"FEAR AND FORGETFULNESS"

There is a verse in the Psalms that we read every Shabbat morning as part of our services, and that we also recite, with special gusto, at the end of our Grace or "Fear the Lord, you, His holy ones; for those who fear Him will suffer no lack or want or need."

On the face of it, this is a beautiful verse, but rather unexceptional: those who are God-fearing will be rewarded by not having to suffer need or privation.

However, on second thought this sentence appears somewhat puzzling and troublesome. Is this not basically an uninspired appeal to selfishness? Is it spiritually worthy to appeal for piety on the grounds that we will be handsomely rewarded for it? Is this not a classical case of what the Rabbis called, disapprovingly, the servant who obeys his master, on the condition that he will receive a tip or reward?

A meaningful answer is offered by the great Hasidic teacher, author of the Divested of its complex Hasidic terminology he answers that the fear of God, which is simply the Hebrew idiom for "religion," is
fundamentally different from any other kind of \( \text{fear} \). Every other fear is caused by a lack or a lack that I recognize within myself. I fear the government because I know that I am powerless and weak by comparison. I fear the Internal Revenue Service, because I know that I lacked integrity in preparing my returns. I fear an examination, because I know that I failed to study and hence lack the learning to pass it. I fear exposure to disease, because my body lacks the strength to combat and endure illness. Every fear is symptomatic of an inner... 

However, the fear of God is not the result of any personal fear. I do not fear God because I am afraid of Him in the ordinary sense. My religion is not motivated by some basic material or psychological needs that I experience and that cry out for fulfillment or care. I am not religious because -- as Pharaoh proclaimed to Moses -- "you are weak, therefore you say: Let us serve the Lord." Religion arises not because I am frail and need support against my enemies in nature and society -- a mistake which was converted by Nietzsche into a philosophy. I am not religious because -- as some modern psychologists maintain -- I am bewildered and need peace of mind, or frightened and am looking for a father-figure. I am religious not because -- as some secular nationalists in Israel maintain -- religion...
was the cohesive force that kept our people together during the long
exile when we lacked any other method of remaining united. Religion is
not the response to any need, whether psychological or sociological,
ethnic or national.

The fear of God exists because we are we and God is God; He
deserves our our fear, or reverence. TReligion is to be pursued
because it represents the truth; because it is objectively worthy,
not subjectively necessary.

This is what is meant by the verse Those who aspire to holiness sought to fear the Lord for His own sake,
not because we experience any lack within ourselves.

This is a major difference between authentic Judaism and certain
inauthentic varieties of Judaism. An inauthentic faith cherishes virtue
because of its reward and abhors vice because of punishment. An authentically
religious person fears God Himself and loves God Himself.

With this in mind, we may understand a puzzling passage in this
morning's Sidra. We read that the Jewish farmer was commanded to offer
his tithe, to bring it with him to Jerusalem and there to recite a
special passage of thanksgiving. Part of this recitation includes the
verse: I have not
transgressed Thy commandments and I have not forgotten. Now, this
appears somewhat redundant. If I have not violated God's commandments,
certainly I have not forgotten them. Why, therefore, is it necessary
to repeat and I have not forgotten?"

The answer is that the two halves of this verse do not refer to the
identical subject. The first half, "I have not violated Thy commandments,"
refers to the fact of observance; the second half, "and I have not
forgotten," refers to the reason or motive for the observance. The
first refers to the "what": I have fulfilled my obligation and given my tithe. The second, "add I have not forgotten," refers to the "why": my motives were right, I performed the Will of God not for any ulterior motive, not because of any extraneous reason, but because God willed it.

If I perform a mitzvah but for the wrong reason, for a motive which is not pure and selfless, I can sometimes forget the very God I am purportedly serving. When religion is inauthentic when my fear of God issues from some , some personal lack within me, then God is forgotten and my act loses its spiritual character. If I turn to God only because I am hungry -- then I may turn away from Him when I have a full stomach: -- Israel has often rejected God out of fullness and satiety. If I seek Him only out of pain, I may well ignore Him out of comfort.

Of course, this does not mean that one should not present his to God, that he should not bring his deepest pains and frustrations and agonies and present them to the Almighty. Many good people have come to Torah and Judaism in a most profound and genuine way, although they were first introduced to it because of inauthentic reasons, because of some illness or because they came to recite the Kaddish. Such people are today some of our most precious Jews. Certainly we know of the principle that one may begin the adventure of Judaism because of selfish reasons, but if he conducts himself properly in practice, then ultimately he may well learn to serve God for His own sake. However, at all times our goal and ideal ought to be authenticity to serve God for God's sake.

When the farmer would come to Jerusalem, he knew that now his harvest was over, his granaries were full, he was blessed with plenty
and prosperity. He had no lack of joy and fulfillment in his life. So, in gratitude, in love and in fear of God Himself, he proclaimed:

\[ \text{I have not violated Thy commandments; and in addition, I have not forgotten that You, O God, are the reason for my observance. I did the right thing for the right reason; I did not forget the sublime goal of all Jewish observance.} \]

No wonder that Rashi, quoting the Sages, comments on the words — I have not forgotten to make the blessing over the offering of the tithes. The function of the blessing is to remind the man who performs the mitzvah of the reason for his performance; it reminds him why he is doing what he is doing, and that is: -- because this is the way that man brings down holiness upon himself, because the action is in response to the divine command, because he thereby fulfills the Will of God. He does not violate the commandment of God, he performs the Will of God, but because of any within him, but because he loves and fears God for His own sake.

