



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 1, Folder 3, "Blueprint to Broadcast: The Eternal Light", 1949.



BLUEPRINT TO BROADCAST: THE ETERNAL LIGHT

By Marc H. Tanenbaum

^{Americans}
Some six million people across the land - among them, Jews, Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, Negroes, university professors, telephone operators, ministers, baby-sitters, taxi-drivers - will celebrate a birthday next October 8.

All over the country, from Maine to California, they will mark the fifth anniversary of the Eternal Light radio program which, since 1944, has been broadcast every Sunday over the National Broadcasting Co. network under the auspices of the Jewish Theol. Sem. of Amer. When this impressive American family, joined together once every week around the loudspeakers of 92 NBC station-outlets, pauses to commemorate five years of Eternal Light broadcasting, it will, in effect, be paying tribute to an idea and its effective fulfillment.

The "idea", as ~~presented by~~ the Eternal Light's Program Editor, Dr. Moshe Davis, ~~is stated simply~~ ^{presented it in 1945 before the Ohio State University's Institute for Education by Radio, is:}

"We do not come to sell soap or toothpowder or automobiles or creed, dogma, or religious denomination. We come to teach humanity to man, morality to society, peace to the world..."

The moral and educational force which the broadcast has come to exert increasingly since its early experimental days, is reflected clearly in the components of this "idea" - which have been the spine of every Eternal Light script:

"..to extol ^{good} ~~those~~ who sanctify God's name; to emphasize the sanctity of the human personality; to demonstrate the fundamental character of the democratic impulse in the good society; to define the

place of Palestine in Jewish religious aspiration; to introduce, elucidate, and interpret Jewish ritual, ceremonial, and folk-lore."

How effective the Eternal Light "idea" has been, can be gauged in many ways. It can be measured in terms of the seven national awards received since the program's birth, all in recognition of its "excellence in religious broadcasting". As a public education and entertainment medium, its effectiveness can be evaluated by its mounting ~~erick~~ acclaim from people like Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Rev. Everett C. Parker (chairman, joint radio committee of the Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches in the United States); and from such radio experts as Variety magazine; John Gould, radio editor, THE NEW YORK TIMES; John Crosby, radio editor, THE NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE; and the Radio-Television Critics Circle of New York, among others.

Further, its success in widening the "democratic impulse" and in interpreting Jewish values can be appreciated from its ~~ever-increasing~~ international influence, through Eternal Light broadcasts in Canada, Palestine, Germany, through contacts maintained with Australia, South Africa, Mexico, South America, China, and Japan.

A perhaps more academic, but not less significant barometer of the program's widespread and profound value is the influence wrought upon education and church groups, Zionist and dramatic ~~group~~ movements which week after week turn to the Eternal Light scripts for the clearest and most positive statement of what is the Jewish past, and the meaning of contemporary Jewish life.

But valued as are all these indications of the program's success, probably the most cherished measuring rod is the response of the Eternal Light family, the six million listeners.

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In effect, the 800 to 1,000 letters which every week swell the Eternal Light's mailboxes tell, almost as dramatically as the scripts themselves, the ~~hugxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ massive effectiveness of the "idea".

~~The~~ Jews steeped in their faith, ~~the letters say,~~ ^{are filled with pride by} the Eternal Light's presentations. Jews wandered from their faith, reestablish contact with Judaism through the Eternal Light, ~~some responses state.~~ For non-Jewish listeners, the Eternal Light has become the spokesman ^{separating fact from fiction} for the Jewish people, ~~making intelligent~~ ^{the unintelligent}, revealing the false and malicious ~~but~~ - but, above all, always stressing the positive, the common heritage, the democracy inherent in religious thinking.

Some of the letters are crisp and businesslike, such as those requesting scripts, or asking where Hebrew can be studied, or inquiring how can one produce an Eternal Light pageant in South Africa or Asia. Some letter are simple and touching, such as that from a Jewish listener:

"I wonder if you realize how much your programs, the Eternal Light, do for Jewish morale? It brings new meaning to democracy when we hear our Jewish ideals dramatized in a Jewish way as freely as other people's. I am so grateful and thrilled."

From somewhere in Illinois, another listener wrote: "We are an average Jewish family with no religious connections; all we remember is what memories we have of our fathers and mothers. After listening to these programs, we have resolved to be better Jews if we possibly can..."

