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Editorial

Quiet, Agnon is Writing

The forthcoming visit to the United States, the first, of S.Y. Agnon is a matter of great moment to the entire American Jewish community. We congratulate the American Friends of the Hebrew University for having arranged the dinner in his honor in New York on May 23rd.

It is noteworthy that when Agnon was awarded the Nobel Prize in Stockholm last December his first reaction to meeting King Gustave Adolf, who made the presentation, was to pronounce the traditional blessing on seeing a monarch.

It is a source of great gratification to us that this covert distinction was given to a completely Jewish writer. Not only are his works accomplished in Hebrew and in Yiddish, but his subject matter is deeply rooted in Judaism and the Jewish people.

His artistry, however, lies in that despite the seeming parochialism of his interests he succeeds in evoking a universality which few writers have been able to achieve.

Many visitors to Jerusalem have been captivated by the fact that the city has closed the small quiet street where Agnon lives to all traffic. We welcome this great master to the United States with the wish that the sign which has been erected at the head of this closed street will stand for many years to come. It reads "Quiet, Agnon is writing."

A Giant Among Us

By Dr. Samuel Silver

That was a forceful plea for the passage of the genocide resolution which Senator Jacob Javits made recently.

In his effective way the Senator said that we, as a nation, should feel a sense of blame and shame that we have not yet okayed the ban of mass massacre passed years ago by the United Nations. In a further effort to get the U.S. moving on this front the Jewish War Veterans of America are circulating petitions urging American ratification.

That was also a fascinating forum at which Senator Javits made his plea for action on genocide. His address was spoken before 1000 guests who were celebrating the One Hundred and Twenty Fifth Anniversary of the great Manhattan synagogue, Congregation Rodolph Shalom.

If that synagogue has historic achievements to boast about many of them are due to the leadership it gets from one of the most majestic rabbis who ever trod a pulpit; Dr. Louis L. Newman.

A rabbi in every sense of the word; appearance, zeal, sweep and scope of mind and heart, Dr. Newman is one of the great men of our generation. Although his preaching and his literary output are tremendous, although his eloquence and erudition are superb, he humbly likes to think of himself as a follower of the late, immortal Stephen S. Wise. One of the most stalwart Zionists of our time, Rabbi Newman, in the columns he used to write and in his addresses, helped to "Zionize" American Jewry.

All hail to a giant among us!

YO VEY

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Modern Jewish Saint

By Maurice Bisgyer

(Editor's Note: One of the most touching tributes in the auto-biography of Maurice Bisgyer, "Challenge and Encounter," is his recollection of Rabbi Leo Baeck, the leader of German Jewry who chose to stay with his people during the horrors of Nazism. This chapter from the new book by the former executive vice-president of B'nai B'rith is reprinted by special permission of Crown Publishers. To be published in mid-May (New York: \$4.95) the book recounts almost fifty years of modern Jewish history as participated in, and seen by, Mr. Bisgyer.)

One of the great stories of modern Jewish history is that of the epochal, almost legendary religious leader, Rabbi Leo Baeck. He is a symbol of the German Jew at his zenith - in intelligence, philosophy, loyalty to his people, and standing in the community.

Rabbi Baeck was held in such esteem and affection that whenever he was arrested by the Gestapo and thrown into jail, a distinguished visitor would come to see him, Count von Preysing, the Catholic Bishop of Berlin. Through the good offices of his friend, the bishop, he was repeatedly released from confinement.

After serving as president of B'nai B'rith in his country, the famous Dr. Baeck gradually became the spokesman for German Jewry, and in 1933, when the Nazis seized power, he accepted responsibility as head of the Jewish representation in the Reich. The story of Rabbi Baeck's fearlessness is one of the heroic Jewish epics of the war period. During the Hitler period he stayed at his post to protect his people and to delay measures of persecution. Time was precious, and he gained time for many who were able to escape because of him. But he himself did not choose to escape. We tried to rescue him, Alfred M. Cohen arranged with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and B'nai B'rith for a pulpit at the Rockdale Avenue Temple in Cincinnati. Then to me was given the task of getting the papers to Dr. Baeck. Ordinary mail did not reach him. It has never been revealed that through government channels and the American Red Cross a special courier went from Switzerland to Berlin in order that the affidavit and other documents should be safely delivered. The reply from Rabbi Baeck came quickly: "Ich will hier bleiben" (I wish to stay here). His place was at the side of his people, and his personal safety was secondary to their plight.

After being shuttled from one camp to another, he was finally sent to Theresienstadt Concentration Camp in Czechoslovakia, where he was marked for execution. While he was there, another Dr. Leo Baeck died of an undisclosed illness. The report was given to the camp headquarters, and the name was stricken from the lists of those about to die. One day, Rabbi Baeck had to go into the headquarters office, and there Eichmann, the archcriminal among Nazi executioners, saw him. Eichmann who knew the rabbi, was certain that he had died, and though he saw a ghost. Later, by some miraculous means, Baeck escaped in the great confusion caused by the Russian advance.

Cables went forward, arranging for his transfer to England. But Rabbi Baeck refused. There was still work to be done. His people were at Theresienstadt, and during that transitional period they needed his spiritual guidance. He declined to move. A month later, when the camp was broken up, an American bomber fetched Rabbi Baeck to the bosom of his family in England.

Henry Monsky, then president of B'nai B'rith, had the wisdom to invite him to visit the United States. It was a great day when Rabbi Baeck arrived. We were exhilarated by his personal recounting of the story of his escape.

