

Auxilliary Services

The Jewish Center

"THE WAY OF HONOR"

Yom Kippur is one of the strangest, most fascinating days of the Jewish calendar. It is a great paradox, composed of two contradictory moods. On the one hand it is Yom Tzom - a fast day, solemn and somber. On the other hand it is Yom Tov - a festival, happy and joyous. On the one hand it is the great and awful Yom ha-din, in which judgment is handed down on individuals, ^{on} ~~our~~ nation, and the entire world, a day symbolized by the kittel, reminiscent of the shroud which marked ^s the inevitable and of arrogant, mortal man. On the other hand, it is a day when we affirm life, proclaiming zakhrenu le'chayim, - "remember us unto life," when we recite the blessing she'hecheyanu ve'kiymanu ve'higyanu la-zeman ha-zeh - a blessing reserved for only the happiest occasion. It is Yom Kippurim, when we ask forgiveness for our overwhelming, crushing guilt; and, as some commentaries put it, Yom ke-Purim - a day as joyous and heartwarming as Purim.

All through this day which we now commence you will find this clash of opposing moods, of conflicting ^{themes} ~~scenes~~. After our confession we recite two passages that reflect this paradox. First we shall say Elokai, ad she'lo notzarti eini kedai - "Oh my G-d, before I was born I was unworthy; now that I am born, it is as if I were yet unborn." We emphasize the worthlessness of man's life, the vanity of his foolish illusion. Yet right afterwards we begin another prayer, the first word ^{ch} of which is also Elokai - "Oh my G-d." We say Elokai, netzor leshoni me-ra...petach libi be'toratekha v'acharei mitzvotekha tirdof nafshi. Oh my G-d, teach me to be big enough to be silent when I am ^m ~~s~~creamed by small men, when petty people aim their shaft ^s at me. Give me a sterling character. Open my heart to the glories of Thy Torah, and let me behold the majesty of Thy

Mitzvot so that I might pursue them. What a difference! In one prayer we come to Elokai because we are nothing, in the other because we can become something. In one - because we are worthless, in the other because we can yet be worthy. In one - because life is just awful, in the other because G-d is awesome. In one we follow the trend of U-ve'khen ten pachdekha...al kol maasekha, v'ematekha al mah she'barata - we speak of the fear and the terror that the presence of G-d blankets over humanity. We are caught up in trembling and anxiety. And the second represents the trend expressed in the prayer U-ve'khen ten kavod - we ask G-d to show us His glory and His honor, and instead of pachad and emah, fear and fright, we speak of kavod and tehillah and tikvah - honor and praise, perfection and holiness.

Both these elements are integral parts of Judaism. Turn ^{ing} to G-d because of horror, and turning to him because of honor - both are respectable parts of Yom Kippur. The question is: which ought we choose for ourselves? What does Torah urge upon us? Is there any difference which way I come to G-d, why I am in the synagogue tonight?

I believe there is a very definite difference. I believe it is a difference that will ultimately determine the meaning of your life and my life, as well as the complexion of the Jewish community for a long time to come.

This answer is not something I discovered. It was in issue a long time ago, and the Torah - the depository of the divine wisdom revealed to our race - has ^{hinted at it} ~~interadded~~ indirectly. It has to do with a tender ^e scene between husband and wife in a somber, tragic setting.

In one of the most touching scenes recorded in all the Bible, we find our Mother Rachel on her death bed. Here she was, a young woman in the prime of life, destined to die ~~in child birth~~ as she gave birth to her second

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child. And something ^{remarkable} ~~very strange~~ happened. She ^{is} ~~has~~ shown the child, and she says: let him be called Ben-Oni. And next to her bed stands her husband Jacob and he says, "No, his name shall not be Ben-Oni. His name shall be Ben-Yamin." How strange! Here is Jacob who loves his wife so dearly that he slaved for her as a ^{Shepherd} ~~shepherd~~ for fourteen long years to win her hand - and he turns down her death-bed wish!

What really happened? Just imagine ^{that you were} present at that scene. Rachel, young, beautiful and ~~dying~~, sees her child brought before her.

Bitterness and resentment well up in her heart. Why must I die now?

