

LESSONS OF THE WAR

(A Symposium in *Petachim*)

*The editorial board of Petachim, a quarterly journal of Jewish thought, shortly after the Yom Kippur War invited its readers by means of a circular to convey their reactions on the social, moral and religious issues involved. Of the more than seventy replies which were received, about one-third were published in Petachim, January 1974, issue no. 1 (27). Its editor, Joseph S. Bentwich, very kindly made English summaries of a few typical views available for Immanuel.*

*Prof. Ze'ev Falk (Professor of Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem)*

Yom Kippur combines two apparently contradictory elements. The fast and the prayers are an expression of the soul's aspiration upwards, to be released from earthly bonds and to be cleansed from the impurities of the lower world. On the other hand, the object of worship is to make us better fitted to return to the world as it is, to reform it "in the Kingdom of God". Both elements were to be found in this war of the few against the many. The brave men, who stood up to the enemy's legions to defend men women and children of Israel, faced death for the sake of life.

Our sages said: When troubles come upon man, let him examine his deeds; and this war certainly calls now for serious soul-searching of our people. We cannot divest ourselves of responsibility by appeal to historic fatalism, but must follow the way of the Torah and the Prophets to ask ourselves what is the religious significance of what has happened.

We have sinned in throwing off the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and ignoring the principle that our people exists only on the basis of Torah. We have sinned the sin of pride, thinking that "my power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth". We have sinned in wanting to lead a "normal" life, like other peoples who were not called on to be "the servants of God". We have sinned, like the prophet Jonah, in trying to evade our mission and destiny. We thought there was no longer danger to our existence, that the forces of humanism and socialism would prevent a repetition of the Holocaust. We must realise the evil that exists in the world. God has said: "I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil" (Isaiah 45:7); the evil gives peace its significance.

We must accept our troubles therefore, as "afflictions of love", as trials like those of Job and Abraham. These are trials of the *Tzaddikim*, and their purpose (following Ramban) is to enable them to put their potential righteousness into practice. "The Lord trieth the righteous" (Psalm 11:5).

Close to the concept of "trial" is that of "election". Israel, as the chosen people, are made to undergo trials in order to move towards their destiny. "Behold I have refined thee but not with silver, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10).

Our State is now, more than ever, in need of faith in its destiny. This requires a deepening sense of history, a return in some sense to Torah and *mitzvot*, and a strengthening of brotherhood among soldiers and civilians alike. If it is our destiny to be a "people that shall dwell alone", by election and trial, it were best that we accept it erect and upright. We must try daily to fit ourselves for this task.

*Dr. Pinchas Rosenblüt* (Formerly head of the religious sector of Mikveh Israel Agricultural School, presently lecturer at Bar Ilan University)

There is no concealing the frustration which has overtaken so many people in Israel since the war. This is the result not only of military and political mistakes, but of not realising the forces at work in the Middle East: the awakening nationalism and social ferment of the peoples around; the rival interests of great powers; the rapid development of technology of armaments; and world dependence on oil.

Against this background, it is difficult to decipher the part of Providence in recent events. Too often in the past have victories been regarded as signs of divine intervention – after the Six Day War in particular. But perhaps *faith* should be shown, not by assigning religious significance to historical facts, but by *faithfulness* to one's destiny, even in face of external circumstances; just as Abraham "believed in the Lord", although "the Canaanite dwelt then in the land".

Yet, in spite of this necessary caution in the interpretation of events, one may see "the finger of God" working within them as a "hidden miracle" (according to Nachmanides), a kind of "historical thermostat". Thus we may regard the fall of Assyria and Babylon as caused by their own wickedness (Habakkuk, ch. 1), or the fall of Hitler in our time.

So what has happened in our war too, may be seen as a consequence of failings in the previous years of peace: evasion of responsibility, apathy in daily matters (cleanliness, waiting for one's turn), the pursuit of luxury, and the lack of example of austerity from public leaders. Contrast the emphasis of religious parties on outward observances with their indifference to moral issues, such as Government obstinacy towards the former inhabitants of Ikrit and Bir'im. Yet we must beware of over-emphasizing individual mo-

rality; simplicity and voluntary effort may be found in totalitarian regimes as well. We must analyse carefully the causes of our relapse, and try to remove them.

