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## TELL TALES

"One Man Plus The Truth Constitutes A Majority"

BY JACK TELL



(ED NOTE: This is the most outstanding, heart-warming down to Earth column ever written on contemporary Jewish life. We take our hat off to Nat Ziprin, J.T.)

### Letter to a Reader

BY NATHAN ZIPRIN

The problem you pose is unique only in its presentation. In essence it is a replica of the dilemma troubling all wanderers as they wend their way back home.

Like many intellectuals of our generation, you seem to have the fatal mistake of equating the quest for newness with the abandonment of old values. You were prepared to sacrifice your Jewish past on the altars of the new gods, little realizing that the values which have stood the test of time might be immeasurably superior to the untested images you were worshipping. And when the chill of disillusionment came upon you and your world crashed about you in tremor, you ran for shelter and warmth in your father's household.

But now that you are again at the hearth, you find it somewhat wanting. The synagogue, you claim, is no longer the sanctuary it was in your boyhood days. Where there was once piety and learning there is now, in your own words, only emptiness and indifference to the ideals of our prophets and our heritage, with tradition giving way to externals and faith to outward forms.

I wish I could say that your complaint is unwarranted. Unfortunately, your indictment is largely a sound one. But it has weakness too. Your concept of synagogue and tradition is predicated on a youthful experience. You seem to forget that in a changing world the synagogue cannot escape change. The basic mistake you make is in thinking of the new synagogue in terms of the old one. The picture of sages bent over sacred books in a synagogue is indeed an unforgettable one to those who ever had the privilege of beholding it, as in the sight of congregants trembling in hope of gathering some of the pearls of wisdom flowing from the mouth of their teacher. Unfortunately, the old sages and teachers are no more.

Atmosphere is what we make it. If, as you say, the synagogue is lacking in benign climate, the way to remedy the situation is not through nostalgic yearning for the old and old alone, but through striving to bring newness. It seems to me there is too much complaining about the synagogue, but too little effort to reform it. If it fails to meet the spiritual needs of the young, it is not because the older generation is adamant to change but because the young in most cases have not been sufficiently vocal.

Yet I am not prepared to wholly defend the synagogue structure in America. Its greatest fault perhaps is over-organization. It has tended to become more of a social than religious center. It has in many instances fallen under the domination of rich donors who lack the spiritual qualities essential to religious leadership. It has given overemphasis to externals while forgetting that it must be dedicated to learning and education as well as to worship. In the selection of its rabbinate, it often prefers the virtue of good tongues to good heart and knowledge. In its attempt to take on the coloration of its surroundings, it has often shed its own color to the point of bad taste.

But with all its faults, the synagogue still is our strongest bastion against disintegration. There is no other value in Jewish life to replace it as a survivalist force in Jewish life in America.

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