

"THERE IS RELIGION AND THERE IS RELIGION"

The Book of Ruth, which is read on this Shevuoth Festival, offers us one of the most profound insights into the modern status of Religion. By telling the extremely personal tale of love and pathos concerning three major meta-historical characters, all women, we are given one of the most illuminating analyses of the two kinds of Religion which vie for the control of men's consciences, souls and destinies this very day.

Elimelech was a rather important person in the Palestine of about three thousand years ago. Financially, scholastically and personally he was a well-known Jew whose name was important enough to be mentioned in a Book of the Bible. One fine day Elimelech decided to leave his homeland and emigrate to the nearby Moab. Famine stalked Israel, and Elimelech thought that he and his family would fare better in this strange land. And so, he took with him his Naomi, whose name means "pleasantness", and his two sons and their non-Jewish wives. Very soon thereafter, Elimelech and his two sons die, and they fade out of the picture as secondary and unimportant characters. The sweet but sad Naomi now decides to return to her native Land of Israel probably to die in loneliness and sorrow. She decides to take leave of her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, and go back to what once was her home. But the young ladies have become too attached to her to say good-bye so easily. They tell her that they share a common grief, a common tragedy and therefore a common destiny. Both Ruth and Orpah tell Naomi that they want to accept her faith - Judaism - and return with her to Israel. We begin to sense a religious stirring in these pathetic souls who find themselves enmeshed in this intensely human drama. Naomi is moved by their expression of loyalty, but she will not hear of it. In consonance with Jewish teaching that we are not to encourage conversions to our faith, she bids them return to their heathen countries - to Moab - to return to their parents, perhaps to remarry and begin new lives. I have passed my prime, says Naomi, and have only memories to live for, but you two are still young and perhaps you can forget the past and find a future. Both protest that their love for their mother-in-law outweighs their desire for home, and they want to remain. Naomi again tries to dissuade them. And here the really crucial event occurs: Orpah takes leave of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law and returns to her pagan family in Moab. But Ruth, our heroine, is adamant. She will not leave her Naomi. She must become a Jewess. In the moving simplicity of all great poetry, she tells Naomi: "Where you will go, I will go; where you will sleep, I will sleep; and where you will die, there I will die".

And here, as these two dim figures of Ruth and Orpah part in the early <sup>dawn</sup> morning of recorded history, generations and destinies move with them. A bleak, lonely, pathetic scene on the distant plains of ancient Moab, but one which initiates and summarizes the parting of ways of two great nations. For Ruth converted to Torah, accepted Naomi's faith, married a great Jew - the kindly, renowned and saintly Boaz - and ultimately became the great-grandmother of the greatest king of Israel whose birthday is today, King David - the noble, saintly, sweet singer of Israel who unified a nation and gave it the immortal Psalms. Orpah returned to her heathen origins, despite her original protestations, ultimately forgot that she even ever knew the Naomi and Ruth, and was swallowed up in the life of Moab. And tradition here records the opposite - she became the ancestress not of kings and saints and scholars and prophets and poets, but she ~~became the~~ bore a line of descent distinguished by their viciousness, immorality, venery and anti-semitism. Just as Ruth became the forerunner of King David, and the royal house of Israel, so did Orpah, her sister-in-law, become the grandmother of David's arch enemy, Goliath, hero of that lewd and savage people, the Phillistines. Isreal was ~~the~~ constantly at war with the raiding Phillistines, both martially and culturally. And their eternal opposition was epitomized in the unequal battle between David and Goliath. And this entire drama of nation against nation and culture against culture goes back to two young women who parted from each other in the presence of one Naomi, two young ladies who were sisters-in-law, and who, but for a turn of Fate, might have remained together for all time.

