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Series A: Sermons and Prayers, 1940-2016.

Subseries 1: High Holidays, 1941-2016, undated.

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Sermons and notes, 1983.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the
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High Holy Days
Lowliness

1983

We all need more space
but not emptiness!



Slickot

Sept 3, 83

Dialogue With God

Mr. Reb Levi Yitzhak of Beudicher was
 told, would begin his stay at about
 at the ^{Arch} ~~of~~ ~~town~~ — go to his window, open
 it up ~~and about~~
wake up the neighbors with the noise.

Good morning 9/18/83 10/12/83

His most famous prayer — which became a
 Yiddish folksong is known as the Dudle
 an ecstatic outburst of adoration consisting
 chiefly of the single pronoun "You"

You - you - you
 Where I wonder - You
 Where I ponder - You
 Only you, you you, always you
 You - you - you
 Sky is you & Earth is you
 You above, you below
 You - you - you

He was on regular speaking terms with God
 why are not we?

DIALOGUE WITH GOD

When the pious tell of their relationship with God,
those who are not, are incredulous and raise their eyebrows
in disbelief:

It must be wishful thinking
hallucination

a neurosis

a father-image projection etc

They just can't believe that it is possible for God & man to
be in direct communication.

A Hasidic story compares the ~~(religious)~~ skeptic with a passerby
who looks through the window into a room in which people make
all kinds of weird motions. Not hearing the music, he does not
realize that they are dancing — and so he thinks they are all
crazy.

The agnostic does not hear the music of faith
and ~~and~~ therefore won't take seriously the whole process
of prayer as a dialogue with God.

To one who has never experienced love —
the emotion described to him by a lover seems like
a mild form of insanity.

Religion is a spiritual love affair : it ^{also} inspires
a certain vision of nature and morality, but
it is more than both — it is initiation into mystery.

How can the uninitiated get into it?

How can one who is not a steady practitioner of worship
get the feeling of a personal relationship with God?

I don't believe anyone can offer a sure prescription.
After all we only know the human side of the dialogue
— i.e. it is in our power to determine to call
upon God but ^{we can} not ^{predict} God's response — He may
or may not answer us.

But we could suggest a few points — possible stages
in preparation for such a dialogue:

- ① You will not find if you do not seek
" " " hear " " listen
" " " see " " look

We have it in our power to make ourselves
spiritually sensitive or insensitive

Judah Halevi in his magnificent poem
O Lord, where shall I find Thee

Suggests that all we need to do is to become aware (VPII p.192)
that God is ~~ever~~ present - there is no place where God is not

O Lord, where shall I find Thee?
Hid is Thy lofty place;
And where shall I not find Thee
Whose glory fills all space

The One who formed the world, abideth
Within man's soul always;

According to Halevi, prayer should not be offered
merely as a petition but as an outreach to God
and if pursued wholeheartedly, will lead you to
an encounter with God.

With all my heart I pray
Then going forth to seek Thee
Then meetest me on the way.

Shmuel Zelman went a step further and suggested
that more than we seek God, God seeks us.
How so?

We interpreted the ~~sentence~~ incident in Paradise
eating the forbidden fruit is trying to hide - and God said
Adam - (Man) where art thou?

This question was not just addressed to Adam at that one particular moment but reverberates throughout the ages as a call to all mankind and everyone of us who pauses long enough for introspection will hear from within God's voice calling him to account:

Where are you at this moment in your life?
What are you doing with your life?

However inconceivable it may be for our rational mind that the Supreme spirit could care & be concerned for each of His countless creatures - it makes perfectly good sense for the human being who loves God to believe that God loves him too.

Jewish Tradition sees our bond with God in the image of a Covenant - a marriage contract - inspired by love. Our sages reinforce this thought by explaining to us that the ^{our personal preparation for} High Holidays begins with SLICHO which falls into the closing week of the month of ELUL and these 4 letters are really an acronym for the 4 Hebrew words from Song of Songs ו' אהבה אהבה יסו
I belong to My beloved
And My beloved belongs to Me.

The implication for our High Holiday observance is clear:

No matter how far we have strayed from Him, God wants us back

and we, by beginning tonight the solemn process of DROR - a word thus translated as repentance - really it means

Return, we shall be

~~searching for the path of life, searching for the one true God~~

~~reaffirming our love for God~~ in response to God's love for us...

DIALOGUE WITH GOD

By: Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman
Washington Hebrew Congregation

S'LICHOT
Saturday, September 3, 1983

Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, we are told, would begin his day at the crack of dawn -- go to his window, open it wide and with a shout:

"Good Morning,
Master of the Universe"

he would wake up all the neighbors.

His most famous prayer which became a Yiddish folk song is known as the "Dudele", an ecstatic outburst of adoration, consisting chiefly of the single pronoun "You."

"You -- You -- You
Where I wander -- You!
Where I ponder -- You!
Only You, You, always You
You -- You -- You!
Sky is You!
Earth is You!
You Above, You Below!
You, You, You!"

He was on regular speaking terms with God. Why are not we?

When the pious tell of their relationship with God, those who are not, are incredulous and raise their eyebrows in disbelief. They say it must be wishful thinking, hallucination, a neurosis, or a father-image projection, and so forth.

They just can't believe that it is for real, that it is possible for God and man to be in direct communication.

A Hasidic story compares the skeptic with a passer-by who looks through the window into a room in which people make all kinds of strange motions. Not hearing the dancing music, he does not realize that they're dancing and so he thinks that they are all crazy.

The agnostic does not hear the music of faith and therefore won't take seriously the whole process of prayer as a dialogue with God.

To one who has never experienced love, the emotion described by a lover seems like a mild form of insanity.

Religion is a spiritual love affair! It also inspires a certain vision of nature and morality, but it is more than both. It is initiation into mystery.

How can the uninitiated get into it? How can one, who is not the steady practitioner of worship get the feeling of a

personal relationship with God?

I don't believe anyone can offer a sure prescription. After all, we only know the human side of the dialogue, that is, it is in our power only to make the decision to call upon God. But, we cannot predict God's response. He may and then he may not answer us.

But, we could suggest a few points, possible stages in preparation for such a dialogue:

Most certainly you will not find, if you do not seek.
You will not hear, if you do not listen.
You will not see, if you do not look.

We have it in our power to make ourselves spiritually more sensitive or to shut our eyes and hold our ears and make ourselves spiritually insensitive.

Judah Halevi, in his magnificent poem "O Lord where shall I find Thee?" suggests that all we need to do is to become aware that God is ever present. There is no place where God is not:

"O Lord, where shall I find Thee?
Hid is Thy lofty place;
And where shall I not find Thee
Whose glory fills all space."

The One Who formed the world, abideth
Within man's soul always."

According to Halevi, prayer should not be offered merely as a petition, but as an outreach to God. If pursued wholeheartedly, prayer will lead you to an encounter with God:

"With all my heart I pray
Then going forth to seek Thee
Thou meetest me on the way."

Shneur Zalman went a step further than Halevi and suggested that more than we seek, God seeks us. How so? He interpreted the incident in paradise when Adam, after eating the forbidden fruit is trying to hide, and God said:

"Adam -- (man) where art thou?"

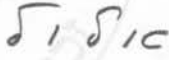
This question was not just addressed to Adam, the first man, at that one particular moment, but reverberates throughout the ages as a call to every man and everyone of us who pauses long enough for introspection will hear from within God's voice calling him to account:

"Where are you at this moment in your life?
What are you doing with your life?"

It seems that we somehow must render an account to someone, that we feel the need to justify ourselves. Who is the someone

to whom we feel inwardly driven to render an account? Who is the one for whom we need to justify ourselves?

How ever inconceivable it may be for our rational mind that the Supreme Spirit could care and be concerned for each of His countless creatures, it makes perfectly good sense for the human being who loves God to believe that God loves him too, and with His Infinite Powers is able to keep track of each of us.

Jewish tradition sees our bond with God in the image of a Covenant, a marriage contract, which was inspired by love. Our sages reinforced this thought by explaining to us that our personal preparation for the High Holy Days begins with S'lichot, which falls into the closing week of the month of Elul. The four letters of this word  are really an acronym for the four Hebrew words from the Song of Songs



"I belong to my beloved
And my beloved belongs to me"

The implication for our High Holy Day observance is clear: no matter how far we have strayed from Him, God wants us back -- and we, by beginning tonight the solemn process of T'shuvah, — a word mistranslated as repentance for it really means Return, — we shall be reaffirming our love for God in response to God's love for us. Amen.

Original



Back - to -
Back

BACK TO GOD

By: Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman
Washington Hebrew Congregation

ROSH HASHONAH EVE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1983

This is the birthday of the world, Yom Horat Ha-olam, -- a challenge to see ourselves in the context of the totality of the cosmos and in the relationship with the supreme power that created the world and still sustains it.

Has there ever been a time when we were more ready and willing to take our minds off this troubled little globe with its interminable problems? Ever since space travel began, human fantasy has run riot, imagining different, perhaps, wiser creatures, far away in outer space. All over this earth we have listening posts for science and signals from UFO's (Unidentified Flying Objects) -- wondering whether some saving power might reach us some day from outer space.

Possibly the only thing on which people, in both the Free and Communist World are agreed is a general disgust with politics. Global conditions are frightful.

The Wall Street Journal, in ^atheir recent editorial, (By Vermont Roysten -- August 17, 1983) advised its readers to acknowledge the fact that some problems are insuperable. Even though this is

"one of the most difficult things for Americans to believe -- much less to accept" -- nevertheless, we face problems "not solvable by the means at our disposal." You can start your list of festering national, religious, economic and ideological conflicts not yet within the range of any solution with the Middle East Island, most of Africa, Southeast Asia . . . you can add to your list the political jungle and economic chaos of Central and South America, and the persistent material and social gap between black and white in the U.S.A. of which the recent March on Washington reminded us. Overshadowing all of these are the dark clouds of an unstoppable nuclear and missile armament program, whose potential for destruction boggles the mind, while its ever increasing production, is draining the wealth of the nations.

