

SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE:

A SYMPOSIUM ON THE SABBATH*

A questionnaire was sent to a selection of the subscribers to 'Petachim', a bi-monthly Journal of Jewish Thought which, by allowing free expression of different views, aims at encouraging religious thought and practice, and in that way making its contribution to the revival of faith in Israel.

What should be the form of the Sabbath in the State of Israel in our day?

'This question, it seems to us, has two aspects: a theoretical aspect-what is the significance of the Sabbath and the source of its sanctity; and a practical aspect-how to maintain this sanctity in a modern and mainly secular state'.

'Do you think there is need of changes in the existing legislation, and if so, what changes?'

The following is a selection of replies taken from three groups of respondents:

- A. Observant.
- B. Liberal.
- C. From Kibbutzim.

A. OBSERVANT

Menahem Hartum

The problem is how to find those aspects of the Sabbath which can be understood in our society, although our society does not accept the assumptions which served our people in the past.

In my opinion, the aspect to be stressed is that of the *equality* of all members of society. The equality of all mankind, an Utopian ideal, is actually attained on the Sabbath, when all men, even slaves, are free. It follows that on the Sabbath there must be a complete cessation of work; nor should anybody be called upon to render services to other people except in case of danger to life (private or public). Our tradition distinguishes between observance of the Sabbath in private and in public. Every man can behave in his own home according to his own lights. But in public there must be no open contravention. Consequently the existing legislation must be retained. All transport, and the functioning of places of entertainment

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(including beaches), of radio and television, should be prohibited. Though they may give pleasure to some people, it can only be by requiring others to work on their behalf, and the principle of equality is contravened.

On the other hand, services necessary to avert danger to life should be performed by all Jews alike; 'religious' Jews should not require 'non-religious' to act as "Shabbes Goy" on their behalf.

Shemuel Ben-Artzi

The Sabbath is a sign of the covenant between God the Creator, and His people. It is this which makes the Sabbath holy.

With the return to the land, we have succeeded in reviving the barren soil, the Hebrew language, and the dry bones of our people. It is not less important to renew and to strengthen the sign of the covenant between us and the Creator. The Sabbath must signalize the Jewish people, more than all the other achievements – in defence, in agriculture and in science.

Its form must be not essentially different from that of tradition, as a day of prayer and study, of spiritual and bodily enjoyment, and as a family celebration. It is to be hoped that the working week will be shortened to five days, allowing one day for sports and excursions, and leaving the Sabbath free for spiritual content.

B. LIBERALS

Jack J. Cohen

The *inner Sabbath* in men's hearts has changed. One cannot ignore the fact that the world-outlook of millions of Jews is different from that of the past. Most Jews of today regard the Sabbath as a day of rest and holiness, but do not accept the detailed prohibitions as a Divine command. Consequently there must be room in Israel for two kinds of Sabbath. Freedom of thought is one of the foundations of a democratic state, and so we must find a way to enable the two sectors, the observant and the liberal, to find their way with a minimum of friction. One has to reckon also with a third sector, who regard the Sabbath only as a day of rest.

I do not believe that there is a way at present of reconciling these different view-points. Certainly a halakhic solution is impracticable. There will have to be a long period of search and experiment.

For example, the prohibition of public transport is harmful, because it is hypocritical. The Orthodox know that the *status quo* – permitting private transport – is contrary to the Halakhah. And the Socialists accept the *status quo*, although it discriminates in favour of the rich – who have their own cars. Why should the poor not be able to visit hospitals on the Sabbath? Travelling is not necessarily a profanation, but may be a means of

applying the Sabbath to the era of large cities.

A more difficult problem is the blurring of the distinction between the Sabbath and week-days in all that concerns culture and study. The synagogue in its present form no longer fills the same function as in the past, and new forms must be devised. These may serve both observant and liberal sectors alike.

How to retain the family Sabbath in Israel? Here it seems to me that the youth movements are partly to blame, undermining the family instead of supporting it.

Menahem Regev

The status of the Sabbath in Israel cannot be separated from the more general question of Religion and State. Orthodox Jews insist on the application of the Halakhah to the Sabbath equally with laws of marriage, divorce, etc. But whoever advocates, as I do, the separation of Religion and State – precisely on account of a positive attitude to religion and tradition – must think out ways and means of creating a cultural atmosphere which will favour religion and attract young people to identify themselves with it. When compulsion is removed, and all trends in Judaism are placed on an equal footing, their mutual emulation in course of time will create a new *Israeli Sabbath*. Many people are seeking ways of observing the Sabbath and don't know how. A 'variety of Sabbaths' should be offered to them. There is room for the creation of a *Centre for the Israeli Sabbath* – perhaps under the aegis of Petahim – to publish material which can serve for guidance, and to whom people can apply for advice.

C. KIBBUTZIM

Joseph Krieger (Kfar Hamaccabi)

A Sabbath in Sa'ad (a religious kibbutz) – impressions from a visit of the 'Circle for Jewish Thought' of the Ihud (an organisation of kibbutzim related to the Israel Labour Party's former-Mapai wing).

On Friday, before sundown, all connections with the outer world are cut off. The gates are closed; no radio; one is on an island, as it were, an island which is wholly *Sabbath*. And within the island, preparations are being completed 'to meet the bride' – washing and dressing, the boys tying up their bicycles; and now candles are lit in each home, and the families stream towards the synagogue, from which one will soon hear '*Lekkah Dodi*' and 'A Song for the Sabbath Day' (Psalm 92). After the service, the festive meal in the kibbutz dining-hall, with Kiddush and grace and Zemiroth.

