

"ONE HOUR"

In its formulation of Prayer, the Jewish tradition is somewhat more mystical than rationalistic, and its teaching strikes us intuitively as attractive and religiously valid. Normally, we assume that it makes no difference when a man prays, provided that he knows what he says and is sincere in his devotion. But Judaism tells us that there is more required than the participation of the heart and the genuineness of the spirit, although they are, of course, indispensable. A man must also know *כיצד וכן*, how to guess or strike the right hour.

Time, the tradition means to tell us, is not uniform. Certain hours are more accessible to particular prayers than others. Certain prayers are more suited to certain times than to others. A good prayer has its right time, and the one who prays must have a sense of the appropriateness of what he says to the time it is said. Thus, *שאלה*, asking for the fulfillment of one's needs, must not be uttered on the Sabbath. Prayers celebrating God's sovereignty over nature are normally recited at the change of the day -- as dawn and dusk -- or change of the month, as Rosh Hodesh. Certain propitiatory prayers, such as Tahanun, may not be recited at night.

In the same vein, Maimonides, in his "Laws of Teshuvah," tells us concerning the repentance and the prayer of individuals: *ואם לא תשובה* and *ואם לא תפלה*, repentance and prayer are al-

ways appropriate, during the ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur they are especially beautiful and immediately accepted. This penitential period, which reaches its climax on this day, is especially suitable and appropriate for prayer.

Hence, the verse which we repeat every day during this High Holy Day season: אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הָאֵל הַיָּחִיד  
הַיָּחִיד הָאֵל הַיָּחִיד , "Our Father, our King, may this hour prove to be an hour of mercy and a time of grace before Thee."

There are certain times that are particularly susceptible to certain movements of the spirit, and if we miss them, then those exquisite moments of spiritual efficacy and exhilaration are lost to us forever. These spiritual moments are irretrievable.

What I am trying to say is this: the world of the spirit teaches what the practical world already knows -- that certain opportunities are singular: they arise, never to return. If we are wise, we know how to exploit these opportunities. If we are not, they are lost and cannot be recaptured.

The same idea has been expressed in a beautiful fashion and a different way. The Talmud teaches: דָּבָר רַבִּי, וְלֵי קוֹרְבָן  
אֵל . Rabbi wept and exclaimed that there are some people who must work all their lives in order to win their share in the world-to-come, while others, whose lives may be spent in dereliction of duty, can, in one hour of strenuous and heroic effort, win their world, the world-to-come.

The great Rabbi of Lublin, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, asked a simple and obvious question: Why, if indeed a man can change his destiny in one hour, should that cause Rabbi to weep? On the contrary, he should have been overjoyed that man is afforded such opportunities that, in but one hour, he may change the course of his destiny. The Lubliner answered: Rabbi cried, because it is possible that that hour can come into the life of a man, and the man should be unaware of it. The hour may come, the man sleeps, and the hour departs -- forever... The opportunity for immortality arises for but one hour; and the hour may be lost.

It is with this in mind that I turn to the high school and college students who are here this day. You are the victims of social and economic circumstances beyond your control, which have forced you into an unnaturally prolonged adolescence. Because of this unnatural state, many of your contemporaries have fallen prey to a mass hysteria of irrationalism, disguised as noble idealism. I need not enumerate the ways in which this neurosis expresses itself. But I plead with you: do not fall victim to it. Do not imagine that you can live a life of nonsense or abandon, leaving your religious development to later in life. No, that *הנלך* , that hour of golden opportunity, is at hand now; it may not return later on. Now, in the full flush of your strength and enthusiasm, in the full bloom of your young idealism, now is the time for you heroically to show how a true Jew lives on the campus -- despite the difficulty, despite the ridicule, despite the discomfort, despite the burden of differentness it places upon you. It is almost a prophetic

mission -- to be the models of Jewish conduct for your peers -- but it is an exciting one and a creative one. And now is the time -- this hour.

As the Rabbis taught in Avot, אל תאמר כי כשיהיה לי זמן אבין  
אולי לא "do not say that when I have time I shall study; you may never have the time..."

