

Holydays an Instrument of Mental Health

BY RABBI EDWARD TO. SANDRAW

The Jewish holydays -- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur -- are times of introspection and spiritual recreation. This season of the year is a call to conscience. More than that, it is a time for stocktaking of the state of one's mental health. Recent events in the political history of America have pointed up two facts. One is the

prevalence of so many "emotional breakdowns," often hidden or incorrectly interpreted. Second is the lack of understanding on the part of most people, in spite of all the public education in the area of mental health, of the true nature of "breakdowns," of depression, of self-punishment, of what Freud called "those wrecked by success." These "Days of Awe" are then a storehouse for the study of the psychology of religion and mental health. Professor Mortimer Ostow of the department of Pastoral Psychiatry at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America has indicated that religion under certain circumstances can sustain "the energy level of the ego" and that religious worship can act, "in general, to create the impression of rebirth by sustaining the ego energy level, and in this way create in the individual and the . . . community, optimism, enthusiasm and morale, which not only give pleasure to the individual but strengthen the community."

There is a relationship between Jewish values and mental health and the holydays illuminate this fact. It is therefore no surprise that from the days of Freud to the present moment, Jews, even those who fought hard to prove that they were "freed" from their Jewish antecedents, have been in the forefront of the professions of psychiatry and psychotherapy. One who has been a religionist and a devotee of Jewish peoplehood long ago discovered that emotional disorders are definitely involved in the individual's reaction to his life experience. A human being may have symptoms of dysfunction. If one suffers physically, one seeks the advice and treatment of a physician.

The tremendous ethical and human content of Judaism can help the Jew today in the area of self discipline, in achieving a sense of independence, and in assuming greater personal responsibility. All these values are also inherent in the achievement of a modicum of mental health. The very nature of existence presupposed the fact that a certain quantity of our lives is determined for us. Yet, in the process of achieving mental health, FOR ANY PERSON, the Jewish notion of "free will" plays a part. We cannot always blame others or mankind for our guilt. The Jew is told to explore his inner self and repent in order to renew his relation-



JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS AFFILIATED WITH JWB CREATE AND STRENGTHEN A SENSE OF JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD. THIS 'YEHRID IN SHTETL' SCENE AT WASHINGTON, D.C., DEMONSTRATES PROGRAM STARTED WITH A SMALL COMMITTEE OF ABOUT FIVE PERSONS AND GREW TO INVOLVE THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. IT WAS A DEMONSTRATION OF HOW THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER IS AN INSTITUTION OF AND FOR THE ENTIRE JEWISH COMMUNITY.

ship to himself, and then to his community, to Israel, and to the world. Thus, he will gain the insight which will enable him to rid himself, as far as he can, from self-centeredness, and open his heart and his pocket to the needs of his people, to Federation, to the United Jewish Appeal.



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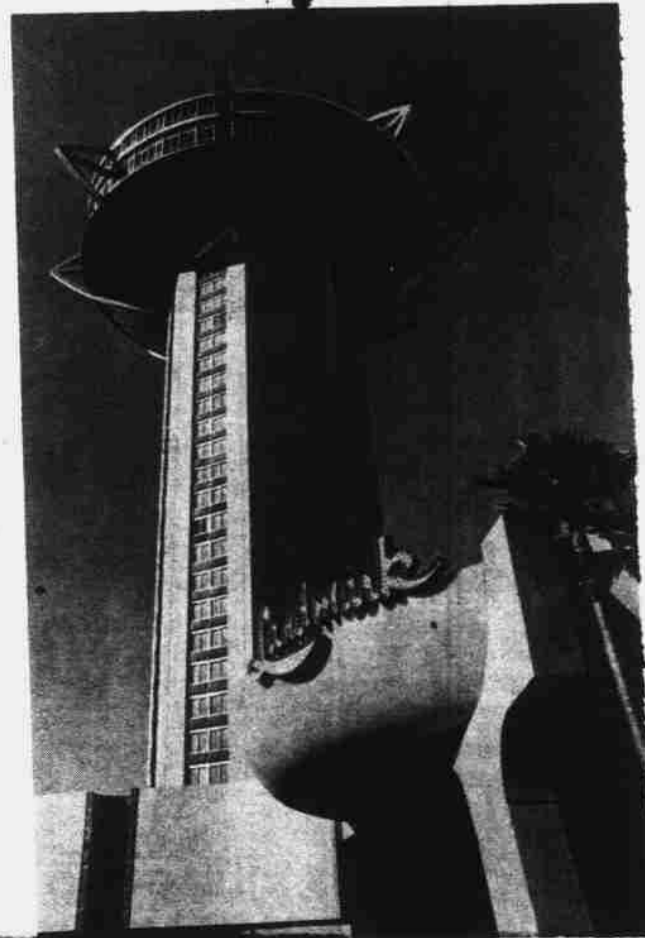
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