During my trip to India six months ago, I had the occasion to visit one of the most fabulous cities in the world. This small city, containing about one or two dozen exquisitely ornate buildings, was built by King Akbar, who lies buried in the nearby Taj Mahal, for himself, his two queens, and about 2,000 concubines. It is a most striking example of Oriental opulence and incredible splendor. Built four hundred years ago, these breathtakingly beautiful structures are made of marble, semi-precious stones, and extremely valuable building materials and composed in a marvelous architectural style. Fahtepur Sikri, as the city is called, has an unusual, weird story behind it. After spending what today would be millions upon millions of dollars to build it, employing thousands of slave-laborers for many, many years, the King and his court never had much of an opportunity to enjoy the wealth and beauty of Fahtepur Sikri. For shortly after they moved in, they discovered, to their dismay, that the architects had built the city without thinking of a water supply. And since there was no well or other source of water in the vicinity, they all had to move out, and Fahtepur Sikri has been a ghost town for these past four centuries. Rich, exquisite, glorious - but empty, dead, a ghost town.

I mention this today — the day of self-judgment and self-criticism — for the story and fate of Fahtepur Sikri is to me both a symbol of and a warning to American Jewry. Remember that a well or a fountain of water is more than just a supply problem for an
engineer or city planner. It is a life-giving necessity for everyone and, as such, a poetic symbol in religion for G-d Himself. In the words of Jeremiah, oti azavu, mekor mayim chayyim, My people have abandoned Me, says G-d, the Fountain of living waters. G-d, as the Creator and Source of all life and existence, is the Well or Fountain of the waters of life.

And we have indeed abandoned Him. Like the foolish builders of Fatehpur Sikri, we have laid our plans, worked at building family and fortune, attended to a myriad of complex details in establishing ourselves and our reputations -- and forgot to arrange for the water supply, forgot that for a meaningful life you must have G-d, the Fountain of Life. We have become, in the words of King David (Ps.9:18), shekhechei elokim, those who forget G-d. For American Jews rarely deny G-d; they usually ignore Him, even as the architects of King Akbar simply forgot about a source of water.

As a community, we American Jews have come dangerously close to doing just that. In too many instances we have built fabulous public Jewish institutions - charitable, educational, social - without any regard to G-d, Torah, Judaism, which are the mekor mayim chayyim, the Fountain of Living Waters, without which no Jewish institution has the right to call itself Jewish. A Jewish-sponsored university in Massachusetts is one of the most heavily endowed schools in the country. But its builders forgot about G-d, and so if a student should by some miracle develop a bit of thirst for a word of Torah, a taste of Judaism, a drop of Yiddishkeit, he will find nothing to satisfy him. Federations in Jewish communities around the country
support almost every cause — except for their Day Schools, the guarantee of Jewish perpetuation and the survival of G-d's word. Jewish country clubs in the most fashionable neighborhoods are elaborate, ornate structures which have everything — except the vital source of Jewishness, G-d and Torah. Shades of King Akbar! I fear we may have been building for ourselves another Fahtepur Sikri — beautiful, opulent, imposing, but lifeless; a well-appointed ghost city, a place where the death of the spirit stalks the gilded chambers, because the architects of our community forgot the mekor mayim chayyim.

This holds true for us as individuals as well. We live the major part of our lives, until well into our middle ages, building family, business, reputation. And then when the major part of the structure of our lives is completed, we realize, with a rude and cruel shock, that we have made a tragic omission. Everything is there but that which counts most. There is no G-d. Life is only a shell. We are, spiritually, well-dressed corpses. Like a ghost city gone dry, our lives have all but that which can give us meaning, vitality, joy, peace. No wonder so many of us succeed, yet inwardly regard ourselves as failures. No wonder so many of us are secretly bitter and do not know why. No wonder we have so much and enjoy so little. For we have become Fahtepur Sikris, having everything but the Source of living waters — G-d. Life has run dry. Our social lives are bathed in cocktails, but the soul is parched. Outside we are the envy of our neighbors; inside we are dried up. We have been so busy with the details and facade of our lives that we forgot the Fountain of Living Waters. And when oti azavu, mekor mayim chayyim, when you forget G-d, the Fountain of Life, then you must turn into a ghost, a shell.
 Appropriately, it is on Rosh Hashanah afternoon that we perform the tashlikh; we go to a body of water and recite certain prayers. A major reason for this is to emphasize one of the major themes of this holy day, that of Malkhuyot, the celebration of G-d as King of the world. At the coronation of ancient Jewish kings, the anointing would always take place at the side of a stream. When we declare the coronation of G-d, so to speak, we do so near water — for, just as a well or fountain is the source of water, so is G-d the Source of all life and existence.

