

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

(title originally planned for sermon on last Mishna B.Mezia)

1. Soon to bentsh Geshem
2. Geshem, in ancient agricultural community Palestine, the assurance of good crops, plentiful harvest. Witjout it: drought, famine, disease....Therefore is symbol of prosperity, economic well-being
3. Very fact that we recite blessing over G and make it a central part of our prayers on this holiday shows that we are not other-worldly, that Judaism not look down upon desire for prosperity. Prosperity is a laudable, praiseworthy goal; provided, of course, that we understand that we are to attribute its attainment to G-d, and that we use it in the ethical and moral ways desired by G-d. That is why we incorporate it into our Tefillos.
4. Yet Rabbis understood that real danger accrues to Prosperity, that wealth carries with it certain inherent difficulties. They said: KASHA YOMA D'MITRA K'YOMA ~~BT~~ D'DINA, that the day we ask for G is as difficult, severe, as Day of Judgement. Because they understood that Man is tried by both extremes. It is true, as people usually say, that Poverty is trying. It can break a man, leave him spiritless, hopeless and cynical. But, on the other extreme, Prosperity is even a greater Trial. Man is caught betwixt and between: between the trials of too little and too much, between scarcity and plenty, poverty and prosperity. And of the two, the latter is the greater test of a man's character.
5. It is indeed in this respect that YOMA DMITRA KYOMA DDINA:: being prosperous is being on trial. Man is tested by its temptations and by ~~his~~ powers it confers upon him. And - & this is important - just as in his Day of Judgement, when a man is on trial for his life, every aspect of his character is brought into the open and ~~more~~ emphasized more than usual, when his good qualities are are brought out in an angelic light and his less appealing characteristics, his faults, are exaggerated, so with Prosperity: they enhance, exaggerate out of proportion both his good and bad features.

We all know people whom wealth has made more gracious, more generous, more understanding, more humane than they would have been if not wealthy. It has highlighted essential goodness. And, contrary, we know many others on whom reverse effect: it has corrupted them. The feeling of power has made them yearn for more, endowed them with a feeling of omniscient superiority, made them feel they're more talented, qualified, competent than anyone else in any field, gives them right to criticize from an exalted position and generally made them very unhumble people. It has brought out the essential faults they would have had in lesser intensity had they not been so well off. YOMA DMITRA KYOMA DDINA. And that's why Chazan wears white and sings Hagh Holiday melodies- like Yom Kippur.
6. We American Jews have, by and large, attained Geshem. Almost with ut exception, we are better off than other nations, and than Jews of other nations. We are wealthier than we were twenty five and 50 years ago - some more, some less, some are only damp with Geshem, some are soaked with it. But we have all tasted of prosperity. Well, how have we fared in this Trial? Have we succeeded or failed- and where?
7. We can, of course, count many successes and many faliures. We have become more benevolent, and less humble. More charitable, and at the same time more obsessed with the striving for even more money. In many ways improved, many retrogressed.

8. But in one way we seem to have failed most alarmingly. Prosperity has spoiled and corrupted us in one particular aspect of life where Jews were always strong and proud.

9. Rabbis told us that this particular kind of corruption is possible and even probable when they told of the following. BE'SHANAH SHE'GISHAMEHA MERUBIN SHALCHU ANSHEI MISHMAR LE'ANSHEI MAAMAD, TNU EINEICHEM BA'ACHEINU SHE'BA'GOLAH SHE'LO YEHYU BATEIHEM KIVREIHEM. They need a lot of praying for them! they who are in exile, in spiritual exile as well as political exile, they who are losing themselves in the mad race for more and more, they who have lost contact with the rich beauty of Torah, in the years when there is much Geshem, when Prosperity is great, pray that their homes should not become their graves that Geshem should not flood their homes and the deluge of prosperity should not drown them. That is the danger: the danger of losing the Jewish home!

10. And that is what has happened with us: homes-graves, where Jewishness is a corpse, a mummy represented as an old heirloom called Siddur or Mezuzah... Our homes have lost life, sparkle, dynamism, Torah. Friday night should have candles, cleanliness, challah, kiddush, song of z'mros - instead: ash-trays, cocktails, card games, song ubiquitous TV sets. We have succumbed to the threat of Geshem - our homes have been soaked and converted into KVARIM, watery graves.

11. The primacy of Home over any other place (including House Worship) always been a part of Jewish life. In fact, a point of departure between the Church and Judaism. Yet today we have learned to express our Judaism outside home, be satisfied with an infrequent visit to shul. Home devitalized. Is it no wonder that the security of the Jewish family is being steadily annihilated? Do not mean to say that Religion only thing which can make or break Jewish home: but certainly is on top of list (Judaism meaning all of it - ritual, moral, ethical).

