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What Mean These Prayers?, 1965.

WHAT MEAN THESE PRAYERS?

#136

The Temple

Sunday, January 17, 1965

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

My self-assigned topic this morning is the theme "What Mean These Prayers?" I propose to approach it the long way round. I only hope this way will prove interesting to you and I can assure you we will come round.

Many whom I cherish dearly, cherish dearly a familiar misconception: "Rabbi," they say to me, "You know I don't come around, but I obey the Ten Commandments. I try to help out in the community, I've never denied what I am. That's what it's all about, isn't it?" That is part of it, but not all by half. A good Jew is something more than a garden-variety gentleman. A good man exhibits character and good manners. A good Jew exhibits character and manners and an understanding of and commitment to his faith. To be sure, a good Jew is a member of the house of mankind, but he is also a member of the household of Israel. He exhibits a sturdy morality, but he must also exhibit a sturdy spirituality.

Judaism is something far more profound than an ethical theory. When the prophets talked of freedom and righteousness and justice they did not do so simply because justice or righteousness or freedom was reasonable. Rather, "and the Lord spoke unto Moses saying," --. When a man says to me, "Rabbi, I obey the Ten Commandments" he implies something on this order: I obey the law. I am loving and tender to my family, loyal. I am concerned for the welfare of my friends and my neighborhood. I long for a better world and I hope for peace. Now, these are sound virtues all. Were that they were more in evidence. I mean no disparagement, therefore, when I say that such a man

has not yet understood the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments begin: "I am the Lord, thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other Gods before Me." The Commandments begin with affirmation. Our rule is written in the language of faith. To say in the same breath, "I do not come around" and "I obey the Ten Commandments," is to be guilty of contradiction.

Jewish life exhibits and teaches certain moralities. Our American way of life exhibits and teaches certain moralities. Often these moralities converge. Judaism and our common culture agree that honesty is a virtue; that freedom is an urgency; that human decency is a priority. But, as often, in little things and in large, American attitudes diverge from those which our tradition teaches.

Judaism teaches reserve: "A fool says what he knows; the sage knows what he says and the wisest of men weighs his words for it is a duty to speak only when speech is heard." In our American society it is a virtue to be gay, to be sociable, to be garrulous - the life of the party. In America we prize youth. The elderly often dress as adolescents. Judaism venerates and respects age. In the Book of Leviticus we read: "Honor the hoary head and rise before it." In the Book of Proverbs we read: The whitened hair is a crown of glory." Believe me, no patriarch was ever sassed by his adolescent son and no matriarch wore any but her own hair.

Our American way begins with an affirmation of private ownership. Judaism begins with the affirmation that we are stewards of all we possess. "All that we have is but lent to us." God did not build pockets in our skin. The welfare-oriented society is an old and familiar way of life to the Jew but a somewhat suspect theory in our nation. There is no parallel in Jewish thought

to the theme of rugged individualism. Jews are not taught to be alone and to keep their own counsel, but to take common council - "Separate not thyself from the community." "The evil son is the son who withdraws himself from the family." In Judaism we become ourselves in and through the group and not by standing aside and withholding our citizenship. What I am saying is simply **this**: the man who says to me in one breath "I do not come around but I obey the Ten Commandments" is saying in effect, "I do not come around but I obey the ordinary virtues of our American way of life." I respect him for it, but he does not obey the First Commandment, or, indeed, all ten. For, if the Ten Commandments are what I believe them to be, the quintessence of the biblical effort and a symbol of the range and the reach of our Jewish tradition; he fails even to begin to understand them.

Taken at face value the Commandments are little more than the most rudimentary of social conventions. "Thou Shalt Not Murder" - "Thou Shalt Not Steal" - "Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness" - "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery" are the ordinary irrevocable requirements of any social group. Moses did not originate them or create them. What is unique in the Ten Commandments is the faith therein implicit - our faith in the one God, the Creator God, the God of freedom, the God who ordered the Sabbath as a day of rest - the faith and its ethical implications. When we say, as we often do - "Judaism rests in the Ten Commandments," we mean something more than that we are obedient to rudimentary conventions. We think of the Ten Commandments as a symbol of all that our prophets taught, all that our law-givers established, and all the wisdom of our teachers. The man who does not come around, who does not listen to explanations and who never opens the Bible or reads a text, such a man sees only the surface and not the deep. He cannot lead his life

