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Reel
146

Box
51

Folder
67

Blazing a Trail Through Life, 1920.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON "BLAZING
A TRAIL THROUGH LIFE," AT THE TEMPLE, EAST
55th STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE, FEBRUARY 1,
1920, CLEVELAND, OHIO.

We are indeed living in a wonderful age, and
for no one is this age more wonderful than for ^{its} ~~the~~ young
~~men and women.~~
~~men and the young woman.~~ This age is wonderful because
it is an age of youth. It is controlled by the impulses
which characterize youth, ~~and not old age.~~ Our civiliza-
tion today, our culture, our literature, our institutions
are experiencing the pulsating throb of passionate, youth-
ful ideals.

The world will not, for a good number of years to
come, settle down to the staid, quiet, slow-moving life of
age. (And those who are engaged at present in endeavoring
to chill ~~the~~ warm currents of progressive thought in our
land are engaged ⁱⁿ ~~upon~~ a futile task.) Our civilization to-
day is wonderfully elastic, yielding, ~~plastic-wonderful-~~
~~ly~~ susceptible to new ideas and new influences. You cannot
stifle progress; you can not incarcerate the on-rushing
spirit of the world, ~~today,~~ especially in our own land of
~~freedom where men and women have had the tradition of a~~
~~century of freedom.~~ One cannot narrow or confine these
~~fine, out-rushing and explosive ideas of the new life of~~
~~today.~~ Not even the absurdities of a Mr. Palmer, not

even the stupidities of a Mr. Sweet, not even the vulgarities and blunders of all the heresy hunters of our day will succeed in aging and stultifying the spirit of youth that is abroad in the land.

~~Now, youth will make mistakes, but it is only~~
~~by mistakes that we learn and achieve, and we want young~~
~~men who are young to continue the fine work of today and~~
~~carry it on into the future.~~ ^{Now} ~~and~~ ^{need} We want more especially
the men whom life has favored, ~~the men and women~~ who have
enjoyed the privileges of education, of ~~fine~~ culture and an
inspiring environment, to lead in the world, ^{and} ~~to~~ keep ^{it}
~~the world~~ young.

Unfortunately, the generation of ~~the~~ young men
today, ~~also of the young Jewish men and women today,~~ is
a generation of mediocrity. ^{It is} ~~They are~~ characterized by a
frightful sameness. It is ordinary, very ordinary. The
^{man} young ~~man, and the young Jewish man and woman today,~~
especially of the comfortable middle class, lack ^{of} ~~the~~
~~certain~~ individuality. He is stamped with the stamp of
his ^{class} ~~group~~, and he seldom rises above the ^{level} ~~average~~ of his
^{class} ~~group~~. He lacks personality; he lacks spiritual initia-
tive; he lacks spiritual enterprise and adventure. He
has all the virtues ^{and} ~~but also~~ all the vices of the middle-
class. He has a mind that, in spite of its training, is
a very ordinary, ~~mind~~. It is ~~a~~ uncritical, ~~mind~~. It is
~~a mind that~~ takes its clue from the ^{prevailing} ~~(sentiment~~ and opinion.

It

~~prevalent about him, it is a mind that~~ feeds on second-hand information, ~~it is a mechanical type of mind;~~ It is a newspaper type of mind, ~~it is a mind that is not~~ critically analytical, ~~it~~ does not separate the chaff from the grain, ~~that~~ accepts rumor for truth.

The young man and woman of today, ~~and the young~~ Jewishman and woman of the middle class--I mean, my friends, the ones I meet daily and come in daily contact with--lack that lift, that enthusiasm, that transfiguring something which is characteristic of so many of the younger generation in European lands. ~~Their~~ ^{The} one ^{compelling} desire in ^{for these young people} life is to get on or pass by someone, ~~else~~. It is not ~~an~~ ^{blameful} altogether faulty ambition ~~to get on, to succeed, but I~~ am afraid that ~~the ambition~~ is altogether too utilitarian; ~~it is~~ too practical, ~~it is~~ too circumscribed, ~~it is~~ too selfish. The morals of the average young man of the middle class are not bad, but they are not good. ~~They are~~ ^{he is} not vicious, but ~~they are~~ ^{he is} not virtuous, ~~and certainly~~ ^{he does not lack} ~~while the average young man and woman has a sense of~~ ^{the sentiment of} charity and of kindness, ~~his and her life is not dominated by a sense of loyal service of their kinsmen and~~ ^{but his} ~~of their people.~~ ^{any overpowering} ~~fellow men.~~ ^{to his}

