

"BELIEVE IN LIFE"

A 366

This is the season when Americans of all kinds speak of faith. Our country has recently experienced a series of crises in its international relations. Our leaders urge us not to lose heart, to have faith in America. This is the ~~season~~ time for election campaigns. Our candidates and their supporters punctuate their partisan oratory with appeals for faith: faith in a particular party or candidate, faith in the future, faith in democracy, faith in the American way of life.

It is in place, therefore, to call your attention this morning to a particularly significant verse in this morning's Sidra that affirms the call to faith. It is phrased negatively, telling us of the curse of not having faith. It is at the end of the long list of punishments, known as the tokhachah, to which Israel will be subject if it disobeys G-d and goes astray after strange gods, that we read the climax of all these horrors: ve'lo taamin be'chayekha - - "and you will not believe in your own life." Disease, poverty, exile - - all these are merely prelude to the most devastating and tragic of all the frightening allusions in the tokhachah: not to believe in your self, in life itself.

But what does that mean, "and you will not believe in your own life?" What does faith in life imply, and why is it deemed so vital that its absence is regarded as a curse?

Rav Bibi, in the Talmud (Men.103b), answers that question as follows: zeh ha-somekh al ha-palter, the definition of lack of faith in life is "one who relies upon the baker." What strange words!

Of course, what Rav Bibi meant is that when a man is reduced to such abject poverty that he must rely upon the goodness of his baker for his daily bread, that he lives from meal to meal because of the charity of his storekeeper, then he has lost the opportunity to find meaning and satisfaction in his own life. Ve-lo taamin be'chayekha.

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But please bear with me if I purport to find deeper meaning in Rav Bibi's words than a mere assertion that poverty is no good. There is nothing revolutionary about opposing poverty, and our Rabbis were not given to empty platitudes. I believe the Talmud meant to give the Worah's verse a broader definition than the mere economic one. For poverty is a condition of the spirit as well as of the pocket. There is a Book of Life that may yield different conclusions ~~to~~ from that of the checkbook and bankbook. There is ^{one} ~~a different~~ kind of accounting for Internal Revenue and an entirely different one for ~~internal~~ eternal values. The poor man who does not allow himself to be crushed by his needs, who will not become enslaved to his misery, who can annacipate himself from constant worry over his wants, whose whole attitude towards life is such that physical ^{privatun or} needs and material comfort^s are important but not the whole story -- such a man is free, confident, strong, with an abundance of faith in life itself, and especially in his own life. Another man, though he may be proseprous by accepted standards, if his whole life is monopolized by the next "deal" and the one after that, if all his ambitions are determined by how much he can make and how ~~well~~ ^{much} he can spend, if his only real value is his economic standing and his social status, and his greatest fear is that he will not be able to buy what he thinks he needs and ^{what} others tell him he wants -- that man is a pauper, one who is weak, one who is dependent upon others, one who lacks self-determination and confidence in his own life.

The first type we described is a man who believes in lufe, for he is not a somekh al ha-palter, he does not place all his lufe's dreams and hopes and ambitions in the credit his ^{shop} ~~store~~keeper will give him and the social acceptability the ^{shop} ~~store~~keeper's wife will bestow upon him. He has his own soul, his own existence, his own inner life that cannot easily be shaken by external conditions and by little people. The second ~~type~~ ^{symbolizes} is the tragic type, the kind who ~~expresses~~ the worst of the tokhachah. No matter what his income and no matter what his rating, he remains a somekh al ha-palter, one who ^{psychologically} relies on the handouts that society doles out to the status-seekers

who crave the status symbol as the addict craves his drugs. No matter that he does not have to live by the good graces of his baker ^{or his grocer} -- but heremains a somekh ^{but} al ha-palter if you translate palter as his car-dealer, ^{his stockbroker,} his interior decorator or furrier or builder or travel agent. For what counts is ^{his} the psychological attitude and ^{his} the spiritual approach. ^{Both} The afflicted who has no time to think and the affluent who has too much time to kill, when they hope and dream only of material objects, whether it ^{be} is bread or gadgets, food or trinkets, when such ambitions crowd out any thought of the inner life and a man becomes dependent upon ^{more things & dumb objects.} ~~trinkets and and gadgets,~~ then the Torah diagnoses his illness; ve'lo taamin be'chayekhah ~~~~~~~~~ you are a slave to a shopkeeper, you do not really have faith in your own inner life. What a tokhachah! ~~Either you place your faith~~

