



THE  
UNITED  
SYNAGOGUE OF  
CONSERVATIVE  
JUDAISM

# Synagogue Resource Center

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CONSERVATIVE  
JUDAISM

The Association of  
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Congregations

UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Department of Congregational Programming  
Department of Leadership Development

LOOKING FOR A HIGH HOLY DAY IDEA?

WANT TO KNOW WHAT OTHERS WROTE  
RECENTLY?

NEED A TALMUDIC THOUGHT FOR  
INSPIRATION?

SEARCHING FOR A STORY TO HOOK YOUR  
MESSAGE?

Department Of  
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RABBI MOSHE EDELMAN  
Director

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TO HELP FUTURE PRESIDENTS

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THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

DEPARTMENT OF CONGREGATIONAL PROGRAMMING

*KOL NIDRE* APPEAL CAMPAIGN: A Statement

*Yom Kippur* is a most sacred day on our religious calendar. The evening service ushering in this holy day - the *Kol Nidre* - finds our synagogues filled to capacity with worshippers. The theme of the entire twenty five hour period is devoted to *Teshuvah*, *Tefillah* and *Tzedakah*. We have utilized the occasion of *Yom Kippur* for appealing to our membership to support the synagogue. This has been especially true about the *Kol Nidre* Service.

It is important to examine the methods employed in this appeal with a view to achieving maximum results and at the same time to maintain the dignity of the service.

A campaign conducted prior to *Yom Kippur* itself affords the best opportunity for a meaningful, successful effort. Such a campaign eliminates the need for interrupting the spirit of the service and thus maintains its spiritual level. It also affords more time to properly plan and execute a program which reaches the members of the congregation.

The *Kol Nidre* Appeal Campaign should be launched in mid-summer with a letter from the leadership of the congregation, the Rabbi and President, stressing the needs of the synagogue as well as the traditional obligation of *tzedakah* at this time. The letter should be followed up with a visitation program. Committees of two, visiting members at their homes, will secure a pledge and establish personal contact with the general membership. It has been shown that the non-public appeal encourages a larger number of members to participate and encourages more prompt fulfillment of the pledge.

During the summer months, a concentrated effort of Board members visiting the general membership should prove successful in securing *Kol Nidre* contributions and in integrating members into the lifestream of the congregation. Congregations utilizing this approach increased their *Kol Nidre* contributions. If it is the custom of the congregation to publicize the names of its donors, it is recommended that the synagogue publication be utilized either immediately following the holidays or on a continuing basis during the campaign. The growing list of contributors will serve as an inspiration to others to give.

The adoption of this approach to *Kol Nidre* contributions will enhance the dignity of the service and increase the contribution from the members.

revised August 1997  
Rabbi Moshe Edelman

# חשבון הנפש קהילתי



Bits and bytes for sermons for Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur  
and congregational self-evaluation.

on the theme of personal self-evaluation

Please let me know that the material is being used. Please share a copy of your sermon with me after Yom Tov.  
Shana Tova u-metuka.

THESE EXCERPTS ARE FROM  
THE WISDOM & WRITING OF  
RABBI SIDNEY GREENBERG,  
of blessed memory.

Moshe

Rabbi Moshe Edelman  
Director of Leadership Development  
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

WHEN USING THESE  
IDEAS BE SURE TO  
ATTRIBUTE &  
ACKNOWLEDGE RABBI  
GREENBERG

## WHAT CAN WE PROVE BY YOU?

Recently, I had the dubious privilege of spending a very long hour in the company of a man who had the distressing habit of repeating a rather popular expression. No matter what topic presented itself for discussion, he was ready with his pet comment: "You can't prove it by me." We ranged over many fields—politics, golf, juvenile delinquency, the weather—and with rare consistency our so-called conversationalist kept injecting, "You can't prove it by me."

Much later that night, long after the human record had been turned off, the monotonous refrain lingered on. I couldn't expel it from my mind. Suddenly, I realized that in his expression there is summed up the real weakness of Jewish religious life in America.

The sad truth is that there are too many things about Judaism that nobody could prove by the lives of Jews who belong to synagogues.