Let us continue our critical analysis, our self-judgment as American Jews, by drawing again on this metaphor of water for G-d and Torah to describe a second class of Jews who have not forgotten G-d, but have committed a grievous error in another way. They are the ones who, a generation ago, thought that only from Europe could true Judaism be imported into the U.S., and who, today, rely upon the State of Israel to "inspire" Judaism and Jewish content in America. The feature common to both is: a sense of resignation about developing a true Jewish renaissance here in the U.S., one which will proceed under its own steam. And, as a result of this despair or resignation, they have considered it a waste of time to build our own schools, our own truly Jewish institutions, our own Torah life. "This is America" has become the stock excuse as to why it is not worth even trying to establish true Judaism here. Whatever can be had, can be obtained only by filling your jug at the fountains of European or Israeli Jewry — but never at your own American wells.

Remarkably, just such a situation is figuratively described to us in Genesis, or that portion of it which we read today. Hagar had fled into the desert with her infant son Ishamel, and Abraham
had given her a chemet maxim, a bottle or jug of water to sustain her and the child. After a while, however, va-yikhlu ha-mayim min ha-chemet, the water was spent and the bottle remained empty. And so, in the heat of the desert, Hagar cast the child under one of the shrubs and abandoned him, thinking, al ereh be'mot ha-yelled, I don't want to look and see how the child dies. Va-tisa et kolah va-tevk, she raised her voice and wept. Suddenly, however, an angel appeared to her and said, mah lakh hagar, what is wrong with you, Hagar? Kumi, s'i et ha-naar va'hachaziki et yadekh bo, arise, lift up the lad, and hold him with your hand. And thereupon G-d opened her eyes and she realized that in front of her, all along, there had been a well, and so she went, filled the bottle at the well, and slaked the thirst of her child.

How well this incident describes, in symbolic terms, those Jews who have branded America a midbar, a spiritual desert or wasteland in which the living waters of Torah could never flow of themselves. They are the people who have tried to subsist on the little water in the bottles brought over from Poland or Lithuania, or those they think we can now painfully import, a bit at a time, from Israel. They are the people who remember the Jewish training they received in the homes of their immigrant or first-generation parents, who revel in it and delight in it, but are convinced that this kind of warm and vibrant Judaism can never be discovered in native America. And so they derided any attempt to dig wells here, to build yeshivot, to found Torah institutions, to teach their
children, in the bosom of the family, Shabbat and Kashrut. Instead
they hoarded the bit of mayim be'chemet until it ran out, and busied
themselves with all kinds of activities, business and social, so that
al erah be'mot ha-yelled, so that they not notice how their children's
souls are drying up, how their children are spiritually expiring.)
Talk to such people about the chances for Jewish life in this country --
not the ersatz Jewishness of a Chanukah ball and High Holidays in a
non-kosher hotel, of gala Bar Mitzvahs and plush, vulgar weddings,
but real, authentic Orthodox Judaism -- and, like Hagar, all they
can produce is a dirge and a sigh: va-tisa et kolah va-tevk.
Today, Rosh Hashanah, that same angel that appeared to Hagar, stands
here and speaks to the heart of each of us, of any of us who have
entertained such dreary thoughts: mah lakh, Hagar, what is wrong with
you that you have fallen into this Hagar-type thinking? Why have
you abandoned your children to an emptiness of the spirit, to the
nightmare of a life that has everything but a neshamah? Get up,
shake yourselves out of your lethargy and fruitless despair, hold
tight to your children, their hands in your hands, and lead them
not to a bottle of borrowed water, but to the well that stands in
front of you all these many years, ready to be tapped, ready to gush
forth the delightful, clear waters of a vital Jewish life. Don't
moan that New York is not Vilna, that Manhattan is not Warsaw. Open
your eyes and you will find the be'er, the well of Judaism, the
mekor mayim chayyim, in neighborhood schools, in yeshivot and Talmud
Torahs, in your synagogue -- if you attend it regularly -- and your
own homes. There is not a person here who cannot, given the will
and desire, find a well of Jewishness in his or her own home. No,
do not look upon your children as they suffer spiritual extinction, as they go farther and farther afield, as they ultimately seek to intermarry. But do not, like Hagar, abandon them merely because you do not want to look. Instead, taking the advice of the angel, open your eyes to the opportunities you have of digging a well of Jewishness in your own home and slake thirst. Do not try to survive on the waters of other wells you have saved up in a lone bottle. Dig your own wells. And live on as proud Jews.

