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KEEPING JUDAISM ALIVE

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On Rosh Hashonah, we spoke of the original authors of the universal spirit, the Hebrew prophets. We pointed out that Jeremiah had even prophesied the time when organized religion would no longer be necessary, because all men would have the law of God written on their hearts. While this is our ultimate goal, we will have to admit that a goal which has not been reached in three thousand years, will hardly be achieved in large substance for a few more generations at least. To be a Jew, one must be concerned with ultimates, but if we ignore the harsh realities of the present entirely, we do a disservice to our cause. One cannot survive in the battle of life without a star to which to point, but one must also have his feet on the earth. We still have to deal with the day-to-day problems in an organized way.

If we as Jews are to aid the march towards the brotherhood of man, we have first to make certain that we survive as an organized religious body. History has demonstrated to us that we cannot rely upon the idealism of the non-Jewish world alone. The time has not yet come when the world has no need of Jews. In spite of the fact that more people seem to be working towards universalistic goals, the dedicated workers for the cause of peace and understanding are still few and far between. If Jeremiah's goal is to be attained, we will need every one of his co-religionists working full time.

If the strength of the Jewish community is to be felt in the struggle going on around us, it seems to me that there are three main steps we must take. First, we must see to it that Jewish institutions operate at full strength. I have heard some Jews say, "To me, religion is the golden rule. I don't have to be a part of the organized Jewish community." This thinking, if carried to its logical conclusion, would bring anarchy to the world. Can you imagine someone saying, "I believe in the United Nations, therefore I surrender my American citizenship." The best way to work for an international world is, of course, through your own nation. Similarly, it is impossible for a Jew to weaken his loyalty to Judaism in order to work for the day in which all men will acknowledge the common fatherhood of God.

What are the Jewish institutions which are necessary to Jewish survival in modern times? I would answer that we have three minimally essential institutions. These are the synagogue, the Jewish Community Federations, and the State of Israel. With the destruction of the ancient Temple in the year 70 of this era, the synagogue became the focal point for Jewish worship, education, and culture. While its efficiency and popularity has fluctuated over the past 2,000 years, it would be fair to say that the synagogue is as vital a force today as it has ever been. There are two reasons for the strength of the synagogue in our time. In the first place, the development of American society has given to the church and to the synagogue a place of preeminence. It is certainly true that when the non-Jewish American thinks of the Jewish community, he thinks of the synagogued Jews. Increasingly in America, inter-faith activities are stemming from direct church-synagogue relationships, as we here in Beth Am are demonstrating with our Sisterhood inter-faith luncheons and our inter-visitations with numerous church groups. In the second place, the synagogue is so strong a force in America today because it has progressively changed from the small corner-shul of 30 or 40 years ago to major community centers housing varied kinds of activities presented by professional people, and offering first class physical facilities to its constituents. It would be fair to say that the progressive synagogue in America today is the true center of Jewish life in most of its significant phases.

I do not ask for what reason you have joined this congregation. Whatever the reason, your membership strengthens the Jewish community. In this day when Jews no longer live in ghettos, the synagogue has become the minimum measure of Jewish identification. Whether one considers himself religious or not, joining the synagogue is equivalent to saying, "I cast my lot in with the Jewish people." Those who choose not to join a synagogue are, by their disassociation, declaring themselves against the continuance of Jews as an organized community. I am not now suggesting, of course, that mere membership in a synagogue makes one a fellow of Jeremiah. I say that the minimum obligation of every Jew is to join and to support a synagogue, and buying High Holiday tickets is not fulfilling this minimum obligation.

When we speak of the synagogue, it is important to note that we include in this designation, the national organizations which make possible the existence of the local synagogue. Beth Am could not exist without a school that trains Rabbis and Cantors. It could not exist without a national agency that publishes religious texts and which maintains a highly skilled staff to work on educational problems and youth programming. When you give money to the Campaign for American Judaism, you are supporting our national agencies, The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Hebrew Union College. You are wise to support them, because Beth Am cannot exist without them. You ought to know more about these agencies. You ought not to take them for granted. If Beth Am is considered the flowering plant, then these agencies are our root and soil. They are an inseparable part of the synagogue structure.

Although the synagogue lies at the heart of the Jewish community today, it is not enough for a Jew to belong only to a synagogue. This is the minimum evidence of his Jewishness. A Jew cannot survive without education and worship, but he can't survive without charity either. The character of our Miami community is shaped in great measure by the many agencies that are a part of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. When you give to the Combined Jewish Appeal, the CJA, you are making possible the continuance of organized Jewish charity. As you know, the Protestants maintain their own charity organizations; The Catholics maintain theirs; and we maintain our own. When a Jewish family has a problem between husband and wife or a problem concerning the children, it goes to the Jewish Family and Children's Welfare Service. An old person can hope to be cared for in our Old Age Home, which has incidentally, become a model for old age homes of other denominations around the country. Our Federation maintains a Vocational Guidance Center, a Jewish Community Center Program, the Bureau of Jewish Education, and the like. Your dollars make possible the maintenance of these agencies through our Federation. These agencies are our responsibility.

