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May It Be A Blessing An Introduction to Judaism

There are three Israels, two Torahs, One God.
Jews are missionaries, but seek no converts.
Jews are special, but not better; chosen, as are others.
Jews embrace law, because they stress faith.
Judaism is no approach to God. It is response.



"MODEL SEDER" — Asking the Four Questions. In Gaeta, Italy, Malka Resnicoff assists her father, Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff at a "model Seder" for the Protestant and Catholic communities. Eighty officers and sailors from the PUGET SOUND, Sixth Fleet flagship, attended the Seder with their families — remembering the story of the Exodus as a source of revelation for men and women of all faiths.

Jacob strove with God, and *Israel* became his name.
Now, Jacob's children — his descendents — know faith includes a struggle we each must face alone.

At Sinai, from the Jewish dream, came forth the Jewish people. And *Am Yisrael* — a family based on covenant, not on blood — learned peoples, too, must wrestle with God's word.

Across the Jordan, a Promised Land. The thought of *Eretz Yisrael* — land of Israel — taught even nations might be linked to dreams. Out of Zion, might come forth words of faith.

Three "Israels" — three levels of existence for us all: the way we see ourselves, the way we face each other, the way we see the world.

Individual, people, land: each challenged to be chosen.
All commanded to be holy.

On day one, God made light. Not till later would there be a sun or moon.

And so, we learn, there is a light beyond the world.
There is the light of hope. There is the light of God.

Torah is one source: Torah — revelation — revealed word of God. For Jews, such Torah takes two forms: written words of Scripture; and oral teachings, handed down, which keep those words alive.

In the Talmud, we wrestle with God's word. We study written word and passed-down thoughts — and life, and land, and world. The challenge is to take God's word to heart, embracing human hearts — and hopes and needs and dreams — as well.

We love God's word, but we must love His world, as well. When faith can teach us both, then out of Torah has come forth light.

Three Israels:
Individual
People
Land

Two Torahs: One Light

One God
One Plan
One Sabbath Day

Holy land is linked to holy time. Along with dreams of promised land came hopes of Sabbath peace.

One God could mean one plan — and we could play a part. In a world with many gods, rules could often change. Now we might change, instead. And so, a shift in thoughts of Heaven transformed as well our views of earth.

Shabbat — the Sabbath day — is symbol of God's plan. The Temple had been sign of God on earth. Now, undestroyed and indestructible, Shabbat became (as Heschel wrote) a Temple built in time.

The pilgrimage of old becomes a journey every week renewed. On Shabbat, we pause to ask if we are still on track.

We think of God and think of self, and ask for strength to do our part. When Sabbath prayers recall creation, we recognize a plan behind the world. When Sabbath songs recall redemption, we reaffirm our faith that God still acts, and we are not alone.



"MODEL SEDER" — Interfaith Education. In Gaeta, Italy, homeport for the U.S. Sixth Fleet, Chaplain Resnicoff reminds the community that the story of the Exodus contains revelation for men and women of all faiths. Some eighty officers and sailors from the USS PUGET SOUND, the Sixth Fleet Flagship, attended the educational seder with their families. Here, Chaplain "Bill" Weimer, PUGET SOUND Chaplain, assists the Rabbi with the ritual of hand washing — symbolizing our need to approach God not only with words, but also with "clean hands," deeds of righteousness and kindness.

With Abraham, the Jewish dream was born. And, with that dream, a vision and a hope: "In you will all the earth be blessed."

Jews were chosen: part of divine plan. Their mission: first, as slaves, to keep their faith and hold onto their dreams. Then, to share the truth of Sinai -- so others might take faith, and learn to dream, as well.

And, from their story, a message for us all: one people's faith might matter; one nation's faith might change the world.

We seek the light of God, then -- through our faith -- reflect that light as well. "A light unto the nations" never meant conversion of the world to Jewish ways. It meant that Jews were challenged -- to convert their ways to rays of hope, and reminders of one God.

And so, through word and deed, Jews have always seen themselves as missionaries to the world. Their mission is to spread the word: there is a God -- a God who cares; a God who spoke to generations past; a God who speaks to us, today.

Prophets taught that Jews were not alone; other peoples, too, were part of divine plan. Jews were but one tool: not always choosing rightly, but chosen, nonetheless. Jews were blessed by being challenged. Their response might bless the world.

We know that weakness, and not strength, was sometimes cause for choice. With Gideon, so few were left that none could doubt the hand of God. Egyptian wisdom would not surprise the world. But wisdom born at Sinai -- a band of slaves, a desert mount -- showed the world the words were God's.

The Jewish story did reach others; did, in fact, give birth to other faiths, and other dreams. If slaves could go free once, then others' dreams of freedom would not disappear. If prophets challenged kings, then -- in every age -- would cries for justice ring out loud and clear.

Jews do not seek converts, but their mission drives them on: a charge to keep their faith, and share their dream -- a commandment -- as Isaiah taught -- to live as witness for their God.

We sense our God in Torah and in time. We also sense His presence in the simplest acts of life.

Some deeds so reflect God's love that we reflect on Him. When we see acts of loving-kindness, we glimpse the kind of loving which makes of us an image of our God.

But if acts of love can touch our faith, so faithful acts can deepen love -- and bring a sense of holiness to life. Deeds become traditions: reminders of our parents' search -- a search we share, and carry on, as we reach out to God; reminders of an ever-near and always present God, who reaches out to us.

And so, we do not pray with words alone; through ritual and holy acts, we pray with life itself: a deed lifts life to holy heights. An act becomes a prayer: a reminder of a dream.

The Jewish way is based on law, immersed in faith: commandments and traditions which set the Jews apart, but teach as well of ties that bind us all.

We all share moral law. But Jewish laws give Jews our way to think of faith, to think beyond ourselves.

For us, commandments recall dreams, when we might have thought of needs alone. We cannot eat, or dress, or live, without confronting thoughts of faith.

For Jews, therefore, faith does not lead to act, or act to faith. There is no line between the two. Deeds are prayers, and faithfulness links lives to hopes and dreams.

Jewish law is halacha -- a way, but not the goal; the means, but not the end. Law does not make us better than our neighbors. But laws can make us think of neighbors -- and then remind us all we could be better than we are.

In Proverbs, Torah is called "light" -- and we are taught one source of light is law (Pr. 6). For Jews, a law -- mitzvah; divine command -- becomes one lamp from which the light shines forth.

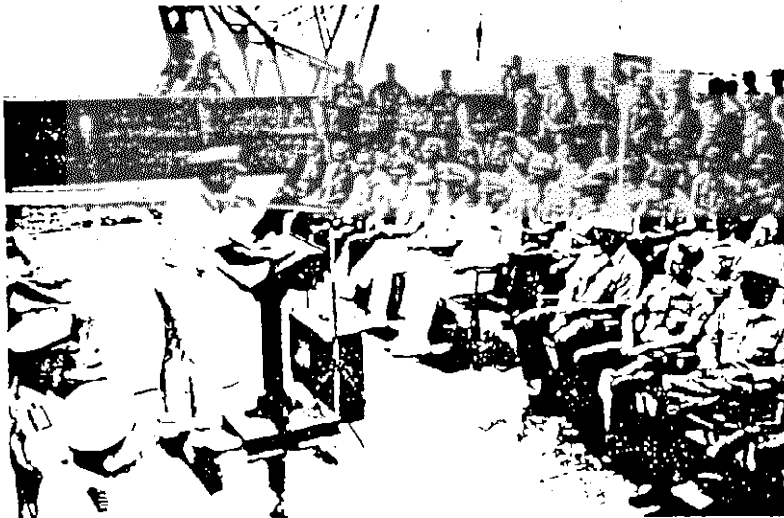


Left to right: Chaplain Arnold Resnicoff; Rabbi David Clayman, Director of the Jerusalem office of the American Jewish Congress; Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kolleck; Commodore Grant Sharp, Chief of Staff, U.S. Sixth Fleet.

The scene is a meeting between Mayor Kolleck and officers on the staff of Commander Sixth Fleet — one of a number of special events arranged by Rabbi Resnicoff during the Sixth Fleet flagship's visit to Israel. The meeting was held at Jerusalem's Laromme Hotel.



YOM KIPPUR BREAK-THE-FAST. *On board the aircraft carrier USS AMERICA (CV 66), deployed in the Mediterranean, Jewish Lay Leader (First Class Petty Officer) Bob Semon recites the blessing over the bread — officially ending the 24-hour Yom Kippur fast. Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff, Assistant Fleet Chaplain for the Sixth Fleet, on board to lead High Holy Day services at sea, looks on. AMERICA bakers used a recipe from The First Jewish Catalog for their first attempt to bake the special "challot" for the meal.*



Holocaust Day Ceremony on board USS PUGET SOUND (AD 38). *Chaplain Resnicoff leads a service in commemoration of the President's Annual Days of Remembrance for Holocaust Victims. Malaga, Spain.*

Brit:
The Covenant Response

And so, all life can be a prayer. Within the brit, all deeds can touch the holy, all acts be tied to dreams, all lives be linked to God.

Since Noah's time, all peoples share a covenant: a link to others, and to God. Within this framework, separate roads exist.

For Jews, the way is chosen. Other faiths have other paths. But all must share the bond the rainbow brings to mind: the second chance, the future promise, the brit -- the covenant -- for humankind.

For all, there is a challenge, and a choice. To turn from God, and live like Noah's world. Or to turn toward God: to hear -- and heed -- divine command, and know all life might be response.

For Jews, the Rabbi is the link to what has come before, and what must come to pass. "Melamed" is a teacher, but "Rabbis" must be more. Their lessons must touch hearts as well as minds; their judgments must share justice, not just law.

Within this Jewish framework -- this "covenant-within" -- there is room for Jews to disagree; room for "movements," schools of thought. Still, most Jews share more than they do not:

- * the dream that peace will be; that how we live can touch and change the world.

- * that life is good, and so are we; we can combat the urge to sin, and -- from a neutral start -- each can make of life a struggle toward a dream.

