

YOU ARE ISRAEL

A High Holiday Sermon by
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MOST OF US ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY OF DAVID AND GOLIATH. WE LOVE THAT STORY BECAUSE IT TELLS US HOW A LITTLE SHEPHERD BOY HAD THE COURAGE TO FIGHT A HUGE GIANT AND DEFEAT HIM. WHAT SOME OF US DO NOT KNOW IS THAT THIS BATTLE WAS NOT UNUSUAL AS A WAY OF SETTLING WARS BETWEEN THE ANCIENT NATIONS. EACH NATION WOULD APPOINT A REPRESENTATIVE, AND THE TWO REPRESENTATIVES WOULD FIGHT. IT WAS ASSUMED THAT THE GODS HAD SMILED UPON THE NATION REPRESENTED BY THE WINNER, AND THE ENTIRE LOSING ARMY WOULD RUN AWAY IN FEAR. IN THE STORY WE KNOW, AS IT IS TOLD IN THE BOOK OF FIRST SAMUEL, DAVID REPRESENTS ISRAEL, AND GOLIATH, THE GIANT, REPRESENTS THE PHILISTINES. IN ANCIENT TIMES, IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL FOR ONE PERSON TO BE CONSIDERED THE SYMBOL OF THE ENTIRE NATION. IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL TO BELIEVE THAT THE FATE OF THE ENTIRE NATION WAS BOUND UP IN THE ACTIONS OF THIS ONE PERSON.

THE BIBLE TELLS US THAT WHEN GOD SPOKE TO ABRAHAM, GOD COULD SEE IN ABRAHAM AN ENTIRE PEOPLE WHO WOULD BECOME A BR'ACHA, A BLESSING, TO ALL MANKIND. A THOUSAND YEARS LATER, WHEN THE PROPHETS SPEAK OF THE HEBREW NATION, THEY CALL THEM BY THE NAME OF ABRAHAM'S GRANDSON, JACOB, WHO IS ALSO NAMED ISRAEL. WHAT THE PATRIARCH JACOB DID WHEN HE WAS ALIVE AFFECTED THE HISTORY OF AN ENTIRE PEOPLE. WHAT THE PEOPLE DID HUNDREDS OF YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF JACOB AFFECTED THE REPUTATION AND MEMORY OF JACOB.

IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL TODAY, JEWS STILL HAVE SOMETHING OF THIS OLD NOTION THAT THE INDIVIDUAL JEW AND THE PEOPLE ARE ONE AND THE SAME. DURING THE YOM KIPPUR WAR OF 1973, WE SAW AN INCIDENT ON TV THAT MADE THIS POINT CLEARLY. A YOUNG ISRAELI PILOT HAD BEEN SHOT DOWN OVER SYRIA BY ONE OF THE RUSSIAN-MADE MISSILES. ALTHOUGH HE HAD BEEN CAPTURED BY THE SYRIANS AND PLACED IN A HOSPITAL, IT SEEMED HARDLY LIKELY THAT THE YOUNG MAN WOULD SURVIVE. AS THE TV CAMERAS WHIRLED, THE BOY HAD STRENGTH ENOUGH TO ASK HIS NURSE ONLY ONE QUESTION, "ARE THE EGYPTIANS STILL IN THE SINAI?" ALTHOUGH HIS LIFE WAS HANGING BY A THREAD, THE BOY COULD THINK OF ONLY ONE THING, THE SAFETY OF HIS PEOPLE. HIS LIFE AND THE LIFE OF HIS PEOPLE WERE ONE AND THE SAME TO HIM.