I would direct my remarks in the same vein to young men who are at the beginning or the middle of their business or professional careers, chalking up one success after another. There is a natural tendency to become so absorbed in your work that you neglect all other portions of your personality that do not deal with the empirical and the pragmatic world. But these talents and propensities do not last forever. You will not always have the ability to develop a warm relationship with wife and children. You will not always have the kind of artistic or aesthetic bents you may now have. Above all else, remember that there is a spiritual side to personality -- and I do not only refer to outward religious observances. There is an aspect of life itself that speaks of inner sensitivity, of a mystic longing, of a spiritual yearning. Do not neglect it. Now is the הנ/א זמן in which you must begin to develop this side of your lives. If you do not, it may very well wither away. I know that you are busy. In our period of life, busy-ness is both the blessing and the bane of our existence. Never must busy-ness allow us to neglect our own higher, non-material development.

A rather depressing story was told to me by a colleague of mine. He was returning from a funeral of a dear friend in the same car with the deceased's son, who had been very close to his father.

The son seemed even more upset than the circumstances called for, and much more than his personality would lead one to expect. My colleague inquired of him as to any special reason for his disturbance. "Yes," answered the young man. "I was told that shortly before he passed away, my father felt the urge to speak with me. He wanted to tell me something important. So, from his hospital bed, he picked up the telephone and rang my number. But -- my line was busy. By the time I was free, he was dead."

דאס וואר דאס יונגסטע און גרויסע  
און גרויסע און גרויסע און גרויסע

How sad, that during that hour, that precious and cherished and great hour -- our lines are busy. And the hour never returns.

Before Yizkor, our thoughts inevitably turn to parents and children. Discord, irritation, differences, are normal in relations between parents and children. But they must never be permitted to get out of hand, to strike below the surface. To children I would say: you have your parents only for a limited time. They themselves will shortly say Yizkor for their parents. Make up your minds that this year will be your *אין אונזער*, your special time to exploit for the great Jewish and universal ideal of *אין אונזער*. Devote this year more than ever before to honoring and giving comfort and satisfaction to your parents -- with sensitivity, with patience, with grace.

And to parents I would say: children are really all we have. The time that we can influence them is severely limited -- relatively, a *אין אונזער*, or infrequent hours spread throughout life.

Try to be wise in discharging your duties. Do not relinquish your parental role as teacher and guide. But -- do not bear down too hard, do not interfere with the development of a child's natural, healthy personality. If his goals are right, allow him to achieve these goals in his own way. Do not abuse and lose this golden opportunity for developing a healthy relationship with a child, a warm and loving one, that will always remain as the great source of strength for future guidance.

Now is the opportunity. Now, and perhaps never again.

זמן יקר ופעם אחת.

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In all these instances, simple awareness of opportunities is insufficient. What is more important is the willingness to exploit them, to work and exert yourselves in order to take advantage of opportunities.

In the second chapter of Bava Metzia, the Talmud tells us the various laws of metziot, of finds. In one law, we are told of two people going on the way. One is a רוכב על חיה, riding on an animal, and another walks, leading the animal, and they chance upon a metziah. The rider sees it first -- but the pedestrian picks it up first. Both claim the find, and come to court. What is the law? The Talmud decides the Halakhah: נשאל מלמד ארני זכיוני דה רבה, the one who picks it up first and says, "it is mine," he is the rightful and legal owner.

There are many metziot in life -- in business, in family happiness, in community work, in friendship, in the simple opportunity to



help someone when he most needs it. In every instance, merely being aware and articulating the opportunity does not mean that we have taken advantage of it. We must be willing to work, to labor; if you permit me the appropriate colloquialism, a man must be willing to get off his high horse in order to exploit the rare hour of opportunity.

Perhaps the most crucial instance of a *holec noll* that we dare not ignore is the possibility of a religious renaissance in the State of Israel since the Six-Day War.

Before that war, many or even most Israelis were afflicted with a dogmatic agnosticism, almost an irritating and arrogant cynicism. The war changed that for many -- and it changed it deeply. Only one small symptom of the phenomenal change was a slim volume which has become a classic in Israel: " *פְּנִינֵי חֵל* ", the testimony of the young paratroopers who first conquered the Western Wall. These were the children of the extreme Left kibbutzim, and yet what they had to say revealed a dimension of historic affiliation and spiritual orientation that they themselves were unaware of. Generally, the war served to detach the cynics from their cynicism, to disorient the dogmatic secularist, and has made especially the young question the wisdom of their parents who raised them more on Marx than on Moses.

