



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel
146

Box
51

Folder
66

Organizing for Happiness, 1920.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON
"ORGANIZING FOR HAPPINESS," AT THE
TEMPLE, EAST 55th AND CENTRAL AVENUE,
CLEVELAND, OHIO, JANUARY 18, 1920.

In my lecture last week, "Organizing for Service," I dwelt entirely upon the relation of the business man to society. This morning, in speaking of organizing for happiness, I shall dwell almost entirely upon the relation of the business man to himself. I have frequently said, and I believe that it is true, that the greatest sins which men commit are the sins which they commit not against other men but against themselves. Men sin most frequently against their own immortal souls.

When I speak this morning about the business man I shall have in mind the average man, the so-called middle class--the professional, the clerk, the manufacturer, the retailer, the small bourgeoisie, as it is commonly known in economic parlance--the common man, the average man, that class which is least understood and most abused of society.

The radical has no use for the middleman--the middle class, because the middle class is the backbone of our economic organization. The middle class is the staid, conservative, slow-moving, closely calculating element in

our population. He has no redeeming virtues, and no redeeming vices, according to the radical. He is a good father, a good husband, a good churchman, a good friend; he is charitable, he is kindly, he has ambitions; he rises and tries to raise others. He has all the commonplace virtues that unfit him for a radical, and so he is despised.

Big Business and organized labor use this average man, this middle class, as a sort of a foot-ball. He is a nice, docile sort of a lamb that can be and is easily fleeced. He is too gentlemanly to raise a howl or to threaten or to strike. He is the silent, suffering and enduring element of our citizenry. Everything is done in his name but nothing is done for him. He is never consulted but always assaulted and drained and used. The middleman, the average man--the professional, the teacher, the clerk, the small retailer,-gets no sympathy anywhere.

Big Business has a horde of loud-mouthed newspapers who cry revolution whenever any of the privileges of Big Business are about to be invaded. Organized labor has ten thousand dollar a year tribunes to lobby in behalf of its interests. The poor, silent middleman has no voice and is not heard. Occasionally he receives a verbal bouquet of compliments around November time. The middleman, the average man, is never wanted except when the tax registry is posted, and then he is discovered

and saved from absolute obscurity. He is taken out into the limelight and is searched and quizzed and squeezed and taxed. Every charitable organization, every community chest, and all the local drives known in history discover the middleman and use him.

Sometime ago I came across this rather plaintive cry from one of these bleating sheep that had been fleeced. A cigar manufacturer recently received from the firm who sells him leaf tobacco a terse letter asking why he had not sent his check as promised, to which the cigar manufacturer penned the following reply: "Answering yours of even date, my reasons for failing to send check are these: I have been held up, held down, sand-bagged, walked on, sat on, flattened out and squeezed --first by the United States government for the federal war tax, the excess profit tax, the liberty loan bonds, thrift stamps, capital stock tax, merchants' license, and auto tax, and by every society and organization that the inventive mind of man can invent, to extract what I may or may not possess; from the Society of John the Baptist, the D. A. R., the Women's Relief, the Navy League, the Red Cross, the Black Cross, the double cross, the triple cross, the Children's Home, the Dorcas Society, the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. C. A., the Boy Scouts, the Jewish Relief, the Belgium Relief, and every hospital in town. Then on top of it all came the

Associated Charities. The government has so governed my business that I don't know who owns it. I am inspected, suspected, examined and re-examined, informed, required and commanded. So I don't know who I am, what I am, or what I am here for. All I know is that I am supposed to be an inexhaustible supply of money for every known need, desire or hope of the human race. And because I will not sell all I have and go out and beg, borrow or steal money or give way, I have been cursed, discussed, boycotted, talked to, talked about, lied to, lied about, held up, hung up, robbed and nearly ruined, and the only reason I am clinging to life is to see what in heaven is coming next."

Now, nobody has ever said a kind word to the average man or about the average man. People eulogize the hero or the genius or the freak. Half of the space of every front page in our newspapers is devoted daily to the criminal, to the unusual thing, to the dramatic thing. The thing that is ordinary and average receives scant notice. If Mr. Smith has been a good husband for thirty years--which is, quite an achievement in itself--newspapers will rarely comment upon the fact, but if Mr. Smith in an off moment will beat his wife, every newsboy in the city will cry the glad tidings into every listening ear of the population. The extraordinary is the dramatic; the ordinary is the stupid, and hence the hero and the scoundrel have monopolized all the news and

all the literature of our day.

Now, some day I believe some brave soul who is not afraid of ridicule will write the epic of the average man, the man who has no obtrusive virtues and no fascinating vices and strikes a fairly good average; the man who leads an evil life with just enough of adventure to add a certain zest or relish to it, the man who climbs no imaginary peaks and sinks to no mythical depths, the man who works steadily and eats heartily and plays occasionally, who loves his home and his family, who is proud of his city and his country, who is strong without being brutish, and tender without being soft, the man who loves books that are simple and honest, and plays that are clean,--the average man, the ordinary man, the man, who, after all, is the life force of society and the solid, enduring foundation of it.