- * that faith and law are linked, and Jewish ways can touch our hearts, and guide our deeds; that Jewish acts impart a sense of holiness to life.

- * that we must love ourselves, and from that start might love our neighbor, too.

- * that we must hear the past: learn from those who came before.

- * that we cannot live alone; that sometimes it takes many to understand one truth.

*that Jewish ways are not for all; that different faiths mean different paths -- but differences can bless our world, so long as righteousness and peace remain shared goals.

*that, in Jewish thought, the hope of messianic times is yet to be fulfilled: the vision of a peace on earth, a time of learning war no more, must guard against complacency; must inspire us to try again; must remind us not of dreams alone, but of the part within those dreams still left for us to play.

*that we must struggle with our faith: that saying we believe in God means we affirm we are not gods ourselves.

Jews are linked by more than faith: peoplehood means family ties. Converts take a faith -- but they then are adopted by the people they have joined. Person/people/land -- a covenant response: a link to faith, to others, and to the world.

Jewish "movements" disagree -- on ritual laws, on some traditions, and on the role we have in making change. How much choice is in one's hands? What changes must be made by all? What past decisions are now law? How much, as Tevye asks, can tradition bend before it starts to break?

But in a family, there is room for different points of view. Others sometimes find it hard to understand what Jews already know: so long as we are tied to people, faith, or land -- then we are still Jews. We "practice" our religion when we understand that it is ours.

When we can see that other faiths are faiths for others, then we are faithful to our call as Jews. For us, divine command still mandates being Jewish. As Jews, we still remind the world of Egypt and of Sinai; of Exodus and Pentecost; of bondage and of freedom; of hopelessness and hope. We remind the world of Bible stories; we remind ourselves of Prophets' dreams.

For Jews -- at every level of observance -- still struggle with existence, and witness for our God: reminders of His search for us, and our response to Him.

He has spoken; we must respond. When our response is holy, our lives might bless the world.

LCDR A. E. Resnicoff, CHC, USN





Sabbath Observance is Spiritual Renewal

Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff, U.S. Navy

The "take off" (stop working) for a weekend or a day, due to physical or emotional need, in order to make continuing work possible. Observing the Sabbath is more than freedom from work time. We keep this day in response to the command, so that we may remember why ongoing life is worthwhile. Respite from labor is linked to the question of how we can continue, for we need energy restored. A day set aside as "sabbath" allows reflection as to why we go on, with spirit renewed.

A day off answers our body's need for recreation. The Sabbath is a response to the need of our soul for re-creation; it is a reminder of what life itself will one day become.

The Biblical story of Creation presents us with a world of basic goodness. Day after day, God surveys all that has been done, and pronounces it "good." Only on the Sabbath day, the *Shabbat*, is the concept of holiness introduced. The seventh day is blessed and called holy.

Biblical teaching — Jewish teaching — that we must do our part to "guard and keep" the world; we must work to do our part within the divine plan to build toward peace; we must respond to the unique challenge which has set before us blessing and a curse; and then commanded us to use our lives to choose the good, and build toward the holy.

Yet, even with the importance of the work which must be linked to our prayers, there is danger as well. We can work to the point of disorientation, where we become lost in the struggle and lose sight of the goals. We can work until we think that all depends on labor alone, or that it all is in our hands.

For Jews, the *Shabbat* is a time to step back from work. It is opportunity to cease

contemplating tasks which lie ahead, and an occasion to give thanks for what has already been achieved. On this day, we do not deal with problems which still exist; instead, we come together to appreciate blessings we might otherwise forget. The *Shabbat* is not time to reflect on the world's evils but on its wonders. It is, therefore, not merely a time for physical rest; it is a day for spiritual renewal.

Oneg Shabbat, a term taken from the prophets, means "joy of the Sabbath." We do not merely observe this day; we celebrate it. The *Shabbat* reminds us that we are not alone, and we do not struggle merely to survive: our world, and our lives, are part of God's plan, and we live in order to build toward a time of salvation for us all.

CREATOR AND REDEEMER

The Sabbath reminds us of the relationship of God to the world.

Two complementary themes are given expression in the two Biblical accounts of the Ten Commandments. In Exodus, the link between the Sabbath and creation itself is underlined: *Shabbat* reminds us that the world is no accident; it is part of a divine plan. In Deuteronomy, where the Ten Commandments again appear, the Sabbath is tied to remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. God is not Creator alone, this day reminds us, but Redeemer as well. We recognize not only the God of past history but also the God of history as it continues to unfold.

We celebrate the miracle of creation on *Shabbat*, but we also celebrate our faith that miracles still abound. As God heard the cries of pain of slaves in the past, so can God hear us now and in the future. The Sabbath is a time to renew our sense of

ASTORS: Suggest that teachers invite a Rabbi to take their classes through a model Friday evening meal, or to explain the values of a Sabbath service. Arrange with the synagogue to have your church classes attend worship on a Friday evening. (What is the relationship between Sabbath and the Lord's Day?)

PARENTS: In what ways is the Sabbath different for you? Is there something you do especially on this day? something from which you refrain?

How could a Sabbath meal be made special? What customs or Bible stories could be added to Sunday lunch-time? What special songs could you sing?

faith and of wonder; it is time to rebuild our sense of hope.

VALUES FOR LIVING

Through Sabbath rest and reflection, defined by Biblical command, we build values that give foundation to our lives during the week to come.

Too often, our world seems to value a person for what he/she can earn or produce. The elderly and the infirm lose "value"; good judgment or "sound thinking" is equated with financial success. On the Sabbath, when we do not produce in the material sense, and we do not compete in the world of commerce, we find opportunity to reaffirm personal humanity rather than worldly achievement. Families come together. We remind ourselves that life is beyond value, for each individual is holy. *With greed set aside, we learn to care once again, out of love for one another.*

Caring leads to sharing. We all grow as individuals. In today's world, however, where all members of the family are involved in so many separate activities, such growth must be treated with care. As we pass each other on the run, eating meals on different schedules, individual growth may mean growing away from others. With *Shabbat*, where outside work is forbidden, we find opportunity for sharing what we have learned during the past week: personal experience becomes a basis for family reflection and growth. Special *Shabbat* meals and time together give opportunity for a meeting of minds and a touching of souls. It is a time for learning and understanding, and a time to come together — and to grow closer — in love.

And, with this time of special rest — a rest filled with love, reflection, and care — comes the ability to slow down, to stop, and to change. A popular saying teaches that "today is the first day of the rest of your life." *Shabbat* gives us the opportunity to stop long enough to look around, and to see our life in relation to others, and to the world; it allows us time for "course-correction." If necessary, it gives us a real chance to determine what new direction "the rest of our life" must take.

Without a time to stop, we lose control of life. One word seems to lead to another, often much to our regret; one action seems to commit us to the next, even as we struggle to change. The Sabbath day allows reflection not only on short-term goals, but also on long-term values. On this day we may ask ourselves if we like what we do, and who we are. We face the question of whether we still control our actions, or whether we are being controlled by them.

FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE

For many Jewish philosophers, the link of *Shabbat* to freedom from Egyptian slavery is a reminder of other forms of slavery than the physical bondage of chains. Sabbath observance is a stand for freedom in life.

A Jew who spends the whole day of *Shabbat* at home, puts work in its place and refuses to be its slave. A day when earning or even handling money is forbidden acknowledges that life may be enhanced by possessions, but we must guard against being possessed ourselves by what we own. A Jew who does not drive on the Sabbath not only ensures physical closeness to home and synagogue, but also declares that we create machines to be our servants and not our masters. The man or woman who obeys *Shabbat* law and does not smoke guards against a slavery to inner drives or needs which may turn into taskmasters as harsh as any Pharaoh.

When we obey God's law, we reaffirm our ultimate freedom from the equally dangerous and extreme beliefs that we are all-powerful and can make all rules ourselves — or that we are powerless slaves to forces beyond our control. The Sabbath reminds us that the world was created by God, and that humanity was created in God's image. As the late Abraham Joshua Heschel put it:

"[The Sabbath is a] reminder of every man's royalty; an abolition of the distinction of master and slave, rich and poor, success and failure. To celebrate the Sabbath is to experience one's ultimate independence of civilization and society, of achievement and anxiety. The Sabbath is an embodiment of the belief that all men are equal and that equality of men means the nobility of men. ... The Sabbath is an assurance that the spirit is greater than the Universe."

The Sabbath reaffirms our faith in God's presence; it reaffirms as well our belief that we must live in faithfulness and with hope, existing joyfully in the belief that God-given freedom will allow us to accept the responsibility of life within the divine plan.

During the week, we live by controlling outside forces; on *Shabbat*, we develop inner resources. With science and technology, we may change the world's structure; but only with faith and morality can we hope to affect its essence. On the Sabbath, therefore, we pause from our struggle to change the physical environment around us through labor; instead, we turn to the task of transforming ourselves through faith.

A Celebration and a Vision

The Jewish Sabbath is Saturday, the seventh day of the week, but it begins at sunset on Friday evening, continuing through nightfall on Saturday (following the Biblical pattern, which declares that "there was evening, then morning," as the course of a day). Where danger or tragedy occurs, the saving of a life takes clear precedence in Jewish law over Sabbath observance. Otherwise, work is forbidden; and the stage is set for a day of harmony, reflection, and joy.

It is in the home that Sabbath observance is centered, and it is within the family that rituals become traditions linked to faith.

1. The woman of the home lights *Shabbat* candles, symbolically representing the warmth and light of Sabbath peace. Many families set pocket money aside for charity immediately prior to candle-lighting, so that the week's last association with finances is linked to concern for others.

2. The family song, *Shalom Aleichem*, follows, telling of angels who watch over the family (this Sabbath) eve, and who bless a home of peace and love. It includes a prayer that these blessings will grow in the week to come. Love and peace, the song reminds us, build upon themselves, just as surely as hatred and violence can become ways of life. "Come see us," we sing to the angels, "and may our love grow in the Sabbath days ahead!"

