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"HOPE TO G-D"

This is a year of hope. Internationally, the clouds that have darkened our world horizons have cautiously begun to part. The cold atmosphere of the past ten years has slowly but perceptibly begun to warm up. Medically, we have thrilled to the news of the great strides in preventive medicine which promise to eliminate one of man's most dreaded childhood diseases and ensure hope for thousands of as yet unborn human beings. Religiously, the growing return to tradition, whatever its motivation, and the increased growth of schools teaching maximal Judaism are a good, welcome and hopeful omen for the future.

Yet so frequent have been our disappointments in the past, and so painful our disillusionments, that we moderns have found ourselves almost incapable of hope, almost afraid to hope. Our fondest and most cherished hopes have been dashed to splinters of frustration so often, that we no longer dare to hope. Perhaps Geneva is just another diplomatic maneuver. Perhaps the vaccine will not ultimately work out, or other and more terrible diseases will appear. Perhaps the return to Religion is only a passing fad.

Well, is hope justifiable? Do we, who have flocked to this holy place on this holy day, have the right to hope? Dare we hope?

The answer of Judaism is expressed in one verse, the crowning conclusion of the Penitential Psalm, composed by King David and recited twice daily by Jews the world over during this High Holiday season: KAVEI EL HA'SHEM, CHAZAK VE'YA'AMEITZ LIBECHA VE'KAVEI EL HA'SHEM, Hope to G-d, be strong and have courage of heart - and hope to G-d.

Remember the circumstances under which this statement was ~~first~~ written & recited.
 This is a Declaration of Hope first uttered by the Shepherd King of Israel while hiding out in a cave, hunted like a wild animal by the sick King Saul, not knowing if he would ever again see the light of day. It is an Affirmation of Hope prayerfully chanted by David as his own son Absalom came at him with sword in hand and hatred in heart. It is an Ode to Hope sung by the penitent King as the Prophet Nathan chastised him for his sin

and warned of the wrath of G-d at his dealings with Uriah and Bathsheba. It is a glorification of Hope which beat in his weakening heart even as he lay on his death-bed, informed that there was no peace amongst his children, and that already they were dividing his estate, anxiously waiting for his last breath and contesting the division with bitterness, forgetting they ever had a father. Even at such times, when it is so tempting to despair and give up, David would say, KAVEI...Hope to G-d, be strong and have courage of heart and hope to G-d.

So you see that the answer of Judaism is clear and unequivocal. KAVEI - there is hope. That is the most comforting and glorious message Judaism offers us on this Holy Day.

I dare say there is no man or woman here today who has no need of hope. Behind your healthy and happy faces there is some kind of desperate, anxious yearning. As human beings, we are caught in the complexities that are the web of life. We have each his problems, and to us they are big, even overwhelming, no matter how they appear to others. We approach our G-d humble and lowly in spirit. Someone here may be undergoing an acute financial crisis, wondering whether he will ever be able to face his creditors and meet his household obligations. Another may be deeply worried about how to guide a good-natured but stumbling, wayward child who doesn't know what he wants ~~out~~ from life. Perhaps there is in this synagogue now a couple ~~was~~ burdened with domestic, marital problems. What a tragedy when one begins to notice his marriage crumbling, or even feels the first draughts of coldness and distance chill the warmth of a happy home. There are here today elderly people who feel they have so little to look forward to, dreading a future in which they must turn to their children for help. Some here are laden with grief and miserable in their loneliness as they miss a dear husband or wife or parent or child. There is sickness that threatens, which perhaps no one else knows about yet. There is the plain boredom with the drudgery of everyday existence. There is doubt and worry and perplexity of every kind and shade. To you - nay, to us - Judaism says, first of all, KAVEI - hope! There is indeed something to hope for, for help comes from the most unexpected sources. KAVEI - hope!

He who has seen a sick man recover from near-death knows there is hope. He who has seen a shambles of a people build a state about a hymn called HATIKVAH - the Hope - knows

that it is real and ever-present. He who has seen people of broken spirit and sick mind recover and regain happiness and stability believes the truth of KAVEI. He who has seen whole areas rally from the ravages of flood and disease knows Hope is not a lie. He who has seen a helpless, introverted infant grow in the short space of $2\frac{1}{2}$ months into a smiling, responsive and learning child knows that KAVEI - one can hope for more, for Hope is the Vitamin ~~H~~ of life. I tell you, each and every one of you, that in your particular predicament, whatever it might be, there is still is hope. And not because I say so, but because the Torah says so - KAVEI, hope.

* The second great fact about hope ~~is~~: KAVEI EL HA'SHEM, Hope to G-d. That is, the only true source of hope, the only justifiable, redeemable and meaningful hope, is that which comes from trust in G-d.