What attracted so many Christians, as well as Jews, to this rabbi? He was the answer to a yearning on the part of people of his time for someone whose religious conviction was translated into his daily life. In a world where the vile hypocrisy, unethical conduct, and sadistic lust of so many leaders had created hopelessness, his saintliness and loving kindness restored faith among right-thinking men.

Rabbi Baeck's spirituality spurred him on to a sort of Jewish evangelism, unlike Jews who do not practice proselytism or indulge in seeking converts. He told me that Jews should undertake a program of conversion so that the blood lost by the hemorrhage in Jewish lives could be restored in a measure by gaining new adherents.

When the Gemeinde Baus of Berlin is not a memorial to Rabbi Baeck, it is on the site that old Germans associate with him. Exterior pillars of the old German synagogue of Rabbi Baeck adorn it as a fitting reminder of the past; but, strangely enough, when we searched for a fitting portrait of the distinguished Rabbi Baeck we found only a modest photograph, not in any place of public assembly or entry. Still, there are many visible remembrances of him; in fact, I was one of the first to speak at the reconstituted B'nai B'rith Lodge called Leo Baeck Tradition. After his death in London in 1956, a German stamp was issued to his honor; a West Berlin street was named for him; and the outstanding Leo Baeck lodges and institutes bear his name both in the United States and abroad. The memory of him remains imperishable in our hearts.

TELL TALES

"One Man Plus The Truth
 Constitutes A Majority"

BY JACK TELL



Father's Day June 18

It all started Wednesday morning with a phone call from Evelyn Feinberg to congratulate Bea on her anniversary. It really began 31 years previous on another May 10, when an innocent, unsuspecting guy said "I do." That day of commitment proved to be the beginning of the end. No, not in the way you may presume. That's another story. This column is about the grave blunder of being married on a holiday, any day of remembrance, especially Mother's Day.

May 10 of 1936 happened to be a Sunday, Mother's Day, and what happened to us shouldn't happen to a husband. We never suspected a thing for the first few years, that is, until Donald came along. Then the roof fell in.

The anniversary denoting gifts for TWO participants, which included here and there a tie, or some blowey handkerchiefs, and even a belt with initialed buckle, suddenly became a monoclinal occasion with emphasis on the honoring of motherhood. Now its all right to have a loving remembrance of one's mother, but leave us not forget one's dad, especially on his anniversary.

If we thought the roof fell in and dented our ego with the arrival of Don, Jay and then Mike caused an eruption that meant total annihilation of the male gender. We didn't mind being eliminated from the loot. We were eliminated from the picture.

And the disgusting display to commemorate the clinical and normal sequence of a married woman being a mother, seemed to be gathering momentum as we progressed. Cards, telegrams, flowers and candies apparently aren't enough. Mike had to come through with a leather coat, three-quarter length, and of all colors, antique gold, ugh. Then the man brought the large package from Jay.

As we ripped open the wrappings, we mused that here at last was a sensible gift, we hoped, like size 16 shirts or maybe a sports jacket. But the anticipation fell short of the realization as we uncovered a set of Teflon pots. Imagine, cookware instead of body wear. We thought we brought that boy up to have more sense than geese. As we gandered the gift we realized there was fowl play in the works. Our chagrin was interrupted by the arrival of a telegraphic parcel from Don, Rita, Bonnie and Michele (how did she get into the act?). Et tu Michele?

This little box had to contain at least a watch, we smiled to ourself, as we fondled our wrist to make it ready for the new timepiece. The message said: "To the greatest mother of them all," but that didn't dim our prospects. With us hope remains eternal. Eternal, this time lasted about 20 seconds, until the last filmy wrapper was unfurled. Then we saw it. We could have cried. In fact we did.

If the stopper hadn't been sealed in place, our tears would have diluted the most beautiful bottle of Bea's favorite perfume. Why couldn't it have been man's hair spray of after-shave, or even a tube of tooth paste so both of us could have used it. But no, it had to be perfume for a lady.

Don't those nitwit kids of ours know that it takes two to tango? So forget about anniversaries, don't remember when we promised to love, honor and obey and obey and obey. Don't those dum dums know that in order for there to be a mother there has to be a father? The last time we mentioned that little item to them individually and collectively, they winked and said, don't worry, there's always Father's Day. So what. So when Father's Day arrived it was just the third Sunday in June on the calendar.

But this year we're reminding them well in advance. Father's Day this year is June 18th.

Those darling little youngsters surely remember the times we built those gigantic projects with the erector set and ran those electric trains. Those dear lads can't forget the baseball we played and all the fishing we did. How often those wholesome teenagers accompanied us to see the pro-football Giants or the World Series or the basketball tourneys at Madison Square Garden. And then, as handsome young men, how grateful they were for those tickets to Broadway shows, and the comps we arranged at the Copa and Latin Quarter. And how they appreciated the use of the car for their special dates.

And now the brats I raised are full grown men, and dad is among the missing when it comes to dishing out the loot.

Let that be a warning to every future bridegroom. Don't get married on or near a holiday. Your anniversary, like ours will be just another date on the calendar. We'd have forgotten completely, had not Evelyn Feinberg called to remind us. And how did she know? Because Evelyn and Preston were married on the exact same day, 31 years ago.

So to Evelyn we say, Happy Mother's Day, but to Preston and Evelyn we convey hearty congratulations for a happy and healthy Anniversary, especially to Preston.