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"ON THE HIGHWAY OF LIFE"

After Joseph reveals his true identity to his brothers, he sends them back to fetch their father, Jacob, and gives them three words of advice which our tradition regarded as most significant: Al tirgezu ba-derekh -- "do not fall out by the way."

Our rabbis were fascinated by this counsel, and tried to read into Joseph's words a number of ideas they think he had in mind. One of the most meaningful interpretations of Joseph's words can be found in the Midrash, Bereshit Rabbah, where sages enumerate three specific instructions that Joseph gave his brothers when he said, Al tirgezu ba-derekh.

The first of these is Al tifse'u pesiah gassah -- "do not take large steps, do not speed too quickly." What is true in modern days was true in ancient years as well: speed is the greatest cause of fatal accidents. You are going to give our father some great and marvelous news, Joseph told his brothers, but do not endanger your lives by hurrying too quickly.

The second instruction he gave them was: Hikansa be-chemmah le'ir -- "Whilst traveling, when you find you must turn in for the night, enter the city where you will be spending that night during the daytime. Do not enter it furtively and surreptitiously, lest the inhabitants suspect you of some evil designs. Finally, his third piece of advice was: Al taamidu atzmekhem mi-divrei torah -- "Although you are on your way for an exciting and intensely personal mission, do not during this time fail to continue your study of Torah."

I have no doubt that this sage counsel that Joseph gave his brothers, as our rabbis expounded it, has a significance that transcends the particular incident described in the Torah. I believe that Joseph's advice has relevance for all those who travel on the highway of life. For life itself is indeed

a pilgrimage, a journey on a way. We speak of religion as a "way of life." In the Jewish tradition we describe worldly conduct as Derekh Eretz -- the way of the land -- and religious conduct as Halakhah -- a way, or going. In all facets of life, therefore, and in all times, Joseph's advice makes sense: Al tirgezu ba-derekh. Do not fall out by the way. Do not get lost in the byways of existence. Do not wander off the highway into the winding dead end alleys of experience. Do not take unnecessary risks on the highway of life and add fatalities that the call of the open road imposes upon the traveler.

My friends, it had been my intention to analyze with you this morning the words of Joseph as our rabbis interpreted them, and as they apply to our personal and communal endeavors in 1960. I had wanted to speak to you of the danger of Pesiah Gassah, the curse of speed in our daily lives, the problem of our constant, unceasing rush through life. I had wanted to urge you to desist from the mad hurry that characterizes our civilization, and to point out to you that if the life of our grandfathers was like a road, and that of our parents like a highway, then our lives are unfortunately like a throughway or turnpike.

However, despite my original intention, I feel that this pulpit must react to the events of these last two weeks that have so unnerved and disturbed not only the Jewish community, but the entire civilized community of the world and it is in regard to these events that I find the advice of Joseph even more meaningful than usual.

The crude rash of swastikas, the hoarse cries of "Juden Raus!" that have descended like a plague of boils upon the Western World, from Cologne to New York, from Oslo to Melbourne, from Buenos Aires to Milan, are a shocking and irritating reminder that we Jews are guilty of having disregarded the first instruction that our sages attributed to Joseph: Al tifse'u pesiah gassah:

"Do not speed."

In our desire to erase from our collective memories the burden of the knowledge of the world's guilt against us; in our anxious wish to find about us a new world where men will be humans and not beasts, where decadence and horror will be replaced by decency and honor; we have been Pose'im pesiah gassah, we have been taking very large steps indeed and continuing on a pace much faster than that which the situation warrants. We have gone too far in accepting a wish as reality. We have been too quick and peremptory in forgiving and forgetting German brutality. We have been in a hurry to forget that seemingly civilized people can become sick with hatred and demented with enmity. We have forgiven all too quickly the guilt of the German people, even of former Nazis who pleaded helplessness and offered innocent intention as the way of obtaining atonement.

What has happened this past while, during the season of peace and good will on the Christian calendar, has perhaps had some good and constructive consequences. It has reminded us sharply that we are not as safe and secure as we perhaps had thought. It has challenged us into an awareness that the Western World's supposed repentance might after all be only superficial; that the protestations of sympathy to the people of Israel rings somewhat false and counterfeit. It has reminded us who are Pose'im pesiah gassah, that while we certainly ought not to submit to any mass hysteria, still there is a powerful and potent antisemitism that is latent in large numbers of people around the globe, and if you but scratch the surface, you may expect the glands of old hatred to exude the pus of a new antisemitism. Al tirgezu ba-derekh -- Al tifse'u pesiah gassah: We must slow down on the way we have been going these past several years.

In addition to the error of Pesiah Gassah, of making too many far reaching assumptions about a "good" Germany, we have been negligent in the

second aspect of Al tirgezu ba-derekh: Hikansu be-chammah le'ir -- the instruction to come into the city during daylight. We have been satisfied with furtive, indirect, half-hearted attempts at assuring Jewish survival, and especially at teaching Western Germans how to reconstruct their lives. We have not been sufficiently forthright and frank in demanding publicly and openly the total reconstruction of German society so that such crimes as we have witnessed in our lifetime might never recur.

And who knows but that the eagerness of the State of Israel to accept monetary compensation for the blood of martyrs and still worse -- her anxiousness and unhesitating willingness to sell weapons to this nation of murderers (despite all the political and economic justification which we can bring to bear in her favor) has given West Germany the "chutzpah" to relax its denazification program. Perhaps because of this Germany has felt that its past sins have been "officially" forgiven.

