

## THE ELLUL MOOD

As we of Kodimoh welcome the month of Ellul on this very important Sabbath, I am inclined to recall how Jews of old once experienced the same event. The solemnity and sacredness that was ushered in with this penitential season, this forty-day period of Teshuvah, was more than just an idea or a principle. It was something which enveloped one's whole existence. There was an undefinable warmth about it. There was the thrill of expectancy. There was a fear of the unknown. There was a clean feeling about it all that permeated even little Yeshiva boys who had not sinned enough to repent. It was a happy solemnity, a gay seriousness, almost a sort of adventure into the sacred days that were to follow. Perhaps all this can be summed up by calling it the "Ellul Mood." For that is just what it was - a mood. It was an invaluable, cleansing, holy and thoroughly Jewish mood, and one which we should and must recapture this morning. We must get into the Ellul Mood.

If we are to recreate this Mood and recapture some of its great spirit for ourselves, we must attempt to analyze it, to break it down into its components so that we can build it up again. What, then, are the components of the Ellul Mood? Let us analyze it down to three basic elements.

First and foremost, the Ellul Mood consists of a determination to seek out G-d - not to just to find Him by accident, as it were, but to look for Him conscientiously. Waldo Frank, in a recent issue of The Nation (June 19, 1954) voices the fear that America is becoming a "people that holds on", whereas in the past we have been a "people that sought", with writers of maturity who ennobled this search. It is that distinction which we become aware of, in a Jewish sense, at this time of the year. It is not enough to hold on. We must search for greater achievements.

All year long we speak and preach and argue "Jewish survival". We put our minds together figuring out ways and means of surviving as Jews. Some think a Sunday School will help Judaism survive. Most others think we must have afternoon or all-day education for survival. But, and this is the crux of the matter, we are interested in "survival". That is, we want to hold on, to consolidate. We are on the spiritual defensive. All we ask is to survive. Or take the phrase "Jewish identification". We try with all our might to ensure the "Jewish identification" of our youth. We give them a Center. Perhaps a picnic will make them identify themselves as Jews. Maybe a dance. Perhaps charitable work. At least, we sigh, identify yourselves as members of our people. We want at least to hold on.

What a tragedy if this "holding on" philosophy were sum total of our Jewish aspirations! Imagine if, year in year out, you worked only so that your business should survive. You would be, financially, in a very sorry state of affairs. Or imagine if your family conditions reached such a point that you would have to take special measures, and be satisfied with, making your children keep up their "identification" as your sons or daughters. You would say that the psychiatrist or family counsellor or social worker should have stepped in long ago.

What then is it that we must do this month? We must seek. We must look for something greater, deeper, holier, for something more Jewish and more positive. We must become seekers for G-d. We must not be satisfied with anything less.

The 27th Psalm, which we recite beginning tomorrow, emphasizes this element of the Ellul Mood with David's moving words: L'CHA AMAR LIBI BAKSHU FANAI, ESS PANECHA HA'SHEM AVAKESH, my heart hath said unto Thee...I will seek Thy presence, O G-d. O G-d, all year I'm satisfied with holding on. Now I'm going out to search for You and for Your presence. Now I'm not satisfied with not slipping. Now I've got to climb. I've got to come closer and nearer to G-d. ESS PANECHA HA'SHEM AVAKESH.

And perhaps we should emphasize that this search which is an integral part of the Ellul Mood is a very specific one. It means more than more charity. It means more than more study. It means more than more kindness. It means that in addition to all these there must be more of the purely religious element, the emotional content of Judaism, more of the AHAVAS HA'SHEM we spoke of last week. If we can manage to participate in that search for G-d, then the rest will follow. Then we will realize that the G-d we seek demands more charity, more kindness, more study, more prayer, more Mitzvos. The famed "Yud Ha'kadosh" was once heard to comment about his colleague, Rabbi David Le'lover, that "I came to fear the Lord through my study of the Torah; but my friend Reb David came to study the Torah through his fear of G-d. He is therefore greater than I am." Once we search for G-d Himself, once we too say ESS PANECHA HA'SHEM AVAKESH, we will find the rest - and it will have more meaning. The first element of the Ellul Mood, then, is to search for G-d; not to be staisfied with holding on, with surviving, with being on the defensive, but to go on to greater heights by seeking G-d's presence.

The second component of the Ellul Mood follows from the first. And that is, the knowledge that G-d responds to to the search. He wants to be found. He makes Himself available. It may be more courageous to seek than to hold on, but it's worth it.

It is told of the famed Hassidic teacher, R. Baruch Mezbozer, that he chanced upon his grandson, Yechiel Michel, who was crying. He explained to R. Baruch that he was playing hide-and-seek with his friends, and he was hiding, but no one came to look for him. Thereupon R. Baruch thought for a moment, and he too began to cry. When asked for an explanation by his Hassidim, he said, "That is G-d's complaint too. He says 'VA'ASTIR PANAY MI'CHEM', and I will hide My presence from you, and He waits for us to look for Him, but no one seeks ~~Hi~~ ...."

So that G-d's hiding from man is not spiteful. It is calculated to increase man's desire for G-d - and G-d's promise to respond. It is a rewarding search, one which promises fulfillment and meaningfulness. The very name of this month, ELLUL, has been used by our Sages as an acrostic. They said that its first letters spell the verse from Shir Ha'shirim, ANI LE'DODI VE'DODI LI, I am for my beloved, and my beloved is for me. By that they meant to convey to us this element of the Ellul Mood, the idea that G-d responds to us, the more we are for Him, the more is He for us. The more we love, the more He loves; the more we seek Him, the more does He come to us. Happiness for man is the reward for the search for G-d.

As Ellul comes, we know that if we call upon G-d, then sometimes during this season He will answer: that is, we will feel that thrill, that warmth, that confidence, that thrill of the heart, which is Judaism's great discovery: that seeking G-d is finding Him. ANI LE'DODI VE'DODI LI.

And both these elements are contingent upon the third. The confidence that it is worth the effort to seek - nay, even the heart-ache that seeking G-d sometimes entails - and the faith that G-d will respond and, in ways now unknown to me, reward my search with the thrill of discovery, are based upon the third element, namely, the knowledge that, basically, this is a good world. If the first element of seeking gives to the Mood the fear of the unknown, and if the second, G-d's response, gives to it the thrill of expectancy, then the third gives it the feeling of warmth and happiness.

When we say that we believe that life is essentially good, we do not mean to say that, in the words of Voltaire's philosopher in "Candide", that this is "the best of all possible worlds". Far from it indeed! There is much that is rotten and evil and spiteful and degenerate in this world of ours. We would have to be

misguided simpletons to really believe that all of life is just one cheerful sled-ride on the smooth surface of existence. It is nothing of the sort. But neither is it the dreadful torture that we sometimes label it. How often do we come across a man who has a prosperous business, is the head of a wonderful family, is in the best of health and, chewing on a big cigar, complains that "life is miserable". There is a Yiddish expression to the effect that if G-d gave us the choice, we would all again choose the same bundle of TSARUS in preference to that of our neighbors. No, life is neither all good nor all bad. But, and this is the essence of what we want to say, the Good in life is part and parcel of existence, it is inherent in Life. But the Evil we find is only incidental, it is not a necessary ingredient, it can be avoided.

The Gerer Rebbe makes an interesting observation on the beginning of this morning's Sidra. We read that G-d gives us freedom of choice. There is before us both BRACHAH and KLALLAH. We can choose good or evil, blessing or curse. And then Torah tells us when we will receive the BRACHA and when, Heaven Forbid, the KLALLAH. ESS HA'BRACHAH ASHER TISHME'U EL MITZVOS HA'SHEM....VE'HA'KLALLAH IM LO SISHME'U... "the blessing when you will obey G-d's commandments, and the curse if you will not obey..." Why the difference in the two pronouns, he asks, why here ASHER-"when", and here IM-"if"? And, he answers, because BRACHAH is always present, it is an indigenous part of all life, it is only a matter of time, hence: ASHER-when. But KLALLAH is not essential to life, and it can be avoided, hence IM-if. Blessing is basic; curse is not.

It is that knowledge, the knowledge that when all the columns are compared, and the question resolved with level-headedness and sobriety, that G-d's world is a good one. BRACHAH predominates, and waits for us to take advantage of it. In a world of this sort, we feel, it is worth the effort of seeking out G-d. The Creator of such a world must answer. If indeed Life is a gamble, we place the odds on BRACHAH.

Fear and apprehension can never be absent from the YOM HA'DIN. But as we Jews face the coming Day of Judgement, we do so <sup>as</sup> with a sense of happiness and anticipation.

As we welcome the month of Ellul, let us recapture the Ellul Mood which is its outstanding feature. Let us determine to seek G-d, to await His response, and to be happy in the knowledge the Good G-d has given us every opportunity to live a blessed life.

For we know that the  
greatest good is that  
which is possible; that  
all can be transformed  
into good