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Let me tell you the story of Herman Goldberg. Herman Goldberg worshipped on the High Holidays last year in his synagogue in Lansing, Michigan. During the year that followed, he had the opportunity to affirm his Jewishness in many different ways, but he didn't do so. For example, he missed 104 opportunities to attend services on Friday evenings or Saturday mornings during the year. Yet his Rabbi, who is a friend of mine, assures me that Herman Goldberg will be in Temple tonight. A good Jew, Mr. Goldberg thinks, can do what he wants all year, but he would not dare to absent himself from the Temple on Rosh Hashanah. I tell you this story not to be critical of Mr. Goldberg, but to ask you to try to understand him.

He is not one of those fortunate few who know that the profound religious spirit is something that is continually present and regularly exercised, but Mr. Goldberg is not so withdrawn from the faith of his fathers that he does not understand that on some fixed occasions, he must make an outward show of his identity with his people. He knows that at least once a year, he must touch home base. When he comes to the synagogue, feelings bubble up within him which seem to say, "How good it is to be with my fellow Jews. How good it is to discover that I am not alone in the world, how comforting to be reminded that there is a God, and that I have some relation to him." Mr. Goldberg gains a great deal from his participation on the High Holidays. Apparently, he gains enough impetus to retire from the synagogue for the year. He seems to acquire enough spiritual stamina to go it alone for another 12 months.

It is clear that Mr. Goldberg is not one of those people who have absolute faith in God. As a matter of fact, he sometimes has real doubt that there is a God. When he comes to Temple on Rosh Hashanah, he seems to be saying, "I'm not sure there is a God, but I'll keep my hand in the game. I vote for the possibility that there is a God. If Mr. Goldberg were here to speak for himself, he might very well say, "somehow the experience on the holidays is fulfilling. Maybe it's because I seem to gain some assurance and confidence as I express the prayers in which I would like to believe." Mr. Goldberg might even say, "I have my doubts about religion, but what it teaches ought to be true, and with all my doubts, I am not prepared to say that it isn't true."

I think we ought to try to understand Mr. Goldberg because he is a great deal like most of us. There is no one of us here who has never doubted. And there is none of us here who does not at some time believe. Even Moses had his moments of doubt in spite of a usually burning faith. The tradition tells us that Moses did not see the promised land because, in a certain major situation, he did not have the faith that God would perform the miracle that the people wanted him to perform. The author of the Psalms could say on the one hand, "The Lord Is My Shepherd, I Shall Not Want". Yet in another moment, he cried, "Eli Eli, Lamah Azavtahn, My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?" Every religious man is a doubter at times. Jeremiah the Prophet complained that because of his faith in the power of God, he had become a laughing stock to the people. He appealed to God, "Wilt Thou Indeed Be Unto Me As A Deceitful Brook, As Waters That Fail?"

Similarly, it is true that every doubter is at times devout. Frequently, a person most alienated from the rituals of Judaism will, upon the death of a parent, insist upon the performance of the most orthodox of rituals. Parents who have never prayed, will turn to me when a child is seriously ill and plead, "Rabbi, teach me to pray." The difference between the person who considers himself religious and the person who considers himself irreligious is not a matter of white and black, but a matter of degree. Browning has expressed the difference in this way:

"An irreligious person is one who lives a life of doubt-diversified by faith.
A pious person is one who lives a life of faith-diversified by doubt."

Here lies the basic problem of each of us with respect to religion. It is not that we do not believe. It is that our belief is unsteady. One poet has said it this way, "We are the children of an age of half-belief and half-doubt, standing at Temple doors, heart in, head out." Here you are at the Temple doors, half in, half out. Yet, like Mr. Goldberg, you want to be inside, you want to believe. How can we make our faith steadier? That is the problem to which we address ourselves this evening.

First of all, it will help us to understand that it is not only with respect to religion that human beings are subject to moods. We find fluctuations and alternations in every area of human interest. Sometimes we can quickly solve the most complicated mathematical problem. On another occasion, we can't add six and seven. I find that on some occasions, I can speak with distinct clarity. On other occasions, I can't get the words out of my mouth. All of us experience varying degrees of mental clarity, and differing degrees of perceptiveness. It is not strange, then, that our religious concern should ebb and flow.

