

YAVNEH: LOOKING AHEAD VALUES AND GOALS

Have you ever wondered what would happen if Mashiach came? Offhand we think there would be a radical change in people's lives and values. Deeper intuition, however, suggests that this is not so.¹

Some years ago, I speculated on this possibility in a short sketch which went something like this.²

In the middle of a dark night, a brilliant light floods the world, as predicted in Jewish folklore.³ Instantly, the switchboards at police stations, radio stations, newspapers, light up as thousands of anxious callers telephone to ask what is up. Rumor and counter rumor swirl through the population. In the midst of this confusion only one solid piece of news emerges. An Associated Press dispatch reports that on a hill at the Northern approach to Mt. Zion a poor, somewhat wild looking man, astride a white donkey, has been seen riding toward Jerusalem. Public panic and hysteria begin to build as no explanation is forthcoming from authoritative sources.

A committee of scientists hastily convened deliberates for several hours. Its chairman, Bertrand Russell, interrupts his campaign for unilateral disarmament to announce its conclusions to the public. In a half hour interview on BBC, he explains that there is no cause for concern. It can be shown mathematically that the sun had to come out at this specific hour. It is true that the occurrence seems unexpected but actually the astronomical calculations were not made carefully enough and it is all quite clear now. "There is no reason for retreat into obscurantism," he adds. He announces his new book "How to Live With Your Fears."⁴

Next to respond is Moscow Radio. From the Kremlin (to which he has hurriedly returned from a vacation in the Crimea) Chairman Khrushchev reads the following declaration: "The false and scurrilous stories being spread by the oppressors of the international proletariat are based on discredited bourgeois Nationalist Zionist idealist superstitions which have been thoroughly refuted by Marxist-Leninist materialistic dialectic. This is an attempt by warmongering capitalists to split the peace loving Socialist camp . . . Besides we were the first into space."

Ed Sullivan wires an offer of a \$50,000 fee for exclusive rights for the first appearance of Mashiach on television.⁵ Wagon Train offers an appearance on a special program called "The Mashiach Story" starring Burt Lancaster.

This paper was delivered by Rabbi Greenberg on Sunday evening, September 2, 1962.

Crowds of Neturei Karta supporters demonstrate in front of the Heichal Shlomo building against Ben Gurion's thinly disguised plot to reestablish the Sanhedrin. Ben Gurion announces that as only 600 people went out of Egypt, only one thousandth of a Mashiach should now come.⁶

After an all night session of the Ecumenical Council, chaired by the Pope and closed to the press, the Vatican announces the following decision of the Church. "The reputed Messiah is to be stopped at once and asked the following question: Is this his first or second coming? If it is his second, he is to be allowed to proceed and greeted with hosannas in Jerusalem. If it is his first, he is a fraud."

In the whole world, only one person's life is changed by the coming of the Mashiach. An old man learning in the Bais Medrash in the middle of the night, jumps up when he sees the light. Eureka! he cries Taykoo! תשבי יתרון קושיות ואבניות! And he runs out to get the answers to all the Kashyes and unsolved problems he has been saving up in years of learning . . .

I fear that our generation is illustrating this story. We are living in Messianic times yet our motto seems to be "business as usual." I do not wish to bandy around lightly words like Mashiach. We have been taught by Jewish history that we cannot "hasten the end." But what honest observer can doubt that we live in a time of the shaking of the foundations and the stirring of the depths of mankind and all its institutions. We Jews have lived through the most shattering events in thousands of years. They should be — but are not yet — awakening events.

First we experienced the Emancipation and westernization which washed away the Torah centered community framework of our life as a people.^{7a} Then came World War II and the extermination of six million Jews.^{7b} I wonder if you realize what a watershed this experience is in our lives.

It has demolished all our established conventional positions and put us under the stern necessity of rebuilding our lives — if we are courageous enough to face up to it honestly . . .

It has revealed the bankruptcy and insufficiency of Western civilization by itself and shown up its claim of moral progress and that man was being perfected by modern culture. Jewish assimilation in the last century and a half has been the reflection of glib acceptance of these illusions. Tragically enough it has taken this catastrophe to give us insight into the limitations of contemporary civilization. We, the survivors, now have to work out a new relationship of communication with a culture whose goodness and achievement we appreciate but whose evil and limitations we have experienced.

