. Every averah is a lie.

Take, for instance, the mitzvah of Shabbat. By observing the Sabbath I declare a truth: that the earth is the Lord's, that man is not the master of his own destiny; that, therefore, we are responsible to God for how we dispose of our material wealth and our material possessions.

*By* our observance of the festivals ~~is our way of declaring~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~their~~ <sup>history</sup> that we are ~~in for~~ a great ~~vicinity~~ which these festivals summarize and recapitulate for us, from the exodus from Egypt to the receiving of Torah at Sinai. It is a way of reminding ~~us~~ ourselves of the ennobling truth that we are not merely salesmen or cutters, merchants or customers, not merely lawyers or executives, college students or housewives or grocerymen. We are ~~the~~ children of Prophets. We are the newest link in the golden chain that continues from Abraham through Isaac to a great future beyond us. We bear the burden <sup>of</sup> a divine history, and we are each of us not insignificant ciphers but ambassadors of

Our religious observances are not folkways. They are not charming sentiments. They are not "cute" avocations. They are not compulsive rituals. They are the way of emet.



God and Jewish destiny to <sup>the</sup> world at large.

~~that~~ Kashruth is a way of declaring an emet. For kashrut <sup>not</sup> means/that certain foods are forbidden, but that they are permitted! For originally all meat was forbidden to Adam, for life was too precious for man to devour it in any form. ~~Only~~ later did God permit <sup>us</sup> only certain kinds of foods, -- what we call kosher foods. By observing kashruth, therefore, we declare that life is sacred and that we must always stand in reverence of it. We declare at the same time that through kashruth we acknowledge that Israel is separate, different, and that this difference is expressed in the most intimate way known to man: his diet. A man who eats in accordance with the dictates of the divine faith, will not marry out of that faith, and will not conduct his moral and ethical life out of keeping with the conscience directives of that faith.

This is how we can survive the standard of din by enhancing the hessed and the ~~emmet~~ emet aspects of our characters of our lives.

The world can <sup>not</sup> survive with <sup>out</sup> justice; it also can <sup>not</sup> survive with justice alone. Isaac, who represents genuine justice, is therefore held on <sup>one</sup> each side by Abraham, ~~and~~ <sup>on the other by</sup> representing hessed or love, and Jacob representing emet or religious truth. The three sounds of the shofar <sup>balst</sup> represent those three, And when they are united <sup>with</sup> justice in the middle, <sup>with</sup> love on this right hand, ~~and with~~ truth on the left hand, then all three together will make the stirring and effective appeal to Almighty God to grant us a blessed year of compassion.

Later, because of man's vast appetite for food, not permitted meat -- but for Israel the original vegetarianism, symbol of Jewish reverence for life, was retained for all but special species of life.



This is the meaning of the Zohar's interpretation of the Shofar. We arouse Abraham, the patron of hessed or love. We arouse Isaac, the patron of din or justice. We arouse Jacob, the patron of emet or truth. With love and with truth, and with justice firmly ~~set~~ set between them, we march forward before the Divine bar of justice, before the Divine throne.

With three such distinguished <sup>p</sup>leaders, we sound the Shofar in the confidence that Almighty God will grant us a year of rahamim, a year of peace and blessings and happiness.