

"GRANDEUR:  
A Jewish Definition"

A-361

A-361

This week our country and our city have been hosts to one of the most distinguished visitors ever to come to our shores. General Charles de Gaulle, Premier of France, is a man who has captured the imagination of the world, teaching men that it is possible to raise a modern nation from the throes of despair by holding before it the image of its ancient splendor. In particular, there is one word or quality associated with his name and character that is descriptive of his role in modern history. That word is: grandeur.

The word and the man come to mind on this Sabbath preceding the Yom Ha-Atzma'ut, Israel's Twelfth Anniversary of Independence. Is there a quality appropriate to Israel that is equivalent to the grandeur of France? Do we Jews have a grandeur of our own? What, in other words, is the specifically Jewish definition of grandeur?

I believe there are three Hebrew words that, together, can best spell out for us what Jewish grandeur is. Each represents another aspect of this elusive but very real quality. Combined, they represent the Jewish definition of grandeur.

The first word is: tiferet. We might loosely translate that as dignity. There can be no grandeur without a sense of dignity.

Of course, dignity has certain external manifestations, certain outer appearances that enhance it. But the dignity of tiferet is also expressed in an inner quality which, ultimately, proves far more important. We read in the second chapter of Avot: Rabbi said, what is the right way that a man ought to choose for himself? And he answers: whatever is tiferet l'oseha and tiferet lo min ha-adam -- whatever gives dignity to him who does it, and <sup>appears</sup> ~~dignity from~~ <sup>due to</sup> his fellow men. I prefer to interpret that somewhat differently. The right way a man ought to choose, the way of grandeur, certainly includes tiferet l'oseha -- it gives an air of dignity, a dignified atmosphere, to

"GRANDEUR  
A Jewish Definition"

whoever acts in the proper manner. But of far more crucial significance is tiferet lo min ha-adam -- that the dignity come from the inner self, that it issue min ha-adam, from one's true manliness. True tiferet, real dignity, is intimately associated with one's inwardness, with his uniqueness. True tiferet is achieved when man fulfills his ability to be himself. True grandeur comes when a man or a people realizes self-worthiness. Tiferet, the grandeur of dignity, must always issue min ha-adam, from the deepest resources of selfhood.

If we are to achieve the grandeur implied by tiferet, it means that we must not adopt the standards of others because they happen to be most popular. It means, rather, that we must live up to our own destiny. The grandeur of tiferet is not a matter of posture, but of perception; not demeanor but destiny. When a human being remembers that his real self, his true self, is tzelem Elokim, the image of G-d in which he was created -- and he strives to live up to that image, then tiferet lo min ha-adam, then he has achieved grandeur.

So it is with the Jew and his collective historical and national character. Our true selfhood is defined by the heritage we received at Sinai, when we were commanded to be unto G-d a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests." When we strive in manly fashion to achieve that high purpose and live up to that great image, then we have achieved the dignity that is the first requirement of Jewish grandeur.

The second element in the Jewish definition of grandeur is kavod -- which we might translate as "honor." From tiferet -- the requirement to fulfill one's own destiny and realize his self value -- follows the second point of grandeur which is honor or kavod. Kavod means that we must learn to earn the respect of others and deserve the honor they accord us.

"GRANDEUR  
A Jewish Definition"

How is that achieved? It is worth noting that the word kavod is very close to kaved. "Honor" derives from "heavy." True respect can only come from being weighty, from a concern with that which is truly significant and important. A person or a people of grandeur does not deal in trivialities. Grandeur is concerned only with the world issues that are truly heavyweight. Grandeur strives not to entertain but to impress. Kavod urges a man to strive not to be acceptable, but to be exceptional.

Put in another way, this means that the kavod type of grandeur will inspire us not to strive to be loved by others, but rather to be respected by others. The man of kavod caters not to the wants of his peers, but to their needs. This essentially is the difference between an immature and a mature person. Everyone wants to be "wanted," everyone desires to feel that he "belongs." But with an immature person this is the totality of his ambition. The mature person transcends this. He achieves kavod -- kaved; he achieves true honor and grandeur by concentrating on the heavier issues of life which sometimes can cause a man to be alienated from his fellow men.

