

# CAMP BOIBERIK

## The Growth of an Idea

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כנסת ישראל ליונה אימתילה  
סנהדרין צ"ב א'

The community  
of Israel is likened  
unto a dove

די כנסת ישראל איז  
געגליכן צו א טויב



Another striking difference is the place of the Yiddish language in the two reports. In the earlier one Yiddish as an important item in the life of the camp is hardly mentioned. There are only one or two passing remarks, without any particular comment. In the present account the importance of Yiddish is especially emphasized. The reason is quite obvious. In the 'twenties, speaking Yiddish was felt to be a natural practice. True, the consistency of that practice is often highly exaggerated. But the difficulties encountered in making campers understand what was being told them were considered natural obstacles to be overcome. At present, with most campers and staff members of the second American generation, the role of Yiddish in our Jewish educational outlook demands theoretical justification and should therefore be stressed.

Another difference which is easily noticed is the matter of religion. In the article of 1928 there were only some critical remarks about the unattractive "religion" parading as anti-religion. That approach, expressed by a considerable number in our midst, had often been annoyingly sarcastic in comments about Jewish traditional practices at Boiberik.

How different the atmosphere has now become. In this paper the subject of religion is given the emphasis it deserves and the inadequacy of the concept of secularism as applied to Jewish life is clearly stated. A separate section is devoted to the subject of religion and its psychological roots.

On the side of the unbroken succession of ideas and practices, I was surprised to find not only the titles of the two accounts to be practically the same, but that activities, traditions and general approach to be along the same general line. The changes that did occur, and they are very important in the present life of the camp, have been introduced in the attempt to make some ideas, ritual forms, or activities conveying Jewish information, more conspicuous and emphatic.

There is one general attitude expressed in the article published more than thirty years ago which should be quoted here. It is a line of thinking and feeling about our task which exhibits a still prevalent state of mind.

"Boiberik is a growing institution in every sense of the word. Nothing is frozen, decided and sealed. A genuine educational institution should be conducted in such a way that the leaders might learn no less—and in the dimension of depth much more—than the followers. Boiberik does all it can to proceed along that path."

The differences, no less than the identities found in the two accounts of the Boiberik story bear witness to an essential continuity since the earliest beginnings. It is all because the spiritual frame within which the "plot" had been placed remained basically the same throughout.

With the survival of that frame, continuity may be assured and all changes which must emerge, as in the past, will only serve to vouchsafe the basic identity of motive and form. It is my ardent hope that such will be the character of the succeeding chapters of the story of Camp Boiberik.

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The cover shows the book-plate used by the Boiberik library. It is a variation on the theme of the white dove, emblem of Camp Boiberik, made by a gifted member of the "Boiberikaner" tribe, Mrs. Cecelia Waletzky.

### INTRODUCTION

The following is an account of the principles, views and ideas regarding Jewish thinking and living which have been a guiding light in the setting of what may be called the Boiberik pattern.

In my present comments I am endeavoring to outline principles, beliefs, convictions, in short, theoretical pronouncements, and concrete forms issuing from them, for many of which I personally must carry the sole responsibility. The frequent use of the personal pronoun is sufficiently accounted for by the necessarily autobiographical character of this report. But it should also be construed as a desire to absolve from responsibility all those who may have been greatly helpful in the growth and stabilization of our organized venture and yet did not fully agree, or emphatically disagreed, with the ideas that have inspired me.

In this paper I am mainly interested in formulating ideas regardless of practical outcome. However, the question as to how far the results are commensurate with the effort invested, is fully justified. Most people define success in material terms. We all know that Boiberik began small and poor, now it is bigger and richer. In my opinion, even from the point of view of a purely business enterprise, the camp is much less of a success than most people are led to believe. Nor will it please me to exaggerate our success in the light of a philosophy of Jewish culture and education. Some feel we should be happy with the pleasing fact that so many former campers, now in their adult years, come with their families to visit us to satisfy a home feeling which Boiberik has implanted in them.

It certainly gladdens my heart to know that the camp has succeeded in creating an atmosphere which is capable of coloring the experiences of campers with lasting impressions of

positive value. It is only natural to rejoice in such results of our efforts. But as far as Boiberik is concerned this does not go far enough. For the intention, the end in view, involved something larger, greater and Jewishly more inclusive than just giving rise to emotional states associated with experiences of personal at-homeness.

From the very beginning I had interpreted the core and meaning of my function to be something which is above that of directing a camp, in the usual sense of the term. The organization of camping activities was naturally the first line in the course of things, but I had conceived my ultimate purpose to be that of encouraging a particular endeavor in the way of thinking and living as Jews and of Jewish education. Accordingly, I considered my most outstanding task to be the initiation of patterns adapted to a situation molded by camping activities, which may concretely exemplify that endeavor. It is reasonable to assume that the attraction and lasting impression of what has been called the Boiberik spirit are an indirect consequence of the work and attitude involved in the pursuit of that task.

Let me add at this point another word on the subject of the sentimental attachment of some former campers or "Boiberikaner" to the camp in their adult life. It is true, a number of that group are satisfied to enroll their children with the camp of their childhood; that many of them have been visiting the camp each summer. It is also true that the number is constantly increasing. Shall I assume that the Jewish orientation of Boiberik has been a factor, at least partly, in that feeling of attachment? Maybe so, but then there are too many other manifestations by the same "Boiberikaner" which tend to question the probability of that assumption. Hence, although the facts as such are, from a certain point of view, quite encouraging, the doubt as to their exact meaning detracts from their value in the light of the purposes Boiberik has come to serve.

This being so, Boiberik's accomplishments in the most important area of its operations are not too obvious, unless objective research will dispel my doubts. I am therefore glad to announce that the camp decided to make a serious attempt to initiate such a piece of research in the near future. Needless

to add that all parties concerned will await impatiently the results of such a venture. I hope that all former campers, our Boiberikaner community, will do their share to help us reach that goal without too much delay.

At any rate, whatever the outcome, the ultimate value of what was actually obtained will still have been worth the effort spent in its behalf. For I entertain an overriding feeling that in the last analysis values do not reside only in the men and women who uphold them. Values emerge somehow from the nature of creation whether or not they become imbedded in the souls of a greater or smaller number of humans. The values, general and Jewish, which are the guiding light of the Boiberik pattern should therefore be considered on their own level, as qualities of general and Jewish living and should not be measured by the number of adherents they have acquired.

Such is my approach, as I take a bird's-eye view of the different phases contained in the chronicles of Camp Boiberik. That attitude is indeed comforting, though it does not entitle one to be overly proud of actual accomplishments. It is in that light and with that spirit that I shall now analyze more fully the emotional and intellectual motivations which have inspired and guided our efforts in my thirty-six years of service at Camp Boiberik.

## CAMP BOIBERIK—THE GROWTH OF AN IDEA

In 1919 Sholem Aleichem Folk Shul #1 had launched a project enabling the children of that school to spend their summer vacations out of the city in an atmosphere of play, learning and leisure. Only the parents of 5 boys and 5 girls agreed to avail themselves of the opportunity. The program consisted of play, singing Jewish songs and reading some of the works of Sholem Aleichem. It was then and there that the children decided to name the place "Boiberik" after the name of the summer resort which figures in some of Sholem Aleichem's stories.

For many reasons the project was not repeated the following year. However, the idea lingered on for some time. In 1922 I was approached by the leaders of the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute to help initiate a similar project, but this time on a larger scale and based on a full camping program. The idea appealed to me and I agreed to direct such a venture.

Camping had just become popular about that time. The literature dealing with the problems concerned was almost nonexistent. There were few occasions to learn not only about the untold educational and other opportunities for successful camping, but it barely dawned on us that there was much to study and learn about that growing institution. However, all of this was not the greatest worry as time went on. For as far as general problems were concerned there were many new camps opening each summer, new experiences accumulating, the literature was growing by leaps and bounds, opportunities were opened to learn from our own experiences, as well as from those of others. In short, one could easily see, and be confronted with the idea that very soon general experiences and more detailed information would give rise to a body of knowledge which would result in expert handling of children's camp life by accomplished professionals.

