

Editor's Page

Life, Liberty And - - - To Be Pursued By Happiness

It is perhaps timely, at the beginning of this bi-centennial year, to remember the principles that allowed this Republic to grow, prosper and reach its 200th birthday as the most powerful and richest country in the world. Our soil is blessed. We are also blessed with a good climate and with rich natural resources. Oceans separate and protect us even from far away enemies. History has amply demonstrated, however, that although all important, these blessings are not enough in themselves. The single most important natural resource to be found anywhere is an industrious, intelligent and self-sufficient people. Without it, even potentially rich countries are underdeveloped and poor. With it, even deserts are made to bloom.



DR. BAR-LEVAV

A tough new breed of people emerged when this country was first settled. Only those strong in body and spirit could survive the hardships of long sea voyages and of a dangerous, hostile and primitive new land. Their dreams and hopes sustained them, as their daily toil hardened them. Pride must have lit their eyes, as they brought forth bread from their virgin soil. Eager to make a home for themselves and hungry to conquer new horizons, they changed the landscape and were themselves changed in the process. A new people was born, offering hope to the oppressed everywhere, and holding human dignity, initiative and individual responsibility high up, for all to rally around. The Declaration of Independence only emphasized that which was already firmly planted in the heart of Man, the "self-evident" truths "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are—Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

The freedom to pursue the good life under conditions of equality and fairness was sometimes illusive. Reality was not always as glorious as the dream. Even so, the name "America" was usually associated with hope and "Americans" with fortitude, fairness, generosity and hard work.

Times have changed. Individuals and groups in the last generation or two have increasingly come to expect not only a fair chance but also guarantees against failure. Sullenness, dissatisfaction and depression are more prevalent now than ever, even though more of an individual's needs are provided for and guaranteed. Risk taking may well be a cause of anxiety, but it has also always provided the excitement and exhilaration of anticipation and fulfillment. These are largely absent now in the lives of many.

The suffering of millions during the great depression was so horrible that the priorities of the nation were basically changed. Legislation was passed to insure non-recurrence of extreme catastrophies and major abuses of the more complex economy. This humane principle has since been abused so that the taking of any risks may be avoided. The wish to be guaranteed total care from cradle to grave has become the political goal of large segments of the population, in spite of the fact that services provided by central agencies are always the least efficient and the most costly. The price is unbelievably high not only in terms of money but also in lost human dignity, unrealized self-reliance and unattainable joy and pride in one's own achievements.

When thousands of aggressive African bees escaped from a Brazilian geneticist's laboratory in 1957, a lethal new breed of bees developed. At least ten human deaths

have positively been attributed to attacks by swarms of these fierce creatures. Several hundred additional deaths have reportedly resulted from this scientific accident, and much anxiety exists in many countries on the probable path of these bees.

Reports now indicate that the threat is likely to dissipate before it actually poses a real danger. Breeding with the more sluggish and slower bees of South America, the genetic composition of the new breed is changing. It is now believed that when these swarms finally arrive in the U.S., around 1990, they may essentially be no different than other bees.

A similar process occurs among our people. Each new generation seems to have lost more of the spirit of the pioneers, and expects even more than its predecessors to be cared for. Many of the young today seem helpless and lost and indulge themselves in self-destructive inactivity in the name of "doing one's thing." Immediate gratification of all needs is often demanded. Even when most unreasonable, such demands are often fulfilled, with apologies for any delay, as if fair play and democracy really require that everyone have the same and be the same. Housing and medical care, legal aid and welfare payments, social agency services, drugs, travel and insurance, clothing and food as well as recreation and education all the way through college are all expected as rights. Students have gone on strike when minimum education standards were enforced, the poor organized a well-financed march on Washington and welfare recipients demanded, and were granted, the right to have their checks delivered to their homes.

College students who literally cannot read or write receive a free education and are graduated. Rebuilt apartment buildings, paid for by public funds, remain totally unoccupied and are vandalized within weeks, with every single window methodically broken. Senseless murders occur nightly in every major city for no other reason than the discharge of frustration and hate by bored, hurt and angry youngsters, roaming aimlessly about.

The pursuit of God in Judaism is a daily requirement, never the finding of God. In fact, Moses is told that when man sees God, he shall die. In the very pursuit of God, man becomes godly. Our Founding Fathers, many of them deeply religious, may have sensed this truth, even if they did not know it consciously. They also knew that the pursuit of happiness is, in itself, not the major but the only route to being happy. Finding happiness, like finding God, leaves nothing else to look forward to, but to die.

Present-day legislators and political leaders, having themselves grown up in the United States of the 20th Century, are a different and less wise breed of men and women than their forebears. With very few exceptions, they are true representatives of an insecure, hungry and anxious generation. By promising the people more and more they are not really giving them what they need. These are false promises based on false premises. Many present-day "rights" are neither self-evident nor unalienable. They are, in fact, not rights at all, and they are not endowed by the Creator. They are simply man-made promises, mere products of politicians eager to get elected. The "right" to medical treatment, for instance, must be paid for somehow, since it requires efforts, time, materials, knowledge and facilities. Unlike life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, such "rights" depend on limited and unavailable resources and in reality are nobody's right. To tell the people otherwise is plainly to deceive them.

Life, liberty and—to be pursued by happiness seems to have become the new credo. This bi-centennial year may be a good time to restore the original text, which makes more sense. By pursuing happiness we might even sometimes get a glimpse of it.

R. Pan-Lerman, D.