It has radically changed being a Jew — even for the assimilated. Being Jewish is no longer merely a discrimination or disadvantage one is born into. It is a serious identification for which a person may have to die *י"ח*. Who could have dreamt fifteen years after World War II and less than a year after Eichmann's trial anti-Semitism would re-emerge so openly and unshamedly?⁷ This fact is not raised for the sake of wringing our hands. The point is that every Jew must now face up to the fact and ask himself: is it worth it? He must make something of it or face the ultimate absurdity of risking his life for something meaningless to him.⁸

It has added entirely new dimensions to being an Orthodox Jew. Firstly, it has revolutionized our relationship with G-d. How can we serve Him conventionally ever again? How — unless we draw near to G-d and multiply our love a thousandfold — can we bear the infinite weight of the sorrow of our brothers? Only if we love as Rabbi Akiva did: with all our hearts, with all our soul — even if he takes our soul;⁹ only if we can feel "though He slay me yet I long for Him."¹⁰

Secondly, it has challenged us to broaden our philosophy and understanding of Torah. We simply dare no longer shut out a single Jewish experience from our understanding. Can we embrace the boundless agony and suffering of six million Jews? Can we keep them alive?¹⁰ Can we find balm for their wounds and cover their nakedness with our love? If we fail *י"ח*, only then will they die again and finally.¹¹ The experience of every one of them — the Tsaddik, the Bundist, the Zionist and the assimilationist, the moral and the mean, must be incorporated into our understanding of Jewish history and seen in their pointing the way to the Kingdom of G-d. Is this not the awesome mystery of sacred history as depicted in Tanach and Chazal? The lives of the Fathers and the behavior of the Meraglim; the happiness of Purim and the suffering of Tisha B'Av — all must be seen in the framework of divine pattern.¹² The behavior of Avraham and the behavior of Lot — by showing what is right and showing what is wrong — must be understood. Never have we needed so badly a healing, life giving mission of profound religious thought.

Thirdly, we must relate ourselves anew to non-religious Jews who — it took Hitler to remind us and teach us — are our brothers in life and in death. The knowledge of our common destiny must prevent us from abandoning them or self-righteously writing them off. It must spur us until we bind our lives to theirs and draw them with bands of love and sympathy ever closer to Torah.¹³

It is not only tragedy that has strained the fabric of our inherited, conventional religious commitment. The State of Israel — the beginning

of redemption — has similarly taxed our capacity for deeper understanding. Who among us will help us understand how Mashiach is being brought closer by the very apikoros who is stripping a Jewish teenager of his tradition and turning him into a secular idealist or, all too often, into a street corner "hood"?¹⁴ Who will teach us how to help, yet resist, yet, change people who are involved in a frantic copying of American material values while they have saved — and are saving — hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives? Who will give *us* eyes to see the fulfillment of prophecy — a true authentication of the divinity of Yahadut — and the cunning and courage to lift the state up to living by divine standards?

How can we remain so apathetic when we see the breakdown of idols? Scientism is dying; Marxism is self-revealed for the Moloch it is; secular liberalism is dessicating in the hands of its conventional practitioners. Yet thus far, not enough people have faced up to the revolution of our times.¹⁵

In its own modest fashion, Yavneh is a response to our profound sense of the new conditions. We are people who feel — each in his own way — that we have been irrevocably changed. The name Yavneh was chosen to express our sense of continuity with that Yavneh of 1900 years ago. Then, too, at a time of terrible destruction, the seeds of rebirth were planted.^{16a} We are told that at the time when Sodom was destroyed,^{16b} at the time Joseph was sold into slavery,^{16c} at the time of the burning of the Temple,^{16d} at all times when disaster has been met by unquenchable Jewish will to rebuild, G-d has been there "engaged in preparing the light of the Mashiach."^{16e} We believe that now, as then, the revival must start with learning,¹⁷ for Torah is the source of living contact with G-d and His rejuvenating holiness. We believe that now, as then, Torah must be given the depth, scope and dynamic to master new conditions and to restore the broken unity and wholeness of Israel.