3. A special blessing for the children follows, emphasizing love between generations, and hope for the future.

4. The chanting of Proverbs, ch. 31, comes next. The husband praises his wife in verses written in alphabetical order (a fact lost in Bible translations!). "I love you from 'a' to 'z,'" the husband declares through this tradition, "from beginning to end; now and forever."

We cannot talk of the love of God, these Sabbath customs remind us, unless we develop the capacity to love God's creatures, to love one another. (For the same reason, many communities also read *Song of Songs* on Friday evening.)

Special customs for the *Shabbat* meal include two special loaves of bread (*challah*), in memory of the fact that a "double-portion" of manna was provided in the wilderness, as the Sabbath day approached. Special songs and melodies make each *Shabbat* meal a feast, and the day itself a festival. Indeed, of all Jewish holy days, none is of greater importance than the Sabbath.

It has been said, "More than the Jewish people have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jewish people." In the Bible, verses link the Sabbath day to the building of the Temple. Based on this fact, many Jewish theologians refer to *Shabbat* as a Temple in its own right: a Temple in time itself, which has united the Jewish people in worship in every place, and in every age.

No people and no faith has suffered more than the Jews; and none has looked at the world's problems more realistically, with more admission that we lack easy answers, than have we. From ancient prophets to modern rabbis, Jews have struggled with questions of human suffering, even as they maintained faith in promises that things would change, that war and hatred would cease, and that suffering would one day be no more.

Throughout the millenia, the Sabbath has helped to keep faith alive and to restore hope. Just as Tevye and his daughters (in *Fiddler on the Roof*) gathered around the table during times of persecution without — able to find strength in songs of hope and love, and in the flames of candles that seemed to promise new light ahead — the *Shabbat* has given external form and structure to the inner faith and vision of Jews throughout the ages.

In a world of pain, *Shabbat* taught us to hope; in a world of nightmare, it taught us to dream.

No wonder that the Sabbath day has been called, in Jewish tradition, "a foretaste of eternity" — for, through this day, we make the prophetic visions our own. In some small way, we experience God's promise today, and so we want to face tomorrow.

With *Shabbat* comes hope for the week ahead. We know we do not work for naught, and we do not work alone. On this special day of rest — Sabbath rest — we recreate our vision and we reaffirm our faith.

On a day off, we tend our weary bodies; on the Sabbath, we mend our broken hearts and our sagging spirits. We reaffirm the vow at Sinai that "we will do, and we will hear." We reestablish our commitment to work as individuals, as families, and as a people, to keep alive God's word and promise of a future time of peace and joy all humanity will share.

Sukkot: Season of Thanksgiving— Offers Us Many Lessons

by Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff,
Chaplain Corps, United States Navy

Sukkot, the Biblical festival of tabernacles, or Feast of Booths, begins at sunset, September 21, this year. The word "succot" is plural of the Hebrew word, "sukka," which means hut.

On Sukkot, Jews around the world not only build small temporary huts but also dream of building a world. We live for a time in imperfect dwellings, and we seek lessons from the festival for life in a less-than-perfect world. We put up makeshift walls and ceilings, and we pray for wisdom to tear down walls and barriers that keep us apart, block our vision, and limit our dreams. On Sukkot we deal with the temporary, but we find faith in the eternal.

OCCASION FOR JOY

Sukkot is a time of thanksgiving, and an occasion for joy. It is so filled with happiness that rabbinical literature refers to it simply as "the holiday," a time of supreme rejoicing.

The High Holy Days of Judaism are annual times of judgment and introspection. Sukkot follows, just five days after Yom Kippur, and it brings with it the commandment to rejoice — to begin the New Year filled with happiness based on trust in God's mercy and forgiveness. We have been granted another year, and therefore another chance. Is this not reason enough to thank God, and to embrace (celebrate) life?

The notion of being commanded to rejoice is hard for some to understand, but it is crucial to Jewish faith, and to an understanding of Biblical religion. "This is the day the Lord hath made," we read, "Rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24). "Thou shalt observe the Feast of Booths...and thou shalt rejoice" (Deut. 16:13).

For Jews, rejoicing is not simply a response



to good fortune. It is an approach to life. It is not a reaction but a commitment, not an end but a beginning. Choosing to seek out cause for joy does not mean ignoring or sidestepping problems of pain in the present, but it does mean affirming the belief that there will be a

future; it does mean keeping faith in the promises and hopes of tomorrow even as we face up to, and grapple with, the sorrows of today.

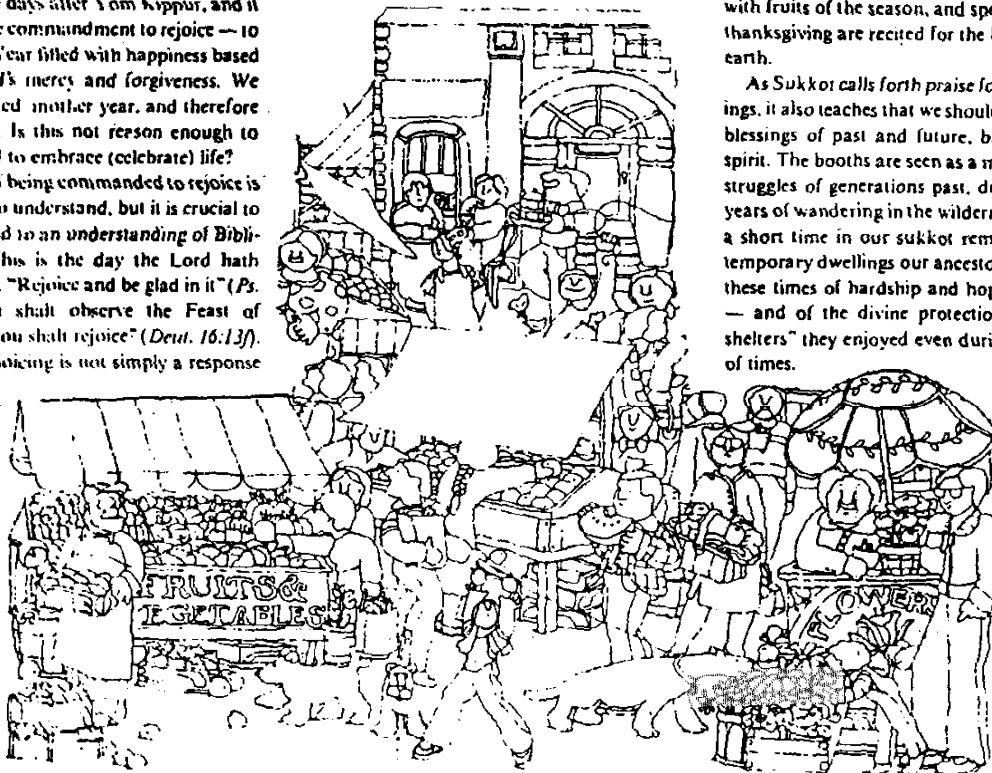
With Sukkot, we give thanks not only for the harvest of this year but also for the ability to plant again for the year to come. With God help, life will go on — and the future will be most be, bright.

THE WORLD AND ITS BLESSINGS

Like other Biblical festivals, Sukkot has agricultural roots in Israel, the holy land. This is the time of the annual harvest in the Middle East and Sukkot is the Biblical expression of thanksgiving for the earth's bounty (Lev. 23:29). Thousands of years later, when the Pilgrims to America would give thanks for the first harvest in the New World, it would be to Sukkot that they would turn for inspiration, creating what has become our national celebration of Thanksgiving.

During Sukkot, Jews follow the Biblical commandment to set up booths, temporary shelters. As a link to thanksgiving for the gifts of the earth, the booths remind us of the shelter farmers build in the field during the time of harvest, providing shade for them as they work. For the festival, these "sukkot" are decorated with fruits of the season, and special prayers of thanksgiving are recited for the blessings of the earth.

As Sukkot calls forth praise for today's blessings, it also teaches that we should be mindful of blessings of past and future, blessings of the spirit. The booths are seen as a memorial to the struggles of generations past, during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Living for a short time in our sukkot reminds us of the temporary dwellings our ancestors used during these times of hardship and hope (Lev. 23:42) — and of the divine protection, the "divine shelters" they enjoyed even during the hardest of times.



Leaving our homes for short periods to eat in the sukkah, or to sleep there (many children look forward to this holiday opportunity to unroll sleeping bags and "camp out"), reminds us that we, too, are continuing the journey in the wilderness, living in the tension between Exodus and Promised Land.

And the sukkot remind us of future blessings and promises: the "sukkat shalom" ("tabernacle of peace") for which we pray, and toward which we must work. Coming together to build this shelter, we ready ourselves for the time when, as prophesied by Isaiah and Micah, even weapons of war will be turned into instruments of peace and nations will build together a world where suffering will be no more.

THE TEMPORARY AND THE ETERNAL.

From the temporary sukkot, ours for eight days of the year, we draw lessons which give us perspective for the months and years to come.

The buildings of the world in which we take such pride too often become fortresses of a sort, serving to separate us from one another, and shielding us from life. Sukkot reminds us that, ultimately, all that we construct and accumulate is as temporary as the frail booths we now set up. We must put all within the perspective of eternity if we are ever to work together to recognize the everlasting kingdom of God, and the shelter of God's love.

Such a perspective helps us remember that the world is not ours, but that "the earth is the Lord's." An old saying teaches that "a man's home is his castle," as if we have a God-given right to keep others out. We must learn from the Bible the image not of ownership, but of stewardship, and the ideal of hospitality which brings others in.

If we enjoy good fortune, we must recognize our responsibility to those less fortunate than we. Scripture teaches that we must leave part of the field and part of the harvest for the poor, the widow, and the orphan. We must contribute toward the life of the community, as we once did with sacrifices; we must heed the cries of the needy, as we once did with tithes. The Bible teaches us to "remember the stranger" — foreigners who come to our land — for we were once strangers in a land not ours.