by the Ten Commandments because he is not aware of the thrust of our Jewish tradition. It is foreign to him. Judaism demands a sacrificial service beyond ordinary citizenship. Judaism demands a tenderness and sensitivity in human relations beyond providing for and being loyal to. Judaism demands a patience under trial which refuses to be embittered or to burden others with our defeat or fear. Judaism demands a respect for the mind as an instrument of truth-seeking rather than of the mind as a useful professional tool. Not all Jews, of course, obey these and other of our virtues. If they did, I would be out of a job. But these are required of anyone who would say, "Rabbi, I obey the Ten Commandments."

You and I are Jews. Historically, we are an unusual kind of Jew. Heretofore Jews awoke in Jewishness. The daily idiom was the language of the past. Home practice was the practice of the faith. Schooling was parochial. The Midrash provided fairy stories and childhood heroes. The world centered in and about the synagogue. Jews lived in a world impregnated with the tradition and the teaching. But, you and I are outsiders to such a pervasive religious culture. Day in and day out we do our business in an open society. Day in and day out the learning, the news and the responsibilities which are our's are secular - other than - sometimes alien to. How can we tie in again to the living tradition? How can we come to understand the Ten Commandments? Worship can bring us home. In worship we rehearse the great affirmations. In worship we reread the great truths. Worship helps us to sense again all the commands, all the disciples, all the beauty, the duty of our Jewish way of life. It is this hour which ties us to our faith. It is here that we draw close to God and to true goodness. It is here that the past through its beauty. through its language, through its music, through its doctrine, through its heroism, becomes ours.

Rabbis of old could argue that the Jewish ethic was a divine revealed command.

To go out and do was God's will. We believe more in inspiration than in revelation. We picture Amos tense and concentrating, reaching out into life and down into his soul, and somehow finding there truth and understanding. It matters not to me which piety we assume. What is crucial is that there is a valuable tradition and that we gain a sense of being within it and belonging to it through worship. In worship we renew the Jewish focus. Often this way is strange to us, but it is the way of our Torah - a good way.

What is it the Bible teaches? "Stand ye in the way and see which is the good way. It is the old way. And walk therein, for therein shalt thou find peace of mind." Why must worship be a consecrated hour? Why must it be an hour of devotion? Why can it not be simply an hour of ethical reading? Because our command begins in faith. Judaism is not an ethical theory. "Holy shalt thou be for I, the Lord, thy God am holy." Judaism is a religion. Jews do not believe in freedom because freedom is sociologically a healthy state for man, but because God commanded () "Proclaim ye the freedom unto the land." Jews do not believe in family loyalty because families are socially and psychologically wholesome but because God ordered "Honor thy Father and thy Mother." Mitzvah, the divine command, is the drive in Jewish life. To say this to a modern congregation is to call forth a rather puzzled and negative reaction. We are children of the Enlightenment. We prize reason. We rebel against authority. We do not like to obey something simply because we are told to do so. We want to question everything. We want everything laid out. This is good. Reason has given us our science. Reason has given us our technology, our high standard of living, our richness and our prosperity. Reason has given us our technology, our high standard of living, our richness and our prosperity. Reason has helped us outgrow certain archaic practices our fathers

claimed as divinely sanctioned. But can we be confident of reason as an all knowing guide and mentor in the realm of right and wrong or in the area of philosophy? In the name of reason, half of the world has justified an ethic of class war. In the name of reason, a fourth of our world justifies an ethic of racial apartheid and another quarter an ethic of race hate. In the name of reason, many within our own nation justified the ethic of predatory jungle animals and an economic free-for-all. Reason, I am afraid, often leads to war and wrong and unreasonable confusion. How many of you, who are parents, distraught, at the end of a long day, turn to your husband and to your wife or to another parent, and say "How can I raise my children in the midst of this noise and this vulgarity - in the midst of too much?" Reason has given us many rules but not the rule. How do our children know what is demanded of them? Shall they be obedient to their parents or independent of them? Shall they learn or shall they question? Shall they show respect or shall they call their parents and elders by their first names? There are many reasonable and conflicting ethics on child rearing. Time and time again we have seen friends become enthusiastic about a new logic of children-raising or about a new way of sanctifying marriage, or about a new way of growing old with some degree of grace. All of these enthusiasms are evidence only of one thing - that there is no certainty. None of us are sure of the way which we must go. Reason is a virtue. Reason has the highest priority in our faith. But reason should tell us that forty centuries of Jewish life - forty centuries of grace and of dignity - provide us solid ground for our decisions - a way which is a good way; a way which can guide us, surely and steadily. It is useful time and again to come back here to the sanctuary, here to touch base, here to reach up to God, here to draw close again to the burden of our tradition.