This is something that we Jews have had to learn, and have learned -- but must constantly relearn. We must understand that we cannot force our affections upon the non-Jewish world. We ought, better, earn their admiration. We Diaspora Jews do not always understand <sup>that</sup>. All too often we make the major goal of so many of our defense agencies the entry of Jews into country clubs where they are not wanted, or non-kosher hotels which are restricted. We dabble in trivialities, not in that which is kaved. It is a sign that we want to extract love forcibly. This is not the way of honor. ~~It is a sign that we want to extract love forcibly. This is not the way of~~  
~~honor.~~ We ought rather learn from the State of Israel. When Israel is not invited to an international conference because of the blackmail of the Arab

"GRANDEUR  
A Jewish Definition"

countries, she never whimpers, she never begs obsequiously to be loved. Instead, with quiet dignity, with kavod-honor she works hard to earn the respect of her friends in the concert of nations. We too ought concentrate better upon building hospitals and advancing scholarship, upon increasing our philanthropy and espousing the cause of Torah. For in the way of kavod, there lies Jewish grandeur.

The third element in the Jewish definition of grandeur is a word, which literally translated, most closely resembles the French "grandeur." That word is gedulah -- greatness. What is gedulah? Is it wealth? Is it influence? Is it power?

Yes, it is that. But that is only part of the story. Grandeur is that and much more than that. And here, more than in the previous cases, we find the specifically Jewish contribution to grandeur. Here we chance upon a genuinely Jewish definition of this great word. For our tradition has insisted that gedulah must always result in -- gentleness, kindness, generosity.

Rabbi Yochanan said: Be'khol makom she'ata<sup>motzei</sup> gedulato shel Ha-Kadosh barukh Hu, sham ata motzei anvetanuto. Wherever you find mentioned the gedulah -- the greatness or grandeur -- of the Holy One, Blessed by He, there you also find mentioned His anvetanut, His gentleness. In all the Bible, the two qualities are associated. We read of G-d as "the Lord of Lords, the great powerful and awesome G-d" -- and immediately thereafter we read of Him: "He executeth justice for the orphan and the widow, and loveth the stranger to give him bread and raiment." We read of G-d as "dwelling in the high heavens, Holy is His Name" and shortly thereafter we read of Him that He "revives the spirit of the lowly, and revives the heart of the crushed and oppressed." Of this great G-d of gedulah, we

"GRANDEUR  
A Jewish Definition"

read that He is "the father of the orphans and the judge of the widows."

There can be no true grandeur, no true gedulah, without anvetanut.

When we remember that Jewish ethics is based upon "imitatio dei," then we shall understand how grandeur is to be achieved by man. He who desires the secret of grandeur, must learn the secret of gentleness. He who wishes to scale the heights of gedulah, must bend down and gently minister to the lowly of spirit and the crushed in heart. Grandeur, in the Jewish scheme, must never be associated with arrogance or egotistical aloofness. Grandeur is not something that one can buy at the marketplace of public opinion. It is not a commodity that one purchases with acts of strategy. It is a divine quality that issues from numberless acts of gentleness, of kindness, of humaneness.

It is true that grandeur is not achieved by getting others to love you. But grandeur is achieved by getting yourself to love others. How interesting that in Judaism, a man of piety and scholarship, he who combines character and the wisdom of Torah, is called a gadol -- a man of grandeur!

We may rightly be proud of the State of Israel in this respect. It has shown a deep understanding of the ancient Jewish definition of grandeur. In the help that Israel has been extending to the new nations of Asia and Africa, she has revealed her awareness that gedulah can be achieved only through anvetanut. Israel has reaffirmed for all of us the gentleness that is the foundation of true grandeur.

As we wish the State of Israel Mazal Tov upon its twelfth birthday, we pray to Almighty G-d to protect it and to guide its leaders with His Divine love. We pray that Israel achieve the grandeur which is its destiny.

"GRANDEUR  
A Jewish Definition"

For so were we taught by Moses. Rak am chakham ve'navon ha-goy ha-gadol ha-zeh -- only a people of wisdom and understanding can become a nation of grandeur. Ki mi goy gadol? -- How does a people achieve grandeur? Asher lo Elokim kerovim elav -- when it expresses, through thought and action, its fealty to G-d Who is close to it whenever they call upon Him. And once again: U-mi, goy gadol, who is a goy-gadol -- a nation of grandeur? And the answer is a people asher lo chukim u-mishpatim tzaddikim ke'khol ha-torah ha-zot -- which has laws and ordinances that are righteous, as is written in this Torah.