



FROM THE RABBI'S DESK

A God Who Cares

In last week's column, we made the point that parents who really want their children to be Jewish cannot escape the responsibility of trying to develop their own spirituality. This is not easy in a technological age. We are cut off from the basic creative rhythm of the earth by technical marvels and by efficient packaging. We are no longer privileged to experience the miracle of seed and growth. In Judaism, one of the purposes of the major festivals, Sukkot, Shavuot, and Passover, all agricultural festivals, is to restore to us this sense of nearness and oneness with the creative process. Our traditional brethren build a Sukkah in their backyard, garnish it with fruit of many kinds, and spend the night under the stars. The return to nature is not only an idea of today's younger generation, it is the essence of traditional Judaism. He who can feel the pulse of Mother Earth in its creative cycle comes closer to God.

We are speaking now of the need to become more aware of the reality that exists beyond the masks of modern technology. When one goes to the hospital today, for example, it is easy to think that one has been cured by the new medicines, the elaborate surgical techniques, and the costly machinery. These things are important and helpful, to be sure, but they are all trappings for the basic show. None of these would be effective, were we not so created that the body is capable of healing itself, given appropriate assistance. Built into us, without our even asking, are the continuing miracles of healing and growth.

No modern invention is responsible for the miracle of the human heart pumping away without an external power source, and no human is responsible for our intricate blood system, and no machine is responsible for our ability to think, or to feel, or to love. Anyone who studies the complexities of the human body comes closer to sensing the reality of God.

What a curse it is that modern man is blocked off by his preoccupation with things from an inter-relation with the creative source from which he springs and which flows through him! How impoverished we are alongside the Prophet and the Hasid who could feel God within him.

What Does This God Teach and Do?

Many of our Jewish collegians today, having not found God at home, have gone off to India in search of a god. They have found a god who can save them from the mad drive of Americans towards financial success. This is a god who leads them away from life as we know it. He is a god without desire, and he asks them to imitate him, that is, to become without desire, without feeling. Nirvana, the great goal, is the state of non-being, non-feeling, beyond ambition, beyond anger, beyond love and sacrifice, as we know these terms. In Nirvana, not even sex has a place.

Classic Judaism has a completely different view of God. His very name is "Being" ("I am What I Shall Be"). This is a God, the Bible tells us, who is angry at injustice, who feels the anguish of the afflicted, who rallies to the aid of the oppressed, who wants man to procreate sexually, who wants man to imitate Him in His holiness (His active goodness). The basic difference between the Jewish and the Indian idea of God is that ours is a feeling God who wants us to feel. God says to Moses from the midst of the burning bush, "I hear the cry of the people, I know their pain. . ." The story does not conclude until Moses is commanded to go help free the slaves. God, as we understand Him, commands all of us to the ethical act. Judaism is best expressed in the act, not in the mental state, as in Indian religion.

What does all this mean for you? It means that if you don't want to become an extension of the technology of our age, you, too, must hear the call of the feeling God. You must HEAR it! You must not merely act out the just deed. The command must be PERSONAL. God speaks to you (as to all others). Not just to you, but to you ALSO. And to you uniquely, for each of us has his own sensitivity and spiritual capacity.

To believe in God, as Jews understand believing, is to be able to hear the personal command from a God who cares about what happens to human beings. Belief, for us, is not an abstract concept; it is a matter of being able to identify in feeling and in action with the caring Spirit of the Universe that flows through all of us.