IN TIME OF WAR, IT IS EASY TO SEE THAT THE FATE OF AN ENTIRE PEOPLE MAY WELL DEPEND UPON WHAT THE SOLDIER DOES. HOW HAVE JEWS FELT ABOUT THIS CLOSE IDENTIFICATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL JEW AND THE PEOPLE IN PEACE-TIME? IF YOU READ EUROPEAN JEWISH HISTORY, YOU DISCOVER THAT THE JEWS RARELY HAD A PERIOD WHICH MIGHT BE CALLED PEACE-TIME. IN EASTERN EUROPE, IF ONE JEW COMMITTED EVEN THE SMALLEST CRIME AGAINST A NON-JEW, IT WAS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT AN ENTIRE JEWISH VILLAGE WOULD BE BURNED AND ITS PEOPLE KILLED. FATHER FLANNERY, THE CATHOLIC PRIEST WHO IS AN AUTHORITY ON ANTI-SEMITISM, WRITES THAT BECAUSE SOME FEW JEWISH PRIESTS MAY HAVE DESIRED THE DEATH OF JESUS, OVER FIVE MILLION EUROPEAN JEWS HAVE BEEN KILLED IN THE LAST THOUSAND YEARS BY THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN JESUS AS GOD.# FOR 2,000 YEARS, JEWS WHO NEVER SAW JESUS HAVE BEEN ACCUSED OF DESIRING HIS DEATH. THIS IS APART FROM THOSE JEWS KILLED BY HITLER.

"The Anguish of the Jew" MacMillan, 1965.

We must be careful not to blame all Christians for these deeds.

THIS PRACTICE OF LINKING ALL THE JEWS TO THE ACTIONS OF ONE JEW OF A SMALL GROUP OF JEWS HAS BEEN FOLLOWED IN AMERICA ALSO. WHEN I WAS A BOY IN VIRGINIA, IF ONE JEWISH CHILD IN THE CLASS DID SOMETHING OUT OF THE WAY, HOWEVER SMALL, THE REST OF THE JEWS IN THE CLASS FELT UNCOMFORTABLE, BECAUSE WE WERE CERTAIN TO SUFFER FROM THE REPERCUSSIONS. MY MOTHER UNDERSTOOD THIS VERY CLEARLY, WHEN SHE SAID TO ME, "HERBERT, I WANT YOU TO BE HONEST AND GOOD, BECAUSE YOU ARE A JEW, AND WHATEVER YOU DO WILL REFLECT ON THE REST OF THE JEWS."

THE INDIVIDUAL AMERICAN JEW MAY NOT WANT TO BELIEVE THAT HE IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER AMERICANS. SOME JEWS TRY TO CUT THEMSELVES OFF FROM THE JEWISH GROUP, TO HIDE THEIR IDENTITY OR TO GET LOST IN SOME ISOLATED ISLAND OF ACTIVITY. THE FACT REMAINS THAT EVEN IN CIVILIZED AND PROGRESSIVE AMERICA, WHAT ONE JEW DOES AFFECTS ALL JEWS. THE FATE OF OUR PEOPLE IS STILL LOCKED UP IN EACH OF US.

WHEN ABE FORTAS WAS APPOINTED SUPREME COURT JUSTICE BY HARRY TRUMAN, THE JEWS OF AMERICA WERE VERY PROUD. WE TOOK PERSONAL PLEASURE IN THE FACT THAT CARDOZA, BRANDEIS AND FRANKFURTER HAD BEEN AMONGST THE FINEST SUPREME COURT JUSTICES AMERICA HAD EVER HAD. WHEN FORTAS BECAME INVOLVED IN WHAT WOULD BE CALLED TODAY A MINOR DIFFICULTY, EVERY JEW IN AMERICA WAS CONCERNED THAT HIS INDISCRETION WOULD REFLECT ON EVERY OTHER JEW. IT IS WORTHY OF NOTE THAT IN SPITE OF MANY OPENINGS IN THE COURT SINCE FORTAS STEPPED DOWN, NO OTHER JEW HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO THAT HIGH COURT.