During the 'twenties the plans regarding creative camping were greatly assisted by a spate of new ideas and views in the field of education. Under the influence of John Dewey and the philosophy of the experimental method, called progressive education, had introduced theoretical concepts and practical plans into the school which were truly revolutionary. Radical changes of the school curriculum were introduced under such magic formulas as "learning by doing," "child-centered school," etc. The value of all this for the school had met with sharp differences of opinion. However, the camping program, even of the most conservative variety, could be greatly enriched by the ideas of such men as John Dewey and William Kilpatrick. Needless to say that Boiberik was not too slow in availing itself of those ideas, though with some critical modifications.

The worries were, however, great and indeed very disturbing, in a field where I had been at that time, almost all alone. For as an educational institution Boiberik might easily find many opportunities to teach and to learn, but as a guide in our Jewish educational endeavor I felt like a blind man groping in the dark. Since the teaching of formal subjects is bound to be out of step with the spirit and interests in a camp situation, the observance of some forms of the Jewish traditional rituals, might prove gratifying and profitable in the cause of bringing our children closer to the sphere of our history and heritage. This was indeed done by slow degrees from the very beginning, but for reasons I shall presently enumerate, the practice had to overcome very serious obstacles. Hence in moments of solitary meditation I was beset by doubts and prayed for better days to come.

Let me describe the situation very succinctly. The people at the head of the Sholem Aleichem Schools came from Eastern Europe at a time when the struggle of the young against the old had reached its greatest fury. One of the main issues of the struggle had been religious observance. It was only natural that the total negation of religion should have been equated with the repudiation of ritual observance. After all, rituals are concrete forms though they represent highly complicated emotions and abstract ideas. Hence negativistic attitudes can be more easily attached to them without the need of obtruse logical

analyses. This is true of most people. They pay little conscious attention to the social, psychological and philosophical bases without which religion is meaningless. In short, religion and ritual are thought to be completely synonymous.

The reasons for the anti-religious attitude does not concern us here. But the carrying over of such an attitude into every phase of Jewish observance was particularly unfortunate in our case. For Jewish ritual, in addition to being an expression of general psychic experiences, has also another function in our Diaspora. It helps advance and deepen our feelings of belongingness, of our common destiny, of actively expressing our share in the history of the Jewish people. But since the popularly accepted negativistic attitude toward religion had placed most of its weight upon ritual observance, it gave rise, on the one hand, to mounting opposition, and, on the other — on the part of gentler souls — to uninspiring indifference. Both had to be overcome.

As long as such differences of attitude and opinions were confined to verbal debate, they constituted no serious problem for people attracted to the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute. For the curriculum of the Schools of the Institute contained nothing that would make a decisive difference for the parties on either side of such a debate. There is nothing in the teaching of Yiddish, Jewish history, Hebrew, literature, etc., that could in itself be considered as Jewishly one-sided. This is especially so since no one advocated the learning of prayers from the sidur, or any similar subject. True, the teacher's personal attitude in presenting his subject, and the many imponderables that make up the spirit and the atmosphere, may make a big difference. But then again, the teachers had been so close to the lay leaders regarding their Jewish background, and other factors in the formation of personality, that not much conflict could have arisen on that score, as far as the schools were concerned.

But in a camp, an educational institution conducted on entirely different terms, the situation is totally different. Here we come not to get instruction, but to live, to give concrete expression to our Jewish belongingness in one way or another. However, how shall it be done in such a way as to be a truly affirmative expression of Jewish living and at the same time

give offense to no one who at that time thought that the mere use of Yiddish would suffice?

True, in those days many of our campers had little difficulty in speaking, let alone understanding, the Yiddish language. Nor can it be gainsaid that Yiddish was a powerful factor in the intensification of the children's Jewish consciousness. Moreover, at that time many of the staff, too, could use Yiddish to great advantage as a Jewish educational medium. But all that could not satisfy me. Yiddish alone would have left too much of a vacuum in the Jewish area of social, emotional and intellectual experiences, without which the very existence of Boiberik has no justification. Even at that time when Yiddish could have conceivably been considered a focal point in Jewish schooling, it could not answer the need for Jewish living in general, including that of the camp situation.

Sometimes social pressure exerted upon those carrying the burden of responsibility may be a great help in the solution of human problems. Constant demands coming from those upon whom the material life of the camp depends, i.e., the parents and guests, could have helped to awaken deeper insights and facilitate the attempts at filling our atmosphere with appropriate Jewish content. But this too, was lacking. The average Jewish adult is usually interested in the most immediate elementary needs for himself and his children. Meaningful and creative Jewish living is very rarely considered a genuine need to be cultivated and cherished. In the absence of a stimulus from this side too, the difficulties and doubts became still more pressing.

The more I became involved in all such doubts, uncertainties and groping for a way out, the more the difficulties mounted. For the introduction of meaningful, traditional Jewish rituals would at that time have met with serious opposition from those who had become estranged from Jewish religious ways. Ritual without a reasoned background from which it springs leads only to beautiful nonsense. Those who have gone still further and lost all roots of our old tradition, for them ritual would be just pure, unmixed nonsense. Hence it was necessary to find some forms, authentically Jewish, and yet not too offensive to modern, secularized ways of thinking.

Thus far it may appear that the problems were essentially only of a practical sort, to strike some point along the Jewish line which by its nature would help to avert opposition from both ends against the middle. Such impression, however, will not convey the full seriousness of the situation. For more than mere tactical problems were involved. It had been clear from the very beginning that any Jewish educational venture in America must, in order to be of any significance, decide to make a definite contribution to the idea of Jewish individual and social living. This is especially important in our case here.

We are part of a Jewish group who for one reason or another cannot become reconciled to any of the three existing Jewish denominations. Most of our group prefer to call themselves secular, whatever that may mean. They had drifted away from the extreme orthodoxy of the world of their parents but had established no Jewish pattern of their own. Thus a tragic vacuum had arisen within the souls of loyal and devoted sons and daughters of our people. Their attachment to most of our historical and traditional heritage had weakened or disappeared altogether so that they had been left with a conscious or unconscious quest for some Jewish content to satisfy a deeply felt need. It seemed that it would be a grateful task to at least point the way toward some method whereby we might hope to fill that vacuum.

As time went on, I was overtaken by a haunting idea that one of Boiberik's objectives should be to develop, if possible, such a method. The fact that in addition to the camp side we have here also a guest side for the adults might greatly facilitate the approach to such an objective which must include the older generation as well as the younger. This sharpened awareness, that what was being done here might significantly exceed the limits of a purely local affair, heightened ambition and the increased responsibility in turn opened new ways to both hope and fear.

It was almost self-evident that if Boiberik was to carry a message of such a character then its leaders, at least those at the helm, must be mindful not only of the importance of routine Jewish forms, like rituals, as an expression of being at home with the Jewish people and all that this implies. In addi-

tion there should be worked out a program of activities to cover other fields with a view to satisfying felt needs, enhancing Jewish values served by those activities and to some extent enrich the store of Jewish information with which our children are so poorly equipped.

But here another difficulty had to be encountered. For while the development of all phases of the camping idea had given rise to a group of well trained men and women with expert knowledge of all aspects of the highly complicated enterprise represented by a modern camp, those experts, and I have in mind only those responsible for typical camp activities, are not necessarily also competent in the Jewish field. Indeed, those combining both are few and far between. However, no camp director would ever think, in hiring his staff, to relegate to a secondary position those who are competent in the camping field whether or not this competence is accompanied by sufficient training in Jewish cultural affairs.

There is another outstanding fact which should be borne in mind. With the exception of a few members of the supervisory personnel, all the rest, the bulk of the staff, do not continue for very long in any one camp, at most for not more than two or three summers. This is bound to be so because of the necessary frequent changes which are natural in the lives of young people. Hence the impact of frequent changes in staff—a condition which cannot be avoided in any camp—is certainly not favorable for a camp like Boiberik. For a camp, whose very soul is the idea of making a definite Jewish contribution, depends, to that extent, upon the constancy of its endeavor, consistency of its form and continuity of its spirit. These characteristics create in camps as well as staff a home feeling which may account for a great many of Boiberik's successes in the past. How have those successes, however limited, been made possible?

