

The "Frontlets Before  
The Eyes"

# The Pattern of Greatness

All of us have watched a magician as he mumbles some presumably magic words as if they ~~were~~ were the most important feature, the dynamic force in his feats of mystery ~~and wonder~~. Still very few of us are gullible enough to believe that the words have anything at all to do with the sleight of hand maneuvering by the magician. Most of us realize that the fancy words are loaded decoys empty of meaning. Mentally, we separate the words from the movement of the hands, and we watch the hands, we look for the action.

Nevertheless

~~On the other hand~~, we are not quite so clever when it comes to religion and religious services. Too often, we are satisfied ourselves, as chief actors in a personal drama, to repeat the formal prayers at a service as if the mere repetition of the words would conjure up some divine action. We forget that while Judaism does attach importance to verbal prayer, it attaches even more importance to the movement of the hands to action. Again and again our rabbis have taught, we must pray with intention, with understanding. We must look into the words for their deeper meaning and we must derive from them an ~~inspiration~~ inspiration to act. He who mutters the words without understanding and ~~intention~~ is as if he hadn't prayed at all.

With this in mind, I'd like to direct your ~~intention~~ attention to the central prayer in our liturgy which we repeat at every service. <sup>AP 45 NE</sup> If we fully understand the delicate and yet all-embracing concept of this prayer, we would repeat it with trembling voice and the greatest intensity, for within it lies the strongest possible challenge to religious action. Let us analyze it closely.

First comes a statement of the oneness of God, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." The man or woman who repeats this statement with understanding affirms his belief in a world where all men are considered spiritual outlets of the same creative force. To mouth these words is to contend that the world consists of one community of men, each of whom is equally precious. But lest the reader slip and think that the first statement separates the oneness of God from the oneness of men, the second statement is inserted. "Blessed be His name, whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever". To the ancient Jews, the "Kingdom of God" referred to this world and not to a mystical "other world" in the great by and by. Then, lest the reader wonder how the Creator is to be reconciled with His kingdom, ~~the prayer continues~~ how men can bridge the gap between themselves and God, the prayer continues, "And thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." In connection with the use of the word "love", it must be remembered that the ancient Jews were a stern people who used such language not in the romantic sense but in the <sup>real</sup> sense of service. To love God is to serve Him. And the language of the prayer does not leave us long in doubt as to its meaning. "And these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." In brief, to love God means you must have his moral laws always with you - they must be ~~written~~ etched on your heart, you must remember to teach them to your children, to speak of them always on every possible occasion. Finally, to make certain that you remember, the prayer concludes, "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the

door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates". From this portion of the prayer, the rabbis devised the custom of ~~the~~ winding Tephillin around the arm and hand and placing a box containing the words upon ~~the~~ arm and the forehead during daily morning prayers. From this portion, too, we devised the custom of placing mazuzzahs on the door-posts of Jewish homes. The Tephillin and the Mazzuz<sup>ah</sup> were signs to the world, that in this body and in this home, the moral laws of God were practiced.

But there is still a deeper ~~meaning~~ sense to this prayer than the ~~external~~ <sup>visible use</sup> of Tephillin and Mazzuzoth. The philosophical meaning of the phrase "And they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes" is ~~made abundantly clear~~ <sup>incorporated</sup> in the previous sentences. The moral law is to be on the hand, in the heart, before the eyes of the Jew at ~~all~~ every waking moment. Each deed that he does is to be measured by the lofty demands of the moral law. Every thing that the Jew ~~sees~~ sees is to be seen through the perspective of the moral law.

This is indeed a weighty challenge to be contained in so few words. He who repeats this prayer with understanding undertakes an awesome responsibility. He undertakes to live his life, as Walter Lippmann expresses it, with a "Vision of Greatness" always before him. The person who repeats this prayer with intention undertakes to make his mind "a mansion for all lovely forms," ; his memory "a dwelling-place for all sweet sounds and harmonies", as William Wordsworth puts it. With this vision of greatness, we propose to look into the life about us, and where that life disagrees with the pattern of the vision, to rearrange the world until it fits the pattern of greatness. The moral law becomes our microscope through which we look to examine the activities of men.

And there is no such thing as a forty hour/week in this assignment. There is no time and a half for overtime. There is only continued allegiance to a cause which may never be fully attained, but <sup>✓ for</sup> which we must constantly work ~~for~~ nevertheless.

