

A RECORD BREAKING ERA

RABBI LEON MACHLIS

Dean Yeshiva Ohel Moshe, B'klyn, N. Y.

Our century will be known in the annals of history as a record breaking era. Nearly every time a jet plane is unveiled, it flies at a faster pace than attained previously. Every time a new trans-atlantic liner makes its maiden voyage on the high seas, a new speed record is announced. Human beings run a mile faster than they used to in days gone by. Nations maintain large armies, buildings grow higher, cities grow in population and size, excavations grow deeper and some cities are built even under the earth.

The atomic and speed age has brought numerous accomplishments which may be classified as record-breaking. Nearly every day's news brings word of some hitherto goal surpassed, some previous high mark surmounted, even in fields wherein none ever thought of breaking records. Now they are speaking of the Moon City, of coming closer to the heavenly bodies through new techniques and inventions.

Have we ever given this matter some thought? The practice of breaking records is the privilege only of the few. Mile runners, pilots, atom bomb builders, scientists, inventors and technicians — these are the people who break the records most of the time. The ordinary man does not get a chance. Nobody pays much attention to him and to what he does. He or she may be privileged to read of record-breaking events but never or rarely to be a participant. This too, needs closer analysis.

In Judaism and in Jewish life — we differ from all other religions through the basic fact that we continuously

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believe in the axim בשבילי נברא העולם "because of me and for me — the world was created." With this thought in mind every Jew and Jewess can be a record-breaking individual.

You may ask — What formula is one to follow in order to be of the exceptional few who are record-breakers? Through what procedure can we too take on added importance and our actions added significance? When we record an enrollment of 40,000 pupils, ken yirbu, attending the Yeshivah movement in this country — or that U.J.A. had raised larger amounts for overseas aid — this news should give every contributor and every co-worker in the Day School movement a feeling of added strength and importance. As we read of the greater interest of suburban communities in Jewish life, or that a Synagogue was filled to capacity on a Sabbath or Holiday, this too, should give every congregant and every participant a sense of possessing a share in some new record-breaking event.

In this week's Sidrah of the Law, we find the blueprint and the guiding factor for such outlook on life. In fact, our sages of old prescribed the weekly portions of the Torah to be read each Sabbath morning as a means of increasing our knowledge regularly and gaining new implements and interests of life as we continue to mature.

והי' עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אותם —
ושמר ה' אלקיך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך.
"And it shall come to pass — because you hearken to these ordinances — and keep — and do them — that the Lord thy G-d shall keep with thee — the covenant and the mercy which He swore unto thy fathers."

While the word עקב is ordinarily translated — because of — The Midrash and Rashi pause to explain its other meaning — the heel of the foot — and seek ways and means of

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interpreting the text in this light אם המצות קלות שאדם דש בעקביו תשמעון. "If the commandments of minor importance which one tramples with his heels — which one treats lightly you will obey." "Then will the blessings of the text come true."

How true of human nature. We have attuned our way of living towards the direction of major things only and displayed sheer negligence of so-called minor things in life. Yes, if they will attract headlines we are ready to answer the call. What of our religious values and observances? Must they too be observed only when they are record-breaking events or can we find spiritual satisfaction and delight of the soul in a Mitzvah well performed?

Let us cite but a few examples: How we can all become members of the record-breaking brigade.

Observance of the Sabbath. A commandment of major importance yet so shamefully desecrated. When one sets up his or her household and family life with the Sabbath observed as it should be — with the true spirit permeating the house and the inhabitants thereof — one is automatically breaking a record.

The Laws of Kashruth — when one can truthfully say — "I have never violated Jewish dietary laws and have followed every precept as I have seen in my parents' home — there too one becomes a member of a people of high attainment.

Prayer — or as we so often call it — Davening — donning Talis and Tefillin. What a glorious record one can perform by beginning each day with prayer and thanksgiving to the A-mighty, by reciting blessings and grace before and after the meal. Never turning down a worthy cause. Always dealing

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honestly and justly with our fellow-man. And so we can go on and on.

Each is a record-breaking event — perhaps not reaching the headlines of our press — nor being announced by the voice of the commentator but nevertheless they are of great importance in the life of the individual which in turn affect our community and humanity at large.

A story is told of a man who was persuaded by his minister that 10% of all he had belonged to G-d. Being a farmer with a large field — he set aside one-tenth of his field for G-d. He was going to obey the words of his religious guide. The following year the minister returned to visit him and he found that nine-tenths of the farm were cultivated and growing fine crops and beautiful fruits — but the other tenth was covered with weeds. “How does it happen that you have neglected one part of your field so badly?,” he asked. The farmer replied, “You told me one-tenth belonged to G-d. So, I’ve left it for Him to take care of of.”

Friends — the upright Jew knows quite well that were he to cultivate, sow, plant, plow and water the religious field of life, he too would reap a fine harvest. Our individual life would be more meaningful, our family life more content, our community life more spirited and our universe more peaceful.

We all possess this grasp of record-breaking within our reach. “What is it the L-rd asks of us?” “To keep the commandments and His Statues *for thy good.*”

Did you ever see a picture of a painting of the tree of Jewish centuries of the past? Starting with our father Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshuah, the Judges, the Kings, the Prophets and all the sages of Israel, generations of

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Jews, of families, of communities who followed the tradition of our people, the precepts of our faith in an age when conveniences were lacking. They sought no shortcuts — no modern design for religion — no speed motors — and no tunnels uprooting the principals of faith.

This week, we in New York, had a record-breaking heat and all sought ways and means of finding relief and comfort. We too, in the religious sense have within our reach the source — the means and the ways of becoming record-breakers of the 20th century era. Treating every commandment with due regard — so we may live — not a mechanically attuned life — but rather a fruitful life of joy and contentment, of accomplishments and glory. Yes, indeed as we travel on the glorious highway of spirituality, let us be extra cautious of the red and green signals. The Mitzvos — the pattern of life as prescribed by Torah — the Mitzvos Aseh — the green lights — the obligatory commandments — and the red signals — the prohibitory commandments. Then and then only will we be recorded in our generation and in future annals of history as a people who were record-breakers in their own way — but yet saved a civilization from complete destruction. Let each one recall daily "Because of me the world was created."

And G-d will love and bless thee and He will bless the fruit of thy hand. Amen.