If someone were to ask: "Is Shabbat, the cornerstone of Judaism really vital?" how many affiliated Jews would be compelled to answer, "You can't prove it by me.?"

If someone were to ask: "Is prayer with the congregation at regular intervals truly necessary?"—how many synagogue members would be compelled to answer, "You can't prove it by me.?"

If someone were to ask: "Does a child's Jewish education really require a parent's personal example and constant active interest?"—how many synagogue Jews would be compelled to answer, "You can't prove it by me.?"

If someone were to ask: "Does a Jewish home really give a special tone and quality to life?"—how many affiliated Jews would be compelled to answer, "You can't prove it by me.?"

If someone were to ask: "Is it true that Judaism is both a way of looking at the world and a way of living in the world—in our shops, our offices our factories?"—how many affiliated Jews would be compelled to answer, "You can't prove it by me.?"

I submit, dear friends, that if there were more truths about Judaism that could be proved by those inside the synagogue, there would be fewer Jews outside it.

The significance of Franz Rosenzweig for us is that he said to the world: Judaism is of the utmost importance and you can prove it by me!

When our ancestors were commanded to build the first sanctuary in the wilderness, they were told that God's purpose was, "so that I might dwell among them." Our sages, with fine ethical sensitivity, noted that the Bible did not say "so that I might dwell in the sanctuary," but rather "among them." The sanctuary was not meant to contain God, but to radiate him. The individual Jew was himself to become a sanctuary, a dwelling-place of the Divine. But all our efforts will be vitiated unless we realize that our true objective as Jews is not to build sanctuaries, but to become sanctuaries, to reflect in the glory of God and the grandeur of Judaism.

When Franz Rosenzweig re-embraced his ancestral faith, he did so with conviction and followed it by commitment. Like him, may we translate our loyalty into concrete mitzvot, daily duties and acts of self-sanctification.

## DO A LITTLE MORE

Yom Kippur is the last and climactic day of the Ten Days of Penitence. Its central theme is a call to T'shuvah. It sounds a summons to retrace our steps back to the path from which, during the past year, we may have wandered. Its underlying assumption at all times was that during the course of the year, the Jew was prone to fall below the standards he had set for himself. Yom Kippur, therefore, held up a familiar standard to which the erring Jew could repair. It attempted to win him back to the way of life from which he had temporarily strayed.

For many of us, this call to return is still valid. But, I am acutely aware that there are also many among us, how many I have no way of know-



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ing, for whom a call to return has an empty ring because they have never been more observant, more loyal, more committed. If anything, they have been living more Jewishly in recent years than ever before in their lives.

If, then, our lives are to know a deeper religious fervor, if we are to bring our own straying footsteps back to the Jewish way of life, the call to many of us tonight must be, not a call to return but, a summons to advance. "Speak unto the children of Israel and let them move forward."

A generation ago, the key word in the messages from synagogue pulpits across the land was "survival." We were literally struggling for our very lives as Jews. We were fighting a holding action, trying desperately to cling to some refuge against the combined onslaught of the anti-religious proletarian elements, the assimilationists and the self-hating Jews. Today the key word is "revival." The cry of the faithful of the 1930's "lo amut—I shall not die," has given way to the second half of that verse—*ki echyeh—I shall surely live.* In years gone by, the most persistent question used to be: Why should I be a Jew? Today it is: How can I be a Jew?

Because our motivations for returning have been so largely superficial, our actions after returning have been so conspicuously sterile. The critics are not overly impressed by the splendor of our new synagogue structures. These they dismiss either as a manifestation of the "edifice complex" or as a reversion to the "stone age." We build synagogues and we use them primarily, for social purposes; we send our children to religious schools but make little or no effort to enlarge the pitifully meager Jewish knowledge we ourselves possess. Our Jewish consciousness comes perilously close to being a Jewish unconsciousness because we know that we are Jews but we have only the vaguest intimations of what Jewishness is.

