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Reel
150

Box
53

Folder
255

What is Judaism? Part II: Its practices, 1926.

9/18 This morning I wish to speak briefly of "The Jewish Way"
- its disciplines

~~Last week I spoke on Judaism--its doctrines.~~

~~Now, Judaism was not content to enunciate ^{great} some theologic doctrines or moral principles; ~~Judaism~~ ^{It indicated to men} also sought to show ~~men how to practice these ideals.~~ ^{It offered them also} In other words, Judaism has not only a theory but also a practice; not only the ideal but also ^a the program, ^{and a} the technique. This program ~~may be divided into two parts:~~ ^{included both} institutions and ceremonies.~~

Now, an institution is a corporate achievement. An institution is not created by an individual; it is created by a people, a race, and it most nearly represents the genius of that race. Every great historic people, every great historic religion, will manifest itself in some institutions which most nearly mirror its essential self.

~~Now, the institution most characteristic of Judaism, ^{and the one} the institution most dearly beloved by Israel throughout the ages is the synagogue. I venture to say that the synagogue is the most original creation of the Jew. The temple, ^{of Jerusalem} which antedated the synagogue, was not an original creation of the genius of the Jew. Other religions, ~~other peoples~~, had their temples; other peoples had their sacred shrines where sacrifices were offered and where priests and temple attendants officiated. There was nothing unique about ~~the temple~~, the ancient temple, in ^{except that it was dedicated to the one God.} Jerusalem. But no ancient people had an institution comparable to the synagogue.--a place of worship, a house of God in which sacrifices were not offered, in which a~~

a house, and which was

priestly hierarchy did not officiate; just a place of ^{prayer} worship, of study, ^{and} of the education of the youth, ^{a place where} ~~of the~~ ~~disbursement~~ ^{was disbursed} of charity, ^{when the stranger was welcomed and} for the welcoming of the stranger. ^{found.}

~~Such an institution, which is the synagogue, we find among~~
~~none of the peoples of antiquity. It is the unique and~~
~~characteristic creation of the Jew. The temple was a~~
~~survival; the synagogue was a creation. The synagogue was~~
born in exile,--in the Babylonian exile in the sixth
century before the common era. The Babylonians ^{had} destroyed
Palestine; its capital, Jerusalem; ^{and} its heart, the temple.
The people were exiled, ^{and} taken to Babylon, ^{and} ~~there~~ ^{at} many
of them thought that they had been completely forsaken by
their God, or that their God was completely powerless
because his own sanctuary in Jerusalem he could not save
from destruction ^{even his}

But ~~there arose~~ in that spiritual crisis ^{then} ~~there~~ ^{arose}
~~his~~ prophets and sages in Babylon, who ^{taught} ~~told~~ the people
that the whole earth is full of the glory of God; that
God does not abide in any one ^{place} ~~locality~~, and that wherever
a group of pious men and women meet for prayer and devotion
and study, there God is to be found. And so the exiles,
uprooted, driven from their home, in ^a ~~this~~ strange land
built for themselves synagogues, houses of worship, where ^{they}
~~groups of them~~ would assemble ^{for prayer} ~~and worship~~ and study. The
synagogue was the creation of the Jewish layman, ~~of the~~
~~masses of the people.~~ It had no priesthood; it had no
officialdom; it was ~~the~~ most democratic religious institution

known to antiquity. And even after the people ^{had} returned from exile to Palestine and the temple was rebuilt, the synagogue had become so ^{dear to the hearts of} intertwined in the affections of the people that it was not ^{abandoned,} surrendered. On the contrary, it continued to develop alongside of the temple, ^{and in every community one or more synagogues were established} and it was in the synagogue that the Rabbis expounded the law, interpreted the law to meet the changed ^{our} conditions of life. ^{It was here that children were taught the faith, their fathers} It was to the synagogue that the masses wended their way ^{for instruction} when they sought real enlightenment and inspiration. ^{guidance,} It was to the synagogues that the Pharisees and the rabbis came; ^{relief,} it was to the synagogue that the poor came for ^{help} aid and success; ~~it was to the synagogue that the oppressed and the wronged came to have their wrongs righted.~~

