

## *TABLE ECOLOGY*

Don't look up into the heavens above. Look down about you. Don't look at the stars beyond your reach, but at those who sit around the table. Ecological conscience begins, but does not end, in the home.

Look at the entrance of your home, at the vertical mezuzah hanging on the right doorpost, reminding you, in your coming in and in your going out, that home is the matrix of morality.

Look to the table where you eat and drink, and share your bread, salt and wine.

Look and listen to the Torah of your table talk. It is here that our spiritual and cultural ambience are cultivated and sustained.

There is an ethic behind every ritual gesture. The brightest light of the Sabbath candles is blown out through the breath of a voice raised in anger.

The freshly baked challah turns hard and stale with the whisper of gossip. The sweet taste of the Kiddush turns sour with acrimonious insult. The finest meal turns dry as dust without the song of appreciation. Food and drink turn tasteless when derisive inquiry takes the place of loving laughter.

Under our roof, the dangers of global warming is evident in the hot anger or cold indifference that reaches around the table. The petty, sarcastic downputting threatens our health as much as the floating particles of carbon dioxide.

A home can be an oasis, or a dried up swamp. Home can be a place to breathe deeply the clear air of integrity, or a place that makes you choke in discomfort.

The philosopher Ludwig Fueerbach once wrote, "We are what we eat." I would amend his aphorism: "We are how we eat." We can eat to fuel the body, to eat quickly so as to escape to things that amuse us more and demand far little from us. The television calls for no interchange, no real meeting and no real dialogue, only remote control. The table demands a different conversation, and a deeper dialogue.

Around the table do not ask, "Show me your report card," "What grade did you receive?" "What accounts for your failure?" "Why can't you do better?" "Why do our neighbors have more than we have?"

There are a thousand ways to contaminate the household. Eating and drinking together can be a burden of confrontation when poisoned by irritable exchanges. But there are ways to purify the home atmosphere.

There are ways to speak words that elevate the dignity of others, and welcome home those who have come in from the assaults of the outer atmosphere.

There are things to be spoken beyond school marks or vocation or stocks and bonds or the acquisition of things.

There is a world out there to which we belong and into which we were born and which we cannot ignore.

Speak to those seated at the table about the condition of society and how we can make it closer to heaven than to hell. Speak of God and Godliness and the responsibility of citizens that makes of us more than consumers of meals, more than customers who wait impatiently for the waiter to serve and the busboy to clean away.

And when you leave your home, look at the mezuzah, and let its words of peace and hope follow you into the marketplace.