Who is going to wake up in the middle of the night, my child, to ~~see~~ care for you? Strange hands are going to clothe and comfort you in the wee hours

of the cold morning. Another heart will beat with delight at your

happiness and success, and weep with you ⁱⁿ ~~when~~ your moments of failure

and frustration. Someone else's hands shall rock your cradle and raise you from infancy to manhood. And you, my child, will grow up never knowing who your mother was. ~~You are a handsome baby. May your fortune be as~~

~~handsome~~. What of the long years ahead of you, will you ever remember that your life was brought into the world at the cost of mine? - That you had

a mother who 'ere you were born dreamed great dreams for you and loved you with a tender ^{and} great love? Therefore let your name be Ben-Oni, the son

of my misery and bitterness. For if you will not remember me in the time of happiness and ^{triumph} success, at least in the time when you will feel crushed, as if life weighs upon you like a great burden, when you will feel the

sharp edge of life's grief and tragedies, then you will remember your

mother, and then I will pray to Almighty G-d for you. When my children's

children's children will pass by this place as exiles from their homeland -- a

^{later described the same at Ramah,}
they will stop here at my grave and I will weep for them, for my Ben-Oni,

the children of my grief and my tragedy. Ben-Oni!

But then her loving, devoted husband Jacob turned to her and said, "No, my dearest wife. Your tragedy hurts me deeply enough - no man can ever measure it. But don't call that child the son of your affliction. No, Rachel dear. Do not let him go through life as the sort of person who will remember his past, his mother, his tradition, his G-d - only during the time of ond, only when misery will shrink his heart, and grief oppress his soul. Let him not be the sort of man who will turn to the sacred memories of ~~his~~ ^{the} past and the holy promises for the future only ~~by~~ ^{when} contemplating the horror, and the terror, and ^{the} anxieties of life. Call him rather Ben-Yamin - the son of your right hand. Let him be the ~~sort~~ ^{kind} of child who will remember his mother not only in trouble, in toil, and in ~~poverty~~, but also in times of happiness and ex^ultation; ~~not~~ ^{not} only in moments of illness, need, and death, but also at a Bar Mitzvah and a wedding. Let him turn in gratitude to the woman who gave his life when he appreciated life and when life smiles at him, when he is charmed by the delight of G-d's good and gracious world. For this, my dear Rachel, is the way of honor, not the way of horror. Ben-Yamin - the son of our right hand!

Here, my friends, is the ~~example~~ ^{two} of the ~~true~~ conflicting trends of Yom Kippur and the choice that Jacob made and that the Torah confirmed: between Ben-Oni, turning to G-d because of misery and affliction, or Ben-Yamin, because of majesty and graciousness, the way of honor lies

with Ben-Yamin, the way of honor. Both kinds of people are Jewish children; but Ben-Yamin is a true Jewish way, the way of Jewish nobility, the way of Jewish permanence and perpetuation.

For if one comes to the synagogue and true Judaism because of Ben-Oni, because of pached and emah, because of the fear of death symbolized by kittel and the feelings of worthlessness, then in the moments of satisfaction and peace, of health and success, ~~you~~ ^{he} forgets G-d, ignores his Torah, disregards His law. There is only so much a man can take

in contemplating evil and tragedy and pain, after ~~a~~ while he can no longer bear it and so he closes his eyes - and blinds himself to the vision of the Ribbono shel Olam -. Most of those ^{- though not all -} who come to the synagogue because of kaddish - leave after the year of mourning has ended. Those who come because of kedushah, because of a quest for purpose in life, a search for the sacred and the ennobling - they remain, and they are happy for their chose was Ben-Yamin and not Ben-Oni.

Our world today - complex and complicated as it is - offers us both alternatives. Either one can bring us ^{to} the Ribbono shel Olam. One way is - Ben-Oni, the frightening and confusing elements of our society, ^{for we} are tottering on the brink of atomic catastrophe; our exposure to the fallout from nuclear bombs and the fear of cancer and leukemia and one-hundred other diseases that come in ^{its} wake; the constant neurotic tensions of the cold wars about us; the unforgettable horrible face of an Eichmann ^{of} the television screen and the incredible hair-raising story ^{is} told by the victims who escaped - ^{not} especially the awareness that this is not a unique creature but a normal petty beurocrat who can be turned into an arch sadist, and that therefore it can happen again; the feeling that if a new world is being born, then - as with Rachel's child - it is being born in a death-bed, and who knows if it is worth it. Ben-Oni! There is no place to turn and so we rush, willingly or unwillingly, into our Father's arms. "I came back, ~~★~~ Dad, not because I really wanted to. But I tried to run away and ~~because~~ became frightened. I ran out of money. I'm cold. I'm hungry. I'm sick. Here I am, Dad." So does the Ben-Oni address himself to Avinu She'ba-shamayin, our Father in Heaven.

