

AS MY FATHER BEFORE ME

repetitive

My father never spoke of his own father without using at least one profane word in the same sentence. His father had not been a wicked man in the sense of one who is brutal and mean, but he had been shiftless, lazy, and too unconcerned with the responsibilities of life. My grandmother had ^{endured} taken much from her husband. She had supported him for many years by washing laundry to secure the few dollars absolutely essential to their existence. This spinelessness on the part of my grandfather my father was never able to forget. He could not look up to a man who could do things so low. I could not wonder at my father's bitterness.

the

Last year my grandfather died. Every day for an entire year the son prayed for the father's soul. Every day without a single exception the son repeated the hebraic "Yiss gadal, Veyiss kadash" for the sake of the father. There was no sign of long nursed bitterness as the son followed the traditions of his religion and journeyed to the syna gogue twice daily to worship with a minimum of ten men in the congregation. He could not pray at home, and he could not pray alone. God could be reached only in the syna gogue and only with a minimum of ten men raising their voices in unison.

My father did not know the English translation of the "Yissgadal". An older member of the synagogue had told him that it was an entreaty for the safe journey of the departed parent's spirit. My father took the bearded septuagenarian at his word. As he repeated the ancient passage- several hundred odd Hebraic words- my father closed his eyes and felt pure inside. He did not know what he was saying, but it was something old, and, therefore, something sacred. God was good. He would care for Samuel Baumgard's father, and Samuel Baumgard was

Forgiveness For

to be blessed for seeking the forgiveness of his father, ~~and his~~.

I viewed these daily excursions to "Schul" with some alarm. Did my father really believe that such prayer would help his deceased parent? Did he dare hope that a supreme being was listening to him - a mere human? Why, I reasoned, should a man so inconvenience himself to pray anyhow? Why must he rise at six, worship only at the synagogue, and then only in the presence of at least ten men? Why couldn't he worship at home and alone? And why repeat the "Yissgadal" when he did not even understand it? What is there significant about repeating sounds and syllables like a parrot, who also knows not the significance of what he speaks? I could find no rational explanation for my father's actions, but neither can I explain the keen satisfaction some people get who feel they must, and do, touch every Telephone pole they pass.

I shall never forget the pain pictured on my father's face when I declared that I would not say the "Yissgadal" at his death. Calamity and fear were revealed in the contortion of his features. He seemed to sway as he stood before me. He was silent for several minutes. Then he said, "Very well, I shall pay the Rabbi to pray for my soul." And he turned away from me. I had taken something from him. He was to be concerned now not for his welfare in this world, but for his chances in the next. If the son did not ask forgiveness for the father's sins - why, the sins might never be forgiven! What would happen to his soul? I had hurt him; but I didn't want to deliberately lie to him. I would just as readily repeat "one, two, three, four" every morning as repeat the "Yissgadal". There didn't seem to be a great deal behind either.

The revelation of this shocking attitude to my father served to erect a barrier between us where none had ever been before. I was no longer the faithful son. I was a stranger, of a type, in the household.

This barrier was knocked down only a few months ago and only about a year after its initial appearance, for I happened by accident to discover an interpretation of the meaning of the "Yissgadal" which created in me the desire to grant my parent his wish. I was no longer unwilling to say the "Yissgadal". This ancient passage, I discovered, is not a lamentation for the dead, in spite of the widespread belief among the ~~people~~ ^{MASS of} Jews that it is just such an expression of sorrow. It is not some mystic formula that will hold the heart though one fails to grasp (its) meaning. The words that the Jew mutters for the first time over the grave of a departed parent is not a eulogy. Indeed, it is not a prayer at all. It is a pledge- a pledge for the living. At the grave of his parent and twice daily for an entire year afterwards, the Jew recalls neither his sorrow nor his loss, but his duty. No, the "Yissgadal" is not a superstitious phrase, but a man's motto of life. It declares the man's intent and determination not to allow the heritage of Israel to decay. He promises to continue where his parents ceased.

The "Yissgadal" is the eternal appeal to the divine spark in the heart of every Jewish soul. It is the living consciousness of the Jew's obligation to add to the contribution of the generations before us. It is the great "Remember" of the Jew- sounding from the dawn of history.

It is much easier to be a Jew if one understands the significance of Judaism. ~~and of things Jewish.~~ The "Yissgadal" was something absurd to me before I learned of its meaning. Now it is something beautiful. I have made my father very happy by accepting the passage, ~~but I did not want for his death~~ to dedicate my efforts to the perpetuation of a belief in a God of love and brotherly love.

English B-1

Theme - II

9/24/40

On my honor, this
is my own
work.

Netter Baungard

Interpretation of
passage mentioned
secured originally
from Rabbi Leo
(Lung)

~~JFF~~ 83

A good idea, in general
well treated, though too often
repetitious. It could have
been improved by
dramatization. Its sincerity
rings true.