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Articles, "From the Rabbi's Desk," reprinted from the Temple  
Bulletin, 1961.

**FROM  
THE  
RABBI'S DESK**



**Daniel Jeremy Silver**





**Reprinted from  
The Temple Bulletin  
1957-1961**

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**THE TEMPLE  
CLEVELAND, OHIO**



## THE PURPOSE OF THE PULPIT

I have often been asked how a rabbi determines the topics of his sermons. Our sermons flow from the nature of the pulpit. The pulpit has a unique personality, quite unlike any other lecture platform. Where the scholar proposes to acquaint and the orator to sway, the minister seeks to weigh and to pass in judgment the personal habits, social practices, and political arrangements of our society.

Each sermon tries to describe some area of human activity from the vantage point of basic moral commitment. Speaking from a committed moral position, the pulpit cannot always agree with conventional wisdom. Judaism prizes virtue more than success, justice above convenience, and kindness more than self-seeking. I heard the remark long ago that the sermons most enjoyed were those which dealt with Biblical heroics. Undoubtedly such sermons have a place, but the burden of preaching is to spark the spiritual heroism of today's congregant.

Moral and religious questions underlie every aspect of our lives. So while some sermons deal with the manifestly religious questions of belief and prayer and ritual, others deal with complicated patterns of human relationships, with the intricate arrangement of community organization, or with the tenuous establishment of world peace. Judaism has definite ideas about right and wrong, about the sanctity of the home, about the importance of education, about the discipline of work, about the social virtues of gentleness and generosity, and about the proper arrangement of a just society. The sermon attempts to relate these values to current tensions.

A rabbi tries to balance his sermon schedule so that it includes questions of faith, questions of character, and questions of political concern. He tries, in the course of a preaching season, to deal with the issues that concern his congregation and with those that ought to be of concern. The public press, television and the radio, private conversation and his own reflection mirror the areas in which comment is indicated.

There are many-paged anthologies crammed with tested and effective preaching. Why does any preacher worth his salt persist in the laborious and sometimes difficult writing of each and every effort? Admittedly, the pressures of congregational activity make tempting a parroting of another's creation, but the preacher is blessed, or cursed, with a mind and views of his own. However well set up another's outline, it reflects another's priorities and suggestions, not



one's own. All judgments are tentative, none more difficult than those involving men and their passions. Every pulpit reflects the burden of honored values, but suggests its own adjustments.

Every pulpit errs. Architecture raises the pulpit a few feet above the pew floor, but ordination does not purge ordinary faults and frailties. Ours remains always a human role and a human voice.

A sermon involves judgment, but it does not require condemnation. Sweet reason becomes the pulpit more than the thunder and angry lightning of denunciation. The bench judges and metes out punishment. The pulpit judges and maps out amendment.

How do we determine our sermon schedule? We try to concentrate on problems uppermost in people's minds. We try to balance discussion of personal, family and public interests. We speak out when to do so will be helpful. We do so because our faith and the times require it.

March 1, 1959

## IS RELIGION ALWAYS IN THE RIGHT?

By and large, Americans approve of religion. Each Saturday the press is filled with advertisements urging us to attend the church of our choice. Colleges undertake religious emphasis programs. Public occasions begin with an invocation. For their good work religious institutions are granted tax relief.

We Americans favor religious affirmation and by and large decry religious bigotry. The voice of America was clear and unmistakable during the presidential campaign. Constitutionally and morally, a man's religious profession is not a bar to office. As Americans we know the futility and folly of competitive religious argument. My religion is not necessarily better than your religion; it is simply better for me.

Unfortunately, not all religion is respectable. Often the aura of a carnival side-show permeates. Miracles on cue are still a stock in trade of some religious charlatans.

Unfortunately, too, not every religious purpose is commendable. Religions have selfish as well as noble ends. Some denominations seek a ban on literature which attacks ideas sacred to them. Others would convert the public school into a Sunday school. Others disapprove entirely of public school education. A religious label does not guarantee a program's worth.



All too often religious organizations seek to impose their disciplines upon non-believers. Birth control legislation and Sunday closing laws are cases in point. So is prohibition. In short, one is neither anti-religious nor un-American nor inspired of the devil if he finds himself in honest disagreement with some particular denominational program or policy.

With their increasing strength, our religious institutions will increasingly attempt to influence national policy. Much of this influence will be for the good. Much, however, will be a matter for debate. At issue will be the future of the public school, censorship, Sunday closing laws, planned parenthood and the continued separation of church and state. Let us debate these issues without rancor but let us have debate. We can disagree without being disagreeable. We can respect religion and the religious without necessarily agreeing with every denomination's social and political ends.

No one need be ill at ease or cowed if the negative is taken by a man in a black robe or a turned collar. A platform which bears the label "secular" is not necessarily inferior to one which bears a religious imprimatur. The religious way is the right way — sometimes. The right way is a necessity at all times.

November 13, 1960



## OF WAR AND PEACE

I am not easily shocked, but I was shocked December 7th last. Opening the newspaper, I came face to face with two photographic enlargements of the atomic bombs which we had dropped into Japan in 1945. These missiles were posed with that attention to detail which Tiffany reserves for royal diadems. The accompanying article made much of the engineering skill and unique explosive power which these shells represented. Indeed, only by way of after-thought did the release indicate that these two bombs had atomized one hundred and fifty thousand men, women, and children. No question was raised whether these nightmarish weapons deserved such glamorific publicity.

As a child I remember being puzzled that our Museum of Art should display knights in full armor and hundreds of carefully honed swords, spears, and maces. I have never found beauty in murder nor in weapons of bloodletting. The attention given weapons by the human race testifies only to the beast within us. Despite the engineering achievement these bombs represent, I cannot look at them except to shudder, nor in viewing them can I share any pride of national accomplishment.



How can we look at such weapons with pride? How can we reduce them to scale and give them to our children as toys, or set them up in our public squares for family excursions? War is not a game. Guns are not toys. The hydrogen bomb does not represent the finest accomplishment of human civilization.

Perhaps such bombs are necessary. Some claim that peace can be preserved only through the present balance of terror. I question this position, but surely all of us can agree that we ought to know these bombs for what they are — daemonic, satanic instruments of indiscriminate murder, evidence at best of our civilization's tenuous hold on life.

Atomic weaponry has developed its own set of euphemisms. We speak of clean bombs, tactical weapons, and limited warfare. We treat our capacity for bloodshed antiseptically, when the simple truth is that our weapon stockpile represents neither more nor less than a stored up capacity for massive bloodletting.

Why do I insist that we see these weapons for what they are? Because no one can be comfortable until every atomic or hydrogen warhead has been deactivated. They cannot be accepted as necessities. Ultimately they represent the destruction of every value necessary to human life. It is folly to assume that our world can survive an unceasing atomic arms race. Atomic weapons mean atomic war. Atomic war means a hundred million corpses. The triumph of our age will not be the engineering of new weapons systems but the engineering of world peace and world order and international disarmament.



December 25, 1960

## ON UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

The sensitive fingers and careful rakes of many archaeologists are sifting the dust of the Near East for details of ancient history. Some of the sites being investigated correspond to cities and places mentioned in the Bible. Many of the artifacts uncovered surprisingly confirm the evidence of Scripture.

It is good to know that Israel's chroniclers were fairly careful historians. It is important to remember, however, that a religion's merit rests on its spiritual vision, not on the accuracy of its chronicles. The Bible or the New Testament or, for that matter, the Koran might be entirely accurate as history, but uninspiring and hence worthless as sacred literature. Or, conversely, the Bible or the New Testament or the Koran may develop highly fictionalized accounts without their spiritual value being debased. The Book of Ruth is



patently an historical romance, yet no gentler illustration of ordinary human greatness has ever been written. The Book of Kings is a substantially dependable treatment of Israel's monarchy, yet few of its pages ennoble.

This is by way of answering a question put the other day. One who takes a jaundiced view of Scripture asked whether I understood the Bible completely. My skeptic was reacting to an all too often unacknowledged fact. There are many meanings in our Bible which are uncertain, and some few phrases which are even undecipherable. English translations render every sentence, but to know the Hebrew original is to realize that some of these translations are pure guess work. There are words whose precise meaning has been lost and even whole phrases whose grammar or syntax defy secure translation.

No, I do not understand the Bible completely. No one does. That is why I value so highly the work of those who research the text and its background. Because of their patience we understand the Bible better today than we did a generation ago. We will understand it even more clearly a generation hence.

But what has all this to do with faith? Presumably, if I do not fully understand the Bible I cannot look on it as holy. As I listen to a symphony I do not visualize every note and bar, yet I leave with a definite impression of beauty. So it is with the Bible. There are difficult passages, even some meaningless passages. There are some passages with which I entirely disagree. Yet I cannot escape the text's impact and vigor.

The Bible precipitated a world-wide revolution. It records man's first and classic attempt to reach out from enslavement toward freedom, from ignorance toward knowledge, from imposed tyranny toward justice, from superstition toward enlightenment, from idolatry toward the one spiritual Creator.

Scholars study and research the Iliad in much the same way as they treat Isaiah. Through their work they have broadened our understanding of Homer. The Iliad, however, remains literature, while Isaiah remains alive. Why? The difference lies in the quality of the material, not in the ability of the scholars. Epic Hebrew literature possesses a moral fervor and a humane philosophy largely lacking in epic Greek poetry. The Bible's moral vision still thrills, and so it is still revered.

The Bible is holy because it has precipitated holiness. It will remain holy as long as men are ennobled and causes inspired by its teachings.

May 14, 1961



## SOME THOUGHTS OF THOUGHTFUL STUDENTS

During the first ten weeks of the school year I conduct a course in liturgy for the Confirmation Class. We discuss the meaning of prayer, the development of the synagogue, and the make-up of the prayer book. In a final quiz I ask the class to examine briefly public worship. I found many of their statements quite thoughtful.

"When we pray by ourselves we usually pray for ourselves." How true. Private prayer is born of personal concern, and usually ends once the need has been voiced. The "I" is dominant. Contrast congregational worship, where the "we" appears throughout. The prayer book emphasizes the common weal and community responsibility rather than personal need. Another Confirmand phrased it, "Public prayer brings us together and discourages selfishness."

One young scholar observed, "Public prayer has been developed so that prayer will become something more than petition." By instinct we say 'Help me.' 'Give me.' Through the discipline of worship we learn to say 'Let me help.' 'Let me give.' When we pray privately we often act as if God were a doting grandfather, who can be whined into acquiescence. When we worship publicly God appears as He is, the source of wisdom and values, and we learn to speak praise and make pledge.

In the early years of the twentieth century it was a mark of sophistication to belittle public worship. Public prayer seemed so much less "honest" than the unprompted outpouring of the heart. Why was a book, a building, and a fixed hour necessary when one could pray at any hour, wholly at his own bidding and with his own words, not those set down for him by others. There is a confusion here of prayer with the organized religious discipline which we call worship. Prayer is instinctive. Worship is organized. Prayer is supplication. Worship is meditation. The voice of worship is the voice of gratitude, even for routine; the voice of encouragement, even in happiness; the voice of challenge, even when self-satisfied; the voice of consolation, even in despair. Worship is an organization of prayer which raises it to a higher dimension. It is a crystallization of religious insight placed against the conventional wisdom. It is a re-affirmation of standards beyond the accepted, of needs beyond the personal, and of ideals common to ancient prophet and all men of good will.

Sometimes a student's thought surprises. I read in one paper, "Public prayer is important because it shows that we are willing to stand up for our religion and not be embarrassed to pray to God." Frankly, I had never thought of public prayer in precisely these terms, yet the act of public worship is an act of personal commitment. It is a first step towards abiding one's faith. Not to have the courage to be counted among the body of religious men and women casts doubt upon the sincerity of any protestation.



These teen agers have become quite adept in the philosophy of prayer. They know that 'to pray' and 'to pray for' are not equivalent human moods. All of us might judge worship more fairly and participate in worship more wholeheartedly if we shared their understanding.

November 30, 1958

## THOUGHTS ON THE INAUGURATION

Inauguration Day bears a unique American hallmark. The dignitaries are in diplomatic formal attire but the speeches speak of America to America, and the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, with its prancing cowboys, hat-waving governors and shivering drum majorettes is American to the core.

I have been thinking a good bit about this Inauguration Day — what I hope will be said and what I hope the day augurs for our nation and the world. Above all I hope that under the new administration we can regain our native American idealism. We expect raw geopolitics from ancient ministries. Saber rattling is a habit among many European governments. Some rulers have no scruples about pressing to their bosom scandalous adventurers and dirty handed despots. But that is not the American way.

American politics have never been pristine. Equally, they have never been purely selfish or callously self-interested. We wanted and want not only to promote America but to promote the cause of justice and freedom throughout the world. Occasionally economic interest got the upper hand, but by and large we have been a good neighbor sensitive to the needs of the world and the legitimate ambitions of other countries and peoples.