Throughout the 36 years that I have served as the director of this camp, the purpose has been to find ways of surmounting all the enumerated difficulties and many, very many more. Let me add emphatically, that although I have at times introduced practices, especially those expressing my own Jewish moods and convictions, of which some members of the Boiberik Committee and of the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute, did not

fully approve, I was treated by them with a kindness, friendly consideration and forgiving attitude that made it possible for me to give to Boiberik the best within me. It is at least partly due to this mutual friendship, respect and confidence that it was possible, in the face of all enumerated difficulties, to evolve a continuity of form and spirit without which the very justification of our existence might have been seriously questioned. Mutual respect and confidence are also entitled to at least a part of the credit for enabling me, in devoted cooperation with other staff members to introduce programmatic features and observances combining the universal, the American and the Jewish in the creative blend.

What was said about the Boiberik Committee is especially noteworthy considering the fact that this is a group freely elected at the annual conference of the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute; their time and effort in behalf of the camp are accompanied by no compensation or privilege of any kind. It is that spirit of our lay leadership which should be borne in mind in considering the theoretical background which was our lodestar guiding our plans and our ideas, both Jewish and generally educational, a combination of which has given Boiberik its individuality.

It is important to dwell a little more on the meaning of such a term as Boiberik individuality, or any other, intending to convey the idea of a total unified picture or, dynamically, an integrated process having a definite direction. Indeed the achievement of such a pattern was the inspiring objective, as could be readily inferred from what was said above.

At the beginning I had only vague ideas of the concrete expressions, possible under camping conditions, to be included in a definite pattern within a Jewish frame; nor was I clearly aware of the tremendous difficulties to be encountered. As a consequence, with the passing of the summers, I was only too often beset by the uncertainty as to the value of our efforts altogether. Surrounding life has exposed our work to conditions that aroused grave doubts about the realistic nature of the main objective.

However, there came a time when I was overtaken by a definite feeling that the disheartening doubts were beginning to

fade away. A situation presented itself that had carried at least some slight encouragement. That must have begun some time during the 'forties. It came almost as a sudden revelation. Guests and visitors began more frequently to follow a certain line in describing their impressions of organized life at Boiberik. Such phrases as "Boiberik is different," "There is something in the air around here" and similar expressions were being used to describe the immediate reactions of people after staying here for some time.

Needless to say that the term "different" is not a qualifying statement in the sense of approval or disapproval. But whatever its precise intention, the mere description as such gave a spiritual satisfaction, hardly exceeded by any of the truly happy moments throughout the history of the camp. That satisfaction, moreover, was greatly enhanced by the fact that similar statements, that Boiberik had given the impression of a definite, rounded pattern, had been conveyed by the younger adult guests as well as by the older generation.

To be sure, one may be impressed by the rhythmical appearance of a pattern regardless of the ideas and the emotional experiences that pattern is intended to serve. Hence the mere feeling of the presence of a systematic whole does not necessarily imply any appreciation of the purposes which constitute the driving power behind that pattern. However, the situation is such, as can easily be witnessed by anyone who was ever at Boiberik for some time, that the over-all picture of a Jewish spirit blended with some other relevant elements, is bound to leap to the attention of all with eyes to see. The assumption was therefore justified that the observed pattern included some appreciation, however slight, of the fundamental motive that gave rise to it.

The spiritual satisfaction derived from that assumption should be almost self-evident, especially insofar as the favorable comments came from our first American generation. Those who have ever been under the sway of authentic Jewish tradition must have felt the disparity of some basic elements of Jewish and American culture, a disparity which has led to interminable conflicts between the older and younger generations. I have here in mind the infantile malaise, deeply imbedded in



American culture, that perennial and unquenchable thirst for easy entertainment as an end in itself and felt to be an overriding value in life.

That such attitudes are bound to lead to the neglect of other activities and values of a higher and more edifying character, is naturally to be expected. It is for that additional reason that I have evaluated with particular interest the appreciation expressed for the Boiberik way.

For a pattern as a definite way of life—what some psychologists prefer to call a “gestalt”—consists of various ideas, dramatic expressions and numerous activities and responses all forming a unified whole and recognized by the spatial, temporal, social and other boundaries which mark it off from the rest of life.

Hence a *Gestalt* is characterized by an “outside” which surrounds the “inside,” the field of its functioning existence. Each item of the whole has only the character of a part and its attraction, if any, does not derive only from what it is in itself but also from its role in the unified system and from the particular nature of the system in its entirety. If, therefore, the elements making up the system, manifest in their totality creative potentialities, and are thus able to attract outsiders into the inside, then something of significance may be accomplished.

Applying these ideas to the Boiberik pattern, or gestalt, the accomplishment may consist of turning some of our fellow-Jews from an attitude of outside “neutralism,” a sort of Jewish *laissez-faire*, to inside positivism, accompanied by an intensified feeling of belonging. Those of us who are accustomed to view Jewish life from the inside will readily appreciate such an accomplishment.

Social patterns in the cultural field, the subject of the foregoing paragraphs, contain numerous elements both overt and latent. Philosophical premises, ideas generally, may be only partially expressed or are often likely to occupy a position of being implicitly accepted, a sort of power behind the throne. Most people have less patience with consciously formulated ideas than with the kind of material that impinges upon the senses. Yet no one will doubt the importance of ideas in order to understand the full meaning of all that is being planned and

done in a place which has professedly come to life for the purpose of turning some lofty ideas into concrete realities. What are those ideas? What is the so-called power behind the throne? What is it that is rooted in all we are doing which constitutes the dynamic soul of the entire process?

Ideas are mental organisms, subject to periods of pregnancy, birth, growth and maturity. It takes years before the intellectually cautious are able to formulate to their own satisfaction the basic principles which they decided to follow as guiding lights through life's uncertainties. This was the case with the ideas constituting the motivations underlying the spirit as well as concrete activities at Boiberik. Those ideas, though intimately connected with the direction of the camp, have actually become part and parcel of my personality. After all, because of the continuous efforts in the development of the Boiberik program, I have come to identify my personal life with the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere prevailing in this camp.

### THREE IMPULSES

The ideas constituting the directing spirit of Boiberik may be subsumed under three headings: those arising from the religious impulse, properly so called, those following from the poetic impulse and those transmuted into something which may perhaps be called Jewish impulse.

There is a point in ordinary moral behavior where the religious impulse asserts itself and this point opens the way for a next step with which religious life actually begins. A man acts morally when he follows the dictates of the ordinary virtues. He submits to the religious impulse when he thinks of those virtues in terms of absolutes, i.e., that they are superior and good not relative to a given situation, but are felt to be absolutely good, independent of particular conditions, even when expediency leads away from them. It is this thinking, or feeling, that our nature is invested with qualities of the character of absolutes, which brings one under the sway of the religious impulse. But when you make one step beyond this, when you experience an inner discernment, or belief, that those virtues are *mitzvot*, that they are demanded of you, that they are expected of you by the order inherent in the cosmos, then you have entered the religious realm. In short, the essence of religion consists in the belief that moral behavior is an objectively set standard in the conduct of life which we are called upon to obey. The source of such belief seems to issue from the religious impulse that prompts us to consider moral values as absolutes.

There is an important difference between the moral action conceived as a personal virtue and the same action seen in the light of an added religious commandment. In the former, man is a self-sufficient being; there is no spiritual thread binding his life to anything around and beyond him. Indeed it would be the most distressing situation for man if he had, thus, been left to his own devices, completely torn from the cosmic scheme of

things. But the way out for the average person is to experience and act unthinkingly, whatever the implications of the actions and feelings involved. There seems to be no suspicion that in the processes of "unthinking" the direction taken may be the result of what the existentialists call a "leap of faith." True, in moments of thoughtful deliberation one may consider oneself the victim or the beneficiary of the laws of nature or of history. But then only self-delusion may account for the conviction that those laws have all been thoroughly validated and nothing is involved in them implying faith.

However, in praising a man for a virtuous action, or in blaming him for actions that are morally vicious, we do not experience the state of mind that something has been done correctly or incorrectly. Rather, we judge him to be *right* or *wrong*. The difference is fundamental. In the case of "correct" or "incorrect" we feel that the action was, or was not, according to certain laws of reason or of nature. In this case praise or blame is irrelevant, unless these words are used in the sense of correct or erroneous. For praise or blame, in the moral sense, does not mean that the man did, or did not, comply with given objective laws—as in solving a mathematical or mechanical problem—but that he was doing *good* or *evil*. The difference between our psychological experiences in the two cases is so great that in thinking of one in terms of the other our emotional life completely repudiates our theory.

