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Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated. Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

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Rosh Hashanah, 1982.

Western Reserve Historical Society 10825 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106 (216) 721-5722 wrhs.org American Jewish Archives 3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220 (513) 487-3000 AmericanJewishArchives.org Rosh Hashanah Sermon Daniel Jeremy Silver September 17-18, 1982

Some two centuries ago the English essayist-philosopher, Edmund Burke, observed that man is, by constitution, a religious animal, and our research in the intervening years has proven him to be correct. The reason for this, I believe, is best expressed in a short phrase in the Biblical book of Proverbs, "without hope, the heart withers." Hope frees the psychic energy which allows us to reach up and to reach out; to develop our talents; to think through new thoughts and break new ground; to open ourselves in love and so commit ourselves to another. When we lose hope the soul sickens and withers. We turn away from friends and family; away from others; in on ourselves. Lassitude and melancholy become the predominant features of our lives. We're afraid to try and we sink deeper and deeper into the slough of despond. Our whole life is diminished.

Man is by nature a hoping animal, but many of our hopes never come about. We're often disappointed. Life is brief and often bruising. At times we give ourselves to another in love only to be spurned. Sometime we achieve some goal after arduous labor and the achievement turns to ashes in our mouths. We need a more substantial hope than their dreams; and faith, religion, provides that hope.

Religion assures us that there is reason to do the right, that civilization is not built on quicksand, that it is a virtue to care and to be caring, that there is a purpose which transcends the disappointments of the moment and

so, even when we are disappointed, there is every reason for us to carry on.

When we examine those hopes which faith, religion, certifies, we $c_{0} \neq c_{0} \neq c_{0}$ The discover that they are promises which deal with distant fulfillment rather than any immediate promise. Most religions advise us not to expect our hopes to come true intermediate for the comparison. What we can confidently expect, they tell us, is the long hope. The Eastern religions promise peace of mind. They tell us the soul can be calmed; but only after a long, difficult process of self-discipline. We must first learn to master our appetites, passions, and ambitions, not to care for what we instinctively want. The classic religions of the West assure us that there are hopes that do come true; but in the next world, not necessarily in this one. We will have our heart's desires in Heaven. This life is a time of testing to see whether or not we will be permitted to pass through the gates of Heaven. Those popular modern religions, the materialist ideologies, Marxism and Maoism, promise <u>man-that-there will be</u> economic freedom and international peace; but only when the dialectic of history has been completed and the class wars are victoriously concluded. Until then, man must commit himself to the state and sacrifice for the party and for history.

Judaism, too, as you well know, confirms the long hope: the coming of the messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and the promise of Heaven; but, interestingly, our tradition breaks rank with the other traditions and encourages us to expect happy times and to anticipate the fulfillment of at least some of our dreams. Not all hopes need be deferred ones. "Eat your bread with joy, drink your wine with a merry heart." "There is nothing better for man than that he should enjoy the labor that he performs." "Rejoice, o young man, in your youth." "My beloved is mine and I am my beloved."

There were good reasons why the major religions have tended to certify only the long hope. If they had said to us, 'dream and your dreams will come true,' we would quickly have discovered that they lied to us and might have

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lost all hope and sunk into despair. In that event religion would not have been performing its major function which is to encourage us to develop our God-given talents and flourish. Acting as they did, the religions performed their essential function, which is to say to us, whatever the difficulty, whatever the defeat, persevere. There is reason to carry on and to be open to life. Because they certified the long hope, the hopes that need never be fully abandoned, there was always reason to persevere.

What gave Judaism the courage to say to us: go ahead and hope?

When you study the rituals with which ancient peoples welcomed the New Year, you find that most of them began the year with some complicated rite of purgation. Their purpose was to diminish the power of the evil spirits over the days that lay ahead. Today we crowd into a few hours on December 31 every possible bit of what we call 'happiness' as if we were saying: we can't count on the new year to give us joy, so let's take what we can now. By contrast, tonight as we sat around our dinner tables, we dipped a piece of apple in honey and wished each other a <u>shanah tova</u>, <u>u'metukah</u>, a good, sweet year, full of pleasure, blessing and joy. We greeted one another tonight and said: <u>Shanah tova</u>, may the new year be a happy, healthy, joyous one. Our worship is filled with words of anticipation - <u>Hadesh aleinu shanah tovah</u> - let the new year be full of promise for us.