You ought to know that for the past several years, these agencies have had to cut down on what has been a minimum program of activities. The reason for the cut-back is that Miami Jews do not give to the CJA to the same degree as Jews in Northern cities. The problem is, of course, ignorance. Jews who are new to this area, are not aware that we have a large Jewish Federation and that it is in need of their support. Half of the money you give to CJA goes overseas to help refugees and to help impoverished Jewish communities. How much is a reasonable gift to CJA? Perhaps this illustration can serve as a measurement. A man earning \$15,000 a year ought to be able to give not less than \$100 a year to Federation. Remember when the time for giving to CJA comes around this year that the Jewish community cannot survive without thriving charitable institutions. These charities are living proof to the non-Jewish community that our religion is not merely a matter of words.

We have said that the three minimally essential Jewish institutions are the Synagogue, Federation, and The State of Israel. An American Jew has only one political allegiance, and that is to the USA. The State of Israel is not a second homeland to American Jews, but it is of tremendous importance to the survival of the world Jewish community. In Israel are located the largest number of Jews to be found anywhere outside of the United States. The total world community of Jews has been severely decimated by the Hitlerian holocaust. If we are at all concerned with the survival of Jews, we have to be concerned with the survival of the State of Israel. The State is important to us not only because it continues to be a refuge for the oppressed, but because it is becoming increasingly a center for Jewish ideas and culture. Israel is important to the spread of the universalistic ideal because it is bringing democracy, both political and economic, into an area of the world which has known only dictatorship and ignorance for 2,000 years. The people of Israel are now divided into two sharply opposed groups, one of which is Orthodox, and the other of which is searching for a more dynamic expression of Judaism. Many believe that the greatest ally of the American reform community will be this second group in Israel. The Jew concerned with the propagation of the ideals of the prophets will want to do something to help the State of Israel, whether it is to buy bonds or to help the Hebrew University, or to help in another kind of way.

Let us consider next the weakest link in the structure of the American Jewish community today, the Jewish home. Thirty to forty years ago, the synagogue was floundering because our fathers had not yet learned that you cannot superimpose the European Shul on the American scene. In that crisis, the Jewish home played an heroic role. Most Jewish homes in previous generations observed a large measure of Jewish customs. They celebrated the Jewish festivals to some degree, and they strove in some way to recognize the distinction of the Sabbath. In recent decades, the synagogue in America has completely rebuilt itself. Under the leadership of Reform Judaism, it has dared to replace European texts with English ones; it has replaced European methods of teaching with progressive techniques, and it has once again become the great source of Jewish strength. While this has been going on, however, the Jewish home has been busily de-Judaizing itself.

It was to be expected that the rituals and the folklore which were adopted by the Jews of Asia and Europe would not be completely acceptable in America. Some sifting of the ritualistic process, some re-alignment and simplifying of the super-abundance of rituals was inevitable. What has happened in America, however, is not a ritualistic re-alignment, but an anti-ritual revolt. So-called Conservative and Orthodox homes are as much a part of this revolt as Reform homes. Even the 7% of suburban Jewish homes that keep kosher have thrown off most of the other aspects of the tradition. Let us be clear about the Reform position on ritual. A Reform Jew is not defined as one who doesn't perform the Orthodox rituals. A Reform Jew is one who emphasizes the prophetic or moralistic tradition, who, at the same time, maintains a selected minimum set of rituals which are meaningful to our time. We perform these rituals not because we think them pleasing to God, but because they have teaching and emotional value for us. These suggested rituals are presented from time to time in our Temple newspaper, especially before each holiday season. It is our hope that you read these lists of suggested procedure, and that you are attempting to incorporate this minimum set of rituals in your home. We believe them to be important for historic continuity, and we believe them to have teaching value. We certainly don't want our members to feel that failure to perform a ritual is a sin, but a ritual can be a way to reinforce the meaning of an idea. Take for example, the eating of Moror, or bitter herbs, on Passover. Who can eat the bitter herbs without being reminded that his forefathers had a tough time in slavery, and without resolving to ease the

bitterness of persons discriminated against today. And who can light the Sabbath candles without a flicker of a thought that life can be brighter, that the dull routines of the every day do not have to be the full content of our lives.