Modern man, at the very summit of high technology, stands exposed as a whimpering fool, scared to death at the very powers he is creating.

Against all this organized insanity, both sides of the Iron Curtain, is the United Nations, which at its inception appeared like the realization of the dream of the ages, but soon enough proved its impudence. Instead of serving as a genuine workshop or laboratory for the solution of international problems, the assembly hall of the U.N. has become the boxing ring of dirty propaganda fights. The world is a flame and the firemen are turning the hose upon each other.

This summer, Maxine and I traveled with a group of 41 to Central Europe and Israel. Vienna, Budapest and Prague, -- these cities in my father's day, were among the most glamorous care-free, prosperous and beautiful cities in the world. They are still beautiful, though with a faded sort of elegance, but the signs of decline and world crisis are all over. Once glorious, Vienna, now without its Jews, has become the dull, cultural backwater of the Western world. Its one remaining synagogue of the pre-Nazi era is heavily guarded day and night by special police with automatic weapons.

In Prague and Budapest the Communist regime has succeeded in muffling the voices of the people. They walk about unsmiling and resentful of their drab existence and thoroughly disillusioned by the dream of the socialist paradise.

Everywhere there is a collapse of confidence and trust in government, a cynical shrugging off of promises and no vision of the future, except more of the same -- a perpetual world crisis!

In Israel, whose people have got to be the staunchest and toughest in the world, we sensed, as do all visitors, a remarkable dynamism and determination. They are total realists without illusions. The debate is not on how to solve the Arab-Israel problem, but how to minimize casualties amidst hostilities which are certain to continue in the foreseeable future.

It was in Israel that I discovered a trend, which I believe will soon be worldwide. People are turning inward. If you can't solve the problems of the world outside you can, at least, try to do something about your own inner life and your own peace of mind. Dozens of special Yeshivott have sprung up, not for scholars or devout people, but for people off the street, most of them totally secularized, college students, tourists, entertainers, men and women of all walks of life, who never got into the prayer-life, never studied the great Jewish books, never thought much about God.

What they have in common is not yet a believe in God, but a disbelief in everything else -- and a profound undercurrent of insecurity. They are equally turned off by the promises of politics and science and afraid of the future. They wonder where have we all gone wrong and how do we get back on the right track.

Nations react differently to the insecurity of the times. We in the U.S. still go around shopping for political messiahs, with a bunch of keys for the solution of all world problems. We are most attracted to those who challenge opponents with a can-you-top-this program and, just for reassurance, they promise to beef up our armed forces to protect us against all eventualities.

In Israel, the response to persistent insecurity is not only military and political, but spiritual. People have the urge to

go back to the roots, to re-examine their beliefs, to recover their own sense of moral integrity, to sharpen their sense of right and wrong -- or, as we say, "to clean up their act" in private life.

I see in Israel today a genuine back-to-God movement and that is precisely what the High Holy Days are all about.

Although this is the birthday of the world, please note that the prayers of Rosh Hashonah do not point to world problems but to the world within. We are not asked to cope with global issues of war and peace, but with our own personal conduct, our own inner conflicts, our self-image, or attitude toward family and neighbors, our personal loyalty and faithfulness as Jews. Tradition is clear about the main agenda of this evening. We are gathered to render a Heshbon Ha-nefesh, which means "an accounting of the soul."

They have not yet invented a computer to give us a quick printout of our moral and spiritual condition, our character growth or decline, of our gains or losses of integrity. Of course, you can get by with skipping the whole process -- who would know? But there will come a day of reckoning. In this respect, the Heshbon Ha-nefesh is like a bank account: if you don't check your balance regularly, miscalculations multiply and after a while it is extremely difficult to find the point where you went wrong, and corrections

become almost impossible.

Failing to render your Heshbon Ha-nefesh, you run the risk of going beyond the point of no return.

So, what shall we count? By what criteria are we to judge ourselves? Which experiences, which actions, which intentions and feelings are to our credit or discredit?

Everything we have said so far about the need for self-examination and decision-making, could be said, as well, by a psychotherapist within the setting of a counseling conference. Psychotherapy, ideally speaking and, if successful, is a counseling and healing process which leads from deeper insight and honest self-understanding to the resolution of conflict, to relief of guilt and to better self-acceptance.

How does the Jewish Heshbon Ha-nefesh differ from psychotherapy?

The difference is that the Jewish soul-search does not happen in a vacuum. It is not to himself that a Jew must give an account, but to God.

Without God the solemn exercises of these High Holy Days are just a charade. Without God, Rosh Hashonah may be a social reunion, a warming up of a little nostalgia and, at best, an act of Jewish self-identification, but not a religious experience.

Only if God is real to you, will your prayers carry conviction and help you reshape your life.

If God is not real to you, you will be mumbling along with the crowd and sooner or later, reflect that vacant stare of boredom and inwardly feel like a hypocrite about participation in something that must strike you as an exercise in futility.

Do we have a word for skeptics? Is there a way to God for the unbeliever?

A few weeks ago, I visited a sophisticated, intellectually honest gentleman in the hospital. This man, in his mid-seventies, had survived open-heart surgery a week earlier. He was full of smiles, obviously happy to be alive. Since this fine gentleman was still in intensive care, I tried to make my visit very short and so after a few minutes, I said: "well, let's thank God for your remarkable recovery," -- and was about to leave, when he said: "Rabbi, don't go. I have a question. I've been a member of the Temple for many years, but somehow I have no feeling whatever about God. Not even my most recent crisis made a difference. I got on the operating table spiritually empty."

"Were you ever a believer?" I asked. "Did anything happen to destroy your faith?"

He thought a moment and said: "As a student in Atlanta I attended services and felt a kind of spiritual presence. Then, I moved to Philadelphia, and went to a Temple whose eloquent Rabbi delivered interesting, but spiritually empty lectures and I lost that spark, and I've never felt it again. And then came World War II and the Holocaust -- and that finished me off as far as religion was concerned." He paused and then said: "How does a person like me, at this point in life, regain faith in God?"

The question struck me, as must have been our famous sage, Hillel, when he was asked by the pagan to explain Judaism to him for as long as he could stand on one leg. However, seeing that this was not a needling question but one which was asked in dead earnest, I gave more or less the following response:

"In the first place, it is never too late. Religious faith, like love, is subject to ever-changing experience. It can be lost and it can be regained."

As a rationalist, I added my second point, "You will probably agree that no house has ever been built without a builder and some plan. For the vast majority of thinkers and scientists throughout the ages, the universe appears as a structure and is unimaginable without a constructor or creator and his plan or intention of purpose. If you do not believe in a creator, can you tolerate the alternative

view, namely, a world that is simply there and has evolved the way it has by pure chance and will someday dissolve or maybe vanish altogether? Can you tolerate an existence utterly without meaning or purpose?"

My third point was this: "It has been well said that man's extremity is God's opportunity." Sin of this age is man's worship of himself. The name of our new idolatry is "narcissism" we're drunk with our own power.



"BACK TO GOD"

By: Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman
Washington Hebrew Congregation

ROSH HASHANAH EVE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1983

There is no better greeting for this moment than the customary wish שנה טובה תבא "May you be inscribed for a good year." May it be a year of health, a year of prosperity and a year of peace. And since none of us can partake of these blessings unless they are shared by all, we wish these things for all mankind.

An elderly Jewish widow moved to Florida just in time for Rosh Hashanah. Of course, she went to Temple even though she did not know a soul (in the congregation.) At the end of the service when everyone turned around and people were greeting and kissing each other as family members or friends, she felt very lonely. There was no one to exchange greetings with. So this sweet old lady waited until everybody had left the Sanctuary and then she walked up to the Ark all by herself and said out loud:

"I want to wish you, God . . ."

But wait, she thought, what can I wish God? A year of life and health? All life comes from him! . . . Prosperity? He's the source of all wealth! Then, a marvelous thought came to her, and she cried out:

"Oh God, this I wish you for the New Year: May you have much naches from your children!"

Considering the conditions of our world, it is hard to believe that God is smiling down upon us with satisfaction. Humanity must be a great disappointment to God. Precisely at the point when we have all the means with which to outdue paradise, a lion's share of our mental and material resources is devoted to mutual destruction. Millions of murderous brother Cains are out to kill millions of brother Abels.

We can detect strong escapist tendencies among us. Ever since space travel began, human fantasy has run riot, imagining different, perhaps wiser creatures, far away in outer space. We're wondering, even hoping, that some saving power might reach us some day from outer space.

Possibly the only thing on which people, in both the Free and Communist world, are agreed, is a general disgust with politics. Global conditions are frightful.

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South America. Here at home racial tension and a wide gap between Blacks and Whites remains no matter which party controls the White House and Congress. Overshadowing all of these are the dark clouds of an unstoppable nuclear and missile armament program whose potential for destruction boggles the mind.

Against all this organized insanity is the United Nations which, instead of serving as a genuine workshop or laboratory for the solution of international problems, has become the boxing ring of dirty propaganda fights. The world is aflame and the firemen are turning the hose upon each other.

This summer Maxine and I traveled with a group of 41 to Central Europe and Israel. In Vienna, as everywhere in the Free world, terrorist organizations remind us that persistent conflicts have no boundaries and may claim their innocent victims thousands of miles away. Vienna's one remaining synagogue of pre-Nazi era is heavily guarded day and night by special police with automatic weapons.

In Prague and Budapest, terror is part of the Communist regime; it has succeeded in muffling the voices of the people. They walk about unsmiling and resentful of their drab existence and thoroughly disillusioned by the Socialist paradise.

Everywhere there is a collapse of confidence and trust in government, a cynical shrugging off of promises and no vision of the

future except more of the same -- a perpetual world crisis!

In Israel, whose people have got to be the staunchest and toughest in the world, optimism has yielded to realism. The debate is not on how to solve the Arab-Israel problem, but how to minimize casualties amidst hostilities which are certain to continue in the foreseeable future.