I WAS RAISED ON A SYSTEM OF ETHICS WHICH TAUGHT THAT A JEW HAD TO BE BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE, BECAUSE ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS SLIP A LITTLE BIT AND HE WOULD BE BLAMED DOUBLY FOR HIS ERROR. IT IS NOT QUITE FAIR, OF COURSE, THAT WE JEWS SHOULD HAVE THIS EXTRA RESPONSIBILITY, BUT IT WOULD BE WISE FOR US TO RECOGNIZE THE TRUTH AS IT EXISTS. IT IS TRUE IN ALMOST EVERY CULTURE THAT THE MAJORITY GROUP EXAMINES THE ACTIONS OF A MINORITY MORE SEVERELY THAN IT EXAMINES ITS OWN ACTIONS. THE GENERALIZATIONS THAT ARE A PART OF PREJUDICE APPLY TO THE BAD THINGS A MEMBER OF THE MINORITY GROUP DOES, BUT NOT TO THE GOOD THINGS. IF ONE JEW IN MY SCHOOL STOLE SOMETHING, WE COULD HEAR THE TALK IN THE SCHOOL YARD, "ALL JEWS ARE THIEVES." IF A JEW WAS VALEDICTORIAN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS, THE SAME KIND OF GENERALIZATION ABOUT JEWISH INTEREST IN LEARNING WAS NOT FORTHCOMING.

THERE WERE OTHER REASONS FOR RESTRAINT ON JEWISH CONDUCT THAN WHAT THE NON-JEWS WOULD THINK ABOUT US. MY PARENTS MADE THIS QUITE CLEAR TO ME. JEWS DID NOT DO CERTAIN KINDS OF THINGS. WE HAD TO DO CERTAIN OTHER KINDS OF THINGS. IF A JEW WAS SEEN DRUNK WALKING DOWN THE STREET, EVERYONE IN OUR JEWISH NEIGHBORHOOD WOULD STAND ON THE PORCH AND SAY ALMOST IN UNISON, "A SHANDE, A SHANDE." WE WERE ALL ASHAMED TOGETHER THAT A JEW SHOULD ACT IN SUCH A FASHION.

IT WAS MADE QUITE CLEAR TO ME AS A BOY THAT A JEW DOES NOT RESORT TO VIOLENCE. THERE WAS NO GUN IN MY HOUSE. SO FAR AS I KNEW, NO OTHER JEWISH FAMILY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OWNED A GUN. IN SOME AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOODS, WHEN THERE IS A FAMILY ARGUMENT, THE GUNS AND KNIVES COME OUT. THIS NEVER HAPPENED IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. JEWS DIDN'T OWN THE WEAPONS THAT MIGHT BE USED IN A MOMENT OF VIOLENCE. AS LATE AS TEN YEARS AGO, I WAS PART OF A STUDY GROUP THAT REVIEWED THE MAKEUP OF THE PERFORMERS OF VIOLENT CRIMES IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA. THE JEWS HAD AN EXTREMELY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF CRIMINALS IN THAT GROUP, SOMETHING LESS THAN ONE HALF OF 1%, A TINY NUMBER FOR A STATE WITH A LARGE NUMBER OF JEWS. THIS FACT TELLS US SOMETHING ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE JEWISH ETHIC, IN SPITE OF THE SWIFT RATE OF JEWISH ASSIMILATION IN AMERICA. THIS AVERSION TO VIOLENCE IS AT LEAST PARTIALLY A RESULT OF THAT SENSE OF JEWISH COMMUNITY IDENTITY, WHEN WE WERE ALL TAUGHT A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE ANOTHER. THE RABBIS SAID IT THIS WAY, "KOL YIRRACH AH-RAY-VIM ZEH B'ZEH, ALL JEWS ARE INTERTWINED AND PART OF ONE ANOTHER

PERHAPS ALL OF YOU CAN REMEMBER SITUATIONS LIKE THIS ONE I EXPERIENCED. TWO JEWISH BOYS BEGAN TO FIGHT, AND AS THE BUSINESS OF HITTING EACH OTHER BECAME MORE SERIOUS, MY GRANDFATHER STEPPED IN BETWEEN THE BOYS AND SAID SIMPLY, "AZAY DARF NIT A YID", A JEW DOES NOT DO THAT KIND OF THING." MOST OF US LEARNED WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN NOT MERELY THAT WE SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT DO CERTAIN THINGS, WE LEARNED THAT OUR ACTIONS HAD TO BE MEASURED BY SOMETHING OTHER THAN A GENERAL HUMAN YARDSTICK. WE WERE JEWS, AND BECAUSE WE WERE JEWS, A CERTAIN KIND OF STANDARD WAS EXPECTED OF US.