And as against the momentary feelings of frustration, we must take a balanced view of the events of the last fifty years. The Mandate, the riots, the Partition, the War of Independence, the Six Day War – all these can be seen together as steps in the painful process of our development as a nation and as a State. Many people may be disappointed in their Zionist hopes – of security, of a life based on Jewish values. Yet there is no doubt that Judaism has been given a new significance; and in this way we have strengthened the Diaspora as well.

Nor should we over-estimate our present political isolation. Herein lies a danger of nihilism and despair. The younger generation will be better able to withstand prolonged tension and danger if they realise the values and destiny of the Jewish people. A first condition of this is removal of ignorance of the Jewish heritage – on the part of educators as well.

*Rabbi Dr. Jack Cohen* (Director, B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

The main lesson of the war is that humanity generally has failed to make morality a decisive factor in this world. Theological considerations cannot explain here, any more than in the Holocaust, why the Jewish people should be thus punished, even if they have sinned, nor the attitude of the powers towards the struggle of a small people for its existence. But the *moral issue* is for us of primary importance.

In war and politics there are two weapons: military and moral. Clearly, in our present circumstances, we cannot dispense with the military weapon; but we cannot rely on it exclusively. Our mistake has been to ignore morality; and although the moral weapon takes time for its full effect, we could have done more. In all these years, we have not shown the same initiative and courage in the pursuit of peace as in preparations for war. We left the refugees to their fate, as though their very existence was not a danger as well as a human tragedy; and so the Arabs succeeded in attaching to Israel a badge of cruelty.

Nor, even in our own behaviour, have we acted with sincerity. While inviting the Arabs to face discussion of terms, we meanwhile created facts by establishing settlements beyond the "Green Line".

It may be argued: would the Arabs have been willing anyway to come to terms? But this cannot justify insincerity. Great powers can afford to ignore morality; we cannot. We must take more seriously our duty to be a holy people, to pursue justice – even if peace is not thereby guaranteed.

Z. *Menahe*m (Teacher in Haifa)

The shock of war, it seems to me, has only emphasised the weakness which has been developing in recent years: a loss of the perspective of the Redemption of Israel. Too many people regard recent events, not in the light of Jewish destiny, but from the point of view of the Western world, with a few "ideals" thrown in to give "moral" flavour. My own perspective – after most members of my family met their death in the Holocaust – is that of Jewish blood shed like water throughout the generations, and of Jewish deference to Gentile peoples, preventing us from being true to ourselves.

Some people say that Zionism has failed, since it has not rid us of pogroms, nor given us security. Security indeed has not been gained. But what nation has won its independence without fighting for it? What of Vietnam? What of Hitler and Stalin? Those who say we should have done more for the sake of peace – can they be so sure that their advice, if followed, might not have endangered our very existence? Those who speak of the failure of Zionism expose their own moral failure.

Take the issue of the refugees. Is their blood thicker than that of the million Jews who were forced to leave their homes in Arab countries, and in whose place the Arab refugees could easily have been settled, but that the Arab states chose to leave them homeless, as pawns in their political game? But the Western world has accustomed itself to regard only the Arabs as refugees, and Jewish "moralists" have followed suit.

My own "lessons" from the War have been: a) a feeling of isolation; b) disappointment with our spiritual leaders. I live in a permanent hell of fear for the future of the State. But I am ready to work up to my last breath for the establishment of Israel and for no reward except that of the marvellous feeling of standing on the ground of our own country.

*Moshe Unna* (member of the religious kibbutz Sde Eliahu, formerly a member of the Knesset and Deputy Minister of Education)

I have no doubt that the failings in the conduct of the war, and in political action previous to it, had their root in defects of our society generally. And we must be thankful that these defects were exposed in good time (perhaps that is the main sign of Providence). The Government has appointed a Commission of Inquiry, which will no doubt submit its findings in due course. But these will not suffice to effect the radical change required. The change must come from below.

