

"The Wonderful Failure of Orthodox Judaism"

1. I recently had the pleasure of meeting with a colleague of mine, not an Orthodox man, who expressed his dismay and consternation at the lack of religious progress of us Jews. He felt extremely disturbed and even somewhat ashamed of himself as a Jewish religious official. The source of his dissatisfaction was the lead article in the recent ~~art~~ issue of LOOK magazine, undoubtedly a journal of deep religious scholarship, which pointed out that religion was becoming "big business" and was taking on the techniques of "show business", stressing the contributions of the Protestant and Catholic clergy in this sacred field. Now, while these other religions have availed themselves of all these new "gimmicks" and reveled in new-found popularity, we Jews have remained religiously backwards. No, my colleague sadly commented, we have not learned our lesson, we are again behind the times. But perhaps, he came back hopefully, perhaps some day we too will deserve a high Hooper rating.

to excuse me

2. I ~~may~~ <sup>must</sup> ask you, my friends, for using as my text - or pretext - his sincere feelings on these matters. But I think that it is an attitude, a state of mind, which bears further study. For your edification - and perhaps amusement - let me read you some choice selections from this learned article.

- a) "The preachers are using TV, radio and movies to bring religion back into the home".
- b) "The Protestants are going into show-business in a big way"
- c) "He (a famous Protestant minister) tells his businessmen they'll live longer and be more successful human beings (and salesmen) if they'll only learn to relax and remember that nobody is ever alone so long as G-d's in His heaven".
- d) "There's a guy", said a man in the audience in Chicago recently, "...There's a guy who really reaches out'."
- e) "His director (of a prominent Catholic bishop who has become a TV star) says it's an easy job: 'It's so simple. He doesn't care if we move the cameras in or out while he's making a point. He's an ideal performer'. A simpler description is often applied: 'He's terrific.'"
- f) "TV school for ministers teaches the whole dramatics art, from make-up and lighting to production and camera technique."
- g) "When some of G-d's salesmen began making movies, they realized that turning out a full-length motion picture was not like showing lantern slides of the Holy Land to the Ladies Aid Society. They called in professional stars, technicians, scenarists and directors (and press agents too), and a measure of their success was the accolade in a recent issue of Variety, which ran a banner headline across one page: 'Churches' Show Biz Know-How'".
- h) "Nobody can see 'John Wesley' unless he goes to church, because that picture is being shown only in churches."

3. Well, let us admit it in ch grin, embarrassment and shame: we just don't have it.

- \*Our preachers use ~~different~~ <sup>older</sup> methods of getting religion back into the home.
  - \* We have failed to go into show business in a big way. Some seminaries, it is true have made a good try at radio and now TV, but somehow, nebech, they have not broken into the rarified atmosphere circle of the Peales and Sheens and Grahams.
  - \*We Orthodox Rabbis don't tempt businessmen with the promise that their belief that G-d is in heaven will make them better salesmen.
  - \*We do not always succeed in being Ideal Performers. We are poor in TV dramatic technique. And our Yeshivas unfortunately try to produce out-of-date scholars instead of stressing make-up, lighting sacred production and holy camera art.
  - \* Our Rabbis, backward clerics that we are, would still rather "rate" with the HAPARDES or the JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW or TALPIOS than with VARIETY or FORTUNE.
  - \* And, alas, all we have to offer in our synagogues is Prayer, Study and Repentance.
- No movies, no shows, no gimmicks. We're lost!

4. But is Judaism really lost because of it's low Hooper rating? Is it really and truly a sign of backwardness that we have not stressed these methods of religious teaching? Is our lack of showmanship a symptom of lack of vitality? Are some of our friends right in interpreting this deficiency of ours as a pessimistic sign?

5. The answer: it depends what you're looking for. We Jews too want the masses of our people to be closeto Torah. Torah was given to K'lal Yisroel, to all Jews, not just to a handful of scholars. But in any attempt at mass inculcation, two things must always be kept in mind:

- a) Torah is something which goes to the core of life. It is qualitative, it reaches for the depths of the soul, and is more intensive than extensive. It is infinitely more than a substitute for a pep-talk to weary souls, and is not intended ~~for~~ as material for the mass hysteria of the Evangelists. And it is CHASS VE'SHALOM not intended as a good technique in developing good businessmen or shrewd, convincing salesmen. If a Jew were to speak that way about Judaism he would be committing the ultimate in blasphemy, sacrilege and CHILLUL HA'SHEM.
- b) We do not believe that the means sanctify the ends. The teaching of Torah must be acheived only in a way befitting its sacredness. You may not "sell" MITZVOS like TV sets, and dare not peddle Torah as one disburses napkins or sewing machines.