This holy night is meant to challenge us, in the words of Ezekiel: "Make you a new heart and a new spirit for why shall you die, O house of Israel?" What then shall we do to live? We must re-think our relationship to Judaism. Needed is an overpowering desire to go beyond affiliation to commitment, to start thinking not only in terms of belonging but in terms of becoming. The decisive demonstration of what Judaism really means to us will be given in the arena of action. We will have to prove ourselves capable of one of the most difficult human achievements—a change in our pattern of living.

Professor Abraham Heschel has written "Do as much as you can and then just a little more than you can. This is vital—a little more than you can." He is not asking us to become what he is. He is asking us to become more faithful than we are now.

The first step I would urge upon everyone of us who has not yet taken it, is learn to read Hebrew. Learn to read Hebrew! "The Jews of America," said Solomon Schechter, "cannot live without English but will not survive without Hebrew."

Here are some other steps we can take if we have not already taken them.

1. Attend at least one synagogue service, on the Sabbath or the week-day, during every week of the year.
2. Subscribe to and read at least one Jewish periodical a week and read at least one book of Jewish interest every two months.
3. Refrain from eating forbidden meats and seafood both inside and outside the home as a start to full Kashrut observance.
4. Refrain from performing all truly avoidable labors, commercial or domestic, on the Shabbat. This means a soul-searching examination as to whether it is absolutely necessary to go to places of employment. This entails eliminating cooking, house cleaning, clothes washing on the Shabbat. This means avoiding shopping and smoking.
5. On the positive side, resolve to usher in the Shabbat with that profoundly poetic and spiritual act, the lighting of the candles. Learn and recite the Kiddush at the beginning of the Sabbath meal. Together every effort should be expended to make the Friday night meal a hallowed ritual on the weekly family calendar.
6. Every meal in the home should begin with the Motzi, that simple blessing over the bread which restores us to proper human dimensions and underscores, if only for a fleeting moment, our utter dependence upon the mercies of a gracious God.
7. Where our children are concerned, we should strive to give them a maximum Jewish education for the maximum number of years.
8. We should seek out opportunities to attend worship services with them as often as possible during the year.
9. We should join at least one organization in addition to the synagogue which is committed to furthering Jewish life whether in America or in Israel.
10. Within those organizations our voices should be raised in behalf of richer Jewish content and deeper loyalty to Jewish values and sanctities.

I have ventured to list some basic acts of Jewish commitment because I believe a beginning has to be made to translate our vague religious sentiments into concrete acts, into *Mitzvot*. To those who are observing more I say in the words of the Haggadah "Kol hamarbeh hare zeh m'shubach—the more you do the more praiseworthy."

What is important for all of us, is that we recognize the implications of our membership in synagogues.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF LITTLE THINGS

Geraldine Farrar, the former opera star, was interviewed on her 80th birthday. In the course of her remarks she made an observation which has the clear, sharp ring of the truth. "So much is pressing in on humans today, that no one has time to stand still long enough to evaluate it. They gulp life and taste nothing. They eat life and have no savor." In this jittery, jangling, jet-propelled age, we need desperately to do what she implies, we need to stand still long enough to evaluate life, to taste its flavor, to try to weave all strands into some meaningful pattern. Whatever else our coming to the synagogue on this day means for us, at the very least it provides the opportunity to do just that—to take spiritual inventory, *CHESHBON HA-NEFESH*, "a reckoning of the soul" as our Sages called it. What a pity it would be if we diminished the grandeur of this day by devoting ourselves to anything less than the highest. We should then be like the American tourist at the Louvre who moved from painting to painting examining each carefully and closely. When the visit was concluded, she was asked what she thought of it. "It was perfect," she said with real enthusiasm. "I could not find a speck of dust anywhere." This is not a day for trivial and petty concerns. By the same token, however, we ought not to lose sight of the truth that great matters depend intimately on little things.

To restore our perspective we ought to hasten to point out that little things have not only been responsible for huge losses but have also triggered great discoveries. A child's soap bubble led Newton to his important optical discoveries. A spider web over a garden path suggested the suspension bridge. A tea kettle singing on the stove was the inspiration for the steam engine. A falling apple led to the discovery of the law of gravity. A lantern swinging in a tower was responsible for the pendulum. A wind-blown shirt waving on a clothes line gave us the great balloon

which led to the Zeppelin. On both sides of the historical ledger, great consequences have come from little things.

One Hollywood producer reflecting the prevailing preoccupation with bigness, said that he wanted a film which begins with an earthquake and works up to a climax.

The two nations of antiquity to whom modern civilization is most heavily indebted were the Jews and the Greeks. Jerusalem gave the world its Bible, its morality, its ethics. Athens richly endowed it with philosophy, drama and art. A glance at the map of the ancient world will show how insignificant in size were the two countries who created so disproportionately.

How important is it for us to grasp the simple truth that happiness is found in the little things which are close at hand.

A member of our congregation illustrated this truth for me not very long ago. I paid her a visit at her home after she returned from a serious hospital siege of several week's duration. When I asked her how she was occupying herself since her return, she said with the excitement of a little girl: "I'm just walking from room to room admiring my home. I never realized what beautiful colors I have here. Every time I look at them they grow more marvelous."

"That man is richest," wrote Henry Thoreau, "whose pleasures are cheapest." We might paraphrase him by saying: "That man is happiest whose joys are simplest."

Loyalty to Judaism too frequently was spelled out in acts of martyrdom. Great acts of courage, massive sacrifices were demanded and offered.

But what is demanded of us? Heroism? Martyrdom? Renunciation of home amid security? Scarcely! Loyalty to Judaism for us has to be spelled out in humble acts, undramatic tasks, unspectacular acts little deeds.

Judaism in America will not be defeated by great acts of betrayal. It will be undermined by small acts of negligence. For want of a nail, the kingdom was lost. Judaism will not be saved by any headline-making, breathtaking deeds of valor. It will be saved by great loyalty to little mitzvot.

### ON MIRACLES ALONE YOU CAN'T LIVE

On miracles alone you can't live. Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann, was one of the most prominent contributors to its rebirth, and he spoke out of the depths of personal experience when he said: "Miracles sometimes occur but one has to work terribly hard for them."

This is a truth worth pondering. People often say they don't believe in miracles, and yet their behavior, or lack of it, indicates that they believe in miracles too much. They expect good things to happen without any effort on their part. No toil, no travail, no sacrifice, no surrender of comfort or leisure or pleasure; just relying on miracles to happen.

Long ago our Sages, who surely could not be accused of lacking faith in God, warned us: "We may not rely on miracles." They knew that wishing will not make it so unless we are prepared to work with God to translate those wishes into reality, those desires into deeds.

A pupil once asked his rabbi why the Almighty endowed man with skepticism. "After all," he asked, "we have been taught that everything He created has some beneficial purpose, but what possible purpose could skepticism serve? It only leads to doubt and denial of faith.

The rabbi was ready with his answer. "There are times," he answered, "when it is better not to have too much faith in the Almighty. When a poor man comes to you for help because he and his children are hungry, do not send him away with the assurance that the FIBBONO

SHEL OLAM will perform some miracle for him. That is when you use your skepticism. Act independently. You help the poor man yourself."

- Let's not depend on miracles.
- If we want Israel to be strong, secure and safe, what are we doing to make that wish come true?
- If we want our children to be comfortable in their Jewishness, proud of their past and committed to their future, what are we doing to make that wish come true?
- If we want the name Jew to stand for honesty, integrity and generosity, what are we doing to make that wish come true?
- If we want creative Jewish survival to continue into the uncharted future, what are we doing to make that wish come true?
- The court Philosopher, we are told, had just completed his lecture on miracles, and after the applause ended, the king turned to him with the challenge: "Show me a miracle." The philosopher reflected briefly and answered: "Sire, the Jews."

### SOIL FROM SINAI

It was at Sinai that we were given a code by which to live and a purpose for which to live. It was at Sinai that we became a unique and holy people. It was at Sinai that we first heard the immortal words we were destined to speak to all men. It was at Sinai that great heavenly sparks kindled in the Jewish soul an eternal flame by which all humanity has been warmed. "As long as the world lasts," wrote Matthew Arnold, "all who want to make progress in righteousness will come to Israel for inspiration, as the people who have the sense for righteousness most glowing and strongest."

