

program, and to the ritual practices of the congregation. The autocratic dictates of the rabbi cannot be discussed, let alone challenged, in a synagogue-structured format, in an open, democratic atmosphere. The flowers of free, creative thinking, however, cannot flourish in any other kind of atmosphere.

Big contributors and the rabbi rule too rigidly Jewish academicians are not usually the financial bulwarks of the congregation. Underlying the rabbis' uncontested power over every aspect of temple life is their friendly, working relationship with the principal financial contributors. These men and women are all too often Jewishly illiterate and are quite willing to give the rabbi absolute power in virtually all temple matters, administrative as well as religious. The boat-rocking intellectuals can then be safely rebuked, disregarded, and even discouraged. Many Jewish academicians, finding the heavy, oppressive air of rabbinic totalitarianism too stifling, simply leave. They may try another temple. More often than not the same thing happens there too, sooner or later.

It would be highly beneficial for the general well-being and vitality of congregational life if this entire picture were changed, especially since synagogue affiliation shows continuing signs of further decline. It is not only a matter of numbers, however. In this instance, the ones who are being lost are those who could be making a very vital contribution to the central institution of Jewish life — the synagogue.

## Only churches have altars

Jacob Chinitz

On page 119 of the Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue, these words are found: "As we approach thine altar ..." This is one example of the many sided confusion of Jewish religious concepts which are engendered among us because of our proximity to the language and atmosphere of Christian theology. The fact of the matter is that there is no altar, in any sense of the term, in the synagogue.

An altar is a structure upon which sacrifices are brought. There were altars constructed by Noah, Abraham, Jacob. There was an altar stipulated for the *mishkan*, the Tabernacle in the desert. There was an altar in Solomon's Temple and in Herod's Temple during the Second Commonwealth. But there never was, there was not meant to be, and there is no altar in the synagogue.

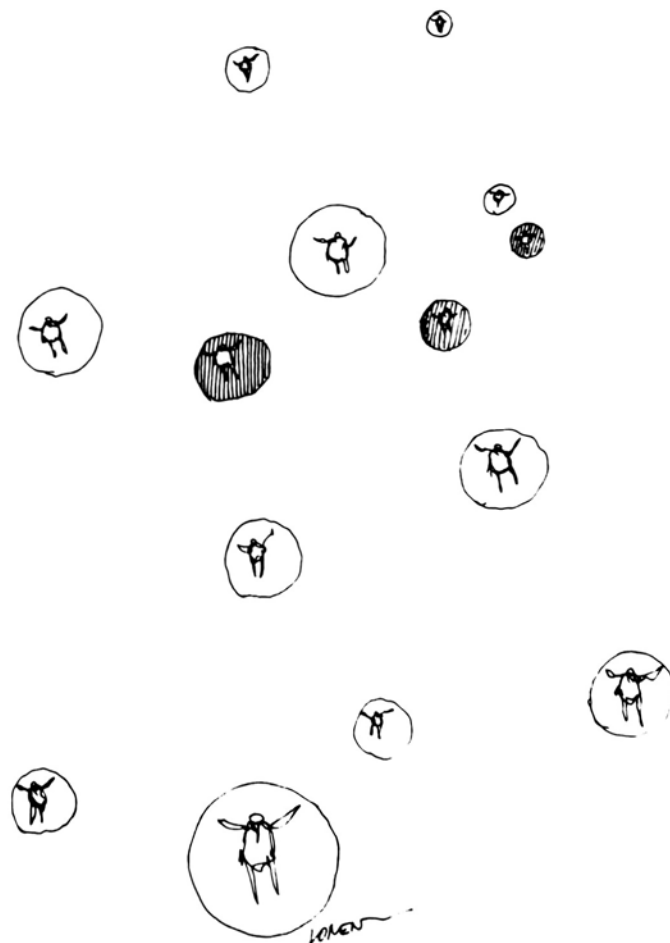
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There is an altar in the church. Why? Because every service in the church is a sacrifice, a Mass for the Catholics or in many cases, a Communion for Protestants, these derive from the last supper when Jesus proclaimed that the *matzah* was his body and the wine was his blood.

Judaism followed a development directly opposite to that followed by Christianity. While the latter retained the concept of sacrifice, shifting from the animal sacrifice of the Temple to the divine sacrifice in the Mass, Judaism moved to replace the animal sacrifices of the Temple with those of "the lips," namely prayer. In the synagogue there is no sacrifice, not actual and not symbolic. There is a *shulchan*, a table, on the bima. But that table is a reading table, a functional item of furniture for the purpose of Torah reading.