There is another important difference between the two concepts of moral action, i.e., morality as a private and purely voluntary choice and as an answer to a call, an attempt to fulfill expectations issuing from the course of the universe. In the latter case the action is accompanied by a feeling of reverence, a looking to something beyond, above the limitations of mortal man, a feeling that the universe is constructed in such a way that the loftiest expression of it is the oft quoted Biblical passage (Micah, 6, 8):

It hath been told thee, O man, what is good  
And what the Lord doth require of thee:  
Only to do justly, and to love mercy,  
And to walk humbly with thy God.

Deprived of that soul-stirring experience, the conception of morality as voluntary choice without the element of the imperative ethics would have been reduced to crass expediency. This, as we know, is not the case: people do feel that to walk humbly with the moral urge within which carries us far beyond the needs of our immediate narrow self, is a virtue to be extolled. We feel it and, within the limits of our frailty, act accordingly. It is only true that most of us do not care to meditate over the metaphysical implications of the actions of our better selves. To paraphrase Heinrich Heine, we implicitly inhale wine and explicitly breathe forth water.

All these reflections, ponderings, meditations, have led me to a faith which to be sure, as a faith, is not verifiable, yet it seems the most reasonable assumption to account for the forces governing human life. It appears that the world is run not merely by an unending chain of blind causes and effects, but that which manifests itself as the ethical nature of man is imbedded in the cosmic order. This is, of course, the very basis of the religious attitude, though as yet without the infinite number of accretions, symbols, rituals, ceremonies, and beliefs which time and history have grafted around all organized religious systems. It is those accretions that bring the felt absolutes closer to mortal man and they color them with the historic and psychological experiences of the particular fragment of humanity which they are serving.

But what have these philosophic and psychological meditations to do with camp life? What bearing have all such ideas upon the concrete activities which constitute the systematic planning of a camp program? In order to proceed logically to answering such questions I must turn to some brief comments on the phenomena issuing from the second impulse, the one which I have called poetic.

The word poetry has acquired some connotations from which I wish to disassociate myself in this particular context. Usually poetry conveys the idea of a literary form using rhetorical devices for decorative purposes and a specific technique to give vent to a variety of emotional experiences. True, I take my cue for the ideas I shall presently express from that usage of

the term. However, it is a different area of psychic experience to which I now wish to apply the concept of poetry.

The poetic impulse is the power driving us to get as close as possible to those aspects of reality which are inaccessible to sense experience, such as concepts, especially those abstracted from ethical life, and stirring emotions in moments of crises. This is, in a sense, true of all art. But it is the greatest advantage of poetry that its medium is language and used in such a way as to embody the abstract in concrete images as symbols carrying meanings of another realm. In this way poetry raises the concrete objects of the imagination closer to the level of imponderables which elude us in ordinary life, and it brings home to the world of sense perception affective states, aspirations and lofty ideas.

Let one example suffice. In his disputation with his friends concerning God's might and man's right to ask questions about it, Job gives us a word-picture of how we receive and test the quality of verbal utterances:

Doth not the ear try words,  
Even as the palate tasteth its food? (Job, 12.11)

The ear is a sense organ perceiving its material at a distance. If you compare it to the palate, which can only sense its object by immediate touch, then the distance between ear and word disappears and reality is brought closer to direct experience. The effect of that process is still more deeply felt by investing the subtle and meaningful unsubstantiality of the word with the palpable and tempting materiality of food. But more important is the effect of the two poetic lines in the context of the problem raised, of the psychic crisis developed and of the total atmosphere prevailing in the Book of Job. It is the tragic outcry of the human heart against the ravages of evil in a world governed by a power potentially good and just. It is within the context of that greatest of all human crises that the drive of our poetic impulse is most conspicuous. The perpetual straining to break through the barriers in our way to the core of reality, our craving for a glimpse into the course and meaning of our destiny, it is this unremitting effort which propels us ever on and on that constitutes the poetic impulse within us.

Another phase of our quest for penetrating the core of reality is our concern with human destiny. The universe around us is oppressively overwhelming. Do we depend upon the course of things totally indifferent to our destiny? What an unbearable tragedy this would have been for man, the crown of creation. Is our destiny reckoned with in the scheme of things? Is our good and evil always in the hands of a power vast and transcendent? This, too, involves human tragedy. How touchingly this is expressed by Biblical poets:

What is man, that thou art mindful of him?  
And the son of man, that thou thinkest of him?  
(Psalms, 8.5)

And Job in his agony of despair cries out:

What is man that thou shouldest magnify him  
And thou shouldest set thy heart upon him (Job 7, 17)

The poetic impulse is given not only to poets, all of us are governed by that powerful drive within us. We find expressions of that impulse in folklore, in folk wisdom, in incidental creative turns of speech and phrases conveying figuratively psychic tensions and other disturbing inner states.

The poetic impulse in its quest for greater effectiveness, frequently combines with the mediatory advantages other arts can yield; with music in song, with drama in ceremonial action, with extensions of the religious impulse in moving ritual. Thus the poetic impulse helps to mediate between metaphysical yearnings and earthly pursuits by both of which the human soul is attracted.

But I am a Jew, and the meaning of the word "am" thus used in the first person singular calls for a psychological analysis. To say that one is a Jew may signify different things. It may convey the merely external characteristic of being born from Jewish parents. It may also mean, in addition, some interest in Jewish activities, religious, social or otherwise. But I have here in mind, under the verb "am" definite psychological aspects of being Jewish, particular experiences, emotional attachments, intellectual considerations and all items that may derive from rational religious and poetic impulses.

Each person has many loyalties, to family, to friends, to one's country, etc. Loyalty, as we know, is an accepted important virtue and as such it partakes of the character of an absolute, an absolute good. It may therefore take the further necessary step and enter the realm of the religious. But the plurality of loyalties does not consist only in the plurality of objects to which it may be directed, but also in the different qualities residing in each particular loyalty. Hence the talk about double loyalty is a misleading term. Since each loyalty is usually qualitatively different there is no sense in the use of the word "double" about two different things. The open conflict between two loyalties, however different they may be, can arise only on the level of action but not on that of feeling, that is, when a crisis arises and one is required to turn in one direction and away from the other. Then, and only then, may the devotion to two different objects come into open conflict. Otherwise, attitudinal discrepancies may be resolved into peaceful coexistence of loyalties to family, club, neighborhood, people, country, etc.

When I say I am a Jew, devotion to some particular interests and general loyalty to a group, are either implied, or at least, considered a virtue as measured by the standard of prevailing ethics. "I am a Jew" is, therefore, not only a fact but also an emotion, it means joy with the happiness of that group, as a group, sadness with the suffering of that group. Such a feeling is greatly intensified in the case of the Jewish people.

The longevity of the Jewish people, though seemingly a neutral temporal fact, turns into a quality which evokes in normal Jews the feeling of respect and admiration, the willingness to help and be of service in many ways. But in addition to, and beyond this, there is the special contribution of our people, the ethical norms formulated by the great teachers of Israel, which by their nature reach the very depths of the human heart. All this is bound to raise our feelings of loyalty to the level of awe and holiness. Nor can we consider as secondary the history of our sufferings for the cause of loyalty to our people and the ideals, the overwhelming humanity of those ideals, for which so many saintly stalwarts of all Jewish generations have given so much, even their lives.

Swayed by such ideas and emotional states, all constituting

the meaning of being a Jew, it is only natural that such a person should be profoundly appreciative of the freedom and the opportunities to live Jewishly in this country. The contrast between our freedom here and the oppression to which we were subjected by the rulers of Eastern Europe, between the liberty and human dignity our existence in this country can enjoy and the outrageous abuses of our elementary human rights, constantly buffeted from pillar to post for thousands of years, small wonder, especially for those whose Jewish historical memory has been throbbingly alive, to feel so deeply indebted to the land of E PLURIBUS UNUM.

But we know that not unlike oppression, freedom, too, has its dangers. Our Biblical forefathers have reminded us (Deuteronomy 32, 15): "But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked . . . and he forsook God who made him." Thus amidst the joy and happiness of our freedom and human dignity we are struck by the growing ignorance of Jewish knowledge, by the estrangement of too many of our people from Jewish community living. Perhaps the most glaring sign of tragic news was the oft repeated outcry for survival and the coinage of the terms survivalist and survivalism implying that at this stage of our great historical career our very existence has become so shaky that some die-hards found it necessary to resist the threat by announcing themselves as "survivalist." No healthy, self-assured organism need emphasize its desire to continue. Yet, no one will deny that the Jewish situation in this country has so many weak spots as to give us serious concern.