Chassidim tell of the Chassid who was terribly ill with a dangerous disease and who came to R. Mordecai of Nishchiz for advice and blessing. The Rabbi instructed the poor Chassid to take off immediately for the town of Anipoli and there see the Professor. When the Chassid arrived - tired, sick and broke - he found a tiny hamlet with no professor and no doctor, not even a nurse. Upon his return he complained sobbingly to the Rabbi, who said, "if so, what does one do if, Heaven forbid, he gets very sick in Anipoli?" Answered the Chassid, "What can he do, nebech? I suppose he has no choice but to rely on G-d and hope for the best." "Ah," replied the great Rabbi, "That is the great Professor of Anipoli I spoke to you of. He who heals the sick and miserable and poor of Anipoli and a thousand other such hamlets will heal you if you have faith, and hope to Him."

Certainly, that is a prime requisite in the Jewish teaching of hope: KAVEI EL HA'SHEM, hope to G-d. The greatest Prof. of Medicine is G-d - ANI HA'SHEM ROFECHA. The greatest Diplomat and Maker of Peace is G-d - OSEH SHALOM BIMROMAV. The greatest Supplier of Food is G-d - ZAN UMFARNEISS LAKOL. The greatest Psychiatrist and Consoler of the Greivous is G-d - ANOCHI ANOCHI HU MENACHEM SHEM. Hope without Faith is just a wild guess. Hope without Religion is just foolish optimism. Hope without Torah is a dangerously misplaced confidence. Hope without G-d is just a false, pagan superstition.

* But merely to recommend Hope is a piece of grossly harmful advice. Anyone can give such a suggestion. The beauty of the Torah's counsel is that it tells us where to find that Hope we seek. And that is where the profound advice is.

We Jews have always prayed ME'OLAM KIVINU LECHA - ME'OLAM means not only "forever," thus "forever we hope to Thee", but it also means, literally, "of all the world." It means that to place our hope in G-d we must not place it in anything else or anyone else in the world. And has not the violation of that principle been the sin of the modern world? We Americans placed our hopes in the invulnerability provided us by two great ^{mighty-sounding} oceans and in ~~A legal document, founding the League of Nations~~ - and we had World War I. We trusted the word of a mad, demonic dictator in Munich - and we had World War II. We placed our hopes thereafter in the goodness of the Russian bear - and we have a Cold War. We hoped a Bevin would keep his word - and almost lost the State of Israel. We place our complete, absolute and undivided hopes in Science, in Psychiatry, in an economic theory, ^{political system} in a ~~party~~, in an individual, in all the idols of our day. No wonder we are an apprehensive, ^{who are afraid to hope!} frustrated, disappointed people! We have naively entrusted our most sacred hopes to every idea, movement and agency - evry, but G-d!

The same holds, ~~is~~ true, only more so, for our hopes for Judaism. There is no man or woman here who does not want to see Judaism live on and thrive, his children live by it and marry in it. But let us remember: KAVEI EL HA'SHEM. Hope, especially for Jews, lies only in G-d. Not in Jewish country clubs, not in Jewish camps, not in Jewish charities, not in Jewish steam-rooms, not in Jewish foods - important as all these are - but only ~~in~~ EL HA'SHEM - in G-d. Hope in G-d means belonging to and supporting a synagogue. It means praying in it regularly with warmth and fervor. It means lending a hand to every project which seeks to advance the cause of Torah. It means working for Jewish education and acquiring one yourself. That is where hope lies - in G-d.

And yet, friends, I feel that there might be somebody here this morning who might want to challenge me and ask; Rabbi, is there not something disturbing about this affirmation of hope by Judaism? Is it not a confession of impotence to have to resort to hope? Is it ^{+ the weak-minded} not the escape of weaklings? Is not hope in G-d, as the Nietzsches of all ages have maintained, a false mirage conjured up by and for the weak, the desperate and the lazy? The strong ^{after exhausting all possibilities,} and the capable resign themselves to fate; the weak, the lazy - they just hope.

It is in response to this piece of cynicism that David's third point comes to us like ^{both of} a light out of the darkness. KAVEI EL HA'SHEM - CHAZAK VE'YA'AMEITZ LIBECHA. In order to [^] hope to G-d you must have strength and courage of heart. Hope in G-d, David wants to tell us, is not a confession of weakness and the practice of the inadequate. It requires moral strength and real courage. To place yourself completely in the hands of G-d means, in the language of diplomatic negotiators, to lead from strength. In the Torah view, G-d should not be the LAST resort for hope, but the FIRST. In the Jewish view, it is not sufficient to say SHMA YISRAEL after the doctors have given up hope and the patient is in a coma. It means coming to the synagogue before there is a patient, coming despite the sneers of those who may label such practice as "old-fashioned" and "outmoded", coming and thanking G-d for good health and expressing a hope that He will grant many more years of the same. It means not crying and complaining when a man has lost his fortune, but having the fortitude of character to recognize G-d as the One Who gave it - G-d and not luck, G-d and not shrewdness, ^{appearing before G-d even when others prefer to spend their Saturdays elsewhere, and by} G-d and not salesmanship - and expressing that hope by [^] sharing the bounty He has given you so far. Hoping to G-d is indeed a first resort, not a last resort; leading from strength and not following from weakness. Strength and courage of heart is the prerequisite of KAVEI EL HA'SHEM, of religious hope.

