

LEGITIMATELY JEWISH

The world Jewish community today faces two crises.

The first is that of its continued existence, and the second concerns the purpose and the meaning of that existence.

There is a large group for whom the simple continuity of the Jewish people has now been brought into question. Not only is this material survival in jeopardy because of external anti-Semitism, such as behind the Iron Curtain or in Arab countries, but because of voluntary "geno-suicide," by such eroding and corroding forces as assimilation and intermarriage, in the Free World.

But within the group that is determined that we shall survive, there is a further question: Why? Is there any meaning to our existence? Some, who identify themselves as nationalists and secularists, say: No, there is no higher meaning or purpose, and there doesn't have to be any. The simple fact of our existence, without any meaning or direction from above or beyond, is sufficient justification for wanting to continue. Jews are an organic, collective national unit, that possesses its own instinct of self-preservation -- and that is that.

But there are those who are opposed to this philosophy. They believe that there is a transcendent purpose to Israel and a higher force directing its story. We are a people which has a significance beyond ourselves. There is a meaning that over-

arches the particularities of the present time and place. There is a spiritual destiny, a religious dimension, that far exceeds in importance the mere national-ethnic continuity of the Jewish people.

As Orthodox Jews, we naturally belong in the second camp. Our whole faith, our whole historic experience, tells us that there is more to Israel than Israel. Yet, in this time of crisis -- and in many ways the threat to American Jewry is as great as that to Soviet Jewry -- we must fight on all fronts. We cannot afford the luxury of retreating into our own shell and ignoring the rest of the community. We must join with all those who aspire to Jewish survival, even those who are opposed to our particular point of view or to any point of view which sees meaning to the Jewish story beyond simple physical continuity. We must lend our best efforts to any enterprise that seeks to perpetuate Jewry, whether in Israel or the Diaspora. Unless Jews will remain Jews, they cannot very well be religious Jews. We might well paraphrase what Rav Kook said, when he commented that *קדושה* (the sacred) can only be as strong as the *חיל* (the profane) upon which it is based: the commitment to Torah can be no stronger than the desire to remain Jewish as such.

Yet, having said that, we must reaffirm clearly and unequivocally our judgment on the striking inadequacy of mere

Jewishness without Judaism -- the secularist, nationalist, naturalist interpretation of Jewish continuity.

The Jewish people has always had an awareness of transcendent meaning, and not only in its days of anguish but even during its period of independence. Perhaps some Israelis like to think that they can do away with the burden of a special destiny for Jewry as irrelevant, that they can think of themselves "naturally." But sooner or later, they begin to spell out the implications of their position, and identify themselves as "Israelis" and no longer as "Jews." And when such Israelis decide to emigrate from Israel and become yordim, they are the first ones to assimilate without any compunctions or inhibitions.

Certainly, in the Diaspora, such as the United States, or in any condition of freedom, we must speak of a meaning or a higher purpose, a surpassing goal, which informs Jewishness. Without such spiritual content, without such historical-ideological orientation, our survival as a people lacks any compelling necessity or attractiveness. Young, perceptive Jews are unwilling to sacrifice for mere ethnic togetherness. And, as a minority, the pressures all point to easy assimilation and collective disappearance.

The real question is not whether there is meaning, but what meaning there is to our story. What is our commitment, and how are we to discharge it?

And here our answer is clear and unambiguous. Much

as we encourage any expression of loyalty to Jewish continuity per se; much as we encourage all efforts to find higher meaning to our existence, not matter what or how that meaning is defined; our ultimate commitment is clearly to God, Torah, and the observance of the Halakhic Way. It is only Judaism, full and undiminished, that can make Jewishness truly legitimate.

Our Sidra of this morning began by giving us the

genealogy of the second of the patriarchs: *וְאֵלֶּה הַדּוֹרֹת* , "These are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac." The Rabbis were bothered by the obvious redundance in

this one verse: If Isaac is the son of Abraham, then we already know that Abraham begot Isaac; and why, then, does the Bible bother to repeat that? Rashi quotes the famous answer of the

Midrash: *עַל שֵׁינֵי עֵיזְבֵן הַבּוֹר אֲמָרִים וְאֲבִימֶלֶךְ*

*וְנִלְמַד שֶׁהָיָה*. The cynics of that generation, noticing that all these years Sarah had not conceived, but that she did give birth shortly after she was seized and taken into the harem of Abimelech, concluded that Isaac was not really the son of Abraham, but the son of Abimelech. In order to dispel this rumor, God made the

*קָדְמֵי פָּנָיו* of Isaac, his facial appearance, identical to that of Abraham -- "Abraham begot Isaac" -- so as to refute the cynics' claim and to establish clearly for all to see that Isaac was indeed the son of Abraham.