Since the end of the Second World War we have been following a hard-nosed program of so-called political realism. Our leaders told us to grow up. They said that we live in a cruel, complicated world, a world which respects only power, a world which would only laugh away idealism as naive. Yet the military alliances with self-serving and oppressive forces, born of this political realism, are not only out of character but unsuccessful. We live in a revolutionary world and we cannot allow the revolutionaries by default to the Soviet. It is time that we again identified ourselves with the cause of liberty and economic justice. This means less concern with military alliance, more foreign aid for economic development, an increasing reliance on the United Nations, and a greater patience towards neutralism. It also means a possible end to anti-American riots throughout the world.



Uncle Sam astride an atomic cannon is an incongruous image. This long-legged, Lincoln-esque gentleman ought rather to be figured stubbornly clinging to principle, inventively supporting progress, and not too proud to clasp the hand of cooperation and peace.

January twentieth I hope to witness his return to such familiar and becoming pursuits.

January 15, 1961

## OF MOVIES AND THE BIBLE

Of late, Biblical films have been the vogue. Hollywood has repeatedly and lucratively mined the romance and pageantry of Scripture. Press agents tell us that more such cinema is on the way.

I suppose that this is testimony to the much publicized American religious revival. The Bible is good box office. Church and synagogue groups can be exploited to boost attendance. Everyone ought to be happy. May I confess that I am not?

I do not suggest that these films do conscious violence to the texts from which they are drawn. If anything, they are slavishly literal. I am not complaining that they are unhistorical. Often the research involved has been prodigious. Nor do I complain about their lavish cost, although their production figures might build many a hospital or school.

Why, then, my concern? Partially because I dislike seeing the Bible reduced to the dollars and cents of a commercial enterprise, but largely because these films tend to be coarse and violence-soaked, more interested in the details of human passion than in the truths of searing prophecy. Finally, because they exploit the legendary and the mythical and transmute these poetic fancies into crude, improbable miracles with the unfortunate implication that religion rests its case on such side show legerdemain.



Hollywood can explain its method. The shocking and the violent swell admission. Large sects of religious primitives still sanction every scrap of improbable legend and might howl blasphemy if these were treated imaginatively. When you court a massive audience you must be careful not to offend. But whatever their explanation, as long as caution and commerce rule out poetry and art, the result will remain banal, if not vulgar.



The Bible cries out for interpretation. The Bible is poetry; fanciful, brilliant, full of insight, profound in characterization. There is nothing undignified or inappropriate about a fanciful recreation of a Bible story. In each generation Michaelangelos, Rembrandts, and Chagalls have sought to capture the essence of a single Biblical moment. Hollywood, unfortunately, has used a wide screen rather than a subtle focus. Consequently Hollywood has contributed an art form which appeals to man's senses rather than his heart, to his stomach rather than his spirit, to his physical rather than his moral passions.

David managed his sword with the skill of a professional, his eye could be turned by a pretty ankle, but he was also a poet king of exceptional literary power and a child of a rough and violent age who grew in wisdom and in control. Any filming of Scriptural history ought detail the soul as well as the sword. This is Hollywood's challenge. To meet it will require a daring and a sensitivity which has so far not been evidenced.

February 28, 1960



## OFFICE MUSINGS

This is the first column I have written at my new desk in my new office. It seems strange, after a year and a half of makeshift, finally to be settled. Strangely, I somehow miss inviting you into the nearest classroom to talk things over.

This lovely office is a wonderful asset, but it is not the office itself but the use to which it is put that ultimately determines its worth. Our makeshift quarters were pleasant. They were pleasant because they were filled with men and women planning Temple activities, discussing The Temple's wellbeing, working out the school's curriculum and airing questions and problems. Surely these were good quarters, because they were busy quarters.

What does a rabbi do in his office? When I can, I catch a moment to read and do research for my classes and lectures. But most of my day is spent in conference and on the telephone. This morning a father spent some time with me discussing the schooling of his child. A staff meeting was held to program school assemblies. A young couple came in to discuss marriage. A group was here from the Public Library to plan an evening on the life and teachings of Moses Maimonides. By noon I had made several calls on Temple business, answered a good bit of correspondence, and worked on a new edition of our Elementary School Prayer Book. This schedule is not unusual. It is to the



rabbi's office that members and their children come for advice and encouragement. It is in the rabbi's office that groups meet to plan the varied activities of the congregation. It is with the rabbi that young people, very much in love, discuss their wedding and their hopes.

There are times when a rabbi cannot be helpful. Believe it or not, there are questions a rabbi cannot answer. Sometimes when you come to this study I will refer you to local social welfare agencies. There are many agencies well equipped to provide financial assistance, to offer psychiatric counseling, or to help solve many of the tensions of family life. A rabbi is primarily a teacher and spiritual leader. He is not a professionally trained psychiatrist or a social worker. Each area requires its own skills and knowledge, and it is the better part of wisdom not to overreach your abilities.

But the rabbi's door is always open. I trust that you will make good use of our new study.

November 2, 1958



## OUR CHANGING WORLD

A home is built, bought, then re-sold. Ordinarily this information would command a brief paragraph in the real estate news, satisfying our curiosity as to the mortgage a friend is undertaking. But this particular home was built in an exclusive suburb, bought by an epidermically acceptable prospective settler, and re-sold to one whose skin color raised a question of admissibility.

What particularly intrigued me about this incident was the awkward, foot-in-gaping-mouth position in which this suburb's Mayor found himself. On Wednesday he told a group of clergymen, "We live in a changing world and we have changing neighborhoods." On Thursday, after the news became public, he told a reporter, "I will fight with every means and ability to prevent infiltration in those neighborhoods where the neighbors are content with the status quo."

The Mayor's position does not do him credit. A changing suburb requires calm, helpful leadership. Instead, the Mayor fanned the very flames of fear and confusion which must at all costs be kept under control.

I find the Mayor's dilemma not only tragic but symbolic. Many of us, like him, espouse equality and justice as long as integration takes place in another part of town. We are dedicated social liberals as long as only white children play on our green lawns. Forced to face up to a changing neighborhood, we



put up a "For Sale" sign and scurry away to seek another suburb which has not yet been afflicted with the disease of democracy. Is it not time that everyone accepted the reality and the rightness of modern living? The 1960s will see profound social changes. In the South there will be integrated schools, in the North integrated suburbs. Economics, politics, and simple justice demand it.

We can no longer pay the price of private prejudice. Culturally, educationally, financially, legally, many a colored person is the equal, if not the better, of the average white suburbanite and understandably wants the same opportunities for himself and his children. Shall we flee? Mass exodus will only lower the value of our homes. Shall we be fearful? Of what? Are the lives of our children not the richer for knowing those of other backgrounds and persuasions? In our tense and anxious world can we afford the bitterness of community strife, a bitterness inevitable if we attempt to bar our gates? What we must do is learn to live in the twentieth century in that spirit which our prophets commanded thirty centuries ago. It will not be easy. There are no simple, wholly adequate solutions. But this much is evident — those neighbors who extended a hand of welcome understood the dimensions of modern life. The Mayor, protesting loudly both pious platitude and the prejudices of property, is a man who has not yet faced squarely the challenge of our times.

November 6, 1960



## WHAT SHALL WE GIVE?

This is the season when America becomes possessed — possessed of a mania for gifts and gift giving. Now, I have no quarrel with gift giving. There is too much tight-fistedness in this world for anyone to be critical even of calendar-determined generosity. A national predisposition to share and to bring joy is to be applauded even if it evidences itself only one month in twelve.

I am concerned, however, with the integrity of Chanukah. Chanukah is in danger of being drowned in the flood of our December generosity. It all began with an occasional exchange of 'Chanukah gelt.' Next, gaily wrapped presents were exchanged on the first night. Now, such is progress that some children receive presents every night.

I suspect there is something of a 'See, our holiday is better than their holiday' attitude in all of this. I decry that attitude as psychologically over-indulgent and needlessly competitive. Judaism's worth does not rest on the advantage that a child receives eight presents instead of one.



If our culture insists on Chanukah giving, so be it. But let the giving be in moderation. After all, Chanukah rests on a principle rather than on presents. It marks a victory for the free man over a thought-controlling, arrogant and all-powerful tyrant. If we expect our children to have a system of values which transcends materialism we must guide them towards these values.

The battle of free men, for freedom of speech and assembly — for all that we label civil liberties — is still joined and the issue is still uncertain. The free world confronts the controlled world of the Soviet. Emerging nations are vacillating between old-new tyrants and old-new liberties. In our own country there are those who seek to shut down dissent, to impose censorship, and who insist on political or religious conformity. The ritual of Chanukah is the lighting of the eight-candled Menorah. The Menorah commemorates a skirmish for freedom long since won in a war for freedom not yet won. For our free society to survive our children must understand and cherish these candles bright.

December 12, 1960



## ON ART AND THE SYNAGOGUE

Once upon a time every god had a favorite address. Callers could view his portrait hanging above the fireplace or pass before a well-cut likeness in the patio court. Later on, artists abandoned realism in favor of impressionist studies. Some began to represent their gods with stylized symbols — the halo, the extended hand, the Alpha and Omega.

In all ages, men have revered their deities with a rich and brilliant art. The Jew did not. God was neither pictured nor symbolized. No icons were sculptured. Even colorful recreations of beloved Biblical stories were not admitted into our sanctuaries.

Assessing this attitude towards sacred art, some authorities pundit that our people lack an esthetic sense. Artistic ability is a rare talent but it is not racial. Jews keep their sanctuaries pristine, not because of their genes but because of the command "Make no graven image nor any manner of likeness." Behind this rule lies a theology which affirms God as the creative source of life but denies that God can be figured in any form or shape. God is the Spirit of holiness. God's address is the Universe. God's form is the majesty of nature. God's symmetry is the movement of life. God's signature is the achievement of man. Man can sense God but not describe Him. God is beyond any and all human comparison.



Men who fill their temples with images run the risk of mistaking representation for reality. Men who fill their temples with images run the risk of believing that God uniquely dwells within those walls. Much as we would like to feel superior, we cannot allow ourselves this vanity. God is as concerned with a Sunday morning sleeper as with a Sunday morning worshipper. A man who attends is more concerned with himself — but this is another story.

Bare walls need not be ugly walls. Our temples are anything but shabby. Our museum is crammed with magnificent ritual objects testifying to the artistic vigor of our people. Of the beauty of the temple little need be said, but of its lack of image, icon and statuary much can be said. It testifies to a faith angry with even the suspicion of superstition. It testifies to a faith determined not to confuse myth for reality. It testifies to a faith determined that God be known as He is.

April 16, 1961

## TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS

Each year at this time my desk is deluged with calendars. Everybody, it seems, is concerned that I schedule my life, and eager that I carry out this schedule under the watchful eye of a company's trade-mark.

A culture reveals itself in small details. Concern with dates and diaries is unique to the West. Time is for us our greatest asset and its swift passage our greatest frustration. In Asia the calendar business must be a poor one indeed.

Recently, I was particularly taken by a magnificent calendar which came to me from Israel. It was developed by one of Israel's new paper-making industries. It features an amazingly accurate reproduction of twelve leaves from a medieval hand-illuminated holiday prayer book; and showing a consideration and a taste often missing in American counterparts, each leaf is detachable from the journal. The twelve sheaves can be bound and kept permanently without advertisement in a specially prepared folder.

Time is important. Western culture has the proper time perspective. We have only so many hours and so many days to develop our talents, to build our families, to contribute to our communities, and to help establish peace in our world. A lack of concern with time's swift passage is not the mark of superior wisdom, but of long-standing frustration. It is the philosophic rationale of a society to whom change seems out of the question.



I especially like the idea of a calendar appended to leaves of a prayer book. One can live frenetically but meaninglessly. We can be very busy but very wasteful of our time and frivolous of our energies. A reminder that energy ought to be husbanded for worthwhile activity is always appropriate. It helps us to strike a valuable balance between the conflicting claims of society and self, of service and private entertainment, of the fireside and involvement in activities which pull us outside our homes.

I do not know whether you received this particular calendar, but I do hope that as you sum achievement and plan ahead you will recall this calendar prayer book and consider whether you are simply tired from running in place or are pacing yourself intelligently and are making acceptable progress towards prized laurels and goals.

December 20, 1959

## ON MAKING A VISIT OF CONDOLENCE

For many, one of life's most awkward moments is the visit to a friend who is in mourning. We are never quite sure just what to say.

As a rabbi, I enter such homes more often than most. From time to time, I am asked what one should say and how one should act. The best rule I know is simply to extend honest sympathy and to be a good listener.