Remember how Abraham and Sarah, of whom we read this morning, ~~wanted~~ a child? It was the all-consuming desire of their lives. They had both dedicated their lives to the teaching of G-dliness, they had succeeded greatly in these endeavors, they had thrived and prospered financially, and they had all a couple could ask for as they settled back in their old age. All, that is, except a child - and that was everything. Their unhappiness was intolerable. Who would don the mantle of Abraham and keep the Sabbath candles burning in the tent of Sarah after they breathed their last? What emptiness, what hollowness, what a complete vacuum their home was - the house too neat, the books untouched, the stillness unbroken by youthful voice. Instead their was bitterness.

Was it easy for such people to hope to G-d for a child? Put yourself in their predicament and you will find the answer. ^{birthday} Remember that Abraham was an old man who had reached his 100th ~~year~~ and that Sarah was past her prime - she was 90. To hope for a child at

that age was sheer folly. As a matter of fact, when G-d informed them that such hope was possible of fulfillment, Sarah laughed to herself. Bear a child when you should be rocking away on the porch of an old age home! KOL HA'SHOMEIA YETZACHAK LI, Sarah said, whoever hears of this will laugh at me! And our Rabbis tell us that when Sarah was with child, the LEITZANEI HA'DOR, the cynics of that age, began to spread evil rumors about the child and said it was not Abraham's. To hope for a child under such conditions means braving the stares of strangers, the quizzical looks and raised eyebrows of so-called friends, the ugly rumors that could ruin reputations built over a lifetime. No, a weaker person, a "softie", one without strength and courage of heart, would have preferred continuing childlessness for the few years left in life to the punishment and cruelty of the knowing smiles and anxious whispers and wise remarks.

*for the world always laughs when it sees those with small, meek hearts
means strive for great goals, great hopes attached to small, meek hearts beginnings*

That would be a "normal" reaction - scrap the hope and spare the criticism. It took spine and spirit and toughness to hope and plan and prepare nonetheless. Yet that is what they did: they hoped, they planned, they prepared. The world laughed - but G-d redeemed their hopes. And they did have a child, and they called him YITZCHAK - Isaac - which derives from the word meaning "laughter" - the laughter and ridicule this elderly couple had to brave. ^{in order to hope to G-d} So that the very name of one of our great Patriarchs is a testimony to that great fact we have been discussing - the fact that KAVEI EL HA'SHEM, hope to G-d, requires CHAZAK VE'YA'AMEITZ LEBECHA, strength and courage of heart. It means G-d as a First Resort, not Last; leading not from weakness but from strength.

To those ~~who~~ of us, then, who have come here on this Rosh Hashanah day burdened by anxieties, miserable in their solitude, deeply disturbed by some knowledge that no outsider shares, thirsty for hope and longing for a sign of help, our Torah tells us in eternal syllables of encouragement: KAVEI EL HA'SHEM - hope to G-d! It is a hope which will not be misplaced. It is a hope which will be redeemed by the Eternal Source of all life in whose hands are the secrets of healing, the seeds of security, the comfort of companionship, the solutions to all the agonizing problems of men.

And to those who have been blessed by G-d with life, with ease and tranquility, with security and health and peace of mind, our Torah presents the great challenge: CHAZAK VE'YA'AMEITZ LIBECHA VE'KAVEI EL HA'SHEM, you more than others need hope. For you to hope requires moral courage, the strenght of the heart and the insight of the soul. ~~In gratitude and thanksgiving, at this beginning of a New Year, place that hope in G-d, and may your strength and courage in so doing be acceptable to G-d as the most precious sacrifice.~~ →

SHIR HAMAALOS MIMAAMAKIM KRASICHA HA'SHEM, Out of the depths I called unto Thee, O Lord: My G-d, listen to my voice...if Thou, G-d, should beunt our sins, who could survive? For with Thee is forgiveness, so that Thou art revered. KIVISI HA'SHEM KIVSAH NAFSHI, I hope to Thee, O G-d, my soul hopes and I await Thy answer; my soul hopes for the Lord more than anxious watchmen hope for the dawn. YACHEIL YISROEL EL HA'SHEM, O Israel, hope to G-d, for with the Lord is mercy, with Him redemption abounds. V'HU YIFDEH ES YISROEL MIKOL AVONOSOM, and He will redeem Israel from all its sins, justify our cherished hopes that we offer up to Him, and inscribe us and all Israel in the Book of Life, Peace, Health and Happiness. Amen.

Let others regard your prayer as ^{superfluous} primitive. Let them discourage you from attending an Orthodox synagogue. Let them laugh at your discovering of Torah. In gratitude + thanksgiving, at this beginning of a new year, place that strong + courageous hope in G-d. And as you hope, may G-d help.