**wonder about new feature Jewish life, alcoholism? 1954 Geneva report that further Jews drift from Tradition, more alcoholism. Sure, because replaced Kiddush cup with highball, and moved from the home to the bar.

**so far have we drifted that Orthodox Rabbis, like myself, hardly ever mention the matter of Family Purity, those unique laws of Judaism which are medically and psychologically sound and sane, greater insurance than hundred marriage counsellors and thousand revised Kesubot against break-up of homes due to psycho-sexual maladjustments.

**any wonder that modern parents have been reduced to menial vassals who cater to every whim and caprice of their children, who are themselves bewildered by the position they have assumed - that of pint-sized tyrants whose merest whimper sends their sensitive parents into hysterics? - that they have never learned KIBUD AV VA'EM, that respect for older people & particularly parents is conspicuous by its absence? It is because home is Jewishly a graveyard - and that because our prosperity has corrupted us, has caused us to worship as devout supplicants at the Altar of Convenience and become cowardly conformists who shift with every change in the social wind. Our Prosperity has caused us to prostitute the sanctity of our Homes. We've robbed them of all Life!

**Lest you think that I speak with prejudice when I say that the absence of Torah, of... in our homes has caused its breakdown, has increased divorce, adultery & anxious tension, let me read to you what a known writer has to say about the matter:

"Particularly in those households where Orthodox Judaism is practiced and observed ... almost the entire rubric we have drawn of Jewish home life... may be observed even today. In those homes where the liberties of the Emancipation have infiltrated there exists a wide variety of family patterns, conditioned by the range of defection from Orthodox Judaism." Written by an Orthodox Rabbi?... NO - by Reform Rabbi Stanley Brav of Rockland Avenue Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio.

12. As one active in three different types Jewish schools this city, want to take you into my confidence, share with you some of my difficulties and frustrations.

**We try teach child, in whatever time we have him, essence of living Torah, living faith, way of LIFE, loyalty to Living G-d. But how successful can we be if no response from home, if its either neutral or antagonistic...

How teach Mezuzah if never see it t home, or Shabbos, or Prayer?.....

** More than that (& this goes for ALL schools fr. Sunday thru Hebrew thru Day) the home - i.e. parents - not only do not cooperate with the school, not only not at least be grateful and appreciative, but actually OBSTRUCT!!...is heart-rending ...the magic word "conflict", fear of which makes a parent indignant against school rather than change home to coordinate with what we teach.... parents will not yeild an inch to the child, to the only rrainng which can make the child live a meaningful life with a purpose to it....what PERVERSITY have wehere! - parent who will spoil and indulge child with everything from bicycle to piano lessons to family car will not begrudge him the observance of Judaism...so flooded have their homes become with the Geshem of prosperity, that they have imgained that they are now duty-bound to follow the social AND religious patterns of other moneyed or just prosperous people, so they will give their child everything that is insignificant and meanijgless and deny to him that which is most important. They insist that the dead hand of their homes choke off the breath of life the school tries to breath into them.

13. Now more than ever we who are the ~~NA~~ ANSHEI MISHMAR V'ANSHEI MAAMAD, the guardians and watchmen of Judaism in our d_ay and city, must work doubly hard and pray with twice the intensity that in these times when GESHAMIM MERUBIN, when the rains come fast and thick, when prosperity is the common lot of most of our people, that LOYIHYU BATEIHEM KIVREIHEM, that the Home be spared, that it not fall victim to the ~~faliures~~ attendant upon prosperity, that we pass the Trial of Wealth, that Purity, Morality, Love, Happiness, thorough out-and-out genuine and authentic Jewishness be the foundation stones of the Jewish home.

14. If we can resolve to safeguard that one weak point, to protect the home and maintain it in its original ^{"wholeness"} wholeness and wholesomeness, then we have the right to implore G-d for more GESHEM. For then we can approach the Almighty and show that we can stand the test of Wealth, that our homes shall not become graveyards of the spirit, but wonderful and beautiful and deeply Jewish cradles of Life and ^{"fortresses"} fortresses of Torah. Then this new year will come to us LI'VRACHAH V'LO L'KLALLAH, L'CHAYIM VLO L'MAVESS, L'SOVA VLO L'RAZON, for blessing and not for curse, for plenty and not for scarcity, for life and not for death.

The surging floods of emptiness & hollowness which often result from the heavy rainfall of prosperity.