There are some who, when they make such a visit, busily set about making small talk. If death is mentioned they quickly change the subject. They insist that everybody busy himself with the weather, politics, or grandchildren. They even make small jokes. Such visitors are, of course, well-intentioned, but I am afraid that they are often misdirected. There are times when idle chit-chat may be welcome. The week of mourning is a long week. But there are also times when such a forced diversion is definitely out of place. Death is a fact which simply cannot be denied. In grief our emotions are pent up and cry out for release. It is good and necessary to be able to unburden ourselves.

There are prattlers and there are probers. Most of us have read a little psychology and know that one of the remedies for grief is the expression of feeling. So some enter a house of mourning determined not to allow the mourners to keep a stiff upper lip. They tearfully pull at every heartstring and one wonders to whose benefit. Each person has his own emotional make-up. The mourner must choose his own time and occasion to open his heart. A great deal of unnecessary pain can be caused by thoughtlessly forcing the issue.



Particularly unnecessary in a house of mourning is any discussion of one's own bereavements. It is understandable that many feel that the mourner will be comforted by recognizing that he belongs to a fraternity of the bereaved. Honest reflection will reveal, however, that we introduce our loss not to comfort but to be comforted — changing places, as it were, with the bereaved. The week of mourning is sufficiently difficult without adding your burden to that which is already felt.

I have always admired simple honesty in human relations. Amateurs that most of us are in the field of psychiatry, such honesty is still the best rule of thumb. Speak what is in your heart. Listen quietly and helpfully. Be gracious, and remember that however much your first visit was welcome, your second visit a week or a month later will be even more precious.

February 1, 1959

## ON THE CAMPAIGN AND THE CAMPAIGNERS

A national campaign is in full swing and all of us are being forced to do that which we like least, make up our minds.

I am always thrilled by a campaign, not so much by the speeches and slogans, which become repetitious, as by its evidence of democracy at work. Ours is not a perfect system. The process of nomination by party convention and certification by a college of electors leaves much to be desired. In every campaign, calloused appeals are made to prejudice, emotion and the pocket-book. But by and large our campaigns raise and debate the major issues facing the nation and the elected receives a mandate for his platform from the nation.

We choose in a campaign. The elected are changed by a campaign. Surely the regimen of hand-shaking, baby-kissing and sweet-talking tries a man's patience, but as the candidate rubs shoulders with the people he becomes more sensitive to their will and more responsible as agent of that will.

Actually, there is no perfect political system. Every political system lends itself to abuse. In its early history, Israel's leaders were chosen sometimes by birth, sometimes by class, at times by age, and even at times by a form of suffrage. Each method had its successes and its failures. What saves our nation is not our system or even the responsibility and character of those who seek office, but the spirit in which political choice is made. The American



political system cannot guarantee that the elected will abide their platforms or be uncorrupted by power. Yet the Hardings have been few, largely, I believe, because a determined people chooses determined and dedicated men. A serious minded people frustrates the candidate who will toy with them for his own selfish ends. They will not be stampeded, and they will not allow themselves to be dismissed as a Roman mob whose witlessness may be easily manipulated to an official's advantage.

Party leaders know that Americans expect competence and character in their major office holders. In national elections Americans choose wisely. Unfortunately, we are not as passionately interested in the lesser offices and consequently we must often choose between inadequate men. When we become sophisticated on every level of political decision the measure of candidates for these offices too will rise and we will be better served. For in simple truth the wisdom of our choosing determines the quality of the chosen.

October 13, 1960

## THOUGHTS ON IMMORTALITY

"Rabbi, after death what?" No question is asked of me more frequently. "What does Judaism believe about immortality?" — which is another way of saying "When I die, what will happen to me?"

I do not know. No one does. The curtain which masks eternity cannot be drawn. No round-trip passage has ever been completed. No one and no faith can say with certainty "Here is a picture of heaven" or "This is the geography of the City of God."

Simply put, faith holds that as God brought us into life and sustains us, so will He shield and sustain us beyond the grave. Judaism believes in immortality, but we make no attempt to define its terms. The grave is not the end but we cannot describe that which it begins. That knowledge is God's alone.

Men have speculated endlessly on the after-life. Human psychology, embodying as it does a life urge, assures that we will continue to speculate hopefully — to what profit no man can say. Nor need we know. Let men tend to their knitting. God is certainly capable of tending to His. After all, we do what we do not for a heavenly credit memo but because such work is right and proper.

Beyond such a restatement of faith, perhaps only this thought can be added profitably. Religions which chart the after-life usually attempt to incorporate themselves as the visa bureau franchised to validate credentials.



Men who describe their personal version of the life beyond often use the occasion to relieve themselves by placing hated enemies in some boiling purgatory. Dante, for all his genius, is a case in point. Yet surely, whatever the after-life may be, it is neither one man's private property nor one faith's restricted subdivision.

Faith suggests. Faith is best expressed through the poet's vocabulary of symbol and image. We are mistaken when we make this vision specific. No anger is more futile and no bad blood more unnecessary than that which develops when men confuse fact for faith and break lances and heads over issues which are fundamentally unknown and unknowable.

April 9, 1961

## THE MOOD OF THE CAMPUS

One senses a new mood among college students. The question period after campus lectures once revolved on existentialism, the Jewish doctrine of man, and Martin Buber. Today I am more likely to be challenged on Judaism's activities in bettering race relations, in changing the moral climate of American life, and in improving the chances for world peace.

Headlines tell a similar story. During the 1950s world events did not seem to disturb the equanimity of collegiate life. All about, one heard the strident voice of Senator McCarthy, and threats of violence should school desegregation be ordered. Serious issues troubled the nation, yet the turbulent world of mid-century spawned surprisingly few student marches, mass petitions, or angry debates. Traditionally, college enthusiasms are volatile and easily engaged. During the 1950s the campus was preternaturally quiescent.

Not so today. The sit-in demonstrations were begun by and organized by Negro college students. I cannot recall a single mass protest organized over Little Rock, but many a campus, north and south, has seen organized parades and protests over lunch counter privilege. Press releases from the White House Conference on Children and Youth tell of collegians insisting that the Conference take a clear and positive stand on social issues despite the desire of the Conference leadership to avoid controversy. I find young Republican and Democratic clubs everywhere being organized in anticipation of the Fall election. I find enthusiasm for the suggested Peace Corps. Foreign and domestic policies are again being discussed heatedly before, during, and after study. The youth want not only to learn but to change.



I find this change refreshing. The voice of youth is sometimes raucous, often-times radical, and not always realistic, but when its voice is not heard in the land, there is cause for concern. The young dream a nation's dreams. They are impatient with a nation's failings. Their voice is the voice of a society's conscience. When the voice of youth is silent today's compromises harden into tomorrow's injustices. To hear again of students picketing, debating, petitioning and volunteering, is therefore cause for hope.

April 17, 1960

## THE MEANING OF KOREA

This is by way of a personal footnote to current headlines. As a Chaplain, I was in and out of Korea during most of 1953 and 1954. Every month or so I became a circuit rider visiting scattered Navy and Marine units in the Korean area.

South Korea's internal political tensions were evident even then. Rumor had it that Syngman Rhee's first act on our retaking many communities was a purge of political opponents. Critical opinion was rigidly censored. Political rallies were by order of the government.

The Korean government encouraged an almost total separation of American service men and local citizens. We were invited to sight-see. The shrines and temples of South Korea could be visited. But personal contacts were frowned upon and we were forbidden to enter most homes and even many places of business. I tried many times to engage priests and others with whom I had official contact in discussion of current issues, invariably to no avail.

During the shooting, our government did not seem much exercised by these restrictions nor by the mounting evidence of despotism and cruelty which these regulations were designed to blanket. Mr. Rhee's strong-arm behavior was rationalized as a military necessity. After all, even in America certain civil rights are set aside in time of war. But with the cease-fire there was no change in our attitude. We continued to remain silent despite pyramiding evidence of naked tyranny. Korea was almost totally dependent upon our military support and financial aid, yet little if anything was done to stimulate her democratic development. Now, tardily but strongly, America has expressed disapproval of one man rule and a concern for the establishment of republican institutions. Such expression is welcome but hardly convincing. Actions speak louder than words, and a decade of inaction cannot be erased by what must seem



to the Korean pious platitude. We missed our opportunity. A decade ago an expression of principle might have avoided the current bloodshed and, to be selfish about it, might have prevented us from being identified with the hated and now ousted overlord.

I recall a visit to a shrine near Pusan. My guide was a respected village elder. I asked him about American-Korean relations. He made no direct answer save this cryptic observation: "I am eighty. People respect my judgment. They no longer respect my physical strength."

When strong men fall, as inevitably they must, their backers reap an international whirlwind. This is self evident, yet we sustained Rhee in power for a decade and more. The best light in which the whole issue can be viewed is that our eagerness for military advantage forced our judgment. History gives the lie to such compromise. If the current Korean crisis has any meaning it is that in the long term power is always disputed. Only principles retain respect. In the long run our international position rests not on military support or even foreign aid but on vigorous adherence to fundamental principle and the sympathy nobility excites in the hearts of men.

May 8, 1960



## ON PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH

"Rabbi, will you break a glass at my wedding? I really don't want it for myself, but there is a great-aunt in the family who is orthodox."

It is easy to be accommodating, but is it always wise? How often I discover the "orthodox" great-aunt happily eating shrimp at the wedding feast. How often I discover that her orthodoxy is a label and an emotion, not a loyalty or a conviction. My Reform Judaism is a mature conviction. I believe that the custom of breaking a glass introduces a coarse note into the wedding service. I believe that it is no longer necessary to symbolize so broadly the sexual basis of marriage.

Reform Judaism has its own structure. There are rituals we practice and rituals we do not, prayers we voice and prayers we do not. There is a reason for our practice and for the changes which Reform has brought. I wonder if Reform Jews ought easily to set aside their convictions in deference to tradition when and if tradition goes no deeper than half-understood sentimentality.



I will happily participate in any ritual which has meaning and is part of the life of believing men and women. I wonder, however, if the accommodation ought always be by the convinced Liberal Jew. Reform exists because Judaism urgently needed a new dress in the modern world. This new style caught the public's fancy. It alone made it possible for many to commit their hearts to the essentials of our faith. If we wish to further Judaism's relevance what do we achieve by asking a bride and groom to turn from the teachings of their temple and the practices of their home for some older tradition, however venerable, which of necessity must be little understood and superficial? It is anachronistic to see two Confirmands, attended by fellow Confirmands, surrounded by parents who are members of a Reform congregation, wearing skull caps at their wedding for perhaps the first and only time of their lives. Ought we not to respect the religious sensitivity of the young as much as we respect the memories of an older generation?

Ought we not to ask ourselves this question: does our desire to be agreeable confuse the public image of Liberal Judaism? It is charged that Reform is simply an accommodation, a watering down of Judaism for those who have not the heart nor the will to practice its traditions. We say Reform is a matter of conviction. We say we have changed certain traditions, not to make them easier but to make Judaism more vigorous and its truths more vital. The ease with which we accommodate deliberately discarded practices seems to belie the necessity of change.

December 13, 1959

## WE BATTLE FOR OUR MINDS

We deplore brain-washing. Every connotation of brain-washing is noxious. Symbolic of the brain-washed is the unexpected emotionless confession in open court by a seemingly untortured prisoner to crimes he never committed. Useful as brain-washing has been to the Soviet, it is important that techniques of mind control not be considered a black art known only to Communists. Calloused police officers the globe over have elicited confessions by essentially similar methods: prolonged interrogation and carefully managed fear and anxiety.

The significant fact which emerges is that our minds are pawns capable of being captured. Pass a parade before us, wave the flag, and we will shout with abandon slogans we might prefer to qualify. Hitler effectively used mass singing and mob swaying and torches ablaze in the night to set the mood for



his vitriolic Nuremberg frenzies. Revivalists and evangelists have long known that if they can paint a terrifying vision of the tortures of the damned and excite the guilt-fears of the congregation, the chances of religious conversion are dramatically increased. Fear unseals our lips. The surge of the mob carries us along. Anxiety unbalances reason. Place us under sufficient tension, and the mind inhibits itself, becomes open to suggestion, and if required, we will admit that black is white and white, black.

Many simple but crucial observations follow. Even the slightest police excess cannot be tolerated. The courts must develop a more inclusive definition of duress. Each of us must be on his guard against the techniques of persuasion and our government must bar the mass media to the hidden persuader. Fear blocks judgment. The demagogue plays on our anxieties, offering as solution his own omniscient person.

What is true of politics is true of religion. The suggestibility of the frenzied or overwrought is an open and ancient secret. Spiritual doctors have long been aware of the mind's suggestibility and have at times abused this knowledge. The Catholic inquisitor in the fifteenth century and the Protestant witch hunter in the seventeenth were adept at eliciting false confession. From the primitive beating of the voodoo drum and the dancing dervish to current fervid evangelist rallies anxiety, tension, fear, and excitement — translate dancing, shaking, charming, and public confession — have been effective tools of religious manipulation.