What does it mean in practical terms to ~~have~~ wear these "frontlets before our eyes" to have this "vision of greatness"? Let's look at a few examples. I once walked into a room and found a friend of mine staring as if hypnotized at a girl of ten playing the piano. The girl was just learning to play and wasn't performing any miracles at her task, but my friend acquired the greatest thrill <sup>✓</sup> from her playing. He told me later that there was no more wonderful thing in the world than the ability of a child to learn, and he had been totally fascinated by the sight of the girl intensely concentrating to make music come out of a wooden box. This man was truly appreciative of the delicacy and the genius of human existence. But ~~this~~ <sup>✓</sup> young lady represented to him all other ~~young children~~ children who learn, she represented all humanity to him. As delicate as was his understanding, there was no room in it for divisions and fragments. And <sup>✓</sup> what he appreciated in this child, he saw in all children, in all men, and seeing this greatness within them, he respected them and loved them. He wanted to help them, to befriend them, to share their ~~gifts~~ talents and their shortcomings, to laugh with them and to cry with them. This was a vision of greatness, a vision of oneness. This man wore his frontlets at all times.

*was thrilled*

Still another friend, a Southerner, tell me on each occasion that he sees a Negro walk to his cage in the back of a bus or stree-car, he goes through a violent emotional upheaval in hatred of the principle which sanctions such a separation of men. Each particular event is to this man, a new crucifixion of his soul. Each event stings him like the lashing of a whip, the piercing of a nail through flesh, for to him each event is the total situation. Each Negro is all Negroes. Each Negro is all men. He sees not only the Negro suffering, but the Jew in his ghetto, the oppressed colonials of our modern imperialistic nations. This man, too, has a vision of oneness. He wears his frontlets of love at all times. His was a greater feeling than, "There but for the grace of God, go I". He felt in his bones, THERE GO I!"

Normal Littell, ~~who~~ was Assistant Attorney Genral of the United States under the Roosevelt regime. ~~tells us that when he was~~ in Germany in 1936, <sup>Littell</sup> was strolling down one of the main streets of Berlin when he saw an aged Jew being manhandled by two members of the German police. It was high noon on a busy week-day and the street was filled with passers-by, but not one of them, Jew or Gentile, made an attempt to halt the abuse being heaped upon the unfortunate Jew. Here was ~~an~~ elderly man being shoved and kicked, perhaps being led to a concentration camp, but not one German found it within himself to intercede. As Littell watched the scene, he could not help but feel that down this street ~~went~~ so much more than an old man being unjustly bruised. Down this street, with a Gestapo agent holding on to each arm, went the sense of fairness, the self respect, the freedom of the entire German people. The body being dragged and kicked by the police was religion, law, love. This maltreated individual was the symbol of the hundreds of thousands of people Jew, Hungarian, Austrian, Russian, French, American, who were soon to be treated in precisely this manner and worse by the Hitler government. Littell, too, wore his frontlets before his eyes. Would that more people in 1936 were as far-sighted and understanding.

This process of association and of unifying ever has been the mark of the great man. It is as common with the Emersons and the Spinozas as it is with the rabbis and prophets. It was Emerson who wrote, "Nothing is complete in itself, the universe is the rest of it." The English poet, John Donne wrote, "No man is an island, complete in itself. Each man is a part of the continent, a part of the maine. If so much as a clod be washed away by the sea, I am the less. Any man's death diminishes me. Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee".

*(Walter sitting far - I'm building a Temple of God)*

To look at the world through the perspective of the moral law is to relate the big and the little. To love God is to relate man to God, to related man to man, and to unite man. If you show a mathematician an arc, <sup>person</sup> he will be able to plot for you the whole curve. If you show a religious ~~man~~ one man, he will show you all men, he will show you divinity.

The late Thomas Wolfe wrote before he died, "If I had my <sup>life to live</sup> ~~life to live~~ over again, I would try to see a whole forest in a single leaf, all of humanity in a single face." This is what is meant by a vision of greatness, the frontlets before the eyes. And this is the necessary prelude to religious action. It is in action that the final test of our vision comes. We are bidden in our ~~prayer not only to wear the frontlets~~, but to bear the sign of the moral law upon our hands, the symbol of labor. We are bidden to bridge the gap between the imperfections which exist and the good society

the kingdom which is the goal of creation; to take the rough pieces of the world and to fit them smoothly together.

If we read the "shema" with this message ringing in our ears and tearing at our hearts, then, indeed, have the mere words become a living, palpitating prayer.

*Repeat the Shema.*

### *Notes*

This is good in thought and presentation. Good illustrations for they appeal to the heart.

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Your style is literary, not in choice of words but in length of sentences. Write shorter sentences.

Shorter sentences will give you punch instead of a drawl, freshness of style in place of a pattern that becomes a long-winded monotony. Get me?