

TWO SERMONS OF

RABBI WALTER WURZBERGER

IN *The Rabbi's Quill* (2003).

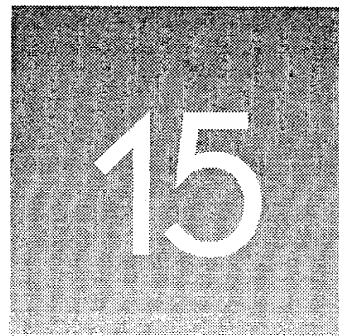
integrity of purpose of individuals who have been suffused with the true spirit of Shaaray Tefila - the love of God, Israel and man.

The decision was made with the full understanding of the tremendous burden and staggering responsibilities involved.

But we understood that if a tragic fire could result in the terrible loss of our beloved Synagogue, the fire of commitment and dedication would be needed to restore Shaaray to its leading position as an exponent of Halakhic Judaism stressing the love of all Israel.

It was perhaps symbolic that this epoch-making meeting took place in the beginning of Adar - the most joyous month of the year. It is the month when we celebrate Purim and rejoice because "Grief was converted into joy and mourning into a holiday." The calibre of the discussions, as well as the ultimate decisions at the Board meeting, convinced me that ours is an extraordinary opportunity to repeat another Purim miracle within our beloved congregation. Out of the tears and agonies over our terrible loss there will be distilled the joy of making a creative contribution to assure that Shaaray's great past will become the foundation of an even greater future.

Elated as I am over this momentous meeting, I fully realize that a hard and arduous road lies ahead. We have embarked upon a program that will sorely try our stamina and determination. We can succeed only if every one of us will understand that the outcome of the campaign will depend upon each one of us individually. We shall be called upon not merely to make contributions of our time, energy and substance, but as the Hebrew term "Terumah" suggests - the kind of contribution through which we shall elevate ourselves and rise to the heights of the challenge which has been thrust upon us.



## EXPANDING HORIZONS

SEPTEMBER 1969

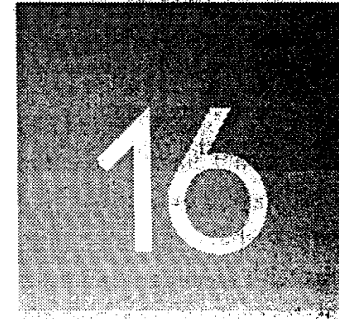
The landing of Apollo 11 on the Sea of Tranquility has not only opened new frontiers for man but has ushered in an entirely new era which demands a radical overhauling of many of our antiquated ideals and values. We have witnessed what the prophet Isaiah has termed "the making of a new heaven and a new earth." For us, the moon no longer belongs to the heavenly spheres, but has become an extension of the earth over which man's dominion extends.

But while the heavens have receded, they have not shrunk. Our awareness of the vastness of the heavenly expanses, most of which will forever elude man's reach, deepens our awe for the mysteries of creation. Unless our perspective will be distorted by arrogance, our newly gained knowledge should increase rather than diminish our faith in the Creator. The host of problems on earth from which our attention may be temporarily diverted by the spectacular feat of the astronauts, but which cannot be solved in this fashion, poignantly reminds us that man cannot live by technology alone.

4 It is becoming increasingly evident that unless we achieve some kind of spiritual breakthrough, man, either literally or figuratively speaking, will suffocate in the atmosphere he has polluted through his shortsightedness. All over the world there is growing apprehension over our failure to develop the moral and spiritual resources that enable us to come to grips with the agonizing problems of our time. Does it really make sense to land on the moon with the most up-to-date equipment, but with values and ideas which are totally obsolete today since they were hardly adequate even for the horizons of primitive man?

It is against this background that we Jews should consider the meaning of our existence. A generation that has been an eye-witness both to the Holocaust and the rebirth of the State of Israel is perhaps too close to the scene to appreciate the full dimension of these events. Yet, somehow, we can sense what the prophet Isaiah wanted to convey when he promised that, "Even as I create a new heaven and a new earth, thus shall your seed and your name endure."

It is perhaps no co-incidence that man has reached the moon precisely at the time that Israel has once again emerged as a sovereign independent nation in its own ancient homeland. Our people have always reckoned its calendar according to the moon, and each month pious Jews perform the Mitzvah of Kiddush Ha-Chodesh (the sanctification of the moon). Would it be wrong to assume that we Jews today are charged with the mammoth task of helping the world to make the moon-age an era marked by sanctification rather than profanation or degradation, one where a new earth will be surrounded by an atmosphere of holiness rather than enveloped by dismal absurdity? Would that the new year 5730 bring us the courage, the hope, the understanding so indispensable to the fulfillment of our mission.



## DESOLATION AND CONSOLATION

SUMMER 1970

*Highlights of the Sermon delivered on the Sabbath following the tragic bus accident which claimed the lives of seven children.*

Stunned as we are by the horrible tragedy that has so prematurely snuffed out the lives of so many precious children, we cannot help but ask again and again the agonizing and unanswerable question: Why? Why? Why should children of so much promise be denied the opportunity to live and to make their creative contribution to the world? Why should such a calamity strike parents who only wanted to raise their children as loyal, dedicated Jews? Why should God's providential design for the world include such unspeakable grief and anguish, not only for the immediate families of the victims, but for our entire community?

As we raise these questions with hearts seared by grief and with minds tormented by an ordeal that staggers the imagination, we are in a position to appreciate the wisdom contained in a rather sarcastic comment by the



21

## PART-TIME JUDAISM

JULY AUGUST SEPTEMBER 1989

Many years ago, I was taken aback when a prominent Rabbi who was hailed for leadership in the struggle for civil rights publicly declared that his Judaism had nothing to do with his efforts to promote equality and justice. His involvement, so he maintained, was as an American, not as a Jew. I was shocked by this compartmentalization because I could not understand how a Rabbi could possibly divorce his involvement in various social causes from his Judaism.

As the years went by, I learned to my chagrin that this was by no means a unique case. I recall speaking to a distinguished Orthodox scientist, who, in response to my question, contended that in the laboratory he worked as a scientist, but when it came to matters of faith, he simply disregarded all his rational convictions and lived by the faith of his fathers.

The attempt to treat Judaism as a self-enclosed enclave isolated from the rest of one's life dates back to the beginning of the Haskalah

movement, which coined the slogan "Be a human being on the outside and a Jew in your home!" In other words, there was to be a sharp line of demarcation between the public life of the Jew, where Judaism was supposed to be totally irrelevant, and the private sphere where Jewish religious values could play a role.

Without necessarily adopting the Haskalah's formula, there are many committed Jews who refuse to let Torah impact upon all spheres of life and seek to restrict it to some specific areas such as the Synagogue, the kitchen and the bedroom. But when it comes to matters of commerce and finance, "business is business" and the "bottom line" becomes the only consideration.

It is high time that our various educational institutions review their policies and examine whether sufficient attention is paid to such topics as "Geneivat Daat" (misleading others), let alone outright theft and fraud and "Chillul Hashem" (to act in such a manner as to discredit the Jewish people, which has been summoned to function as the messenger of G-d).

It is especially important to impress upon the observant community that the Jewish religious ideal cannot be reached simply by concentrating upon select areas of religious practice. Our entire life must be lived in the consciousness that we stand before God at all times. As the Sages put it, "all your actions should be for the sake of G-d." Judaism is not a part-time activity but a full-time vocation that claims the totality of our very being. Perhaps with a bit more emphasis upon the all conclusiveness of the demands of the Torah makes upon us, we might have been spared some of the recent embarrassments that have jolted so many of us.