

# THE SABBATH EVE SEDER: AN INDISPENSABLE INNOVATION

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THE JEWS of the world today, except, for anti-Semitic purposes, constitute an anonymous amalgam of human beings with no functioning bond of unity. The most serious symptom of this abnormal situation is the uncertainty with regard to Jewish identity. This has recently been demonstrated on two occasions: one in Israel, where Ben-Gurion's appeal to about two hundred Jewish scholars for an answer to the question "Who is a Jew?" proved to be in vain; the other in America, where an anthropologist, in an article on the subject on Jewish identity, wrote: "No word means more things to more people than the word Jew." That means that Jews nowadays lack that group consciousness which throughout the past united all Jews throughout the world with a sense of mutual responsibility, and which was a source of happiness to every Jew individually. Both in order for them to regain that happiness, and to recover the history-making ability of their group consciousness, Jews have to be formally and publicly reconstituted as a people. That is the only way it can be saved from the fate that overcame the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel.

## A History-Making People

However, are the Jews fully aware of the danger to their survival as a

people? The answer is certainly in the negative. Those who are concerned look to Zionism as the solution. The marginal Jews, whose number is legion, are not at all concerned. As for the rest, who amount to about half the number of Jews, something has to be done to reawaken in them enough of a desire to prevent the Jewish people from becoming absorbed by the various populations among which it is dispersed to demand that they be formally and publicly reconstituted as a people *de jure*. For that to be the case, a way has to be found whereby that "saving remnant" might become aware of the history-making genius of the Jewish people throughout its entire past of about thirty-five centuries.

To be a history-making people means to contribute to the enhancement of human life and the creative fulfillment of its most worthwhile potentialities. For that it is not enough to produce writers of history. It means being collectively as a people so aware of its history as to derive from it a sense of destiny which is that of being a source of blessing to all other peoples and nations in the world. To recover that history-making ability as a people, Jews have to get to know the past of their people, with its promise for their own future as well as for that of the rest of the world. To that end it is of utmost importance to introduce into Jewish life an innovation of an edu-

cative character, the practice every Friday night of the Sabbath Eve Seder, analogous in spirit and purpose to the Pesah Eve Seder.

### One Seder a Year Not Enough

Why the Pesah Seder at a model? Because its purpose is to educate the Jewish people in the art of functioning as a history-making people. That is the art of transmitting the social and spiritual heritage from one generation to the next. To succeed in that art, the education has to be adapted to the character and maturity of each child. Thus, the fourfold repetition of the command in the Torah for parents to acquaint their children with the story of the Exodus from Egypt, which marks the beginning of the history-making career of the Jewish people, is interpreted as referring to four different types of children: the wise child, the stubborn child, the naive child, and the very young child who has to be taught to ask questions.

In view of the present critical situation of the Jewish people, one such Seder a year, no matter how well conducted, even with the aid of the *New Haggadah*, is far from enough. Every Friday night must be used to conduct a Sabbath Eve Seder for the transmission of the Jewish heritage from parents to children; this has become indispensable to the parents as well as to the children. However, instead of a fixed liturgical text, as the Pesah Seder, the Sabbath Eve Seder has to include first the consecutive reading each Friday night of selections from some major standard work which might serve as the basic text for at least two years. By that time, we may assume, the family will be prepared

to make use of other sources of their choosing. If enough families take this innovation seriously, sufficient interest would be aroused in the Jewish history and destiny as to expedite the formal and public reconstitution of the Jewish people.

### Friday Night Home Night

Apart from the foregoing direct purpose to be served by the Sabbath Eve Seder, the following spiritual purposes might also be achieved:

In the first place, it would reinstate the one religious institution which has done more than any other to render the functioning of religion the most humanizing aspect of a people's life style or civilization. No less a modernist Jewish thinker than Ahad Ha-am has written: "There is more significance to the observance of the Sabbath than the fact that the Jewish people kept it; it is the fact that the Sabbath observance kept the Jewish people alive."

In *Judaism As A Civilization* (1934) there is the following passage concerning the Sabbath: "In the last instance it is not what the Jew will refrain from doing on the Sabbath, but the affirmative conduct which the observance of the Sabbath will elicit from him. The Sabbath must make itself felt in the home. Only there can its observance be made attractive enough to impel the Jew to effort and sacrifice in its behalf. If it depends upon the home to render the results of Sabbath observances tangible, the Jew should take advantage of the Sabbath eve which, in most cases, is the only time when the home can be utilized for that purpose.