SOMETHING OF THIS ETHIC IS STILL ALIVE IN OUR JEWISH COMMUNITY TODAY, BUT WE MUST ALL ADMIT THAT IT IS WEAKENING. WHILE IT IS STILL TRUE THAT JEWS COMMIT CRIMES OF VIOLENCE WITH MUCH LESS FREQUENCY THAN NON-JEWS, WE ARE BEGINNING TO HEAR ABOUT SUCH VIOLENCE-PRONE JEWS IN THE NEWS. A MIAMI BEACH BOY STABS A MAN TO DEATH IN HIS CAR BECAUSE OF SOME MONEY INVOLVING A DRUG SALE. A JEWISH YOUNG MAN IN NEW YORK SETS OUT TO TERRORIZE A CITY AND KILLS HALF A DOZEN PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS, AND WHEN HE IS ARRESTED, THE YOUNG MAN IS CAUGHT WITH AN ARSENAL OF GUNS. WHAT IS A JEWISH BOY DOING WITH THAT KIND OF ARSENAL? WHAT IS A JEWISH BOY DOING IN THE BUSINESS OF DRUG SALES?"

MORE AND MORE WE HEAR ABOUT JEWS INVOLVED IN THEFT. WE HAD A TEMPLE ADMINISTRATOR WORKING FOR BETH AM HALF A DOZEN YEARS AGO WHO WAS SYSTEMATICALLY STEALING MONEY EVEN WHILE HE QUOTED YIDDISH POETRY AT OUR SILICHOT OR FORGIVENESS SERVICE. WE OPEN THE NEWSPAPERS, AND WE SEE ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL THAT THE JEWISH FINANCIAL SECRETARY OF ZALE CORP., A JEWISH OWNED JEWELRY FIRM, IS THE MASTERMIND IN AN INTERNAL REVENUE TAX SWINDLE INVOLVING TEN MILLION DOLLARS. IN PAST YEARS, WE USED TO HEAR OCCASIONALLY ABOUT SOME JEW ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN WHO DID SOMETHING DISHONORABLE. NOW, WE ALL HAVE A FEW FRIENDS WHO ARE ACCUSED OF ONE ILLEGALITY OR ANOTHER. WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE JEWISH SENSE OF NOBLESSE OBLIGE? WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR AWARENESS THAT IF ONE JEW DOES SOMETHING WRONG, HE BRINGS DISHONOR TO THE ENTIRE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

IF WE WANT TO FACE THE TRUTH, WE WILL HAVE TO ADMIT THAT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IS AMONG THE CASUALTIES OF THE AMERICAN EMPHASIS ON INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS. AS AMERICAN INDIVIDUALS OF ALL PERSUASIONS HAVE STEADILY CUT THEIR TIES TO THE GROUP OF THEIR ORIGIN, THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS HAD LESS AND LESS INFLUENCE ON ITS OWN MEMBERS. HOW CAN WE TALK TO A YOUNG JEW ABOUT HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, WHEN HE IS BUSY CUTTING OFF HIS ROOTS TO HIS OWN FAMILY? AFTER ALL, THERE IS A NEW GOD IN TOWN. HE IS NOT THE GOD OF ISRAEL WHO DEMANDS LOYALTY TO SOCIETY, HE IS A HIP-SWINGING GOD WHO SAYS, "CUT OUT AND DO YOUR THING." MANY OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE, IN BLIND WORSHIP OF THE NEW GOD AND HIS SWINGING PRIESTS, ARE IN SOME CONFUSION ABOUT WHAT THE THING IS THAT THEY WANT TO DO, BUT THEY ARE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT THEY WANT TO CUT OUT AND CUT OFF. THANK GOD, MANY OF OUR REBELS ARE ABLE TO RETURN TO US SAFE AND SOUND BEFORE THEY BECOME COMPLETELY LOST IN THE TEEMING MASS OF LOOSE INDIVIDUALS TRYING TO FIND SOME MEANINGFUL PURPOSE IN LIFE IN ALIEN BUT EXOTIC CIRCLES.