But this is not the worthy way. This can lead to Judaism, but it ~~does~~ not the way of honor, ^{the one} that Torah recommends. If you are a prodigal son, ^{is} who

Returned not because you could not face the outside world, but because you

remember the loveliness of your parents home. Come not because of the fear of death, but because of the love of true life. Come because you contemplated the kavod and tehillah and tikvah - the glory of G-d, the praise of men who devote their lives to peace, the hope that as long as there are men of 85 years old who are willing to go to jail for their convictions on behalf of peace and sanity, that our world can still be redeemed. Come because of the miracle that with all the weapons of destruction at our command, our world has not yet committed collective suicide; that G-d has given us wisdom, through science, to discover new immunities against polio and measles; that there were some few, solitary people, here and there, who were able to raise a ^{staying} ~~stained~~ hand against the ~~sadism~~ ^{stateism} of the Nazis; the fact that out of the ashes of Treblinka and Buchenwald, there rose a State of Israel, even as Benjamin was a child who transformed the tragedy of Rachel's early death into the glory of her eternal posterity; the fact that there is nothing as warm and charming as the Shabbat table we ~~yet~~ knew in our parents' home and shall ^{yet} have in our own and in our children; nothing as thrilling as a child coming home with the discovery of Jewish knowledge, nothing as satisfying as beginning every day with words of prayer. Ben-Mamin means that instead of running back to G-d and synagogue because all our other dreams have been dashed and crushed and transformed to nightmares, we return because that itself is our most precious and beautiful dream. We are in the synagogue tonight not because we are like spoiled children who did not succeed in running away, but because we are loyal children who are glad to be back in our Father's home.

We of the American Jewish community have an unprecedented and unparalleled opportunity to express our allegiance to Almighty G-d in the form of Ben-Mamin. Never before has a Jewish community so enjoyed the benefits of life, the gift of security, freedom from ^{programs} ~~the drums~~. Thank Heaven we need

no Freedom Riders to desegregate us. We are financially secure - our greatest worry is whether we can afford a luxurious vacation, not whether we shall be able to afford ^{a piece of} bread for our children. With these great opportunities let us not wait until, Heaven forbid, anxiety and tragedy drive us into the synagogue. Let us, rather, turn to G-d out of gratitude, in health, in prosperity, in satisfaction and fullfillment.

My dear friends, the Jewish Center is dedicated to the principle of Ben-Yamin . Our purpose is to present to our community, and especially our youth, the face of honor and happiness as a way to Torah and G-d. We prefer that our approach to Judaism come not through the solemnity of the shroud, and the Kittel, but through ^{gladness +} ~~the weapon of~~ joy. Indeed we have provided for you, men and woman ^e of our community, a lovely synagogue for the first time redecorated and air-conditioned, so that together we can thank G-d she'hecheyanu ve'kiymanu ve'higivanu la-zeman ha-zeh - that we can together usher in this New Year in happiness, in loveliness, in pleasantness.

Our synagogue makes every effort to accomodate the community. Our youth program, our school which we support so heavily, the availability of our officials for whatever purpose you may call upon them - these are the ways of honor with which we wish to ~~serve~~ serve. But for this we must have your assistance...

Notes on ~~LET THERE BE LIGHT~~ "FOUNTAIN OF LIFE" *****

This Sermon was given AT AUXILLIARY SERVICE during R.H.I, 1961. It was superb, just excellent, and can and OUGHT ~~TO~~ BE ~~BE~~ GIVEN AT MAIN SERVICE ON

R.H. II, 1962 i.y.h.

which is a Sunday, using the idea of TASHLIKH that afternoon as the timely element.