We are told that when the temple was destroyed the second time in 70 A.D., there existed in the city of Jerusalem alone ^{more} 480 ~~such~~ synagogues, each one having attached to it a school and a high school, and a place for the reception of the stranger and the needy one. When the Jews were exiled a second time and scattered over the face of the earth, the synagogue went with them, wandered with them ~~to this day,~~ ^{came to} and whether they dwelt in prosperous cities or in poverty stricken ghettos, the synagogue was the heart of their ^{dwelling place} habitation. The synagogue safeguarded the spirit of the Jew; ^{it} ~~the synagogue~~ preserved inviolate the faith of the Jew.

A few days ago there visited our city an eminent Hebrew poet--Chaim Nachman Bialik, one of the great

living poets of the world. Among his most significant poems there are two which have to do with this thing of which I now speak--the synagogue. One poem is called, "If You Wish to Know." And the poet exclaims in this magnificent lyric outburst:

"If you wish to know the spring from which your people drew the strength to face the accumulated hate of the world; who faced exile and martyrdom these many centuries,--if you wish to know the fortress wherein the soul of your people was shielded from the onslaughts of adversity,--if you wish to know the kind and merciful mother which gathered the tears of her unfortunate children, and soothed them, come with me in some twilight hour, in some forsaken village or town in the distant steppes of Russia, or in any part of the world where the faith of Israel is still unquenched; I will take you into some old synagogue burdened with years and crowded with memories, unadorned with physical beauty, but resplendent with inner spiritual glory, and there around a table you will perhaps find three or four bent figures, whose faces are lined and seared with the burden of life, and you will listen and perhaps hear them repeat some ancient lore out of an ancient tome; or perhaps you will catch the plaintive chant of some psalm of David, sung by

these lonely souls in the gathering gloom of the twilight, and there, my brother, you will be standing upon the threshold of your people's eternal life, and there you will see with your own eyes your race immortality."

He has another poem called, "Upon the Threshold of the House of State"--which was the synagogue. And in that poem the poet gives his spiritual autobiography. He had left his home, his early surroundings; he had turned his back upon the synagogue where his early years were spent in study and in prayer. He sought the great world outside. He was tantalized by the glitter and the fascination of the grand civilizations of the Western people, and he spent his young manhood in the great metropolises of Europe, in the universities and in the colleges, imbibing the advanced culture of this people; and yet, somehow, his life remained incomplete; somehow, he was spiritually restive and dissatisfied; somehow, the great world outside did not give him that peace of soul, that harmony of being which he craved, and after many years of seeking that which he could not find, he returns to the little village and to the ramshackle little synagogue, and enters it; that place crowded with shadows, with dead memories of forgotten years--poor and unattractive. He returns, as he says, "unfortunate, ashamed, beaten"; and there he finds that which the great world could not give him--a peace which passeth all

~~understanding.~~

~~There he is at home. The compassionate mother gathered her wandering child back in her arms.~~

~~That is what~~ This unique institution of Israel, the synagogue, has always ~~meant for the people of~~ Israel and that synagogue must always ^{have} remain central in Jewish life. ^{It must remain central also in the future.} Whatever concept of ~~the~~ Jewish life we

built up for ourselves, the synagogue must ~~forever~~ remain the focal point thereof, or ^{suddenly and} the Jew will cease to exist.

I know that there are people among us ~~secularists,~~

~~racialists,~~ who try to construct a theory of Jewish life

in which the synagogue ^{generally occupying a peripheral} ~~and religion has no place or only a~~

