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7 Ways of Wisdom

By JACK SIEGEL

The legends abound; the lessons therefrom proliferate. For every modern situation we face, we can to to the past and find a parallel answer. Not much in terms of national or political history because there was a long period in which the Jews were not a nation-state. But they have always been a people; thus their insights maintain the basic currency and are applicable even to now.

One of the most curious men of his time, was Mishe Leib Sassover, of the same name town. He was a Chesid and like the others of similar persuasion, he loved to learn from everything, from every person, from every phenomenon. "Life is a great book of study," he once said. He was a great Rabbi yet he had time to pay attention to little children.

A child, another Rabbi once said, never sits idle. He cries when he demands something. And on satisfaction, his unhappiness disappears. But Moshe Leib was no premature Dr. Spock. The latter taught parents how to handle children. Moshe Leib dealt directly with kids because he considered himself an humble man who had to be concerned about the welfare of others. He believed it essential for a good Jew to partake of the troubles of other people. For instnace, once he was late for Kol Nidre and there was tremendous apprehension. A search party set out for him and found him caring for a child whose mother was in Schul. The child, he said, had to be put to sleep and so he sang to it.

Shimon Dubnow, a great historian of recent times whose end came at the hands of the Nazis, compared Moshe Lefb Sassover with St. Francis of Assissi. Both were the saints of their times. Both tried for moral perfection. Therefore, it is odd that a saintly man should come on strong with observations from the seamier side of life. He admitted that he had learned seven ways of wisdom from a thief and perhaps his saintliness, as is the case with most people who possess such an attribute, was naive. But he listed the seven ways:

- 1. The thief's main work is at night.
- 2. He works every night, whereas a Chosid (whose work is worship) works day and night.
- 3. The crook takes everything he sees.
- 4. The thief never divulges his secret plans.
- 5. The crook never confesses on apprehension,
- 6. He does not squeal
- 7. He always knows that in one minute it is possible to lose all he has seized.

Moshe Leib's lesson us that the zeal which a thief puts into his work a Chosid should put into his life. But not all the seven ways of wisdom are operative today.

A thief also works during the day, if he has cased the joint, He doesn't work every day if his haul is good and successful. Nor des he take everything he sees. He brabs the best and runs because he operates on split timing. And sometimes, they confess; often they squeal.

Crooks have changed but Saints have not. The truble with Saints today is that there is not enough of them. We need thme to apply the body of our Jewish experience to the times. Perhaps it takes a certain naivete to see past crookedness and so maybe the moment in history has arrived for the coming of another Moshe Leib Sassover. A better baby-sitter you couldn't have --

SANTIAGO, Chile (Wns) -- The first university Center of Jewish Studies in Latin America has been established at the University of Chile as an affiliate of the institution's School of Philosophy and Education.





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