It was in Israel that I discovered a trend, which I believe will soon be worldwide. People are turning inward. If you can't solve the problems of the world outside, you can, at least, try to do something about your own inner life and your own peace of mind. Dozens of special Yeshivot have sprung up, not for scholars or devout people, but for people off the street, most of them secularized, college students, tourists, entertainers, men and women of all walks of life who never got into the prayer life, never studied the great Jewish books, never thought much about God.

What they have in common is not always a belief in God, but a disbelief in everything else -- and a profound undercurrent^{of} disillusionment and deep feelings of insecurity. They are turned off by the promises of politics and science, and they are afraid of the future. They wonder where have we gone wrong and how do we get back on the right track.

Where did our Western Civilization go wrong? Sometime ago an odd incident disrupted the business of Nieman-Marcus in Dallas, Texas. A juvenile gang beat the security system of the famous store and gained entry during the night. They were careful not to upset any displays. Theft was not their object. They were pranksters. They just moved from show-window-to show-window and switched all the price tags. The next morning it was bedlam at the store. Customers rushed in and wanted to buy valuable fur pieces and evening gowns for^a pittance just as marked in the show window.

A major reason for the present day turmoil in our world is that our value system has been thrown into confusion. Our moral and spiritual price tags have been mixed up. The highest moral priorities have been marked down, such as: the sanctity of life, the integrity of marriage and the family, parental authority, respect for teachers and many human rights and liberties. At the same time, there has been an unbelievable mark-up of formerly low priorities such as the military, weapon research and the control of our private lives by governmental power.

The whole moral system of the Western world has been upset. The chief pranksters who changed the price tags of our civilization were the three most brilliant intellects of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: **K**arl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Karl Marx declared religion an escape from social responsibility and ~~cancelled~~ our moral tradition as bourgeois morality designed to serve only the interest of the ruling class.

Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion ~~for~~ the purpose of enforcing certain taboos of society, something to be outgrown in the future by a more enlightened and maturing mankind.

Friedrich Nietzsche made the strongest frontal attack on Judaism and Christianity: "God is dead!" he declared.

"God", he said, "was an invention by which the mass ~~of~~ weak and inferior people imposed a restraining morality upon the superior few who should be masters of the world and subject to nothing but their own sovereign will." Nietzsche actually called for a "transvaluation of all values," that is, ^{literally} a switching of all the moral price tags, the abolition of Biblical morality and its replacement by the rule of the strong who have the talent and natural right to govern. According to Nietzsche, the highest good is power and the best man, he, who knows how to use power effectively.

This philosophy was music to the ears of Fascism, Nazism, and Soviet Bolshevism -- and that is why all three ideologies ferociously try to stamp out religion and its ethics.

As recent history has shown, the immediate consequence of a Godless society is tyranny, the ruthless regime of human beings who put themselves in the place of God.

We shall not know security and moral stability again until God is again recognized as the Supreme Being and his law is supreme, which is another way of saying that no human government must ever tamper with certain rights with which all human beings have been endowed by God.

It is tragic that we Jews, the people who first gave this faith to mankind are now so reluctant to stand by it. How can we affirm such a faith when God has become a stranger to so many of our people?

What sort of advocates and spokesman can you be for religion, when you lack conviction about God?

Why, -- some of us are so secularized that any reference to God embarrasses them and so, when someone sneezes, they won't say "God bless you" but just "bless you."

How can the religiously alienated come back to God? Do we have a word for skeptics? Is there a way back to God for the unbeliever?

A few weeks ago, I visited a sophisticated, intellectually honest gentleman in the hospital. This man, in his mid-seventies

had survived open-heart surgery a week earlier. He was full of smiles, obviously happy to be alive. Since he was still in intensive care, I tried to make my visit very short. And so after a few minutes, I said: "Well, let's thank God for your remarkable recovery," -- and was about to leave, when he said: "Rabbi, don't go. I have a question. I've been a member of the Temple for many years, but somehow I have no feeling whatever about God. -- How does a person like me, at this point in life, regain faith in God?"

My first impulse was to respond as did the Professor of Religion, who was asked in his class by a student, "Why should I believe in God?" "That question," said the Professor, "calls, not for an answer but for an education!"

However, seeing that my friend had not been asking a needling question, but was in earnest, I gave more or less the following response:

"In the first place, it is never too late. Religious faith, like love, is subject to ever changing experience. It can be lost and it can be regained."

I added another point: "As a rationalist, you will probably agree that no house has ever been built without a builder. The universe as a structure is unimaginable without a constructor. If I could bring myself to say to every flower, -- there is no seed! and to every song, there is no composer! -- and to every painting,

there is no artist! -- then, I might look at this world and conclude, *there* is no creator."

My third point is existential. Can you really tolerate the bleak world view to which the agnostic, Clarence Darrow, was driven:

Man is a hitchhiker "on a rudderless raft, aimlessly adrift in a limitless sea," living and dying for no purpose whatever?

The Danish Philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, found the human condition in this kind of a scenario unbearable and made his famous leap of faith. If reason and logic cannot find evidence for a context of higher ~~mean~~ing, then we must leave reason behind and rely on faith in order to go on with life.

It has been said "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." When all the props are knocked out from under us and we are helpless and none of our means avail us, not money, not social position, not power, not intelligence -- then, in the very collapse of our sense of self-sufficiency we experience a feeling of total dependence on something other than ourselves. If we are somehow kept going, we may properly identify, as God, that power, not ourselves, which sustains us when all else fails us.

I then turned to my friend and said:

"You have been brought low and now you are reviving. What better proof do you need that you are subject to a power other than yourself?"

No Jew in the Twentieth Century can think of God without being troubled by some colossal breakdown in the moral and spiritual structure of our universe as a result of World War I, World War II and the Holocaust. I need only reread our Torah which describes, in graphic detail, the calamities that await mankind if God's law is violated. We might be persuaded by the belief that retribution is sometimes delayed but cannot be escaped in the long run. As Edwin Markham said:

"The laws are the secret avengers
and they rule above all lands
They come on wool soft sandals,
But they strike with iron hands.

The robber is robbed by his riches
The tyrant is dragged by his chain,
The schemer is snared by his cunning
The slayer lies dead by the slain."

There is enough evidence in history to back up our faith in retribution. What continues to trouble us is the suffering of the innocent. Where was God when so many of the best and purest of our

people were slain?

As a matter of principle, one should ask the same question, even when only a few or just one innocent person falls victim to the brutality of wrongdoers.

Should we not also blame God for the death of 269 innocent victims who went down with the Korean plane that was shot down by the Russians over the sea of Japan?

To be consistent with our protest against the suffering of the innocent, we should blame God even when an innocent pedestrian is run over by a criminally negligent driver.

What can we answer those who are troubled by the suffering of the innocent?

You must not see God as our bodyguard, but as our moral and spiritual compass. If anyone deviates from God's laws of nature or morality, woeful consequences must be suffered, not only by the evildoer, but all who are within the range of his influence. We live in an inter-dependent world. When wrong is done by anyone, all of us suffer. Our destinies are inter-twined as the limbs and the organs of our body are inter-dependent. The malfunction of one can destroy all others. It is our destiny to interact and to be accountable for each other. As William Blake put it: "No man is an island."

This, the Bible taught us three thousand years before Blake: "We are our brother's keeper."

CONCLUSION

In calling you "Back to God," I wish to point out a fundamental difference between the Born-Again-Christian and his Jewish counterpart, the Baal T'shuvah, the Jew Who Returns. The Christian conversion-experience implies the total rejection and abandonment of the former self. The Jew who returns to God does not reject his former self, but, on the contrary, penetrates into the very core of his being more deeply and recovers something within it, the best and noblest part of his inner self where God may be found.

Our cabalistic mystics call this "the breaking of the shell."

The divine spark, the living spirit of man, is encapsuled, imprisoned within each of us. We seal ourselves off from others, from our inner^{being} and most assuredly from God. Each of us is in need of a spiritual breakthrough. We need to be spiritually liberated and sensitized. Do you hear God calling you from within?

I know that many of us have no such experience whatever, no sense of an encounter with God. He seems so remote as to be virtually non-existent, even on a Holy Day such as this. You wonder, how does

God call you?

He taps out his signals through every heartbeat which maintains your wondrous rhythm of life. He is your host through every breath of air you breathe, through every bit of nourishment you take. Nature, God's creation, literally sets a table before you and keeps you alive in the presence of countless forces of destruction.

Don't look for God as though he were a needle in a hay stack.

He is very present, whether or not we are aware of Him. He may enter our thoughts as we think of Him. As we seek Him, He may respond to our search in a whisper of our conscience, as a moment of awe, and, perhaps as no more than the inner certainty that He is with us, as the 23rd Psalm says:

"Thou art with me."

Whether or not you have experienced the presence of God, you are not alone. Whatever meaning your life has, lies in its connection with something much bigger than you.

The key sentence of our faith says

"Here O Israel . . ." Listen, O my people! God calls you every moment of your life.

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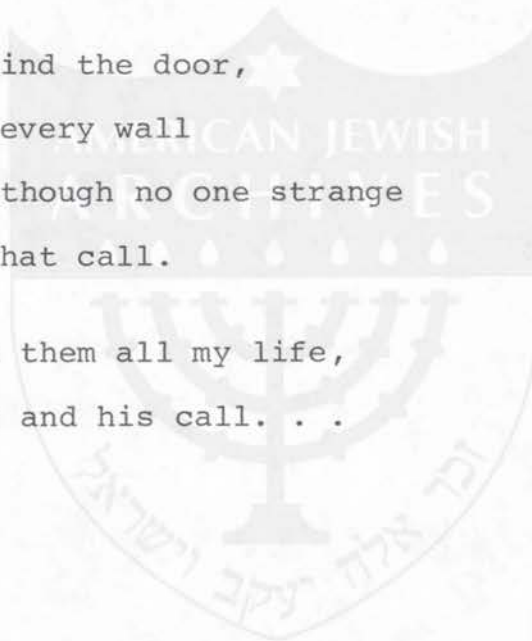
This, the great Yiddish poet, H. Leivick, expressed it in a haunting poem entitled, "A Voice:"

"A voice calls out: You must!"
Must what? Oh, Voice explain!
Instead of an answer I hear
That call again.