Now, most of us belong to this abused class. We have no grievances against life. We are not anxious to play dramatic roles upon the stage of life; we are content to follow the even tenor of our ways,--to live simply and work honestly and gain little happinesses in life.

I believe even as a class we are the happiest of all classes, and yet there is not enough happiness in our own class, and simply because we fail to organize for happiness. When some of us do find happiness it

is often by mere chance that we stumble upon it. You organize for industry, you organize for profession, you organize for building, you organize for any campaign, but few of us organize for the greatest campaign of all --the battle of life.

Now, I believe that there are some besetting sins of the middleman, I believe there are some vices to which the middleman falls the easiest victim, and vices which keep him from the shrine of happiness, even though his pilgrimage may be long and hard. And one of the sins is the sin of the routine. You and I too frequently fall into the rut of our professions, and we permit all the energies of our mind and soul to drift into that rut. We lose soon in life the uplifting romance of existence. We lose the spirit of adventure that makes life livable..

Why, I know a man, and I am quite confident that you know many such, whose days are planned and mapped out so mechanically that there is not an iota of variation between one day and another. They are like automats, like adding machines. I know a man who for twenty years has left his home in the morning at the same time and has taken the same street car and has bought the same newspaper and has opened his mail in the same way, and has eaten in the same restaurant the same lunch, and has returned home the same way and attended the same moving picture house, and played the same game of cards with the same group of men for fifteen years without variation.

Now, this man is not unhappy. But how much of happiness he misses in life ! He has grooved, routined his life; He has driven out of it all the thrill and the romance and the inspiriting adventure. He lives an easy life but by no means an interesting life. The middleman is the one that is most prone to fall into this besetting sin of routine, that never makes for happiness.

The second sin of the middle class, of you and of me, is the sin of drudgery. We become possessed by the things which we possess. We try to master our business and are soon mastered by it. We become the slave of the many petty and exacting details of our professions, and our life is centered in our business instead of our business being but one focal center;--but one focal center of a rich and diversified life.

We forget that man was not created for a profession, but that professions were created for man. How many people do you know who have sacrificed almost everything in life for the sake of success? Not success in life but success in business. How many men do you know who have given up all pleasure, all enjoyment, all cultural enterprises, all travel, all reading, all play,--who have even abandoned the innocent joys of home, and have sacrificed the inspiration which they can give to their homes and derive from their homes for the sake of this voracious demon of success, who demanded all the

devotion and all the energy and all the time and all the effort of this devotee and worshiper. And when success was attained, success in business, when money had been amassed, and when the man was ready to enjoy life, life slipped from between his fingers and he was called away.

The middleman, because of his honesty, because of his industry, because of his thrift, because of his love of work, is the easiest victim of that great danger of drudgery, of starving one's life into one department or one job or one profession, instead of developing him-
an
self into an all-around, many-sided, many interested man, made in the image of God.

The third sin of the middle class, of you and me, is the sin of looking for happiness in the wrong place. We have somehow come to believe that happiness is to be found in the number of fine things that we can put on our backs, and not in the number of fine things that we can put into our minds and into our souls. We have, not in a spirit of evil, but in a spirit of ignorance, come to look for happiness in things, in pleasures, in wealth, in luxury, in display. What standard do we use for gauging a man's wealth today? What passport does a man need today to enter the highest circles of society? Culture? Very rarely. Artistic achievement? Very rarely? Education? Very seldom. You don't find many artists or many professors in the choice and selected circles of social life. The gauge that is

most frequently used is the gauge of wealth, of things.

Some of you are so addicted to this philosophy that you even rear your children into it. You take your children when they are young, when they know little and care little for the tinsel finery and the show of life, children who make friends not on the basis of wealth but on the basis of an intuitive like for an individual, children who find the greatest enjoyment of life in the most innocent and simplest pleasures of life, and you train them into an artificial life. You make them imitate the elders; you place upon their backs the finest and costliest dresses; you make them imitate the artificial entertainment of their elders--the same manner of speech, the same form of entertainment, the same form of dress. You artificialize their lives. You make them drink the cup of life greedily and too hastily. You make them oldish when they should be young. By the time they have become twenty or twenty-five they have drained the cup of life completely, and they have become disillusioned and blase and given to seek excitement to keep them from ennui and boredom. We are prone to look for happiness in things, and things can never yield happiness nor pleasures. You might multiply pleasures, one after another, filling your days with them--exciting, hectic, feverish, entertaining and alluring pleasures, but you will find at the end of the day that it has turned to wormwood in your

mouth, that it has brought you nothing.