I sometimes hear the plaint that our services are cold and austere. It is one of the few complaints with which I am impatient. Men think best when they think calmly. Our judgment is most critical when it is least excited by passion, swaying, or movement. Jewish worship is designed as the worship of free, thoughtful men. We wish to release the power of reason rather than inhibit thoughtfulness or subtly implant suggestion. There are no sudden illuminations or conversions in our service, there is not even a great deal of tensional release, but, equally, there is no artificial excitation, no playing on fear, no carefully introduced suggestion. Let us not be critical of that which stands to our credit.

May 7, 1961



## THERE IS SOMETHING NEW

Science is fact and force of modern life. Because of science we must revise our rule book. To say in our brand new world that we can hold fast to proverbial wisdom is to be blind to the change about us. To be fruitful and multiply is to over-populate the world. To render unto Caesar is to subvert democracy. Physical strength is no longer crucial. In an era of push-button warfare, the hero needs only to be callous and to have a steady index finger.

Older philosophies were pessimistic. Disease wasted prematurely. The land was never sufficiently fertile. Tools were so primitive as not to permit the amenities, much less the luxuries. Today, all this is changed. The average American lives longer and better and enjoys more comfort and leisure than a Caesar.

Where philosophy was once necessarily pessimistic, science now permits a cautious optimism. Science applied can both increase food production and effectively limit human reproduction. We need no longer shiver against the icy blast. Pain can be assuaged. Many a disease can be controlled. Labor need be neither backbreaking nor sapping. No longer must economics be the dismal science of inadequate necessity, nor politics a tawdry description of inequality made legitimate.

Religion's contemporary failure has been its inability to respond to this new hopefulness. Read current theology and you are plunged into an abyss of dark gloom and unrelieved despair. No better description of human brutishness exists and no more hapless prophecy.

There is danger in our modern life. Atomic annihilation is an immediate threat. One need look no further than the Eichmann trial for chapter and verse of human savagery. Yet the atom and Auschwitz are only part of the story. We must not blind ourselves to human achievement. There is no future for man in rubbing his nose continuously in his own filth. For the medieval to be preoccupied with the golden streets of another world was excusable. His streets were open sewers. For the modern to despair is neither so readily defensible nor excusable. There is opportunity. There is vast wealth needing only broad distribution. There are political systems adequate to freedom and policies capable of establishing universal education. For the first time we have the wealth, the wherewithal and the wisdom to build a just and prosperous society. All we need is the will. Religious teachings which sap that will are not only unhelpful but untrue.

April 23, 1961



## ALL ISRAEL ARE BROTHERS

The last several months have not been without their embarrassment. Swastikas and Nazi style gangs have reminded us forcibly that this is not yet the best of all possible worlds.

Much has been written on the causes of this spate of anti-Semitic incidents, I would add a word only as to its lingering effect. I note that we are increasingly self-conscious. Harsh judgments are made. The theory is advanced that certain habits of ours create and stimulate anti-Semitism.

Nothing could be further from the fact. The peccadilloes of individual Jews provide grist to the anti-Semite's mill, but he will unabashedly manufacture grotesquery where life provides none. Anti-Semitism is a centuries-old malignancy. It is born of human frustration and fanaticism, of ignorance and superstition, and of religious immaturity and bigotry. It is unrelated to the characteristics of individual Jews or of the Jewish group.

Permit me an historical reminder. In the nineteenth century many believed that anti-Semitism was a product of the Jew's difference, his 'ghetto quaintness,' his ghetto language, his unique dress and manner and speech. It was argued that when Jews became German or Austrian or Polish in taste and dress and manners, anti-Semitism would wane and eventually disappear. Logical perhaps, but in fact the very contrary took place. The most virulent outbreak of anti-Semitism—Hitler's—took as its mark the thoroughly westernized German Jew. Hitler's text could not be found in Jewish idiosyncrasy, so pretext was discovered in the theory of racial inferiority.

We Jews ought to be hard on ourselves. Our faith insists on rectitude, probity, and principle. Conscience adds its own command. But we ought not to allow the current outbreaks to make us cast a jaundiced eye on fellow Jews. As a people we have our saints and our sinners. It cannot be otherwise; indeed, it matters not. What we are does not make detractors what they are.

In a world of tension and stress, let us at least be at peace with one another. All too often in the past we have allowed hasty and harsh judgment to create an atmosphere of tension and estrangement. Let us not allow it now.

February 21, 1960



## ON PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Rabbi, teach me to pray.

Surprisingly, no one has ever asked me to do so, although I should think such a query directly touches my rabbinic competence. I have been asked to explain the ritual or to outline the details of our liturgy, but the personal note is always singularly absent.

Why? I suspect because prayer is wholly natural. Prayer is the universal language of surcharged emotion. When we need to pray we somehow find ourselves praying. The words may be anything but elegant — indeed, there may be no words at all — but the end result is our prayer, therefore, good prayer.

When the heart is calm and we do not feel the pressure of intense emotion, we feel no need to pray. When composed, what we see and, therefore, ask about are the congregational services. These are formally organized and richly tapestried, and we want them explained, much as we welcome program notes at a symphony.

Prayer is instinctive. Worship is a discipline. We pray because we need to. We worship because we want to. We worship to find stimulation, ennoblement and guidance. It may surprise, but the synagogue hour is not architected as an hour of prayer. Sometimes familiar melody and quiet dignity unstop the heart, but such release is not the primary focus of worship. In the synagogue we thank God for His many blessings and relearn the lessons of humility and sharing. In the synagogue we rehearse ethical traditions and reconsecrate ourselves to these, the elemental virtues of life. We review the insights of Scripture. We listen while someone juxtaposes political realism and ethical discipline, personal convenience and moral truth. We memorialize our dead and allow their sacrifice and example to upgrade our decisions. The essence of private prayer is petition. The essence of public worship is affirmation.

Philosophically prayer presents difficulty. Its cathartic effect is self-evident, but can we justify its effectiveness? Surely God knows what is best for us far better than we ourselves. His plan may be entirely other than our own. It is somewhat presumptuous to expect that our petitions will change God's mind, and it is close to blasphemy to image God as a complaint clerk who straightens out incorrectly delivered orders and pacifies irate customers.

The efficacy of prayer is uncertain. Public worship works. We are the better for it. In public worship we enunciate the finest ideals of the human race and question only our capacity for abiding them. In the synagogue we bless God for His graciousness rather than remind Him of supposed niggardliness. A taste for public worship must be cultivated. It is not instinctive. But once acquired, a love of worship richly rewards.

April 30, 1961



## THE SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving evokes the memory of drumsticks cleaned to the bone and of footballers struggling manfully in the deep snow. Nor can I separate from Thanksgiving my recollection of the great dating controversy, when traditional sentiment and commercial enterprise were at war over a plan to add six more shopping days before Christmas.

Thanksgiving is a happy holiday, a family holiday, and a restful holiday. So much so that we often forget that the Pilgrim pioneers created the Thanksgiving as a holy day. Thanksgiving is a Sukkoth, an outpouring of gratitude to God for the bountiful harvest. The Pilgrims enjoyed a Bible-drenched faith, and it was their intention to re-create on Thanksgiving Day the Scriptural Sukkoth. The spirit evoked in our Sukkoth liturgy is essential to the meaning of Thanksgiving: "All that we have is a gift of Thy hand. When tempted to hoard Thy blessings, to impoverish others that we might prosper, open Thou our eyes to the wrong and privation we would thus inflict on our own brothers. Help us to realize that the blessings we enjoy are but tokens of Thy love and that when we use Thy gifts in the service of our fellow men we offer thanksgiving unto Thee."

It is a mark of the maturity of our society that more and more Americans are setting aside an hour of prayer on Thanksgiving. I applaud this tendency. My own experience makes me certain that the gastronomical delicacies of the mid-day and the athletic delights of the mid-afternoon take on added meaning because of the devotion of the mid-morning. It is not wise to take the good life for granted. Equally, it is significant that Americans are uniting in such prayer without regard to denominational loyalties. I approve the spread of community services. There is every reason that Thanksgiving ought not be parochial. The rationale of groups who will not unite even once a year without religious label to speak thanks to God escapes me. How any who read in their Bible, "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us all?" can isolate themselves over what are, after all, purely ritual and trivial issues disturbs me. Whatever our personal affiliations, the sun and the rain and the rich earth bless us equally, and we are equally beholden to God for such blessing. I would wish that all could participate in what is, after all, an American holiday rather than a Christian or Jewish celebration.

November 20, 1960



## ON LORD ACTON

Fate is unpredictable. Lord Acton deserved immortality for his legal genius, but his name remains current largely for a single acerbic observation. How many discussions of political chicanery are finished off when some parlor skeptic parrots, "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Familiarity breeds acceptance. We tend to accept the familiar without question, because, being familiar, it does not excite our critical faculties. Despite its currency, Acton's rule does not bear careful analysis. Power can corrupt. It need not. Man is corruptible, but not contemptible. There are at least some who are no different in power than out. Admit human frailty, and we begin to recognize those who discharge power with humility, honesty, and humor. Their occasional outbursts of rashness, jealousy or petulance are part of their nature, not a by-product of their power. Power increases temptation, but not all have voracious appetites.

Historians sometimes overlook one of the most significant sources of power — knowledge. So powerful is knowledge that those who possess it have consistently opposed its dissemination. The ancient astronomer-priests hoarded knowledge, coded it in complex cipher, passed it only to the initiate, and demanded wealth and reverence before revealing its secrets. The Egyptian and Akkadian priest-astronomers, Greek mathematicians, Arab doctors, European artisans, and medieval masons became rich from the knowledge they refused to share.

Our scientists control today's most marketable knowledge. Yet the first principle of modern science is the open and immediate publication of research. Pure science admits neither copyright nor patent. Pure science recognizes that progress is dependent on knowledge willingly and promptly shared. If science had followed any other discipline, if its knowledge had been hoarded, restricted, or coded, mankind would still be in the pre-industrial, rather than the atomic age.

Can science sustain its self-discipline? It is difficult to say. There is increasing complaint against the principle of open and immediate publication. Government agencies on both sides and straddling the Iron Curtain spend their days stamping "classified" on scientific documents. Defense departments and atomic energy commissioners seek to padlock research, arguing that publication gives aid and comfort to the enemy.

Individual scientists and academic research centers have so far withstood the severing of scientific communication. Some few universities have refused government grants because of the security restrictions involved. But as research becomes increasingly costly and Federal subsidies increasing basic, such abnegation will be more and more difficult. Laboratory notebooks are being put under lock and key. Increasingly long delays occur before these notebooks are declassified and publication achieved. As a result, not only is there costly and



unnecessary duplication, but the bond of intellectual adventure which united academics is being worn thin. Science is becoming a tool of national protection rather than of human progress.

This is not a plea that weapons technology be declassified. Our knowledge of the techniques of murder is already far too refined. But if the Cold War forces science to harden along national lines, the pace of human progress will be slowed, and science will develop its own self-seeking hierarchy to promote its secrets to selfish personal or national advantage.

Science and Mr. Acton it seems are to have a go at it.

March 5, 1961

## SOME THOUGHTS ON CHILDREN AND FUNERALS

Should a child be taken to a funeral?

Much depends, of course, on the age of the child and on his ties to the deceased. We may take it for granted that it is unnecessary needlessly to expose a child to the tensions of grief and mourning. Few parents make this mistake.

A child so young that he would not normally be taken to public functions ought not, in my opinion, be taken to a funeral. A five-year-old has difficulty even sitting still. A five-year-old has no frame of reference for the weeping and the waiting and the words which accompany the funeral service and ride in the funeral cortege. He will be the object of much well-intentioned but emotionally oppressive solicitude.

It is one thing to have a friend baby-sit with the five-year-old during the funeral service. It is quite another to isolate him entirely from the fact of death. In point of fact, he cannot be shielded. He will soon miss a familiar face. His sensitive nerve-ends will pick up the radar signals of grief. Studies by students of human behavior underscore that the euphemisms with which we try to protect often conjure up nightmare images more frightening than any the simple truth might suggest. A child must be given an opportunity to react to death and to voice his questions. Some explanation must be given of the tension and the tears. That which our parents can accept we can accept. That which they hide from us becomes more dreadful to us.

What of the pre-adolescent? He wants to know and to understand. He feels grown up when he is allowed to accompany his parents. The pre-adolescent



who shares the experience of grief with his family draws closer to them. He feels needed. He is with familiars. He is eager to be helpful and will probably have few fears.

What of the adolescent? The adolescent takes death in one of two extreme ways. He is stoic. She bathes herself in tears. The stoic must be helped to cry. The weeping must be staunched and controlled. There is no question here of participating in the funeral. The question is one of establishing the normalcy and inevitability of death. A rabbi or minister can be helpful. Explanations of the rites and of the eulogy are equally helpful.