Yavneh has started carefully and maturely — building only on a voluntary basis and in places where enough people feel the need and create their own response. Our program is based solidly on education — teaching ourselves and others who draw near. But, we insist on the wholeness of Torah. We do not study and teach just one fraction of the Law. Bayn Adam La Makon — between man and G-d — is as precious to us as between man and man — and vice versa. Love of fellow man and ethical action is our commitment — for thereby we walk in His ways. We believe that neither should concern for the downtrodden and for social justice be a monopoly of non-observant Jews, nor should concern for Mikveh or Kashruth be a monopoly of observant Jews. For the moment our prime concern is self-improvement — to deepen our

knowledge and improve our behavior. But even now we think and plan for the years when we will enter the community and work for our ideals there. We dream and prepare for the raising of standards of Jewish community life and religious education. We are proud of the expansion of the Hebrew Day School movement and welcome the fact that "study in a Yeshiva" is now an accepted slogan. But we know all too well that there is a basic need for evaluation and overhauling of the Yeshiva curriculum. Tanach is still too much taught on the child's level of simple translation. This is inexcusable when in our classical commentators and in modern pedagogy in Israel, the profundity, relevance and excitement of Scripture have been brought out and taught. We know that in most places Talmud still gets the lion's share of the time students spend in Yeshiva at all levels. Yet, little has been done to make vivid the religious implications, to eliminate the playing with texts in favor of a solid derech in learning, or to restore the wholeness of Talmud by proper attention to Agada. Little has been done with Jewish philosophy, history, literature. We feel these weaknesses sharply when, in college, we are faced with the challenge of well formulated challenging philosophies. We plan for the day when an educational foundation will be set up to encourage the necessary enrichment of the curriculum and raise the living standards of the men who teach us. We look forward to the time when with the aid of Yavneh alumni, we will sponsor Yavneh fellows on each campus — assistantships in teaching Torah for graduate students with proper backgrounds — so that we can end our chronic shortage of instructors able to teach Yahadut to college students. We look to the day when we can sponsor a Yavneh scholar — a mature scholar who will be given the time and financial assistance he needs to write and teach us all the philosophy and understanding of Judaism which we and the community need. This past year I had the pleasure of spending a year as a Fulbright lecturer in Israel. I look forward to the time when such opportunities for study or improving teaching skills are made available to qualified Roshei Yeshiva and Rabbis so that their gain will be translated into better religious education for all of us. Finally, we hope to set new standards of charity and philanthropy. It is interesting to note that two of the fastest growing, most successful sects in America — The Mormon Church and the Seventh Day Adventists — have established the principle that their members give 10% of their income for their church and its activities. I do not know if we will achieve a concept of Ma'aser among all Jews.¹⁸ At times, I almost feel that we should settle for Trumah.¹⁹ But we hope to establish a standard of generous giving — and intelligent giving — directed toward creative educational and

rehabilitative work and to newer programs that may be promising even if not entrenched in the community.

In the meantime, there is the ongoing Yavneh educational work which has grown from year to year. It is my pleasure to introduce two new programs to be initiated by Yavneh in the coming year. Both reflect its constant striving for more depth and effectiveness. Both, we hope, may be usable in the adult Jewish community eventually.

First — a Yavneh Israel Institute. The basic details of this program are set, although final details are to be worked out. The program for boys will consist of full time participation in an Israeli Yeshiva — specifically, Merkaz Harav Kook. However, only the first Seder (approximately five hours) will be spent in the regular Talmud program. In addition, special teachers will be provided for a unique program of supplementary Jewish studies. Dr. Nechama Leibowitz (teaching Chumash) is an example of the quality of teaching we anticipate having for the special program. The supplementary studies will consist of 12 to 15 hours per week, divided among Tanach, Jewish philosophy (primarily modern), Jewish history (if there are 15 hours), and a special course on Torah She B'Al Peh (Oral Law). This course will survey the tradition, the codification, the authority and principles, and the literature of Torah She B'Al Peh. In addition, there will be a series of talks on religious issues and problems and a bi-weekly meeting with a leading figure in Israeli religious thought and education.²⁰ I might add that this program bids fair to be unique. The current Yeshiva setup both in Israel and abroad usually means that the student must choose between Talmud or high level supplementary Jewish studies. The Institute will be pitched at an intensive level, requiring homework and individual papers and will be a serious study undertaking. Therefore all participants will have to be full time students at the Institute.²¹ We anticipate a very nominal cost for the year (under \$600).

Second — A special, nationally standardized course for Yavneh Chugim with specially prepared material. The course is designed to overcome the shortage of good teachers, to give the student special material unavailable elsewhere and to help set higher standards in religious education. We have chosen for our pilot project, the book of Jonah. A Yavneh member is currently translating a very fine Hebrew work on Jonah which will be made available as the basic text.²² In addition five topics growing out of and suggested by the text will be taken up.²³ For these topics special study guides containing sources from all of Jewish thought and interpretative suggestions and questions will be supplied. Over the years we hope to build up a library of books and courses that will bring out more clearly the "light that is in Torah"²⁴

— the depth and relevance of our holy writings. We hope that every Yavneh member will participate and that eventually adult education groups in the community will use them as well.

