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By the Grace of G-d
In the Days of Selichoth
5717. Brooklyn, N. Y.

To my Brethern Everywhere
G-d bless you all,

Greeting and Blessing:

With the approach of Rosh Hashana, and the introspection that it calls forth, both in terms of one's own world and in relation to the world at large, a good starting point would be some reflection on the physical organism, 'the world in miniature' (microcosm).

In the human organism there are common functions, in which all organs of the body participate in a common effort; and there are specific individual functions pertaining to individual organs. In the latter case, the individual organ must make a special effort to fulfil its particular function, while the common functions are carried out much more easily.

What would happen when a particular organ surrenders its individuality and particular function, applying its energy solely towards the common functions?

At first glance it would seem to benefit thereby in saving much effort and in the ability to increase its share in the fulfilment of the common functions of the body, together with the rest of the organs. Yet, needless to say, the results would be disastrous both for the individual organ and for the organism as a whole. For the individual organ would lose identity and essence which are predicted precisely on its ability to perform a particular function. Failure to exercise this particular function would, moreover, lead to its atrophy and, eventually, complete uselessness also in the fulfilment of the common functions. As for the organism as a whole, its deprivation of the particular function and the eventual loss of the limb, would be injurious to the whole body, and even fatal - if the organ in question is a vital one.

This analogy can truly be applied to the individual in society, and to a minority group within a state, and to a nation within the community of nations. It is certainly true in our case, both on the national level, as a people, and in regard to every Jew individually.

The Jewish people, of whom it has been said long ago "for you are the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7), is a small minority

among the nations of the world, and the individual Jew is a minority in his environment; even living in the midst of his own people, there are places, sad to say, where the Jew living Jewishly, i.e. in accord with our holy Torah and the observance of its precepts in his daily life, is in the minority.

What is the specific function of our people, and of the Jew as an individual?

It is, of course, easier to ascertain the individual function of any particular organ in the body than the function of a people in the community of nations. However, in the case of the Jewish people, which is unique in its extremely varied experiences and long history, the answer is not difficult to find. By a process of simple elimination, we can easily ascertain what factors have been essential to its existence and survival, and thus determine the essential character and function of our people.

An objective, unprejudiced survey of the long history of our people will at once bring to light the fact that it was not material wealth, nor physical strength, that helped us to survive. Even during the most prosperous times under the united monarchy of King Solomon, the Jewish people and state were materially insignificant by comparison with such contemporary world empires as Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia. That it was not statehood or homeland - is clear from the fact that most of the time, by far, our people possessed no independent state and has lived in the diaspora. That it was not the language, is likewise clear from the fact that even in Biblical times Aramaic began to supplant the Holy Tongue as the spoken language; parts of the Scripture and almost all of our Babylonian Talmud, the Zohar, etc., are written in that language. In the days of Saadia and Maimonides Arabic was the spoken language of most Jews, while, later, Yiddish and other languages. Nor was it any common secular culture that preserved our people, since that changed radically from one era to another.

The one and only common factor which has been present with Jews throughout the ages, in all lands, and under all circumstances, is the Torah Mitzvoth, which Jews have observed tenaciously in their daily life.

To be sure, there arose occasionally dissident groups that attempted to break away from true Judaism, such as the idolatry movements during the first Beth Hamikdosh, the Hellenists during the second, Alexandrian assimilationists, Karaaites, etc., but they have disappeared. Considered without prejudice, the Torah and Mitzvoth must be recognized as the essential thing and essential function of our people, whether for the individual Jew, or in relation of the Jewish people to humanity as a whole.

Hence the logical conclusion: The policy of imitating the other nations, far from helping preserve the Jewish people, rather endangers its very existence, and instead of gaining their favor will only intensify their antagonism. In like manner, those Jews who court the favor of the non-religious groups by concessions and compromise in matters of Torah and Mitzvoth, not only undermine their own existence and that of our people as a whole - for the Torah and

Mitzvoth are our very life, but they defeat even their immediate aim, for such a policy can evoke only derision and contempt; and justifiably so, for a minor concession today, leads to a major one tomorrow, and an evasion of duty towards G-d leads to an evasion of duty towards man, and who is to say where this down-sliding is to stop?

At this time, standing as we are on the threshold of the New Year, a time propitious for earnest introspection and stock-taking, I earnestly hope that my brethren everywhere, both as individuals and as groups (and larger the group, the greater its potentialities and responsibilities), will recognize the Reality and Truth:

The essential factor of our existence and survival is our adherence to the Torah and the practice of its precepts in our every-day life. Let no one delude himself by taking the easier way out, nor be bribed by any temporary advantages and illusory gains.

The secret of our existence is in our being "a people that dwell alone" (Num. 23:9), every one of us, man or woman, believing in the One G-d, leading a life according to the one Torah, which is eternal and unchangeable. Our 'otherness' and independence of thought and conduct are not our weakness but our strength. Only in this way can we fulfill our function imposed on us by the Creator, to be unto G-d a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation", thereby being also a "segulah" for all humanity.

With prayerful wishes for a Kesive vachasime toive, for a good and pleasant year, 'good' as defined by our Torah, which is truly good, both materially and spiritually, and

With blessing

M. Schwartz