And the last besetting sin of the middle class, to my mind, is the sin of being swayed, of lacking independence and individuality. The middle class man is afraid of showing his emotions until he is in a crowd and a mob, and then, goaded on by emotions, he will do things that he will be ashamed of, if he were asked to do them by himself.

We are too prone to sacrifice our individuality to the sway and the swirl and the challenging dominion of the mob and the mass. We permit others to form opinions for us, and we are guided by their clever propaganda and their clever manipulations. We do not stand on our own feet enough; we do not think through problems for ourselves. We are not cultured in the sense of being independent.

Now, if we wish to organize for happiness we must have these four things constantly in mind. You will never be happy, you or I, if our lives are routined, if we are mastered by the thing we ought to master, if we seek for happiness in external things, and if we do not develop an independent, sound and determined outlook upon things.

If you seek for happiness, my friends, the very first thing that you must do is to try to tear yourself free from your groove, to strike out, to seek new or roads and meet new people and face new problems, to go out in search of them, to take a new path deliberately.

even when the old path is more comfortable. God did not lead the children of Israel through the land of Egypt because it was near to the promised land; he took them through the desert in a round-about way so that forty years of experience might purify them and prepare them for the promised land. We all need new experiences to startle us, to challenge us, to make us think. We must guard ourselves against being adding machines.

And if you seek happiness, my friends, organize for it by refusing to become the drudge of your profession, of your business. Say to yourself, "I have many professions in life beside the one that I am engaged in. I have the business of cultivating my mind, of disciplining my soul, of improving my surroundings. I have the business of establishing friendly and helpful relations with my fellow men; I have the business to give inspiration to my family and to derive inspiration from it. Business, with all of its responsibilities and obligations, is equally as sacred and equally as binding as my responsibility to my particular profession.

Say to yourself, "I may use my business to ^{not} serve the ends of my life, and my life to serve the ends of my business." Say to yourself, "I shall try to give free play to all the latent powers of my mind and my soul. I shall not atrophy any sentiment and any emotion that is within me. I shall not starve any capacity of my soul. I shall try to develop all of my powers, and

be yet well around them as complete a man as is given me to be.

And if you seek happiness, my friends, organize for it by changing your point of view. Seek it not in things, not in success or prosperity, not in wealth, not in power, not in fame. These things by themselves have never yet brought happiness to the struggling children of men. Most often they have brought trials and misery and heartaches to them. Seek happiness, my friends, in the harmonious life. Seek happiness in fine enterprises, that give free play to all the abilities of your life. Seek happiness in doing the thing that you like^{to do} and in doing it the best possible way. Seek happiness in doing things and not so much in achieving things. Seek happiness in the process and not so much in the result. Seek happiness in soul virtues, in spiritual qualities, and not so much in things that can be gauged by the yardstick of materialism.

If you want happiness, my friends, organize for it, by developing an independent outlook on everything. Free yourself from the horde that is frequently goaded into a stampede that leads nowhere. Refuse to think just because your neighbors think in this particular way on this particular thing. Do not try to imitate. Do not try to lose your identity in the vast majority. That is the comfortable thing to do; that is the easy thing to

do--to move with the mass, but that leads not to happiness. Happiness is found in holy and sanctifying convictions that may sometimes challenge the vast majority. Happiness is found in reasoning a thing through and then holding it sacred in the sanctuary of your soul. Happiness is found not in imitation but in creation. Happiness is found in filling your mind with certain ideals that are crystal and pure. They are yourself because you have lived through them and reasoned through them and made them a part of yourself. Happiness is found in having a definite distinctive point of view on life and on human relations.

Why do wars come into the world? Because men of these four sins. Because men are rutted and routined, because they refuse to strike out on a new road of destiny and experiment with new things, because men and nations are mastered by the things which they ought to master, because government and diplomacy soon come to serve the ends of Big Business and capital. It is because nations given to serve the Moloch of things, of wealth, of territory, of power, that wars come into the world. Business in your own life and in the lives of nations can come only when men learn to organize for it, and for happiness--first, by permitting the free winds of life to sweep through their souls, by throwing open the doors and windows of their minds and their souls so that new light and new

truth can constantly pour in, by getting out of the rut, and then by realizing that man is a child of God, made in the image of God, that his life is a glorious adventure into worlds spiritual and beautiful; that he must never bring and confine his soul into one small profession, or one petty job. And then by realizing that man finds happiness in work, in doing the fine things, and in doing them well, and not in things; by realizing that poverty and wealth have nothing to do with happiness. The great man never permits poverty or wealth to touch his soul. And by realizing that progress is possible only when men think and reason for themselves, and challenge, if need be, the mass and the horde.

Organize for happiness. Introduce efficiency into your lives and happiness will be yours.