Many are surprised when I define the purpose of worship in these terms. They think of the Sunday hour or the Sabbath hour as an hour of prayer. Prayer is that surge of impulsive emotion which we felt as we stood with our beloved at the wedding alter; as we stood tense and frightened outside the hospital room of a parent. All of us have prayed. All of us have prayed when we were propelled to the high altitudes of emotion, where our heart pounded, our head throbbed and we simply could not contain ourselves. We found ourselves down on our knees because we had no place else to go. Words spewed out, half-formed. It was a catharsis. Those of us who have prayed and those who have not know that when we come into the sanctuary, the mood is quite other. In our worship there is little of the unbottling or sheer release. Here, everything is scheduled. It is written down. Here is a wall which shelters you from the bustle of life - from extreme emotion, and many are disappointed.

They expected to find release from their fears, comfort for their anxieties, soothing for their troubles and they found instead a structured contrived service, yes, artificial, for civilization is artificial. They left, they did not return. They expected one thing and they found another. Shall we deny that this service is not in tune to the extremes of emotion? Why deny it? It is true. Shall we deny the simple truth that prayer cannot be scheduled - or that it comes to us in unexpected moments - in danger, in fear, in the exaltation of joy? How could we deny it? It is true. I will go one step further. The explosion of emotion, which we sometimes label prayer, needs no address. To pray you do not need to believe in God. Those who believe in the river spirits, those who believe in God and those who believe in no God, pray. As a chaplain, I found time and again the skeptical and the cynical as well as the believer at prayer before they went into battle.

We do not need an address for that instinctive release of emotion which is prayer. We do not need a sanctuary or a book in order to pray. Prayer is instinctive - wholly natural. Man prayed before there was writing - perhaps before there was language. But is it with prayer that we are concerned here at this hour? What we say here is carefully addressed. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." You do not come here if you angrily deny God, if you have no sense of a Power beyond. Here our thoughts are ordered for us by the great poets of our tradition. To be sure, our mind runs on with us, but here there is form. What happens here is contrived - civilized; is the creation of a high religion for those who belong to that religion. And its purpose? To tie you in. To give you a connecting point between your lives and your Lord - between the living and the learned - between the confusions and clarity. Here, in the quiet and in the music; here in the familiar formula of worship, we draw close again to God. God is everywhere and always but we are not everywhere and always aware. This is familiar. This is God's home, as it were. The past is conjured up before us. Here we speak words which have been spoken by a thousand generations; the words of a faith, the words of hope, the words of commitment. And as we speak these words, they become our own. We accept the burden. We accept the faith. The teaching is taught, the Bible is read, the sermon is spoken and we are inspired. Here is also the moment of silence when our thoughts run on. Whatever we come to understand as the substance of Godliness and goodness, we fit into the fabric of our lives. That is why, though we worship as a congregation, each worships alone. Each of us takes from an hour of worship, his own food.

What mean these prayers? Simply this; that our faith is alive. We are searching. Here is a teaching. We are confused and we look here for enlightenment. We need faith and we come here to be bound the more closely to it. What mean these prayers? Let us be honest about it. Often they mean very little. Sometimes we come in and we are not in the mood - we are preoccupied, or we cannot quiet down, there is something discordant in the air, we leave as we came. But as we come again and again, as the discipline becomes part of us, the worship hour comes alive. It teaches and inspires. From it we take a certain grace out to the world beyond. From it we take a certain teaching, a certain sense of responsibility out into the world beyond. From it we take a sense of God's closeness out into the loneliness of the world about. This, then, is the meaning of these prayers.



Amen.