What gave Judaism the courage to say to us: go ahead and look forward to a good year? Why were we encouraged to believe that there are joys that do come true? The answer, I think, begins in the respect which Judaism shows for our capacity. Judaism does not treat us as children who cannot be trusted and must be guided every step of the way. Judaism treats us as people of potentially sound judgment who can intelligently shape and master the emotional forces of life. Judaism does not think of us as children who want every toy in the window, every bit of candy in the box, but as discriminating adults who can take most disappointments in stride and not be embittered by most defeats.

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As the new year begins I'd like to give you an image which may help you think about this concept of hope. It's found in the book of the prophet Isaiah. Night has fallen on a Judean village. A lone citizen is abroad in the dark street. He's been working at some task and has no sense of how much of the night stretches before him. This is Biblical Israel. There are no watches or clocks. He calls up to the watchman on the gate of the city who can see further than he can see: <u>Shomer mah mi'laylah</u>, shomer mah m'leil, "watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" The watchman turns to the east and scans the horizon to see if there is any sign of the dawn. He notices a slight lightening of the darkness and calls down: <u>atah boker</u>, the "dawn comes," but then he quickly adds, v'gam laylah, "but also another night."

Imagine yourself as that lonely Judean up late at night at your work. The night, of course, is not the physical darkness but the darkness of your problems and fears. You are thinking about a straitened relationship, about a growing of Ennymy your problems of livelihood, about your loneliness or illness or grief. Like that Judean citizen, you cannot see how far the darkness stretches ahead of you and so you call up to one who can see further, to wisdom, to Judaism: what of the night? And wisdom, experience, calls back to you: 'there is a lighthing in the distance. The dawn comes. Do not despair.' Just as day follows night in the natural order, so laughter and tears alternate in the human order, in our private lives. In time car problems dissipate. The dawn comes - if we have the perseverance and the courage to be steady, if we do not turn in on ourselves and turn away from life. And to be steady we need to have hope.

I often speak this way to people who are in grief or who feel abandoned by someone they love, or who find life too much for them. I speak to them of confidence, of the dawn, of hope and faith, the message of our tradition. Recently, when I spoke this way to a good friend, a cultured man, whose life had recently paralleled that of Job's, he listened to me patiently and responded

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gently with a quotation which I later discovered was from the poet Wordworth, who claimed to have read this sentence in an inscription above a hermit's cave: "Hopes, what are they? Beads of mourning strung on slender blades of grass." // My Job was saying to me: 'Hopes are insubstantial. They're like the morning mist. . .Immediately after the sun comes they dissipate and evaporate. Hope will not bring back my wife whom I have loved, or give me back the health I $e_{VANESCENT}$ have lost. Hopes are ephemeral and **effenescent**.' I agreed with him. Hopes are $e_{VANESCENT}$ **effective example e** and insubstantial, but the morning mist refreshes the earth and freshens the air. If it were not for the morning dew the land would wither and ultimately the earth would dry up. Just as the morning mist begins the day hopefully, so hope sets all our efforts in motion.

Let's turn again to the image. We're abroad in the darkness. We cannot see the dawn. We know we ought to hope but can see no practical way to resolve our problem. Shall we listen to wisdom, to the watchman, who says to us, the dawn comes? Are we simply deluding ourselves? Experience suggests we should listen. How often have there been just such moments of despair in our lives, when we looked hopelessly around and, not knowing what to do, set off in a thousand directions. No plan seemed feasible, yet, one day the clouds were no $A_5 \prod_{i=1}^{N} h_{A,i} = h_{A,i}$ how of the solution of the world.

What is true in our private lives is true in our collective lives. This year has not been a generous year for our country or our world. The descriptive word is recession, which means that things have gotten worse, and are moving downhill. There is less prosperity and more unemployment. The financial foundations of our world are shaky. Many in our country, indeed, whole countries have not only tightened their belts but faced want and outright starvation.

When we look about for some program, some practical advice which we can follow, there is none. Reagonomics doesn't work. Marxian ideologies don't work. No one can see how far downhill we will go or how much of the night still stretches before us. Yet, we have a down use Maxim there are cycles in the economic order as in our personal lives and in nature, and that if we don't surrender to despair and roll up our sleeves and use our God-given intelligence, initiative and concern, take each day as it comes, ultimately the dawn will come.

