

Hebrew is often a most ambiguous language.

The opening words of tonight's torah-
portion are : Aleh toldot yizhak.

~~Some translations~~

The tra nslations have trouble with those
simple words.

"These are the generations of Isaac"

"These are the progeny of Isaac"

"This is the story of Isaac."

"These are the descendants of Isaac"

All of this to put into English the
single word: "Toledot".

That word comes from a Hebrew root which
means to give birth. But it is a plural.

So you might say that ^{each} ~~all the~~ translations
~~have~~ ^{has} something to commend ~~them~~ it. And,

taken together, all are a way of conveying
~~on~~ ^{an} idea. That idea is an ;important one.

It is that the times are the people and
the people are the times. Our generation
shapes us and we shape our generation.
The times are the people and the people
are the times.

Carlyle treated the theme from the individual point of view. But, in truth, we do not know just how much of our characters are shaped by the times in which we live. ~~Now~~ Nor do we know just how much of the character of our age is determined by our own individual behavior.

Most of us can remember when at least we thought that one or two individuals through their own personalities, their goals exerted immense influence on the shape of their times.

Was Hitler really responsible in the true sense for the horrors of Nazism? Was Roosevelt really the sole architect of recovery from the Great Depression? Was Churchill rallying voice and dogged determinism really responsible for the survival of Britain and finally for the victory of the democracies? It may be convenient to think so. But is it *true*?

How real is it to assume that one man--
or woman or, for that matter, child can
assure the character of tomorrow's time for
a nation, a society or a family?

But that is what we have been saying.

Aside from the stupidities of the
electoral campaign which would make an
intelligent monkey blush with shame
(if monkeys could blush), the principals
and their cohorts regaled us with the
incessant theme song of "Promises, Promises."
So extravagant were the claims of ability
~~xx~~ to effect the solutions to the most
complex world wide problems ~~xxx~~ that
an observer of our global turmoil would
~~xx~~ think not that we were electing a mere
President of the United States but ~~x~~
the long awaited Messiah himself.

Having said that we are forced to reflect
~~that~~ this week is a pivotal one in ~~xxxxx~~
American History. We have elected an
American President --we hope for the best.
And it was one year ago that our fellow
American citizens were taken hostage in Iran.

The first event is the most modern, enlightened social process in the long history of mankind. Whether one is happy with the elected president or not, we can take pride in a civilized process.

The other event: the hostages and their detention from home and freedom is a disgrace to any people. It is a throwback to medieval times with which we Jews, at any rate, are well familiar. We are not new to the redemption of hostages. ~~We were~~ ^{we were} for centuries prime targets of such callousness and madness.

The president will not be able to fulfill even a scintilla of his promises-- even if he thinks he can. But we had best take the will for the deed. *and help where we can.*

The hostages -- free or not and, curiously, like the president are not exactly masters of their destiny. Their role in shaping our times was involuntary but nevertheless like many of the woes all of us endure do demand self-discipline, trust and even heroism. They have given ~~it~~ ^{these virtues} (or ~~a~~ in strict truth had such ~~taken~~ ^{from them}

elicited from them) and in so doing brought to our nation and to all of us a sense of pride. I hope we deserve it. We cannot help but be the better for it. The times are the people and the people are the times.

I will dare to say that none of us could have found the way to extricate the hostages from their ~~xxx~~ imprisonment without overwhelming risk, penalty and danger for them and our nation.

Weighing that risk will be easy in hindsight but which of us will easily or ethically offer other people's lives for ours? Warfare is ~~horrible~~ ^{of human lives} enough but selective exchange is sheer tragedy.

Tonight we ought pay ~~x~~ tribute to the people who make our times.

To the newly elected president who will quickly discover that he too is a hostage.

And to the ~~hostage~~ hostages whom we pray will be able to find, to the end of their days, that what they endured was worth while in the cause of liberty and helped to

shape our times ~~for~~ toward decency and peace.

Of course, Judaism has something classic to say of all of this.

Judaism declares that individual decision is an ultimate value.

"Do not follow after a multitude to do evil."

"And in the place where there are no men, try to act like a man."

(?That means, of course, to act ~~like~~
~~like~~ the part of a moral human being)

~~People are our times~~

People are our times and our times are people. We are people. We, each of us, can and must stand up for right.

That's the only honor we can give to our new president and to our hostages and, then, we have honored ourselves.

Prayer for our Country and Our Countrymen

Nov 7 - 1950

This night , O God, we give you thanks
for safety and security of our nation.

Here our worship knows nothing of fear;
our gathering nothing of threat.

We remember with pain how so many of our
fellow Jews reached for the warmth and
beauty of Shabbat with hands clamped in
chains and bodies wracked with hunger.

Our Shabbat is ~~part~~ the spirit of our
Land.

Our Land is the Shabbat of the nations.

Help us, O God, to feel at one with those
of our fellow Americans far from the
embrace of their families, blind to the
smiles of their children, deaf to the
voices of those they love. May we and
they soon rejoice together in thier
homecoming in ~~an~~ whol3ness of mind and
spirit.

Above all, Father of us all, make us ever
consci3us of what the year of ^{their} imprisonment
has taught us all. Never for a fleeting
moment let us be unaware of our blessings
here but ~~let~~ may even the flaws of our
country be seen as human frailties still
subject to our ability to erase them.

Give peace of mind to our President
that he conclude his administration
with the dignity and honor he deserves.

And to our President elect, our choice
in freedom, grant discretion and valor,
wisdom and strength to carry on the
American dream of nation to be glorified
in the pursuit of peace in all the world.

Bless us , the governed and the governing,
the led and the leaders, -bless us and
may we be a blessing.