Non-Jewish listeners have been no less explicit in declaring what the Eternal Light has meant to them. "I am not of your faith," wrote one, "but I am most anxious for harmony and love among all faiths

and races, and I think your program is a major contribution to that end. The program has always had the quality of reverence and gentleness which is common among all men of good will."

A perceptive example of the program's universal appeal was found in this letter from a non-Jewish listener: "Sometime ago I visited a house of some Italians. The mother, a widow, born in Italy, is a very devout Catholic. Lack of opportunity prevented her from learning how to read and write. She was very intent on the hour and kept asking whether it was twelve thirty as there was a program she wanted to listen to and always listened to. This was my introduction to your hour."

Probably the best testament of the abiding worth of the broadcasts "idea" ~~of the broadcasts~~ was its ready acceptance in countries outside America. When Israel Blumenfeld, veteran of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and editor of a magazine published by the liberated Jews of Germany, first considered introducing "Das Ewige Lichte Programme" to a German public, he fretted. Jewish displaced persons had been out of touch with Jewish life for more than six years. The German populace had just emerged from a nightmare of anti-Jewish hatred. To present a program such as the Eternal Light, with its constant emphasis on positive Jewish life and creativity, seemed foolhardy.

Yet, in 1946, when Blumenfeld and a group of survivors from the concentration camps, produced their first "Ewige Lichte" program - the story of the German-Jewish philosopher, "Moses Mendelsohn" - they were stunned by the response: 15,000 letters from German non-Jews as well as Jews. Thereafter, "Das Ewige Lichte" was heard over Radio Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Bremen, and Cologne.

The aim of "Das Ewige Lichte", as Blumenfeld sees it, is to infuse Jewish cultural content into the lives of the liberated Jews

in Germany; and to help in salvaging good-will and tolerance among German religious groups. ~~Whether~~

How does one account for the demonstrable success of the Eternal Light during these five years? First, the ~~pungent and striking~~ ^{independent's incisive} themes covering virtually every stripe of the Jewish spectrum have wielded a magnetic attraction on the imaginations of millions of radio listeners. Secondly, a ~~sparkling new~~ "team-concept", first generated by the President of the Jewish Theological Seminary, ^{Dr. Louis Finkelstein} opened new vistas for Jewish creative outpouring.)

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When the Eternal Light ~~took~~ timidly put its foot forward on October 8, 1944, it set then the broad pattern of future programming. Beginning with great moments in 3,000 years of synagogue history, the first series ~~was~~ ^{in Oct 1944} built around 13 historic synagogues, from Touro in Newport, Rhode Island, to the crumbling synagogogue of Chinese Jews in Kai-Fe-Fung (2). Then the pattern broadened with a series on the "Builders of Judaism", dramatizations of the lives ~~and lessons~~ of Supreme Court Justice Brandeis, Poetess Emma Lazarus, ~~Folklorist~~ ^{Folklorist} Sholem Aleichim, Humanitarian Henrietta Szold, Martyr Rabbi Akiba, among others. Thereafter, came "Stories of a People", based on writings with Jewish settings and personalities. Classics such as Thomas Mann's "Joseph", ^{trilogy} ~~and Baratz's writings~~ Jean Racine's "Athalie", Leonid Andreyev's "Samson in Chains" were presented.

On the first anniversary of the broadcast, a new series was begun. Called "Ramparts of an Ancient Faith", this series was highlighted by the dramatic account of Solomon Schechter's searching out the ~~treasures~~ ^{ruins} of the Genizah in Cairo.

When the tragedy of European Jewry ^{came} ~~burst~~ upon the world, the Eternal Light ^{Commemorated} ~~rendered immortal~~ the heroic resistance of the Jewish

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most popular of the Eternal Light programs "Berditchev", which blended the tender story of Berditchev with stirring Hassidic melodies. Following the broadcast, 1153 letters poured in and 1800 requests for scripts, a large demand for contemporary developments - the independence of the nations week, Civil Rights legislation, the

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civilization, the team of scholar-artist." In simple fact, that is the story of the Eternal Light.

When an Eternal Light production goes on the air at 12:30 on Sundays, it is the ~~xxxxxx~~ work of ^{what has become known as} the "scholar-artist team". Heading the entire team is Dr. Moshe Davis, Program Editor who is also Dean of the Teachers' Institute and Seminary College for Jewish Studies. The team works in this fashion:

An idea, found in a newspaper clipping, a footnote, a book, an ancient tale, ^{or} ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{becomes the basis for a script} is suggested by either Dr. Davis, ~~a writer, a faculty member, or a research assistant.~~ The idea is threshed out between the program editor and ~~the writer~~ one of the team of writers ^{features units of} which now includes, Morton Wishengrad, who has ⁷⁴ been with the program since its inception producing nearly 150 ^{high} scripts, Peter Lyon, Irve Tunick, Sylvia Berger, Alan Marcus, and Ernest Kinoy.