I have said this to the ladies many times and I say it again, "Don't underestimate the importance of the stomach in the teaching of Judaism." As Americans, we follow the ritual of eating turkey on Thanksgiving. Why, as Jews, can't we eat hamantaschen at Purim? The purpose of the Purim holiday is to teach that the good will triumph over evil in the end. How better can you teach that idea than by transforming the cruel Haman into a delicious cake with poppy seeds or prunes? And how can we teach gratitude better than by acknowledging at the Sabbath meal that much of what we have in the world is not the result of our own doing. I once asked a woman in her early 20's why she seemed to be so happy in her Judaism. She replied, "Rabbi, I don't know that I am more religious than anyone else, but in my home the time for togetherness were religious occasions. We were together at Passover and together at Rosh Hashanah and together at the Sabbath meal. And we sang together, and performed the rituals together, and, on these occasions, we talked together." "I suppose", she continued, "that Judaism means being together with my family, and being loved!" How keen must her parents have been to have caught the main meaning of the ritual. Today, our families go together to the ball game and together to the Pizza Palace, but do we go together to the synagogue on Friday night, and do we take occasion on the Jewish holidays to use the opportunities for togetherness? When our children grow older, the fun they experienced at the athletic contests or the pleasure of their numerous entertainment experiences will not sustain them in moments of spiritual crisis. They're going to need something else, and it is our task to see that they get it.

The absence of some ritual in the Jewish home is, of course, not the major sign of its abdication from Judaism. Perhaps the greatest loss in the home is its dedication to learning. There was a time when even non-religious Jews were intensively steeped in the Bible and in Jewish history. The majority of the Jews of Israel who are not affiliated with synagogues still know the Bible backwards. Recently, the owner of a book store in South Miami asked me, "Rabbi, why don't the Jews buy Bibles? The Christians come in to buy Bibles, but not the Jews." Why don't they? I can only think that they are operating under a misconception that Judaism is something that goes on only in the synagogue. The Book of Proverbs in our Bible is a large collection of teachings through which the father of old used to instruct his son on the ways of life. Today, sociologists tell us that the American father is becoming increasingly just a wage earner and decreasingly a man of learning. They forecast the time in the near future when the father will have no information to transmit to his children except the facts that concern his vocation. I wonder if we fathers are willing to accept our projected role as ignorami, or whether we want to teach our children something about the struggles of mankind to build a world of meaning. I wonder if we fathers want to hear our children saying, "Don't ask the old man anything. He's just a dollar collector." It's no sin to collect dollars, of course, but if that is all one does, it is a sign of inadequacy as a human being.

Like the fathers, our mothers, too, are suffering from inadequate training in the content of our faith. Few are the mothers who actually try to transmit a knowledge of Judaism to their children. As you may know, it is my privilege to help dozens of people convert to Judaism each year. There is no question that these converts know much more about Judaism than 99% of those borne into the faith. The reason is simple. The converts study Judaism as an adult and receive an adult impression of this most profound of all religions.

Those borne into Judaism get a religious education as a child, and then, conclude that they know it all. Now we are all capable of understanding that a child's knowledge is not sufficient for an adult mind, and we will want to do something to augment our knowledge. How can we do this in a guided manner? Does Beth Am have a school for adults? Of course we do. It's called our Adult Education Institute which convenes on Monday evenings, beginning the first Monday in October. Here you can study the Jewish sources, in English, among other adults. The classes are informal. Questions are encouraged, and your prior background is unimportant. If you want to teach your children something about the heart of Judaism, if you want to have the pride which comes with personal knowledge, attend these classes. They will help you transform your home into a center for the teaching of the Jeremian prophecy.

There are three main steps that we must take to survive as a Jewish community. We must support Jewish institutions. We must make our home a place where Jewish values are taught and lived, and, finally, we must live out the values of our faith in the broader community. The purpose of the synagogue and the home is to give us roots and guidance. They ought to make us feel that we belong to a group which has a meaningful role to play. They ought to give us the rational and emotional support that we need to feel worthwhile and loved. Ultimately, however, we have to go out into the world to live as individuals. In our vocational routine, and in our contact with other individuals, our values and faith are tested. If those values are firmly embedded in us; if we feel secure about them, we will not be tempted to cast them aside in order to fit into the publicly accepted mould of a successful person. If we feel that the prophetic ideal of a cooperative world is attainable, we will live out that ideal in our lives. We will appear to others as a person of good will; we will speak truth to falsehood; we will uphold the weak; we will strive for honesty in our dealings; we will respect the worth of those with whom we deal as children of God. We will support community organizations such as the United Fund, which strive for charity, and we will support community organizations which strive for equality like The Society for the United Nations and The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

To the broader community, the Jew expresses his Judaism in terms of the universal values of his faith. Within his own Jewish community, the Jew must identify with the particularistic institutions that make the survival of Judaism possible. Before we can love the world, we have to learn to love our own. We can not truly love mankind unless we love Jews also. As we deepen our loyalty to our home, to our synagogue, and to our Federation of charities, we will find our idealism expanding as the barrel overflows. Our talmud teaches, "Only the tree with deep roots in its native soil can hope to reach high into the sky."