

C-7402 Transcription

Friedman, Herbert A. "Establishing the Theme." Wexner Heritage

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Herbert A. Friedman:

...much about that sentence. Whether measured by the rank of the sheer number [static; unclear]...ethical suspicion in criminal investigation, the amount of sleeeaze is awesome. Precise comparisons to the Grant, or the Harding, or the Nixon administration's aren't possible or necessary. The Reagan administration rivals them all for official lawlessness, contempt for the law, and playing loose with the truth. In the *Washington Post*...[unclear] headline of the article, [with exaggerated tone], "Has truth gone out of style?" And the first paragraph of that article said, Did Ronald Raegan feel small and slimy in 1987, which was the year [01:00] of lying dangerously? Did Joe Biden feel small and slimy? Did Pat Robertson? Gary Hart? Jim and Tammy? Oliver North...eh, the Admiral? Elliot Abrams? Bob McFarland? The Honorable Mario Biachi? The boys in the odometer department at Chrysler? The gang at Beech Nut? William H. Casey? The Wall Street insiders? Did these people

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feel small and slimy for helping to create not just one dupe, but a whole nation of dupes? Expediency, that is, whatever sells, is the final test...[02:00]

When people ask themselves, was Reagan lying, was North lying, did Jim Baker do it with Jessica Hahn, is Dever guilty of anything, should Gary Hart be disqualified...what they're really saying is, "What is guilt, and what is innocence?" Did so-and-so do right, or did so-and-so do wrong? The underlying question is, what constitutes right and wrong, good and bad? The arguments and the discussions which flow from this question simply center around two issues: what is the definition of right and wrong, good and evil? And, who laid down that definition? If you say something's right, who told you that something is right? If you say something is wrong, who said so, that it was wrong? Where are the standards, what's the anchor, where's the basis [03:00], from which we draw the conclusions?

The oldest standards, certainly known to us as Jews, were religious in origin, and they were absolute. Absolute standards, not relative. No maybes, no qualifications, no ifs or buts, or...mankind's basic moral code is religious in origin. God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, who gave them to the Hebrew people, who spent thousands of years elaborating and expanding

them. Ten Commandments became 613, and then the Mishna and the two Talmuds and the Mishna Torah of Maimonides and the Shulchan Aruch, and all the other codes and commentaries down through the centuries. In all these cases, we were dealing with an absolute standard set by religious authority with all the weight of God and clergy behind it. There was no compromise [04:00], no excuse, no shading of meaning. Everyone knew clearly what was right, and what was sin, and what was wrong, and what was meant by God's reward and God's punishment. It was all very clear!

Jewish ethics are based on the Torah. The command to refrain from harming one's fellow man and to avoid [static; cannot be heard]...establish justice...to love goodness and to...[static]

...the focus of the Hebrew, Biblical religion. The Torah itself complements the ethical side of Judaism. In Deuteronomy it says, in a self-congratulatory way [05:00], "What great nation has laws and rules as perfect as all this teaching that I set before you this day?" So God is saying to the Jewish people, "we got the best set of rules in the business! Nobody has set down the rules as clearly as we have."...

There's a chapter in Leviticus which is called the Holiness Code, Leviticus chapter 19. That one chapter, if you look for

one chapter, in all of the 39 books of the Bible, that one chapter - and I'll only read you a few verses from it - condenses and concretizes the ethical attitudes of the Jewish religion: "The Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy [06:00]. When you reap...' " now, here's holiness, here's what holiness means. This is called the Holiness Code. "'When you reap the harvest of your field, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather every gleaning of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruits from the vine. You shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. I the Lord am your God.'" And so it begins, right away, feed the hungry. "'You shall not steal. You shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. You shall not swear falsely. You shall not defraud your neighbor. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning.'" Pay the man off at the end of the day when he's done his work [07:00], because he needs the money! "'You shall not insult the deaf,'" who can't hear you, so you're really being pretty sleazy to insult them behind their back. "'Nor shall you place a stumbling block in the path of the blind,'" who can't see it, so you can cause a