^{place, a very small place.} They are committing a great error. I have

searched high and low in Jewish ^{history and} literature to discover

that the Jew at any time sought to preserve his identity ^{for its}

^{own sake} ~~in the world for the sake of preserving his physical self,~~

~~his race,~~ or for the sake of producing a great art or a

great literature or a great ^{science} ~~music; I have sought high and~~

~~low in our literature to discover that the Jew at any~~

~~time opposed intermarriage, for example, which would have~~

~~inevitably destroyed him through assimilation, because he~~

~~feared that racial admixture would have resulted in less~~

~~gifted artistic or literary talents. Nowhere do we find~~

~~such a thought in our whole literature of three thousand~~

~~years. Only this thought is echoed and re-echoed con-~~

~~stantly: "Lest ye turn thy son from following me and worship~~

~~other gods."~~

It is loyalty to the faith which spelled
loyalty to the ~~people~~; ~~it is the will to preserve the~~
~~integrity of certain tremendous spiritual and moral ideals~~
which made the Jew careful about his physical self-
perpetuation; and ~~whenever religion or its magnificent~~
symbol, the synagogue, ~~is~~ ^{are} relegated to an insignificant
position in Jewish life, Judaism and the Jew are ~~bound to~~
~~strictly and surely to be destroyed.~~ ^{endangered,} The anti-religious
Jew will be the first to go, as he always has been the
first to leave; and the religiously indifferent Jew will
linger on for a while, until the assimilative forces in
American life, for example, will completely overwhelm him;
and even the secular nationalist Jew will abide as long as
that ideology borrowed from the segregated and compact
Jewish community life of Eastern Europe is dissipated by
the relentless assimilative forces of American life. He,
too, will go. It is only the Jew who will remain stead-
fast to his faith, and to the fullest and richest expression
the
in institution of his faith, the synagogue, who will con-
tinue, and who will preserve all these great cultural
values which we all seek to preserve. The synagogue, then,
must forever remain central in Jewish life. ^{There is no Jewish}
^{way of life divorced from the synagogue, or from prayer}
~~That is the first institution which Judaism~~
~~founded.~~ ^{of Judaism} The second institution is the school--the school
for religious education. ~~That means for training in~~
~~religious thinking and in ethical self-development; the~~
~~school which was to begin with childhood and continue~~

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~~throughout a man's life.~~ Judaism has always maintained
that ^{its} ~~the~~ great doctrines first propounded by prophet and
seer must be studied, must be meditated upon, ~~must be~~
~~recreative in the life of every man and every generation.~~

"The words of this Torah shall not depart from thy mouth
or from the mouth of thy children." One of the first

injunctions given to our people was, "Thou shalt teach
them diligently unto the children."

*The ignorant are not
way, God himself is
truly God-revering. True faith and piety call
represented in the legends of our people as teaching
children His ways--the ways of light.* That is why Israel

*for a spiritual maturity, the profoundest insights and the highest
knowledge that the individual is capable of.* was ~~among~~ the first peoples of the world to ~~create~~ ^{establish} a universal

with the better situated school system ~~for everyone.~~ The poorest and the humblest ~~always~~

received an education in right living, in right thinking, ~~and~~

in right conduct. That is why the proportion of illiteracy

in Israel was at all times, from earliest times to this,

~~almost insignificant.~~ *Very small.*

The school--that is central. We are all
coming to realize that the secular school, which are of
Jew and non-Jew alike, is insufficient: that moral living
does not come as a result of the education of the mind
only, in knowledge or the imparting of information. Right
living and right doing comes as a result of moral training
and religious inspiration, *our people* and Israel has always sought to

supplement secular education with a full, ~~rich~~ program of
religious and ethical training, ~~and in our own day~~ *religious* the school
must still remain central in our ^{with} life or Judaism will cease
to exist.

And the third great institution of Israel-- if I might call it an institution--is organized charity. Now, the impulse of charity is universal; the giving of relief is as old as human want and as the sense of compassion. All peoples have it. But in Israel charity became more than a mere philanthropic impulse; charity became mandatory; charity was legislated by Divine law, because charity derived not merely from the compassionate impulse within but from the universal sense of justice, which made the help which the more favored must give to the less favored inevitable and mandatory. And so in our Bible we already find legislation to take care of the needy and the denied and the dispossessed. Every third year the tide of a man's produce must be set aside for the poor; every year the corner of the field, or the gleanings of the field, or that which is forgotten upon the field, or the topmost branches of the vine must be left for the poor.

