

THE NORTHWIND AT MIDNIGHT

I. "VA'YEHI BA'CHATZI HA'LAILAH - and it was midnight". How well these words describe the feelings of our people this day. We need no Prophets of Doom to tell us that these last weeks have so unnerved us, so shaken us, so outraged and horrified us, that we have not felt as we do since that terrible day at the end of World War II when the headlines announced that mass obituary - "SIX MILLION JEWS PERISH IN EUROPE". For us, the hour hand on the clock of Western Civilization has turned a complete circle - and we are back at midnight, deep in the gloom of despair at the fate of 3 million of our brothers and sisters behind the Iron Curtains.

At a time of this sort it is the business of a Rabbi ^{to} ~~to~~ neither lecture nor ^{to} preach, but to speak from the heart and to offer a shimmer of Hope and Faith to brighten the blackness of midnight.

II. According to a Masorah, or Tradition, recorded by the Baal Haturim, at that fateful hour in the history of Egyptian Jewry, CHARDU CHARADAH G'DOLLAH; that midnight on the eve of the Exodus found the Israelites a frightened people, whose horizons were blackened by despair and ~~gloom~~ gloom. The Israelites at that midnight were heavy-hearted indeed. Behind them were the slave-labor camps of Pithom and Rameses; in front of them - the dreaded Sahara, a wide, blazing, parched and sterile desert stretching on endlessly. They had just emerged from a Plague of Darkness which took its toll among Hebrews as well as Egyptians; they were entering into an era of bitter waters and golden calves. The Jew in the middle of that night certainly had reason for despair and gloom. He had reason to feel that this was his midnight. VAYEHI BA'CHATZI HA'LAILAH.

But just then, at the very moment of midnight, when the occasion for gloom and melancholy was greatest, G-d bared his master-stroke of the liberation of Israel - ~~the Plague of the first-born~~ - and it came just at the twelfth hour. For as dark as things may seem, G-d does not forsake His ~~people~~ people.

Our sages of the Talmud relate that this sort of last minute deliverance at midnight continued for the 40 years they spent in the desert - and perhaps

even all through Jewish History. KOL ARBA'IM SHANAH SHE'HAYU YISROEL BA'MIDBAR LO NASHVAH RUACH TZ'PONIS ELA BA'CHATZI HA'LAILAH. During the forty years Israel was in the desert, it never failed that the Northwind blew at midnight. Now, this Northwind had some very special quality. It had the ability to give healing to the sick. It was a RUACH MARPEI, a wind of healing. Just when the pain was strongest, when death seemed most imminent, when the night seemed darkest, just then the redeeming Northwind blew to soothe the pain, drive away the spectre of Death and Destruction, and bring with it the wings of the coming dawn. "Israel", our Rabbis meant to tell us, "even at the midnights that inevitably envelop a person and a people, even then do not give up hope, for there is always a Northwind that G-d sends your way; a Northwind which can break the back of your enemy and kill off his first-born, a Northwind which can at the same time warm the huddling bodies suffering from the chill of the desert night and cool the feverish brow of the sick, the Northwind which brings promise of a new dawn to come, the North Wind of Healing".

III. And that same Northwind that blew at midnight in the desert came to our people at every midnight since. It came in the form of a Samson when our people were threatened by Philistines, and in the form of a Solomon when their existence was jeopardized by internal dissension and civil war. That Northwind spoke as a BAS KOL, as a voice emanating from Heaven, and reconciled Hillel and Shammai, when their differences threatened to break the backbone of Jewish Law. It came in the shape of a CHASSAM SOFER, when drastic and heretical reforms threatened to undermine the entire structure of our Faith. Always G-d arrived, so to speak, just in time to blow the Northwind at Midnight. Our own State of Israel ^{which came} right after the holocaust in Europe, when thousands upon thousands of refugees had no place to turn to, is the most recent proof that the Northwind retains its old powers of MARPEI, of healing.

IV. Every man has his personal midnight too, and G-d provides for individual men their individual Northwinds. Only this week I saw a remarkable example of that special kind of Divine meteorology. A young man walked into my study, a young man of 19, who was visibly on the verge of total collapse. He could pronounce his own name, only with the utmost difficulty. He was gripped by a horrible fear, a fear

which blackened all his emotions and submerged his soul in the tangible dark of the midnight of a personality. He was terribly afraid of being arrested for a crime he did not commit, and planned either jail-break or suicide should that occur. He was a boy entirely alone in the world - he had never known a home, only one orphanage after another - and was "on his own" since he was 14 years old. The light had gone out of his eyes. He could see no glimmer of light on the horizon. He literally stumbled into my office after bunking into one of the poles of the canopy in front of the building. He had come to tell me, he said, that he had nothing left to live for. He was born, and now he was going to die - probably by his ~~own~~ own hand - and he had not ~~even~~ lived inbetween. I have never come across a more ~~pathetic~~ pathetic case, one where a human being was groping aimlessly in total darkness. I myself did not think that that person would ever see the break of ~~the~~ dawn.

And yet, one special delivery letter and three days later, he was a new man. A Northwind was blowing for him. The police authorities assured him that he had nothing to worry about. A Jewish counselling service promised to look into the case. An employer complimented him on his good work. And he had found solace and friendship and warmth in an office situated right in the busiest section of the busiest city of the world. X VAYEHI BA'CHATZI HA'LAILAH. It was midnight. But then the Northwind blew and dawn came.