The leaders of modern Israel, even the secularist labor people, are waking up to the implications of that idea. They have suddenly discovered that a younger generation, raised without the faith of their fathers, is becoming addicted to the worship of "things," of convenience and luxury and comfort. ^{The pioneer spirit is weakening as the kibbutzim are losing their attraction.} All too many Israelis, traveling abroad, reveal a great ignorance of Jewish tradition, and find little to bind them to their fellow Jews in the Golah. They show signs of losing faith in the life of ~~Kelal~~ Kelal Yisrael for they have too much faith in the physical and material. Hence Israel's renewed emphasis on todaah yehudit, the "Jewish consciousness" program it is belatedly introducing into its educational program. ^{There are much too many} ~~It is concerned by the number~~ of yordim, those young Israelis who are emigrating, preferring the fleshpots of exile to the hardships of a young, determined, growing country. When all you offer a young man is an economic theory in place of a G-d, it is easy for him to abandon the theory in favor of his convenience. ^{and faith in country} Faith in life cannot abide faith in possessions.

The President of a South American country was recently asked why it is that North America has made so much progress while South America is comparatively backward. He answered that you can trace the reason to those who first came to the shores of the continent. The first white men who came to N. America were Puritans who came in search of G-d. The first white men who came to S. America were Spaniards - who came

in search of gold.

Indeed, if you believe in G-d you cannot make a religion of gold.

If you believe in your life, you cannot believe in your possessions.

If you believe in your life, then your faith must be in your Creator, not in the whims of His creatures, in ideals not in things, in ^{the Giver of} ~~G-d-given~~ life and not in the baker ^{of the} ~~given~~ loaf.

If you believe in your life, then you must ~~seek~~ believe in and always seek to enhance what you are and put an end to all obsessions and compulsions with what you have. For what you are is tzelem Elokim, the image of G-d; and what you have - - ultimately it makes no difference, for in the perspective of eternity such things do not count one way or the other.

Our country was recently shaken, embarrassed, and deeply chagrined by the two code-clerks formerly of the Central Intelligence Agency who defected to Russia. Their performance was truly disgraceful, even repulsive. Yet I believe that even more disgraceful, even more shocking and ominous, was another recent case of an American in Russia which most of our press somehow regarded as a "victory" for America. It was the Powers trial. Why do I say it was worse? ^D Because the two clerks were, at least, speaking of values. True, they chose the wrong values - - but they were, apparently, motivated by ideas. What Powers revealed was ~~something~~ a devastating accusation of a whole generation. He chose to work for the C.I.A. because he could not get a better job. He became a spy for his country not because of loyalty, but because the airlines could not match the government's salary. He was politically naive, ideologically dumb. Right or wrong were not part of his vocabulary. No convictions. Only contracts. Somehow we get the gnawing feeling that here is a representative of America today. And if that is true, ~~it~~ is the American tokhachah, the curse of our country. Such ² man rate \$30,000 a year as worth risking their life, but have never thought about the values their country represents. The somekh al ha-palter is the symbol of a national tragedy. For more than a lack of national purpose, so fully discussed in recent months, it is symbolic of lack of national faith in the life of America

We who truly love our country and the ^{humaneness} ~~principles~~ for which it stands will
pray that such attitudes ^{be} ~~are~~ not/typical of our nation; that our young men and young
women learn to value principles ^{more} than possessions, and ideals more than deals.

Ve'ne'eman ata le'hachayot metim. May He Who is faithful to give life to the
dead teach us and all our contemporaries to turn once again to the Source of all
existence and learn anew the faith in life and in the Creator of Life, so that
the lifelessness of the ~~the~~ soul & the paralysis of the spirit will
give way to new courage, new vigor, & new vision -- a new
faith in life.