And then, friends, there is the third and final category of misguided Jew. He is, likely as not, a member of our younger generation. He has not forgotten about the Fountain, or despair declaring it; because he simply has never heard of it. In some indirect way he has come to Judaism, but he does not even know it. But let me explain by referring to the second half of today's Torah reading.

Abraham had some disagreement with a local potentate, by the name of Avimelech. Ve'hokhiach Avraham et Avimelekh al odot ha-be'er asher gazlu avdei Avimelekh. Abraham reproved Avimelech because of the wells of water which the servants of Avimelech had stolen from him, from Abraham. This is indeed what has recurred in our days. The wells of Judaism have fed sparkling waters of idealism and nobility into the lands of the West, but little people, motivated by a combination of pettiness and ignorance, have stolen the wells and declared that the waters belong to them. The servants of Avimelech have taken away the wells of Abraham.
Let me illustrate this with something that has happened to me and, I suppose, to almost every other Rabbi. A young lady, away from home for the first time at an out-of-town college, comes home for vacation and her parents notice a change in her demeanor. Upon inquiry, she challenges them with the fact that she has little feeling left for Judaism and the synagogue, despite her intensive Sunday School education. And when she comes to me, brought by her worried parents, she begins to spell out her complaint. "Why," she says, "don't we Jews have anything as noble and beautiful as the Christians do, for instance the statement 'thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'?"

We ought not laugh but sympathize with this deluded typical youngster who does not realize that thirteen hundred years before the Common Era a voice issued from Sinai, recorded in the Third Book of Moses, that said ve'ahavta le'reiakh kamokha, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Novelists like Faulkner and journalists like Arthur Krock have made equally ignorant errors, attributing whole phrases and thoughts from the Chumash to the Christian gospels. The wells are the wells of Abraham -- but the little servants of Avimelech have stolen them and claimed them for their own.

One can give example upon example. There is the young man in his first flush of idealism who shuns the synagogue and Shabbat because he has discovered the secret of social idealism in the New Deal. Why doesn't Judaism speak about such things as Relief and Social Security? The poor boy does not realize that the
avdei Avimelech have been using the wells of Abraham, for in our Torah we were commanded to support the orphan, the widow, the stranger -- the laws of leket, shikechah and pa'ah. It is the fountain of Torah under a strange name. Is it old-age insurance and respect for the dignity of an older person? — return to the wells of Abraham: mi-pnei sevah takum, rise before the hoary head and reverence the face of the elderly. Peaceful coexistence was not invented by the servant of Avimelech known as Khruschev, though he doesn't really mean it. Amos spoke of every nation coming under the banner of its own God -- in peace. Social justice issued not from the wells of Rome, but from the Torah -- tzedek tzedek tirdof. The protection of the proletariat was not original with Marx. The Torah, the well of Abraham, issued the words, "thou shalt not oppress the laborer" and commanded us to pay him on time. The ideals of peace were not new with Woodrow Wilson, nor even with the founders of Christianity. The Torah commanded it, Isaiah preached it, Amos prophesied it. Perhaps if some of these lofty ideas and ideals, so attractive to our youth, were correctly labeled as Jewish, as the wells of Abraham instead of Avimelech, our newer generation would have a much healthier respect for the tradition of their forbears. Maybe if they knew of the tremendous stature of Jewish social and ethical teaching they might act with greater reference to Jewish ritual teaching, such as the dietary laws, the Sabbath observances, the holiday strictures. Ve'hokhiach Avarahm, it is time that we, the descendants of Abraham, accepted the reproof and called the wells by the names of their rightful owners. I do not maintain that all wisdom— including science and technology—comes from Judaism. But the greatest part of the ethical and moral verities of the West are...
To summarize, then, the theme of Malkhuyot, of G-d's kingship which is celebrated at the side of a brook or stream, reminds us first not to forget Him in constructing the city of life, for He is the Fountain of Living Waters; second, we must not try to live on borrowed resources, but tap the wells in our own homes and communities in our own America; finally, we ought to realize that a great deal of the moral and ethical wisdom of Western civilization is the result of Judaism and its direct effect.