We must use terms carefully and precisely

There is a Mishnaic reference to the altar, not in the synagogue, but in the home. The Sages tell us that "The table of man (in his home) is the altar of God." Here we see a remarkable evolution from the Pentateuch notion of animal sacrifice to the Talmudic idea of ritual worship. One might say that the altar in the



"If I am only for myself..."

twofoldness – written and oral Torah. The three introductory Torah *b'rachot* (*Ber.* 11b; see Birnbaum, p. 13) further suggest flexibility; one may choose any single one or combination as the immediate situation may call for.

Following study, the third part of personal devotion begins (*l'olam y'hay adam* – Birnbaum, p. 23), and here yet another transition occurs, from singular to plural, for as the individual moves closer to public worship, s/he is absorbed into community. These supplications are indeed designed to heighten the awareness of self in community, for they move from individual ephemerality through divine immutability to ultimate fulfilment: the restoration of Kingdom and Kingship. They are introduced by what may be a rubric of instruction concerning one's attitude when praying for the Kingdom. (See *Seder Eliyahu Rabba*, ch. xxi; Friedman, p. 118)

#### **Birkat hashachar: the art of private prayer**

When re-assembled in this way and taken out of contextlessness back into context, *Birkat hashachar* no longer requires Kelman's apology: "Some of my suggestions may seem irreverent or just silly," nor his request that judgment be withheld. Put where they belong, his suggestions are not substitutes for but enhancements of the first, natural level of meaning. *Asher yatzar*, too, escapes from its denatured liturgical setting back to where it belongs: the privy, where man is called upon to remember that even one of his animal inheritances – voiding (*Hagigah* 16a) – discloses divine wisdom, linking, as Kelman aptly noted, the physical to the spiritual. More than this, as a School for Prayer, the *Birkat hashachar* can instruct us in the art of personal and private prayer, an art all too unfamiliar to those whose view is circumscribed by the horizon of institutionalized worship. Finally, the recovery of such prayer can lead to the recovery of public worship as something more and other than a mere institution.

### **On my mind**

*Balfour Brickner*

That element of the Jewish community which responded to the U.N. General Assembly's resolution equating Zionism with Judaism made serious tactical and philosophical mistakes. Tactically, they let a potential diplomatic counter-offensive slip away. In tennis parlance, they could have put the ball back in the opponent's court instead of remaining on the de-

fensive, which is where the Jewish community is now. Philosophically, they made an equation which, if not untrue, is of such prescient debate as to cause it to break out in pretentious ads in the *New York Times* (see those of Elmer Berger, 11/23/75; the Arab Information Center, 11/21/75; and Neturei Karta of the USA, 11/7/75, all denying that Zionism equals Judaism). The issue is as widely debated in Israel. One need only recall the furor Ben-Gurion raised in 1961 over his definition of Zionism, when he stated that Jews who do not come to live or settle in Israel are not Zionists. At that time, Dr. Nathan Goldman said: "While it is true that the majority of the Jewish people support Israel at least financially and sentimentally, it is naive to believe that the majority has adopted the Zionist program." That debate still smoulders within the Jewish community.

Zionism is neither racism nor is it synonymous with Judaism. Clearly there are traditionally observant Jews who reject Zionism in its contemporary political form, and as clearly the Arabs who seek to equate Zionism with racism are themselves among racism's most profligate practitioners.

#### **The racism charge was easy to refute**

How should American Jewry have responded, and how might it yet respond to the deceptive and insulting rhetoric of the U.N.? Were we as thoughtful as we are emotionally propelled to react, we might have said: Zionism is not racism. Racism is what General Idi Amin of Uganda, a nation that voted for the resolution, did when, in 1972, he expelled 40,000 Indians and Pakistanis, long residents of Uganda, because they were not, in his judgment, proper Ugandans. Racism is what Arab countries practice when they seek to exclude *Jews* (no test for Zionism involved), women, and others from contracts these Arab nations seek to let with American firms to build roads in Saudi Arabia. Racism is an Arab boycott, so obvious, so unacceptable even to members of the U.S. Congress, that the Senate Banking and Currency Subcommittee on International Finance is moved to approve legislation that would curb racial discrimination against American Jews when American companies do business with Arab nations that participate in the boycott. That is racism. Pure, naked, obvious. The American people can and do understand that. The American Jewish community would have done well to let the matter rest there. The burden of defending their outrageous charge in the light of these and other, similar, uncontestable facts, would have been on the Arab-African-Communist bloc countries that put the resolution together and then rammed it