And as we ponder this juxtaposition of nations, the people of David vs. the people of Goliath; the Psalms vs. the Spear; Holiness vs. Lewdness; we look back to their ancestresses, who were sisters-in-law. And why, one wonders, was Fate so good to Ruth and so harsh on Orpah. For did not Orpah too offer to remain with Naomi and accept Torah instead of a civilization of immorality? And the answer, my friends, lies in that slight difference of attitude which usually passes unnoticed, but which moves history as effectively as a bulldozer pushing sand. Listen to the Bible describe the parting of ways of these two girls: VA'TISHAK ORPAH LA'CHAMOSSAH, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, VE'RUS DAVKAH BAH, whereas Ruth clung to her. Here was the essential difference between Ruth's and Orpah's attitude towards Naomi and therefore Torah: Orpah only kissed while Ruth cleaved and clung. A very slight difference, you might say. True, but one which develops and unfolds through the centuries. The clinging and deep attachment of a Ruth becomes the profound passion for Truth and noble clinging to G-d of a David and an Israel. And the superficiality of Orpah, symbolized by the kiss, degenerates into the rabid and demonic wickedness of a Goliath; the lukewarm attraction becomes the very cold antipathy. Indeed, the Talmud refers to Israel as BNEI DVUKAH, the sons of she who clung; and to the enemies of Israel as BNEI NESHUKAH, the sons of she who kissed her mother-in-law. And ultimately, predict the Ages, YAVO'U BNEI NESHUKAH VE'YIPLU BE'YAD BNEI D'VUKAH, the clingers prevail over those who merely kiss, the Davids vanquish the Goliaths. Superficiality must always buckle and fall, when the real test comes, before the power of sincerity and the might of depth and true loyalty.

Story psychiatrist friend...typical... young child unseemly habits, queer phobias, emotionally unstable... Parents puzzled...Psychiatrist: love-starved...parents protest - give everything he wants, dress, toys, gifts....Psych, asks for schedule...night, fondle, kiss good-night, babysitter... Psych - that's trouble. Kiss less, but try to develop a real attachment to him. Let your soul cling to his. Help with home-work, discuss problems, show him a way in life, develop deep, real love and loyalty, not a smooching, superficial attachment. BNEI DVUKAH, not BNEI NESHUKAH. When parents kiss but fail to cling, when there is emptiness and hollowness and only form without content, then there must be failure.

And isn't Religion itself today affected by this same kind of superficiality, this form-without-content malady? Certainly, for there are two kinds of "religion" - the kissing and the clinging. We have got to be careful when using that word religion. For there is religion and there is religion. One is the B. NESH. and the other the B. D'V. And the differences between them are easy enough to detect. The B. NESH. are ever-ready with the ubiquitous and easy expression of affection. Synagogue - nice.. services.. beautiful.. Talmud Torah or Day School - necessary.. kashruth - fine thing for some folks. All our Jewish institutions are treated with the saccharine sweetness symbolized by the superficial and sugar-coated kiss. But the BN.DV., without whom these same institutions could never exist, view these things otherwise. Synagogue: not nice, but urgent; services - not beautiful but profound & souls-stirring; J. ed. - not just necessary but vital, matter of life and death; Kashruth & family purity not just good ideas for some folks, but very cornerstones of our own faith and survival our way of life. The B.NNESH. kiss the Mezuzah; the BN.DV. cling to what is written therein. The BN.NESH close the Siddur, kiss it & leave it in synagogue; the BN.DEV. close it, take its message with them, open their hearts to it, and begin to practice it. BN.NESH. express affection, whilst BN.DEV. impress with passion and devotion. The BN.NESH. are ultimately of no avail, while the BN. DEV. ultimately will prevail. VE'ATEM HA'DVEIKIM BA'ADONAY, CHAYIM KULCHEM HA'YOM. "And you who cling to the Lord are alive, every one of you, to this day".

These then, are some of the differences between the kissing kind of "religion" which has only form, only superficiality, only a saccharine sentimentalism, and the clinging kind of "religion" which means meaningfulness, purpose, depth & a hold on the core of Life.



What of today? An extensive analysis of religious trends by the N.Y. Times' religious staff shows a return to churches, temples and synagogues on an unprecedented d scale. A return to what, we ask, to a BN.NESH. sentimentalism with which we hope to cover up our basic dilemma, and hide the mighty wrangling of our souls; or to the BN.DEV. kind of religion, where we are going to meet ourselves directly, where we are going to go to the core of things and make of ideals and principles working things which will guide us through all situations?

I am afraid that this report is misleading. I am afraid that the return is only in name, and only to a more exaggerated sentimentalism. For if there were a real return to a clinging, fighting, powerful and meaningful type of religion - I don't care what denomination - it would show tremendous effects on the economics and politics of our nations. A true revival of real and deep religion would not allow to go unchallenged the dumping and over production of butter and grain here while little children shrivel to emaciated skeletons overseas. A true and deep religious return would not allow the vulgarist demagogue in American History to monopolize the TV channels for so long a time over trivialities. It would center the matter on moral and ethical issues. That would be part of the results of a BN.DEV., clinging, Ruth-like kind of Religion.