guy to fall and break his neck! Very simple. "I am the Lord. You shall not render an unfair decision." Don't favor the poor, or don't show any deference to the rich. Everybody's equal; judge your neighbor fairly! "Do not deal basely with your fellows. Do not profit by the blood of your neighbor. I am the Lord. You shall not hate your kinsman in your heart. Reprove your neighbor, but incur no guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge [08:00] against your kinfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself." And if you want to know where that sentence comes from, it's Leviticus, Chapter 19, Verse 18. It's easy to remember, 19:18, and that's the key verse. Love your neighbor as yourself. It's the basis of all the religions of mankind, and comes right here out of the Jewish sense of ethics. "Rise up before the aged." When an older man walks in the room, get up off your chair and stand! That's an act of respect! "You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old. I am the Lord. When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him." These next couple of sentences echo in your ears in view of what's happening today, right now. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him." [09:00] Don't break his wrists with any clubs. "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of

your citizens. You shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not falsify measures of length, weight or capacity.'" Don't sell goods with scales that are false. Don't cheat. If you're selling something, give a man an honest weight for his money. "'You shall not falsify measures...You shall have an honest scale, honest weights, and honest *ephah*...'" An *ephah* is a scale, is a quantity, it's about two pecks, uh dry, whatever it is, apples or whatever, "'and an honest *hin*.'" A *hin* is a measure of liquid, it's about a gallon. "'I am the Lord your God, who freed you from the land of Egypt. You shall faithfully observe all my laws and all my rules. I am the Lord.'" [10:00]

Now that's pretty good. That's about half of chapter 19. That's a powerful chapter. Listen to this. Judaism says that this moral law does not exist by virtue of a divine act or an authoritative fiat. It flows from the essence of God's being, from His absolute, moral nature. The fundamental law, listen, "You shall be holy" does not continue with the words, "For I so command it." That's not what God says. God doesn't say, "You shall be holy because I'm commanding you to be holy." It doesn't say, "I so will it." Rather it says this, "You shall be holy because I am holy. So I'm trying to set a moral example, and

that's what you should follow. [11:00] Because I am merciful, thou shalt be merciful. As I am gracious, thou shalt be gracious."

Role model, that's all God sets Himself up as, a role model. And you have to have the wisdom and the courage and the maturity to take that role model and follow it. What Leviticus chapter 19 said was repeated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, just a hundred years ago, 18 - in the year 1885, by a big conference of Jews in Germany. There were 350 rabbis and teachers of religion, of all shades of opinion, and 270 Jewish jurists from Germany and Austria, and they had a great big conference in 1885. And they laid down the principles of Jewish ethics, and here's what they said to you...and to me: Judaism teaches the unity of the human race [12:00]. We all have one Father; one God has created us. We all know that, we've got lots of examples uh in, in the Torah and the Talmud, over and over again that's repeated. Judaism commands "Love thy neighbor as thyself," it therefore forbids any sort of animosity, envy, malevolence, or unkindness toward any other human being. Judaism demands consideration for the life, health, powers, and possessions of one's neighbor, therefore it forbids injuring a fellow man by force. Judaism commands holding a fellow man's honor as sacred as his own.

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Don't mortify your fellow man, don't downgrade him, don't make him feel like two pennies; that's what they're telling you.

"Judaism commands the practice of charity towards all; clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, nursing the sick. Judaism commands absolute truthfulness." [13:00] Our yea shall be nay- shall be yea, our nay, nay. "Judaism commands walking humbly and modestly. Judaism demands peaceableness, mildness, benevolence. It forbids taking revenge and nursing hatred!" No! "Judaism commands chastity. Judaism commands the conscientious observance of the laws of the state and respect for the government. Judaism commands the promotion of the welfare of one's fellow men, the service of individuals and communities, in accordance with one's ability." You've heard that in every campaign solicitation that's ever been made of you. You have to support your community to the extent of your ability. And these principles, you could read them in...hundreds of years before the common era, and you can read a hundred years ago [14:00], and they're the same. They are eternal.

Is that situation which prevailed for all of these millennia prevalent today? Do we have today an absolute standard based upon what God said and what we should follow, and, our, and, and, uh, good is clear, and evil is clear? The answer is



no. Today there are no longer any absolutes. Most people do not believe in God, so most people do not accept God as the ultimate referee, and it doesn't matter to tell me what God said is the right or the wrong 'cause I don't believe there's a God. So how do I know what's right and wrong? *I'll* decide what's right and wrong! And everything is relative, and everybody makes up his own code of conduct and everybody rationalizes for himself in his own mind what's ethical and what's unethical [15:00]. By the way, that's not, uh, unknown. Uh, I will take you to a sentence in the Book of Judges which says, "In those days there was no king in Israel, and everyone did that which was pleasing in his own sight." [laughs] So if today you are living by that standard, so did they once before live by that standard. But that was an unusual time, before- after um, uh, Joshua, and before there were kings. Everybody did what he wanted to in his own eyes.