I would like to add that we hope — possibly *this year* — to broaden our annual Summer Institute from a part time to a full time program. As in the past the courses and instructors will be chosen with the standards that have come to characterize Yavneh's educational efforts.

If I can summarize all these developments, it seems to me that their point is clear. No one can be a good Jew, a profound Jew, unless he matures intellectually and personally as a Jew. Every Yavneh member should set as a goal participation in one or two study Chugim during the year.²⁵ In addition, there should be a period of full time Jewish study and experience. Such an experience can come only in an atmosphere where all efforts are dedicated to Torah study. If we spend ten months a year in which general studies are primary, then it is a moral and personal obligation to spend at least two months a year in Jewish study.²⁶ Finally, our goal should be at least one year of full time intensive Jewish studies such as in the Israel Institute. Two months or ten months intensive study of high level Jewish courses means that we will be that much closer to our goal of taking the best of Western civilization and suffusing it with the values of Torah. It means we will be better able to use Western insight and achievement in illuminating Torah.

All that I have sketched personally and educationally may sound demanding and grandiose, but in light of our revolutionary times, we can do no less. To few generations are given the trials and opportunities that we have been given. Moreover, we know that what we do is for our own good. By realizing our highest potential as Jews, we can attain our fullest capacity as human beings. Someone jokingly told me that in view of Yavneh's goals of Jewish study and excellence in college, of professional growth and personal maturity, of revitalizing Judaism and Jewish life, each member would have to live seven lives. Ever since I have seen the full tragedy of our people, I have believed that this is indeed true. Every Jew must live not only for himself, but for the little children who never were given a chance to grow up. We must experience deeply for the millions who were not allowed to do so. We must do charity for them; we must give the love which was cut off from them. Never has the world needed it so badly from us. Never have our divine concepts of the sanctity of the individual, of holiness and wholeness of daily life, of the mastery of modern technology through Mitzvot (such as Shabbat) been so vital for all of mankind. If we allow ourselves and the Jewish community to drift with indif-

ference and low standards, then later generations חס ושלום will point to us for the small people, for the destroyers we were. If we will only see the true condition of our times and grow to meet the challenge, then we will be for all time the generation of rebirth and redemption. Then mankind will know that in our times too,

while evil men were engaged in destruction;

while foolish men were engaged in business as usual;

while the world was engaged in crisis and fear,

The Holy One, Blessed be He, was engaged in preparing the light of Mashiach.²⁷

NOTES

1. The reader is referred to a similar intuition in the story "The Last Kopeck" in N. Ausubel ed., *A Treasury of Jewish Humor* (Doubleday, 1951) pp. 90 ff.

2. I think this is original but was approached by one auditor who claimed to have read such a story somewhere. He could not recall where. Neither can I.

3. In this connection the German Jewish renaissance under the shadow of the earth — then a brilliant light.

4. According to an unconfirmed report, Erich Fromm is reported to have denounced the Messiah as a fraud. "How can there be two of us," he explained.

5. Some observers noted that this was the second highest fee in television history.

6. Abba Eban backs Ben Gurion in the Knesset with a magnificent oratorical effort in which he shows that actually Mashiach is not a man but a broad, humanistic goal of Israel in accordance with the highest aims of Western man. Compare, Anti-Defamation League Bulletin #64 and the joint statement of the symposium on Mashiach in the December issue of *Commentary*.

7a. See the charming, nostalgic portrait of the shtetl in M. Zborowski and E. Herzog, *Life is With People* (International Universities Press, 1952) (which also illuminates why Emancipation made such inroads) and the solemnly beautiful A. J. Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's* (Meridian Books, 1962 reprints) as well as Roman Vishniac's photograph portraits of the last days before the catastrophe swooped down.

7b. Every Jew should read at least Gerald Reitlinger's *The Final Solution* (reprint, A. S. Barnes, New York, 1961) or Joseph Tennenbaum's *Race and Reich* (Twayne Publishers, N. Y.) or some equivalent book.

7. Soviet and South American anti-Semitism are only the more acute forms today.

8. In this connection the German Jewish renaissance under the shadow of the Third Reich is instructive and revealing. See the publications of the Leo Baeck Institute.

8a. See *Berachot* 61b.