If we help our children accept death as a normal fact of life we will have given them the only universal antidote to the poison of grief. Need I add that this antidote is as effective with adults as with the young.

February 15, 1959

## WHERE RELIGION FAILS

You may have seen a survey of religious attitudes which was conducted recently among college age men and women. Sponsored by the International Council of Religious Education, it set out to detail the spiritual attitudes and practices of the maturing American. The results were sobering. Fewer than thirty-two percent managed a passing mark on a grade-school level Bible test. The overwhelming majority of Protestants and Jews and a sizable minority of Catholics did not attend church regularly. Few in any denomination had ever bothered to read the Bible. Less than twenty-six percent of the Jews and twenty-eight percent of the Protestants considered themselves "religious."

The usual qualifications come to mind — sophomore atheism and the pose of collegiate worldliness, the quicksand of statistics. Yet we play the ostrich to dismiss these facts out of hand. We need no scholarly apparatus to detail from our own experience evidence of religious disinterest among young people.

The young take religion lightly when a society takes it lightly. Children learn the ABCs of religious indifference from parents who dispatch their children to Sunday school and stay home to sleep. Adolescents accept the downgrading of church membership when they overhear it discussed by adults in the same terms as Kiwanis or the country club: are the meetings convenient, and do the right people belong.



Devoted religionists often say as much and then proceed to decry the materialist preoccupation of our society. We are stuffed by our abundance. The heart is affected when the body is overweight. But the fault lies as much with the congregation as with the congregant. "Pie in the sky" preaching and "Give me that old time religion" hymning guarantee the disinterest of the young. Too many congregations can be charged with irrelevance. How many pulpits preach a social doctrine out of date since the days of the immigrant worker and the robber barons. All too often the sum and substance of religious education is a class reading of some antique fairy tales. Some vestries insist that pulpit and forum be silent on the troubling issues of our time. Seeking to be all things to all men, many congregations no longer represent principle or even piety to their communities.

About us the Communist religious movement surges ahead despite its errors. Why? Because it speaks the language of politics and grapples with the realities of the pocketbook and offers solutions to practical problems. The great religious leaders of all times spoke simply, directly, and relevantly. Moses bearded Pharaoh in his own palace and later hammered out the details of Hebrew jurisprudence. Priest and prophet in ancient Israel spoke forthrightly and directly to the political and moral crises of their day.

If we want the loyalty of the young we must prove to them that religion is a matter of some moment. Church suppers, bowling parties, miracle-stressing Bible classes, simple, pious homilies are innocent and inoffensive amusements, but not the basis of an effective religious program. If we want young people to renew interest we will have to ask, and answer, certain difficult basic questions. Why should a young person be religious? Can religion help him to be adult? Can religion significantly support his determination to establish justice and peace? Can religion adjust intellectually to the age of science and dress itself up spiritually to satisfy today's esthetic tastes? Unless the pulpit is forthright and forceful, unless the congregation is principled and aggressive, unless the school curriculum is prophetic and relevant, I am afraid that the statistics of religious interest will become increasingly disturbing.

March 22, 1960



## AN ANNIVERSARY AND ITS MEANING

There has recently been built in Paris an impressive monument to the Jewish martyrs of Hitler's tyranny. It is a three-story Museum-Library designed to record the unbelievable tragedy of the six million. The face of the building is lined in marble. On its flagstone approach there burns a flame of remembrance. High up the marble facade, bronze Hebrew letters starkly reproduce the Biblical "Remember Amalek." The whole effect is moving.

When Israel under Moses advanced towards the Promised Land, free and peaceful passage was asked of the various nations through whose territory the tribes must pass. Generally, such permission was automatic. Not so with Amalek. Without warning, Amalek fell upon the tribes and a brutal battle ensued. Passage was won, but only at the cost of much blood. Subsequently there was only bad blood between these two. "Remember Amalek" became for the Jew a by-word and a caution — never fully trust a sometime enemy.

This week marks the anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War. Those determined to destroy us in that war are now our close allies. We have rearmed them. We have reestablished their economy. They have fared better in the post war period than some of our erstwhile allies.

It is noble to be forgiving. But our nobility does not guarantee the world's. Hatreds do not die easily. Ambitions are only temporarily shelved. In a world of complex desires, we would be foolish, indeed, were prosperity and peace to make us forget that many have chosen war and may choose it again.

This is not a plea for increased armaments. Military preparedness is not the only nor the best safeguard of peace. It is a plea that we remember that many men in many nations, and not in one nation alone, are capable of rude violence and are quite prepared to risk war. It is a plea that, knowing this, we rededicate ourselves to such policies as evidence our high principles, protect the interests of all, and promote better understanding among men.

"Remember Amalek." Remember that man's potential cruelty is our immediate challenge.

December 6, 1959



## ON THE CENSUS

This year the government will count our noses. The decennial population census is to be taken. As at the beginning of every decade, the national government wants to know where we live, where we work, what we earn and how many children are in our families.

This census will inventory the now famous population explosion. An explosion is powerful and if not controlled, destructive. This census is intended to help the government describe orderly and meaningful programs to educate, house and sustain the health of our people. It is a valuable and necessary task.

Some time back there was talk that this census would include a questionnaire of religious belief. It had been proposed that each American be asked the denomination which he affirmed and the church of which he was a member. Fortunately, this religious census will not be taken. Fortunately, the doctrine that faith is a matter of private conscience won the day over the statisticians' love of statistics.

There are many reasons that I am glad that this is so. It is self-evident that religious affiliation and religious affirmation are not identical. There are many sincere God-believing men and women who, for reasons of preference or geography or economics, are not members of any church. There are many who are members who neither believe nor affirm but have joined for convenience or because of social pressure. Any statistic of religious profession would be misleading.

There is another reason, perhaps even more important. We in America have tended to be impatient with the agnostic. Because Communist doctrine is atheistic, we have tended to assume that a good American proves his loyalty by belonging to a church or synagogue. Belonging to a church has, of course, many advantages. Educationally and spiritually, much can be gained. But affiliation is not a measure of merit nor is non-belief evidence of lack of character or disloyalty.

The right to affirm freely is a precious right, guaranteed to us by our Constitution. The right to deny freely is a precious right which we who affirm must jealously guard. As history shows, religious institutions have been tremendous forces for good. Equally, they have at times been conservative, even calloused. The dissenter serves as a goad and as a reminder that we must have God in our hearts, not only on our lips; that we must prove our faith in our lives, not only on our Sundays.

Since our government will not ask the religious question, perhaps we ought to ask it of ourselves. How deep is our religious faith? Is it a matter of convenience or conviction? What does our membership really mean?

March 6, 1960



## ON BEING SUPERSTITIOUS

We were talking of people who make decisions according to newspaper horoscopes or return home if a black cat chanced across their path. I made quite a point of the folly of superstition, but the class challenged: "Why make such a fuss about it? After all, superstitions are harmless."

Most superstitions do seem harmless, almost irrelevant. The ball player who touches third base as he returns from the field does no one any harm, and he feels himself more secure. So with the sweet young thing who does not feel prepared to face the world without her special charm bracelet.

Why make a fuss about superstition? In part, because superstition is idolatry. To knock on wood is to attribute to wood sufficient power to alter or manipulate our destiny. To put faith in a horoscope is to deify the planets and presume their control over our fate.

An oft repeated theme of the Bible condemns all superstition. The soothsayer is not to be consulted. No credence is to be given to oracle or medium. The black arts are to be shunned. Monotheism cannot exist where superstition is rife. God is not one and omnipotent if men believe their lives are influenced by demons, shades, and spirits.

Today superstitious practice is much attenuated. A grandmother may give the child an amulet, but will at the same time call her doctor. Those who knock on wood do so as much out of habit as out of fear. Yet I wonder if the continuing prevalence of such actions does not indicate a certain failure of nerve. This is a scientific age, yet we are afraid to believe our science. Somehow we do not trust what we know to be true.

Today's adult laughs awkwardly as he throws salt over his shoulder, but he continues to throw salt. Why? He rationalizes that such action hurts no one and that it brings a measure of comfort. But is it benign? Those who place an icon in their cars drive just a bit more rashly. Those who carry a rabbit's foot into athletics perform just a bit too dangerously.

We live in a difficult and sometimes frightening world, but superstition will not help us solve our problems. Only if we face facts honestly can we face life with any real assurance. Those who believe in the One God and value His gift of reason cannot at the same time abide false gods.

February 26, 1961



## ON THE VIRTUE OF POLITICS

Today's wisdom may be tomorrow's folly. Yesterday's proverb bars the way to progress.

There is an ancient Hebrew saying to the effect that man ought not become overly involved with the rulers of a state. In the eras of Caesars and Czars this was sensible advice. Political favor was often given on whim, as easily forfeited as won. To court favor was to tempt disfavor. The court Jew often purchased his position at the final cost of life and fortune.

In certain parts of our world this proverb still is not a mistaken caution. Think of the recent trials of the former Menderes government of Turkey, of the downfall of Rhee's coterie in Korea and the attendant mass accusations of treason, and of the merry-go-round of arrests taking place daily in Cuba and The Congo. When a society lacks peaceful means of changing its government, those who accept power often stake their lives on their continuation in office. They can be unseated only by revolution or by a change of heart on the part of superiors. Often the last act is played before the bar of some tribunal. Every autocratic state needs its Siberia and its Morro Castle.

For us this ancient wisdom is out of place. Political involvement is a universally acknowledged obligation and the vocation of politics can be considered without fear. For us the only cost of entering government is an occasional post-election bruised ego. We do not take sufficient pride in this unique political achievement. Historically it has been easy to organize power and almost impossible to devise orderly means for a periodic transfer of power. Those in power wish to preserve their authority. Those seeking power lack orderly ways to voice disapproval and to prove their strength.

All this is by way of applauding the attempts being made to interest more of us in active political enterprise. If we do not like the candidates selected we have the recourse not only of criticism and caustic comment, but of personal commitment. We can enter politics. We can do so without jeopardizing our lives or those of our families. I, for one, would like to see more men and more women actively involved at every level of our political structure, seeking office, marshalling support for their candidates, expressing effectively their hopes and their judgments.

October 30, 1960



## RING OUT THE OLD

This is by way of confession. I am not one who enjoys enforced gaiety. I have always found that my best moments come unexpectedly. The annual calendar necessity of riotously enjoying oneself on New Year's Eve has never appealed to me.

Perhaps it's just that I'm getting older. I may be projecting, but it seems that most of us no longer plan or need the release of a wild and wooly New Year's Eve. We have our parties, of course, but the level of excitement is hardly different than on other social occasions. It is not unusual for a group of friends to meet on January One and admit that they were in bed by one o'clock.

Why so? I suspect that the current mood of restraint testifies to our national wellbeing. When life is raw or difficult and the past and future are full of crisis and tension, body and spirit cry out for the release of excitement. During depression days, the days of Hitler and the war, every routine had a bitter edge. Like the circuses of ancient Rome and the carnivals of medieval Europe, New Year's Eve unbottled life's tensions through the frenzy of laughter and alcohol. Our happy and fairly relaxed age finds such explosive Auld Lang Synes somewhat artificial and forced. For us every day has its measure of leisure and comfort. The occasional crises of daily living only in rare instances tear away the prevailing euphoria.

Ours is a prosperous society, but there is an element of the bal masque to our wellbeing. Our world is changing more rapidly and dramatically than we care to admit. Politically, we speak of the emergence of the underdeveloped nations. Practically, we must recognize the emergence of a thousand new problems. Ours is a world of life led at the balance of atomic terror. Ours is a world of abundance enjoyed on a globe stuffed with undernourished millions. Ours is a world of scientific knowledge spawning faster than it can be absorbed. It is a shrinking world, teeming with more people, more prejudice, and more ignorance than it can tolerate.

It would be tragic if we were locked so completely in our private world that we forgot, or failed to admit the explosive problems which beset mankind. Our New Year requires meditation as well as celebration. If we wish to enjoy many more New Year's celebrations we had best step up the voltage of our meditations.

January 1, 1961



## A LESSON FROM MOSES

A few acres of second-rate real estate separate Egypt and Israel. Moses brought his emigres here. Recently, the armored cars of an Israeli army raced through. Flight time between Egyptian and Israeli centers is a matter of minutes. Even on foot this distance can be negotiated in a few days. Yet this short trip occupied Moses for forty years.

Was he lost? The Bible tells us specifically that Moses knew of the direct coastal approach. Why, then, did he linger? Moses discovered that the tribes were not prepared. No sooner was escape certain than Moses faced dissention. The delivered were a contentious lot. Repeated acts of pettiness and cowardice revealed them as lacking the stuff of greatness. It was not their fault. A man in chains, who is daily beaten and lashed, must concentrate on the basics of survival. If he lives, cunning becomes second nature. To survive he becomes animal. We can accept literally the phrase 'slavery brutalizes man,' so much so, in fact, that the liberated cannot always discard the servile habits of a lifetime.