Whoever thinks that the Orthodox Sabbath is 'boring' is mistaken. One understands too that there is no room for compromises if one wishes to retain the atmosphere of a day 'which is wholly Sabbath', all serenity, rest,

spirit and holiness. Here a young generation is growing up with deep roots, immunized against 'Discotheques' and the like, and at the same time healthy and good workers.

On the Saturday eve, as we approach the synagogue for '*Havdalah*', we pass a small hall from which children's voices are issuing. This is 'the accompaniment of the bride'. And suddenly I have the feeling; these are the guardians of the continued existence of the Jewish people.

We parted in enthusiasm – and not without regret. Regret that we (i. e. the kibbutzim of the Ihud) have not known how to give our children a life so complete and rich in content. But perhaps something may yet be done?

A kibbutz mother (anonymous)

I was born in a kibbutz. My earliest childhood memories include Sabbath ceremonies, in which I always took part. The adults had no celebration. Our teachers pressed on us to institute a *Kabbalat Shabbat* in the dining-hall; attempts were made, but after a few weeks fizzled out.

In my present kibbutz there is a *Kabbalat Shabbat* with an original blessing of the candle: 'Blessed be the Sabbath candle, the harbinger of our rest. Its white light has brought purity into our home. May your holy flame accompany us into the days of toil ahead, until it is re-lit with us-again in the next Sabbath'. But not many take part.

In my own home I do not light the candles and we have no Sabbath songs. Why? That's how it is. I would like to, but not to the point of being a *nudnik*.

From all this it seems to me that it is impossible to have holiness in a secular society. Nothing can be changed by legislation. The only way to change is by education, from childhood on.

SOME CRITICAL COMMENTS

Zvi Yaron (Zinger)

The sanctity of the Sabbath is commonly discussed as an entity by itself, without relation to the rest of life. Rabbi Kook explains the word '*Zemanim*' (times), as applied to the Jewish festivals, as set periods within the year, serving to strengthen the sense of holiness which, although hidden perhaps in working days, is nevertheless latent everywhere – like the feelings between two lovers which is strengthened when they meet after a period of separation, but is never extinguished. The festivals merely 'lift the veil' hiding the beauty below. He makes use also of the terms '*the content of life*' and '*the path of life*'. The content determines the path. If the content, the ultimate aim, is lofty, so will the path be lofty too.

Unfortunately, in our discussions, attention is paid mainly to external details – e.g. transport on the Sabbath – not to the inner content.

Another danger is that emphasis is laid mainly on public forms of ceremony – including some often beautiful celebrations of the Festivals – but without attention to the involvement of the individual. Is attendance at a public ceremony equivalent to the actual experience of making Kiddush in one's own home? Perhaps we should pay less attention to public acts, and rather strive inwardly, each in his own way, to seek the sanctity in the inner soul.

AN ATTEMPTED SUMMARY

J. S. Bentwich

It will be seen that the Observant Jews lay primary emphasis on the holiness of the Sabbath, which, they consider, cannot be maintained except according to the Halakhah. The Liberals do not regard the Halakhah as a Divine commandment, and think that holiness can be retained together with a measure of freedom. The kibbutzim are trying to restore a measure of holiness in the form of ceremonies, though some members are sceptical.

The essential problem arises from two facts:

A. 'The world-outlook of millions of Jews is different from that of past generations' and 'one cannot impose demands on the community which the majority are unable (or unwilling) to perform'.

B. True holiness is not easily created; and the attempts of liberals and kibbutzim to introduce new forms have hitherto not created a Sabbath of the same significance as that of our forefathers.

The pessimist inference – that there is nothing to be done – is, I think, unnecessary and unjustified. The so-called secular groups are by no means wholly divorced from religion – as we have seen in the Six-Day War. It is conceivable that a new Israeli Sabbath will, in course of time, be evolved; indeed the State must regard this as a primary task and make every effort to fulfil it. This is essentially an educational task, education from childhood 'to the day of his death' (Maimonides), and entails the reconstruction of a Jewish world-outlook as complete as that of our forefathers. (Petahim is trying to contribute to this.) Education must here be understood in a broad sense, as conveyed not only in schools but by the institutions, laws, customs and culture of society as a whole. Holiness is attached not only to the Divine commandments, but also to the works of man – e.g. the cathedrals and the music of Bach. It is not impossible that new forms may be created, not less valuable than the old.

The suggestion to abolish the existing Sabbath legislation must be considered with great care. Have the existing regulations helped to create an atmosphere of holiness and so contributed to education? Will their abo-

lition contribute equally, or rather encourage people to think that they can do what they like? Democracy may be an argument for pluralism, but not for complete permissiveness. Personally, I am not happy with the *status quo*. The whole problem might be eased when a five day working week becomes the rule; and in considering what should be the form of the Sabbath, we will do well to build on that assumption. Then it should be perfectly possible to retain the Sabbath as a day of holiness; and with regard to any given activity – music, sports, excursions, etc. – we can decide whether it is appropriate to the Sabbath or should be relegated to the secular day of rest. Each activity must be considered here on its own merits: does it contribute to, or at least, is it consonant with, the holiness of the day? In this framework, I believe that a large measure of consent can be attained.

Summary taken from “English Summaries” attached to the issues of “Petachim”, by kind permission of the Editor.