Today it's not the exception. Today it's the rule. Parents do not impose standards on their children. I know why. You hear modern parents say, "Well I can't say to my child, 'Yes, you may do this or no, you may not do that,' because I don't wanna traumatize the kid, I don't wanna shock the kid." Or for whatever reason they rationalize. Maybe they're too busy; maybe

they're too tired [16:00]. They abscond from laying down the law. Perhaps they don't believe in themselves as constituting an ultimate authority, and they are unable to rebut a child's cynical refusal to obey. How many teenage children have you heard rebelling against their parents with the challenging query, "Who are you to tell me what to do?" [laughter] Heh heh heh, yeah. Painful isn't it? There's hardly a parent in this room who hasn't heard those words out of the mouths of his own children.

So, you don't believe in God and his standards. You don't have standards of your own. So everything is [unclear]. And here we come to the nub of the matter: if everything is relative, if no one is in possession of authority, adults do as they fit [17:00], their children follow suit, religion has no place in the educational system, and so teachers are equally without authority. If you separate church and state, and the state says no religion in the school system, and even the Ten Commandments is considered religion in the school system, so teachers in the school system are without any armor or armament, and so they are taught that they may not, and this may shock you...In the New York school system, a teacher is not allowed to say to a child, "You may not have drugs." The teacher has no right to interfere

in the child's personal life. All of the teaching is supposed to be value free! Do not impose your values on the children by telling them what's right and wrong. Did you ever hear a more obscene word? Value-free?![18:00] How do you educate a child, if you deliberately begin that you cannot give him values? If the religion has no influence, and if the parent has no influence, and if the school has no influence...then how do you expect that there will be any sense of what's right or what's wrong in the world?

Aristotle wrote a book called *Ethics* and he's got an interesting sentence, "Virtue is of two kinds: Intellectual and moral. While intellectual virtue owes its birth and growth to teaching, moral virtue comes about as a result of habit." Habit! The moral virtues we get by first exercising them, habit, working them out. [19:00] We become just by doing just acts. We become temperate by doing temperate acts. We become brave by doing brave acts. Nothing didactic about it. You cannot teach, you cannot give a course in ethics. You cannot give lectures about ethics. You cannot preach, "be good!" and hope that anybody's going to be listening to you. Not in today's world. Everything has to be contextual. In the context of the life of

the child, that's where you have to work out the sense of morality.

There are two great boarding schools in America. One is called Andover, one is called Exeter. Each of the two principals has a different point of view. The principal at Exeter believed in a didactic approach, and he still does to this day. The principal [20:00] at Andover believes in this contextual approach, in which he says, "the most promising route for moral education is to test out own schools against the key principles of justice, charity, and service. Are our schools consistently fair? Are our schools compassionate? Do they provoke a selfless commitment to service to others? Do we show respect to our students? Do we trust them, with dignity? Do we watch for hypocrisy in our, the teachers' conduct? Hypocrisy is the adult trait held in most contempt by adolescents. Our schools cannot teach the values of justice and fairness if they harbor institutional injustice. [21:00] In a word, if we are interested in the moral education of our students, we must start with a searching look at the moral order of our own schools, of our own adult community and values. If the context is right, if we intentionally and deliberately create just and compassionate schools, their products are more likely to be just and

compassionate than through any other pedagogy we might employ. Such is the power of a boarding school. The path to moral education starts with us, the teachers, not with the students. Let us begin by looking in the mirror."

