

THE HOUR AGAINST ETERNITY

When our Rabbis inquired as to the reason we recite the blessings over the Torah when we are called up to it in the synagogue, Rabbi Ishmael replied as follows (Ber. 48b): KAL VA-CHOMER, AL CHAYEI SHAAH MEVARECH, AL CHAYEI OLAM LO KOL SHEKEIN, ~~certainly~~ if we make a blessing over food which is only CHAYEI SHAAH, only temporal, mundane living, then we certainly ought to bless G-d for Torah which is CHAYE OLAM, eternal life. And with this our Rabbis presented us with a distinction that governs all of life and which calls upon each of us to decide how we shall conduct our lives. For every activity of life can be regarded as either CHAYE SHAAH, which means the "life of the hour", that which must be done but which has no lasting significance, or CHAYE OLAM, the "life of eternity", that which may not seem pressing, but which is of eternal and permanent dignificance. It is between the life of the hour and the life eternity that the Jew must choose. And our Rabbis leave us little doubt as to which they considered more valuable.

CHAYEI OLAM and CHAYEI SHAAH -- eternal life and temporal life, the life of the hour and the life of ever. Perhaps we can reduce those terms to two simpler English words: the urgent and the important. C.SH. is the urgent. It includes all those matters which press us day in and day out, problems that have to be solved in a hurry, within the hour, desires to be fulfilled, personal wishes to be satisfied. The Life of the Hour is the life of the Urgent. CH.O. is the important. Eternity is never in a hurry. There is no urgency about matters of the spirit. But ultimately, in the long view of a man's life, they are what really counts -- they are the important issues. The urgent matters pass with the hour. The important matters are CH.O., they last for all eternity. The urgent requires of us to make it fast; the important -- to make it deep. It is urgent that a businessman sometimes be clever. It is important that he be wise. It is urgent for the ~~mother~~ housewife to be a gracious hostess; it is important that she be a loving wife and mother. It is urgent that our children get good grades; it is important that they learn how to live. This is to say that the urgent is significant and certainly ought to occupy our attention. But we ought certainly give equal time and even greater attention and weight to that which is important, to that which outlasts the temporary CH.SH. for it is CH.O. -- eternal and everlasting. Certainly, as our Rabbis taught, the CH.O. ought to elicit from us more blessing, more thankfulness, than the CH.SH.

Look at our modern ^{civilization} world and you will soon discover ^{soon enough} if it has struck the proper balance between the important and the urgent, the hour and eternity, the holy and the profane. In a recent article (SR), Dr. Glen Olds, the new president of Springfield College, has drawn our attention to this problem in a well-phrased question that is most disturbing. He asks: we are on the verge of conquering outer space -- but what about inner space? We have girdled the earth with satellites, we plan trips to the Moon and to Mars. We have utilized mathematics and engineering to reduce the vast reaches of outer space to manageable proportions. The task was indeed urgent, and we have achieved a victory in CH. SHAAH. But what of inner space, which may not be as urgent as matching Russian progress, but is far more important in the long run? What about the vast hollowness inside men's hearts and minds? What about the gaping emptiness that afflicts their souls with meaninglessness, with lack of direction? And what of the inner space in the society of men -- what about shrinking the distances that separate man from man and nation from nation, distances that evoke man's basest cruelty and hatreds? Shall this inner vacuum and inner emptiness remain unshrunk while we divert ourselves with the urgent but relatively unimportant problem of observing the other side of the moon? To learn the art of morality and fill man's inner space is to win CH.O. -- eternity. Certainly this bigger prize ought not be completely neglected in favor of the lesser though more urgent prize of winning CH.SH.

And oh how our world has allowed the urgent to eclipse the important, O how the hour has obscured eternity! This year was such a precarious one for our brink-worn world. Such grave crises rocked our nation with the news from both Middle East and Far East. And in this year when it was so important to get together the leaders of nations for some kind of summit discussion to stop the insanity of wars and brinks, whether a summit independently or a summit under U.N. auspices -- this year nations aimed their missiles all the way up to the moon, and were not able to get off the ground for a summit meeting only a few thousand feet above sea level in Geneva or New York. We are making wonderful progress in the CH.SH. -- and losing out our CH.O. What a fate -- to become the master of the hour and to forfeit eternity! ^{however} ~~What a tragic commentary on the~~ ^{look at our civilization that we know only fear, not joy; only hate, not love; only war, not peace.} And I would go a step further. If we truly desire CH.O. instead of only CH.SH.; if we truly desire to survive and to live through the crises of the hour, then we shall have to cease relying on mere summit meetings of chiefs of state to save us. It is not enough to convene the peak personalities -- it is necessary that each of us convene the peak ideas as well. It is the summits of our lives as well as the summits of our governments. It means that each of us must think tall thoughts if we are to be big people. We must rid ourselves of pettiness, of little selfish wants, of picayune complaints. We must climb above the merely urgent issues of the hour and scale the mountains of life to the very summit, to dedicate ourselves to CH.O. -- to the great ideas at the peak of life, ideas such as righteousness and charity, ideas such as honor and dignity, reverence for life and submission to the divine Will. If we do not reach these personal summits, then neither governmental summit conferences nor shooting missiles at the peaks of the moon's mountains will give us life and eternity.