Today's liberators face grumbling and contention. Once Independence Day celebrations are over, their burden is as great, if not greater than before. Survival instincts ingrained by generations of enforced labor, minimal education, and prescribed servility are everywhere in evidence. Like the ancient Israelites, the modern redeemed are difficult to organize; braggarts rather than heroes, confused men and women who often mistake license for liberty.

Wisely, Moses brought the Jews directly from the Red Sea to Sinai. Every emerging nation needs its Sinai: a new language of goals and rules, a well conceived constitution, a feeling of common purpose and a growing self discipline. Yet even Sinai did not do the trick. The tribes surrounded Sinai seven weeks after leaving Egypt. Forty years were to pass before they surrounded Jericho and set foot on the Promised Land. Independence can be achieved by the stroke of a pen. Habits change slowly, if at all. Sometimes a people must mark time until a new generation can grow up schooled in the disciplines of freedom.

The interval between exodus and entry, between independence and political maturity is crucial. In this in-between stage the quality of leadership often determines success or spells failure. Without a Moses the quarreling mob feeds on itself. If the leadership is strong but self-seeking, tyranny follows. It is sad, but true, that a liberated people may find themselves free of colonial overlord but tyrannized by their own.

History does not repeat itself. Historical comparisons are at best tenuous. But the analogy of Moses is one that cries out to be considered.

June 1, 1961



## EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The problems and future direction of the American educational system have been a matter of universal concern. Recently, Cleveland was host to the Ohio State School Board Association's annual meeting. At this meeting members of local school boards and their administrators and superintendents met to discuss common problems of supervision, curriculum, and administration.

I was particularly impressed by the comment of one member, in which he emphasized that we ought not to consider education in the same terms as big business. American education is big. Enrollment is at an all time high. Plant investment is gigantic. Education's annual budget totals many billions of dollars. But there is one fundamental difference. Big business aims at profit and at standardization, while the educational system has as its goal the development of competent individuals. Standardization is a great temptation in education, but to succumb would be to destroy whatever effectiveness our school systems enjoy.

We in America have said that our schools are to be concerned with the mastery of content and with the development of character. We want a system which will involve itself in the personal life of each scholar and not content itself with preparing the scholar for a series of examinations. The Russian system is of the latter type. Its standards are high, but the cost in frustrated lives is higher yet. Some time in the process which we call growing up every young person runs into problems and emotional involvements which hamper his scholarship. He then needs understanding and love and a great deal of sympathy. If he is treated as a cipher without thought to his uniqueness, he will fail and fumble and be frustrated. If he is treated as an individual and with patience, he may outgrow his problem and become not only a fine citizen but a creative and contributing member of society.

Our various school systems have paid a good deal of attention to the mechanical problems of enlarging their facilities, balancing their budgets and supervising their increased enrollment. It is time, and in many cases far past time, that they turn their attention to the needs of the child rather than the needs of the system. There is no doubt that the curriculum of the American school needs to be made more demanding. It is being made more demanding. But as we do, so let us demand that our schools pay increasing attention not only to the curriculum but to the child.

November 22, 1959



## ON BOOKS AND BOOKSELLERS

Rare books are expensive. A. S. W. Rosenbach, who died in 1952, was an internationally known bookseller and the man who more than any other contributed to the high cost of book collecting. It was not unusual for him to sell first folios and original manuscripts in six figure prices. Needless to say, his clientel was limited, if select.

Edwin Wolf 2nd and John Fleming have recently published Rosenbach's biography. He was an unusual man, but despite his vanity and his social pretension and his lack of conventional moral values, he was both highly successful and something of a scholar.

This brief comment is not by way of a review. The biography will have interest largely to those who are themselves bibliophiles and are at home in the recondite atmosphere of literary archives. Most will find that this biography is more weighty than witty, but it is well written and it did suggest this note.

As you might imagine, I was particularly interested in Rosenbach as Jew. Rosenbach, himself, was not a practicing Jew in the conventional sense, but throughout his life he was affiliated with venerable Mikveh Israel Congregation in Philadelphia to which his parents had belonged and he was intermittently interested in Jewish causes—especially those which were academic and involved learning, and, of course, books. Rosenbach contributed largely to the American Jewish Historical Society, both as scholar and patron, and was for many years President of this first attempt to systemize research into American Jewish history.

The incident which pleased me most concerned Rosenbach's Bar Mitzvah. The year was 1889. The service, which followed the Spanish liturgy, must have been quite beautiful. Rosenbach was well and conscientiously trained and the day was obviously a success. That evening Mrs. Rosenbach invited close friends to the house for a reception. On the printed invitation the final line stated succinctly "Presents not accepted."

Obviously the merchandising aspect of religious ceremonies was a problem then as now. I admire Mrs. Rosenbach's forthrightness. She saw to it that there was no rain of neckties and fountain pens which are put away for years until they are rewrapped and sent off on a repeat performance. She saw to it, in other words, that her son's Bar Mitzvah centered on a personal rather than commercial note. In so doing she taught her son a lesson. Friendship is consideration and loyalty and pleasure in another's achievements. Friendship is the spoken word and the proffered hand and the companionable smile. It is not a wrapped package and a hastily written card.



I am sure young Rosenbach received gifts from his immediate family. I do not decry all gifting, but as with every pleasure there is excess and there is moderation. Surely there is a vast difference between the love-wrapped, longed-for gift of a parent and the hastily-wrapped, pro forma tie box of a neighbor. I cannot but feel that many an occasion would be the richer were we to subscribe to our invitations Mrs. Rosenbach's "Presents not accepted."

January 8, 1961

## ON SUMMER SPORT

"Summer is a-comin' in" is reputed to be the oldest verse in English. However ancient, it aptly describes this season. The air has a warming brilliance. The ball park is again crowded. These are the days when it is difficult to work, suffering as we do from Spring fever.

Of all the seasons, Summer is the most physical. We are television athletes during the Winter, but when the trees become green and the sun fills the air the pool, the golf course and the back yard become irresistible.

Ought we respond to this Summer call to exercise? What attitude does our tradition take toward athletics? By way of answer, consider the Summer Olympics which will be held this year in Rome. The Olympic games are, of course, Greek in origin. Greece gloried in the physical. Greek artists immortalized the symmetry of human form. Their art and statuary still delight.

Historians sometimes contrast Greek and Hebrew approaches to life. They argue that contrary to the Greek enthusiasm for physical fitness, the Hebrews and the Christians after them contemned the body and sought to mortify the flesh. Our ancestors are made out to be ascetic, monkish men, pious and good, but impatient of such vanities as physical development and athletic skill. This is emphatically not the case. The Rabbis objected to immodest display. Olympic sport was *au naturelle*. The Rabbis objected to the deification of the human figure. They were indignant at the sanguine brutality and the needless cruelty of gladiator sport. They were appalled at the frenzy and sexual license which often accompanied these semi-religious events. But nowhere in our tradition will you find objection to exercise, or voices raised against the prescription of a sound mind in a sound body. Indeed, you will find that pride of person and dignity of bearing are constantly held up as moral virtues.



The laurels of good character, of learning and of modesty were more coveted by our ancestors than the Olympic wreath, but that is not to say that exercise was proscribed or that recreation was unnaturally limited.

Jews will participate in the Olympic games as members of many national teams. Israel will enter contestants in many sports. Those who do will in no way be violating ancient or modern prohibition. Only when athletics becomes the significant end in life, only when physical fitness precludes concern with character, only when a sport is of such a daredevilish quality as to endanger life and limb, only then does tradition enter an objection — and its objection then is well taken.

May 1, 1960

## ON JOINING OUR FAITH

The recent highly publicized conversion to Judaism by three of Hollywood's most beautiful starlets has precipitated many questions about conversion and Judaism's acceptance of converts. Our faith has not in recent millennia engaged in missionary activity. In part, this was due to Judaism's minority status. If occasionally a medieval religious or political leader did renounce Christianity, the local Jewish community often had to suffer bloody attack by an outraged mob. In measure also, Judaism's missionary inactivity was due to basic philosophy. There are many ways to the good life of which the Jewish way is but one. Judaism does not believe that the acceptance of its creed validates one's passport into Heaven. The Talmud specifies that the righteous, whatever their faith, have a share in the world to come.

This does not mean that only one who has been born a Jew can be a Jew. Jews are a family of believers, not a race. Nor does it mean that the convert must accept subordinate status within the Jewish community. The Bible insists that there is to be one rule for the stranger and the homeborn. Each year at The Temple some twenty or thirty men and women accept Judaism. About half of these are young people forced to rethink religious beliefs because love cannot be segregated. The other half consists of those who simply are dissatisfied with their own faith or lack of faith and who, after private search, have found that Jewish prayer and prophecy offer a satisfying spiritual formula.

What are the requirements of conversion? The would-be initiate spends many hours of discussion with the rabbi. During these conferences he is en-



couraged to raise his questions and his doubts. Between sessions he is required to study the history, philosophy and religious practices of our faith. We want him to be certain in his own mind. We want to be certain ourselves that this conversion is undertaken after deliberation. Neither impulse nor pique is a valid base for religious affirmation. Preparation may last weeks or months, depending upon the needs of the individual. The right of conversion is granted to those whom we feel are mature in judgment and honest in their decision. On the day of acceptance, a short service is conducted during which the convert renounces former religious ties and publicly accepts the obligations of Jewish life, affiliates himself formally with the congregation, and affirms his faith in the one creative God.

Many converts occupy positions of leadership within the Jewish community. Most reflect honor on their new faith, both in their private and their public lives. We gain their fresh vitality. They gain our ancient wisdom.

April 12, 1959



## **SOME THOUGHTS ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

A local newspaper is surveying views on the issue of capital punishment. The Governor has come out in opposition to the death penalty.

The Bible prescribes capital punishment for certain categories of crime, i.e. murder, witchcraft, and the encouragement of mass apostasy. As a matter of fact, four different methods of execution are detailed. The Rabbis, however, were not content that capital punishment was either a deterrent to crime or a satisfactory punishment. Though the death penalty was specified in the Bible itself, in practice it was avoided. Trial regulations were so tightly written that capital sentence could but rarely be pronounced. Two thousand years ago, answering a question on the advisability of sentencing a prisoner to death, a rabbi stated that the death penalty is permitted, but that a court which sentenced one man to death every seventy years was to be considered as a murderous court. The State of Israel, drawing on this tradition, permits capital punishment only in the most exceptional instances.

I do not think that the State of Ohio would find any precipitous rise in crime were we to abolish capital punishment. Imprisonment for life is in some ways a more formidable punishment than the loss of life itself. The



experience of western Europe during the Middle Ages, when the death penalty was exacted for seemingly minor offenses, suggests that even the fear of death is not a sufficient deterrent. Indeed, neither fear nor threat has ever successfully curbed the violent. The modern emphasis in penology goes beyond punishment to psychological and educational rehabilitation and moral reform. The tragedy of our penal system is that theory and practice are widely separate. In point of fact we seldom succeed in developing actual programs of a constructive nature. Our penal systems are much as they were thirty years ago.

Those who are concerned with the disconcerting rise of crime ought not fear a voiding of capital punishment, but rather bestir themselves to curb those social ills which breed violence. A society which even minimally condones racial tension and permits festering slums or fails to provide adequate recreational and leisure time guidance spreads the very anti-social virus its courts seek to isolate.

February 8, 1959



## **SOME THOUGHTS ON OCCASIONAL MOMENTS OF VIOLENCE**

I know that all of us have been concerned by the news of occasional violence against temples and synagogues. It is never pleasant to be reminded that the venom of anti-Semitism still infects a few among the lunatic fringe of our population.

Actually, America has made great strides in inter-group relationships in the past several decades. Legally and extra-legally, our best spirits have been grappling with the problems of social, religious and racial discrimination. But in a world which has seen the lies of a Hitler and the cries of the Klan and the bitterness of Little Rock, it is not surprising that there are occasionally moments in which violence breaks out. This is especially true where state or local government have lent tacit support to those who propose to violate the law.

I do not think this is a moment of alarm for the Jewish community. Law and order will quickly be established by the responsible agencies of local and federal government. For after all, this is not a Jewish problem but a police problem, and after all, this is the action of the unbalanced and irresponsible few.

In judging this outbreak we should not forget that these eruptions of violence take place at a time when the law of the land is extending greater



rights to those minority groups who did not share equally America's promise. Historically, social advance has always precipitated social unrest and left a residue of explosive anger with those whose familiar prejudices are no longer sanctioned. I would be much more worried about the future of our nation if things were placid and conditions calm and no progress were being made toward solving the equation of equal rights.