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There's something of the child in everyone of us. At five we were 9^{σ^7} To convinced that once we became a-big-child and were convolted in school all our problems would be over. When we were ten or eleven we were convinced that if we were allowed to stay up late at night our star would shine forever. At fifteen we knew that when we were given the car keys the future stretched gloriously ahead.. Many of us go through life convinced that when we graduate and get our professional license, marry and establish a family, gain the respect of our peers, are elected to high office, achieve financial security, leave the rat race and retire, at that point we will have solved our problems, or, to use a child's phrase, we will have made it.

We should rejoice in these achievements, but, at the same time, we must recognize that they are only way stations in the journey that we call life. As we move through them we will continue to be exposed to all the uncertainties and unexpected accidents of which life is made. There is no place short of the grave where our problems disappear forever.

It's one thing to live for hope; it's quite another, and quite dangerous, to live in our hopes, to assume that life is a fairy story, that some day we will live happily ever after. Those who remain children in this respect often

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end up putting their trust in some pied piper who leads them to crushing defeat. More than this, living in our dreams consigns us to continuous disappointment and denies us the pleasure of finding in life, with all of its problems, the joys that are there. To seek perfection is to condemn ourselves to disappointment. On this Rosh Hashanah, tonight, in this place, let me speak of another

hope, a hope we have all shared, and the difference it makes if we live for that hope or in it. For two thousand years our people dreamt of returning to Zion. For the better part of a hundred years the best spirits among our people labored and sacrificed to make that return possible, to create a Jewish national home. Only a few believed it could happen. The night had been dark and had lasted for centuries; yet, happen it did, and when the dawn came we were amazed. Not only did we have again our national home, but it had actualized so many of the finest values of our tradition. A blighted land had been made green. Democracy had been established in a part of the world which had known only arbitrary authority and tyranny. World class institutions of learning, culture and research had been established. Three million people would be transformed from refugees into citi-Imaginative experiments in communitarian living, social democracy, have zens. been attempted and sustained. The day was bright, but there is no day without its shadows. Soon the very fact of democracy created problems. Its peculiar form gave unwarranted power to the ultra-orthodox. There was an unexpected and unwanted religious struggle. The intransigence of those who denied Israel the right to survive created constant pressure and, in time, some developed a seige mentality. The costs of maintaining necessary defense constricted institutional development. The dawn comes, and also the night.

Those who knew that we cannot live in our hopes expected political miscalculations. No one is infallible. Perhaps too much was given away at Camp David and there was not enough give on the West Bank. They knew that under pressure leaders would gamble, there would be times like Lebanon. They accepted

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the fact that no state is pure and priotine. But they also knew that by any national standard one wants to suggest, Israel comes off well. The Israelis pay the highest taxes in the world, but their social welfare safety net has no gaping holes in it. The Israelis have had to go to war time and again, interrupt their studies, but when you factor in the size of the population no country on

earth has such a brilliant record of academic, medical and technical achievement. Israel has suffered a permanent stage of seige, yet, it is still an open society and has maintained its democratic institutions while country after country elsewhere has adopted what is euphemistically called guided democracy.

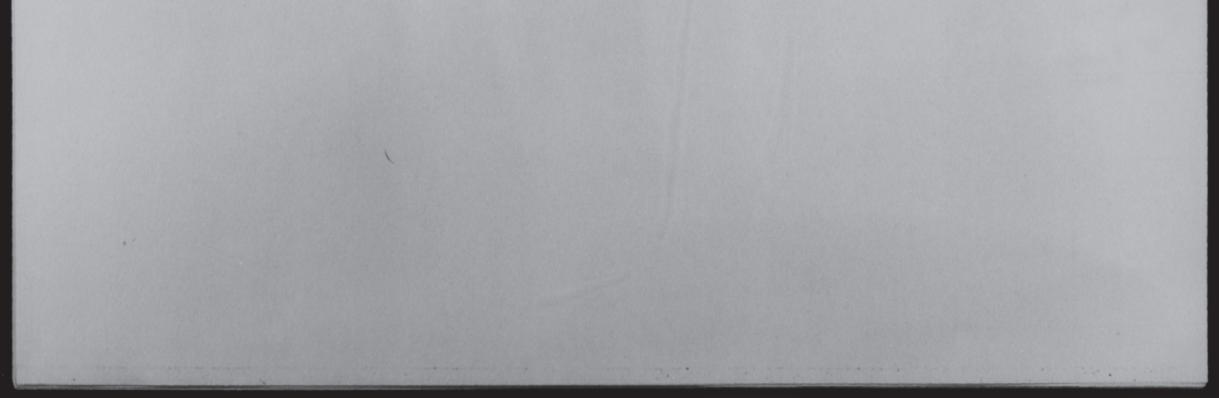
There's no morality in war, but I put to you that there's quite a difference between showering leaflets on a civilian population, telling them to leave before an attack comes, and losing the value of surprise, and the indiscriminate fire-bombing of Hanoi and the defoliation of Vietnam, and the indiscriminate use of poison gas in Afghanistan. For those who live for the dream and not in the dream, Israel remains an achievement of significant consequence, a state committed to fine human values, fallible, prone to mistakes certainly, but, nevertheless, one which has tried to live up to its possibilities as best it can, given the context in which she survives.