Let me read this sentence from the Bible: "For the needy will not cease out of the land; therefore do I command thee, saying thou shalt open wide thy hand unto thy brother, to thy poor and to thy needy in the land." "Therefore do I command thee." And notice this phrase: "thy brother." A poor man is not standing in the Bible as a poor man, just an impersonal human being. He is "thy brother." "For thy brother shall wax poor, and thou shalt surely help him." Because every community, every society,

however large, is a brotherhood, a fellowship, one family; each one is dependent upon another; all we have we enjoy because others have made them available for us. So that we are equally indebted for all that we have.

In our great rabbinic text, the Mishna, which was compiled in the second century after the common era, we already have a completely developed code concerning charity; we already have mention of a public administrator of charity known as the Gabai Zederkah, or the parnas,-- the provider of the poor. And later on we find in our rabbinic literature mention of a community chest--Kuppah, or Tamchui,---- where all the needy may have their wants satisfied. And how remarkable! The ideal of charity and the institution of charity, not merely as relief, palliative or remedial; not merely as prevention, but also as restoration, as adjustment, developed in Israel.

Let me read you this paragraph from the code of the great Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages,-- Maimonides,--really one of the most significant statements on the subject in the whole literature of the world. Maimonides defines eight degrees of charity. He says: "There are eight degrees in the giving of charity, one superior to the other." In view of the great campaign for Jewish relief which our community is about to launch, please listen carefully to Maimonides' statement on the giving of charity. "There are eight degrees in the giving of charity, one superior to the other. A high degree, than

which there is no higher, is that of one who takes hold of an Israelite who has become impoverished, and gives him a gift or a loan, or goes into partnership with him, or finds work for him, in order to strengthen his hands, so that he be spared the necessity of appealing for help. And concerning him it is said, 'then shalt thou uphold him. As a stranger and a settler shall he live with thee. Take hold of him that he fall not, and come to me.'" That is the highest degree of charity--the rehabilitation of a man, not merely the handing out of alms, a pittance to satisfy his immediate wants, but so to reconstruct his economic life that he became economically independent; to make a man of him again. That is the last word in charity to this day.

"Less than this, next below in rank, is the case of one who gives charity to the poor widow, knowing to whom he gives, and without the poor knowing from whom he takes. Less than this is the case of the one who knows to whom he gives, without the poor knowing from whom he receives." An example of this is the number of distinguished wise men who used to go secretly and leave money at the doors of the poor. "Less than this is the case where the poor man knows from whom he takes, but the giver does not know the receiver. An example of this type is the number of the wise who used to wrap up money in their cloaks and cast the bundles back of them, the poor coming after them to pick them up, thus being spared all the shame. Less than this is the case of him who gives without being asked. Less than

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this is the case of him who gives after he is asked. Less than this is the case of him who gives less than his proffer but in a pleasing manner. And less than this is the case of him who gives reluctantly." In the giving of charity, mind you, our people was able to construct a whole system of eight degrees, of eight elevations. Organized charity remains to this day an essential institution of Israel.

~~Another great institution is that of prayer--~~
~~private and public prayer.~~ Israel was first among the peoples to disassociate prayer from sacrifice, ^{and} ~~of~~ prayer from magic. ~~All peoples pray;~~ all primitive peoples prayed. But in Israel prayer first became absolutely disassociated from any act of sacrifice or from any attempt by magic to compel the Deity to do the will of the worshipper. Prayer in Israel became devotion, communion, the outpouring of the soul. Prayer transcended the ~~primitive~~ ^{petitioner} notion of the ~~petitioner~~; prayer is more than mere petition; prayer is more than mere ^{asking} ~~begging~~ for things. Prayer is the desire of the human soul to reach up and commune with God; prayer is the invitation which the soul of man offers ^{for} ~~through~~ the grace of God to descend and dwell within it; prayer is the yearning of the human soul to establish spiritual contact and kinship with Divinity. ~~And there can be~~ ^{is} no religion without prayer. A man who does not pray to God has no need of God, and God may as well not exist for him. Prayer, whether it be private prayer or the equally important ~~act~~ ^{form} of public worship, which expresses the ideal of social

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unity and social ~~responsibility~~ ^{destiny} ~~that must~~ ^{is} for all time
~~a central feature, the Jewish way of life.~~
~~remain a central institution in Israel.~~ *Step!* And the right kind
of prayer, my friends, I may say in passing, is always
answered. The wrong kind of prayer is never answered.
When we pray for things we do not know whether these things
are always good for us. God alone knows; and such prayers
may not always be answered. But when we pray not to have
more but to be more; when we pray for the nearness of God--
"I seek not the things of God but God himself"--then that
prayer is always answered.