It is that situation of which I became painfully aware at Boiberik. True, a great many of the campers in the 'twenties came from Yiddish speaking homes, and Yiddish is not only a medium for social relations but also an expressive symbol of Jewish reality. Hence, the very fact that Yiddish could be most frequently used in official relations with campers and staff was considered a reassuring sign of the continued strength of our Jewish vitality.

I am now clearly aware that this evaluation, without serious qualifications, is subject to grave doubt. On the other hand I am fully convinced that too many of us ignore, at the peril of weakening our creative life, the symbolic value of Yiddish in

Jewish education, let alone other purposes which the teaching of Yiddish may serve.

At any rate, as time went by I became fully convinced that in order to develop a definite pattern of Jewish community living, Boiberik would have to assume responsibilities which its founders had not thought of at the beginning and which most of the leaders of the group did not fully realize. It is true that in modern time, a consciously positive attitude toward a language of our own, Yiddish or Hebrew, or both, has become far more urgent than in the past for the continuity of Jewish creative life. But the spread of the misleading concept of secular Jewishness, as something divorced from religious feelings, ideas and practices, has led to the erroneous notion that it was desirable, or even possible, to have Jewish life based upon the difference of language; that rather than being given the position of an accompaniment, language should be thought of as the very melody, practically the only melody, distinguishing Jewish existence.

This may be called utopian secularism, only in the sense of being imaginary, impossible of realization, though far from an inspiring ideal in any case. For according to what was said above about the religious impulse and the religious realm proper, the elements of that experience are found even where they are least expected. They may enter life by indirect routes, though not necessarily by deliberate decision. Granted, elements of such experience, issuing from the religious impulse, do not necessarily turn one into a religious person. One may still shy away from the notion that the demand for righteous living is imbedded in the texture of the universe, and without this belief the term religious is not applicable. However, the religious impulse forcing us into acting and thinking in terms of absolutes always inclines us to be receptive to the religious appeal though sometimes couched in emphatic secular terms.

The religious element is plainly detected, regardless of the terms used, by anyone whose insight is not vitiated by contrary habits of thought, in the case of one who affirms his Jewishness with the positive attitude that goes far beyond the mere fact of Jewish descent. Such an attitude, presupposes a number of virtues, felt to be absolute, like loyalty, devotion, readiness to

set up ideals and serve them disinterestedly, a feeling of awe for the inspiringly exceptional story of the Jewish people, all of them being the sort of virtues capable of rendering one disposed to listen more intently to the "still small voice" from the world of values, the realm where religion dwells.

The growth of Jewish life in America has taken such a turn that with the passage of time it became extremely difficult to find a staff having the necessary Jewish knowledge and the emotional satisfaction to help inspire children with the beauties of their Jewish heritage. The more that situation dawned upon us the greater became the burden of our responsibilities. It became necessary to draw into a creative Jewish atmosphere not only the campers but also their immediate young leaders. However, to accomplish this in the course of days, or even weeks, in a camp situation, is a task hardly realizable under ordinary conditions.

The task ahead was quite clear. Based upon the two impulses, the religious and the poetic, the first constituting the potent stimulus, the second creating the means for its active and concrete embodiment, it was necessary to evolve Jewish ways, expressions and forms so as to draw sustenance for the satisfaction of those impulses arising from Jewish sources. The more such expressions could be turned into public affairs as part of the camp program, the less dependent we should be upon the individual services of the staff and thus there would be developed a general pattern of Jewish experience.

Those not sufficiently familiar with the so-called secularists, or with the nature of the problem involved, might pose a simple question. Why not avail ourselves of ready-made Jewish traditional patterns, say, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform? The simple answer could seemingly be the opposition to such a course on the part of the outspoken non-religious, secularist trend of most of our lay leaders referred to above. However, that would be only a partial answer which would not touch the psychological root of the matter. For if religion be conceived in terms of faith then, in our case, it was the nature of ritual, not articles of belief, that had presented the crux of the difficulty.

Ceremonies, rituals, may be the expression of faith in a

metaphysical order of the universe or devotion to religious entities, but they may also represent — without the former, or in addition to them — a dramatic rendering of a systematically evolved way of life. The observance of opening the door at a certain moment of the Passover Seder does not necessarily involve the belief that the Prophet Elijah will come in to drink his share of wine. Nor does it seem likely that those observing meticulously the ritual of Yiskor at the synagogue attach any significance to the literal meaning of the prayer that the soul of the deceased "be kept among the immortal souls of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah and all the righteous men and women in paradise." Indeed, to be moved by the dramatic performance of the ceremony, it is hardly necessary to think of, let alone to believe in, any literal meaning of words. One need only experience a feeling of love for and a desire to honor the deceased.

Ceremonies and rituals may be first and foremost expressions of attachment, of being at home, with people in their intimate responses to their profound emotional stirrings. Whatever else they may be, they express symbolically deep-seated, individualized social experiences accompanied by feelings of reverence and awe. The literal meaning of some verbal utterances the rituals may happen to contain may be of no importance at all. Indeed, the mere sounds of those words, if sanctified by tradition, become carriers of potent emotional responses. The very same words, with their supernatural reference, may exercise no appeal at all, may evoke a feeling of aversion if placed in another context.

After all, the same may happen in the field of poetry. Verses written in a similar vein which is typical of religious prayer, may elicit responses closely resembling those occurring in religious observance. However, a different context may change completely the reader's response.

Yet in the case of ritual something is added which is of great importance. There is a powerful attraction in social ties to a group. The feeling of being an insider with people whose social presence is attractive is a very gratifying and rewarding experience.

The people who concern us here have all come from ancestral homes where an authentic Jewish tradition of faith and observance had been practiced from time immemorial. They themselves had been committed to that tradition up to the early teens. Then a storm broke out, children turned against parents. Old Jewish religious tradition was considered enslaving and humiliating, anti-religious socialism had replaced Messianic hope. Hence the dramatic power of traditional ritual had lost not only all positive meaning but, on the contrary, was associated with feelings of opposition, even disgust, symbolically expressing their attitude toward the group from which they had broken away in the course of a long embittered struggle.

It is remarkable how the very people who pride themselves on their throughgoing rationalism and their willingness to follow only the world of sense-impression, the very same people are profoundly moved by poetic expressions about the Jewish people and Yiddish, utterances which belong to the same universe whence religious faith springs. Apparently, the value of the symbol lies in its psychological referent not in its own literal meaning.

At any rate, one could not reasonably expect to see our people return to the tradition from which they were alienated in a prolonged struggle fought with painful severity. This was true even of those among them whose sound religious insights have never deserted them completely and who have continued to experience inwardly on the one hand the overwhelming meaningfulness of our traditional heritage and, on the other, the dangerously vulnerable situation created by the bare secularistic devotion to the poetry of people and language.

Thus the problem was how to develop a configuration of Jewish symbolic and traditional elements to satisfy both principles and conditions outlined above. What has actually been accomplished may, upon closer examination, be discovered by any interested visitor. At this point it should be remarked that here we are not talking about a finished product but about something still in the process of growth. In the 'twenties and 'thirties Boiberik, in its inner life, was not what it is today. It has advanced substantially both as an

American camp as well as a home for Jewish living. Both these elements have markedly grown each in itself and they have now combined into a more integrated whole. Hardly a summer passes without some addition or change so as to render more effective both elements constituting the life and soul of Camp Boiberik.

As far as the Jewish aspect is concerned, there is a policy followed at Boiberik which I regard as highly important. It is indeed the policy of the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute and consists in the emphasis given to the value of the Yiddish language. Boiberik started at a time when many of our campers were of the first American generation. Most of them were quite familiar with Yiddish. The use of the language was for them a continuation of their home environment where they heard Yiddish spoken by their parents.