From the temporary quality of the sukkah, we learn additional lessons. The ceiling, for example, must not be solid; we must be able to see the sky. There is a story about a boy who once asked his father how far a person could see. "Twenty miles," guessed the father, "perhaps even double if one is high up." "That can't be right," the boy answered. "My teacher told me the stars are millions of miles away, and I can see them when I look up."

The sukkah, with its see-through roof, teaches us to expand our horizon and broaden our vision with the simple reminder that we can all look up. No matter what we call them, even our tallest buildings are not truly "sky-scrapers," and there are not limits to our dreams.

MORE TO LEARN

While *Sukkot* as a whole is referred to in Jewish writing as "zman simchateinu" ("the time of our rejoicing"), there is a separate celebration linked to the festival, "Simchat Torah" (the joy of God's teachings) is a time of special festivity, devoted to the idea of thanksgiving for the light of God's revelation.

As we give thanks for the gifts of the field, so must we remember to give thanks for the fruits of the Bible, the "tree of life."

Sifrei Torah (hand-written Torah scrolls, containing the Five Books of Moses, the first section of the Bible) are taken from the synagogue's Holy Ark, and held tightly amidst song and dance. For Jews, the word of God is welcomed and reaffirmed not as burden, but as treasure, and its lessons and *mitzvot* (commandments) looked to as sources of divine light, adding beauty and meaning to life.

Central to the *Simchat Torah* celebration is the Torah reading ceremony, when the yearly cycle of studying is ended, yet immediately began anew. When the final words of Deuteronomy are chanted, the first words of Genesis are sung out as well. We must never feel as if we have "finished the Bible" or learned all there is to learn, this holiday teaches; rather, we must always be in the process of search, or study, and of growth. We are human beings, so we must constantly be mindful of the fact that we do not have all the answers. We cannot sit back and be so sure of what is right; we must continue to question and to learn.



BUILDING TOGETHER

Reasoning from Biblical verses such as *Zech. 14:16*, rabbis have taught that, of all Jewish festivals, *Sukkot* will one day be celebrated by all nations of the world. (Are the American and Canadian celebrations of Thanksgiving a beginning of this prophecy?)

It is during *Sukkot* that we give thanks for the gifts of the earth, gifts that we all may share and enjoy: "The land has produced its harvest; God, our God, has blessed us" (*Ps. 67:6*). Through thanksgiving and praise, we learn not to take the world for granted; we learn to appreciate and recognize miracles of the world, and of life.

With *Sukkot* we are reminded of the simple truth every farmer knows: it is necessary for us to do our part (even working, as the Bible commands, "by the sweat of our brow"), but it is not enough. Human labor is required, but its outcome is uncertain. It is to God that we pray, hoping that we have done our part well. But in the final analysis, it is God who "brings forth bread from the earth" (*Ps. 104:14*).

On *Sukkot*, all nations of the world must view themselves from a similar perspective. We must strive to understand our role within God's plan, and live up to our responsibilities. Ultimately, however, we must put our trust in God and measure how well our living compares with our dreams — and how our dreams compare with those of the prophets. What is important is not how our buildings and monuments measure up, but how we do.

Sukkot, therefore, may begin with the building of small booths, but it is a time of examining the way in which we build our lives. It is an opportunity to look closely at our structures, our institutions, and our goals. It is an occasion to take a close look at what we build, and to ask hard questions: To what end, to what purpose, do we work and live?

For teachers, pastors, and parents:

- Call your local synagogue, and ask whether the class can visit a local community or family *sukka*.
- In what ways does Thanksgiving compare to the Biblical holiday of *Sukkot*? In what ways are the festivals different?
- Can you use some of the Biblical verses referring to *Sukkot*, or to the harvest, to create a short service for Thanksgiving?
- How does the festival of *Sukkot*, with the values discussed in this article, compare with the verse from Psalms: "Unless the Lord builds the house, they who build it labor in vain" (*Ps. 127:1*)?

Tu B'Shvat Celebrates Life and the Building of a World

by Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff, U.S. Navy

Editor's Note: We suspect that many of our readers will not know about the holy day, Bishvat, celebrated in the Jewish community. This year it is January 29. We appreciate Rabbi Resnicoff's reflections on this day and its meaning for all of us.

Through the lessons and values of holy days, we build and strengthen our relationship with God, or with God's creatures, our neighbors. On Tu B'Shvat, we remind ourselves that nature is also God's: On this holiday, we examine our relationship with our environment. We remind ourselves that our approach to life not only affects our society but also affects our very world.

A SENSE OF AWE

The first lesson of Tu B'Shvat is that the world is a place of wonders. It has beauty and grandeur that we should not take for granted. We must guard against an approach to life which forgets that God has given us a world, in Biblical terms, which is "good...good...very good."

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord," the psalmist sings. "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing." (Ps. 100.)

A year ago, when my daughter, Malka, was three, she asked if God really made me and my wife. When I answered affirmatively, she thought for a moment, broke into a grin, and said with such happiness: "Him did a wonderful job!"

Tu B'Shvat, the "New Year for Trees," the holiday which allows us to look around us and celebrate the beauty of the world in which we live, is a time to reaffirm our belief that God has given us a world of blessing and wonders. It is a time to emphasize that our approach to God and the world must be one whereby we "choose life" and serve with gladness.

The physical blessings of the world include food and shelter, but they also include color, beauty, and even sweet fragrance. (There is a blessing in Judaism which is recited after "majestic" events such as thunder or lightning; but there is also one to be said after smelling a pleasant aroma from a fruit or from a tree.) There is blessing in the very variety of God's creation, although we have not yet learned to see this beauty in the



variety within humanity — in the infinite pluralism of our colors, physical make-up, or even in our differing understandings of life and of God.

The Talmud (Berakhot 43b), the collection of Jewish wisdom, quotes one Rabbi's prayer: "Blessed be He who did not let His world lack anything: Who created for it beautiful creatures, and these beautiful trees, that men may see them and be filled with joy."

One Tu B'Shvat tradition is to taste many different fruits. We remind ourselves of the teaching that God will hold us accountable for the blessings he created for us which we on earth ignored! According to Jewish teaching, every synagogue should have a window: we should never cut ourselves off from the world. It is too easy to focus on misfortune; Tu B'Shvat reminds us that we must retain a sense of wonder, of joy, and of awe; we must "count our blessings." Only from within a framework of affirmation and appreciation of the good, can we find strength and cour-

PARENTS: Read this article, then mark the special passages that appealed to you. Share them with your family and discuss them.

PASTORS: In your community, who could come to share Bishvat? (A rabbi or Jewish family?) You may find ideas here for a sermon/homily.

age to recognize and deal with the bad.

"BIBLICAL ECOLOGY"

While many in today's world would claim that "ecology" is a modern concept, the second lesson of Tu B'Shvat is that we must work to ensure that the blessings we enjoy are available for our children, and children's children as well. "The earth is the Lord's," (Ps. 24) — ours only "in trust" for generations yet to come. Like Adam, in the first chapters of Genesis, we must "till it and keep it."

A Rabbinic midrash (ancient homily) tells the story of God's words to Adam, as he first surveyed the wonders of Eden, "See my works...all that I have created; Think upon this, and do not desolate My world; For if you corrupt it, there is no one to set it right after you."

The concept of our responsibility to the world around us takes the shape of many Biblical commandments, perhaps the most stirring of which is the admonition to think of the future even in the most horrible of times, in the midst of war. When cutting down trees to use in the attack of a city (Deut. Ch. 20), only trees that bear no fruit may be used. Battles are won or lost; life must go on after the fighting has ended; the world must exist for victor and vanquished alike.

ONGOING CREATION

Jewish teaching sees humanity blessed with the great challenge of helping to perfect the world. We have been granted the privilege of becoming "partners" with God in ongoing creation.

In Jewish tradition, one reason that bread symbolizes all food is that it represents such a partnership for good: the wheat comes from the earth, but it is up to us to tend it and to use it as a source of food.

An ancient commentary on Gen. 2:2 (And by the seventh day God ended His work which He had done) places the emphasis on the word, "He" — the work He had done by Himself. From here on in, the commentary explains, humanity would be called upon to help in the work of making a world. By our actions, we would hasten or delay the day of perfection, the time of peace for which we pray.

In a spiritual, and perhaps in a poetic sense, we are taught (Deut. Ch. 11) that if we

heed the commandments, the rains will come, and the world's blessings will be ours. However, if we turn aside from good and do evil, the rains will stop; the world will dry up.

Tu B'Shvat reminds us that this teaching is not entirely one of Biblical imagery. The world's resources are not limitless, and so we must take care with what we have and think in terms of future needs. We must also take responsibility for the power in our hands — power which can be used selfishly, without regard to our impact on the world, or which can be used not only to keep the world as it is but also to improve it, to add to it, to work to make it whole.

MIRACLE OF LIFE

Jewish teaching includes a respect for all life. Many Biblical commandments remind us that animals have feeling. For example, *Deut. 22:10* prohibits a farmer to yoke an ox and donkey together, because of the pain this would cause the weaker animal; *Deut. 25:4* forbids us to muzzle an ox being used to tread corn. Many of the laws of *kashrut*, the Jewish dietary laws, are based on concern for the pain of living creatures. Not only is an animal not "kosher," acceptable, if it has been slaughtered with physical pain, but also it is not kosher if care has not been taken to avoid emotional pain as well. For example, a cow cannot be killed in the presence of its calf, or vice versa.

On Tu B'Shvat, we remind ourselves that all of creation is a part of God's plan. We must not indiscriminately destroy anything in the world, for destruction not only disregards the gifts of God's creation, but it also tears down the sensitivity to life which makes us human.

In the Zohar, the book of Jewish mysticism, there is a teaching that "not a blade or herb (exists) which does not manifest God's wisdom." An ancient Rabbi offered the mystical commentary, "If a man kills a tree before its time, it is as though he had murdered a soul." In a sense, the "soul" he is murdering might even be his own(!) — because, if we begin with indifference to the beauty of life in nature, we will lose sensitivity to animal feeling soon thereafter; and eventually we will become callous to human suffering as well.