Now, I do not ^{with} ~~desire~~ to ^{pronounce} ~~indulge in~~ a general indictment. I know there are splendid and beautiful exceptions to what I am saying, ^{but you will agree with me} ~~but I do believe that if~~ you and I are really frank that we must come to acknowledge ^{the middle} ~~the fact that the average young man and woman of our class~~ class

they have fine qualities, these men
and women. They are full of promise.
But their promise is seldom fulfilled.
Perhaps they miss the knowledge
of the

Perhaps they lack



✓ which we must regard
as essential

today lack something. Is it a lack of spirituality?

Is it a lack of moral firmness? Is it a lack of vision?

Is it a lack of purpose? What is it?

I believe that our young people must become aware
of some of the fundamental things that go into the making
of a successful life. I would have them inculcated with
those holy convictions that would save their lives from
the morass of the ordinary and the average, and the plain
and the uninteresting and the drowsy. They all have gifts,
and they all have capacities, and they all have latent
powers, but somehow the atmosphere, the environment, the
traditions of their ^{class} group deaden, they extinguish the spark
they make in their souls. that is in them.

If I were to speak to ~~them~~ ^{these young men and women} I would say to them,

"Friends, you must ~~first~~ ^{you} get into your life a tone of
confidence, which the average member of ~~the middle~~ ^{your} class-
es lacks--confidence not in your power to make a success
in business or in ^a your profession, but confidence to make
of your life something supremely and superbly beautiful."

I would ~~try~~ ^{the} to have you gain faith in yourself that
you, ^{have it within yourselves to} everyone of you, can become a path-finder, one who
will blaze a new trail through life. I would have you
become conscious of ^{that} the greatness, of ^{that} the divinity, that
is within you, but that which you are daily stifling and
holding under. You can blaze a new trail through life.
You can become a path-finder in any
profession that you choose for yourself. You can develop
your gifts and your talents to the nth power."

Know thyself. You do not give yourself ^{over} a chance,
~~to know yourself, because~~ you do not give your powers and
your talents, ~~all of them,~~ a chance to express themselves
in life. You ~~delimit~~ and circumscribe and confine your
lives; you have no confidence in yourself. I would
rather undertake the ^{the great adventure and face} biggest thing ~~and have people laugh~~
~~the scorn of people who will taunt me with the~~
~~at me and say that I am inspired by the foolhardiness of~~
~~and my lack of~~ youth, ~~that I lack experience, that I do not know the~~
~~ways of the world, that I am arrogant;~~ I would rather
undertake to do that tremendously big thing rather than
~~engage in~~ undertake to do a pittance, a tid-bit or reality, and
have people say, "He is a practical, ^{reliable} commonsense individ-
idual." In the doing of the big things I might commit
^{foibles} tremendous blunders, but I might also gain tremendous
inspiration. I might touch the very robe of the shachina,
of God Himself. ^{she china}

^{also} Secondly, I would say to my young friends,
^{that} "Gain a sense of dignity, ~~a~~ sense of dignity which will
^{with} come ~~as a direct result of this~~ confidence that I would
^{the} have you bring into your lives. ~~Not~~ to do things, ^{not} because
people will praise you for them, but because your soul
prompts you to their performance. ~~and~~ to keep yourself
^{not} from doing certain things/because people will censure you ^{for the}
but because your soul revolts against the doing of these
things. To feel that your soul is of God, something holy
and something noble, is to keep you from doing ~~these~~ ^{the}
things that taint and defile and lower ~~you~~."

"I would not be a quack doctor or dentist or a cheap lawyer, or a juggling real estate ^{agent} ~~merchant~~, or a cheating, profiteering retailer, or a loud, dishonest salesman, or a bond manipulator, or a thumb-screw landlord, ^{not} ~~Not~~ because these things are ^{frowned upon by} ~~to the discredit of~~ men, but because my soul would not permit me." That is the feeling that you and I ought to have. It is stooping, it is wallowing in the mud.

^{from} I would urge young men to keep themselves free ~~of~~ the social taint, not because it will devastate their physical lives, but because ^{it} ~~they~~ will ~~be~~ besmirching their God-given soul; because it is cheap; because it is not the fine and the decent thing for brave men to do: Because it is a confession of a moral debacle, ~~of a~~ ^{loss} ~~moral disease~~, of a weakness, of a ~~destruction of~~ ^{the} soul-discipline; because it is soft and weak. A sense of dignity in life--that is of supreme importance.