How interesting that when a person is in mourning, at the time of his grief and despair and melancholia, he recites the words of the Kaddis: VE'YAMLICH ^HMALCUSEI BE'CHAYAICHON U'VE'YOMEICHON U'VE'CHAYE D'CAAL BEIS YISROEL - May the Kingdom of G-d, the reign of Peace and Tranquility and Eternal Life, be realized ~~in~~ our life-times and in our days, and in the life-times of all the House of Israel. Yes, in the lifetime of he who now mourns in grief the ^{scourge} ~~toll~~ of midnight, a Northwind will ~~g~~ yet waft in happiness.

V. We, my friends, find ourselves this moment in the midst of a terribly dark and ominous midnight. So many of us thought that the Red Revolution, with its proclamation that anti-semitism is a crime, would, despite its many evils, herald a new dawn in the relations of East Europe to Jews. And how tragically disappointed

we are. No, no dawn indeed. Quite the contrary, we find that the hour hand of the clock of Western Civilization has been moved back to the midnight of Nazi Germany. When Hitler rose to power and just before he dealt the death-stroke to those millions of martyrs, the Hebrew poet, Zalman Shneour, cried out a warning to the world, a warning which came from the depths of the agonized and tormented soul of World Jewry, a warning which resounded 'round the world in ~~lines of poetry~~ ^{xxxx} lines of pain ^{and} ~~of~~ verses of calamity: YEMAI HA'BAINAYIM K'RAYVIM U'VA'IM - "The Middle ages are coming back!" And today, my friends, we must raise a greater cry of protest and warning, for something worse than the Middle ages ^{is} approaching - CHAZI HA'LAILAH KAREV UVA - The Middle of the Night is coming back, that same dread midnight which blinded the eyes of the worlds' democracies and gave them an excuse for not stopping the demons of Germany from building their Mardaneks and Treblinkas and Dachaus and Buchenwalds! No one will have any excuse if this midnight strikes. Neither those demonic Jewish communists and spies who are besmirching our good name - so that a good number of the replies to my sermon of two weeks ago read, "All Jews are Traitors", or "Murder Inc. has become Traitors Inc." - nor those who pOoh-pooh the British arrest of ~~ex-Nazi~~ ex-Nazi conspirators, nor those who in criminal ignorance lightly dismiss the U.S. High Commissions startling report of the number of pro-Nazis in West Germany - none of them will have clean hands, their very souls will be blood-stained, and the ghost of the martyrs of our people from Rabbi Akiva through the martyrs of the Inquisition through the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto and to the slave laborers in the camps behind the Urals will return to haunt them to and beyond their graves.

Yet what good does all this screaming and protesting accomplish. The stark fact remains that we are now at one minute to midnight. The vicious racism of Red Eugope, the new Nazism of both parts of Germany, the reviving anti-semitism in our own country as a result of the diabolical Communist spies of Jewish origin - these are the components of the new cloud which has eclipsed the proud sun which began to shine in Israel. It is Midnight and dawn seems so far off. How desperate things seem.

No one has easy ~~ex~~ solutions for problems of such magnitude. I have not even a complex solution. Only this remains - our silent Hope that G-d will yet intervene

and send his Northwind which did not fail our ancestors at their midnights. A wind which will shatter the Red Empire - Red because it feeds on blood - and loosen the shackles of our enslaved bretheren; a wind which will in one gust do in Germany, that accursed land, what must be done, so that it will be called "The Morgenthau Plan Wind", and a wind which will clear the name of our people in the great democracies.

VI. An ancient aggada quoted in the Talmud relates that before King David would go to sleep, he would hang his KINOR, his harp, upon the wall. And then, at midnight, the Northwind would come and its gentle breeze would pluck upon the strings of his harp, and that beautiful melody would awaken David, who then would take his harp and "RECHT UP CHATZOS", he would compose his saintly Psalms for the glory of G-d.

Many of us Jews also tend to sleep. We go to bed when it is still light, we feel assured when "things are going good", and we retire from worries about the welfare of our people. Once a State of Israel is founded, we forget about a UJA, about a Yeshiva University, about all day-school education. We begin to slumber. And ordinarily we would slumber on, oblivious to the black clouds and the disappearing daylight, we would sleep through the midnights. But the Jew has a harp, a beautiful and wonderful soul, which, though it has no eyes and is at times blind to Light and Dark, yet has very sensitive strings. And when midnight comes, it is not frightened into ^{paralyzing} despair. For out of the North comes a G-dly wind which plucks these strings, and composes saintly psalms. And so, with this Northwind playing upon his soul, the Jew ~~wax~~ wakes up, takes that harp, that soul, into hand, and returns to his G-d and his people.

Perhaps some of us are guilty of over sleeping. But with the oncoming midnight, G-d will yet send a YESHUAH, and the soul of our people will respond like a harp to the wind, and return to G-d we surely will.

The night ^{was} will come and ^{the night} ~~it~~ will go. But once the Northwind plucks the strings of our harps, we shall take them into hand and ~~forever~~ thereafter never cease to give thanks and glory to the Name of G-d. In the words of Yehudah Ha'levi:

ANI KINOR LE'SHIRAYICH - "O Zion, I am a harp for thy songs".

Benedictions

Today's Benediction comes from a poem by Chayim Nachman Bialik.

אהם בברי נשם
 לא קצכו כל בני צוה לא אהו
 מהרי נשם עוד נחם יגדה
 מתקיקי הסעצים - ספורים ערדה

- " The mountains of Midnight upon us are gathered,
 " Yet the sparks within us shall not be smothered;
 " ~~AX~~ flame shall we ~~how~~ from their black slope,
 " And from the clefts of their rocks - sapphires of Hope."