OUR YOUNG PEOPLE, OF COURSE, ARE JUST THE GROWING EDGE OF ROOTS THAT YOU AND I HAVE PLANTED, AND WE ALSO HAVE BEEN SHARPLY INFLUENCED BY OUR ENVIRONMENT. RECENTLY, THE HEAD OF THE NEW ORLEANS CRIME COMMISSION SAID ON TV, "THERE IS NO MORALITY IN A CORPORATION BOARD ROOM." THE INFERENCE OF THE SPEAKER WAS THAT THE ONLY LAW IN A BOARD ROOM IS THE LAW OF PROFIT AND LOSS. WHERE THE INDIVIDUAL JEW IN AMERICA ACCEPTS THIS LAW AS HIS STANDARD, HE WEAKENS HIS LOYALTY TO THE STANDARDS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. MY GRANDFATHER WAS ONE OF THE POOREST BUSINESS MEN I HAVE EVER KNOWN, AND YET HE HAD A SENSE OF PERSONAL INTEGRITY WHICH STAMPED HIM AS A FINE MAN. HE WAS AN ABJECT FAILURE AT MAKING A PROFIT IN HIS GROCERY STORE, BUT HE WAS A HUGE SUCCESS AS A HUMAN BEING. SOME OF OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMEN TODAY ARE DISMAL FAILURES AS HUMAN BEINGS. BECAUSE

THEY WERE NOT PERMITTED TO OWN LAND IN EUROPE, JEWS WERE FORCED TO BECOME THE FIRST TRADERS IN MERCHANDISE, BEGINNING AS SMALL PEDDLERS, BUT FOR A THOUSAND YEARS JEWS WERE ABLE TO BE ADEPT AT THEIR BUSINESS AND YET BE TRUE TO THE ETHICAL STANDARDS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. WHY ISN'T THIS ARRANGEMENT POSSIBLE TODAY? I HAVE KNOWN MANY BUSINESS MEN OF HIGH INTEGRITY, AND IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE VERY FORCE OF THEIR HONESTY IS WHAT DREW THEIR CUSTOMERS TO THEM.

THE BUSINESS MAN IN AMERICA HEARS THE SAME KIND OF CALL AS OUR YOUNG PEOPLE. THE ATTRACTION TO MANEUVER AROUND THE LAW IS SO ALLURING, SO PROMISING, THAT THE LURE SEEMS TOO GREAT TO TURN DOWN. ALL ONE HAS TO DO IS TO CHEAT THE LEAST BIT, AND INSTEAD OF MAKING TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS A YEAR, ONE MAKES FIFTY THOUSAND. THE POSSIBILITY TO BE RICH IS SO STRONG IN AMERICA THAT ITS BRIGHT LIGHT SEEMS TO PLACE EVERYTHING ELSE IN SHADOW. AS WE FOLLOW THE HYPNOTIC EFFECT OF THIS BRIGHT LIGHT, WE SOON DISCOVER THAT WE ARE LOSING FRIENDS AND MAY EVEN LOSE OUR SPOUSE AND OUR CHILDREN. WHAT DOES IT MATTER, THE SOOTHING EFFECT OF WHAT MONEY CAN BUY DULLS OUR SENSE OF REMORSE AND LONELINESS, AND WE TRY TO FORGET WHAT WE HAVE LOST IN HUMAN WARMTH WITH THE PURCHASE OF PILES OF NEW GADGETS FOR COMFORT.