Now, this is a remarkable story. Certainly one would imagine that the Rabbis had more profitable pursuits than that of laying to rest obscene rumors of callow cynics long dead, and mercifully buried in well-deserved anonymity behind the veils of historic oblivion. But if they did tell us of this incident, they meant it to be interpreted in terms of larger significance. They probably had in mind the ancient exegetical principle of *פירוש מן אבות*, that what happened to the Fathers remains a symbol and a teaching for the children. So there is more to this vile rumor passed about the paternity of Isaac than the mere slur on the progenitors of our people. And in order to understand this significance, we must begin to treat fatherhood and motherhood not only as biological facts, but as symbols of a larger reality.

Depth-psychologists tell us that mother symbolizes the organic bond between an individual and his environment. She represents the natural, immediate, unreflective origin of a man. Whereas, father symbolizes that which is more remote -- the idea that informs a man's life, his spiritual origins, his overall destiny. Greek mythology too knows of Ulysses searching for his father, which symbolizes man's search for his spiritual origin and destiny.

In traditional Jewish life, they serve as similar symbols. Thus, mother represents the people of Israel:

גזע אקומוה: The Midrash tells us: *מטרוניחא or פניחא ישראל*  
*נקרא ישראל פדה*. The people of Israel is referred to

as a bride. The individual Jew's "mother" is -- the Jewish  
people as such. And father stands for *אביון אלהים*,  
our Father in Heaven, the Almighty. Thus, the Torah teaches

us *בנים אתם ד' אלוהיכם*, we are children to  
the Lord. Or, as the Midrash states: *תאב צה תקד'ה רבן*

*ישראל צה* -- the individual Jew is a son, the Holy One  
is called Father.

The Midrash may now be seen as saying much more than  
we originally thought. There is an overabundance of cynics who,  
contemplating individual Jews of every generation, proclaim:

*מאבימסק ותגמה שרה*, the Isaacs -- the contemporary Jews --  
are ethnically and racially Jewish, they may be the genetic  
descendants of Sarah, our Mother -- but Abraham is not the  
Father! The spiritual dimension of Jews is not that of a God  
who covenanted Abraham, but is rather that of Abimelechs and  
Pharoahs, of assorted Egyptians and Philistines.

And it is that ancient-modern cynicism that we, as  
observant and faithful Orthodox Jews, must deny as we seek to  
prevail upon our fellow Jews to create in our generation a

*קדושה פנימ*, an intellectual profile and spiritual phy-  
siognomy, that will clearly testify to our direct lineage and  
descent from Father Abraham. For assuredly, the cynics sound

only too credible when they question our legitimacy as a historic continuity from Abraham, and assign us to strange spiritual and ideological origins. All too often, unfortunately, we Jews have encouraged such charges of spiritual illegitimacy against us and made them seem justifiable.

We have often been too willing to subscribe to fashionable philosophies and fads, and shamelessly declare that this is the belief of the Jewish people! For instance, upon reading the Hebrew literature of the Enlightenment period, it is not difficult to come across works which imply that Judaism is just the philosophy of Immanuel Kant in Mid-Eastern or medieval dress, or that Judaism is a true precursor of Hegel or of Nietzsche -- of all people! Now, there is no denying that there may be points of contact or even a definite influence between Judaism and any of the thinkers mentioned; but to declare that they are almost identical, or that Judaism clearly supports one or another of these philosophers, is in a way an irresponsible assertion attributing paternity to someone other than the legal father.

Today we have the same problem with liberalism. To hear the American Jewish Congress tell it, for instance, the essence of traditional Judaism is a wall -- not the Western Wall of the Temple, certainly not the wall that separates the men's and women's section of the Synagogue, but the holy "wall of separation" between Church and State! An old anti-clerical principle, that

has lost most of its relevance in this day and age when religion has only marginal significance in the life of society, has been elevated to the rank of a primary religious doctrine. It is now not uncommon to read in the sophisticated general press about the "traditional Jewish" opposition to breaching the Wall between Church and State. Can any one question that Judaism preaches as a major mitzvah that we must not permit the Federal Government to support parochial schools? -- that even if we do not press upon federations to support the Yeshivot, we must rather forego Talmud Torah and any other religious education to our children, but never accept the blemished money of the Federal Government? Indeed, one almost would expect that Talmudical Law would explicitly proscribe that sardonic sign that one sees occasionally nowadays: "No prayers permitted in this public school except in case of atomic attack."