I peer behind the door,
I dash at every wall
I search, though no one strange
Has sent that call.

I've known them all my life,
The caller and his call. . .

Amen.



"BACK TO GOD"

By: Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman
Washington Hebrew Congregation

ROSH HASHANAH EVE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1983
(Elul 29, 5743/44)

An elderly Jewish widow moved to Florida just in time for Rosh Hashanah. Of course, she went to Temple even though she did not know a soul. At the end of the service, when everyone turned around and people were greeting and kissing each other, she felt very lonely. There was no one to exchange greetings with. So, this sweet old lady waited until everybody had left the Sanctuary and then she walked up to the Ark all by herself and said out loud:

"I want to wish you, God . . ."

But wait, she thought, what can I wish God? A year of life and health? All life comes from him! . . . Prosperity? He's the Source of all wealth! Then, a marvelous thought came to her, and she cried out:

"Oh God, this I wish to you for the New Year: May you have naches from your children!"

Considering the conditions of our world, it is hard to believe that God is having "naches," that He is smiling down upon us with satisfaction. Humanity must be a great disappointment to God. Instead of rebuilding Paradise with our new technology -- we blew it! Millions of brother Cains are out to kill millions of brother Abels.

We detect strong escapist tendencies among us. Ever since space travel began, human fantasy has run riot, about different, wiser creatures, in outer space. We're hoping that some saving power might reach us from "out there."

Possibly the only thing on which people, in both the Free and Communist world, are agreed, is a general disgust with politics. Global conditions are frightful.

The Wall Street Journal, in a recent editorial, (By Vermont Roysten August 17, 1983) advised its readers to acknowledge the fact that some problems are insuperable. Even though this is "one of the most difficult things for Americans to believe -- much less to accept" -- nevertheless, we face problems "not solvable by the means at our disposal." As illustrations, we could mention the Middle East, most of Africa, Southeast Asia . . . and you can add Central and South America. Here at home racial tension and a wide gap between Blacks and Whites remains no matter which party controls the White House and Congress. Overshadowing all of these are the dark clouds of an unstoppable nuclear and missile armament program whose potential for destruction boggles the mind.

Helpless against all this organized insanity is the United Nations which, in its impotence, has become the boxing ring of dirty propaganda fights. The world is aflame and the firemen are turning the hose upon each other.

This summer Maxine and I traveled with a group of 41 to Central Europe and Israel. In Vienna, as elsewhere in the Free world, terrorist organizations remind us that persistent conflicts have no boundaries and may claim their innocent victims thousands of miles away. Vienna's one remaining synagogue of the pre-Nazi era is heavily guarded day and night by special police with automatic weapons.

In Prague and Budapest, terror is official government policy: it has succeeded in muffling the voices of the people. They walk about unsmiling and resentful of their drab existence and thoroughly disillusioned by the Communist paradise.

Everywhere there is a collapse of trust in government, a cynical shrugging off of promises and no vision of the future except more of the same -- a perpetual world crisis!

In Israel, optimism has yielded to a tough realism. The debate is not on how to solve the Arab-Israel problem, but how to minimize casualties amidst hostilities which are certain to continue in the foreseeable future.

It was in Israel that I discovered a trend, which I believe will soon be worldwide. People are turning inward. If you can't solve the problems of the world outside, you can, at least, try to do something about your own inner life and your own peace of mind. Dozens of special Yeshivot have sprung up, not for scholars or devout people, but for

people off the street, most of them secularized college students, tourists, entertainers, men and women of all walks of life who never got into the prayer life, never studied the great Jewish books, never thought much about God.

What they have in common is not always a belief in God, but a disbelief in everything else -- disillusionment and deep feelings of insecurity. They are turned off by the promises of politics and science, and they are afraid of the future. They wonder where have we gone wrong and how do we get back on the right track.

Where did our Western Civilization go wrong? Sometime ago an odd incident disrupted the business of Neiman-Marcus in Dallas, Texas. A juvenile gang disabled the security system of the famous store and gained entry during the night. Theft was not their object. They were pranksters. They just moved from show-window to show-window and switched all the price tags. The next morning it was bedlam. Customers rushed to buy valuable fur pieces and evening gowns for a pittance, -- as marked in the show window.

A major reason for the present day turmoil in our world is that our value system has been thrown into confusion. Our moral and spiritual price tags have been mixed up. The highest moral priorities have been marked down, such as: the sanctity of life, the integrity of marriage and the family, parental authority, respect for teachers and many human rights and liberties. At the same time, there has been an unbelievable

mark-up of formerly low priorities such as the military, weapons research and the control of our private lives by governmental power.

The whole moral system of the Western world has been upset. The chief pranksters who changed the price tags of our civilization were the three most brilliant intellects of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Karl Marx declared religion an escape from social responsibility. Our moral tradition, he said, is a bourgeois morality serving only the interest of the ruling class. It can be disregarded, set aside, suspended.

Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion. It helps enforce the taboos of society, but it is something to be outgrown in the future by a more enlightened and maturing mankind.

Friedrich Nietzsche made the strongest frontal attack on Judaism and Christianity: "God is dead!" he declared.

"God," he said, "was an invention by which the mass of weak and inferior people imposed a restraining morality upon the superior few who should be masters of the world, subject to nothing but their own sovereign will." Nietzsche actually called for a "transvaluation of all values," literally a switching of all moral price tags, the replacement of Biblical morality of justice and compassion by the rule of the strong who have the talent to govern. According to Nietzsche, the highest good is power and the best man, he, who knows how to use power effectively.

This philosophy was music to the ears of Fascism, Nazism, and Soviet Bolshevism -- and that is why all three ideologies ferociously try to stamp out religion and its ethics.

As recent history has shown, the immediate consequence of a Godless society is tyranny, the ruthless regime of human beings who put themselves in the place of God.

What appeal is there in a secular society against government overreaching itself? You say "the majority of the people." What if the majority of the people turns into a tyranny? To whom can we appeal if either government or the people tamper with the basic rights of man?

We shall not know security and moral stability again until God is again recognized as the Supreme Being and His law supreme. We have no other guarantee for fundamental human rights with which we have been endowed by our Creator.

It is tragic that we Jews, the people who first gave this faith to mankind are now so reluctant to stand by it. How can we affirm it when God has become a stranger to so many of our people?

What sort of advocates and spokesman can you be for religion, when you lack conviction about God?

How can the religiously alienated come back to God? Do we have a word for skeptics? Is there a way back to God for the unbeliever?

A few weeks ago, I visited a sophisticated, intellectually honest gentleman in the hospital. This man, in his mid-seventies, had survived open-heart surgery a week earlier. He was full of smiles, obviously happy to be alive. Since he was still in intensive care, I said after a few minutes, "Well, let's thank God for your remarkable recovery," -- and was about to leave, when he said: "Rabbi, don't go. I have a question. I've been a member of the Temple for many years, but somehow I have no feeling whatever about God. -- How does a person like me, at this point in life, regain faith in God?"

My first impulse was to respond as did the Professor of Religion, who, when asked, "Why should I believe in God?", said: "This question calls, not for an answer, but for an education!"

However, seeing that my friend was in earnest, I gave more or less the following response:

"As a rationalist, you will probably agree that no house has ever been built without a builder. The universe, as a structure, is unimaginable without a constructor. If I could bring myself to say to every flower, -- you have no seed! and to every song, you have no composer! -- and to every painting, you have no artist! -- then, I might look at this world and say, you have no Creator."

My next point is existential. Can you really tolerate the bleak

world view to which the agnostic, Clarence Darrow, was driven:

Man is a hitchhiker "on a rudderless raft, aimlessly adrift in a limitless sea," living and dying for no purpose whatever?

The Danish Philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, found the human condition in this kind of a scenario impossible and made his famous leap of faith. If reason and logic cannot find evidence for a context of higher meaning, then we must leave reason behind and rely on faith in order to go on with life.

It has been said "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." When all the props are knocked out from under us and we are helpless and none of our means avail us, not money, not social position, not power, not intelligence -- then, in the very collapse of our self-sufficiency, we experience a feeling of total dependence on something other than ourselves. If we are, somehow, still kept going, even when no strength is left within us, we may properly identify, as God, that power, not ourselves, which sustains us when all else fails us.

I then turned to my friend and said:

"You have been brought low and now you are reviving. What better proof do you need that you are subject to a power other than yourself?"

No Jew in the Twentieth Century can think of God without being troubled by a colossal breakdown in the moral and spiritual structure

of our universe as a result of World War I, World War II and then the culmination of all tragedies, the massacre of all massacres -- the Holocaust. What can we say? I need only reread our Torah which describes, in graphic detail, the calamities that await mankind if God's law is violated. As Edwin Markham said, in poetry, what the Torah spelled out in many a page:

"The laws are the secret avengers
and they rule above all lands.

They come on wool soft sandals,
But they strike with iron hands.

The robber is robbed by his riches
The tyrant is dragged by his chain,
The schemer is snared by his cunning
The slayer lies dead by the slain."

There is enough evidence in history to back up our faith in justice and retribution. What continues to trouble us is the suffering of the innocent. Where was God when so many of the best and purest of our people were slain?

Why not also blame God for allowing the death of 269 innocent victims in the Korean plane so savagely shot down by the Russians over the sea of Japan?

As a matter of principle, one should ask the same question, even when only a few innocent persons are victimized by wrongdoers.

To be consistent, we should blame God even when one innocent pedestrian is run over by a criminally negligent driver.

What can we answer those who are so deeply troubled by the suffering of the innocent?

We must not see God as our bodyguard, but as our moral and spiritual compass. If anyone deviates from God's laws of nature or morality, woeful consequences must be suffered, not only by the evildoer, but by all who are within the range of his influence. We live in an inter-dependent world. When wrong is done by anyone, all of us, to some degree, suffer. Our destinies are inter-twined as the limbs and organs of our body are inter-dependent. The malfunction, the malignancy of a single cell can destroy all the trillions of cells that make up our body. It is our destiny to interact and to be accountable for each other. As John Donne put it: "No man is an island." This, the Bible taught us three thousand years before Donne: "We are our brother's keeper."