For the leaders of the camp, however, the language was also a considered approach to Jewish education and a principle involved in the survival of Jewish cultural awareness. With the passage of time that situation has changed; our campers are partly of the second and by far the greatest number of the third American generation. Very few, if any, have an intimate familiarity with Yiddish, except some knowledge of a few idiomatic phrases; they know that it is a Jewish language and spoken by the more authentically Jewish of the older generation. Yiddish has thus turned into a symbol of a cultural world of our own, of something characteristic of the world to which the children belong as Jews. A camp is not a school, it cannot hope to impart a great deal of knowledge of anything, let alone language. But it is incumbent upon us to point up emphatically the value of our languages, Yiddish and Hebrew, in different ways, including some teaching after a fashion. Under camp conditions we cannot turn them into subjects of extended study but we can hope to awaken a feeling for their value, the value of Yiddish for the intensification of Jewish consciousness. This is, in a different way, certainly true of Hebrew, but Hebrew needs less emphasis because happily very few Jews would doubt its value for religious or cultural reasons or both.

## SOME JEWISH PRACTICES

The concrete forms expressing our Jewish orientation, and points of Jewish interest generally, the methods used in weaving them into the program as a whole, the numerous imponderables which have contributed to the prevailing spirit at Boiberik, all these involve too many problems to receive extended treatment here. Nor will I discuss the varied functions of our Jewish Culture Counselor whose responsibility it is to supervise all Jewish elements of our program and to initiate new projects to make Jewish activities, performances, and rituals more meaningful and enjoyable. It is known that he conducts daily sessions with groups of campers; he teaches and discusses with them matters of Jewish interest. But his functions and duties ramify far beyond these limits. However, it would lead me too far afield were I to describe and analyze all those items. Suffice it to mention most of the above points and stop to consider only a few of them in greater detail.

The progress of the Sabbath services, as they developed at Boiberik in the course of the years, is a typical example of the process leading gradually to the more elaborate forms of Jewish traditional practices. It began with a solemn assembly at which was read the Honor Roll of the week, announcing the names of those who distinguished themselves in keeping their bunks clean, in helping others or the camp, thus emphasizing the loftier ideals and moral duties associated with the Biblical injunction of the observance of the Sabbath. This was followed by singing appropriate songs and story-telling in Yiddish. The stories were all taken from Jewish history, folklore and literature.

Incidentally, some time around the end of the 'thirties story-telling as part of the Sabbath eve service was eliminated altogether. The number of campers, as well as staff-members, familiar with Yiddish had become fewer and fewer each sum-

mer. The natural way out of this would seem to be a change in favor of English. But that was thought to be highly inadvisable, especially on a solemn occasion like Sabbath eve. I felt that, in addition to my own reluctance for drastic changes of such a nature, it would create an unusual stir and vehement opposition on the part of the leading members of the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute.

It is well to remember that at that time I had been the target of severe attacks by the teachers of the Sholem Aleichem Schools as well as by the leaders of the Institute, all protesting and lamenting the fact that Yiddish had become less frequently used in organized activities and in social intercourse. Only a few had dared express their doubts whether I should be considered the guilty party in that course of events.

In retrospect we can only marvel at the human capacity for stark blindness when love or principle is repudiated by brutal reality. However, as the storm of that onslaught had subsided, story-telling as part of the Sabbath eve service was resumed, this time in English, with no change, however, in subject matter. It was almost always stories from Jewish history and literature.

A pre-service ceremonial was later added before the beginning of the Friday evening meal in the dining room. It consists of reciting and singing a poem written for the occasion by the poet Ephraim Auerbach, followed by lighting of candles and reciting the traditional blessing, the reciting of Kiddush and singing of songs and *nigunim*.

Another Sabbath service was added for Saturday morning. This consists of reading some passages of the weekly portion of the Bible in Yiddish and English. A timely comment is then offered by a staff member. This takes place in the auditorium on Saturday morning before breakfast, followed by a short ceremony in the dining room as the campers enter for their morning meal. I do not consider it unimportant to add that most melodies of the Sabbath eve services, whatever the texts, are taken from the traditional Jewish liturgy. It should also be mentioned that some time ago a custom was introduced that four groups of the *Eltste* (seniors) division came forward to the stage during the services on Sabbath eve, constitut-



ing a choir, singing *Lekho Doidi* and *Shir Hashirim*. The Sabbath candelabrum on the stage with the lighted seven candles and the Special Sabbath backdrop painted with Jewish religious symbols bring a synagogal atmosphere into the auditorium. Incidentally, our system of self-government has come to include the election of candle lighters, Kiddush reciter, and the reciter of the poem "Sholem Aleichem" by H. Leivick, especially written for our Sabbath service.

An outstanding event at the end of July dates back to the beginning of Camp Boiberik on its present site in 1923. But here too a significant change took place. It began as a masquerade of the familiar pattern. Since the beginning of the 'thirties it changed into what is now known as the mid-season performance. It consists of a dramatized rendering of a chapter, or a period, of Jewish history in which all campers participate either actively and directly or in some accompanying fashion.

In writing the texts for those pageants I was always mindful of the need that they be used to impart knowledge of the subjects to which they are devoted, that the dramatic effects should not eclipse the importance of the historical facts or personalities. Needless to say that I was no less aware of the educational value of an impressive performance which must include music, dance, sceneries and various dramatic devices.

The mid-season performances, since their beginning, have covered vast areas of Jewish history. They have dramatized events as far apart as the story of the Exodus and the Jewish participation in the American Revolution, the Revolt of Bar Kokhvah against Rome and the fantastic plan of the American Major Noah to establish a Jewish state near Buffalo. They have dramatized the lives of personalities, such as Judah the Macabean, Maimonides, Jehuda Halevi, Menasseh ben Israel, Dr. Theodore Herzl, etc. In other words, the change from the mid-season masquerade to the mid-season performance was in agreement with the idea that whenever possible entertainment at Boiberik should carry Jewish meaning and offer instruction in Jewish subject matter. It goes without saying that this does not intend to minimize the educational value of entertainment as such, without any extraneous motive, which is amply represented in our camp program.

Our Collective Bar Mitzvah celebrates the occasion of campers of both sexes having reached the age of thirteen during the camp season. Our aim is to emphasize the value of that custom in Jewish tradition which points up the age of thirteen as the transition from childhood to a period when the assumption of more serious responsibilities should begin. Among such responsibilities should now be placed in a conspicuous position our duties as belonging to the Jewish people and members of the Jewish community.

We make it clear that the celebration of Bar Mitzvah should normally be shared by three partners: the home, the synagogue and the circle of friends. We wish to express our joy with the celebrants as the last of the three.

I regret to say that we have not succeeded in doing full justice to that important occasion. The celebration is still lacking in form, in content and in more active participation of the camp community. I am painfully aware of the reasons which have made this unavoidable. I hope that under the guidance of my successors this Jewish event, too, will reach a much higher degree of development as it certainly deserves because of its intrinsic merits as well as a means of enriching the Jewish meaning of the Boiberik atmosphere.

The youngest member of the family of special Jewish events is Mazl Tov Day. The program for this day is still in the process of growth. But although its beginning dates back only to 1956, it has already shown that it is eminently worthwhile. The campers are divided into four groups, according to the season of their births, spring, summer, fall, winter, or, as they are called at Boiberik, Pessakh, Shovuos, Sukos, Chanukah. The day begins with Hora dancing of each of the four groups on the auditorium field. This is followed by a number of contests between the groups including water sports, novelty races, indoor games, such as chess and checkers. At the end of the day the four groups compete in a Jewish History quiz.

Let me not neglect to mention the special award given at the end of the season to those who have shown a high degree of positive Jewish attitudes. The award consists of a sterling

silver button in the form of the symbol of Boiberik—a white dove.

Whenever these awards are announced the thought is always emphasized that they are not credits for knowledge acquired, or displayed on special occasions. They are rather an expression of a deeply felt appreciation for positive attitudes toward the desirability of and need for Jewish knowledge and the importance to be placed on Jewish values and way of life. The award is therefore not for learned information or mastered skills but for the readiness to do one's duty to our people and our great heritage.

The Felker Yomtov (Holiday of Nations) has acquired a unique position in Boiberik history. Although its theme is thoroughly and typically international, it is nevertheless a full-fledged contribution to our Jewish program.