Our program at this retreat, therefore, is contextual. We have tried to create here a context. We want to relate to what's happened in our past, moral examples of leadership and Professor Pelle is going to do that [22:00]. We want to know what's happening in the present, in business, and Mr. Wexner's going to do that. And in the financial marketplace, and Mr. Stephen Peck is going to do that. And in our communities, Jewish communities, and Mr. Markowitz is going to do that. And in our Jewish school system, and Mr. Wucher is going to do that. And in our dearly beloved Israel, and Mr. Eban tonight and Mr. Netanyahu tomorrow night, two Israeli ambassadors, are going to do- talk about our dearly beloved Israel. And then, we want to see what might be models for our future, where we might relate to new ways of expressing ethical instincts. And on Sunday morning, Mr. Fine will talk about a hunger project that will, if it gets going, express our ethical instincts about feeding the hungry and [coughs] uh [23:00], the uh and rabbi uh...[voice from crowd; Lipzger] Lipzger, is going to talk about a project of how- of

dealing with prisoners, which might teach us how to deal with our fellow men.

Absolute standards are vastly preferable to relative standards. The absolute standards of the past, based on religion, if they are no longer universally applicable...must make it perfectly clear that the moral anarchy which has evolved in this country is alarming and dangerous. So if absolute standards based on religion are not going to be the model that you will follow, then the answer, seems to me, is to seek a new absolutism, because relativism is out, [24:00] totally independent-undependable. A new absolutism, which can be based on premises that might be more acceptable to the modern man, namely, premises which he might accept...as helping to build a better world, some of the major premises of which might be described as follows. Some!

Number one: A democratic form of society is preferable to a dictatorial form, of any sort.

Number two: Discrimination, whether racial, religious, gender, or any other, is completely undesirable.

Number three: Justice, equally and swiftly applied to every person, is indispensable.

Number four: Poverty, and its many concomitant evils, is *totally* unacceptable.

Number five: Health, education, and other useful [25:00] social services are to be supplied to all people.

These are five premises, you could put down five more all in the same mood, all in the same thrust, all in the same direction. I'm simply suggesting an approach. Sounds like the Bible, doesn't it? But if you, modern man, come to accept these premises as the basis for your morality, then even though they might have had their source in religion, which you say you cannot accept, then accept your own judgment about what you consider to be ethical, and once you accept these or any other set of premises, they become absolute! There is then no longer deviation, and no longer relativism. If these premises and any others in a similar vein are accepted by you, then automatically we will have developed a new code of absolute standards which will have the backing of a human revelation, not a divine one [26:00], one which modern man has come to establish though his own increasing sense of what civilization demands. Man then becomes the new authority, establishes his own absolutes. Parents and teachers inculcate values, no such thing as value-free! Parents and teachers teach what is right and wrong,

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monitor their own conduct so there is no conflict between their deeds and their words. You tell your teenage kid not to smoke marijuana, and he says to you, "That's not as bad alcohol. You stop drinking alcohol, I'll stop smoking marijuana!" Your deeds have got to match your words. Police and judges administer the punishments, universities and corporations administer the rewards. Perhaps a new ethical code could actually be written entitled, "Duties which all men are obligated to perform [27:00], and rights which all men are entitled to receive."

In conclusion, people like yourselves, synagogue-oriented and Federation active people, could be the first to set new standards. Don't cheat on your income tax; accept material losses in your personal lives for the sake of making ethical gains. Swallow a material loss, and feel good about an ethical gain that comes as a result of it. Act out your beliefs in social justice. There are plenty of street people, Jews and non-Jews, in every city of America, so you should set up programs in your synagogue to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless, exactly [28:00] as the prophets of old commanded you, but if you won't take it from them then take it from yourselves at least, and do it! And while you turn the synagogue into a holy place in the truest sense, make sure that it be cleansed of some of its



own unethical practices. Let it, let the synagogue not be an instrument for giving false tax deductions for some of those lavish Bar Mitvahs, and let it not sponsor gambling or selling cars for fundraising, and let it now honor dishonest persons.

Ethics was chosen as the subject of this retreat, not to bemoan the present violation of standards, but to challenge you to do two things. To adopt these premises or any others as the basis for your conduct in your personal and communal lives. And secondly, to initiate the writing of a code based on the old [29:00], God-given, and new human-given, absolute. So that Judaism will give forth a new burst of moral creativity in America, and from the particularity of our people and our tradition, there might spring forth another universality free- from which all mankind can benefit in the space age which lies ahead. When man sets up his colonies on the moon and Mars, in the reasonably near future, perhaps he will return to a belief in God, and then the old Biblical absolutes will come back into force. But, if God seems even further away once we are in space, then Judaism will at least have furnished a new ethic to serve the human race in the unimaginable explorations which lie ahead.[30:00] Thank you. [applause]

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