I do not mean to say that Judaism denies liberal principles or premises. Of course not. There is a great deal in Judaism that probably gave birth to some of the major ideas that molded the liberal thought of our century. But Judaism is not only or even essentially liberalism. Judaism does not/<sup>un</sup>questionably command that we observe Moratorium Day, or oppose the Vietnam war, or advocate a Minimum Annual Wage, or offer unqualified support for the United Nations. I happen to be in favor of some if not all of the policies just mentioned. But it would be sheer



arrogance and unmitigated chutzpah for me to assert that this is Judaism. Indeed, I hope that a great deal of my general thinking is influenced, either directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, by my Jewish background. But Judaism is not a rubber stamp for any and all social theories and political lines.

Just as the Mother of individual Jews is Sarah, the Jewish People, so the Father is Abraham -- and not Washington or Jefferson or Ben Franklin, not Senator McCarthy or Professor Marcuse or even Dr. Spock. It is blasphemous to draw a straight line from Sinai to Washington and to assert their immediate linkage, let alone their inner identity.

It is time for us to be honest. We must disown what has become an American Jewish dogma: that Judaism is identical with internationalism. Now, it is true that ultimately the Jewish people entertains universal goals. Our concept of the Messiah is of one who will usher in an age of universal peace, of justice for all mankind, of plenty for all men. But the Jewish tradition does not know of any shortcut to the attainment of these universalist goals. It tells us that they can be obtained only via our national experience and aspirations. The redemption of the world can take place only through the prior redemption of Israel. That is why in our prayers we always speak of the welfare of Israel -- not because we ignore the welfare of the rest of mankind, but because in our scheme of things, it is only through the

renaissance of our little and marginal people that peace and justice will be brought to all of mankind. Our immediate interests, therefore, are with the people of Israel and its spiritual destiny, although this certainly does not exclude concern with all men and all peoples. To speak almost exclusively of the world or the universe or mankind, and not of Israel, is to be false to the Jewish tradition. One cannot convey universal insights through universal poetry; poetry must be written exceedingly well in one particular, specific language. That is why the Reform Prayerbook is almost comical with its excision, to such a great extent, of traditional references to Israel and its substitution of "mankind." One Jewish scholar, writing in the current issue of a Jewish quarterly (Prof. Jacob Neusner in Midstream), tells of a reaction to the New Liberal Prayerbook in England, which is so replete with references to "mankind," that he felt moved to write a personal letter of congratulations to its author, signing off with the sentence: "With warm and affectionate regards to your wife and children and all mankind..."

This unthinking liberalism leads, when taken to an extreme, to spiritual libertarianism. I therefore believe that we of the Orthodox community can appreciate and approve and wholeheartedly endorse what happened in Boston this week. At the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds -- a group that to the largest extent determines

how the American Jewish philanthropic dollar will be spent -- several hundred Jewish university students, calling themselves the "Concerned Jewish Students," distributed literature protesting the narrow-mindedness and the myopia of our communal leaders. When the leader of the students appeared before the General Assembly of this organization, he denounced its system of priorities, its members' foolish and inane and sycophantic desire to ingratiate themselves with the amorphous and faceless general public by outdoing themselves in sponsoring non-Jewish and interdenominational projects, while neglecting that which is closest to our hearts and our future. They demanded that priority be given not to hospitals and senior citizens homes -- important as they are, and deserving of support as they are -- but rather to those projects which do not receive government help and which spell our future itself, such as: Jewish education, particularly Day Schools, and Soviet Jewry. These young people are children who want their real father. They are the Isaacs who want a community which will acknowledge not only Sarah but also Abraham. They want to remake our community into the kind of *עיר אברהם* which will be reminiscent of an Abraham and so confute the *רובני ציון*, the cynics of this generation.

In summary, at a time when some Jews wish to divest themselves of their very identity, to deny Mother Sarah and the organic bond to the Jewish people, we Orthodox Jews must join

every effort to keep Jews as Jews, no matter what their commitment. Never must we dismiss them because they do not share our particular point of view.

Yet we must never tire of our sacred mission: to go beyond Jewishness to Judaism; to refute the אבותינו who grant the motherhood of Israel while denying the fatherhood of God. And our מגילת אבות, the document of our legitimacy as the heirs of Abraham, is the Torah.

We are not only a national, natural, racial polity. We are a ילדי אברהם, we are the children of Abraham, covenanted by God.

In the words of Malachi in today's Haftorah: בן כבוד אבן כבוד, a son honors his father, and a servant his master. אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו. But if I am a Father, where is the honor you owe Me, and if I am a Master, where is the fear of Me?

There are two alternatives before us: to honor God as a loving Father -- or to remain in dread of Him as a harsh Master.

Let us be wise and choose to honor Him as a Father, so that He in turn may love us as a father loves his delightful children.