

"ASPECTS OF CREATIVITY"

The most wondrous miracle in the course of life is the ~~experience~~^{appearance} of life itself -- the birth of a child. If, therefore, when a child is born, he is greeted with simhah, with happiness, this is as it should be; for a child is the very highest expression of joyous creativity. No wonder the Jewish tradition teaches us that the father and mother of a child are partners with God in his creation; for the act of childbirth is the most significant creative act in human life. According to some of our classical commentators, the meaning of the biblical verse that man was created in the ^{divine} ~~tsellem~~, the image of God, means that just as God is creative so does man have the capacity to build and create. The most God-like of all human activities is that of creativity.

It is interesting therefore, and somewhat perplexing, to note the somewhat remarkable law which ^{comes at} ~~forms~~ the beginning of the first of the two portions which we read this morning, namely, that a woman is considered in a state of ritual impurity, or tum'ah, for a specified period of time after childbirth. If, indeed, the creative act is an imitation of God, why should the act of childbirth, the most creative natural act of which a human being is capable, bring with it, as a side-effect, a state of tum'ah?

What the Torah wanted to teach us, thereby, is that every creative human act, no matter how noble, inevitably brings with it certain negative features. Destructivity is one of the aspects of creativity, for creativity is a re-orientation of the kebot ha-nefish, it disturbs the equilibrium of the inner workings of the soul, for what is new can be produced only by upsetting the status quo; and from the same reorganization which produces creative results there also emerge destructive consequences. You cannot have yetzirah without tum'ah. The creative act involves an area of shade, something negative, an element of pain and agony and frustration. The seed must rot for the plant to

* This idea has been elaborated psychoanalytically by Freud in his Civilization and its Discontents.

grow. When you carve wood, you must expect splinters. The sculptor must chip away part of the block and discard it in order to have the figure, which his imagination has conceived, emerge.

In the very creation of the world, according to the Kabbalah, the same principle held true: the creation was accompanied by what the Kabbalah called the shevirat ha-kelim, the breaking or bursting of the vessels; meaning, that just as God gave life and vitality to all the world in His holiness, so did some of this life-giving holiness become entrapped and ensconced in evil. God gave rise to the world, and, as a side-effect, there arose evil as well. Tum'ah or uncleanness accompanied the cosmic act of yetzirah.

The establishment of great nations, great ideas, and great institutions likewise follows this pattern. American democracy came into being at the expense of bloodshed and revolution. French democracy, a most creative element in world history, carried with it the tum'ah of Robespierre and the symbol of the guillotine. The people of Israel was created in the house of slavery of Egypt. And when we left, there came along with us the eruv rav, the riffraff, those who did not deserve integration into our people. It is they who, according to the Jewish tradition, were responsible for the making of the golden calf and all the other sordid features that characterized the history of our people in those early days. No creation is possible without an element of impurity. ¶ That is why the Torah gives us, in this week's Sidra, the laws of impurity as they relate to the yoledet, the mother who ^{has} just given birth to a child. The Torah wishes to inform us, by observing the most creative of all acts, childbirth, that every element of yetzirah has the adhesions of impurity, teaching us thereby to expect them and thus avoid their evil consequences.

Parenthood itself contains risks of impurity. Some parents imagine that their children belong to them, and fail, even in later years, to allow a child to develop as an independent personality -- even as some parents fail in the

opposite direction, by abandoning responsibility for guiding and directing a child through being overly permissive. How many parents ~~are~~ really feel they have completely succeeded in raising their children without making any mistakes? In order to prepare young parents to expect mistakes, and to try to avoid them, the Torah stresses tumah right after childbirth.

Thus too it reminds the man building a business that if he does not take care, he is liable to build ^{his} ~~A~~ business at the cost of his ethical integrity, or at the ^{expense} ~~cost~~ of his psychological tranquility. He may become so totally involved in his work that other aspects of his personality wither away. It warns the man in public life that he may create a great deal of good for the community, but if he is not aware of the principle of tum²'ah that adheres to creativity, he may neglect his family while he pays attention to the larger human or national community. It warns the writer or the novelist that in the throes of creation and in the intense dedication necessary to produce something of enduring value, he is liable to disturb the inner recesses of the soul and ~~to allow recesses of the soul and~~ to allow repressed demons to emerge; he may ignore his moral responsibilities as an artistic creator. All too often modern writers, sometimes Jews more than others, allow their literary creations to wallow in all kinds of obscenity, all sorts of verbal tum¹ah.

Perpahs this too is the explanation of the remarkable law in this week's Sidra, ~~that~~ that/the mother's period of impurity is twice as long upon the birth of a baby girl as upon the birth of a baby boy. The question of this difference in time span intrigued our Rabbis of old. When the question was addressed to Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai, he replied, enigmatically, that when a boy is born ha-kol semehin bo, everyone rejoices, and therefore seven days of impurity is sufficient. But when/a girl is born, ha-kol atzevin bah, there is an element of sadness, and therefore the impurity lasts twice as long.