We listen to these extravagant words of praise from a non-Jewish scholar and we are understandably uplifted. It is astonishing that so small a people should have made so enormous a contribution. It is immensely gratifying to be able to say with Chaim Weizmann: "We may be sons of peddlers but we are the grandsons of prophets." But what are we ourselves doing with the legacy of Sinai? To what extent are we trying to familiarize ourselves with it, to learn what guidance it has for our anxious times, what direction it can offer to a generation which seems to have lost its capacity for telling right from wrong? To what extent do we permit that legacy to shape our lives? How much evidence of it do we find in our homes, in our places of business, in our lying down and our rising up? Do we teach it diligently to our children? Do we speak of it when we sit at home or walk by the way? How many distinctively Jewish acts do we perform in a day, a week, a year? "How strange," Dr. Heschel has exclaimed, "to be a Jew and to go astray on God's perilous errands." Unless we keep alive the legacy of Sinai, what meaning is there to the Jewish past, what likelihood is there for a Jewish future? And if our past is without meaning and our future without hope, what sense does it make to be a Jew at all?

But we do want to be Jews. That is why we build and support synagogues. That is why we send our children to religious schools. That is why we look for colleges for our children with a large Jewish population. That is why we are so relieved when our son informs us that he has found a

"nice Jewish girl." That is why we search out Jewish neighborhoods, Jewish swim clubs, Jewish organizations and Jewish causes. All this is evidence of our genuine yearning to perpetuate our Jewishness. This yearning must be translated daily into acts of loyalty. To live on with dignity, with direction, with distinction, we must draw regularly upon those unique moral and ethical values which are embodied in our legacy, values which teach us what to cherish in the world, how to look upon the world, how to live in the world.

### ON BEING IMPRACTICAL

A streak of impracticality runs through Jewish thought as well as Jewish history. Thus one of the truly unique Jewish contributions is the concept of "TORAH LISHMAH" - study of Torah for its own sake. We are urged to engage in a discipline of study which leads to no trade or profession, which has no utilitarian purpose, which we may not use "as a spade with which to dig" - to use the rabbinic phrase. Torah study directed to no practical end is one of our tradition's most hallowed MITZVOT.

We are also urged to serve God without any practical purpose in mind. Our performance of His will should be motivated solely by our love of Him and not by any hope that we will be repaid by material blessings. Thus we are admonished in PIRKEI AVOT "Be not like servants who serve their Master without expecting a reward. A MITZVAH is not an investment on which dividends are expected. The reward of the MITZVAH is the MITZVAH itself." Beyond that, it has no practical value.

When we stop to think about the matter, we realize how deeply indebted we are to impractical people. Giving charity is impractical. After all, why should anyone voluntarily part with possessions acquired at the cost of time and toil? Giving time to one's synagogue or community is impractical. The time could be used for one's own entertainment, recreation or relaxation. Visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, performing acts of kindness and thoughtfulness are all impractical—the time and energy could be better invested in furthering our own pursuits. Yet who will deny that it is precisely these impractical acts which humanize our lives and add a dimension of holiness to our existence?

### PROMISES TO KEEP

Kol Nidre speaks of broken promises and unfulfilled vows. Who among us can confront a God of Judgment before Whom nothing is hidden, without a stabbing sense of remorse over promises we did not keep, the vows we did not fulfill?

Among the best known and most frequently quoted lines of Robert Frost are these "The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep...and miles to go before I sleep..." Not long before his death, Frost was asked after a public lecture, what promises he had in mind when he wrote those lines. The poet smiled softly and replied, "Oh, promises to myself and promises to my ancestors."

We too have promises to keep—to ourselves and to our ancestors.

Have we kept the promises we have made to ourselves? Everyone of us is endowed at birth with all sorts of magnificent possibilities and potentialities.

Let's face it! We have not made the most of ourselves. We have not cultivated all our latent thoughtfulness and kindness and ability. We have not been as devoted, as tolerant, as forgiving as we could have been and should have been.

How well have we kept the promise inherent in our parenthood, the unspoken promise that forms itself in the heart of the father and mother of every newborn babe, to set a noble example, to establish a pattern of life which accentuates the importance of values and principles?