CONCLUSION

In calling you "back to God," I wish to point out a fundamental difference between the Born-Again-Christian and his Jewish counterpart, the Baal T'shuvah, the Jew who returns in repentance. The Christian conversion-experience implies the total rejection and abandonment of one's former self. The Jew who returns to God does not reject his former self, he does not reject his humanity. On the contrary, he penetrates into the very core of his being to find the true person God enabled us

to be and wants us to be, and recovers something within it, the best and noblest part of his inner self where God may be found.

Our cabalistic mystics call this "the breaking of the shell."

The divine spark, the living spirit of man, is encapsuled and imprisoned within each of us. We seal ourselves off from others, from our inner being, and most assuredly, we separate ourselves from God. Each of us is in need of a spiritual breakthrough -- to reach out and touch the "hem of God." We need to be spiritually liberated and sensitized. Do you hear God calling you from within?

I know that many of us have no such experience whatever, no sense of an encounter with God. He seems so remote as to be virtually non-existent. You wonder, then, how does God call you?

He taps out his signals through every heartbeat. He is your host through every breath, through every bit of nourishment you take. Nature, God's creation, literally sets a table before you and keeps you alive, day by day, in the presence of countless forces of destruction.

Don't look for God as though He were a needle in a hay stack.

He is very present. He may enter our thoughts as we think. He may respond to our search as the whisper of our conscience, as a moment of awe and discovery. Sometimes His response is nothing more than the silent inner certainty of a Presence, God within us, as the 23rd Psalm says:

"Thou art with me."

"Thou art with me, I shall fear no evil, Yea though
I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
Thou art with me."

The key sentence of our faith is

"Hear O Israel . . ." Listen, O my People! God calls you every moment of your life. We are subject to all kinds of inner forces, feelings, sudden ideas -- all voices from within. Some day you will correctly identify one of the voices that calls you from within as the Voice of God, a voice that has been calling you ever since you were born!

This, the great Yiddish poet, H. Leivick, once expressed in a beautiful, haunting poem entitled, "A Voice." In this poem he tried to suggest the mystery of that inner voice which you, at first, do not identify as God's voice, until it becomes clear to you that it is a persistent voice that has been calling you as long as you've been alive:

"A Voice calls out: You must!
Must what? Oh, Voice explain!
Instead of an answer I hear
That call again.

I peer behind the door,
I dash at every wall
I search, though no one strange
Has sent that call.

I've known them all my life,
The caller and his call . . ." Amen.

THE QUEST FOR MEANING AND THE SABBATH

By: Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman
Washington Hebrew Congregation

YOM KIPPUR EVE
Friday, September 16, 1983
(Tishri 9, 5744)

Whenever I gaze at our Kol Nidre night congregation, I feel uplifted by a thousand wings, but also pressed down by a thousand burdens. Each of us brings to this night the hope of a new vision, the expectation of new courage and new purpose. But also on this night, we unburden ourselves in prayer and take stock of our lives. I feel the weight of countless problems unresolved and the pain of many who are waiting for relief and comfort.

There is an overwhelming sense of common purpose which we share tonight. We are all trying to be on the same spiritual wave length.

Tonight the focus of our attention is inward.

When did you last spend a full, uninterrupted day in meditation and reflection about your life? How often during the year do you give as little as a single hour to this inward probing?

The Western world does not encourage introspection. We favor action.

1. THE MEANS AND THE ENDS

Our mental image of personal achievement and social progress is full of action and movement. We speak admiringly of a person with

"drive," who is "on the go" and in hot pursuit of opportunities.

Typically, ~~the most notable breakthrough~~ of our civilization ^{excels in} ~~has been~~ the acceleration of speed and mobility.

When the Chinese sage, Lin-Yu-Tang, first visited New York, his host took him sightseeing from lower to upper Manhattan. He marveled at the breathless pace, the rush-hour crowd, the ~~countless~~ cars and cabs. When they took the subway from Wall Street to Columbia University, his host explained that this would save them at least 30 minutes time. As soon as they emerged from the station, the Chinese visitor spotted a park bench and sat down. "Are you tired?" asked the host.

"Not at all," said Lin-Yu-Tang, "but since we saved 30 minutes -- I am now going to use the time we saved, for a little meditation."

This anecdote underscores the difference between our mentality and that of the East. Eastern civilizations stress the ends while neglecting the material means of achieving them. Western man, by contrast, bends all his efforts on the improvement of means while losing sight of his larger purposes. We rush to get there -- but what for? How worthwhile are the purposes for which we use our time?

We are a nation on wheels cluttered up with gadgets, computers and electronic gear, all meant to save us lots of time, but have we improved the beneficial use of our time?

Albert Einstein ~~prophetically~~ deplored this as the fatal flaw in our technological society:

"We have a perfection of methods and a confusion of ~~goals~~ ^{purpose}."

We show genius in the building up of industrial power, but sheer madness in its abuse for mutual destruction.

We are brilliant in developing a fantastic communication network but often infantile in its use for the promotion of cultural junk.

No people ~~are~~ ^{is} better housed than we: luxury homes equipped with climate control, all sorts of automation, pools, saunas and jaccusis, but do we live more happily in these palaces of comfort? How attentive and inventive have we been in the improvement of our inner well-being and personal relationships? Why are so many who live so well at the end of their wits with boredom, restlessness and discontent?

My attention was once caught by a bumper sticker that read:

"Don't follow me. I'm lost."

There are two kinds of going astray: the generation that wandered in the wilderness for forty years often lost their way but never their goal. They kept looking for the Promised Land and reached it in the end. The other kind of going astray is to lose not only the way but also your aim, your goal, your purpose. This is not confusion, but tragedy: "For him who has no port to sail to, all winds are unfavorable."

Those who fall into this category live adrift in aimlessness. Many become drop-outs, among them thousands of gifted, sensitive college students and, surprisingly, more and more adults and middle-aged persons who, after "making it" in their vocations and enterprises, run out of steam. They are spiritually drained, bored to the point of desperation, holding themselves and their work in contempt.

A number of these lost souls try to relieve their inner ache on the psychiatrist's couch. However, theirs is not a mental or emotional disorder. The eminent psychotherapist, Carl Jung said:

"The central neurosis of our time is emptiness."

It is a sickness of the soul, spiritual starvation.

It is also reflected in the writings of popular novelists and playwrights. Their dominant theme is the absurdity, the meaninglessness of it all.

Hemingway in "Death in the Afternoon" said:

"I live in a vacuum that is as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and there is no current to plug in to."

Eugene O'Neill in "Long Day's Journey into Night" mirrors the despair at life's emptiness:

"Life's only meaning is death."

These and other artists illustrate the decadence of Western culture. Together, collectively they are saying:

"Don't follow me. I'm lost."

There has been a steady crumbling away of our values. We are the best fed, best housed, best educated generation wondering whether anything really matters?

There are those among us old enough to have lived thru several generations - they know how much of a moral decline we suffered

We should be grieved over the spiritual emptiness of so many, but not surprised. Values and purposes of life do not grow on trees nor do they come in handy packages.

In the Western world only one people ever succeeded in providing a major place for the cultivation of meaning for the mass of people, the rank and file. We Jews, for nearly 30 centuries, accustomed ourselves to devote one-seventh of our life, one day ~~out~~ of seven, to the clarification of purpose rather than the acquisition of means.

What national parks are doing for the preservation of America's scenic beauty, the 52 Sabbaths of the year are trying to do for the preservation of all that is good and beautiful in ~~Jewish beliefs and ideals~~ *human existence*. During the week, we cannot help but pollute some of our idealism. Of necessity, all sorts of compromises chip away at our principles. But, the seventh day is Israel's day of spiritual regeneration. It is a day on which to re-adjust the binoculars of faith to catch, again, the distant visions yet to be fulfilled, —

as we study the wisdom of our prophets and sages, the Bible, the great commentators and ^{the} philosophers who so brilliantly interpreted God's words for us.

2. A CHANGE OF PACE

Please note that the Sabbath Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" is not primarily a call to ceremonial performance. It is not candles and kiddush, not even worship, that constitutes the Sabbath. These are ~~just~~ ^{only} solemn ways of marking the boundaries between the days of the week and Shabbat.

The real Shabbat observance, for which I plead tonight, ~~for your own good,~~ is a radical change of pace on the seventh day, a twenty-four hour retreat into the contemplative life in which we create at least the possibility for the human spirit to recover a vision of higher meaning by entering the dimension of the sacred.

Somewhere in England, in a small country cemetery, stands a tombstone inscribed with two lines, which sum up the life story -- and also the tragedy -- of many of us in the Western world:

"Here lies Henry Spicer

Born a man, and died a grocer."

I can see thousands of similar inscriptions with our names ^{on} that would describe the predicament of many of us. Is it happening to you? Born a man -- or a woman -- And now a worker, dealer, agent, ^{salesman,}

professional or functionary!

Is your humanity being shredded away as you are being turned into an efficient tool, drained of higher meaning and purposes?

You are in good company. Some of the ablest, most successful and powerful captains of industry find themselves in this predicament. Listen to the prayer of a corporation president under pressure:

"Slow me down, Lord; ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind. Give me, amidst the confusion of my day, the calmness of the everlasting hills. Break the tensions of my nerves and muscles. Teach me the art of slowing down, To look at a flower, To chat with a friend, To pat the dog, To read a few lines from a good book. Remind me that the race is not always to the swift, That there is more to life than increasing its speed."

God gave us the answer to that prayer. That's what the Sabbath is all about.

The word "Shabbat" literally means a stopping point, a point of cessation, a resting place in time and there is no rest and relief as healing as twenty-four hours without pressure, without needing to prove yourself a success, without deadlines, without rushing to buy

or sell, without having to do anything -- a day of truce, and peace.

Is this all there is to the Sabbath? No. Rest in the sense of a total turning away from every day activity is only the beginning, the necessary pre-condition for experiencing the Sabbath at its highest -- which is spiritual elevation in the context of love, study and prayer. There is a progression from the physical to the spiritual.