But is there someone here today who will perhaps deny that it is possible for us ordinary men and women to make space in our CH.SH., in our daily routines, for CH.O., for a bit of eternal life? We are just not naturally religious enough, we don't have the spiritual capacity? -- Nonsense! One of the blessings we make over the Torah -- the real essence of CH.O. -- expresses our faith that G-d NASSAN LANU TORAS EMESS -- He gave us a Torah of truth -- VECHAYEI OLAM NATA BESOCHEINU, and He implanted in us CH.O. -- eternal life. So CH.O., the capacity for being big and acting big and living big is not external to us, but implanted within us.

And we had better begin to pay real attention to the problem of the important, of CH.O., in our lives, for the very future of our happiness depends upon it. There was a time when the voice of religion had to be raised in urging people to spare some of their time from CH.SH., from work and business and family problems, for CH.O., for the life of the spirit. But if they didn't respond, at least they would achieve CH.SH., at least their lives had some temporal significance. Today the danger is different -- and greater. For today there is not enough CH.SH. to go around. There is not that much to do, we have an immense amount of time on our hands. And if we -- men, women and children -- will not learn the art of CH.O. then we shall literally die of boredom and be deprived of both worlds! The anthropologist Asgley Montagu ("The Cultured Man") has recently said that the use of this leisure time is the most serious responsibility facing modern man. In 1776, the work week, the time devoted to the urgencies of CH.SH. was on the average 90 hours a week. The Civil War era saw a work week of 70 hours per week. In 1900 this was reduced to 60, in 1930 to 50 and today we are preparing for a CH.SH. week of less than 40 hours. The urgent matters of daily life can be achieved in very little time. What shall we do with our newly available time? -- it must be either the important CH.O. -- or dearth-dealing, mind-crippling, spirit-breaking boredom. We shall successively fall victim to the American disease of "Sunday Neurosis" if we evade CH.O. any longer. "Sunday Neurosis" -- that MESHUGAAS that overtakes us on our days off when we have nothing urgent on our calendar -- a depression which affects people who become conscious of a lack of content in their lives when the rush of the busy week stops, with the absence of anything important which becomes evident when the urgent is done with.

Our great Talmudists debate the question of whether Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur partake, legally, of the nature of SIMCHAH or happiness. The other three festivals of Sukkos and Pesach and Shevuos are days of YOM TOV -- happy days, days when we rejoice and experience SIMCHAH. What of Rosh Hashanah? ~~Some say~~ and Yom Kippur -- are they to be regarded as completely solemn and devoid of SIMCHAH, or are they too happy days? Some say yes, some say no. And Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik has explained the controversy as follows. Those who deny the existence or requirement of SIMCHAH on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur do so because on these days the Jew was not required to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. On the other three festivals, Jews were required to appear in the Jerusalem Temple, to be seen LIFNEI HASHEM, before the Lord. And only when one is "before the Lord," that is, in the Temple, can he experience true SIMCHAH. Hence the 3 ~~fe~~ pilgrim festivals are days of SIMCHAH, whilst Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are not. But what is now the reason of those who disagree and attribute SIMCHAH even to these judgment days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? There is SIMCHA, says Rabbi Soloveitchik, because the High Holidays are days of DIRSHU HASHEM BEHIMATZ'U -- G-d is everywhere available, one can experience LIFNEI HASHEM, the presence of G-dliness, everywhere, and does not require a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. If Pesach and Shevuos and Sukkos are happy days because Jews would travel to the BEIS HAMIKDASH, the High Holidays are happy days because the Jew experienced the Temple within himself, because wherever he was he felt LIFNEI HASHEM -- and it is this feeling of G-d's presence that is the source of true SIMCHAH, true and lasting happiness.

Here, my friends, is the answer to the challenge of leisure of modern man. His chance for happiness need not be shrunken by the crippling disease of boredom. True happiness comes only from a life of CHAYE OLAM, from devotion to G-dliness, to the realm of eternity where man can look forward to blessed immortality, to an escape from the pettiness of hour and the smallness that befogs his higher vision. True SIMCHA will not come from throwing one's self into the all-absorbing task of making more and more money, of living for the CH.SH. It certainly will not come from the hysterical, obsessive attempts to disguise the harrowing boredom of leisure by throwing ourselves into the endless rounds of dull, meaningless entertainment, the vulgar, nauseating, debilitating and debilitating rounds of games and parties and small, biting talk. No man or woman was ever made truly happier by a cocktail party or game of bridge. They can be made happy even in an unhappy world by an occasional foray into serious study of Judaism, into the grasping of a great idea, by the vision of new loyalty, by the understanding of a new source of meaningfulness. CH.O., eternal life, the awareness of being before G-d at all times and places -- this assures us of SIMCHAH. This is the idea of Yom Kippur. For if we shall neglect CH.O., no amount of success in CH.SH. will make us happy. One recalls the recent strike of elevator operators in N.Y.C., when a group of workers climbed up to their office on the 18th floor -- and discovered that they forgot the keys on the street level. The key to SIMCHA is CH.O. No heights scaled on CH.SH. will get it for us.

