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 P.O. BOX 14096 LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89114
 Editor and Publisher Jack Tell
 Business Manager Bea Tell, 870-1255
 Vegas News Helene Stadler, 384-3685
 Barney Glazer, Nathan Ziprin, Percy Villa,
 and occasional views by Jack Entratter.
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Meaning of Shavuoth

By Dr. Bernard Mandelbaum

The puzzle of a paradox often points to a tantalizing truth about life and history. This is particularly true about two traditions in Rabbinic literature describing the great moment in history known as Revelation, the granting of the Torah to the Children of Israel at Sinai - the occasion for celebrating Shavuoth. Both traditions suggest that the Almighty offered the Torah to other nations before approaching the Israelites. It was turned down because the responsibilities and duties were too demanding.

The thought then continues in the Talmud (Sabbath 88A), commenting on the verse: "And they stood under the mountain" Exodus 19:17).

This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them (the Children of Israel) like an inverted cask (or vault) and said: 'If you accept the Torah 'tis well. If not, you will be buried right here.' " On the same page of the Talmud, Rabbi Chama son of Chanina asks, "What is meant by the verse: 'As the apple tree among the trees of the wood so is my beloved among the song' (Song of Songs 2:3)? Why are the Israelites compared to an apple tree? To teach you, 'Just as the fruit of the apple tree precedes its leaves, so do the Israelites give precedence to 'We will do' over 'We will hearken.' (Exodus 24:7)." "

Both stories, in the same Rabbinic tradition and - indeed - on the same page of the Talmud seem to be paradoxical, if not outright contradictory. The first implies compulsion and force of God's part to bring the truth of Torah to mankind via the Children of Israel. The second indicates a spontaneous, voluntary desire by the Children of Israel to receive the Torah and observe the Law.

Yet, are these two emphases contradictory? Do they not reveal a fundamental, human, psychological truth about man's relationship to any important value? On the other hand, we must have an inner commitment and love for justice, law, mercy; at the same time, there are moments, and they are frequent, when it is necessary to push oneself and force oneself to do the right thing, guided by considerations of justice, law, and mercy. It would be unrealistic to expect that finite man, although made in God's image, could always be capable of doing or even wishing to do the right thing.

The challenge is to resist temptation when it exists. Man is subject to temptation. This is evident by many statements in the Talmud such as the following: "The high place occupied by those who are genuinely repentant, can-

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not be reached even by the righteous." (Berachot 34B). A Hasidic saying puts it this way: "The angels have their virtues and flaws, and men have their virtues and flaws. The virtue of angels is that they cannot deteriorate, and their flaw is that they cannot improve. Man's flaw is that he can deteriorate, and his virtue that he can improve."

Sin and error, shortcomings and animal behavior are, at times, part of the human scene. The challenge, however, is to overcome these lower impulses and to guide our behavior by the Godly and the holy in every man. Thus, there is always the need to push oneself to do the right thing which, alone, can lead to its ultimate inner acceptance. This is a true for something as central to life as the values referred to above, our habits of eating or perfecting the ability to play a musical instrument - the combination of pushing oneself to practice and to do the right thing, to develop the right habits, intermingles with the love, understanding, commitment and pleasure that one derives from the experience itself.

Solomon Schechter once said the following about prayer: "If one were to wait for the religious experience until one prays, one would never pray." The challenge is to pray and when the religious experience may (no guarantees without hard work) follow. This is true of so many areas of human experience - family love, esthetic experience, love of nation, correction of the ills of society. Full recognition of such inner conflict is man is one of the significant and unique insights of the holiday of Shavuoth which celebrates the granting of Torah. It recognizes man's basic makeup of heavenly and earthy qualities. There is need to discipline, train and push oneself to do the right thing, at the same time that one must hope to achieve the goal of wanting to do it for its own sake.

Perhaps one of the signs of maturity - and a factor creating the gulf in the generation gap - is this inability of young people (with good justifications they view the errors of the older generation) to recognize that life has a quality of gray, where the ideal thing cannot happen instantly as in the making of instant coffee or instant cereal. There are setbacks, frustrations, mistakes, lack of complete acceptance and understanding and identification with that which is right. One must push oneself to do the right thing. Only then is there hope that the goal will be achieved and the right thing will be done for its own sake, based on an inner understanding of its reflection of the true nature of the world as created by God.