But those who live in the dream have been disappointed. They were not prepared for reality. They wanted a pure society. They wanted infallible leadership. They wanted Israel to live as no other country lives, as if she did not find herself in an international society which is a jungle, as if her citizens did not have constantly to bear arms and brave death, as if she could avoid those inevitable moments of irrascibility and anger which pressure provokes. When we live in our hopes reality always disappoints us, and some of the disappointed begin to uncritically and unfairly condemn a country whose real virtues they no longer see, whose circumstances they no longer consider, and whose future they can no longer concern themselves with. They do not see that the major failing is theirs.

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The wisdom of our people, the message of this night, is a simple one. There is reason to hope, there are moments of fulfillment. Dare. Care. Open yourself to life. Sense the promise of the new year, but never forget that there is no moment of final release, that life is full of challenges. Don't let your expectations be so vaunting that you lose your balance or your bearings. Do not let your dreams be so imprisoning that they seem to be the real world and that you lose the ability to find in the everyday world the joys and fulfillment it can provide. Take advantage of the promise of the new year. Walk a steady way, work for your hopes, and you'll find in the new year much of the goodness which is there.

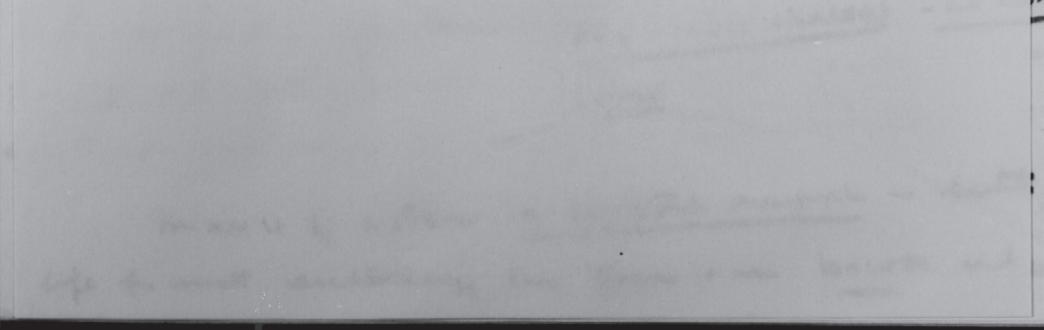
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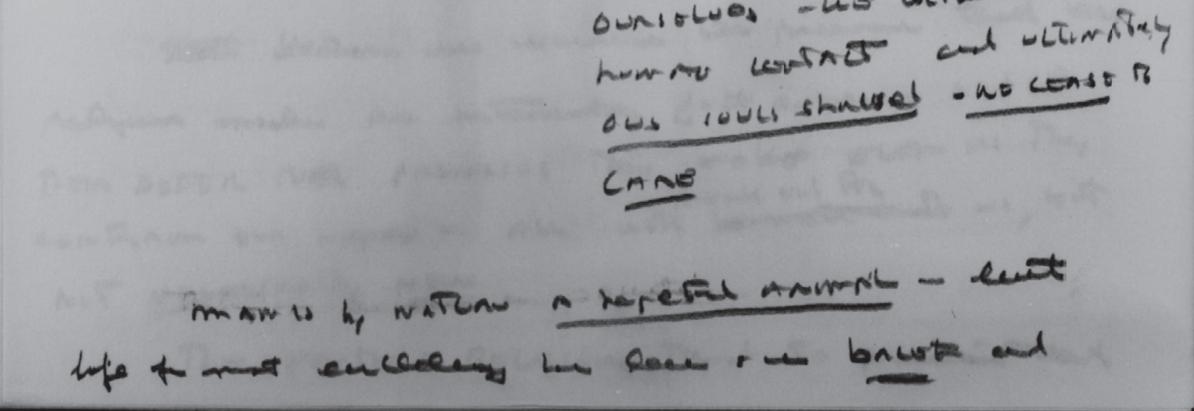
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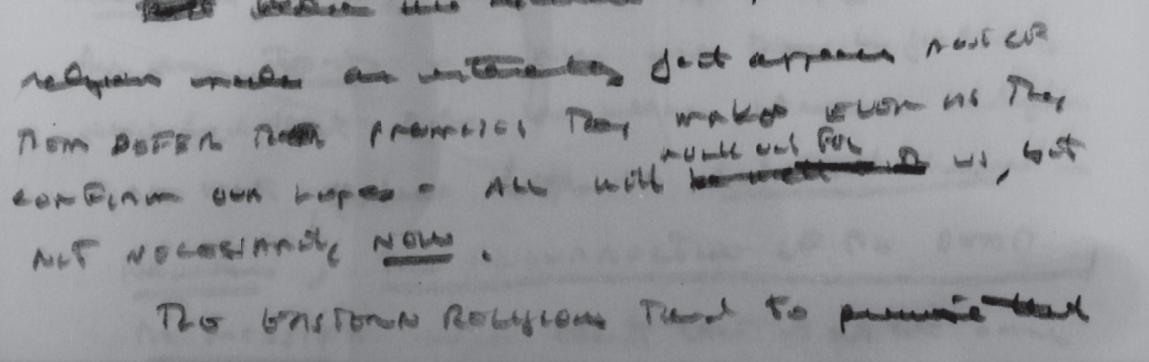