One can hardly ask for a better teacher than Yom Kippur in righting our imbalance, in impressing upon us the great importance of the important, of CH.O. For Yom Kippur is a day of deprivation, of INUY, when we deny ourselves five specific physical or material pleasures, indicating thereby that we can, if necessary, get along without CH.SH., without the mundane and worldly and urgent -- but never without CH.O., without the spiritual. We refrain from ACHILAH USHETIAH, from food and drink. By not eating we acknowledge that as necessary as food is for human life, it is merely urgent that we eat, but the indulgence of our appetites has no lasting value. We can do without it for a day. But we cannot do with a hungry soul, we cannot do with a starved spirit, with an emaciated NESHAMAH. It challenges us to worry not only about the recession in our economy, but also about the recession in our spirits, CH.O. as well as CH.SH. We may do without drink, hard or soft drinks. We can survive that kind of thirst for CH.SH. But we dare not neglect the natural thirst of the human mind and heart and soul for learning and understanding and insight. We refrain from RECHITZAH, from washing ourselves on Yom Kippur, thus acknowledging that necessary as it is to keep clean, it is more important to keep pure -- for cleanliness is ultimately only CH.SH., whilst purity is CH.O.; we need spiritual detergents, a religious hygiene. We do not practice SICHAH, rubbing oils into the skin. For on Yom Kippur we

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recognize that one's appearance, his cosmetic self, is merely urgent, for that ~~is~~ determines how he impresses other people. But one's inner self is important, of cosmic significance, for that is how he impresses G-d. On Yom Kippur we are forbidden to practice NEILAS HASANDAL, the wearing of comfortable shoes, teachingus that good clothing and fine possessions and comfort are all permissible, but they ought not to be the sum and substance of our lives -- for they are only CH.SH. and we can well do without them as we do on Yom Kippur. On this day we feel the cold, hard ground, and the ache of the feet induces compassion in the heart as we remember all those whose ill fortune prevents them from enjoying the comforts of shoes and good clothing all the year. This kind of sympathy and love for our less fortunate brothers -- that is the CH.O. to which Yom Kippur introduces us. It reminds us that what we have is only CH.SH. -- passing, ephemeral, impermanent; what we are is CH.O. -- of enduring, lasting, eternal importance. Yom Kippur forbids TASHMISH HAMITAH, any marital intimacies, reminding us that the desires of the flesh are ultimately only CH.SH., passing whims and without lasting value. What is important rather than merely urgent is the profound love that bind husband and wife, the element of spiritualty the awareness of the SHEKHINAH, that lends dignity and worthiness to their home. CH.O., Yom Kippur tells us, is not the begetting of the family but the raising of decent children, the cherishing of Jewish values in the home, the development of young souls who will not be ignorant of the word of G-d, the growth of family unity and harmony and love. When we deprive ourselves of all these five INUYIM ~~we~~, of eating and drinking, of washing and rubbing with oils and wearing shoes and physical intimacies, we demonstrate thereby that ^{as Jews} we can go a full day without CH.SH., but ^{we} never without CH.O. We live not for the hour -- but for eternity.

As we prepare this morning for the Yizkor service, standing, as it were, at the crossroads between life and death, we are faced with the fact that life must cease. And at a time of this sort we become aware of the fact that with the end of life, all CH.SH. disappears forever and sinks into permanent oblivion. Who will be interested in how much we enjoyed our material lives, in how much success we achieved in pampering ourselves? What remains after life is done is only CH.O., only that which man contributed to eternity, only the creations of the spirit, only his MAASIM TOVIM, his charity and compassion, his nobility of soul and generosity of heart, his cleaving with his G-d in heaven above. At a time of Yizkor when we call to mind beloved relatives and implore Almighty G-d to remember them in mercy -- is it the picture of their CH.SH. that we seek to perpetuate -- their possessions, their financial skill, their excellence in games -- or is it their CH.O., their loveliness of character, their pity and mercy, their essential humanity, the spark of G-d within them? WE say: YIZKOR ELOKIM ES NISHMAS PLONI BEN PLONI -- may G-d remember the soul of so-and-so -- it is that, the soul, the spirit, the CH.O., the striving for eternity and eternal values, that deserves to be memorialized by us and eternalized by G-d.

At this time when we think of others only in terms of their CH.O., we must rethink our own lives. Torah does not ask of us to surrender all mundane values, to give up our earthly pleasures if they are legitimate. It does remind us, however, that CH. SH. is not enough. It reminds us that man must have too CH.O. It reminds us that in the long view of life, the CH.SH., the Life of the Hour, is merely urgent; it is CH.O., the Life of Eternity, which is of true importance. On this holy day we set aside the life of the hour, the hour which passes and once it is gone never returns. Today we dedicate ourselves to the Life of Eternity. For only through a Life of Torah can we gain eternity. And only through Eternity is Life worthwhile. ^{from me}

the Eternity which is G-d's, which He has implanted within us.

we are not asked to surrender the passing Hour;
we are asked not to forfeit the our Eternity.

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