The lesson to be drawn from this turmoil is, it seems to me, that only as we succeed as a nation in solving the inter-personal tensions which trouble our society can we confidently expect unbroken security. Our work then is not to publish broadsides broadcasting our innocence and impeccability, but to support better schools for all, better homes for all, and full voting privileges for all.

October 26, 1958

## ON MAKING THE MOST OF THE SEDER

I do not have any statistics, but I would venture that the Seder is the most universally observed of all our home celebrations. Again though I lack figures I judge that the Seder has taken on the aspect of a family rather than a religious celebration. In many homes the worship is cut short, spoken haltingly, the singing tentatively assayed or engaged in self-consciously, the games overlooked and the ritual neglected.

There are reasons for this. Some homes have allowed the practice of family worship to be so neglected that the language of prayer seems foreign and the mood of reverence uncomfortable. In other homes the language tools are lacking which would make possible a celebration of the Seder in the manner of our grandparents.

I am surprised each year that there are many who do not know that we have revised the Haggadah as we have revised the prayer book, that it is today possible for an Hebraically inarticulate father fluently to conduct a meaningful Seder. Like the prayer book, the Haggadah has not so much been changed as translated and tightened. All the beauty of the service remains. Only the idiom is different.


These observations come to mind because the Seder ought to be more than a family get-together or a sumptuous repast. Its purpose is not only to bind us to our families but to bind us to some of the elemental truths of our



faith. The Haggadah retells the exodus of the Jews from Egyptian slavery — from bondage to freedom. Its theme is man's inalienable right to life and to liberty. Its promise is the assurance of God's support to all who struggle in behalf of these rights.

In a world which has seen Hitler and in which almost half the total population is burdened by dictatorship, it is certainly not a trivial matter that we remind ourselves and teach our children certain larger responsibilities. If we are guilty of any sin it is that of self-sufficiency. Our community is prosperous, peaceful and free. We sometimes forget that many wish it otherwise, that many lack what we enjoy, and that we are responsible to secure and extend our freedom. The Haggadah brings these ideas into focus. Am I mistaken in believing that the spiritual food it offers is as important as the savory delicacies of the Seder meal?

April 3, 1960



## SOME THOUGHTS ON OUR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Old timers delight to image Moses descending among his latter day disciples. They make him out to be appalled at our practice. He would be amazed. The same astonishment could safely be presumed of a reincarnated Buddha or Jesus. Religions are dynamic. They safeguard spiritual values, but the language of these truths and the rituals of worship vary with shifting political climates, cultural tastes and social needs. Once he understood what we purposed, Moses would, I am sure, approve.

Change being of the nature of things in religion as in life, it is surprising that our holiday calendar has remained unchanged since Biblical days. It is a simple calendar, typical of many common in the Iron Age and based on observation of the moon's changing phases. Jewish holidays can vary by as much as a month when we convert them to our secular sun-cycle diary.

The calendar of Reform and Orthodox observance is one, with this single difference: Reform Jews observe the holidays for one day, the traditional, in most cases, for two. Actually, I have over simplified. The Day of Atonement is observed for one day by all Jewish groups. The minor holidays of Chanukah and Purim are celebrated identically.



Why does this variance exist if both Reform and Orthodox enjoy the same ritual calendar? Pick up your Bible and look up chapters twenty-eight and twenty-nine of the Book of Numbers, and you will see that the shorter observance is stipulated in each case. The extra day was added later and for good reason. Israel's ancient calendar was regulated by direct astronomical observation. Observation was undertaken only in Palestine. When Jewish communities were established in widely scattered locations, it was no longer possible for all to receive quick report from Jerusalem, and it became necessary to discard observation in favor of fixed mathematical calculation. However, there was always the danger that unexpected meteorological change might upset the pattern and that Palestine observation and the fixed calculation might not coincide. The hope was that all Jewry would celebrate the holiday on the very day festivities were undertaken in the central Jerusalem sanctuary. As a safety measure, therefore, the custom was instituted of duplicating the ceremonies to insure coeval celebration.

Yom Kippur was never observed for two days. To do so would have imposed an onerous burden of fasting — a rigor foreign to Jewish practice. The minor holidays required no extra safeguard as they did not presume any special Temple ritual.

Reform Judaism felt that an age of instantaneous world-wide communication could afford to return to the Biblical practice. There is no longer any danger of observing the holiday on different days in Cleveland and in Jerusalem. Esthetic considerations also precipitated this change. It was felt that the protracted two-day observance tended to water down the holiday's impact. Modern taste stresses brevity. The pace of modern life requires a miniaturization of religious obligation.

Despite the logic and value of this change and despite its Biblical basis, the custom of the two-day observance is deeply revered by the traditional Jewish community which has not as yet seen fit to accommodate itself to this reform. In any case, it is the spirit in which holy occasions are recreated, not the form or date of these celebrations, which give them value.

March 2, 1958



## WHO IS A JEW?

Who is a Jew? At first blush this query seems academic, even trivial. It is neither. An Israeli Cabinet crisis developed over its answer. Ministers have resigned. Scholars and theologians the world over have taken sides for or against certain definitions.

Political necessity, rather than theologic quibbling, first raised the whole issue. Israel was established as a haven and homeland for Jews. Immigration into Israel is governed by a 'law of return' predicated on the right of any Jew to enter, settle, and become citizen. A non-Jew may enter, settle, and become citizen, but he must follow prescribed naturalization procedures.

Who qualifies for automatic admission? Is one a Jew simply by birth? If so, what of apostasy or passive disavowal? Is a Jew simply one who calls himself Jewish? If so, what of the non-Jew who has not undertaken conversion? Is a Jew one who affirms Judaism? If so, what of the many agnostics who seek refuge? Finally, what is to be done with a child born of parents of different faiths, one Jewish, the other not? What of a child born of non-Jewish parents who later convert? What of a child born of Jewish parents who later apostatise?

The Israeli government fixed its immigration policy on the thesis that to qualify one had only to declare in good faith that he is a Jew and that he does not belong to any other religious group. The government's position is both understandable and practical, but it is also at odds with traditional jurisprudence, which holds that religious identity is an inheritance through the mother. So the debate arose, and so it echoes.

I suspect that this issue may never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Certainly, Judaism is an affirmation, and yet patently it is much more. Certainly, Jews belong to a congregation of believers, but, equally, the Jewish family is both broader and more inclusive. Jews are members both of a communion and of a community. Reading the papers submitted, I came to feel that all this scholarship pointed out only this much truth — that however a Jew be defined it is the practical obligation of Israel to welcome all who feel themselves partners in the Jewish adventure, and the practical task of the synagogue to make all Jews better Jews.

In the Protestant churches there has developed an interesting use of the term 'conversion.' We think of conversion as the shifting of denominational allegiance. In the churches this is not necessarily the case. 'Conversion' is used to denote acceptance by an adult of the faith into which he has been born and trained. Evangelists like Billy Graham are essentially converting Christians to Christianity, and though many ministers disagree with sawdust trail methods, each in his own way is seeking to convert his congregation.

There has been some talk recently whether we as Jews ought not actively to seek out converts. Perhaps we should, but our first task must be the conversion of Jews to Judaism. As a people we are extremely civic-minded, generous, conscious of our communal and neighborly duties, but piety is, in the twentieth century, not our long suit.

September 20, 1959



## ON USING ONE'S EARS

The art of teaching is the art of listening. A rabbi listens to his Confirmation class. What does he learn? He masters a new vocabulary — what it means to be square or to be hep, and a great deal more. He learns that the class and their parents are proud of being Jewish. The flight from religious identification has largely been abandoned. Hitler, Israel, Reform, and two generations of American adjustment have made it possible for Judaism to set lightly on Jewish shoulders and to be held proudly in Jewish hearts.

Listening, a rabbi learns that Mad Comics and Maverick are significant in adolescent culture and, more significantly, that the Sabbath, the holidays and the Seder are elements of that culture. The age of the ritually denuded home is by and large over. Friday evening Kiddush and the holidays are celebrated, if not conventionally, at least with conviviality.

One impression is inescapable. Any discussion of prayer in the home quickly brings out the fact that prayer has remained a nursery age activity, unknown or unacknowledged after the toddler stage. By and large the children remember reciting "Now I lay me down to sleep" or the Sh'ma. In almost every family, however, bedtime prayer was discontinued at about the age Sunday school was begun. The rationale escapes me, but it is certain that only the rare home insists on a few moments of quiet thankfulness at table or before bed.

This is not surprising. Our generation is by and large uncomfortable with the mood of reverence. We are not convinced of prayer's significance. As I listen to the Confirmands, I so often hear this refrain: "My father is a fine human being and a good Jew. He doesn't pray. Why need I?"

Children image life as a play in which they are at once star and audience. What happens in the wings or backstage is of concern only as it relates directly to them. The cruelest truth of all is that the world does not revolve about us and, indeed, that it is not particularly concerned with us.

The child is protected. The child prays. The child awakens to the truth that he is a bit player. The child ceases to pray. The child turns in on himself, takes only his own counsel, seeks only his own success, and turns against the world which has disappointed him.

There is another way. The child is protected. The child prays. The child is encouraged by the example of his parents to continue the discipline of prayer. The child awakens to his billing as a walk-on. He becomes discouraged, but he is buoyed up and supported by prayer. He is not alone. That prayer binds us to God is self evident. That prayer binds us to the fraternity of those who pray is not as evident, but equally significant. We are not alone. We are not the only one who feels humble before God's beauty and who is hurt and angered because of human cruelty and suffering. Many, like him, have walked courageously the lonely way. He learns to see the possibility of life and the sunshine season. He remains sensitive to need. He becomes a man.



## SOME THOUGHTS ON THE KADDISH

The glory of worship is honesty. I saw evidence of such honesty last Saturday morning. I noticed, as the Kaddish was being recited, a young girl hardly in her teens rising for this prayer. I knew her family, and I wondered whom she was mourning. After the service I asked and I discovered that her dog had died and that she had recited the Kaddish prayer in memory of her beloved pet. Strict Jewish law, of course, would not prescribe and might indeed proscribe such saying of the Kaddish. According to tradition a man recited the Kaddish only for members of his most immediate family. But I found nothing unseemly in this girl's act. For what is the Kaddish but a re-affirmation of God in a moment of poignant loss and deep grief?

The Kaddish is a 'mirage' prayer. It appears to be written in Hebrew but is not. It appears to deal with death and grief, but does not. The Kaddish is written in Aramaic. Linguistically, Aramaic is a close cousin of Hebrew. It was the everyday language of the people towards the end of the Biblical period. Written in a popular vernacular, the Kaddish's popularity has never waned.

If the Kaddish does not center on the theme of death or immortality, why then is it recited at the grave-side and during memorial worship? Textually the Kaddish is a glorification of God. Liturgically it is an affirmation of faith, particularly meaningful at the hour when death challenges faith. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me." Spoken at the hour of loss, the Kaddish is fundamental to the discipline of solace.

Strictly speaking, only the male survivors recite the Kaddish. Reform Judaism places this obligation equally on the women. Grief is, after all, not limited to a father's or husband's heart. Personally, I do not find it improper for a child to rise in memory of a grandparent or great-grandparent, or even of an intimate companion. This is not Jewish law, but then we as Reform Jews are concerned with spirit and intention as well as with the forms of traditional observance.

From time to time this question is presented — is it correct and proper for a widow or widower who has since remarried to rise for the saying of the Kaddish? Tradition answers, no. Such provision intends to legitimize a natural desire to keep unhappy memories out of the new home. I tend to disagree with this customary reasoning. Man is capable of many loves. He does not necessarily mar new happiness by reminding himself of older happiness — especially since he cannot in any case forget them. It is quite possible to be completely in love and yet rise year after year in respect of one who was deeply loved and is tenderly remembered.

The other day I was asked still another question regarding the Kaddish. A young man whom I had converted inquired if it is proper to rise in memory of his non-Jewish parents who had recently died. My answer — and in this



case the answer of Jewish tradition — is that it is not only proper but fitting. The convert has accepted only a new form of religious expression. His conversion in no way affects his love for his parents. He needs to express his grief. It would be altogether improper of us to deny him such expression.

November 15, 1959

## ON LIVING IN REVOLUTIONARY TIMES

There has been violence in our land. Black men riding grey buses have been beaten because they dared sit on brown benches in white waiting rooms. If it were not so tragic, this battle of the backsides would seem Rabelaisian comedy. Imagine grown men squabbling over whose pants on which bench!

The cause of the Freedom Riders needs no pleading. What can be said for the counter claims by the solid and respectable South? These men of affairs decry the mob. Rightly they accuse their police of abetting riot. There, however, Southern stock-taking stops. The Freedom Rider is the villain of the piece. He began it all. He is the agitator. If he had not come . . .