WORSHIPPING GOD

Another lesson of Tu B'Shvat has special importance to us today, as our power to change and even to "control" nature increases. This is the lesson that, unlike other ancient peoples, we respect and even celebrate nature, but we do not worship it. We do not see God or divinity within nature; rather, we see nature as reflecting the power of God.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims His handiwork" (*Ps.*

19) We wonder at the majesty of creation; however, we worship only the Creator.

Linked to the concept of improving the world, as described above, this idea allows us to disregard the thought that it is somehow irreligious to "fool with mother nature." We are commanded to work for good, to turn toward blessing and not curse, life and not death.

On the other hand (as Tevye would say, because in Judaism there is always "the other hand"), we remind ourselves that, just as God's creations in nature are not themselves gods, neither are we. Therefore, all of our actions must be examined and judged in terms of ultimate goals (within the framework of the holy covenant). We do not build as did the generation at Babel, merely for the sake of power or a "name," disregarding our community, or our world.

Therefore, Tu B'Shvat gives opportunity today to reexamine our relationship not only with energy (which is limited) but also with the concept of power itself (with necessary limitations on our actions). We must teach ourselves never to celebrate power for its own sake, but rather to explore its potential in terms of the good it can do for the world. In fields ranging from bioethics to nuclear power, we must examine the responsibilities of power in relation to life.

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PLAN

While Judaism is one of the oldest of all living religions, its teachers are the first to admit that we do not have all the answers. Like Job, we must face our humanity and realize that our challenge is to keep faith even when faced with events we do not understand.

A Rabbinic midrash tells of Adam's fright the first night, when, because of the setting of the sun, he thought the world was coming to an end. It was only after living through a number of days and nights that he saw the pattern, and thereafter learned to pattern his life within a world which included times of both darkness and light as part of the "natural order."

We are still faced with fears which come from the world itself. Perhaps one day we will understand the forces that cause floods and earthquakes, and accept them and adapt to them with no further hardship and loss of life. Certainly, were we to use our collective wisdom to solve problems and ease suffering, rather than working for selfish or destructive aims, we would already have taken a step closer to the "perfected" world we have been challenged to build.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Even accepting our failures so far, we can use the teachings of Tu B'Shvat to give us hope. This holiday, whose name is literally translated as "Fifteenth of Shvat," the date on the Hebrew calendar, has another name,

as well: "Rosh Hashanah L'Yanot" — the "New Year for Trees."

This is the time the sap begins to flow anew, signifying an end to the "winter hibernation," and the beginning of new life. Celebrating Tu B'Shvat, we remind ourselves that life can be filled with new beginnings. As the world around us begins anew, we can sing a new song and — using a metaphor from nature — turn over a new leaf.

On Tu B'Shvat, Jewish individuals and families around the world celebrate the festival by planting trees in their communities, or by sending charity to Israel, to be used for planting trees there. In homes, "seders" are conducted, patterned after the Passover seder. In place of the story of the Exodus, verses and stories from the Bible and Talmud are used to tell the tale of Tu B'Shvat, the story of our relationship to the world.

Of all Biblical images drawn from agricultural scenes, none gives more hope than Micah's prophetic promise: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. But every man shall sit under his vine and fig tree, and none shall make them afraid. For the lord of hosts has spoken." (*Micah 4:3b-4*.)

TIPS FOR TEACHERS:

1. Invite each student to prepare a story, poem, or song about the wonders of nature.
2. An ancient tradition for Tu B'Shvat is planting trees, both in this country and in the Holy Land. Could the members of your class plant something outside the window? Or could money be raised to plant a tree in Israel? (A local Rabbi would be happy to make the arrangement.)
3. Begin a discussion by asking the class members to draw lessons from nature through analogies. Use questions like these: Why is a person like a tree? How is the Bible like water? Why is the Bible like the sun?

A TU B'SHVAT POEM

On the fifteenth of Shvat,
When spring comes
An Angel descends, ledger in hand,
And enters each bud, each twig, each tree,
And all our garden flowers.
From town to town, from village to village
He makes his winged way,
Searching the valleys, inspecting the hills,
Flying over the desert —
And returns to heaven.
And when the ledger will be full
Of trees and blossoms and shrubs,
When the desert is turned into a meadow
And all our land is a watered garden,
The Messiah will appear.

by S. Shalom
(Translator: L. V. Snowman)

Tisha B'Av, Jewish Holy Day, Confronts the World's Ugliness

by Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff
Chaplain, U.S. Navy

Editor's Note: We are very glad to be able to resume Rabbi Resnicoff's series on Jewish holy days. He is now stationed in Providence, Rhode Island, and we hope to be hearing from him often. Tisha B'Av will be celebrated this year from sunset, July 27 till sunset, July 28 (1985).

Many holy days celebrate the world's beauty. Tisha B'Av (the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av) forces us to confront its ugliness. Most festivals help us remember the dreams of our ancestors. Tisha B'Av forces us to recall their nightmares.

The Bible tells us that God has given us a choice: life and death, a blessing and a curse. Only by facing our potential for good and for bad do we see the world as It is, and as It might be. Only then do we recognize the true importance of faith as a force which can literally change the world.

THE TEMPLE

Over the centuries, many tragic events became associated with Tisha B'Av. This holy day has come to recall the accumulation of pain in our past. It is a day of mourning for all that is wrong with humanity and the world.

Of all historic tragedies, the destruction of the Temple stands out in Jewish memory. It has become our symbol of pain, and of the imperfection of the world. When the Temple fell, not only were its walls shattered by the invading armies, but hope also was shattered. The ancient world was sure that this would be the end of the Jews.

Of all the miracles of Jewish history, perhaps the greatest of all was that the Jewish people did not disappear, and that faith survived so that hope might be renewed. For other peoples, the destruction of their place of worship and the loss of their land would have proved the weakness of their god. For Jews, it proved only the weakness of humanity. It was not faith in God that was shaken by suffering, but faith in humankind. We must all learn of our potential for evil, and our potential for good. We must build together for good, for justice, and for peace.

As Jews were dispersed, they swore they would not let the lessons of history, or the suffering of humankind, be forgotten. They would remember, and

Parents: Share this article's contents with your family. Consider the questions at the end.

Pastors: Could you invite Jewish neighbors for discussions of this holy day in your own congregation? What teachers in your church would appreciate seeing the article? Please share it.



teach. And they would hope we could learn.

No other people had survived such defeat before, but faith and hope allowed the Jews to defy events of the past. Together in no nation, the Jews made the Bible their constitution, and the Sabbath their Temple in time. They vowed allegiance to the nations in which they might live, but also they maintained identity as part of their community of faith. They built small meeting places, houses of prayer and study which would become the first synagogues. The Priest, the leader of Temple ritual, was replaced by the Rabbi. He would be the teacher who would help them study the past in a way which would give meaning and hope to the present.

THE WALLING WALL

There were actually two Temples. The first was built by Solomon, and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. The second, erected by Jews who returned when Cyrus of Persia ended Babylonian exile, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Jewish legend has it that the date of destruction in each of those years was the same: 9 Av — Tisha B'Av.

Miraculously, part of a wall remained — an outer wall erected during Herod's reign. According to historians, the Romans purposely left it intact, to show the size and strength of the building they had put to the torch. But what they had not reckoned with was the strength of Jewish faith. This remnant of the Temple was taken up as a symbol by the remnant of the people. Jerusalem had burned, but deep in the Jewish heart a spark of hope still burned as well.

This Western Wall, the one part of the Temple complex still standing, never became museum or monument. It never quite became a relic linked to the people's past, but instead it continued as a part of their present. Jews continued to make their way to the Wall, to use it as a site of prayer. A place of tears and a place of hope, centuries passed while Jews mourned, prayed, and hoped, alongside its stones.

According to Rabbinic midrash (ancient homily), the Jews who made their way to this site were not alone. In the morning dewdrops, high atop the stones, Rabbinic teachers saw angelic tears. Not only human beings come here to weep, they explained, but also angels. Heaven and earth come together at this "Wailing Wall," to mourn the world's pain and its suffering. Heaven and earth prayed that we would learn from the wars of the past, and build together toward a time of peace in the future.

Remembering pain as a way of reaffirming hope became part of Jewish ritual and Jewish thinking on many levels. Perhaps the most familiar is the wedding, where the breaking of a glass recalls the world's broken hearts and the Temple's broken stones. No moment is happier in community life than a

wedding, but a moment set aside to remember pain adds perspective. Not everyone yet knows joy as it is shared by the wedding party. By refusing to allow personal joy to blind them to their neighbors' plight, each new couple understands that they must live in a way that brings good to the world.

In Jerusalem, the Wall itself teaches the same lesson. Some tourists see the Wall and ask if there are plans to repair or rebuild the Temple. In Jewish tradition, the idea is to see the Wall and ask what must be done to repair and rebuild the world.

As long as suffering and fighting continue, and hunger and pain still exist, then the world remains in disrepair. It is the world's imperfection that the Temple's destruction calls to mind. "Tikkun ha-Olam," repairing the world, is an ancient Talmudic concept. We must act in a way which makes the world whole, and which makes our lives full. This is the message of Tisha B'Av.

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

In Biblical times, the challenge to remember our responsibilities came from the Prophets. We make a mistake, however, when we think of them as fortune-tellers, who merely came to predict the future. Prophets did not come to predict the future but to change it. They showed us an image of what might be, but they reminded us as well of our ability to make a difference. When the Ninevites responded to Jonah and repented, the events he predicted did not come to pass. Even he had to learn, however, that such a turn of events did not make of him a false prophet. On the contrary, it was the truth of his prophecy that had touched Nineveh and changed the course of history.