Today, with the sounding of the Shofar and the declaration of G-d's Kingship, we are invited to take ourselves, and our families with us, and refresh ourselves and our souls with the sparkling waters of Torah as they issue from the Fountain of Life. U-she'avtem mayim be'sason mi-maynei ha-yeshuah. "And ye shall draw water in joy from the wells of salvation". Amen.
Let us continue our analysis and self-criticism to yet another class of American Jews, again drawing upon the metaphor of a fountain. G-d, according to Jeremiah, is not only a mekor mayyim, chayyim (fountain of water), but a mekor mayyim chayyim, a fountain of living waters. By this is meant that Judaism must be always treated as if it were ever new, ever refreshing, ever inspiring. It must never be for us like stale, stagnant water, but always like fresh, living water. For there are some people who for the major part of their lives rely upon the same body of religious knowledge, the same degree of religious observance that they had or practiced before, and who never progress from that point. Religion is, indeed, like water for them — but stagnated water. And there are two dangers in this stagnation. First, there is the danger of "using it up" and discovering that it no longer is sufficient to sustain you in your moment of need. Second, stale water cannot be an inspiration to your children. If your children are to remain as Jews, they must see something more thrilling and more exciting than the stale remnants of Judaism in order to motivate them. No wonder that the tashlikh must be performed at a body of running water!

Let me explain better by referring to the Torah reading of this morning. Hagar had been turned out of her home and into the desert with her infant son Ishamel. She brought along some water in her chemet or bottle. Soon the water ran out, and she cast the child beneath some shrubs, not wanting to witness his death pangs. She raised her voice and cried. Thereupon an angel appeared to her and said, mah lakh hagar, what is wrong with you, Hagar? Arise, take hold of the child with your hand and go to the well — for just then G-d had opened her eyes and she noticed that all along there had been a well before her. And this she did, and her child was saved.

All too many of us are like Hagar. We rely upon the little bit of water mercifully poured into the bottles of our souls whilst we were yet children.
and before we were turned out into the outside world which appeared to us like a desert or jungle. The little bit of knowledge we acquired in training for Bar Mitzvah, the minute amount of insight we gained in Hebrew School, the residual custom of going to "shul" only on High Holidays and on very special other occasions, a little bit of Kashrut, the gesture of Sabbath observance in the form of lighting the candles -- this is the water we carry around in the bottles of the heart. And we do not even bother to look for new wells in our lives, for opportunities to progress and grow spiritually, to increase our reserves and our reservoir. Soon, then, our water runs out,

va-yikhlu mayim min ha-chemet. We lose interest altogether. Nothing can inspire us any longer. The desert has won over us. Worse yet, as the water turns stale it fails to satisfy whatever we give of it to our children. They are not fooled by our empty gestures, and they are not moved by our urgings for them to remain within the fold. Our children have a natural, healthy thirst for the holy, the transcendent. They thirst for meaning, for the sublime, for the lofty. If all we can give them are a few drops of stale water that we still retain but which is utterly lacking in enthusiasm and wholesomeness, we are consigning them to spiritual extinction. We know it -- but we try not to look. Like Hagar, we keep busy with everything as long as we don't see what is inevitable. We concern ourselves with business, the children's food and clothing and social life. But that is all. And a young generation threatens to be stillborn, die of thirst for the word of God.