Sometimes a husband and wife feel themselves so in love that none of their problems seem to have any significance. On another occasion, the partners will wonder why they stay married. On one day, a parent will speak of a child as if it were the most precious thing ever created. On another day, you would think the parent was talking, not about the child, but about a monster. Clearly, the intensity of affection towards all things fluctuates.

The creative mood has its highs and its lows. At times, an educator can be convinced that he is acting to save the world. In another situation, the same educator will think that his task is futile and unproductive. A Rabbi will be impatient to enter the pulpit at one service because he can't wait to speak to his people about a burning topic. At another service, he will feel as one preacher expressed it, that preaching is like throwing a pitcher of water over rows of narrow-necked bottles. Very little of the water ever gets into the bottles.

It is ultimately in the realm of the religious, however, that fluctuations are the most violent and the most painful. Today, we are absolutely certain that we can improve our own character and that love and mercy are the keys to human salvation. Tomorrow, we are convinced that we shall never be able to overcome our weaknesses and that ideals are for fools.

In the morning of any given day, we are confident that a better world lies ahead, in spite of hydrogen bombs, and communism, and racism. In the afternoon, we are depressed and convinced of mankind's basic degradation. Is it any wonder that we are capable of worshipping God fervently in one moment, and in another moment, we doubt everything.

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Isn't it true that on some occasions we take pride in our being Jewish, and in another moment, we ask ourselves why should we bring children into the world to be the victims of anti-semitism?

Why do we have these moods? The answer is complex, but, in part, they are the result of what we encounter in the world around us. The newspapers are filled with accounts of growing violence. Crime is up 15% says the F.B.I. Rioting in Rochester; Murder in Mississippi; Bombing in Viet Nam! Part of the way we feel is due to our natural reaction to these truly sad occurrences.

But part of our problem lies in the working of our own personalities. Some of us are easier to set off than others. The person who carries a basic mistrust of people from his childhood will project that mistrust over to the people he meets in later life. Some of us will never forgive our spouse, our children, or even God for the sins our parents worked upon us when we were children.

Some of us have more extreme swings in our moods and some of us have more intense moods, but all of us have them. We will feel easier about them if we recognize first, that these moods are universal and that there is nothing sinful about them. Secondly, it will help us to recognize that there is some value in this changing of moods. The person with perfect faith is, at the very least, unimaginative. The Hasidim taught that the person who has the precise formula for opening the gates of heaven will never know the joy of breaking down the gates! Moods of doubt frequently reveal sensitivity. The adolescent to be most worried about is the one with no problems. The sophomore atheist is usually the one who is intelligent enough to throw off his grandmother's ideas about God. Only a thinking person can be baffled. Only a person with ideals can be disillusioned. That is why Tennyson said, "There is more faith in honest doubt than in half your creeds."

As one who was a sophomore atheist, I can tell you that the surer faith is obtained through doubt and searching. For faith can not be inherited. It must be won. Doubt is the anvil on which the higher belief is forged. In some ways, doubt is like a disease. With it usually comes depression, lowered vitality, feverishness, and weakness. But most of these symptom-experiences have a positive use. The man who is never in pain has no sympathy. The man who was never sick a day in his life has no immunity to disease. The man who has never doubted is potentially the best atheist. Consider the Book of Job in the Bible. Job is the man of perfect faith who never doubted. But when life presented him with some serious problems, his faith broke wide open. It was only after prolonged pain and deliberation that Job could say, "Now I first begin to understand the immensity of God. The God in whom I believed before was a small God." A little of disease is a good thing for building up the reactions of the body. A little of doubt is a good thing for building up the faith of the soul. But the great danger is that the malady may become chronic. The great peril is that we will live by our doubts and not by our faiths!