The house have closed, but not the implication. ^{month} deliberation and
on 31st - last will - can defy substance the over term
priority of an universe & reason, / Why?

Because universe is not always made of hard stuff

Because reason does not always give us a quest of truth

modern man prefers what he calls the deliberation of conscience to the

deliberation of glad, he has been at a very long distance from reality

all deliberation of reality - and all deliberation of reality - and all deliberation of reality

after confusion of reality deliberation of reality deliberation of reality

deliberation of reality deliberation of reality deliberation of reality

But reason has one right to deliberation of reality

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Many more of these, some of which are of great value, are to be found in the collection of the British Museum. The following are some of the most interesting:

1. A small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center.

2. A small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center.

3. A small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center.

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9. A small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center.

10. A small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center, and a small, round, black, stone, with a hole in the center.

let's look at the comparison of the good man & the good Jew under
my hand. Was not the good man? Then yes, of course, many provided
answers -

There was by a "good man" just a middle class sort of Jew
~~somebody~~ middle class Jew. In his good words, he doesn't look like
any, he occasionally made a brief -
the "good man" is far off from being called a "good man" or a
"good Jew". If we mean a very particular kind of Jew, that
working, thoughtful, careful of his duties - and not added
something a person who would like to know - a real Jew
person - but he's not yet a good Jew, ~~he's not a Jew~~
~~never seen up to the Bible, which is not a Jew~~
~~of Jewish thought, which is not a Jew~~

The Bible
~~rule of the Bible~~ and ~~the Bible~~ I would delight to call him good
~~but he's not a Jew~~ but let him not say to me "Bible, only a
Bible's - that's what it's all about, isn't it?" For all his prophecy
how can we know how ^{Fully} we need a Bible's consistency? I know in
a man who never gives us the Bible - with a very express meaning
to an expression of our Jewish thought - how can he know what range
reach range of holiness to which the Bible's passed For all must
indeed be as is in the Bible - a symbol - of the people
and all ways as well - by the people - they are a
beginning, all holiness - There shall not be murder, steal,
would adultery,
be false witness,
love thy neighbor.

no so with the great holiness man. But for the holiness

Workshop is a major part of it - I have a good year - for
 about membership and donor don't be led - was that bad and now is
 we just got going, planted in that area not pulled away by the
line in the collegiate movement, Workshop is the inspiration - the
movement is under double study & research, Workshop is the
debunking of misinformation and misconceptions and misunderstanding if misinformation is not
to become a good few,

may be ^{superior} ~~superior~~ to most definitions, ^{it seems to have no right} ~~it seems to have no right~~
 Truly right ^{comment} ~~comment~~ on attitudes for prayer ^{2nd part of the} ~~2nd part of the~~
^{analysis} ~~analysis~~ is that they are not particularly simple for prayer

regarding the correct idea for prayer it's a hard one to understand
and find, it's a good idea to have the idea of prayer
hand - but, I know that I didn't come to Temple
to pray. I have prayed in the synagogue - & when
I did come - well - I really have never felt that same way

of feeling which I know when I prayed outside mosques
^{important} ~~important~~ that prayer is an act which helps one understand the world
and the universe and the human condition and the future of the world
and the universe and the human condition and the future of the world

synagogue, and if you have been to see a synagogue and you are not prayed, remember
the importance of prayer and the importance of prayer and the importance of prayer
should be the same as the importance of prayer and the importance of prayer
don't add a synagogue for the importance of prayer and the importance of prayer
concern - synagogue and the importance of prayer and the importance of prayer
I'll go to the synagogue and you don't need to believe in the synagogue

I would like to see where the matter ~~is~~ ^{of your a question}
you every one not yet, with you - It is simply not enough
even as the number of cases - It does not seem to be
except in the number of the spirit

I have tried to show that even
your 2 are not yet of you - &
I have not learned as yet that
other fundamental of an idea -
to be a unit in spirit & to
really - to unify you



We have received the
The report of the Committee - of the - at
it will be found

Many - opening number is at the middle page - in
a many more fully attention was - the same was
understand - at the same time to be a very + revelation +
have much follow feeling -

Wendy a valuable year dear - for your
over the last period

With many the pages
The many has captured + admirable + and new
under the eyes