Of 20 scripts is highly specialized
Researcher
Associated
Editor
authentic
guided by the program editor,
if much well-ground material has
To lend flesh to the idea, the writer ^{authentic} either consults a Seminary faculty member for background; or he and his research assistant refer to the Seminary library where one of the largest collections of Hebrew books are found; or he uses the files of national organizations; or he interviews friends and relatives of a famous personlaity about whom a script is being done.

authentic
Survey
Mamorsky
U.S.A.
When research is over, and when ~~the~~ the script is written, Morris Mamorsky composes the original music which lends the broadcasts the fresh, authentic stamp for which ~~they~~ have become known. Mamorsky, who was awarded the 1939 Paderewski Fund Prize for an original piano concerto, arranged the liturgical introduction to the Eternal Light series, ~~the lilting Palestinian folk song, Shomair Yisrael~~

Then the music goes to the NBC studio where Milton Katims,

one of America's leading musicians, runs through the score with 25 members of the NBC Symphony Orchestra.

The climax of team-work is then under way. Frank Papp, director of the Eternal Light broadcasts, selects his casts from a distinguished group of radio actors, runs through three rehearsals preliminary to the final rehearsal ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ on Sunday morning, before the broadcast. During these rehearsals, liturgical introductions by the noted cantors David Putterman or Robert Siegel, the acting, the music, the sound effects are all trimmed and trestled into the composite and finished work which marks each broadcast.

A similar pattern of "team work" was followed when the Eternal Light ~~was~~ originated a series of seven broadcasts from Hollywood last summer, under the auspices of the West Coast Branch of the Seminary. With the distinguished scripts prepared by Mr. Wishengrad, the series won added distinction through the performances of such movie-world luminaries as Melvyn Douglas, Edward G. Robinson, Joseph Cotten, Lew Ayres, John Beal, and Sam Jaffe. Previously, such prominent members of the acting profession as Raymond Massey, Margaret Webster, Aline McMahon, and Jane Cowl had participated in Eternal Light series in New York.

The concept of "scholar-artist" team became all the more clear during the summer just past when ~~the~~ a new departure was marked in Eternal Light programming. In a panel series known as "The Words We Live By", significant passages ~~of~~ from the Bible were analyzed by a distinguished group of thinkers. With Dr. Judah Goldin of the University of Iowa, as moderator, the regular participants were Marvin Lowenthal and Marie Syrkin. Among the guest participants were Ben Grauer, Raymond Massey, Irving Fineman, and others.

Behind the entire workings of the Eternal Light, from its earliest experimental days, has stood the sure, guiding hand of Milton E. Rosenthal, producer of the broadcast on behalf of The Seminary.

In entering its fifth year of broadcasting, the Eternal Light will commemorate ~~the~~ its half-decade anniversary by ~~repeating~~ x rebroadcasting thirteen of its most popular programs. Beginning in the fall, these will be chosen by a nationwide poll, and will thus be representative of the overwhelming choice of the Eternal Light listening family.

TVs
On reaching this crucial turning point in its development, the team of "scholar-artist" behind the Eternal Light show an increased sense of responsibility to its vast and growing audience, an audience which looks to it for expression of Jewish aspiration today, for a throbbing statement of the Jewish cultural past, for an affirmation of the universal principles of brotherhood and justice.

Dr. F
Looking back over the past five years, one feels confident that the "idea" will continue to grow and enrich on whatever soil it strikes. For when the "idea" was first planted, on that Sunday, October 8, in 1944, Morton Wishengrad then confided that it was "probably as nervous an innovation as any in radio. There were many things against it," he said. "It had to overcome the entertainment's industry's prejudice against religious drama. It had to overcome religion's uncertainty about radio -- it had to build an audience not only in New York but in places like Bozeman, Montana, and Jackson, Mississippi. The prospects seemed dubious."

Now, on its fifth anniversary, the ever-growing family of the Eternal Light thinks ~~dubious is hardly the word.~~

(the innovation was hardly "dubious")
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