Now, however, we must abandon silence and indirection. The right way, the right Derekh, is Hikansu be-chammah le-ir -- the open, frank, forthright. Expose your honestly held convictions to the light of the sun, and express them in daylight -- before the open bar of world public opinion.

Allow me to give you some examples of what I mean. About a month ago, a law was introduced into the German Parliament singling out antisemitism as a special crime, punishable by special penalties. Yet this law was defeated by a combination of West German politicians and the local Jewish community which refused to have Jews singled out for special mention in the laws of the West German Republic. What frightening foolishness! As if the name "Jews" can ever be forgotten in the history of Germany. A thousand years from today, no student will ever be able to read a history of that people without summing through the crimson, blood stained pages of national disgrace in which the

face of German bestiality in all its horrible evil will show through to terrify and terrorize people who will live in the dim future. And yet, even our own Jews are afraid to have the fact of Jewry and Jewry suffering under the Nazis mentioned publicly.

Another example is the way we have begun to adjust to and even condone the largely negative attitude of the Western powers, even the United States, to the State of Israel. We have learned to accept with equanimity the fact of American "neutrality" in Israeli-Arab problems, a "neutrality" which clearly favors Arab truculence against the young Jewish State.

We have been indifferent, indirect and "shtadlanistic" in demanding the immediate removal from West Germany of Nazi professors, teachers, journalists and -- irony of ironies! -- Nazi judges! We have allowed ourselves to be moved by the crocodile tears of the Bonn Government.

We have not been persistent in insisting that German teachers and German public schools teach their young charges about the disgraceful episode of Nazidom.

But worst of all, to my mind, has been our fundamental error: and that is the conspiracy of silence which has made it unpatriotic and even subversive for American Jews to protest the foreign policy of the United States Government in its insistence upon German reunification. Why have we been so passive and ready to accept reunification as the cornerstone of American foreign policy, when British citizens have been far less inhibited in this willingness to accept the resurrection of the German beast? Englishmen have been more opposed to reunification than Americans because they suffered more than Americans did in World War II. By the same token, we Jews should have been the major champions of non-reunification. Is it true that the temporary policies of the late Secretary of State in the Cold War ought to have taken precedence over

basic humanitarian lessons that we have learned from recent history? Is it true that we have the right to forgive and forget all the suffering of our brothers? Is it true that Germans really have repented, and that they are all ready to enter into decent society and into the company of civilization? The answer is no, and not only once no, not only twice no, but six million times no!

Hikansu be-chammah le'ir. In addition to going slow, to the Pesiah Gassah, we must, in our own subjective attitudes towards this nation with its unspeakably evil past, adopt as a motto for our action: Hikansu be-chammah le'ir: openness and forthrightness. We must insist upon the proper denazification. We must support the State of Israel with all the power and influence at our command. We must protest this amoral and grotesque attempt to revive the German nation. We must not make a secret about our feelings concerning so vital, historic and crucial a matter.

Finally, if we are so crudely reminded of the blight of antisemitism once again, at the attempt at genocide aimed against us, at the obliteration of our people, our response must be not only negative, but also positive.

What do I mean by positive? I mean: being better, stauncher, more affirmative and more authentic Jews. Al tirgezu ba-derekh, the way to avoid fatal accidents on the highway of national life, is: Al taamidu atzmechem mi-divrei torah -- never forgetting the study of Torah. Yes, by building ourselves up spiritually we can better resist the racial onslaught of the bigoted antisemitic world.

Our rabbis long ago expressed a great truth by playing on two words: "Sinai" and "Sine'ah," the mountain on which the Torah was given and the Hebrew word for hatred or antisemitism. The core of antisemitism, according to our rabbis, lies in the resentment of the unredeemed pagan world at the challenge

that issues from Torah which was given to Israel. It is this challenge of Sinai that throughout history has resulted in the paroxysms of Sine'ah, of vicious hatred and vile bigotry directed against the Jew as the reminder of a God in Heaven Who demands right action and decent conduct.

Let us, therefore, in the face of this renewed Sine'ah from both sides of the Iron Curtain, respond to the challenge by a return to Sinai. When hatred is today expressed against Jews, we Jews must answer with greater loyalty to that which makes Jews Jewish: Torah, tradition, our great heritage. Children and adults, old and young, men and women, must return with renewed vigor to the sources of our Jewish tradition. Only by remaining strong within, spiritually, can we have the fortitude to ward off the attack from without.

We Jews today find ourselves in a situation comparable to the brothers of Joseph: On the way, on the highway from Joseph to Jacob, for, in a way, Joseph and Jacob symbolize two eras. We today are leaving the era of Joseph, the rich and powerful "shtadlanim" with highly placed connections who prefer private wire pulling to the public airing of deeply held convictions, who tread very slowly when it comes to "Jewish" problems; who look and act and feel and sound 150% Egyptian; who will not want to be "too Jewish" in the light of the city although they may remain completely loyal to the shadow of Torah in their own homes.

We are heading, hopefully, back to an era of Jacob -- to an open, forthright, and realistic era of ancestral Torah and the tradition of our fathers; an era where, like Jacob, we will be willing to struggle with adversaries, and openly proclaim what we think is right and decent.

We who have lived through the Joseph era, we can appreciate all the more the call to those preparing for the journey on that great highway

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Rabbi Norman Lamm -- 1/9/60

leading to Jacob: Al tirgezu ba-derekh -- let us go not too fast, not too furtively, always with faith and with Torah.

May our way be clear of mishaps, and may the highway of our lives, both individually and collectively, be blessed with the blessings of Torah, of which it is written: "Its ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace."