

A-181

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Kodimoh

It gives me great satisfaction to greet you - old members and new - who have come to attend this, our first Late Friday service of the year. Kodimoh is proud of its 'regulars' and happy to add to its ranks those who have seen fit to link their religious destinies with it and what it stands for - Torah, in its full, complete and genuine sense.

My remarks this evening will be directed primarily to our newcomers, though I hope that those who have been affiliated with us for longer times will benefit by them too.

Let me say that joining our congregation as a member is but the first in a three fold process. Becoming a member is an act of commitment - by ~~joining~~ doing so you commit yourself to the ideals and principles for which Kodimoh stands, the ideals and principles of a dynamic ~~Judaism~~, undiluted Torah Judaism. It means that you have recognized yourself as part of the People of Israel in an active sense. Everyone born a Jew is a part of our people, but he becomes so in a positive sense only when he takes the step of constructive identification in a synagogue. Your membership in Kodimoh therefore means that not only are you not ashamed of your Jewishness, but you are intensely proud of it. You want it known that you are a Jew not only by birth, not only by appearance, not only by fighting anti-semitism - but by choice, your choice.

However important as membership is in a synagogue, it is only a formality if it stops at that point. Being enrolled and paying dues is little more than a social convention in and of itself. The 2nd step is attending. It means seeing and being seen at Kodimoh. It means doing something with your membership. It means availing yourself of the many opportunities that Kodimoh has to offer to you and your family. It means not being a silent partner in the business of Jewish living.

And from this follows a 3rd step. That step is active participation in all the realms of Torah living in the Kodimoh family. It is not enough to attend services. We must worship - 'daven'! It is not enough to attend a meeting - we must participate actively in all that occurs, in helping prepare it, in operating in the process of decision.

I want to make clear what I mean. I refer to 'meetings'. That means all the functions of our synagogue - religious, educational, social, and the business of the congregation. And yet I call all that 'Full Torah living.' Why is that? Because every function of Kodimoh, no matter what its external nature, is and always will be ultimately and inwardly and essentially geared to Torah and its support and advancement. The main business of a synagogue is Torah and all its activities must be executed with that in mind. It is to the credit of Torah that its spirit can be expressed in so many different and varied ways. But essentially - it is the soul of man and his heart that must be directed to G-d. If the main concern of this synagogue - any synagogue - is not that guiding the hearts and souls of its members to G-d, then it has no right to exist. We can thank G-d that Kodimoh has always maintained the supremacy of its religious character and has not allowed it to be submerged by profane interests. We are a religious institution in which many and varied interesting other activities take place. It is on that basis that we appeal to the community. It is an appeal based on our faith and confidence in the intelligence, sincerity and seriousness of our fellow-Jews.

When our Torah, in the portion we read tomorrow morning, wants to tell us how the first Jew, Abraham, convinced people to believe in G-d and got them to join in this religious fellowship, the Biblical expression is not, "the members who joined Abraham's congregation," or "the people

Abraham got to attend services". It is ^{הוא לא יכול להיכנס} the souls Abraham made in Haran. To be ammember is not enough. To attend is insuffi-
cient. The only satisfactoru achievement of a Jew in regard to his synagogue is ^{הוא לא יכול להיכנס} - to recreate the soul, to remake the personality, to rework the characetr. If we who look to Kodimoh for our religious guid-
ance can emerge more deeply religious, more spiritual, better Jews, more ethical and sensitive human beings, then we can regard ourselves as continuing links in the tradition of Abraham. Then Kodimoh will have been a true, authentic success.

By affiliating with Kodimoh, you are affiliating with a synagogue of great and well-deserved repute in he city. You are a member of a house of G-d whose founders had the foresight to build for later generations. You are affiliated with a genuinely religious organization which is a monument to the spirit of the Jew, and a tribute to his immortality. By affiliating yourself with Kodimoh, you are affiliating yourself with the traditions of of Israel, with Torah Judaism in its fullest and most wholesome expression.

What is that Torah Judaism of which we speak? It is, true enough, a system of observances. But it is also a whole way of life. It gives credence to the statement of a certain Jewish writer that 'to be a Jew is a destiny.' It is an expression of many deep loves as well as sacred laws. It is a religion which tells you that you are not a atranger on the face of the earth, born out of nowhere and dissolving into nothing, with unbear-
able ~~symptoms~~ burdens to torment you in between. It tells you that life is not a desperate, forlorn struggle with no meaning and no purpose. It tells you that you are a proud child of great fathers and mothers who discoussed with G-d, that you as an individual are dear to G-d who fashioned you Him-
self and that this G-d is closer to you, that He counts and remembers every tear you shed, for he stores them in a special jug beneath His throne of glory; that his ear picks up every sigh of the wronged and hurt, and that His all-seeing eye does not fail to note every good deed and good thought of the children of man. It is a way of life where joy is preferred to sorrow and wherein we are taught that G-d prefers our happiness to our sad-
ness. It is the ancient faith of Israel which has strength as well as tende ness and where courage girds its wrmth and beauty its holiness, a faith that tells its communicants that man can sometimes overrule G-d, that man is never alone because G-d often stoops t light a word in the mind of man, because He protects the orphan and defends the widow, that the destiny of man is not death but wternity, that his fate is not grime and grave but glory and G-dliness.

That is the Torah which is the business of this synagogue. And they are not empty words. They are real, wonderfully real. G-d is here, and He is waiting for the vall of men. It is told of the saintly R.Baruch of Mezboz grandchild hide-and-seek...crying, no look for me...that is the cry of G-d - I wait and wait and no one comes to look for Me..You have joined the ranks of Kodimoh, have come to search for G-d. You will find Him, each in your own way. If you will be with us in all 3 ways - member, attending, and living Torah, you will find Him in a fulness and beauty and thrill which you never imagined.

And wat does it mean to find G-d? It means to take Him into your life, into every nook and corner of your homes and selves. Living like a Torah Jew, finding G-d means sanctifying all of life, even outside the synagogue. It means, mote than anything else, that life is not longer with-
out meaning, without purpose, that man is no longer a pawn of Nature and statistics. Every act, every thought, every incident in the life of a man or woman becomes invested with a new and thrilling meaning, an experience which ennobles and gives dignity and respect and vitality to us. From birth to death, every event becomes important and significant and unfor-

gettable. Birth itself is not a biological accident but an expression of G-d's will. The infant is not just a dressed up skeleton, but a child of G-d whose very soul was at the foot of Sinai and amidst the thunder and lightning heard the commandment of G-d, KABEID.... It means that puberty is not just a matter of ~~physiological~~ physiological maturation, but the growing into greatness, into a life of high spiritual values which must now be put into practice. It means that marriage is not just a haphazard falling-in and falling-out of love duly recorded by a bored clerk in the dusty record files of some city hall, but an act of KIDDUSHIN, of holiness, pre-ordained in Heaven long before the partners were born; that every Jewish marriage is a triangle with G-d as third party. It means that a house is a home, that it is a warm and light and charming, that the table is the altar and the air is sweet with Torah; that SHOLOM BAYIS is not a convenience but a foundation stone of our faith, that the hazards and dangers that threaten it can be warded off by recourse to Torah and those who know Torah. It means that even Death is more than a certificate signed by the attending physician and a date ~~xx~~ inscribed on a forlorn tombstone, but that it is a beginning as well as an end.

This is what Torah-or Orthodox-Judaism means, and this is what Kodimoh stands for. Do not be disturbed if you cannot feel it all at once. The great game of hide-and-seek requires of us to seek G-d long and hard, but it holds out the promise that we can and will find Him and find purpose in our lives and escape its wretchedness and find beauty in it. If you will be with us often and regularly, if you will dedicate your lives to the great search, and seek with us, your reward will be great.

As your Rabbi I can promise you no miracles, no superior wisdom, no magical solution to any problem whatsoever. A Rabbi is no different from a layman in Judaism, except insofar as he is learned in the Torah and can therefore give of its wealth to those who ask for it. I can give only of the modest measure of Torah that I have acquired until now and that I hope, with your indulgence and patience, I will be allowed to acquire as time goes on. The doors of my study are always open to you. I invite you to cement your friendships with me. I ask of you to share your great experiences with me—your joys and, chalilah, your sorrows, but especially your joys. Let us search together, as two humble children of G-d who turn to His master blueprint, Torah, for the solutions of our problems and the meaning and purpose of our existence.

As you officially enter the ranks of this House of G-d, may He in His great mercy and goodness bless you and your families with health, peace, long-life, the wisdom to search and the felicity of discovering the Lord G-d of Israel.