But what does this mean? Surely not every parent always wants a boy and not a girl - ordinary experience proves that. Even in antiquity, it was recognized that

the human race could not survive without the female portion of its population.

Maharsha, the famed commentator on the Talmud, explains this as follows: when a girl is born, the mother in her own pain and agony of childbirth realizes that this young infant will someday have to undergo the same excruciating experience, and therefore, despite all her happiness at the gift God has given her, she is already saddened because her daughter will have to repeat the same experience.

I would prefer to interpret that just a bit differently. Because creativity implies impurity, therefore the greater the creation, the longer and more intense the period of impurity; even as the greater the light, the more marked is the shadow. When it comes to this most significant of all examples of natural creativity, it is the female of the species who is more creative; it is she who gives birth, not ^{the} male. Therefore, when a daughter is born, the creative act is at its greatest and most intense: for a woman has given birth to a child who herself possesses the ^{capacity} ~~qualifications~~ for human creativity, in other words, the ability to give birth to yet another generation in its own time. Because the birth of a daughter is so much more a creative act than the birth of a son, the period of impurity is twice as great for the mother. Hence, the additional length of the period of tum'ah is not a indication of the relative value of a son or a daughter as such, but, quite to the contrary, a commentary on the greater creativity-value the Torah ascribes to womanhood.

It is with these thoughts in mind that our hearts turn in gratitude to the Almighty for having giving us, fifteen years ago, the gift of the State of Israel at such a crucial point in the history of our people.

The State of Israel was the most creative achievement of our people, in the ^{two} last thousands of years in a national sense. Not only is the State itself the creation of the people of Israel, but this creation itself possesses the potential of further creativity in generations to come. It is truly bat Zion -- the "daughter of Zion." And the idea we have been expressing, that creativity

inevitably has a proportionate aspect of impurity, should be for us both a source of solace and a warning.

All of us who love the State of Israel and admire it and are thankful to Heaven for it, accept it as an immensely creative contribution to the life of our people. And yet anyone who refuses to surrender his critical faculties, will be able to find negative features in the life of the State. Certainly, it is by no means the Messianic goal and the fulfillment of the thousands of years of striving, dreaming, hoping, and prophesying of our people. The religious complexion of the State is by no means stable, and not yet that which we have prayed and hoped for. The creation of the State resulted in a sudden lessening of the idealistic fervor which brought it into being. There are other areas of shade that one can find.

What our Sidra of today tells us is, that this is to be expected, and that it would be completely unnatural were such a historically creative act not to have a concomitant of "impurity" - and that if we are aware of this, we can look for these elements of tum'ah and rid ourselves of them.

How can we dispose of this spiritual impurity, this residue of galut that has come along into the free State of Israel from the many lands of our dispersion?

The answer is - by following the same pattern that the Torah described for the purification of the yoledet, she who gave birth.

One is, time: The Torah specifies a number of days -- no more, no less. You can't hurry up the process. You simply have to wait. Anyone who expects or expected that the State of Israel would suddenly come into being as a full-fledged messianic state was simply day-dreaming and completely out of touch with reality. It will take time until impurities that have attached themselves to us during the last 100 years that Jewish souls have wandered off into the labyrinthian channels of strange ideals and systems are gone, and the tumah is spent, and the population of the State of Israel is ready for a great period of re-

awakening and teshuvah. Nothing can hurry that natural process of maturation and purification.

The second element is - tevilah, immersion, purposeful purification of ourselves. It means that we must consciously seek to wash away from ourselves ~~of~~ all the accretions of alien ideologies that have disrupted the normal development of our spiritual life in the State of Israel and in the Diaspora as well.

Ein mayim ela Torah - "water refers to Torah." The waters of immersion, which the Torah prescribes for the mother who gave birth, symbolize the purification through Torah of the Jewish people throughout the world, they who are the mother of the State of Israel. All Jews can rid themselves of the spiritual impurity of our times not only by waiting for the natural process to take place, but also by dipping our souls into the waters of Torah and the "Sea of Talmud." We must return to our primordial spiritual origin and there cleanse our souls and our spirit and be prepared for the great purification of the people of Israel and the State of Israel in the great and glorious future ahead of us.

The beloved President of Israel, Itzhak Ben Zvi, of blessed memory, who passed away this week, represented both these elements. He was, first, a leader of infinite patience, a forbearing father of his people in whose presence all tempers were stilled and troubled spirits calmed. And, second, he had a love for Torah and a deep reverence for its scholars. He was a synagogue-Jew, a student of Talmud, and an ohev Yisrael. He represented an element of taharah -- of purity and purification in the life of the fledgling state. May his blessed soul return pure to its Creator.

And so our hearts turn to the Almighty in prayer that He guide the State and her leaders in the right path; that He send consolation to her grieving citizens; that He protect her from her many enemies so ominously surrounding her from all sides; that He purify her spiritual life with the mayim tehorim of Torah, and allow all of us to "draw the waters joyously from the wells of salvation."

Amen