We must try to develop modesty instead of exaggerated self-confidence. We must learn to be law-abiding, and not to regard its infringement as the mark of a "good fellow". We must show respect for every human being, in inter-communal relations especially. We must forgo luxuries, and not regard

the "standard of living" as our prime concern. We must remind ourselves continually of the responsibility of each man for his work. In short, all people must try to practise in their daily life the values of Judaism.

This will not be an easy task, and will require great efforts. Here, it seems to me, the Kibbutz movement can show an example. Although many members have yielded to the currents of materialism in the surrounding society, still most of the kibbutzim have maintained a healthy base. Now is their time to make a decisive contribution to Israel society. In human societies, there are times when, under inner shock, men's hearts are opened and great changes are made possible. Such opportunities are usually short-lived, and may easily be missed. Let us try now, before it is too late.

*Moshe Genosar* (member of the editorial board of the Communist weekly, *Kol Ha'Am*)

Ours is a competitive, capitalist society, which develops, in practice, the sharp-witted individual, who knows how best to make money at the expense of others. An egoist of this type earns prestige, and his faults, even criminal, are overlooked. Further, our society is more developed than those in our vicinity, and this has bred in us an overweening nationalism and the illusion that we are really a cultured nation. Even in the religious sector, one finds little expression of universal human values, but rather forces making for a narrow chauvinism.

With the outbreak of war, it soon became apparent that we are only a semi-cultured nation, with a harsh and inefficient bureaucracy. Even the Army was affected with carelessness, and some of the higher officers were far from serving as an example. Efficiency and selfishness are not Siamese twins.

Our public has now come to realise that moral behaviour must not be regarded as a luxury for the few, but is an absolute need for a nation struggling for its existence. For this, we can draw on two important sources of power: the first is the Jewish tradition, which contains both universal values and much human wisdom; the second is the specific tradition of the *Yishuv*, by which I refer to socialist values, in opposition to selfishness and pride. In this respect, both religious Jews and those who are not religious can make common cause.

#### SUMMING UP

*Joseph S. Bentwich* (veteran educationalist, editor of *Petachim*)

Most of the replies are in the spirit of Yom Kippur: "Let us search and try our ways"; but there are notable differences.

First, between those that trace in the war the hand of Providence, "afflictions of love", and those who reject any theological explanation as

primitive, even blasphemous. The latter group certainly have reason on their side; there is a logical contradiction between the idea of God's transcendence and his involvement in human affairs. Facing the Holocaust, many people have been led to disbelieve in God altogether. But for my part, I must confess to a measure of "primitiveness". Though Isaiah could not have foreseen the establishment of the State of Israel in the 20th century, yet when we read his words: "For the Lord shall comfort Zion, He will restore all her waste places" (Isaiah 51:3), our hearts beat in unison. In religion, reason and feeling are combined. It is difficult for us to believe that God, after having created the world, takes no further interest in it; and it is difficult not to feel, at least, in the survival of the Jewish people and the Return to Zion, the "finger of God". Can we then say that our wars are of no religious significance?

There is another issue of difference: between "doves" and "hawks". On the one hand, those who feel that we sinned in not doing more to pursue peace – had we ceded the territories we are ceding now, perhaps war could have been averted; and on the other hand, those who consider that Arab enmity was too deep-rooted, and that, so long as they had hopes, by the use of force, of exterminating Israel altogether, minor concessions would not have been accepted.

But all agree that the patterns of life in Israel are in need of fundamental reform. Israel was saved this time by the courage and devotion of its soldiers; but it will not be able to withstand the tensions of the years ahead unless these qualities become part of the daily life of people as a whole. Not a return to "normalcy", to be "like other peoples", to the pursuit of money and luxury, to indifference to our Arab neighbours or to our own people in distress.

How is this to be brought about? Some call for reform of education. There is no doubt that reform is needed here – more emphasis on character and not on marks, and a more serious attention to Jewish consciousness and values. But education is a slow process, and meanwhile the house is on fire. There must be an awakening and a complete change *now*. For this, there must be a lead, both from below – e. g. the kibbutzim – and from above. There will no doubt be administrative acts compelling austerity; but these must be accompanied by personal example – simplicity, devotion, human relations – among those in authority. Then there may be hope that the *Yishuv* as a whole will become more serious; and "out of the strong will come forth sweetness".