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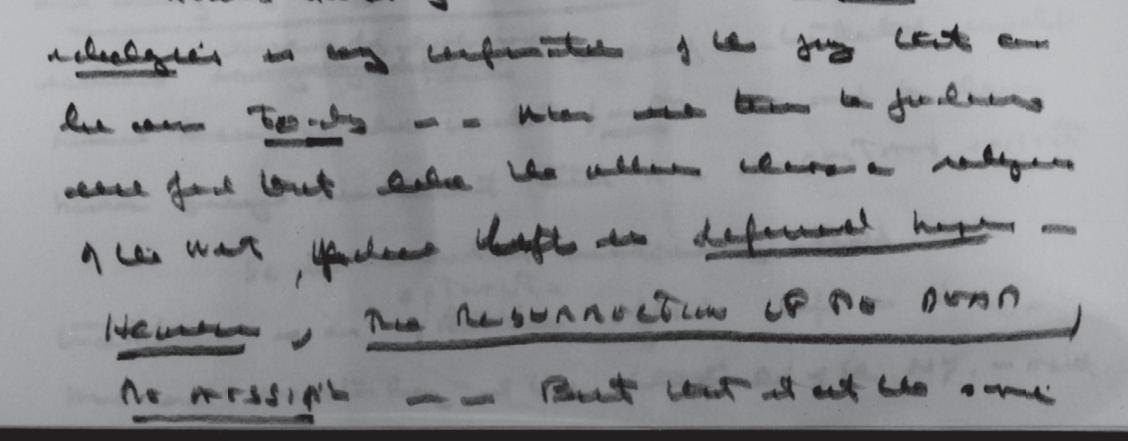