Though the late Friday night serv-

ices afford an opportunity for congregational worship to those who cannot attend synagogue on Sabbath morning, they do not constitute an ideal way of spending the Sabbath eve. That should be a time for family reunion. Away from the routine of work and the thousand and one distractions of clubs, organizations and entertainments, the members of the family might learn to know one another. It is then that parents should become acquainted with their children and children should exchange their experiences with their parents. The memories and impressions resulting from a Sabbath eve spent in this manner will have a far more permanent influence upon the happiness and character of Jews than the most successful Friday night services and lectures" (p. 445).

#### **Innovation to Foster Unique Quality of Jewish Value System**

Second, the foundation of Jewish education, as an education in human values instead of in facts and technics, must be laid in the home life and atmosphere. It is there that the child achieves the basis for whatever relevance and interest he can find in the studies of the religious school. That is especially the case with Jewish education which, unlike general education, especially in the diaspora, deals with facts and values which belong to an entirely different universe of discourse from the universe of discourse into which the child is thrown by the studies in the religious school. The fact that, despite the many years with Jewish education in America it cannot be said to have achieved satisfactory results, is not due to the lack of peda-

gogic ability on the part of the Jewish teacher and educator, but to lack of an educative Jewish atmosphere in the home. That condition would undoubtedly improve with the introduction of the Sabbath Eve Seder into the home.

Third, as a method of dealing with the problem of the extent to which it involves the conservation of religious practices as well as the spirit of Judaism as a whole, *innovation* is to be recommended. To quote one instance of the method of innovation, the institution of the *bat mitzvah*, which corrects the Jewish traditional attitude toward the religious status of the woman, is a form of amendment to a constitution.

Fourth, the spiritual primacy of the collective self-consciousness, which is Judaism's contribution to the humanization of man, would be underscored. In contrast with the Greek oracle "Know thyself," which is addressed to the individual, Hebraism's revelation in the Ten Commandments is addressed to the collective mind of the people of Israel. Thus Judaism, in keeping with Hillel's maxim aims, to have the individual not only know his individual needs but also the needs of the organic society to which he belongs, and without which he would not be able to meet his own individual needs in proper fashion. The sense of responsibility which the individual acquires through his belonging to an organic society like a family, clan, tribe or nation, adds the fourth dimension, holiness, which renders the other three dimensions authentic, viz: truth, goodness, creativity. Without the dimension of holiness, truth is likely to be rationalization, goodness to be not disinterested, and creativity to be for destructive ends.

### Dimension of Holiness

On the other hand, it is the dimension of holiness which enables the human being to experience the reality of God with the same immediacy as he experiences the objects of the senses. This idea of God is in keeping with the oft repeated emphasis on God as being experienced when He is sought after. The prophet urged his people to "seek YHWH where He may be found and to call upon Him where He is near." Likewise the psalmist says: "YHWH is near unto all who call upon Him, to all who sincerely call upon Him." Were the prophet's and psalmist's words taken seriously, there would be an end to the misconception of religion as essentially concerned with the supernatural, the metaphysical, or the mystical aspect of reality. The meaning of the term *emunah* as faith, and therefore as the attitude of mind essentially associated with religion, would at last be

recognized as a distortion of truth. On the other hand, as far as the Bible is concerned, the equivalent of the term "religion" is *hokmah*—wisdom. (Cf. Job 28:28).

The entire project of the Sabbath Eve Seder, however, depends for its success upon the cooperation of the rabbis. They would be only too happy to offer specific guidance on the way to conduct those Sedarim through their bulletins and special lectures, as well as through occasional demonstrations within their synagogues. The main problem is to see to it that whatever text is to be read should be provided with questions that would render it relevant.

Incidentally, that project might lead to the kind of mutual socialization among Jewish families that might help to foster Jew'sh collective consciousness, and that might attract to the synagogue those Jews who, for whatever reasons, have become alienated from it.

## MOON IN THE VALLEY OF AYALON

YITZHAK SHENHAR

At nightfall we left Jerusalem for Tel Aviv. The automobile was old and worn-out and the driver, his side-locks tucked away behind his ears, was manhandling the wheel and mumbling to himself. Next to the driver sat a short, Tarzan-like youth, his legs like thin clappers in the bells of his trousers, his black pompadour emit-

ting the odor of hair tonic. Next to me, in the back seat, was stretched-out a bowlegged, big-bellied, elderly Jew. He was coughing and groaning and breathing with difficulty but, after he had secured the greater part of the seat, he dropped his head to the side and fell asleep. In his shadow was huddled-up a pale, sparsely bearded youth with a black "shtreimel" shading his



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