THAT WHICH LURES THE JEWISH BUSINESS MAN AWAY FROM HIS FRIENDS, AWAY FROM HIS FAMILY AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE, IS THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING VERY RICH, THE POSSIBILITY OF HAVING UNLIMITED FUN. IF THE STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT IS HOW MUCH FUN DOES IT BRING ME, WE CAN ANTICIPATE THAT SOONER OR LATER THE HABITS A YOUNG PERSON FORMS WILL CLASH WITH THE DESIRES OF HIS FAMILY AND THE TEACHING OF JUDAISM. JUDAISM TEACHES THAT WE ARE CREATED "IN THE IMAGE OF THE DIVINE" WITH THE POTENTIAL TO GROW TOWARDS IDEAL GOODNESS, IDEAL LOVE, AND IDEAL JUSTICE. JUDAISM TEACHES THAT TRUE PLEASURE IN LIFE COMES AS A BY-PRODUCT OF OUR WORK AND AS A RESULT OF OUR GROWTH TOWARDS THESE IDEAL VIRTUES. JUDAISM DOES NOT SPEAK OF PLEASURE AS MERE TITILLATION OF THE SENSES. NOWHERE IN THE BIBLE DOES IT SAY GOD WANTS US TO BE CONNOISSEURS OF INTERNATIONAL CUISINE AND "MAVENS" OF SEXUAL EXPERIMENTATION. GOD WANTS US TO FULFILL OUR POTENTIAL AS BEINGS CREATED IN THE DIVINE IMAGE. CLEARLY, THERE IS A BITTER CONFLICT BETWEEN THE PREVAILING STANDARDS IN OUR SOCIETY AND WHAT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS TAUGHT FOR FOUR THOUSAND YEARS.

WE HAD BETTER RECOGNIZE THAT WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR SOCIETY IS A WAR - A WAR WHICH REQUIRES THAT WE TAKE SIDES. IN A SENSE, EVERY TIME THAT AN INDIVIDUAL JEW HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN THE CROWD THAT IS MOVING AWAY FROM THE STANDARD OF ETHICS ASSOCIATED WITH JUDAISM AND DOES NOT DO SO, HE STANDS AS HEROIC AS DAVID DID IN RESISTING THE PHILISTINE GIANT. EVERY TIME WE MAKE A CHOICE TO RESIST THE FLOW TOWARDS VIOLENCE AND THEFT, EVERY TIME WE AFFIRM OUR LOYALTY TO OUR LOVED ONES AND TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, WE ACHIEVE A VICTORY FOR THE ENTIRE JEWISH PEOPLE.

THE CURRENT BATTLE IS BEING WAGED IN TERMS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DAILY CONFRONTED WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO CUT CORNERS AND TO CUT OUT. NEVER HAVE WE HAD SO MUCH FREEDOM TO PLAY THE DOUBLE LIFE, TO SEEM TO BE A SOLID CITIZEN ON THE ONE HAND AND TO PLAY SECRET GAMES ON THE OTHER, UNSEEN BY OUR LOVED ONES AND FRIENDS. EVERY TIME WE SAY "NO" TO THESE OPPORTUNITIES, WE SCORE ONE FOR JUDAISM AND FOR OUR OWN CHARACTER.

ROSH HASHANAH IS THE TIME FOR MAKING RESOLUTIONS, BUT IN OUR CHURNING SOCIETY THE KIND OF RESOLUTION WE NEED MUST BE MADE EVERY DAY, EVERY HOUR. IT MAY WELL BE THAT HALF A DOZEN TIMES A DAY WE WILL HAVE TO AFFIRM THAT WE BELONG TO A GROUP WITH A DIFFERENT STANDARD THAN THAT WHICH PREVAILS AROUND US. THE BATTLE IS A VIGOROUS ONE, AND THE CASUALTIES WILL BE MANY. LET US PRAY THAT NEXT YEAR AT THIS TIME EACH OF US CAN SAY OF HIMSELF, "THANK GOD I DID NOT YIELD. THANK GOD, I LIVED ANOTHER YEAR AS A JEW, AND I DID NOT BRING DISHONOR TO MY PEOPLE."