To us Jews promises are a crucial dimension of our collective existence. When a male child is eight days old, there is engraved upon his flesh the mark of the promise. BRIT means covenant: covenant means an agreement, a binding promise. Jewish history begins with a promise. The first words spoken by God to the first Jew are words of promise. "I will make thee a great nation and I will bless thee, And I will make thy name great and be thou a blessing."

At Sinai the covenant was renewed. Before Moses died he reaffirmed the mutual promise, and he added these fateful words: "Not with you only do I make this covenant and this vow, but with him who stands here today with us before the Lord our God and also with him that is not here with us this day."

Unless we understand the crucial role which promises have played in Jewish thought we cannot begin to understand Jewish history at all.

We cannot begin to understand the whole incredible story of the rebirth of Israel unless we understand the role of the promise—"to your seed shall I give this land."

At the heart of Jewish history is a promise, a promise renewed with every child that is born, a promise renewed with every Sabbath that is kept.

Our most crucial problems each begin with the letter "I." We suffer from ignorance, from indifference and from intermarriage. The three are related one to the other. Where there is ignorance of Jewish texts and tradition, there is likely to be indifference to Jewish sanctities and symbols and Jewish survival. Both together make a fertile soil for intermarriage.

We need to declare war on Jewish poverty. We, who comprise the most affluent Jewish community anywhere in the world, are stricken by spiritual and intellectual poverty. Judaism is rich and we are paupers.

To be a Jew means to be the possessor of a very special message, the bearer of a very sacred promise, the embodiment of a unique way of life. It is a way of life which encompasses Shabbat and Kashrut, work and worship, charity and compassion, honesty and holiness, a love of man and a love of God.

We have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep.

If we are to keep faith with the promises to ourselves and to our ancestors, we have to keep faith with the Synagogue.

The Synagogue is the keeper of that light and you and I have promised to mind that light.

As we keep faith with those who have gone before us, we preserve the faith for those who come after us.

As we keep the promise to our ancestors, we transmit a future of promise to our descendants.

Dear President:

The following material has been provided to help you prepare your Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur message. Each provides an idea that will enhance your presentation. We acknowledge the permission received from Erwin Schild, Rabbi Emeritus of Adath Israel, Downsview, Ontario. These two excerpts were taken from his volume World Through My Window which is available from Adath Israel. There are also three pieces that originally appeared in Torchlight, a publication of the Federation of Jewish Mens Clubs.

**I. DOES GOD KNOW YOU?**

I wanted to tease my friend Seemour a little when he asked me about the topic of my sermon. "I am going to talk about a Lamborghini," I said.

"What in heaven is a Lamborghini?"

I feigned surprise.

"You, supposedly a man of the world, do not know what a Lamborghini is! It's a famous automobile! I saw one parked last week in front of the Synagogue. The kids at the Kiddush were all excited, and insisted that I go out to look at the marvel. It was indeed a sleek, beautiful, powerful-looking white machine; really a dream car. The kids told me it costs more than a hundred thousand dollars.

\* \* \* \* \*

There are people who are *"yedu'ei makom - known to God."* Nothing bad can "happen" to them. For them, there are no "accidents," for God is aware of them. Whatever befell them, it is impossible that God was not looking! By implication, there are then also people who are unknown to God! If we were to pray for one of them, our prayer might be returned unopened with the notation "Unknown!" We have never heard of him! There are people who have never come to God's attention. Clearly, we must live so that God comes to know us. We must come to His notice. We must strive to become *"yedu'ei Makom."*

How do we come to God's notice?

Things that catch human eyes do not catch God's attention

*He does not prize the strength of horses,*

*nor does He value the fleetness of men;*

*but the Lord values those who fear Him,*

*those who depend on His faithful care.*

*(Psalms 147:10)*

Clearly, driving a Lamborghini does not introduce us to God.

What we do to impress others does not impress God. Conspicuous ostentation does not make us conspicuous to God. Mitzvot make us known to God, especially those we do *"mi-bifnim"*: inwardly, discreetly, privately and modestly. Make yourselves known to God! Do Mitzvot! Practice "Tzedaka," righteousness through deeds of loving kindness and social responsibility! And do it without ostentation! Attend Synagogue regularly. Prayer uttered sincerely, with humility, is one good way of coming to God's attention. Coming often, regularly, not only on the high points of the religious year, will make you known to God.