Tradition wisely demands that you begin the Sabbath by making yourself physically attractive, ^{before day of our 100th anniversary we would immerse in the Mikvah in the freezing waters of the river -} put on your best clothes, eat your best meal

by candlelight, with wine and songs, in the company of family or friends; that you put away all business matters and turn from the alarming head-

lines of the daily news to the eternal verities of Judaism. ^{I sometimes}

~~wish I could have the sense of the Orthodox and refrain from turning a switch - espec. the TV~~
~~feel like standing on~~

You will ~~gain~~ the feeling as though you had climbed up an observation tower and now, spread out before your mind's eye is the totality of life. Suddenly, all the crises which so upset and bewilder you during the week, will be reduced to their relatively insignificant proportions and with it will go the resentment and bitterness and harshness and all of the ugly defense mechanisms which we develop in the trenches, while fighting our little wars for survival.

Heinrich Heine captured, in a few poetic lines ("Princess Sabbath") the magic transformation experienced by the Jew on the Sabbath:

"As a dog with dog's ideas
All the week he noses
Through life's filthy mire

But on every Friday evening
On a sudden, in the twilight
The dog once more is human

And his heavenly Father's hall he enters
As a man with man's emotions
Head and heart alike uplifted
Clad in pure and festive raiment.

3. THE NEED FOR VISION

In Israel
This summer I read some of the writings of Amos Oz so as to better appreciate him on his 100th.

In his short story "The Hill of Evil Counsel", the Israeli novelist, Amos Oz, tells of a beautiful Jewish woman, Ruth, of European upper-class background with dreams of a literary career, who shortly after her arrival in Israel, marries a German-Jewish Veterinarian, Dr. Hans Kipnis. They settle down to life in a modest little house on the outskirts of Jerusalem and raise a child. On the surface, all seems well enough, but it isn't. Ruth inwardly mourns the death of her dream as she submits to the routines of an uneventful domestic life. Failing to replace the vision of her youth with some new ideal and new purpose, she feels empty and drained. One day she and her husband are invited to the annual Governor's Ball. Ruth, as though possessed by a demon, dances away the whole evening and then runs off with a womanizing British navy officer she met that very night.

What was Amos Oz really telling us? Is it just the story of an adultery & desertion?

The story is symbolic of the State of Israel running off with an alien world, alien standards -- betraying some of her former ideals in the frantic quest for life like all other nations.

This is Israel's identify crisis today. Should she shamelessly seek power, wealth, pleasure like other nations? Or, should Israel stand alone, an austere, highly moral nation of builders?

Is Israel, culturally, crossing over into the world of naked power and unconcerned materialism?

Is it inevitable that the Jewish State, 35 years after its founding, should go thru its first mid-life crisis, and break with former standards, loyalties, commitments and ideals, and just run off with the crowd of nations to act and do as they do?

As every nation is in danger of deserting its national morality, so is every individual -- which brings us to the strictly personal relevance of Amos Oz's story.

Very interesting is the reaction of Ruth's husband to his wife's escape from the marriage. Of course, he is deeply pained. But even more, he is surprised and keeps repeating: "I don't understand." Who would have suspected this? There had been no previous separation in their marriage, no sharp break, no confrontation, -- hardly a quarrel. What happened all of a sudden? Lots had happened and it wasn't all of a sudden: A succession of subtle changes in their relationship had

accumulated, unnoticed by him. Outwardly, Ruth seemed to be adjusted to her life as wife and mother. But life isn't always what it appears to be, nor are we necessarily what we seem to be. We so often keep up a front of the person we once were, not ever revealing the secret changes that have occurred meanwhile.

Nobody is, today, exactly what he was yesterday. Our goals, our needs, our ambitions, our values, and our relationships are constantly subject to change. Too many of us are so caught up in the trivia of our daily work that we don't even notice what is happening inside until we suffer some breakdown or depression and all of a sudden realize how meaningless and unrelated to our deepest needs many of our activities have become and how our feelings toward people have changed.

Don't wait until it is too late. We must regularly monitor our true feelings and in the case of our most important relationships, such as marriage and parent-child relations, we need to take time out for that kind of communication.

~~I see, in the Sabbath observance,~~ as a full twenty-four hour day of rest and introspection, is an ideal opportunity for intimate communication and for the renewal of purpose and meaning.

Like an artist steps away from his easel, from time-to-time, to see the picture he is painting as a whole, in its broader outline, so, we too, must stop what we're doing, and at regular Sabbath intervals,

try to see ourselves, our family life, our work, in the broader perspective of our larger goals and purposes.

The very word "worship" is derived from "worth." It is focus upon values. It is the reclamation of our ideals which so easily become tarnished in the course of the daily struggle of life. The Sabbath saves us from becoming machines, performing routine functions. The Bible says:

"Without vision, the people perish." (Proverbs 29.18)

4. REST FOR SPIRITUAL REGENERATION

You might say to me:

Why harp on the Sabbath when most people actually have a full weekend off and enjoy more leisure time than any previous generation?

We all think we have leisure time, but the way we spend it is anything but leisure. ~~Instead of slowing down and sitting still to take stock of ourselves, to think, we become even more frantic in our activities on weekends.~~ The social scientist, Lewis Mumford, had this to say about the American weekend:

"Sunday as a day of rest has now become another day of busy work, filled with amusements and restless diversions not essentially different from the routine of the work-week. We continually activate leisure time instead of letting all work and routine duties come serenely to a halt."

~~I suspect, friends,~~ ^{is it} what makes us run so much. ^{is} a basic lack of self-respect. We seem to despise our own inner life. We don't want to be with our own thoughts. — *perhaps because we feel so empty!*

Chesterton, in his autobiography, expressed amazement at people who can't sit still doing nothing:

"I feel as if I had not yet had enough time to ~~unpack~~ even one-tenth part of the luggage of my life and thoughts. For my own part, I can never get enough 'nothing' to do."

~~If the Sabbath were not already our traditional day for study and reflection, we should be forced to invent such a day.~~ ^{Sabbata} A key prayer says: "The Sabbath is a sign between me and the children of Israel."

A Sign - a Contract

The Sabbath is our spiritual maintenance-contract with God, to keep our souls in good repair. Everyone of us suffers some moral and spiritual damage every day. We encounter abrasive people who bring out the worst in us. We become frustrated by obstacles and are tempted to ^{get around them by} ~~use improper means to achieve our ends.~~ By the end of the week, all of us are in need of change and restoration of our better self. This can only happen in the quietness and stillness of extended rest with minimal engagements and a maximum of privacy.

An ancient Jewish legend tells us about the magic river Sambatyon. Six days of the week Sambatyon tosses up a barrage of heavy rocks, *like a volcano.*

No one can cross it. On the seventh day, the waters of Sambatyon, are at peace. Only on the Sabbath ~~day~~ is it possible for a traveler to cross over. And what will he find on the other side? He will find the ten lost Tribes of Israel, -- dwelling in peace and serenity.

reflects Jewish life in the diaspora;
~~The message of this legend is this:~~ During the week, the Jew is separated from his people and his culture by insurmountable obstacles. A highly competitive society engages him in the every day struggle for a livelihood. Only on the Sabbath is it feasible for us to cross the Sambatyon and reawaken our Jewish consciousness, revive the spark of Jewish learning, *to become again the people of the Book, the people of intellect and wisdom and to* restore the feeling of community as we return to our people and to its ideals, and have a taste of peace and serenity.

If you want more serenity --

If you want more peace of mind --

If you want a clearer vision of where you're going in life --

If you want to feel right within yourself --

And if you want a sense of your higher dignity as a creature of God -- and feel closer to God's Creation and the Creator --

REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY AND KEEP IT HOLY. AMEN.

THE QUEST FOR MEANING AND THE SABBATH

By: Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman
Washington Hebrew Congregation

YOM KIPPUR EVE
Friday, September 16, 1983
(Tishri 9, 5744)

Whenever I gaze at our Kol Nidre night congregation, I feel uplifted by a thousand wings, but also pressed down by a thousand burdens. Each of us brings to this night the hope of a new vision, the expectation of new courage and new purpose. But also on this night, we unburden ourselves in prayer and take stock of our lives. I feel the weight of countless problems unresolved and the pain of many who are waiting for relief and comfort.

There is an overwhelming sense of common purpose which we share tonight. We are all trying to be on the same spiritual wave length.

Tonight the focus of our attention is inward.

When did you last spend a full, uninterrupted day in meditation and reflection about your life? How often during the year do you give as little as a single hour to this inward probing?

The Western world does not encourage introspection. We favor action.

1. THE MEANS AND THE ENDS

Our mental image of personal achievement and social progress is full of action and movement. We speak admiringly of a person with

"drive," who is "on the go" and in hot pursuit of opportunities. Typically, the most notable breakthrough of our civilization has been the acceleration of speed and mobility.

When the Chinese sage, Lin-Yu-Tang, first visited New York, his host took him sightseeing from lower to upper Manhattan. He marveled at the breathless pace, the rush-hour crowd, the countless cars and cabs. When they took the subway from Wall Street to Columbia University, his host explained that this would save them at least 30 minutes time. As soon as they emerged from the station, the Chinese visitor spotted a park bench and sat down. "Are you tired?" asked the host.

"Not at all," said Lin-Yu-Tang, "but since we saved 30 minutes -- I am now going to use the time we saved for a little meditation."

This anecdote underscores the difference between our mentality and that of the East. Eastern civilizations stress the ends while neglecting the material means of achieving them. Western man, by contrast, bends all his efforts on the improvement of means while losing sight of his larger purposes. We rush to get there -- but what for? How worthwhile are the purposes for which we use our time?

We are a nation on wheels cluttered up with gadgets, computers and electronic gear, all meant to save us lots of time, but have we improved the beneficial use of our time?

Albert Einstein prophetically deplored this as the fatal flaw in our technological society:

"We have a perfection of methods and a confusion of goals."

We show genius in the building up of industrial power, but sheer madness in its abuse for mutual destruction.

