

Rabbi Kagan

BY RABBI SAMUEL M. SILVER

Every once in a while we feel a pang of nostalgia as we realize that someone we love has died and is no longer available to us for counsel and aid.

We feel that way about departed parents, friends and teachers.

I feel that way often not only about my own parents, who are now gone, but about a rabbi who was a counselor to me.

His name was Rabbi Henry Kagan, of Mt. Vernon, N.Y., who died some years ago but lives on in hearts and minds who remember his sagacity. He was not only a rabbi but a trained psychologist.

I commune with Rabbi Kagan through his writings and the remembrance of his words of helpfulness.

Recently I re-read a paper he gave and marvelled at how he hit the nail with regard to the current obsession with sex in the media. Citing the Jewish outlook about the normality of conubial relations, he deplored the sensuousness of our age in these words: "While it is fortunate that our Western society has finally publicly recognized the physical reality of sex, it has lost the significance of the psychological reality of love."

Dr. Kagan also wrote, "Judaism has long had psychological wisdom of recognizing that the separation of sex from love is not the sign of happiness but a symptom of emotional sickness."

Emotional sickness can be reduced. Rabbi Kagan used to point out in lectures, articles, books and counselling sessions, if one were to adopt the wholesome insights of Judaism which long ago asserted that the invisible can be real and that faith is an imperative component of human stability.

Freud got many of his ideas from Judaism, Dr. Kagan pointed out, and long before Freud, Jewish sages discerned the value of "talking out" one's problems. As for the dangers of parental favoritism and sibling rivalry, that's

in Genesis, the rabbi reminded us. A weak Isaac, son of a dominant father who was ready to sacrifice him, favored the aggressive Esau, whereas a strong Rebecca, who used to come to the well and had to give her consent to be married, favored the docile Jacob whom she could dominate. The sibling rivalry had to ensue, and the trouble was, Dr. Kagan pointed out, that each brother was only half-loved.

Fragmentary love in a family, whether in the home or in the world, can indeed cause trouble.

A wise man was Rabbi Kagan, and his ideas can still be of aid.



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