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"Fight Cancer"

the voters, that the voters were acting unconstitutionally, that the democratic processes of our nation were inane. The elected "unofficials" lost in every court so far. But still they persist. They are using every tactic to delay the ruling of the public.

Now the voters have another opportunity to demonstrate once and for all time that under our democratic form of government we have adopted, where the majority rules, we the voters do not need leaders who tell us what to do, but to DO AS WE TELL THEM.

The policemen of our fair community are asking for an increase. They have set forth their request in Proposition 1, to be voted upon in the upcoming election, May 6. Let us analyze the merits of what the policemen are seeking.

Everyone knows the hazards attached to law enforcement, once a man dons a uniform and badge. We don't have to go into that end.

What are the policemen earning right now? Starting wage is \$578 a month, which breaks down to \$16.25 a day, that's not take home pay. Isn't this a horrible state of affairs? We ask every voter to stop and take a look around. Is there a busboy, a waiter, a bootblack, porter, ad salesman, copy boy, dealer, or any other position in this thriving city of ours, that does not pay more than our policemen are receiving? It's disgusting, positively revolting.

There is no question that the wages the policemen are now earning is insufficient. Salary raises should have been granted long ago by the city commissioners, certainly without forcing the lawmen to bring their position to the voters, like the firemen. But the die has been cast and the pompous city commissioners, are again campaigning with public time, effort and funds to defeat the policemen.

We are presently living in a community with probably the highest growth potential, not only in America, but in the entire world. Nowhere else may be found the steady economic climb, proportionately, as we are enjoying here in Las Vegas. Our present status is top level, and our immediate future is inestimable. Multi-million dollar hotels are mushrooming and industry is flowing in at a rate beyond conception. In the midst of this prosperity, while other areas are poverty-stricken, we are embarrassed by "unofficials" dickering over petty amounts for the most vital of causes. The situation is tragic.

The apathy of the two daily newspapers, each of which claims to be "a voice of the people" is deplorable. Instead of screaming editorial comment now, their weak disapprovals will come after undesirables are elected. No wonder the reading public reluctantly accepts the news reading offered daily with disgust and disdain. But the Sun and Review-Journal are the only games in town and we're stuck with them. Here again is ironic proof of the economic stability of our community. Major newspapers are folding all over the country, but our two mishaps for honorable journalism are complaisant and flourishing. Shame.

There should be no question in anyone's mind concerning the equitable requests granted to the firemen and being made by the policemen.

The question that will face the voters on May 6 is whether we are going to allow power-hungry, low-echelon, elected office holders to usurp the inalienable right of every American citizen to voice opinion and be ruled by the majority.

There are two ways, we the voters, can sock it to them in the ballot booth.

First and foremost, pull the lever that says YES, PROPOSITION 1, to give the policemen the raises they deserve. It will serve notice that the citizens of Las Vegas want and demand the best Police Department available, attainable only by having contented cops.

Second, and equally as important, once the raise is granted, we don't want the policemen to face the same obstacles as the firemen. To prevent this we must elect only city commissioners and a city attorney who pledge to abide by the voice of the people.

Before you cast your ballot be sure you are voting for a man who is going to serve you, not one who will make your subservient.

There are two commission seats up for grabs. Once we elect men who will follow our wishes, if the two remaining and the mayor do not fall into line, we can commence a recall against them.

If this column has convinced you on the merits of Yes, Proposition 1 and the necessity of electing men who recognize the principle of majority rule, then go out and canvass your relatives, friends and neighbors. Your vote is not enough. Impress upon your waitress, cab driver, dealer, slot machine change girl, super market cashout clerk -- any of our residents you come in contact with -- the seriousness of the ramifications of what may be taken for a dull election May 6.

WASHINGTON (WNS) -- An American Jewish Committee study of the attitude of Christian leaders toward Israel's position on recent Middle East events shows that clerical and lay leaders of the Roman Catholic Church are more sympathetic to the Jewish State than Protestant denominational leaders.

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