Today our main worry as Jews is neither our physical survival nor our capability to generate headlines and to exercise political power. Our greatest need is the revival of true Jewish personal piety. It is our moral viability that hangs in balance today; at stake is our survival as a people whose life force is morality. I am afraid that Jews in general are becoming selfish, materialistic and opportunistic. For many Jews, hedonism has effectively replaced the spiritual, altruistic and ethical values of Judaism. Expediency substitutes for principle.

What does it really mean to be a Jew?

*I saved the poor man who cried out,  
the orphan who had none to help him.  
I received the blessing of the lost;  
I gladdened the heart of the widow.  
I clothed myself in righteousness and it robed me;  
justice was my cloak and my turban.  
I was eyes to the blind,  
and feet to the lame,  
I was a father to the needy,  
and I looked into the case of the stranger.  
I broke the jaw of the wrongdoer,  
and I wrested prey from his teeth (Job 29:12-17)*

Is it not remarkable that Job defines personal piety purely in terms of scrupulous ethical behavior? His catalogue of righteousness contains no reference to prayer, to sacrifice or other ritual observance. Kindness and compassion are the essentials of piety.

On a Yom Kippur, in a small town - so the story goes - two Jews left their synagogue for a breath of fresh air. They saw two other Jews coming out of the neighboring congregation and heading for a restaurant. An argument ensued: "How can you eat on Yom Kippur?" "Judaism is ethical monotheism. That means we believe in one God whom we worship not by rituals, but by ethical conduct. We carry on our business with honesty all year. So we need not bother fasting!" The Jews enter the restaurant, while the other two continue their walk. Said one to the other: "What fools! For the sake of one silly meal, they practice honesty all year long!"

This story encapsulates two unfortunate fallacies.

The first is the assumption that moral rectitude obviates compliance with ritual Mitzvot. Jews do not have an exclusive claim on morality. While personal ethics are an absolute requirement of Judaism, adherence to ethics alone does not make you Jewish. Observance of Shabbat, of Kashrut, of circumcision, of Jewish prayer are the identifying signs of Jewishness. Rituals are our marks of identity. Mitzvot, the sacred acts, help to create the distinctiveness without which we cannot survive. --

Different is the fallacy of the two observant Jews in the story. They fail to realize that fasting on Yom Kippur, as well as the observance of the other ritual laws, is nearly meaningless if it is not joined with the observance of the commandments that govern interpersonal relationships, the "*Mitzvot bein adam lachavero - between one human being and his fellow.*" God forgives ritual sins readily. However, sins that bring harm to others, that inflict insult or hurt on our fellow human beings, require as a precondition for divine pardon the making of apologies and amends, as well as forgiveness by the victims.

The Kashrut of the dollar we earn is not less important than the Kashrut of the steak we eat.

All of us can be religious Jews. Everyone can listen for the "Kol Demantia Dacca" - the hidden voice of silence." We can bare our heart to the still encounter. We can address the quiet agenda. We can choose to live in integrity and with compassion. Be kind to others! Be faithful to parents when they age! You can be a Tzaddik! When your friend is in trouble, do not shun him, but go and talk to him. There is so much we can do. No Great Shofars will sound. No global problem will be solved. But our world will be a better one, more worthy to survive, and a heartbeat closer to the Kingdom of the Lord.

### 3. *NEVER QUIT*

*Saul Teplitz, Rabbi Emeritus  
Sons Of Israel, Woodmere, NY*

There are people who enjoy standing at the site of a building that is going up, or an excavation that is being dug for a new building, and criticize the work. These are "sidewalk superintendents," always pointing to some defect in the plan or deficiency in the procedure. While they are busy offering all kinds of suggestions and ideas as to how the work could be improved, the workers are proceeding to build. The sidewalk superintendents will never know the joy of creative effort.