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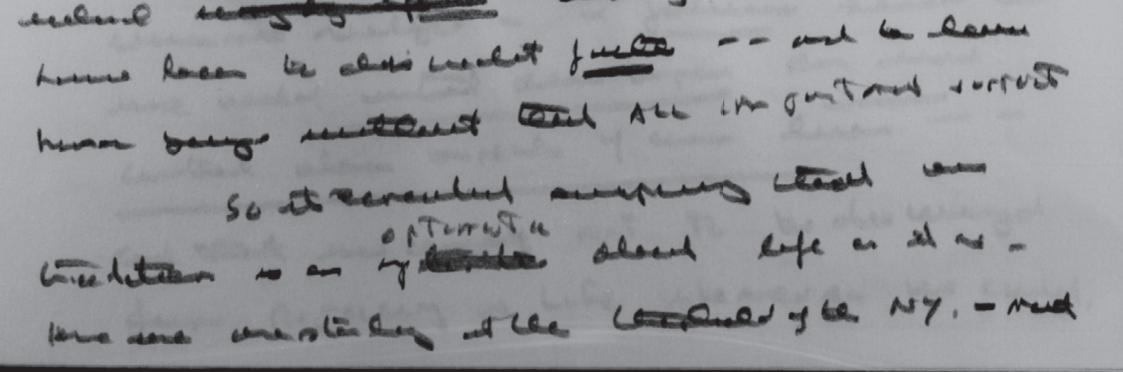


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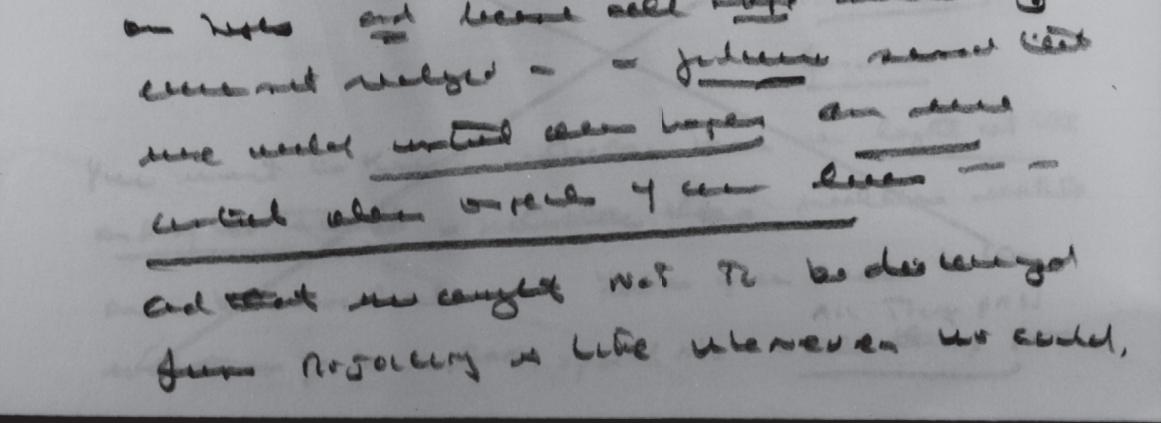
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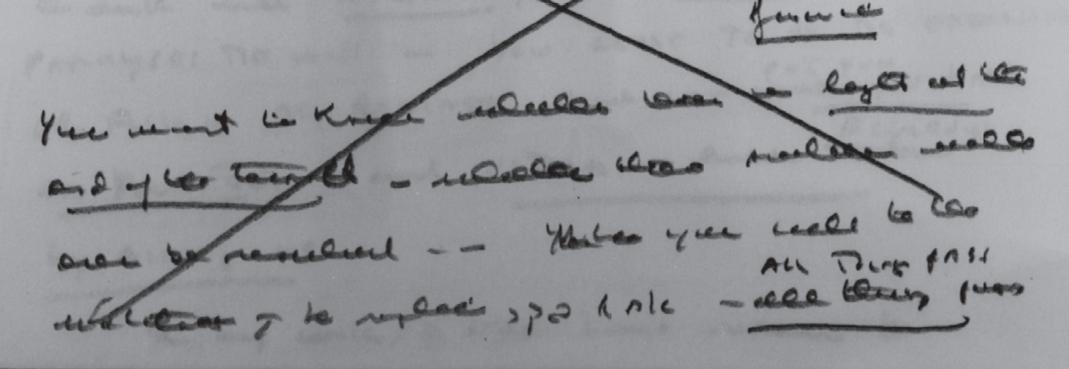
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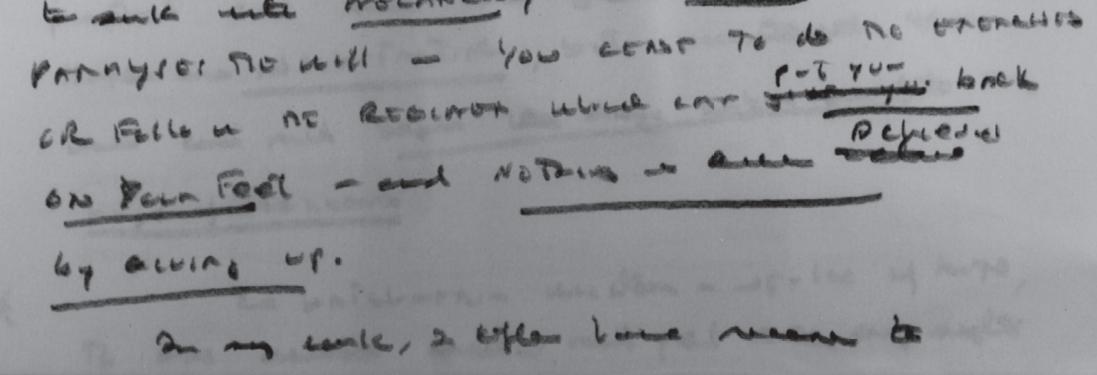


