

Rabbi's Message
"Sucker Sermon"
September 13, 1973
Elul 16 5733

The year which now comes to an end has been a very painful one for Americans generally, and for American Jewry in particular. So much has happened in the nation, in politics, in the economy, and in society, that we are deeply concerned about our country's future. I have referred to this crisis on many occasions in my bulletin messages and in my sermons. I also tried to indicate that there were silver linings in the clouds. And now I want to make a suggestion to everyone, to every Jew and to every American, that may improve morale and substitute a healthy outlook for a sickly one.

I make my suggestion because of an experience I had in the Soviet Union many years ago. I asked my guide in Kiev whether she would not like to visit the United States. She said she had no interest in seeing the United States although she did want to visit England. When I asked why she did not want to visit the United States she told me that she reads American newspapers in Kiev's libraries and learned that all we have here is disaster — crimes, riots, scandals, corruption, everything that is undesirable. I explained to her that newspapers are not a proper mirror of real life in the United States. Just as newspapers in the Soviet Union print only what is good about their country and their government, so in the United States newspapers print only that which is bad, ugly and sordid. The editors and publishers of our newspapers are afraid that they would not sell their product if they had nice things to say about men, situations, and events. At that time I did not dream that the situation as it existed even then in the United States would bring us to the misery in which we presently find ourselves. Now I believe that the time has come to make a revolutionary change. We must somehow convince ourselves and those who prepare publications for us that we want to know more about the good side of people and the moral, decent, behavior of our fellow-men. We want to learn about that which is heartwarming, about that which would serve as a wonderful example to us in our own lives. We must try to put the accent on the positive instead of on the negative.

However, it occurred to me that before we can pressure the mass media to do this we must first adopt this practice in our own lives. We must stop deriving delight from ripping other people to pieces. We must curb our own insatiable appetite for character-assassination and for the demeaning of those we know.

Perhaps this is expecting too much of human beings who still have such enormous capacities for evil. Yet it is this capacity for evil that is drowning as at the moment and destroying our government even as it is impoverishing us in our life long savings. We are actually on the threshold of a flood and we do not realize that it is our own sinfulness that has brought the disaster

In order to save the nation we have to start with our own personal behavior. I stress this because this is the most important resolution we can possibly make for the new year. When others approach us and want to tell us something ugly about our acquaintances let us stop them and suggest the possibility of their saying something nice about the person whose image they would destroy. We should write to newspapers and tell their editors that we want them to publish more about that which is healthy in the United States. In no country of the world does one find such madness as one finds in the United States with every newspaper hellbent on the destruction of our morale with the kind of image we are giving ourselves and our country.

I am not suggesting that we must ignore that which is evil. We must expose and fight what is sin. However, we must not focus our attention exclusively on that which is evil so that we never see anything good. This only encourages and reinforces the performance of evil. On the other hand, if we gave at least as much attention to the good, this would encourage more people to follow suit and perform the good.

This is one of the first messages that I am delivering to my congregation for the New Year. May the New Year truly bring to all of us redemption from evil and the pursuit of the good.