Here was an answer to our prayer, אלוין מרפון אבא דלסא

great הנהיג for teshuvat ha-tzibbur, a repentance of the entire community.

Yet, we have largely let it pass without exploiting it. And because of our indifference, old routines of thought and conduct, old habits of speech and deed, have returned to their former niches. The situation has unfortunately "stabilized" in the old pattern. Religious Jewry so far has failed to exploit this miraculous but rare opportunity.

Measured in historic time, 58 minutes of this *חנ"ל נ"ל* have passed; we have two minutes to go if a beginning is to be made in talking to the non-observant portions of Israeli Jewry. The distance and the alienation between the datiim (religious) and hiloniim (secularist) is not only a religiously pernicious phenomenon, it is also a nationally and socially destructive threat. The fabric of the State of Israel is threatened by it. So we must make a beginning in an effort to bridge the gap between the two communities. We must not lose this *חנ"ל נ"ל*.

Today I tell you: I take this challenge personally. I feel that I too must make my modest contribution to exploiting this great *חנ"ל נ"ל*. For if I fail to try, then *אין נ"ל* -- this Rabbi knows that he will deserve to weep.

For this reason I am taking a three-month leave from The Jewish Center to join my effort to those of other colleagues, both rabbinic and academic, acting through several groups, primarily one called "Gesher" (which means "bridge"), to make this great beginning. The task is a formidable one, a difficult one, and an arduous one, that will take more than 3 months or 3 years or even 10 years. But we have only *חנ"ל נ"ל* in which to begin.



Maybe we shall not succeed. But, as I have often said from this pulpit, there is nothing morally wrong with trying and failing; there is everything morally shameful about failing to try.

My leave from The Jewish Center will represent the combination of such opportunities. It will be a *link* *all* for young children to be exposed to life in Eretz Israel, where hopefully they will learn to love it. It will be an opportunity for me to acquaint myself with Israelis, both leadership and ordinary folk, my first such genuine opportunity. And no one who aspires to any kind of leadership in the American Jewish community can afford not to know Israel. It will mean an opportunity to study and read and learn on a more sustained basis than a busy rabbinate in America affords me.

But above all else, it will be an opportunity, even if but an hour measured in the longer perspective, to try to open a dialogue between the observant and the non-observant, between the Diaspora and the State of Israel, an attempt to present the message of Torah without political motivation, even without missionary intent, but simply with the desire to increase mutual respect between all Jews, an endeavor based on the faith and the confidence that if this mutual respect will be achieved, that Torah can "sell" itself.

To the leadership of The Jewish Center and all The Center Family goes my endless appreciation for their understanding of the historic need of the novel situation of the Jewish world today.

May I assure you that, despite the beauty and the excitement

of living in Jerusalem -- and there is nothing quite as beautiful and exciting -- I shall miss you sorely.

I shall keep all of you in mind, and when I pray at the places where our ancestors trod on the Holy Soil of the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and when I approach the Wall behind which our fathers ministered in the Temple of Solomon, and at the foot of which generations of our people -- from royalty and priesthood to weary pilgrims and refugees -- offered their deepest devotions, I shall offer my tefilot for each and every member of The Center Family: that when I return three months hence, <sup>"</sup>וְכָל, I find the sick restored to health, the weak to strength, the mourners consoled, the lonely encouraged; that all strife will vanish and all unhappiness will disappear.

And in return I ask you for your prayers that my work be crowned with success, and that I return <sup>"</sup>נ' | with my family reinvigorated, ready to rededicate myself to The Center, to the community, and to Torah, with renewed strength.

Because I plan to leave tomorrow <sup>night</sup>, I will not have the chance to bid farewell to each of you personally. So let me address you collectively, and intend each and every one of you individually: may you be blessed with a Gemar Watimah Tovah and a Peace Pin Shie.

Shalom U-le'hitraot and שלום ורחמים, may God  
bless you from Zion.

אבינו מעבירן לתו השנה הקל שנת רחמים ושל  
כי צון מעבירן