By and large, when American Jews are observant, they are pious for the right reasons: they do not forget God. Yet they could stand improvement; all of us can. The question of motive is not a one-time affair. It is a high spiritual challenge and is capable of execution on many levels. The purity of thought, as Hasidism taught, is a life-long task, an educational process that lasts throughout pner's existence.

Let us take some examples from our contemporary life. There are those who tell us that we must support and expand the synagogue in order to prevent assimilation. Now it is true that...
the synagogue will help avoid assimilation; but the cause and effect are reversed. Synagogue services may help prevent assimilation; but the very reason that we want to avoid assimilation is in order that ḥa'ban should rise to יד עליה, to service of God!

There are those who have suddenly come to realize the importance of Jewish education, and the reason they give is: to stop the terrible trend towards intermarriage. Of course, it is true that a better and more intensive Jewish education will usually prevent intermarriage; but the very reason for our opposition to intermarriage is that it makes impossible for any future generations of Jews to continue as Jews and thus frustrates the highest ideal of Judaism: Jewish education, the study of Torah.

Every now and then we hear the ritualistic pronouncements that issue from secular sources in the Holy Land urging the study of the Hebrew language in the Diaspora, because thereby we will make sure that in the future the Jewries of Israel and America will be bound to each other. But the reasoning is reversed! Our motive in desiring the continuing unity of our people in the future, is that our people everywhere shall learn not only to speak but also to think and live בנתיב נחל, which means not only Hebrew, the Holy Tongue, but also the tongue or language of holiness -- our very mission in the world!

Unless we appreciate Jewish values in their proper perspective, unless we elucidate the right motives, unless we learn to identify correctly what is the cause and what is the effect, intelligent and perceptive young people will come to understand that religion is nothing more than a lure, that the mitzvot are a bait, and that services are just a bribe. The results of this misunderstanding can sometimes
be disasterous: for when the cause disappears, so does the effect; when the 

or lack is filled, we may find that the , all religion, vanishes! When we observe the commandments, but forget the proper reason or motive, then sooner or later we shall abandon the commandments as well.

If one settles in an inauthentic Judaism, then he finds that it is possible to pray in a synagogue and yet forget its main purpose: , to know before Whom we stand, to serve the Lord. If the synagogue is attended only because of habit or sentiment or a desire to avoid assimilation, we discover sooner or later that it is not enough. For then the synagogue degenerates either into a noisy marketplace, in which everything is discussed, but nothing is said; or equally bad, to an ornate showplace, in which everything is seen and nothing is to be heard, add in which a Jewish community exercises a collective exhibitionism of its new-found wealth. In both cases, the synagogue is not the genuine , the miniature sanctuary, it was meant to be.

If the Hebrew language is urged upon us only as a bond between various Jewries, it must fail; because linguistic peculiarity is not enough to capture the loyalty and the imagination of intelligent people who are looking for a reason for living and for meaning in existence. If Hebrew is only to be an ethnic bond, divorced from its religious context, forgetting the God who addressed Israel in that language, then we may well find that degenerates into merely another Semitic language, in which even pornography becomes legitimate.

If Jewish education is preached to Jews only on the grounds that it serves as a stopgap to intermarriage, it cannot succeed; for children
are perceptive, and they can discern when parents and teachers are themselves committed to what they teach, and when they are merely using it as a pretext, as the most handy instrument for some ulterior motive. Intermarriage will cease only when Jews are sincerely committed to their own Torah, to their own God. The study of Torah must be for the sake of God, not for the sake of some other reason -- not even to satisfy intellectual curiosity, for then it becomes (to use the title of one of Jacques Barzun's books) merely a "glorious entertainment."

This week American Jewry will participate in a vigil for Russian Jewry at Lafayette Park, opposite the White House. Now it makes no difference to us where or why support will be forthcoming. The important thing is to make every effort to arouse public opinion throughout the world in order to influence Soviet Russia to change its attitude to our fellow Jews behind the Iron Curtain. But, for ourselves and the integrity of our own moral stature and religious lives, we ought to know the right "why," the right motives for our action: our motives must be more than a civil-rights action or anti-poverty drive or humanitarian campaign. True, it is all these -- but it is much more than all, insofar as we are concerned. For us, the Russian Jews are our brothers. They are the cream of our people of the last and of this century. Russian Jewry provided world Jewry with its great "Geonim," with its most distinguished Zionist leaders what are today the leaders of the State of Israel, with some of the most eminent benefactors of humanity.

For us the vigil is a challenge not to sleep, not to forget our own people. It is an act of rescue and redemption of a
a remnant of unutterable preciousness. A man does not cry out for his brother because he is a humanitarian; he does not attempt to help his brother who is stricken by poverty, whether of body or soul, because he believes in the anti-poverty war. He does not seek to rescue his oppressed brother because he is a devotee of civil rights. He does these things because he is a brother, and a brother dare not be forgotten!

Let us not forget that the Russian Jews are not simply another oppressed people; they are our flesh and our blood.

Even as we today read the portion concerning the tithes and we rededicate ourselves to the purity of our love of God, so will we this week, beginning tonight, recite our Selihot—prayers. We shall ask God to answer us, to remember us and protect us and guard us, and to love us -- for His own sake, even as we love Him for His own sake. This year we shall recite those prayers with special care and concern, with special intensity and even anguish. Keeping in mind the old Jewish community of Russia, whose strength has been sapped by forty years of unrelenting oppression, we shall raise our voices to Almighty God and plead with Him: do not abandon us in the time of our old age, and do not forsake us when our strength is spent.

— even as we rise to remember Thee, O Heavenly Father, for Thou art Eternal, so do Thou remember Thy compassion and Thy love for Thy Children of Israel; for they too are eternal.