Like Jonah, other prophets delivered God's word in a way which gave perspective to life. During times of pain, their message was one of comfort and hope, a glimpse of a future when suffering would end. But during times of forgotten responsibilities, seductive times of plenty when some saw no farther than their own happiness, the prophetic message was one of doom. But the future depended not on the prophet's words. What was to be was linked to the people's response.

Today our holy days bring God's word to us as did the ancient prophets. Through festivals, we celebrate with generations past the joys of the world, and we mourn with our ancestors its sorrows. There is a plan, the holidays teach. We reject the notion that we are accident, and that history is whimsy. Tisha B'Av reminds us that people have often brought pain and destruction to the world, but it reminds us as well that we have within us the power to change.

ANOTHER CHANCE

And so, Tisha B'Av — and Judaism as a whole — teaches us not only to

remember, but to remember with hope. We must never forget pain, and we must never take suffering for granted. We must remember if we are to mourn. We must mourn if we are to care. We must care if we are to live. And then we must live in a way which will honor those whom we remember, and ensure that their suffering has not been in vain.

Remembering the past is dangerous, for it is possible to despair and grow bitter. The challenge is to remember with hope. The task of faith is to teach that things might change. The Bible is filled with examples of new beginnings, and we must not forget today's reminders that we can have a second chance.

After the rain, the rainbow in the sky is a Biblical sign of a divine Covenant, established with us as descendants of Noah. It recalls the promise of God not to send the flood again. Evil almost destroyed humanity in Noah's day. We have been given a second chance.

The tablets of the Ten Commandments have become a kind of decoration, used in Sunday Schools or Church and Synagogue windows. We forget that there were two separate tablets, the first destroyed by Moses when he witnessed idolatry at the foot of the golden calf. The tablets were given again. Today they should symbolize for us not only God's commands but also his love. We have a second chance!

Even the "mark of Cain" which we read of in Scripture can be understood as a story of hope. To some, it is remembered as a brand of shame, but in the Bible it was given by God as a sign of protection. Cain was to wander, but he was to live. He had another chance. Perhaps, in his wanderings, he would come to another fork in the road. Perhaps this time he would choose for good.

Tisha B'Av is a holy day of human emotions and community memories, but it is also a festival of faith. It recalls sadness, but it calls forth hope. It reminds us of destruction and challenges us to build.

On Tisha B'Av, we remember death. Only then may we truly understand and affirm our responsibility to life.

FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

This is a good time to study the idea of the Temple in the Bible, or today's Church in the community.

Give an example of something that has happened to us. What would be a way of remembering it that breeds despair? How could it be remembered so that we may learn and do better?

How are the Jewish people commanded to remember that they were once "strangers" in Egypt?

What are some other events the Bible tells us to "remember"?

Passover and Yom HaShoa Offer Lessons For The World

by Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff



Rabbi Resnicoff is Lieutenant Commander in the United States Navy, now serving in Norfolk, Virginia. This is the third in a series for teachers on Jewish feasts.

PASTORS: Might you arrange for a group from your church to be guests at a Jewish seder?

PARENTS: Discuss the meaning of the elements of the Passover meal in your family. Try to imagine suitable symbols for another holiday.

When a band of Jewish slaves left Egypt for freedom, the thoughts and dreams of the world would never be the same again.

Out of the story of the Exodus came values and ideals that shaped the Jewish people and its religion; and, from the experiences of this people and its faith came vision and hope for all humanity. For the message of Judaism was simple: what happened — and happens — to the Jewish people can happen as well to all humankind.

No matter that odds (or "statistics") proved that slaves would be slaves, for that was their lot in life. No matter that the world was cruel, and humanity caught in hopeless suffering, for, as many peoples would say, this was how the world was made. No matter that accepted ways of thinking said that a conquered nation should be happy to give up worship of its own God in favor of the God of its conquerors — for, after all, hadn't their loss proved that the other God was stronger?

From the world-changing event of the Exodus came the idea of redemption, and of God as Redeemer. From it came the image of a caring God, a God whose rule and whose plan extended not only to the form of worship due Him, but the way in which a man or woman treated a neighbor. From the Exodus came the revolutionary idea that *what is* need not be the same as *what can be* — and therefore the hope that the world can change, and that we should not simply be content with the evils and suffering we find before us.

From the Exodus, and from the story of the Passover, came the idea that no human power is absolute. From this story came a people who would forever witness to the world that there was One God over all peoples, weak or strong, mighty or enslaved, and that this God stood for love, for mercy, for righteousness, and for good. From this one story, this one event, came the idea not only of miracles in the past, but an appreciation forever of the miracle of faith, and the miracle of life itself.

Is it any wonder that the blacks who faced slavery went to the Bible's story of Passover to find words for songs of hope? We take it for granted that slaves should dream of freedom; we forget that, before the Biblical exodus, such dreams of a people whose "place" was slavery would have been as absurd as the dream of sprouting wings to fly to safety. From the Bible and from the Jewish story, we find basis for hope and basis for faith, which support so many of the religions we represent today.

RESPONSES TO LIFE

When we study the Biblical Exodus as we do through the holiday of Passover, there is another lesson, as well. Not only do we search Jewish history — this unique story of a people's confrontation with the God of history, and their covenantal relationship with Him; within history — for teachings about life; we learn as well about faithful responses to life.

One natural reaction to memories of slavery might have been hatred of those who enslaved us; instead, the teaching is to recognize the value and the dignity of each individual, and therefore stand up not only for our own freedom, but for the freedom of every people. Remembering the sorrows of ancestors who found themselves in a strange land might have made us mistrustful of strangers; instead, the Bi-

ble commands us to love the stranger — for that is how we are to remember that we were strangers in Egypt. Love for hate is the lesson; hope for despair; life for death.

HOLOCAUST DAY

But, if Judaism as people and faith was fashioned out of Biblical experience, it continued to be shaped through confrontation with God and man in post-Biblical history as well. If the world was to learn through the redemption of the Jews in bondage, so would it learn from their trek toward the promised land; so would they learn from its faith that, no matter what the present suffering, Israel and all the world would one day know peace. And, if on this road to peace, humanity itself cast up obstacles, and showed not only its potential for love, but also its potential for cruelty and hatred, then all the world must learn from these events as well.

Today Yom HaShoa, Holocaust Day, follows Passover by less than a week. And, if the world could never be the same following the Exodus, it should never be the same following the Holocaust.

If Pharaoh's rule and Pharaoh's claim to divinity were threatened by the Jews who would not abandon their faith in God, so Hitler's try for absolute power could not co-exist with Jewish survival — a reminder to the world of divine values of righteousness and justice that no human being could discard or overturn.

And so, like Pharaoh before him, Hitler began to effect his "final solution" to this "Jewish problem." Not only Jewish lives had to be extinguished, but also Jewish hopes of holiness and value within a human life. Jews were not only to be killed; they were to be humiliated, and dehumanized. They were tortured as animals, and, after execution, their bodies were used as fertilizer or soap, their skins as shades for lamps.

It is not surprising to see how similar was the process in Egypt and in Germany. First, reputations were attacked: in Egypt, through Pharaoh's claim that the Jews might someday side with an enemy force; in Germany, through cartoons and jokes about the Jews as enemy to humanity itself. Then came deprivation of civil liberties: slavery in Egypt; loss of civil liberties and property, followed by deportation as slaves, under Hitler. Finally came death: death of the children in Egypt; death of an entire people, the aim in Germany.

What are the lessons for the world?

At the Passover seder, when Jews gather to retell the Exodus story through food, prayer, and song, the children are told to remember how we were slaves —

therefore to champion freedom and human dignity. "In each generation," the haggadah (Passover prayer-book) says, "each person must see himself as if he escaped from Egypt." Each of us escaped slavery; each must tell of the horrors that we saw.

ESCAPE TO FREEDOM

There is no seder for Yom HaShoa, for Holocaust Day, yet, for the pain is too raw for rituals to take shape. But the message is clear, nonetheless. If we hate slavery because of the experience in Egypt, then what must we swear when we remember how we were treated — how Jews were treated — in camps of torture, of humiliation, and of death? If in Egypt we were slaves, and therefore not equal, in Germany we were vermin and dirt, and therefore not even human. If on Passover we affirm the right to freedom we each must have, then on Yom HaShoa we now must affirm the priceless value of each human soul. In each generation, the command must now go out, we must each see ourselves as survivors not only from Egypt, but from Auschwitz as well.

We must not wait to take a stand until death camps are erected; and not even until liberty is denied. We must take a stand when we hear the first racist slur, the first "joke" which denies dignity to a people or a faith.

We must affirm faith amidst despair; hope amidst cruelty. Once again, the lesson must be positive. We must give love for hate, and life for death. But now we must do so with caution. Now we know that the road to redemption is one which requires not only faith, but an acceptance of responsibility, as well.

The story of the Jewish people, in Biblical times and beyond, is a story of witness. From its history and from its holy days, the world continues to learn about the human and the divine. The Jews should have remained slaves, but they found freedom. They should have hated, but they preached forgiveness and hope. They should have denied their faith — those who survived persecution and genocide — but they reaffirmed their faith instead.

When a band of Jewish slaves left Egypt for freedom, and when a band of Jewish survivors left Auschwitz for life, the thoughts and dreams of the world would never be the same again.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Rabbi Resnicoff wishes to acknowledge that the basic ideas in this article come from his teacher, Rabbi Irving Greenberg.

Hanukkah is a Festival of Dedication



by Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff
Jewish Chaplain, Naval Station,
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On one level, the Jewish festival of Hanukkah is a holiday of soldiers, swords, and candles; on another, it is a time of miracle, dreams, and spirit. The name itself represents *dedication* of a building, taken from the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple; but the festival celebrates dedication of another kind, the dedication of humanity to the pursuit of freedom, and the dedication of a people to its God.

Hanukkah may be summarized within a perspective both historical and spiritual, with meaning not only to Jews, but to us all: it is the first time in recorded history when men and women took a stand, and risked their lives, not for wealth, land, or power, but for religious freedom; for the right to worship God in peace.