Before 1948 it was based on a dramatic presentation of the prophets calling all nations to assemble for the purpose of establishing peace on earth. Since 1948 the prophetic ideal has been presented as a mission performed by the State of Israel and the relevant texts have been changed accordingly. Thus the idea of the Felker Yomtov, though stressing in the most effective manner, through song, dance, scenery, costume and ritual, that all men are brothers, is still genuinely Jewish pointing up the most exalted theme of our culture. For is not peace among all men the highest ideal motivating Jewish historical experience?

In a similar way the inscribing of outstanding campers in our Golden Book represents a Jewish ideal through the moral qualifications required for that award. For the Golden Book confers official recognition on campers for showing a high degree of moral character throughout the summer. It has nothing to do with excellence in camping activities, or in matters pertaining to our Jewish program. The citations make it clear that the recognition is being given solely for distinction in the ability to forego personal interests for the sake of the needs of others, for the willingness to help camp mates and the camp generally.

Before leaving the general topic of the concrete expressions of our Jewish orientation I wish to call attention to two

particular items, one negative, the other positive, which in my opinion have contributed greatly to the distinctiveness of Camp Boiberik. The first is the tabooing of card playing and the second has reference to the observance of Tisha b'Ov.

The place of card playing as a leisure time activity, especially among the East European Jewish population, should be a matter of serious concern. That we have, in this respect, been influenced considerably by the American way of life, seems to be a reasonable assumption.

A national survey revealed that cards are played in 87% of American homes. Over 50,000,000 decks of playing cards can be expected to be sold annually. A recent study by Irving Crespi (*Am. Sociol Rev.* Dec. 1956) concludes that the pre-occupation with card playing is accounted for by its being an enjoyable activity which results in strengthening group ties. The same investigator states: "Another inducement to play cards is that the individual can hope to achieve acceptance into groups which enhances his social position."

Card playing as a major leisure time activity, as a force which strengthens group ties and may raise one's social status, this is something not only novel in Jewish cultural life, but a factor which changes profoundly the direction of the intellectual and spiritual character of the traditional Jewish interests. Small wonder that in Jewish life, card playing was considered not as a hobby which has become popular, but as a disease which has assumed epidemic dimensions because it signified a period of painful cultural vacuity in Jewish life without a parallel in any other period of our history.

The epidemic has penetrated not only to the home and to the resort places, it has also infested the most unexpected spots of sacred human endeavor, the synagogue. Indeed, it went so far that the Bulletin of the Rabbinical Assembly (June 1938) found it necessary to grapple with that problem.

I do not remember having had any serious opposition to the abhorrence of card playing among the members of the Boiberik Committee. Some of them objected to it just as vehemently. As for me, I considered it so strongly objectionable that I could not conceive of the slightest compromise. I have always felt that the mere sight of people playing

cards at a public spot at Boiberik would be utterly destructive to the spirit without which the camp would have no meaning whatsoever.

The second example which I wish to point up may serve as a fair illustration of the difficulties encountered in the process of developing a modernized expression of one of the loftiest, Jewishly most unique and most humane ceremonial events of our tradition. I refer to our Tisha b'Ov observance.

Tisha b'Ov is the most eloquent expression of the profoundest tragedy that ever befell a people, the soul-stirring destiny of Israel. Tisha b'Ov is surrounded by a host of the most incisive rituals reaching the depths of the human heart and leaving indelible marks on the memory of a people whose greatest passion was nothing more than to continue its life in its own way according to its own conception of God's commandments.

The general educational value of Tisha b'Ov can hardly be over-estimated. It helped socialize the psychic growth of our children by enlarging their memory to include not only themselves and those immediately around them, but an entire people to which they know they belong; to include not only the short span of a limited number of yesterdays but of long stretches of time the limits of which can hardly be grasped. Tisha b'Ov has helped successive Jewish generations to become sensitive in their ethical outlook. The English poet Meredith says: "There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit," and great is the educational value of vicarious experience of suffering which enhances the potentialities of human sympathy. It was Aristotle who saw the value of Greek tragedy in its effect on the purgation of emotions. Tisha b'Ov satisfies the religious and poetic impulses of which no human being is free; it satisfies likewise the Jewish yearning into which those impulses are channeled. Finally Tisha b'Ov helps prepare our children in their struggle for our creative survival, a struggle which they are destined to carry on willingly or reluctantly, a struggle incidentally, which is rendered more acute in its severity in conditions of freedom.

Naturally, as modern men and women we cannot, nor do we wish to copy faithfully the ritual procedure of our

forefathers, which actually begins three weeks before the great fast day. But we should certainly be grateful to take out a few pages from sanctified Jewish tradition, stylize them to accord with modern life, and draw our children into the educational values and humane spirit provided by Tisha b'Ov rituals.

However, the dramatization of outstanding moments of our traditional and historic life has evoked no serious interest among our lay leaders. The number of such events in the life of the camp has constantly increased and become more elaborate. But they have usually been considered from the standpoint of beauty of form, not as something permeated with the spirit of awe and reverence, which was clearly my intention. As a consequence Boiberik started with no definitely established pattern of rituals and ceremonies and the procedure of our Tisha b'Ov observance went through many experimental attempts, just like everything else, until some pattern was stabilized.

But nothing evoked so much criticism, and so severely expressed, as our observance of that occasion of Jewish mourning. To some the idea of the dramatization of sad memories for children was repellingly unwelcome. I attempted to enlighten some friends on the fact that we, Jews, are perhaps the only people who succeeded in turning physical defeats into psychological victories; that the very act of keeping alive the memory of all our catastrophes by highly dramatized methods had greatly enhanced our will to endure as a people. I doubt whether anyone was convinced. I only know that whenever Tisha b'Ov happens to open on Saturday evening, a time when parents and guests come to us for enjoyment, the expectation that too many will be angered and disappointed by our ritual observance—I hope that it is now less serious than I was led to believe—distresses me far more than I care to spell out.

On the other hand, it is possible that the objection stems from another source. It does not seem reasonable to assume that those who are so vehemently opposed to subjecting children to Tisha b'Ov ritual, will hide sad news from their children or prevent them from reading stories or seeing TV programs where injustice or human tragedies are portrayed. Perhaps one must sense a personal, familial affinity with Jewish

historical experience in order to feel the need for giving vent to emotional expressions arising therefrom. If this be true, then it is a case of estrangement of the parent from Jewish involvement, not a question of educational method for the child.

I was sadly impressed with the probability that this might be so by some disturbing experiences at Boiberik since the end of the Second World War. Only some fifteen years ago, a catastrophe befell our people, a tragedy the like of which, in magnitude and inhumanity, is not known to recorded history. There was hardly anyone of us, campers, staff, parents, guests, whose families, be it distant relatives, had not been affected by that man-made disaster of our people. How did the children of that people on this side of the world react to the tragedy of their brothers and sisters?

In my search among the younger people in this camp, among those of the first and second generation Americans, I have met with what seemed to be an appallingly callous indifference. And because those I am talking about are otherwise excellent examples of the human species, I felt at times all the more within me the lamenting voice of Israel in distress: My God, My God, why have I been forsaken by my blood and flesh in my greatest sorrow? This is a tragedy in itself. For it is not my intention to accuse but simply to state the fact of such a far-gone estrangement that nothing short of a total change in the atmosphere surrounding Jewish life will bring back to us those whose Jewish roots have become too thin and shaky. It is that alienation from the consciousness of our common destiny that Boiberik has sought to counteract with positive Jewish feelings, values and ideas.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In accordance with a certain view of life in general, of Jewish life in particular, Boiberik has endeavored to evolve, on a small scale, a definite pattern to meet the needs of Jewish education as we understand it and to instill in our campers, insofar as this is realizable in a camp situation, the ideal of righteous living and warm attachment to our people and our great heritage. I am too painfully aware of the bleak distance left between the ideal height striven for and the point actually reached. Often I was inspired in this work by some experience akin to awe verging on holiness. In such moments my feeling of responsibility was raised to a pitch which brought physical and mental exhaustion.

The same ideas motivating the practices included in the Boiberik pattern, have naturally, often with greater emphasis, extended to the so-called guest-side, the adult section of the camp. The Jewish needs of those forming the majority of our adult visitors have already been indicated. Hence, here too, rituals and Jewishly colored practices have been developed. It goes without saying that they were similarly based upon our traditional heritage and expressed the three impulses referred to above.