We are brilliant in developing a fantastic communication network but often infantile in its use for the promotion of cultural junk.

No people are better housed than we: luxury homes equipped with climate control, all sorts of automation, pools, saunas and jaccusis, but do we live more happily in these palaces of comfort? How attentive and inventive have we been in the improvement of our inner well-being and personal relationships? Why are so many who live so well at the end of their wits with boredom, restlessness and discontent?

My attention was once caught by a bumper sticker that read:

"Don't follow me. I'm lost."

There are two kinds of going astray: the generation that wandered in the wilderness for forty years often lost their way but never their goal. They kept looking for the Promised Land and reached it in the end. The other kind of going astray is to lose not only the way but also your aim, your goal, your purpose. This is not confusion, but tragedy: "For him who has no port to sail to, all winds are unfavorable."

Those who fall into this category live adrift in aimlessness. Many become drop-outs, among them thousands of gifted, sensitive college students and, surprisingly, more and more adults and middle-aged persons who, after "making it" in their vocations and enterprises, run out of steam. They are spiritually drained, bored to the point of desperation, holding themselves and their work in contempt.

A number of these lost souls try to relieve their inner ache on the psychiatrist's couch. However, theirs is not a mental or emotional disorder. The eminent psychotherapist, Carl Jung said:

"The central neurosis of our time is emptiness."

It is a sickness of the soul, spiritual starvation.

It is also reflected in the writings of popular novelists and playwrights. Their dominant theme is the absurdity, the meaninglessness of it all.

Hemingway in "Death in the Afternoon" said:

"I live in a vacuum that is as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and there is no current to plug in to."

Eugene O'Neill in "Long Day's Journey into Night" mirrors the despair at life's emptiness:

"Life's only meaning is death."

These and other artists illustrate the decadence of Western culture. Together, collectively they are saying:

"Don't follow me. I'm lost."

There has been a steady crumbling away of our values. We are the best fed, best housed, best educated generation wondering whether anything really matters?

We should be grieved over the spiritual emptiness of so many, but not surprised. Values and purposes of life do not grow on trees nor do they come in handy packages.

In the Western world only one people ever succeeded in providing a major place for the cultivation of meaning for the mass of people, the rank and file. We Jews, for nearly 30 centuries, accustomed ourselves to devote one-seventh of our life, one day ~~out~~ of seven, to the clarification of purpose rather than the acquisition of means.

What national parks are doing for the preservation of America's scenic beauty, the 52 Sabbaths of the year are trying to do for the preservation of all that is good and beautiful in Jewish beliefs and ideals. During the week, we cannot help but pollute some of our idealism. Of necessity, all sorts of compromises chip away at our principles. But, the seventh day is Israel's day of spiritual regeneration. It is a day on which to re-adjust the binoculars of faith to catch, again, the distant visions yet to be fulfilled.

We do so as we study the wisdom of our prophets and sages, the Bible, the great commentators and philosophers who so brilliantly interpreted God's words for us.

2. A CHANGE OF PACE

Please note that the Sabbath Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" is not primarily a call to ceremonial performance. It is not candles and kiddush, not even worship, that constitutes the Sabbath. These are just solemn ways of marking the boundaries between the days of the week and Shabbat.

The real Shabbat observance, for which I plead tonight for your own good, is a radical change of pace on the seventh day, a twenty-four hour retreat into the contemplative life in which we create at least the possibility for the human spirit to recover a vision of higher meaning by entering the dimension of the sacred.

Somewhere in England, in a small country cemetery, stands a tombstone inscribed with two lines, which sum up the life story -- and also the tragedy -- of many of us in the Western world:

"Here lies Henry Spicer

Born a man, and died a grocer."

I can see thousands of similar inscriptions with our names that would describe the predicament of many of us. Is it happening to you? Born a man -- or a woman -- And now a worker, dealer, agent,

professional or functionary.

Is your humanity being shredded away as you are being turned into an efficient tool, drained of higher meaning and purposes?

You are in good company. Some of the ablest, most successful and powerful captains of industry find themselves in this predicament. Listen to the prayer of a corporation president under pressure:

"Slow me down, Lord; ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind. Give me, amidst the confusion of my day, the calmness of the everlasting hills.

Break the tensions of my nerves and muscles.

Teach me the art of slowing down,

To look at a flower,

To chat with a friend,

To pat the dog,

To read a few lines from a good book.

Remind me that the race is not always to the swift,

That there is more to life than increasing its speed."

God gave us the answer to that prayer. That's what the Sabbath is all about.

The word "Shabbat" literally means a stopping point, a point of cessation, a resting place in time and there is no rest and relief as healing as twenty-four hours without pressure, without needing to prove yourself a success, without deadlines, without rushing to buy

or sell, without having to do anything -- a day of truce, and peace.

Is this all there is to the Sabbath? No. Rest in the sense of a total turning away from every day activity is only the beginning, the necessary pre-condition for experiencing the Sabbath at its highest -- which is spiritual elevation in the context of love, study and prayer. There is a progression from the physical to the spiritual. Tradition wisely demands that you begin the Sabbath by making yourself physically attractive, put on your best clothes, eat your best meal by candlelight with wine and songs, in the company of family or friends; that you put away all business matters and turn from the alarming headlines of the daily news to the eternal verities of Judaism.

You will have the feeling as though you had climbed up an observation tower and now, spread out before your mind's eye is the totality of life. Suddenly, all the little crises which so upset and bewilder us during the week, will be reduced to their relatively insignificant proportions and with it will go the resentment and bitterness and harshness and all of the ugly defense mechanisms which we develop in the trenches, while fighting our little wars for survival.

Heinrich Heine captured, in a few poetic lines ("Princess Sabbath") the magic transformation experienced by the Jew on the Sabbath:

"As a dog with dog's ideas
All the week he noses
Through life's filthy mire

But on every Friday evening
On a sudden, in the twilight
The dog once more is human.

And his heavenly Father's hall he enters
As a man with man's emotions
Head and heart alike uplifted
Clad in pure and festive raiment.

3. THE NEED FOR VISION

In his short story "The Hill of Evil Counsel", the Israeli novelist, Amos Oz, tells of a beautiful Jewish woman, Ruth, of European upper-class background with dreams of a literary career, who shortly after her arrival in Israel, marries a German-Jewish Veterinarian, Dr. Hans Kipnis. They settle down to life in a modest little house on the outskirts of Jerusalem and raise a child. On the surface, all seems well enough, but it isn't. Ruth inwardly mourns the death of her dream as she submits to the routines of an uneventful domestic life. Failing to replace the vision of her youth with some new ideal and new purpose, she feels empty and drained. One day she and her husband are invited to the annual Governor's Ball. Ruth, as though possessed by a demon, dances away the whole evening and then runs off with a womanizing British navy officer she met that very night.

What is this story all about? Is it just another story of adultery and Desertion?

There are several possible interpretations. Some might read this story as suggestive of the State of Israel running off with an alien world, alien standards, -- betraying some of her former ideals in the frantic quest for life, like all other nations.

Some see in this story a condemnation of those groups in Israel who are being drawn into the world of naked power and unconcerned materialism.

It might possibly be, also, a slap at the nearly 500,000 Israeli "Yordim," emigrants who left Israel for a more affluent, carefree life in the Western World.

But it is not only Israel, the nation or any nation that is in danger of deserting its high idealism, but every individual, every one of us -- which brings us to the strictly personal application of Amos Oz's story.

Very interesting is the reaction of Ruth's husband to his wife's escape from the marriage. Of course, he is deeply pained. But even more, he is surprised and keeps repeating: "I don't understand." Who would have suspected this? There had been no previous separation in their marriage, no sharp break, no confrontation, -- hardly a quarrel. What happened all of a sudden? Lots had happened and it wasn't all of a sudden: A succession of subtle changes in their relationship had

accumulated, unnoticed by him. Outwardly, Ruth seemed to be adjusted to her life as wife and mother. But life isn't always what it appears to be, nor are we necessarily what we seem to be. We so often keep up a front of the person we once were, not ever revealing the secret changes that have occurred meanwhile.

Nobody is, today, exactly what he was yesterday. Our goals, our needs, our ambitions, our values, and our relationships are constantly subject to change. Too many of us are so caught up in the trivia of our daily work that we don't even notice what is happening inside until we suffer some breakdown or depression and all of a sudden realize how meaningless and unrelated to our deepest needs many of our activities have become and how our feelings toward people have changed.

Don't wait until it is too late. We must regularly monitor our true feelings and in the case of our most important relationships, such as marriage and parent-child relations, we need to take time out for that kind of communication.

I see, in the Sabbath observance, as a full twenty-four hour day of rest and introspection, an ideal opportunity for intimate communication and for the renewal of purpose and meaning.

Like an artist steps away from his easel, from time-to-time, to see the picture he is painting as a whole, in its broader outline, so, we too, must stop what we're doing, and at regular Sabbath intervals,

try to see ourselves, our family life, our work, in the broader perspective of our larger goals and purposes.

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JUDGMENT BY HONEY

1988

Yom Kippur
~~Rosh Hashanah~~

It is the day when God issues us our report cards.
is a serious day. There is something very strict about it. The old year is over and we are supposed to think about the way we have acted at home, with friends, in school -- whether we were good, or bad; whether we were kind and sharing or mean and selfish. I am sure each

of us has done something he is ashamed of and for which he is sorry.

Some of us would like to forget about those bad things we have done --

but there is no use trying to hide and cover up. There are no

secrets before God.

ok

This is also a day of sweetness. It is an old Jewish custom to eat a little honey on Rosh Hashanah to make us think of all the sweet and good things in life, how much more thoughtful and loving we could all be towards each other. We taste of honey and hope that all the good things we do in the New Year will leave a sweet taste with everyone.

High Holy Day

My favorite ~~Rosh Hashanah~~ story which I now want to tell you is called "The Judgment of Honey." It tells us something about bad but also about good people.

Have you ever done something wrong and wished that nobody would find out? For example, have you broken something very valuable and quickly swept away the pieces so that no one would know the damage you have done? Or, have you taken something that belongs to another person and when someone asked you about it, you would not tell how you got it?