We need not be afraid of our moods unless we discover that we are more and more yielding to doubt and despair and permitting these to be the standard by which we live. When in my army days, I used to lecture to the troops about the ideals of American democracy, one very bright soldier used to seek me out to say, "You're crazy, Sergeant. In the business world, it's dog eat dog, and if we aren't prepared to act likewise, we'll get eaten up." You can imagine what sort of businessman that fellow is making. I would hate to get into his clutches.

He is a classic illustration of a person who lives by his doubts, by a low view of man and God. All of us share his problem to some degree, but if we all lived by our doubts, the market-place would be nothing but the scene of legalized thievery and nations would be searching for the first opportunity to drop the bomb. If we want to live in a half-way decent world, we must sift out our doubts and emerge with some positive and edifying pattern for ourselves and for society. Isn't this what Moses and the Hebrews did at Mt. Sinai, and isn't this what Americans did in 1776? Each person has to do this kind of sifting for himself and for his own life. If enough of us don't ultimately conclude that we shall strive after honesty and charity, then there is no chance at all that mankind will ever come close to attaining these goals. In brief, it is one thing to experience a mood of doubt, but he who sails his ship without a star will surely crack up on the reefs.

I believe that it is this realization which brings Mr. Goldberg into the synagogue on the High Holidays. He comes because deep down, he understands that his believing self is his better self. He comes to vote for the kind of world he associates with God and with Moses. And so you come to the Temple to say that you believe, deep down, that there is a heart of love at the core of the universe, you come to stand beside Isaiah in his search for peace, you come to stand beside Hillel in his search for brotherhood, you come to stand beside Akiba and the martyrs of the Warsaw Ghetto in their willingness to make sacrifices in behalf of human dignity. You are here in spite of your doubts to express your faith that when all the deeds of justice are added up, they will outweigh the deeds of selfishness and cruelty. You are here to reassure one another that in spite of the disappointments and the pain of the last year, life is still meaningful and rewarding. We have come to promise one another that the New Year will be better than the old one.

The Bible magnificently records all the moods of men on the scale of human conduct, from cowardice to courage, from malice to magnanimity. But the main theme of our Bible is that responsible human beings will triumph over their moods and be capable of the uplifting deed and the purposeful life. The heroes of the Bible are not pictured as men and women who are always whole in their faith, but they are people who perform the life-affirming deed, the community-serving deed in spite of some doubts about the efficacy of these deeds.

A perfect example of faith in the midst of doubt is presented in the story of three Hebrews in the Book of Daniel. The King of Babylon had proclaimed that anyone who would not bow down to the Gods of Babylon would be thrown into the fiery furnace. We may smile at the peculiar sound of their names, but Shadrach, Mishack, and Abed-Nego are to be remembered as great men. Said they to the King who threatened them, "We pray, O King, that our God will be able to save us from the fiery furnace, but if not, O King, know that we will still not bow down to your gods nor serve them." Even if we are not saved, proclaims the religious Jew, we will act in the faith that what our God stands for is more worthwhile. As someone has put it, the way to get religion is by betting your life every moment that there is a God. As you act in terms of love and righteousness, you will come to believe more firmly that there are sources of love other than yourself, even an ultimate source.

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Tend the sick, channel hate and envy, strive for peace, labor for social justice. With the removal of each evil, one more occasion for denying that goodness rules the world will be gone. As we make the world a better place in which to live, the reality of a God who cares will become more believable.

We are here tonight in this reverent place which we have built with our hands as an act of faith to drink from the well of our tradition. We are here to get a transfusion of courage, a new vision, a new resolve. We are here to learn how to triumph over our fears and to place faith at the center of our lives. We want to say with the poet: "Faith is our waking life. One sleeps, indeed, and one dreams at intervals...but waking's the main point for us."

We have our doubts, but faith is the main point for us. We must get busy putting it to work. A wise man has said, "Faith is the willingness to work for that in which you believe." It is the heat of work that makes doubt evaporate. Our fathers knew this when standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai, they said to Moses,

"Na-ah-seh Va-nish-Mah -- We will do, Then we will have faith."