True, in dealing with adults the attempt to initiate organized forms of any definite pattern is rendered far more difficult, sometimes even impossible. Any organized form of living, not conforming to general social practice, demands a degree of discipline to which independent, assumingly self-contained, individuals will subject themselves only under great social pressure, if not motivated by personal conviction.

Yet I believe I have a right to be satisfied with what was achieved along those lines, regardless of the attitude of reluctance on the part of some and the utter indifference of others. However, there was another hope which I cherished very dearly that I should like to dwell upon for a moment.

To help bring some order within the tragic chaos of spiritual Jewish life in America, has always been my ideal and my passion. With the passing of the years I felt more keenly that while the petrified formalism of the ultra-orthodox of the immigrant fathers and grandfathers is of some merit for our continuity, the tragic confusion and thoughtless indifference of the following generation pour deadly venom into the substance of our survival as a creative social entity.

Had I been by nature a missionary, or, in political parlance, a propagandist, my activity at camp would have tended to turn the adult section into a pulpit or platform for the main ideas which I intended to serve. I would have pointed out with tireless repetition that our aim was to bring patterned Jewish living, suggested by our tradition, into the homes, into private life, into some aspects of daily conduct; that Boiberik was only an example of what is really meant; that this should be followed by exchanges of opinion, by conferences to decide by common effort upon definite ways of conduct and to which all those belonging to our group should subscribe. In short, Boiberik should not be considered as an attempt to conduct a particular summer resort along certain Jewish lines, but that it wished, in addition to its own particular Jewish and camping program, to serve as a stimulus for a general Jewish purpose within a certain section of the Jewish community.

But the work of the propagandist, especially of the brow-beating variety, never succeeded in appealing to me. Pressure, coercion, even verbally expressed, just like importunate persuasion, somehow does not fit into my make-up. I have on several occasions attempted to address meetings of my fellow-members of the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute pointing out those ideas to them; in addition, I published a book in 1940 stressing the same thoughts. Yet, I could not bring myself to expose the mixed Boiberik audience to any continuous line of propaganda. Nor indeed are the conditions of a summer camp suitable for such endeavor.

But at heart I have nursed the belief that most of our regular visitors do experience a silent thirst for concrete forms of Jewish expression which the mere use of Yiddish cannot quench. Hence, I thought that the sight of living examples as

part of our camp program would suffice to evoke the necessary emotional and intellectual reactions which would lead to a desire to enrich home life with concrete Jewish content and to initiate a common venture to create the necessary social machinery for the proper handling of the problems involved.

I know that our Jewish practices at Boiberik have met with a degree of success as far as one aspect of our hope was concerned. Some of them did succeed in being adopted in a number of the Sholem Aleichem schools, as well as in some other institutions, but no further. There is no reason to believe that our observances here have penetrated the family life even of those who are looking with favor upon the Jewish spirit prevailing at Boiberik. However, it may be assumed as a certainty that the ideas and symbolic representations of the Boiberik pattern have not found their way toward becoming public issues which by the nature of their urgency should lead to some concrete, practical solution.

That fact has been known to me for years. I felt only too keenly that in that respect our ambitious hopes have not materialized. As a result the creative Jewish expressions at Boiberik have sunk deeper into a purely local soil. In my present thinking I am persuaded that because the Boiberik idea has not extended much beyond the local boundary lines, the section of the Jewish community with which I have been associated throughout life, has sustained a significant loss.

Fortunately, this is only one aspect of the situation. There are a number of others where some comfort may be found. Boiberik was originally founded as a summer camp for both children and adults. It was meant to be a Jewish educational institution for the children and a summer home for the adult members of the Sholem Aleichem family and others who felt at home in that atmosphere. It had occurred to no one that the combination of the two generations in one area, though divided into different sections, would in itself be a beneficial factor favoring our cause.

True, it did not take too long to realize the very serious disadvantages residing in that combination. At the beginning, when the separation of the two sections was minimal, and not strictly enforced at that, the situation was often extremely

annoying. The presence of the guests in the children's section, and vice versa, gave rise to problems of various sorts. That situation has in due time been changed completely. But even then, bearing in mind the underlying ideas shaping up the Boiberik pattern, there have emerged significant merits from the fact that the camp was serving children as well as adults.

Since we do not follow Jewish tradition as practiced by any of the three denominations, Orthodox, Conservative or Reform, we had to proceed with attempts experimentally devised, though having constantly in mind the Jewish traditional frame of reference. This was associated with a hopeful expectation that every positive achievement within the local confines of Boiberik would in the course of time extend into the lives of our guests as personal Jewish practices and as problems to be aired in public discussion. Attempts at Jewish forms having such purposes as ends in view naturally required that we appeal, in the first instance, to the grown-ups, because it was their homes which were in dire need of being filled with more impressive Jewish content. The work along those lines were greatly facilitated because of the close relationship between the forms of Jewish expression in both sections of the camp.

The above remarks dealing with this phase of the work at Boiberik cannot boast of important successes. There are, however, some other aspects which have given us highly satisfactory results.

In the children's section the general program and those imponderables that go to make up what is usually called "spirit" have been constantly progressing from every possible point of view, physical, organizational, programmatic, and all other numerous features constituting camp life. The adult section, too, has given us justified pride with important achievements in addition to facilities and physical comfort. Our general activities are conducted on a high plane and are adjusted so as to cater only to those who desire clean, wholesome recreation and entertainment. However, the more I look back upon the history of the camp as a whole, the more I feel that those positive gains should be referred to with limited

complacency. For after all, it is the Jewish adventure at Boiberik which is not only the most important aspect of its operations but it is here that success or failure should be considered as decisive. Happily there are positive gains in this area, too. At times, manifestations of such gains are so striking that they become a source of genuine satisfaction. But as compared with the greater hopes of bygone days these gains are too modest to give lasting comfort. That this has much to do with general conditions beyond our control cannot be gainsaid, but the stubborn things called "facts" are not changed thereby. We may perhaps find some solace in the Shakespearean idea to the effect that "To climb steep hills requires slow pace at first."

This leads us to a glance into the future. For whatever we may say about the past, the future may hold in store for us—perhaps also with the aid of changed tendencies in general life—great potentialities which we must be ever ready to put to the service of our cause. I do comfort myself with the hopes I place in those who will succeed me. May they be inspired by that sublime humanity and Jewish idealism to continue in the spirit which in the past many of us have sought to implant, but with greater achievement and greater promise. May destiny grant them the certitude in their efforts which their successes may, I hope, warrant.

One of the advantages of the camp situation consists in the drive to translate ideas and words, however abstract, into action. Some people, young and old alike, may not see the full theoretical meaning and the consequent changes in attitude resulting from the action to which they have been subjected and which they helped develop.

I served as director of Boiberik for thirty-six years. The number 36 is twice the numerical value of the Hebrew word meaning "life." It is curiously symbolic of the exciting life at Boiberik, regardless of the remote ideals which were its inspiring guide. All this is because the emphasis on ideals did not in the least minimize the correlative emphasis on action.

Let me conclude this paper with a parable told by the Baal Shem as quoted by Martin Buber: "Some men stood under a very high tree. And one of the men had eyes to see.

He saw that in the top of the tree stood a bird, glorious with genuine beauty. But the others did not see it. And a great longing came over the man to reach the bird and take it; and he could not go from there without the bird. But because of the height of the tree this was not in his power, and a ladder was not to be had. But because his longing was so overpowering he found a way. He took the men who stood around him and placed them on top of one another, each on the shoulder of a comrade. He, however, climbed to the top so that he reached the bird and took it. And although the men helped him, they knew nothing of the bird and did not see it. But he, who knew it and saw it, would not have been able to reach it without them. If, moreover, the lowest of them had left his place, then those above would have fallen to the earth."

The Boiberik story differs from that told by the Baal Shem in two important respects. First, in the Boiberik case the privilege of "eyes to see" was not confined to one. There were quite a number of them, though less active in climbing in a camp situation. Secondly, here the top of the tree has not been reached as yet and the bird is still there and waiting. Those with eyes to see are happy to find us on a much higher level as compared with the position from which we started. The significance of that achievement can be appreciated only by those who have an intimate knowledge of the growth of the Boiberik idea and its impact upon individuals and institutions beyond the confines of the camp, however limited that impact may have been. All things considered, we are indebted to the poet Longfellow for very sound advice:

Let us then be up and doing,  
With heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing,  
Learn to labor and to wait.