There is one thing you can be sure of: the truth will always come out. It may take a little while, but in the end the bad things

but also the good things we do are found out and we receive either the punishment or the reward we deserve.

I want to tell you about a man who thought that nobody would ever find out the wrong he had done and how a young boy discovered the secret of his wrongdoing.

A long, long time ago a Jewish woman lived in Ashkalon in the land of Israel. She had no husband, no sisters or brothers, no children. She lived alone in a little house. One day she decided to go on a trip to Jerusalem. But, it worried her to leave her home alone. She had saved up a number of gold coins for her old age when she could no longer be able to work. Those coins filled up half a pitcher. Could she leave this small treasure in the house while she was away for several weeks? What if a stranger came in, saw the pitcher and discovered the coins in it?

The woman decided to fill the pitcher with honey so that no one might see the coins inside the pitcher. Slowly she poured the golden, sticky honey into the mouth of the pitcher, smiling to herself as she kept thinking how the sticky honey would not only hide the coins but hold them down to the bottom of the pitcher. Then she took the pitcher to her neighbor next door and asked him to be good enough and keep her honey in storage until she returned from Jerusalem.

After a few days, had passed, her neighbor had a party and needed some honey for a cake. Having not enough honey of his own, he remembered the woman's pitcher and said, "I'm sure she won't mind it if I borrow a little of her honey, as long as I fill up her pitcher with honey again before she returns."

As the man poured out the honey from the woman's pitcher, he soon enough saw the shiny coins inside. He became very excited, took a spoon and scooped out all the coins he could find.

"If I keep the coins and fill up her pitcher with honey just the way it was before, she would never know. Oh, how lucky I am," said the man to himself. "I have found a treasure and no one will ever know."

When the woman returned from her trip to Jerusalem, she came to her neighbor's house, asked for the pitcher, saw that it was filled with honey as before, thanked him and took it back home, not knowing that her neighbor had stolen all the money that had been in it. Back in her own house, she immediately lit a candle, held it close to the mouth of the pitcher to make sure that the coins were still in it. Seeing only honey, she became frightened and began to pour out the honey from her pitcher into a bowl. Maybe she had not been able to see the coins with all the honey on top. Imagine her shock when she found the pitcher empty and all the coins gone.

She burst into tears, ran back to her neighbor and said,
"There were many gold coins in the pitcher. It was all the money
I saved for my old age. Don't deny that you took the money. You
are the only one who could have taken it. I trusted you -- now give
me back the money you stole."

The neighbor shook his head and said, "Woman, how dare you call me a thief. You brought me a pitcher which you said was full
of honey. You said nothing about coins in the pitcher. Go home
and don't bother me again."

There was nothing the woman could do but run to the Judge of Ashkalon and tell him her sad story. "My neighbor is not only a thief but a liar," she cried. "Please help me get my money back. Let there be justice in Israel."

The judge felt in his heart that the woman was telling the truth but how could anyone prove that the man had stolen the money? "Do you know of any witnesses who might have seen the man take the money out of the pitcher? Or are there witnesses who could prove that there was money in the pitcher to begin with?"

"No, no," cried the woman, "I wanted no one to know and kept it a secret. You must believe me, your Honor. I put all the money I had into the pitcher and covered it with honey for safe keeping. You must believe me!"

The judge shook his head and said, "My dear woman, I'm sorry. I want to believe you but if there are no witnesses to prove your story I can't pass judgment on the man and call him a thief."

The woman just covered her face with her hands and sobbed, "What shall I do? What shall I do? God help me! God help me!"

It so happens that the young son of the judge, by the name of Solomon, was in the courtroom when the woman had told her story. Suddenly, he turned to his father and said, "If you will call this woman's neighbor ~~who is suspected of theft~~ to the Court and if you will have this woman bring her pitcher with honey, I may be able to find two witnesses to back up her story."

So it was done. The woman brought her pitcher of honey and the man to whom she had entrusted it for safe keeping stood in front of the judge and denied everything.

"This woman is dreaming. There were no coins in the pitcher and I took none. Does this woman have any witnesses to prove her story?" asked the man.

The judge had to admit that so far no witnesses could be found. Turning to his son, Solomon, the judge said in the hearing of the crowded courtroom, "My son, you heard the story of this woman and you thought that you could find two witnesses. Where are they?"

Then young Solomon walked over to the woman, took the pitcher in his hand and said, "I believe we shall find a few witnesses." And with these words, he smashed the pitcher on the floor and quickly bent down to pick up the pieces -- and just as he had expected, he found several small gold coins that had stuck to the ⁱⁿside of the pitcher near its mouth, after the honey had been pured out. Those were a few of the coins the thief had not been able to scoop out. Young Solomon picked up two of these little coins, still sticky with honey, held them up and said, "Here are two witnesses which prove that the woman told the truth."

Her neighbor, taken by surprise, broke down and confessed before the judge what he had done. The judge made him return the money to the woman and four times more as was the law in Israel. And then he said, "Remember the words of our Torah: "your sin will find you out" -- and you cannot hide your wrongdoing. Our God is a God of justice who sees to it that the truth always comes out in the end, that wrongdoing is punished and that good is rewarded."

Whenever you taste a little honey, or something sweet
remember that there is a good God, that goodness will win
out in the end.

May the New Year be sweet for all of us as we try to do
that which is good at home, in school, at work and at play.

AMEN

10 days ago, on Rosh Hashanah, many of us who follow the
Jewish custom, dipped a slice of apple in honey, and
ate it - thinking of all the sweet and good things
in life - and how much more thoughtful
and kind we could all be toward each other.

This I wish for you: May all your words and
deeds in the new year leave a sweet taste
with everyone!

THE LIFE BEYOND

By: Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman
Washington Hebrew Congregation

YOM KIPPUR MEMORIAL SERVICE
September 17, 1983

It was a wise woman, the Bible says, a woman from Tekoa, who pointed out to King David that the moments of life:

"Are spilled on the ground like water, which cannot be gathered up again."

We all know that to be so. We know only too well that we cannot recapture a single moment of our life. Yet, we are mystified by our powers of remembrance. Not in reality, but in remembrance, it is possible for us to skip over the years and decades and relive them. The past is irretrievable and yet it is not lost altogether, as long as it is remembered. How grateful we are for the magic of memory which enables us, even now, to see so clearly beloved faces and hear familiar voices, faces that have vanished and voices that have been silent long ago.

Is it all in our mind? Is all that remains of our life a mere thought, a picture in someone else's mind?

Though we keep repeating that all life must end and that our days are limited, and we keep saying that all flesh is grass and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field, we still

wonder, we still question what is the end to end it all? Is death the end?

We have had many a dream. How did we know that it was only a dream? Only by awakening. Could not life also be just a dream -- and death an awakening to greater reality?

We say death is the end -- the end of what?

Consider a flower seed. Soon after it has sunk into the soil, it disintegrates. You may say it dies as a seed, only to be reborn as a plant. In the summer the plant blossoms and becomes the flower it was meant to be. But not for long. For it wilts and the plant withers away and dies, but not without shedding, again, its seeds into the ground to renew the cycle of life.

What appears as death, at any given point in time, is revealed later on to be merely the gateway to a new phase of life. So, in nature's cycle death is, by no means, the end, but merely the beginning of a new form of existence.

Take a piece of paper and watch it burn. Slowly it wilts in the flame and turns to ashes. The eye tells us that the paper is gone, but the elements which constitute paper have not disappeared. They have merely changed, they have been transformed partly into ashes and partly into smoke and gas. The chemist tells us that there was no

loss at all, only transformation.

May we not also say that death does not devour the elements of life, that there is no termination but merely transformation?

How long is the journey of life? When a person goes traveling, you can estimate the length of the journey by the amount of luggage he takes with him. Why is it that man is equipped for the journey of life in this world with far more talents and capacities than are needed for purely physical survival? The human being has been given baggage for a much longer journey, so to speak: Our capacity for love beyond the separation of death; our inborn discontent with earthly existence; our vision of perfection that can never be realized in this life; our unquenchable hope, our insistent longing for eternity, our capacity for faith in things unseen -- these gifts are an overendowment, a mental and spiritual surplus -- what for? Could it be that the Creator wants us to be prepared for a journey that continues beyond this life?

Belief in the hereafter is not just fantasy, but an extension of realism. Why should our existence be limited only to this small corner of the universe with which we mortals happen to be familiar? What right do we have to fence-in all reality within the small limits of man's perception? Why can there not be existence beyond our concepts of space and time?

Belief in immortality is a persistent dream of man -- but are dreams altogether unrelated to experience? There is no dream without the background of some reality. Even the dream of life eternal is rooted in some knowledge that is deeper than reason.

We record with meticulous care the day of a person's birth and death -- but are birth and death the true beginning and end of human life? Does anyone really know the exact point at which his life began? Birth is surely not the beginning, birth is merely a stage at which what is already alive emerges into our kind of human form and visible existence. Our real origin precedes birth and conception and we may surely trace ourselves back to parents and grandparents and all the way back, through the chain of generations, to the ultimate beginning of all things. If your true origin goes back to that first beginning which we call creation, is it conceivable that it will all come to an abrupt end in death? Our sages consider it absurd that life originating in the eternal past would suddenly stop for ever. They, therefore, changed the Hebrew text in the blessing which ended with the word L'olam "in eternity," by adding the words V'ad Olam, which means "unto eternity." And so we acknowledge God as the God from eternity unto eternity, from the eternal past to the eternal future. So is life, ceaseless, endless and forever moving from eternity unto eternity.

In the same measure, as this faith grows within us, the fear of death will diminish. What joy, what comfort it is to know that there is no place where God is not, as the Psalmist said:

"Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or
Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there;
If I come to rest in the netherworld, behold, Thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning

And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there would Thy hand lead me.

And Thy right hand would hold me. . . ."

(Psalm 139)

Faith, someone said, is putting your hand in God's.

With such faith:

"I take death's hand without a fear
For he who safely brought me here
Will safely take me back." Amen