Why, indeed, does he come? Why does this nice, college educated Negro risk serious injury and jail sentence? He comes, of course, because Dixie law is color law and the Constitution is color blind. He comes because such travel is his right and he intends to exercise and establish this right.

Why can he not be patient? After all, Southern law has been racist since the Reconstruction. Why must the Negro gorge himself on integrated schools, voting equality, and the right to eat, swim, and pray next to the white man, when he has been patient these many generations? The Negro insists and persists because he senses victory. His father and grandfather before him hungered to be human, but public apathy and economic stringency, the South's and his own, conspired to frustrate all hope. Now a rising standard of living, a more sensitive public conscience and the propaganda requirements of foreign policy conspire to forward his struggle.

The Freedom Rider is symbol of a world-wide upheaval. Bind the earth forty degrees north or south of the equator, and you cross five continents and countless nations in which racial and political unrest is very much the order of the day. If I be not mistaken, history will label this mid-century as the triumph of the emerging masses. As recently as the turn of the century only a



fraction of one percent of the world's population enjoyed even the semblance of freedom. One hundred families controlled a quarter of the world's wealth. Today nineteen independent African nations are accredited to the United Nations in one year.

Why is the world determined to set right overnight so many ancient wrongs? Why must we accomplish in a single life span what all other generations could not accomplish in all of recorded time? Has some brand new gospel spread through the world? The Communists would like us to think so. But what is hopeful in their philosophy is as old as the prophets and Jesus. Men have pined and planned for a juster way of life all along. Our age is unique only in this: we control the first economy which makes democracy and decency in law broadly possible. Mass production and a brilliant science make inevitable the emergence of the once exploited. Mass production means more things and greater leisure. Leisure and a higher standard of living means more learning. More learning means better leadership. Better leadership means more efficient organization. More efficient organization means calculated and effective action. Police can bayonet and billy-stick submission for a time, but, even in South Africa, only for a time. The revolution of the masses will not be stayed.

Where ancient morality has not compelled justice a new and far more potent argument now commands respect. Where morality has ameliorated justice the pace of change must now be quickened. The unpredictable in our political equation is no longer the patience of the many toward special privilege but the willingness of the privileged to open their laws and their hearts before patience wears thin. If violence comes it will come because we blind ourselves to the revolutionary quality of this age.

June 1, 1961

## **WHAT I HAVE LEARNED FROM YOUR CHILDREN**

Each year in our Confirmation work we spend a great deal of time discussing the essentials of faith. I explain as much as can be explained of our concept of God, prayer, and holiness. I tell the young people how Moses was revolted by the gross sexuality and the morbidity of Egyptian paganism; how the Jewish people came to the inspired vision of the one universal God; how all images, statues, and idols, indeed, all representations of God, were ultimately purged;



how the prophets insisted on a religion of works, not words, and that belief in the one God required an acceptance of world wide brotherhood.

I tell the young people some of the medieval philosophizing concerning God and His attributes; what we can know about God and what remains forever unknown — and I describe the ways in which Judaism responded to the intellectual and scientific challenge of modern times. However, once I have described and defined and historically explained, much remains, for I am a rabbi, not an historian of religion, and this is a Confirmation class, not a course in comparative religions. I am not concerned so much with what men once believed as with what these children now believe. And so we spend much time talking over their philosophies — not as grand or as ordered perhaps as those of Philo, Maimonides, or Spinoza, but nevertheless their own.

At the Confirmation stage young people remind me of butterflies beginning to shake off the restricting cocoon. Like the butterfly, they have outgrown the protective but circumscribed world in which they were nurtured. They are emerging into a new world, but it is an unfamiliar world and their movements often seem awkward, even contorted. Experience has shown that the facts of the nursery and the God of the nursery — part guardian angel, part doting grandfather — simply do not conform to life. One told a tall tale and was not punished. One loved deeply and prayed to God during a grandmother's illness, and the grandmother died. One child was even able to tell me the exact hour and day in which he began to doubt. I still remember that date — November 12, 1957, seven p.m. This young boy was in Junior High School. After school he had a paper route. He was also captain of an intramural basketball team. This particular fall day, for some reason or another, his game was unexpectedly rescheduled. It was late in the day. The weather was bad, and the young boy was unable to bribe or cajole any other to carry the route for him. Quite understandably in his distress he turned to God and prayer: "Dear God, please let none of my customers complain to the circulation manager. Please, God, I must play this game. Please let me get away with not delivering, this once." At seven p.m. the telephone rang. It was the circulation manager. Someone had complained. It is not pleasant to watch faith drain out of a boy's heart. Yet in our society this is not an unusual occurrence. During pre-adolescence we trust. We test. We are disappointed. Frustrated, we reject entirely.

I asked a class this year to set down for me as honestly as they could what they believed about God. I told them that I was not going to grade the papers. I asked them especially not to write what they thought I wanted to read. May I share three of these paragraphs.

"This grim world really scares me. Every once in a while I realize the cruelty and insensibility of it and that's when I begin to wonder. We can't just be here to disagree, fight, and eventually blow ourselves to bits. There must be some purpose or reason behind us. That is when I think of God.



This ideal is, in a measure, a crutch to lean on. It gives me some hope for the future. I believe I have outgrown the 'old man in the sky watching over me' type of feeling though I can't really describe what has replaced it. Sometimes I can't really accept God, sacrilegious as it may seem, but I might as well be honest about it — probably because the abstract concept is over my head. When I look around and see the hatred and ugliness, I don't understand how God could allow it. The closest I can come, from my experience, is conscience as that part of us which is created in God's image."

Another: "I'm really not sure what I believe about God. I think that there must be something — something larger, better than man, that is within each person helping to draw the line between what is right and what is wrong. I cannot admit to myself that there is a Supreme Being whom we call God. I would like to believe this. I want to believe that when I do something wrong it is all predestined and that there is nothing I can do about it, but I can't. However, there must be something bigger than science — guiding life, love, fear and all things. This I do believe. I cannot simply state, 'there lives a God,' because I just don't know. I don't really feel qualified to give an honest opinion."

And again: "I have not yet developed any definite ideas about God and I probably won't for a long time. I feel there is some reason and some kind of logic in life and why men live, but I am not saying it is God yet. To me God is a concept which is simply accepted by many — by those who actually study it and then accept it. I feel it is accepted only after accepting certain things on faith. I am not ready to say that a divine something created the earth and controls everything in it. There is too much to make this unbelievable — such as the fact that if God doesn't like bloodshed, why war? If God wants peace, why battle? If God wants unity among men, why segregation? I feel that man as a society is much too complex to push off on something man doesn't even comprehend. I furthermore think that with advancement will come a totally new idea as to what controls us — an idea which will be able to be expressed in mathematical symbols. I also believe that too many people have looked for an easy out to the whole question of life and death and origin and end and have simply attached the tag of 'God' to it all. Something much more complex, in my opinion, is the answer."

I prize these papers. I prize them because they reveal a capacity for conceptual thinking and self analysis rare even in the adult. Remember, these are fourteen-year olds, not collegians. What a tragedy that school systems often feed intellectual pabulum to such minds as these. But I prize them even more because these and the papers of which they are symbols represent a questing, a puzzling out, and a grasping for. They are minds in search — in search of meaning, in search of values — and that is, after all, the essential religious discipline.

I do not know how men come to God. Men come to God in individual ways. But I know this: that only those come to faith who ask and who doubt,



who admit difficulty and complexity and uncertainty and the need to find meaning. In the last analysis the atheist and the theist, the believer and disbeliever are not far apart. Each is a mind in search. The believer acknowledges that he has moments of disbelief; the disbeliever acknowledges that he has moments of belief. Both seek understanding and both are at war with complacency, with the many who simply do not care enough to analyze goals or even to be unhappy with the limitations of the society in which they live. These young people are a healthy antidote for the religionist, who often finds himself surrounded by people who accept but who have ceased searching.

Rabbis and ministers today are caught in a velvet trap. We are surrounded by the symbols of success. This is an era of religious revival. The rolls of churches and synagogues are growing at a rate faster than the population. Corporations are spending their stockholders' money to give us billboards and full page advertisements urging us to go to church. In a rare display of unanimity, our country has brought God back into the Pledge of Allegiance and has imprinted God solidly on our currency. Even the habitually iconoclastic campus highlights a religious emphasis week during which neo-orthodox and existentialist theologians pack them in. Not everyone understands them, but everyone knows that they ought to be listened to.

Now, I do not decry any of this. It is far better for people to be exposed even occasionally to religious influence than not to be exposed at all. But as I look about me, I find myself angry with this rotarian spirit of sweet agreeableness. There is about me a euphoria which I find sticky. Everyone agrees God is a good thing: faith is a good thing, it's American, it's democratic, it's loyal. And people come. But I do not sense in them the search. They are joining and they are conforming, but they are not joining and confirming.

It was Tennyson who said: "There is more faith in honest doubt than in half your creeds." I prize this — the uncertainty of the young — because this is honest doubt. This is the record of young people seeking to understand, trying to become adult. This is religious search.

A young man who is in college came to visit The Temple several weeks ago. He spoke to me of an interest in the ministry. I asked him to read several of these papers. He read them with attention and returned, saying, "How can you confirm these young people? Read this." He showed me this paper:

"Now we are back to the age-old question, but to me, of course, it means something different. I have been brought up on respect for God through prayer. The many morals and standards of our religion greatly influence my life. I believe in living a good moral life as taught by my religion and parents, but I think that religion, not God so much, seems to affect my life at present. To me God is an abstract word to whom we pray and about whom I am not sure what I believe, since I haven't spent much time thinking about it up to now and I think I can wait before making any final decision. I believe in the



moral codes as guides in leading a fine life and religion is a good teacher of this, but God to me is something apart. I plan to wait so that I can better understand myself before reaching any conclusions about Him."

This zealous acolyte wanted to know how we can confirm such a child. I asked him what he thought the essence of religious belief to be. "A religionist is one who believes in God." "Are you always certain of your religion? Have you never had any doubts and questions?" "Certainly, but I now have my faith." "Were you certain as an adolescent, always certain?" "No." "Were you confirmed?" "Yes." "Is not this child aware of something which is essential, of a need to search and to understand? Do not all of us have to understand ourselves and our world before we can begin to understand God?" "Yes." "Then is not this a religious paper of high order?"

In Jewish life we are never commanded to define God, or to catechize God, but only to search for God. Jewish life has always played down the credal and the dogmatic. We never ask any Confirmand to subscribe his signature to a complicated theological definition of God and man. The convert is not asked to subscribe his allegiance to an elaborate litany of theosophy. It is enough that men search. If they search, they will find, and if they do not find God they will certainly find worthwhile values.

March 19, 1961



## ON LECTURES AND SERMONS

This week our regular Sunday services begin again. What crosses a rabbi's mind as he thinks ahead to program his year-long lecture schedule?

Basically, he thinks about the four worlds of man: our private world — the world of our dreams and of our frustrations and of our relations to family and friends; our religious world — which transcends the first in that it includes our fate and future as Jews; our world as Americans in which we struggle to realize the democratic dream; and our international world where the ultimate question of life and death, peace or war, will be decided. The rabbi thinks of these four worlds and tries to balance his lecture schedule among them.

What does he see as he takes another hard, critical look at man's four worlds? He sees that the challenges and responsibilities which faced us last year remain essentially the same. Only the context has changed. Man has now reached the moon and encircled the moon. China has emerged as a



possibly greater threat to world peace than Russia. Sluggishly, but determinedly, the world seems to be moving towards serious international exchange and discussion. The battle for better education, for extended civil rights, for new and more helpful approaches to the social conditions which breed crime and delinquency is being waged with some degree of success. Jewish life seems to be developing deeper and sturdier roots.

To look at man's four worlds is to sense advance and achievement. Much is being accomplished. Underdeveloped nations are slowly and painfully winning a rightful share of the earth's bounty. In America prosperity continues to bring its blessings to all levels of our society. As Americans we seem to be growing up to our world-wide and domestic responsibilities. A lecture year ought to reflect these positive accomplishments. It is neither true nor wise, though it is sometimes more dramatic, to be wholly pessimistic.

A lecture year ought to reflect the wish and the will of all peoples for peace, prosperity and justice, but it ought equally to point up the lackadaisical attitude of many toward each of their worlds, the moral rot which has affected so many families and individuals, the lust and greed which motivate self-seeking men, and the halfway measures with which we have sometimes attempted to solve critical social problems. I shall this year attempt to reflect both a feeling of restrained optimism and one of deep concern. I shall try to deal at various times with each of our four worlds. If there is any single theme, it will be this — that life is a serious business, not a leisure time activity, and that we ought to be as concerned and involved in our personal growth, our spiritual development, our national wellbeing and our world's peace as we are with practical and business matters.

November 1, 1959