On this day, friends, the angel that appeared to Hagar speaks to us:

mah lakh hagar, what is wrong with us that we emulate that half-barabrac nomad woman? Go quickly, pick up your children, take them in hand, and dig new wells of inspiration and learning and practice right where you are, for there is the possibility for you to do so, and thereby to draw upon the life-giving waters of Judaism that lie waiting to be tapped. Advance your own education, give your family the charm and beauty of a Shabbat table, attend "shul" regularly -- give your family living waters from the Well, not stale drops.
The late Rav Kook, of blessed memory, saw in this rather strange Aggadah the fundamental difference between Jew and non-Jew in their whole grasp of religion, in the very structure and form of religion. There is no doubt, he maintains, that if G-d would ask of the umot ha-olam to stand erect, or kneel, in prayer for 24 hours, and subject them to the same burning midday sun, that they would not move. Their piety and religious integrity would inspire them to resist all discomforts for the sake of their genuinely held beliefs. For the non-Jewish mind can understand and approve the expression of the spirit in terms of worship, prayer, a service. The proper, rational, natural form of religious devotion is the prayerful mood of hushed reverence in the atmosphere of the cathedral. What the Gentile cannot accept, however, is the Jewish expression of religion in terms of mitzvot maasiyot, in the regimen of practical observances. How can eating and drinking and sleeping in a weak-walled booth, unprotected from the elements, with pieces of sekhakh falling into your food -- how can this be equated with true religion?

Religion, to the Gentile, is largely a psychological phenomenon: the experience of conversation, the feelings of sacredness, what Rudolf Otto calls the awareness of the "numinous." To the Jew, however, religion is expressed by objective deeds more than by subjective moods, by a practical program of holiness that transcends the narrow confines of the synagogue and that permeates all of life. And the sukkah is an excellent example of this essential Jewish attitude.

The non-Jewish world has rarely understood or sympathized with our concept of an observance-centered religion. The Christians therefore twisted the word "Pharisaism" into an epithet of derision and scorn. Secularists, contemplating our Shabbat and Kashruth and Taharat Ha-mishpachah, decided that we were practicing a hide-bound traditionalism, that we were irrationally compulsive, that we suffered from a mass psychological aberration with our
taboos in some cases harking back to the primitive notions of the cave man.

Little did they or do they understand that our mitzvot maasiyot, far from being a collective meshugaat, are the means towards true spiritual eminence, that only through such observances can a people in its entirety aspire to become a kehillah kedoshah, a saintly community. In the Jewish sukkah you may risk a few pieces of sekhakh falling down, but there is also the opportunity for many souls to rise up.

A great non-Jew, one of the few who understood us properly, defined the differences in a very concise manner. John Macmurray, in his A Clue to History, says that whereas other peoples have a religion, Jews are the only ones who were and are religious, for their religion is not confined to a few holy times and holy places, but is a synthesis of all and covers all aspects of existence, both individual and collective. This indeed is the achievement of mitzvot maasiyot such as the sukkah: it provides that not only do we have a religion, but that we be religious in every expression of life and personality.

If we have a religion, then religion is a part of existence and G-d, too, plays a role in life. If we are religious, then religion is all of existence, and G-d is not only another actor, but the producer and director of the drama: the Borei and the Mekayem of all that is.

If we have a religion, then we ultimately begin to think that we discovered G-d, and therefore our prayer degenerates into the presentation of Him of a list of needs which we ask Him to satisfy for us as our Cosmic Servant. If, however, we are religious, then we recognize that it is G-d Who discovered us -- am matzati be-midbar -- and then we become His servants, not only through the formal act of acknowledgement in prayer but throughout all of life in the form of the practical mitzvot.
If we only have religion, then it is important to us what we think of G-d. But if we are religious, then far more important to us is what G-d thinks of us.

He who has a religion may write theology books to ascertain what man believes about G-d. He who is religious reads the Torah to learn what G-d believes about man.

