

## THE ACTIVISM OF YOUTH - 1969

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“The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” “But everyone shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.” Both of these Biblical quotations come from the Book of Jeremiah; both represent the realistic wisdom of Judaism when speaking of the relationship and influence between generations; the sins and inadequacies of the fathers do affect the children; yet the sins of the fathers, like those of the children, blight the individual who commits the deed and not those who follow him. Both quotations speak truth about the relation between the generations today. In this paradox, in this seeming polarization, we need to find the point of balance.

Youth activism and unrest is world-wide and often justly critical of much that is wrong today. A Stanford University conference about today’s student militants while largely oriented to United States problems, offered insights often applicable to other countries as well. Some of the lecturers criticized activists for impatience with democratic processes, but most showed sympathy and understanding for the students and their positions. Speakers stated that the students are angry because of what they see and interpret as the present failures and cruelties of society. They score and oppose: the war and violence in Vietnam; the slowness to accept the legal and human equality of Black Americans; the tendency to meet protesters with swinging clubs; the lapses in an economic system in which they believe efficiency comes first and people second; the failures of liberalism in which the intellectual of 30 years ago becomes part of “the establishment,” defensive of it and critical of those who now would change it.

It was noted that students are also angry at what they consider the failures of universities; their insensitivities to student involvement in choice of study, development of programs, opportunities for genuine intellectual and human contact with professors, and the frequent identification of the university with what they consider the failing programs of government and business. Yet many of the speakers of the Stanford Conference, while recognizing the dangers of intense student anger and youth discontent, nevertheless suggested that much of it may not damage mankind but actually cleanse it. They emphasized that the activism and identification of youth with the need for change springs from deep wells of idealism, from religious impulses, from a search for the sacred. One of the reasons for the impatience of youth, it was said, might be an unconscious faith in the democratic process—a deep belief that men can indeed do anything which they really wish to undertake.

The moral commitment of youth to help to create a better world is to be highly valued. Nor is this moral concern in any way to be denigrated because youth, like age, faced with today’s extraordinary complexities, cannot offer final solutions. It well behooves men neither to reject the legitimate criticisms of young adults because of their lack of experience, nor to join in their advocacy of violent destruction of present systems and institutions as the only road to improvement. Rather it must be the task of the generations, the responsibility of both youth and maturity, to stimulate and regenerate each other’s idealism; to energize each other’s effort to develop together sound programs to improve society at every level; to intermingle the experience of age with the aspiration of youth toward mutually desired goals.

It is no abrogation of the foregoing to register again our stand against violence and violent methods for the achievement of ends, however valid, since violence begets violence. We make this statement even as we recognize that only a relatively small percent of youth is involved in violent protest and that the great majority of young people express their dissent, no matter how strongly felt, in forms consistent with the principles of democratic society. The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, in Convention assembled in Miami Beach, Florida, in October 1969, once more asserts, as it has done in the past, that it respects the right to dissent but it

can never condone anti-democratic means which run counter to expressed ends. We take our stand for the free, non-violent expression and cooperation of all generations in dedication to an open, integrated society of equal opportunity for all.

Therefore, to the end that “old men shall dream dreams, and young men shall see visions,” let this Biennial Assembly affirm:

1. It is a difficult task to distinguish between those who are sincerely critical and those who are bent on destruction, but it is necessary to seek with patience and humility, with study and objective self-scrutiny, this distinction.
2. The voice of youth should be heard both within and without our religious institutions. They should sit in their own right on congregational and communal Boards and Committees and should be invited to participate actively in programs dealing with their concerns. Thus they may present their own viewpoint, as they speak directly to us rather than our listening only to others who speak for or about them. Therefore, we pledge the influence of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods for—and call upon our affiliates to encourage—such participation.
3. Both youth and adults should join in the responsibility to live and to transmit the values and ethics of Judaism. To this end we must commit ourselves in our homes, in our congregations, in our Sisterhoods, in our communities, to study and to work that may bring closer together the realities of religious idealism and the actions of individuals and society.

The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods believes that these affirmations may be a bridge between the generations resulting in a creative synthesis of “old men’s dreams and young men’s visions.”