9. *Job* 13, 15. See the Malbim *loc. cit.* for this translation of הָיָה and also S. R. Hirsch's commentary on *Psalms* 130, 7.

10. It was Eichmann's boast that even if the Nazis failed to annihilate all the Jews, they would have killed the Jewish people for those who remained would be too assimilated or too weak in Jewish understanding to recover and rebuild. See the testimony of Hoess (the commandant at Auschwitz) at his Polish war crimes trial quoted in Tennebaum, *Race and Reich*, p. 342.

11. This is the meaning of Amalek's ultimate punishment — to have its memory wiped out. *Devarim* 25, 19.

12. This point was driven home forcefully to me at the Ohel Zikkaron in the Yad VaShem memorial for European Jewry in Jerusalem. There, alone, beside a permanently silently flickering flame, were engraved the names of Auschwitz, Belsen, Dachau, Treblinka . . . Because the sorrow of Jewry there had to be known and understood, because they changed our lives as Jews, these camps too had become inextricably woven into the immortality of Jewish history.

13. Perhaps our perception of common brotherhood can give us the strength to actually live up to Hillel's call (*Avot* 1, 12) to "love peace, pursue peace, love our fellow creatures and draw them near to Torah."

14. The arrogance (*chutzpah*) at the time of the footsteps of the Messiah stems from the longing for the holiness of the Ineffable — and it will eventually attain its true direction and goal." Rabbi A. I. Kook, *Oroth Ha-Kodesh* (m.s. portion, cited in Y. Bachrach, *Ima Shel Malchut*, p. 79.

15. Sometimes the fear grips me that we are living the curse reported to Isaiah: "Make the heart of this people thick, and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understood with their heart, and return and be healed." *Isaiah* 6, 10.

16a. Cf. *Gittin* 55-57.

16b. Cf. *Medrash Rabba*, ch. 50; *Yevamos* 77a.

16c. *Bereshith Rabba*, ch. 85.

16d. "On the day the Temple was destroyed, the Redeemer was (will be) born." Cf. *Yerushalmi Berachot* ch. 2; *Aychah Rabba*, ch. 1.

16e. Cf. *Bereshith Rabba*, ch. 85.

17. Said Vespasian to Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai ". . . ask something of me and I will give it to you. Rabbi Jochanan said to him: Give me (the city of) Yavneh and its wise men (the scholars of the Academy.)" Cf. *Gittin* 55-57.

18. American Jews have always been proud of their generous philanthropy. But see the illuminating article by Marshall Sklare, "The Future of Jewish Giving" in *Commentary*, November, 1962. It suggests that much fewer Jews than we think actually give.

19. In *Terumah*, the average man gives 2%, the "tightwad" 1½% and the "free spender" 2½%.

20. The Institute will run from September through June and will be run in cooperation with and with the financial help of the Jewish Agency's Department of Torah Education and Culture. *Full details on both plans will be given in a brochure to be to be published shortly*—Editor's note.

21. Because there is no Yeshiva setup for girls, Yavneh's program for girls will participate in the very fine program of Machon Gold, a teacher training seminary of the Jewish Agency. Machon Gold's program parallels our supplementary courses but has much less Talmud than Yeshivot. However, there will be one or two special courses for Yavneh. It is also hoped that the girls can participate in the personal meetings and interviews.

22. The book is "Jonah ben Amitai," a commentary by Rabbi Yehoshua Bachrach. Rabbi Bachrach's work is an outstanding example of the profound approach to Tanach being developed by religious Jewry in Israel. He is also the kind of person the religious community should be (but unfortunately isn't) aiding with free time and assistance to make possible more achievement in his chosen area.

23. The five topics are Prophecy; the Service and Defiance of G-d (i.e., man's relationship to G-d); Teshuvah; the attitude toward the non-Jews; and the Midot of G-d.

24. Cf. the introduction to *Medrash Aychah*.

25. Naturally our members at Yeshiva College and Stern College will be taking these chugim as supplement to a fuller Jewish study program. For our other chapters, the intensive Talmud program given by Rabbi Emanuel Gettinger of the Young Israel of the West Side for Columbia Yavneh students should be held as a model.

26. A Rebbe of mine once put it to me this way. If we spend forty hours a week working at being a doctor (lawyer, businessman, folk singer, etc.) then we should spend some hours a week working at being ourselves, i.e., better human beings.

27. Suggested by *Bereshith Rabah*, chapter 85.