The Torah reading for this morning tells of the epilogue to the story of the national disaster of the worship of the Golden Calf. I believe that a most significant aspect of this historic sin, aside from the essential act of idolatry, was the transformation from a Jewish to a non-Jewish concept of religion, from a people who were religious to a people who now merely have a religion. It was immediately after the Children of Israel fashioned the Golden Calf that we read, va-yashkimu mi-macharat va-yaalu olot va-yagishu shelamim, bright and early the next morning they brought sacrifices to the Calf, worshipped it, prayed — and were done with their religious duties! For, abruptly thereafter, va-yeshev ha-am le'echol ve'shato, the people sat down to eat and drink. Their religion was finished, the cult was practiced, now they were free from it and could enjoy the profane pleasures of life without interference. They forgot what Moses had taught them — that religion is all of life, that the world of the spirit is affected even by what and how you eat, by how much you drink, by the blessing before you indulge and the bentchon afterwards. They forgot this, and no wonder that in the same breath, as it were, the Torah informs us that va-yakumu ha-am le'tzachek, the people arose to make sport — which our Rabbis correctly interpret as meaning the indulgence in idolatry, sexual immorality, and bloodshed. For if religion has no bearing on such mundane matters as diet, as kashruth and sukkah, then it has no bearing on morality and the value of life.
How well we can therefore understand the prayer of Moses after this act of treachery. We read it this morning, and recited it numerous times during the High Holidays: after pleading ve'salachta la-avonenu u-le'chatotenu, forgive us our sins and our transgressions, Moses adds one significant word: u-nechaltanu. What does that mean? A few commentators (Yonatehn ben Uziel, and Rashi in another version) translate: "and give us an inheritance." But most commentators, and they represent the genuine Jewish spirit, say with Rahl: ve'titnenu lekha nachalah, make us Thy inheritance, we want to become your nachalah, your very own possession. How aptly the Torah captures the Jewish philosophy of religion in one word! We do not have a religion because we have a G-d; we are religious because G-d has us, because we are His inheritance!

If u-nechaltanu, then it is not enough merely to worship, no matter how sincerely, at certain times and in certain places. It is our duty to carry out His will everywhere and at all times, by means of the practical commandments — of which sukkah is an example par excellence — and thus sublimate all of life to the highest levels of spiritual exaltedness.

When Jews reject what the sukkah stands for and adopt the non-Jewish approach, then they can at most have a religion, and write books boasting that the Jews gave G-d to the world. When they are genuinely Jewish, and regard themselves as a divine nachalah, they will so live that G-d will be able to boast that He gave the Jews to the world. When we assimilate the gentile forms of religion, then religion as such becomes a part of culture, even an aspect of Jewish nationalism. But when we are truly religious in the Jewish sense, both culture and nationalism are part of Torah. At most, he who has a religion will, like the Philosophers, try to grasp G-d. He who is Jewishly religious will, like the Prophets, feel grasped by G-d. Dr. Yisrael Eldad put it this way: the philosophers, as the word itself indicates, are "lovers of wisdom." The Prophets, however, were wise in the ways of love.
What should u-nechalatanu mean to us? What are the consequences of considering yourself an inheritance of the Lord?

He who is a nachalah of G-d will always act in a manner calculated not to embarrass G-d or those who bear His image — all our fellow-men. He will eat and drink like a human, not like an animal or a pagan. He will give primacy to Torah above all else. He will give generously and charitably, because he recognizes that all he has truly belongs to G-d. Nay, more than that: he will give happily and without complaining and grumbling because he acknowledges that not only what he has but also what he is stems from G-d: u-nechalatanu. This is the teaching of Torah: al yera levevekha betitekha. The Jew who considers himself nachalah will perform the mitzvot with joy, not in a begrudging way, for he is thus expressing his whole purpose in life.

Let us conclude our remarks in the same way Solomon concluded his Kohellet which we read this morning:

Sof davar ha-kol nishma: the end of the matter, after all is said and done, is this: et ha-Elokim yera, fear God; like all other religions, Judaism partakes of the universal expression of religion in the reverence of the synagogue, the awe of the divine Presence, the prayerful attitude and stance. But more than that: et mitzvotav shemor -- observe His commandments. It is not enough to have a religion; you must be religious, by observing the mitzvot maasiyot such as sukkah and pesach, tefillin and tzitzit, kashrut and shabbat.

Then, and only then, when Torah will, through the mitzvot, have permeated all of life, when we will have acted as a true nachalah of the Almighty, will we appreciate ki zeh kol ha-adam, that this is all of man. When we will have consecrated all that makes us adam, human, will we indeed be completely human, children of G-d created in His image. Then we shall return to Him "with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy might."