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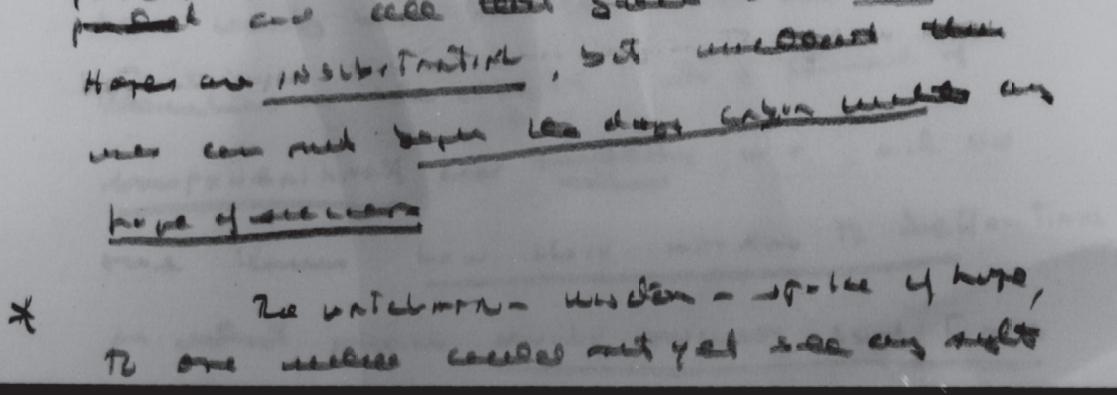
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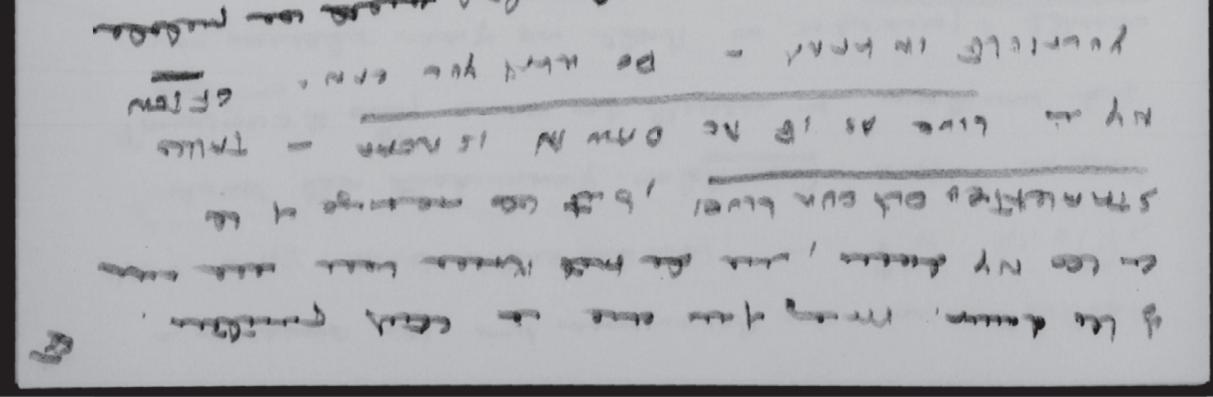
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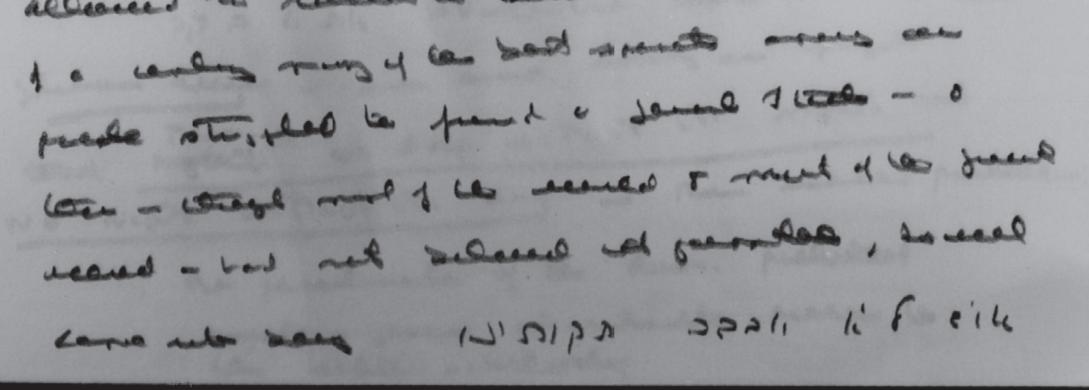