The Holy Land, the country we today call "Israel," was never a land-rich in resources, and yet it was a treasure for which empires vied. Its geographical location may have been partially responsible: located almost at the juncture of three continents, Europe, Africa, and Asia, the land served as bridge for mighty powers hopeful of expanding or protecting their possessions.

Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome ... The list continues of rulers who would seek and gain control of the land, and seek control of the Jews, its people.

With the death of Alexander the Great, his mighty empire was divided three ways, with two of the new powers (the Seleucid in Syria, and the Ptolemy in

Egypt) vying for control of tiny Israel. First one, then the other, would seize power.

When governments changed, the Jews continued to live in their homeland, despite taxes, despite forced labor, even despite the cruel whims of dictators. But, in the second century BCE (before the common era), when Antiochus IV of Syria ruled that all under his control would submit to hellenization, including Greek pagan idolatry, the Jews refused. And, when he forbade the practice and pursuit of Judaism, the people rebelled.

Miraculously, the guerilla fighters known as *maccabees* (either from a word meaning "hammer," or from the Hebrew initials of the Biblical verse, "Who is like Thee, O Lord, among the mighty?") withstood the assaults of Syrian soldiers. In 165 BCE, the Temple was purified and rededicated; the time of the Second Jewish Commonwealth had begun.

LEARNING FROM HISTORY

We cannot change the facts of history, but we do have control over its impact upon our thinking: this is one lesson of Hanukkah. (The Jews, with their belief in divine revelation within history itself, were the first to commit all facts to writing, whether they showed themselves in a good or bad light.)

For, historical facts which might easily have created a celebration of man's military prowess instead were used as basis for a festival celebrating God's miracle's.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We met Rabbi Resnicoff during our NTEP seminars for U.S. Navy chaplains earlier this year. He agreed graciously to do a series of articles for CHURCH TEACHERS, on Jewish celebrations. This is the first of his pieces, and we welcome him to our pages!

PARENTS: This would be an excellent article for family discussion. What are your reactions to the conclusion?

PASTORS: The author of this discussion raises vital issues for our time. How could you use this article in the Advent season?

Like the Jews who crossed the Red Sea, praising God for His miracles because they felt His hand at work (and for Buber, such is the definition of miracle), and not their own ability or stamina, so do the Jews thank God for the miracles of deliverance during the time of the Maccabees, rather than praising the might of our military leaders and fighters.

(An interesting project for religious school would be to take a list of events and discuss the meanings they might have for us, depending upon our perspective.)

MIRACLE OF LIGHT

A story found in the Talmud, the collected wisdom of centuries of Jewish thinking, becomes central for our commemoration of the events. When the Jews sought to rekindle the Temple's Eternal Light, symbol of God's everlasting presence, pure oil sufficient for only one day's light was found, despite the fact that a week would be needed to bring the new supply. Miraculously, when new oil arrived eight days later, the flame still burned.

The story may be interpreted in many ways, accepting it as miracle in fact, or symbolic of the miracle of life itself, when all logic predicted destruction. In fact, Rabbinic commentary even expands on this story: "If the flame burned eight days," one Rabbi asks, "why do we speak of eight miracles (and therefore light eight candles during the festival today)? After all, there was oil for one day, so only seven days were miracles!"

The Talmud's answer is that there was indeed an "eighth miracle," and this was the fact that the Jews, seeing oil for one day alone, used it at all. That they tried, when they should have known better, was as much a miracle as when they fought, and should have lost. The miracle of the light commemorates the miracles not only of the Lord, but those of the human spirit, as well: our ability to reach beyond ourselves; our ability to keep faith, and to dream dreams.

LIGHT AS MIRACLE

Linked to study of the holiday is the idea of light as symbol and as miracle, and the fact that many holidays around this time of year, including Hanukkah and Christmas, use a motif of lights (on the menorah/candelabra or on the tree) may be no accident. After all, the days grow shorter, and perhaps our ancestors feared the world would end; until, with the equinox, the sun seemed to grow stronger, and light began to return.

Light in the Bible can be a basis for

class discussion. What does it mean when we read that God created the world with light from the outset ("Let there be light!"), and yet we find that the heavenly bodies, such as sun, moon, and stars, did not exist until the fourth day? Is there light for us to seek which is other than physical?

What does it mean to Moses to encounter Almighty God through a flame which illumines but does not consume? When does fire burn, and when does it warm?

FAITH AND COURAGE

The Hanukkah story reminds us that it often takes courage to retain faith, and our prayers for peace must sometimes be accompanied by a strength of will sufficient to take risks. We sometimes overlook this factor in Bible stories. (For instance, do we see the action of the Israelites' marking their doorposts as courage linked to faith? Stop and think how they were marking themselves for Pharaoh's

retribution if liberation had not been theirs, as promised!)

In 1906, when President Theodore Roosevelt accepted the Nobel Peace Prize, he accepted with these words:

Peace is generally good in itself, but it is never the highest good unless it comes as the handmaid of righteousness; and it becomes a very evil thing if it serves merely as a mask for cowardice and sloth, or as an instrument to further the ends of despotism or anarchy. We must bear in mind that the great end in view is righteousness, justice as between man and man, and between nation and nation.

As a clergyman, a Rabbi, in the military, perhaps the holiday of Hanukkah has special meaning to me. We pray for peace, and continue to hope, dream, and work for the time when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation."

Meanwhile, we realize, as did the ancient Maccabees in the story of Hanukkah, that "peace at any price" can never be our goal.

Book of Esther forms basis for Feast of Purim

by Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff

Rabbi Resnicoff is a chaplain in the United States Navy, now serving in Norfolk, Virginia. This is the second in a series for teachers on Jewish feasts.



PASTORS: Consider inviting a resource person from a nearby Jewish community to share details about Purim in your own church's educational program.

PARENTS: You might enjoy telling the story of Esther in your family. Why would it become the basis for a time of "gladness"?

In the Book of Esther (ch. 9:20-22), Mordecai enjoins the Jewish people to commemorate annually the time described in the story. Future generations are to recall what happened with "days of feasting and gladness."

Down through the generations the commandment has been followed — and Purim is one of the happiest holidays of the year, a time filled with children's carnivals, costume parties, and Thanksgiving banquets for adults. This year the observance of Purim begins at sunset of March 8, 1982, and ends with nightfall, March 9.

An unusual holy day, based on an unusual book of the Bible, the message of the festival has special significance for us today. Based on Esther, the one book in the Bible that does not mention God, this holiday, associated with merriment, was given special importance by the Rabbis of old. In fact, according to one Talmudic authority, the Jews did not really accept the Torah (God's revelation and authority) at Mount Sinai, but at Shushan (site of the Esther narrative).

How can this be?

Perhaps the best way to understand the message the Rabbis try to bring out of

this book is by comparing it to the festival of Hanukkah, about which I wrote in this magazine (November-December issue, 1981).

At Hanukkah, miracles were everywhere! When the few defeat the many, and the weak defeat the mighty, it is easy to see and feel the "hand of God." Similarly, according to the Rabbis, it took no great amount of faith to accept the Torah at Mount Sinai, after witnessing miracles and signs of the Lord, which had been brought upon Pharaoh and Egypt, and which had culminated with the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea.

But the world of Esther, while also filled with danger and with enemies, was one where survival came more by the "skin of our teeth." Intricate political realities and jealousies meshed with seemingly coincidental happenings (the right man in the right place; the right woman at the right time) to avert catastrophe and destruction; to foil evil designs of evil men; to save a people.

People who could keep faith when genocide was so near — and praise God for their salvation, rather than abandoning all faith in the face of a topsy-turvy world — were "accepting the Torah."

KEEPING FAITH

People who "keep the faith" and are willing to pass it on to children, in a spirit of hope and even of joy, in a world sometimes hard to understand — where divine signs and wonders are not always before us, at least not in a way which is incontrovertible — give hope to a future where

faith can grow. In such a future, faith can grow linked to joy, and not to doom only.

Tevye, in "Fiddler on the Roof," sang of joy in the midst of hardship and absurdity, singing that "God wants us to be joyful, even when our hearts lie panting on the floor; how much more should we be joyful, when there really is something to be joyful for!"

Life will go on, because people will keep hoping, and keep living. Some will try to play God, and decide who has the right to live, and who does not — whether it be a Pharaoh, a Haman from the Book of Esther, or a modern-day tyrant such as Hitler — but he or she will not succeed.

Hitler recognized the danger of Esther, and the danger of Purim: the danger that people would go on believing, no matter what he said or did; and the danger that the idea of the right to life — and the right to freedom — for others, even when they think, look, or act differently from the ways we do — will continue to be accepted, and even fought for.

In World War II, he ordered all synagogues in Nazi-occupied Poland to be closed for the holiday. In January, 1944, he warned that, should the Nazis lose the war, the Jews could celebrate a "second triumphant Purim."

TIME OF FUN AND HOPE

The Holiday of Purim is a time of fun. Jews follow the traditions of the Book of Esther, coming together for a special feast, much like our American Thanksgiving meal; they send "portions" as the book commands, giving out food and candy to friends and neighbors, and charity to those less fortunate than we; they dress up in costumes, even in the synagogue, recalling the Biblical narrative wherein a poor man becomes royalty, the hangman becomes the hanged — and reminding themselves that the world and life itself sometimes seem absurd.

But, with it all, the holiday of Purim is an occasion of hope. It reminds us that we must continue to seek out God, in every area of life and of human endeavor. We must retain our strength and our faith, but respect that of others. We must face the absurdity of the world, and yet continue our search for meaning, continuing to believe that all unfolds within the framework of divine plan, and moves toward good, toward peace, and toward salvation.

If we live in the world as it is, and yet keep the faith that guards against our forgetting what it ought to be, then we keep alive the holiday of Purim, and the Book of Esther. As the Rabbis would have put it, we accept the Torah — in Shushan, and here in America.