6. I think that the experience of our Patriarch Jacob in this morning's Sidra is most edifying in our problem. Jacob left Beersheba on his way to Haran. He was in a most precarious position, he had family troubles and was being hunted by his brother. His soul cried out to G-d. He felt that a great religious experience, the kind that comes once in a lifetime, even once in a century, was enveloping him. He was now on hallowed ground, on the very spot where his grandfather Abraham had lifted the knife to kill his father Isaac, who was bound on the Akedah, at the behest of G-d. At his feet he saw the stones On which Isaac had been bound, and he knew, in his holiness, that on this very spot would rise the Beis Hamikdash. "He came to this spot" is expressed in Biblical Hebrew as VAYITGA BAMAKOM, which our Sages interpreted, in Mishnaic Hebrew, as meaning "he prayed to G-d". Imagine what would have happened had Jacob had "the gift of showmanship". He would have prayed while robed i impressive vestments. He would have arranged for off-stage sound effects and proper lighting with candlelight growing brighter as the sun began to set - which would have come at the very end. He would have acted out his dream of the Ladder from artg to Heaven, and had pretty child actresses acting as angels. Tremendous thunder-effects would have accompanied the booming, batitone voice of G-d. Certainly, if the heathen spectators wouldn't have been affected, his own little family would have. Some day, his little Joseph or Benjamin would say that his father was an Ideal Perfomer.

But that is not for a Jacob. Jacobs don't "bring religion back into the home" by great public demonstrations. They do it by highly private dreams and personal experiences and prophecies. And so as Jacob finishes his prayer, and before he lies down to sleep and dream, we read that he sleeps KI VA HA'SHEMESH, for the sun had set. And our Rabbis read those first two words as one, KIVA HA'SHEMESH, which means MELAMED SHE'HISHKIA HAKADOSH BARUCH HU SH ES HA'CHAMAH SHELO BE'ONASSAH, that G-d extinguished the sun, that he caused it to set much before it was due to do so, BISHVIL LE'DABER IM YAAKOV AVINU BE'TZINA, in order to speak to Jacob privately, or in modesty.

and nothing essential wrong in term as acting on radio, TV or newspaper

- 7. Yes, that is the Jewish way. A great dramatic scene, a tense, exciting situation, a colossal dream, a perfect opportunity for Hollywood success - but if it's going to be Religion, and not irresponsible, demonstrative, exhibitionistic, exploiting Showmanship, then the sun must be blackened before its time, the audience must go home, and every man must dream for himself and "reach out" for G-d - by himself. No nonsense, no veneer, no histrionics and no "projection" when you came face to face with the Creator of all men who can see behind the mascara, beyond the make-up and into the soul, who is unimpressed with studied gesture and sharp wit and the "ability to sell yourself".
  
- 8. Judaism is really not worried about the ability of true teachers of Religion to convey their messages to the broad Jewish masses. Beauty and esthetics are important, yes, but only as secondary considerations. First and foremost - is sincerity and honesty. A great Talmudic Rabbi said it better: KOL MI SHE'YESH LO TORAH MI'BIFNIM, TORASSO MACHREZESS ALAV MI'BA'CHUTZ , whosoever has the Torah within him, the Torah makes itself evident to others. Teaching by example was the greatest pedagogic technique offered by CHAZAL. Torahwithin, in the privacy and intimacy of every Jew's heart, that is what will win souls - not the deep voice and beautiful shock of blond hair.
  
- 9. No, let us not be discouraged and lose heart. LOOK may not hail us, VARIETY may not salute us, and the non-Orthodox may bemoan us. But we are content to use our decent, honorable, gracious ways of teaching Torah. In the dark, quiet of each man's soul, that is where and when G-d appears to Him. When the sun has set, and none can see the sweating brow, the anguished forehead, the tearing eye, the pleading look, that is when G-d sees, when Man cannot. And then and only then does G-d answer, when he knows that these are meant in sincerity, and not for an impressario effect.
  
- 10. Like Jacob who met G-d in the dark and silence of night, we know that what will save Judaism is not a beautiful edifice, not a great museum, not a radio show or TV program, not even headlines in the press about the great new innovation in the Jewish marriage contract. That may win the applause of the critics, but it takes much more to win the approval of G-d.
  
- 11. HA'NISTAROS LA'SHEM ELOKEINU, the hidden things are to the Lord our G-d. Only by reasserting the ancient Jewish verities and qualities of hiddenness, modesty, humility and deep, undiminished and unimpeachable honesty, can we become and convince others to become LA'SHEM ELOKEINU, children of the One Lord, Our G-d;