It is like a man who plays creatively and
intelligently the masterpiece of some great musician: he
may never have seen that musician, he may never have spoken
to him, and yet be playing his masterpiece with *Karavan*
~~Nirvana~~,
with intent, with enthusiasm, with intelligence, with
consecration. The voice of an unknown master begins to
speak to him across the chasm of the centuries. His
prayer, his yearning, is directly answered. That is the
highest conception of prayer which Israel holds up as the
ideal for men.

Finally, friends, there are also customs and
ceremonies which keep us in the Jewish way of life.
~~And lastly, friends, and briefly, for time~~
~~is not my own, among the practices of our faith is the~~
~~observance of certain ceremonies, of holidays. Life would~~
~~be poor without ceremony, and religions would not be as~~
~~helpful to men without the guidance and the stimulation~~
~~which ceremonies give to them. We think in terms of symbols,~~
~~and we are constantly acting ceremonies. Every human~~

being has his birthdays and his anniversaries; every people has its national holidays ~~and its formal functions, and~~ ^{every nation} ~~any~~ great ideal will ultimately seek to express itself ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ tangible forms, ~~to express itself in acts, to express~~ ^{itself} in ceremonies. And so with the ceremonies of faith. ~~Some of them become antiquated, some of them become burdensome; they should be discarded.~~ There can be no great ~~historic~~ religion without its historic anniversaries and its ~~historic~~ celebrations and its ~~historic~~ rituals. We have our Sabbath, ~~we have~~ our Passover, ~~we have~~ our Shabu'ot, ~~we have~~ our Succoth, ~~we have~~ our Purim, ~~we have~~ our Chanukah; we have numerous beautiful ceremonies in Jewish life which have their pedagogic value, ~~which have~~ their inspirational value, ~~which have~~ their ^{survival} ~~preservative~~ value in Jewish life, and they should not be abandoned, ~~surrendered~~. We may not be able to observe them as ~~rigidly and as~~ completely as ^{did} our forebears, ^{who did} ~~living~~ under different conditions and different economic circumstances, ~~who were able to observe them~~, but that does not mean ~~because we cannot keep them completely~~ ^{that} we should ~~not keep~~ ^{discard} them ~~at all~~. ^{religiously} Our religion would ~~be stripped~~ ^{lose} of much of its poetry, its romance, its charm, if it were ~~denuded~~ ^{stripped} of all its religious symbolism. ^{Then, then, as the institutions and ceremonies of Judaism.} ^{They all} ~~To sum up, the practices of Judaism aim at~~ one thing: ~~the making of religion, of faith,~~ ^{to make} real in the lives of men. They aim at the sanctification of human life, ~~at the consecration of human life.~~ In Israel we often

~~find there is no distinction between kodesh and chol, --~~
~~between the sacred and the profane. Every act of life,~~
~~every experience of life, every emotion of life is holy,~~
~~for it is performed in the sight of God, and it has its~~
~~reactions upon the soul of man. And so constantly we are~~
~~to be reminded by our institutions, by our ceremonies and~~
Their purpose is to remind us of the
~~by our observances of holiness inherent in the every day~~

experiences of life, of the spiritual beauty which might

be discovered in every act of human life, ~~hence the~~
the house, the religious
~~synagogue; hence the school; hence the numerous philan-~~
thropic agencies which the spirit of brotherliness created

directly
~~in Israel; hence our Sabbath; hence our holidays, our~~
~~ceremonies, our customs. They are the practices of our~~
~~faith. They are not the heart of our faith, but they lead~~
~~to the heart of faith.~~

May we remain steadfast to the eternal *principles*
~~idealism~~ of Judaism, and may we find in ~~these~~ *it* historic *institutions*
and practices aids and guides towards such steadfastness and
~~towards such~~ loyalty. Amen.

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