

Rabbi's Message

"Sucker Sermon"

May 15, 1969

Iyar 27, 5729

Fifth Avenue Synagogue Vol. XII, No. 8

The festival of Shavuoth is the occasion for the renewal of our covenant with G-d as we reaccept the Torah once again. Therefore it is as perfect a time as one can visualize to ponder the nature of one's commitment as a Jew. I state mine for your consideration and I do so in response to three questions that were posed by a former President of Sarah Lawrence College. At a conference for higher education, she said that the underlying cause of all student unrest on college campuses is the basic failure of educators to answer the fundamental questions to which youth wants replies. Because the questions are so fundamental, our failure to give answers causes students to flounder and he denied the emotional and intellectual well being that they require for proper functioning. These questions are, Who am I? Where am I? Whither am I going?

Needless to say every person must answer these questions for himself. However, as a Jew I make my reply as follows:

"Who am I?" I am God's creature. He created me as He created everything in the Universe, but He did something unique for me. He imparted unto me a divine spark, a soul. He created me in His image, that I might have the capacities to think and feel, to empathize and to create, to meditate as I seek to discover Him, and to share with Him His own creative enterprise in the realms of both matter and spirit. Because of what He did for me, my life has dignity and meaning, and purpose.

Rabbi's Message (Conf'd)

"Where am I?" I am ■situated on a planet which is much larger than I, even though it is very tiny by comparison with the vast universe. However, size is irrelevant. The fact is that I find myself in a period of human history when as a Jew and as an American I can do so much to establish a bridge between heaven and earth, between the real and the ideal, between the physical and the spiritual. Never before in human history have I had ■such

great opportunities to help my family, my people, my country, or my humanity. I may even choose to go to Israel, or I may choose to remain in America, but wherever I choose to be, I have magnificent opportunities to serve God and man as few have had before, and I want to make the most of these opportunities. I shall make my choice on the basis of the opportunities available to me to fulfill the Divine Image with which I have been endowed.

“Whither am I going?” I am trying to move in the direction of achieving the Kingdom of God. The prophets dreamed a dream of a perfect world. They gave us the vision of universal justice and peace. They gave us the vision of even nature’s perfection, with all of nature’s defects eliminated, and even death coming to an end. They gave us the hope that man can achieve intellectual, spiritual and moral excellence, and thus move in the direction of the fulfillment of the vision of the prophets. I want to move in that direction and take along with me all of those who touch my life and whose lives are touched by me. I move and sometimes fall. Not always do I move forward. Sometimes I must even retreat, but God is supporting me, healing my wounds and offering me added encouragement to take a second breath and try to move forward again. I know that within the foreseeable future there will be death, but for every period of my life there are the challenges appropriate to it and in every age, and in every condition, there is one thing or another that I can do to help the world move in the direction in which God wants it to move. In youth or in old age, in strength or in infirmity, there will be things that my body or my spirit will be able to do in different proportions, and to such action I am committed.

These answers may not meet the needs of everyone, but they endow my life with sufficient meaning and purpose for me to find life beautiful and for me to invite others to take the same road.

Whence did I derive these answers? From the Torah, the Written and the Oral Law, and all that my people have done to make their covenant with God meaningful and relevant in every age. On the feast of Shavuoth I am most happy to reaccept the Torah and reaffirm my participation in that covenant.

A happy Shavuoth to you all!