Shavuot Evokes Holiness in Life

by Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff

For many, religion is simply one path toward the good, and therefore the question may be raised, "Why do I need religion? Isn't it enough for me to be a good person, in my own way?"

Shavuot, the Jewish festival recalling "*matan Torah*" ("giving of the Torah" — the revelation at Mount Sinai), reminds us that there is an ideal beyond goodness: there is holiness.

Shavuot, "The Feast of Weeks," recalls revelation, Torah, covenant; it teaches of the presence of the Divine in history and in life; and it commands that existence be transformed to holy being.

Through the Bible, we are enabled to live in a way which spans time. We live in the present, but we may also relive the past. We re-experience life-challenging and world-changing events; we join the struggle of generations long past, and we re-capture their awe and their excitement, making it our own.

From Scripture and from its holy days, we not only examine the light of past revelation, we seek new light, as well. The Bible becomes for us both record of past experience, and spring-board for new. The past informs the present; the present illumines words of the past.

Together with our ancestors, we confront and experience God both as Creator and as Redeemer, Deliverer. And, through His grace-filled gift of Covenant, we feel the presence of a God who for some reason has chosen to make us part of His plan.

PASSOVER AND SHAVUOT

From the events of Egypt and the Exodus, both the Jews and the world at large began to relearn evidently forgotten truths of God's existence. From the Passover story came the teaching of One True God, a God of all peoples of the earth. And, not only a God of infinite power, spread the news, but a God of love and morality, a God of justice and righteousness: a God whose concern and command shaped not

only our relationship to Him, but to our neighbors, as well.

In Jewish tradition, Passover and Shavuot are linked, ritually and spiritually. Each day between the two festivals is counted with a prayer. Even the names for Shavuot emphasize the connection: "Feast of Weeks," because seven weeks of reflection and anticipation separate Egypt and Sinai; "Pentecost," for fifty days mark the distance from Exodus to Arrival. In fact, in Rabbinic tradition, Shavuot is also called "Atzeret," a term usually referring to the final day of a festival — as if the fifty days of Passover-Shavuot actually form one holy day period.

Spiritually, the linkage of Passover and Shavuot teaches that one is incomplete without the other. From the first, we learned of responsibility toward others; from the second, of responsibility toward God. After Passover, we are commanded to reach out; after Shavuot, to reach up. From the Exodus, we learn that justice must give foundation to society; from Sinai, that holiness must give framework to life. The Exodus reminds us that we must remember the rights of others within the framework of civilization; Sinai reminds us that we must constantly recall our own responsibilities within the framework of covenant.

Passover alone might give the impression that righteousness is paramount; Shavuot teaches that it is penultimate: holiness is still higher.

Passover commands that each see him/herself as personally coming out of Egypt; Shavuot challenges us to feel that we were present — that we personally received God's revelation — at Mount Sinai.

Without Shavuot, Jews might have seen themselves as a nation, sharing a common heritage; with Shavuot, they became a people, united also by common mission. Existence now was seen as part of a larger plan, and the promise to Abraham that the Jewish people would somehow

give blessing to the world now began to take form.

After Sinai, the Jews were to share the revelation they experienced, and the lessons and truths they now accepted: the idea of One God, whose presence changed life itself; the promise of meaning and plan, with its dream of a time of peace, when war and suffering would be no more.

OTHER COVENANTS

With Shavuot, and the Covenant (the *brit*) between God and the Jews at Sinai, come teachings and reminders of other covenants, as well. A Rabbinic insight reinforces this idea by showing that "Shavuot" — "weeks" might also be read, "Shevuot" — "oaths."

After the Flood, the Bible speaks of Covenant, this time established between God and "all descendants of Noah," "all living flesh," — a covenant which would include all of us alive today. Never again would the world be destroyed by flood, we are told. (Is the implicit warning here that, while "natural causes" would never again destroy humanity, we retain the power to someday destroy ourselves?) In return, we are commanded not to take life; we must turn from the injustice and immorality of Noah's world. We must make holiness part of our lives.

Symbol of this covenant, and reminder of the world's second chance, is the rainbow. (Observant Jews recite a blessing recalling the covenant each time a rainbow appears.) Some point out that the rainbow was no accidental choice: the blending of its colors into one whole may give hope that our many peoples — our colors, our faiths, our nations — might retain individuality, and yet work together as beautiful parts of a multi-faceted whole.

Shavuot teaches that we must approach God not only as individuals, but as part of larger faiths, as part of holy covenants. Using the beauty of religion and of faith, the heritage of Scripture and of tradition, we begin to see life as part of Divine plan, and existence as something imbued with the holy. A rainbow may remind us not only of nature's blessings, but of our own. A day of rest may become Sabbath: a time not only for physical renewal but symbol of covenant and challenge to renew hopes, dreams, and visions, as well.

Not only our ancestors came out of Egypt; so did we. And, alongside them at Sinai, we experienced revelation which changed the world.



THE HIGH HOLY DAYS: Facing the New Year Together

by Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff, Chaplain, U.S. Navy

For the Jewish people, the High Holy Days begin the new year with the challenge to live both as individuals and as a community. The actions of individuals ultimately shape and determine the life of the group; but the framework of community faith and action not only reminds us of responsibilities toward our neighbors, also it helps support our individual struggle and gives strength to our personal search.

As we live our lives, days and dates take on special identity. One day may bring with it memories of happiness, such as the anniversary of a wedding or the birth of a child; another may bring sadness, recalling the death of a loved one.

Religious holy days challenge us to live also as part of our faith community, and to see time itself as sacred within the framework of the divine covenant between God and humanity. We are happy at Passover because our ancestors took a step toward freedom; we feel sadness at Yom HaShoa (Holocaust Day) because so many could suffer, and so many could stand by. We set apart the Shabbat, the Sabbath, not only as a time of physical rest, but as a reminder of creation, and of the presence of God.

Days become *significant* because of associations with our individual lives; time becomes *holy* because of the link it establishes between us, our faith community, and our God.

Rosh Hashanah, New Year's Day, may be compared in the life of the community to a birthday in the life of an individual. When a man or woman has a birthday, it is, at least in part, a happy time: after all, we give thanks to have made it through another year! On the other hand, it is a serious time as well, especially as the years pass; more and more, we must face the question which accompanies the birthday: "I know I'm a year older; but, am I a year wiser, a year better, as well?"

Rosh Hashanah, the New Year's Day which begins the ten-day period known as the "Days of Awe" or the "High Holy Days" is, for the Jewish people, the "birthday of the world," or the "anniversary of creation." In this sense, the world itself, and all of humanity, must look to themselves and ask the question, "Are we any wiser? Have we learned anything from

the past — or are we simply repeating it?"

It is a time of celebration, because we are thankful that we all have survived, and have been granted the opportunity to begin a new year. But it is a time of reflection and of introspection, as we recognize that we must accept much of the responsibility for the world we will one day bequeath to our children.

Yom Kippur, Atonement Day, is the culmination of the ten-day period. Fasting sets a mood of seriousness, as the day is spent in prayer and in study. Individuals are reminded that they must atone daily, that they must seek constant "course-correction" for lives filled with human error. Now, Yom Kippur teaches not only that we must never forget our ability to change, to turn, to improve; but also that we are not alone in this desire. We may help one another, and turn together.

"ORGANIZED RELIGION"

Some are fond of saying that they have personal faith, and do not need "organized religion." Part of the message and teaching of the High Holy Days is that we must work together, and that community faith can make it easier for individual action and spiritual growth.

It is possible, for example, to pray anywhere. But when we set aside a space — be it a church or synagogue — and attend regularly, it somehow becomes easier to recapture the mood of holiness. When we read in a prayerbook of the dreams and prayers of others, when we are touched by the words of a sermon, or even when a religious symbol fills our hearts and minds with memories, it becomes easier to recapture visions once experienced, and hopes, dreams, and prayers sometimes forgotten.

Similarly, it is always important to repent, to ask forgiveness, to mend bridges, and to try again. With community holy days, somehow it becomes easier. In traditional Jewish communities, as men and women exert extra effort to make telephone calls they have been putting off, or to write letters they know they should have written so much earlier, it becomes easier to ask forgiveness. "Rosh Hashanah is coming," and this is the time to start anew!

The lessons of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are many. Jewish law teaches that sins which have hurt another person must be separated from those which hurt only ourselves: forgiveness for the former cannot be asked of God until everything humanly possible is done to right the wrong, and to seek the forgiveness of the individual involved. The power and efficacy of repentance is stressed; the book of Jonah is read to remind us that turning from evil ways can give us another chance — even, in Biblical imagery, after the "prophet has spoken," or the decree has been announced.

Our responsibility to the world is underlined: ancient men and women saw themselves helpless in the face of incomprehensible forces. The High Holy Days affirm the concept that our actions help determine our own future and that of the world itself. As the Bible teaches with such poetry (*Deut., ch. 11*), if we live with love, if we serve our God with heart and soul, then the world will be rich and blessed; if we do not, the "rains will not come" — the world will dry up.

The relationship between the ritual and the spiritual is another lesson. Empty ritual is meaningless, even evil; but ritual as a prayer of the body can help externalize hopes of the heart and set the stage for inner change. Fasting can only set the mood, on Yom Kippur, for the seriousness necessary to fast (in the words of Isaiah) not only from food but also from wickedness and from oppression. (Those words, from *Isa., ch. 57*, are read during the High Holy Day service.)

A central prayer for these days calls for *turning* — in three ways: *tefila*, *tzedaka*, *teshuva*. *Tefila* (prayer) is a turning toward God; *tzedaka* (righteousness) is a turning toward our neighbor, with justice and *gemilut hassidim* ("deeds of loving kindness"); *teshuva* (repentance) is an inward turning, a change in goals and in values that will turn our lives from evil toward good.

"It is never too late," we remind ourselves. "We can learn, and we can change." And, within the covenant of our faiths, we remind ourselves that we are not alone. As a family, as a people, as a world, we can help one another take the first step toward the time of peace for which we all pray, and of which we all dream.