You have to be little to belittle. The real doers of the world have no time for criticizing others, because they are too busy doing. "Anybody can make a mistake." That's what we say when we make one. If the other person makes a mistake, there is absolutely no excuse for it.

An ancient Jewish moralist once said, "If you are in the mood of praising, praise God; if you are in the mood for blaming, blame yourself.

A mistake is proof that someone had the daring to try to accomplish something. Failures are made by those who fail to dare, not by those who dare to fail. Our greatest failure is to do nothing for fear we will fail.

In biographical literature there is the story of a 15 year old youngster who once stood sheepishly before the head-master of a Munich school who gave him a merciless tongue lashing for his lack of interest in his studies. He then dismissed the boy from school saying, "Your presence in the class destroys the respect of the students." The youngster then took an examination to enter the Swiss Federal Polytechnic School in Zurich, but he failed the test. He ultimately got a position as a tutor for boys in a boarding house, but soon was fired.

The man who compiled this impressive string of failure was none other than Albert Einstein.

### 4. *WHY DO JEWS WIN SO MANY NOBEL PRIZES?*

*Rabbi Samuel Klein  
Ner Tamid, Chicago, Illinois*

I don't recall any annual roster of Nobel Prize winners that didn't have at least two Jewish recipients.

How do we explain the disproportionate number of annual Jewish Nobel Prize winners? Why are Jews so prominent in the realm of the intellect? Is it that the Jew has different lines of evolution? Is it nature or nurture?

I believe it's not genes or heredity, but Jewish religio-culture attitudes that impel Jews to pursue knowledge with unparalleled dedication. Maimonides expanded the meaning of Torah to refer, not only to books of holy scripture, but also the study of science and philosophy.

According to Maimonides, the acquisition of knowledge makes men more human, for it is the intellect that separates man from the animal kingdom. The Jewish ideal is the "Talmud Chacham".

It is the Rambam, embodying the spirit of the study of the holy Torah and the Torah of science and philosophy, who attained to prominence and immortality for this knowledge of

Jewish law and theology and of science and philosophy. His almost super-human intellectual attainments have served as a model for our people through the ages. It is the ideal of Torah study that motivates Jews to excel in the field of learning.

It follows, therefore, that the more assimilated we become and the more removed from the tradition of Judaism, the less prominent we shall be in the fields of knowledge and discovery.

The Maccabeans fought the assimilated, Hellenized Jew of their day, not because the Hellenized Jew integrated into his life aspects of Hellenic culture that were not compatible with Judaism, but rather for his having forsaken Jewish tradition and having swallowed completely the Hellenic culture with all its immorality and idolatry. Maimonides, the great guide to the perplexed, should serve as an ideal for us of excellence in knowledge of the Torah of Judaism as well as the Torah of worldly knowledge.

### 5. *GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT*

*By Rabbi Sheldon Elster*

*Congregation Kol Ami, Annapolis, Maryland*

An elderly Jewish lady at a bus stop turned to the man next to her and asked:

"Du ret Yiddish?" (Do you understand Yiddish)

"Yah," was his reply.

"Gut! Vot time is it?"

You see, she thought she was speaking Yiddish, but all she was really doing was speaking English with a Yiddish accent.

Many people do that.

They think they're living Jewishly when all they're doing is living a secular, ordinary American life with a slight Jewish accent.

The woman who thinks she is maintaining a Jewish home because she served herring; the person who considers a neighborhood Jewish because a "deli" is located there; the one who believes that bringing Jews together for whatever secular reason enhances Jewish survival...these people may think they are speaking and living Judaism, but they are not.

They are representing an essentially non-Jewish, non-religious approach to life with a slight Jewish accent added. Like the old lady in the story, they are speaking secularly and calling it Judaism.

Antiochus wanted all his citizens to be united in a single culture, a single calendar and a single set of habits. He said to the people of Judea: "you can still call yourself Jews, but for some of your distinctive habits and patterns you will substitute the Greek way of doing things. It will make everything so much easier for the administration and for yourselves.

"NO!" was the Jews' response.

To see creative Jewish life and observance coming from secular concerts and programs, ski trips, dances and exercise groups, athletic events and health clubs is to doom the Jewish future.