But what have we instead? Some kindly old senator from Vermont who thinks that he will establish a hegemony over the Christian Paradise if he will introduce a bill in the Senate amending the Constitution to read that we as, antion devoutly recognize the authority and law of the man Christianity calls a god. As if a polite constitutional kiss is going to save us from the heathens, communists, Jews and the Mau-Mau. But let us forget for a moment this travesty of Americanism - and I am inclined to think that the gentleman who introduced the bill probably regrets it by now - and violation of the freedom of religion and separation of Church and State. Let us turn to something we Jews can agree to as far as not violating our religious tenets. Another resolution, passed on the Senate floor - where the strangest things seem to happen nowadays - and passed on to the House with unprecedented speed, sponsored by Senator Ferguson of Michigan, would amend the Pledge of Allegiance. Instead of "one nation indivisible" whith you and I recited since we were tots, and mispronounced as well, we shall now be required to read "one nation under G-d indivisible etc." What a pale victory for Religion! Whata desecration of everything holy to any religion to proclaim it so patriotically, to reduce Religion to two words, but to wait two years and hundreds of victims before beginning to realize that McCarthyism is no good - and that because of political exigencies. BN. NESH. The good Senator just threw a kiss to G-d, but we wonder if G-d is going to blow one back to him. And yet how enthusiastic Americans have become over this great show of religion. The President's pastor is for it in order to distinguish our pledge from Russia's. America is suddenly turning real pious - churches, veteran groups, patriotic organizations, fraternal clubs, labor unions and, of course, the DAR, are all for it. "This nation will grow in strength by this fuller acknowledgement of its faith in Almighty G-d" writes one sacerdotal correspondent. And how does one important correspondent summarize this mass movement to give G-d a coveted entree into our great American pledge? - "All the various sponsors...agree on one thing: the wide-spread support the bill is receiving must bear testimony to a religious revival of significance". That is just what we disagree with! This Rabbi, for one, doesn't care one iota about this entire issue. I personally thank G-d every day for this democracy. But I don't think that just plain verbiage, that this mild and pietistic mention of G-d is going to accomplish much, or that it means very much. It is only a superficial kiss; I fail to detect the c clinging.

What we need, then, is a revival of BN.DV. kind of religion; and we here think especially of that kind of dynamic and powerful return to Torah Judaism. And we therefore appeal from this pulpit to all who have come this morning for the Yizkor Services alone:

try to deepen that religious spark you have. Do not make of Judaism merely a lovely demonstration of sentimentalism for dead parents. Don't come here just for an affectionate kiss to parents' souls. Come, rather, to cling and bind your souls inalterably to the Eternal Spirit with whom they have become united. Do not be BN.NESH. to whom the reading of a list of names becomes metaphysically important and the wherewithal of Judaism. Become a BN.DEV. and begin to live a life of YIZKOR, of remembering the Torah, source of our existence, and thus eternalizing the memories of your loved ones. Prove yourselves to be not BNEI NESHUKAH - lukewarm, superficial, weak Jews who come for Yizkor and then run off before Mussaf, deserting the synagogue and insulting G-d Almighty. Be rather BN. DV. who come to remain and then to return again more and more often until it becomes a regular habit.

The Davids and the Israelites scan over their lives, then, finding happiness, turn their eyes heavenward and thank G-d for having made them the sons of Ruth, who was able to cling. That is the true Yizkor. The Goliaths, their lives spent in hollowness and frustration, do not even know where to turn their eyes. To them Orpah is an unheard of name. Memory is not her lot. She has become the forgotten mother of BNEI NESHUKAH. As we say the Yizkor, let us resolve to return to a faith like the BNEI DEVUKAH of old, and may that forever redound to the credit of those parents and ancestors whom we shall now remember in love, loyalty and everlasting devotion.

May their souls find peace in the source of eternal life.

May their souls find peace in the source of eternal life.

Date May 24, 1961

## Memo

From The Desk Of:

Rabbi: NORMAN LAMM

gave list of this 17:31 - plus talk  
to gen. membership Mtg of J.C.

\* glad am next to last speaker - story 10B  
speaker long program - only one person remained  
audience, speaker began by thanking him... and was:  
stop - I'm the next speaker...

\* happy you liked anecdote & are laughing.  
Perhaps we duty visited new members. Story  
colloquy addressing Sisterhood regarding w.  
folks - all laugh heartily, except one little red  
lady. Says: "don't you like my talk, stories?"  
"Sure": "Then why no laugh?" - "I'm not  
a member..."

\* fistall - we want int 17:40  
but depth - duration - 17:43

\* 2:15 J.C. 17:25 17:40  
17:45 17:50 17:55

For list to Hazzanah (my copy) Down  
with May 24