

May 24, 1973

*America Vindicated:*  
Exposure of Watergate  
seen as result of liberties this country maintains

**R**espect for law is one of the major concerns of every legal system. We would expect nothing less. One might almost say that what self-interest is to self-preservation, respect for law is to the legal order.

Judaism also is very much concerned that its adherents shall have respect for authority and understand how dangerous anarchy can be. That is why even the prophets urged Jews always to pray for the stability of the governments of the countries to which they might be exiled. In some ways, the prophets were revolutionaries but they were also committed to "law and order." In the second paragraph of the third chapter of "Ethics of the Fathers" we find that Rabbi Chanina, the Vice-High Priest, said, "Pray for the welfare of the government, since but for the fear thereof, men would swallow each other alive."

I want here call to your attention to an interesting insight of the great Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch who is regarded as the founder of neo-orthodoxy in the modern age. He pondered the connection between the first paragraph of that chapter of "Ethics of the Fathers" and the second paragraph. In the first paragraph we have the following:

"Akavya, the son of Mahalalel, said, Reflect upon three things, and thou wilt not come within the power of sin: know whence thou earnest, whither thou art going; and before whom thou wilt in the future have to give account and reckoning. Whence thou earnest - from a fetid drop; whither thou art going - to a place of dust, worms and maggots; and before whom thou wilt in future have to give account and reckoning - before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

Is there any connection between the maxim of Akavya, the son of Mahalalel, and the maxim of Rabbi Chanina, the Vice-High Priest? He said that there was. If, he argued, all men were truly moral people and could achieve righteousness simply by reflecting upon the three things suggested by Akavya, the son of Mahalalel, then there would be no need for law or government. All men would be decent because they would be moved by the mere thought of whence they came and whither they were going and before Whom they would one day have to report on their sins of omission and commission.

Unfortunately, however, most men do not ponder these three things and are not moved by such thoughts to lead righteous lives and deport themselves in such a way that they never harm their neighbors. It is for that reason that there must be law and order, and a government to maintain both. For that reason, too, Jews must not only hope for, and, contribute to, the welfare of government but they must even pray to God that He will lend His hand to the achievement of that objective.

For the very same reason the Bible is so insistent, and tells us in so many places, that one must never curse the prince, the ruling authority or anyone who exercises executive power in society. It should be of interest that there are no such commandments with regard to the priests, or even the legislators. It applied only to those who exercised judicial and executive authority.

Apparently the Torah wanted to make sure that there would be no subversion of those who are responsible for the avoidance of anarchy, and the security of human life, limb, and property.

That did not mean that princes and judges could not err. Indeed princes had to bring special offerings even when they were only negligent. Everyone is accountable to God and man, no matter how high his status. However, special steps must be taken to insure the maintenance of respect for constituted authority and while there was always accountability, and there could also be extensive criticism - as prophets were wont to admonish even kings - nonetheless, there was a modicum of respect due those who were charged with the preservation of law and order.

These thoughts occur to me at a time when unfortunately all of us in America are disturbed by what is presently happening in our

country and we must pray for the welfare of our blessed land. I would not suggest by any means that there be any diminution of the accountability of all those who once held, or presently hold, high office. There must be investigation and there must even be prosecution.

My concern is that too much attention is being given to the wrongs that were committed and we are thus causing too many people, young and old alike, to lose their respect for the institution of government and the processes of government, when indeed were it not for government and her processes there could be neither investigation, disclosure nor punishment.

I think it is unfortunate that those in control of the media are placing all of the accent on the wrongs because they are newsworthy and they are not glorifying, as they should, the very processes of government which made possible the discovery and the exposure of that which was wrong. Side by side with all that they have written and said with regard to the evils that have been disclosed, there ought to be at least as much emphases on the glories of the democratic system and the fact that as many men are free to speak as there are. If this were done, then the damage to the image of government as such would not be as great as it presently is.

Somehow we have lost in our day the capacity to be grateful for aspects of our governmental system which, despite its faults, is still one of the greatest on earth. That is why I personally reacted so negatively to the comments of Angela Davis when she was acquitted. She blasted the system without realizing that in the Russian governmental system which she admires she would have experienced an altogether different kind of trial and result.

By the same token, I would have felt much happier if at the end of the Ellsberg trial the defendants would have uttered a kind word about a system of justice that gave them their freedom instead of attacking the President. Perhaps in the case of these defendants and Angela Davis I can be forgiving because they all gave expression to their bitterness.

In the final analysis a trial is an ordeal even if the outcome is in one's favor. However, too many Americans who were not subjected to that ordeal and know only the blessings of American

democracy are ingrates and thus destroy the image of government in the eyes of young people. Thus they undermine the prospects for the survival of our democracy which in the words of Abraham Lincoln is still “the last best hope of the earth.”