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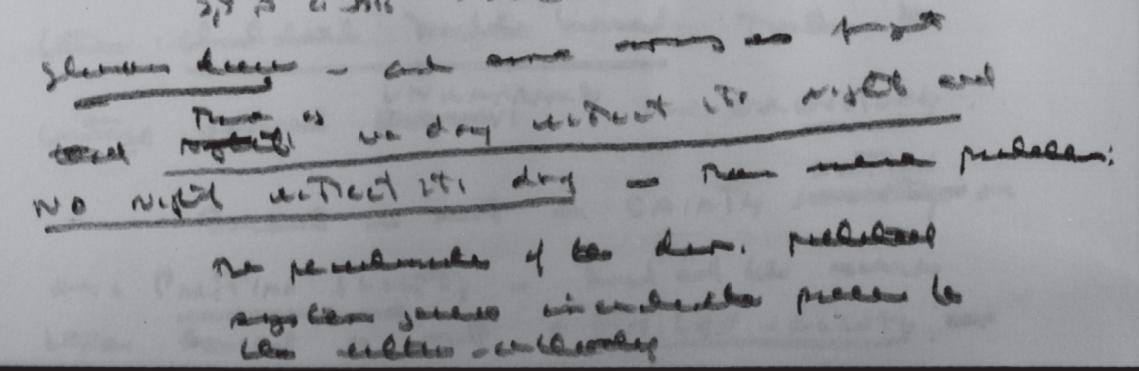
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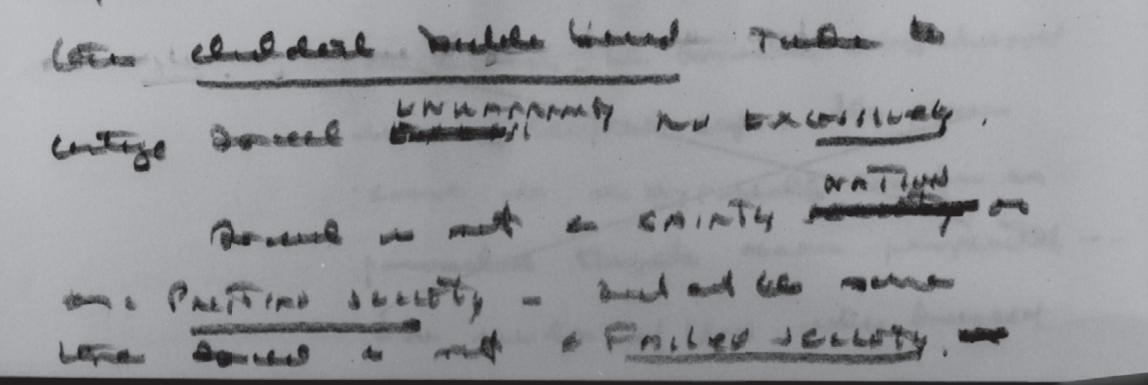
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