I would also have my young friends try to gain a sense of unity in their lives. ~~What is~~ character? Character is nothing else but the harmonious organization of ^{ones} ~~your~~ life. ^{it is the expression} ~~What is culture? Culture is nothing else but the sum total of a beautiful and perfectly organized life. The cultured man does everything which rings true. Every act of his life is an emanation of his soul. Every word, every expression is part of him; it is not accidental, it is not sporadic, it is not something of and by itself, but~~ ^{man of character} ~~it is all part of a great unity in a soul.~~ ^{his}

A man who is a good husband, and a good friend
and a charitable individual, but ^{who} is a contemptible cheat
in his business, lacks character. Why? Because there
is no unity, there is no harmony, there is no honesty
in his soul-organization. The mirror of his soul is
cracked. The glass is all there, but it is not unified;
it does not reflect ^a ~~the~~ soul.

Your life must be dominated by one idea or it is
^{disjointed} a heap of links, ~~that are disjointed~~. There must be a
controlling motif, ~~just like a symphony is a motif~~, that
occurs and recurs constantly, that holds the tones ^{your life} to-
gether, ^{it must have a theme} ~~so must your life have the theme, the motif that~~
~~will hold it all together. It must ring true, all of it.~~
If you have no idea back of your life, your life will be
just a succession of discordant notes struck here and
^{signifying nothing} there, ~~with no thought, with no idea, with no melody.~~

Confidence, a sense of dignity, a sense of unity,
and also a sense of obligation! The world owes you and
me nothing. The world is not indebted to us for anything.
We are indebted to the world for everything. ^{IP} There is
not merit at all attached to superior mental endowments.
If you have a fine mind you deserve no credit for it at
all. That was given to you. You deserve no credit for
having inherited wealth. If you have been blessed with
a beautiful body, you deserve no especial commendation
for it. That is your good fortune.

Merit is bestowed only upon the usage of qualities

7) ~~and attributes~~ and gifts. It is how we utilize these liberal and abundant endowments of our lives, ~~of mind and soul~~, that determines the credit that the world ~~should bestow~~ upon us. ~~Nothing is more beautiful than a beautiful soul in a beautiful body.~~ When you translate the beauty of ^{your body} yourself into the beauty of your soul, when you translate the ^{fine qualities} ~~mental~~ equipment of your mind into acts of social beneficence, when you, in other words, become a blessing through the things with which you ~~were~~ ^{are} blessed, then you are indeed deserving of merit and commendation.

A college education is a social investment. Society invests in you and society anticipates a dividend ^{from} ~~upon~~ its investment. If you ^{use} ~~utilize~~ a college education ^{only} ~~merely~~ for personal adornment, ^{yourself} ~~merely~~ to give you an air of superiority, ^{to compare you in your} ~~merely~~ to justify yourself of exclusiveness, ~~merely~~ to make you an intellectual snob, then society has made an unfortunately poor investment in you. Society trains you because it needs leaders, because it needs path-finders, because it needs men and women to cut ~~their way~~ through the tangle and the wilderness and point the way for other men and women to follow.

And those who have enjoyed the privilege ^{of} ~~of~~ higher education ^{and} ~~but~~ have ^{kept} ~~hogged~~ their education unto themselves, ^{not} ~~without~~ going forth into the highways and byways of life to share it with other men, have not paid

their honest debts to society. They stand accused of supreme selfishness.

There is something wrong with our education, ~~all~~
~~together~~. ~~The~~ European university ^{is} will turn out ~~young~~
men and women who ^{with} have a divine spirit of restlessness
in them; young men who will initiate things, ~~young men~~
who will go forth with tremendous purposes in life, ready
to do, whether it ^{be} is to destroy or to create. ~~But~~ they
are dynamic. They have translated their learning into
emotions and ideals. The Latin quarter or the campus
of a European university may become, ^{very often become} as it has ~~in the past~~,
the starting point ^{for} in a national uprising, ~~in~~ a revolution.
The American campus will never become the battlefield for
any ideas. No revolution will ever begin ~~in~~ a college
campus. It is just ~~that~~ ^{the} difference between an education
aimed solely at polishing an individual, at "finishing"
him--the finishing school, at making him acceptable,
refined, and dignified, and the college education which
aims at a "liberal" education, a liberalizing education,
an emancipating education, a dynamic education.

You men and women who have passed through the
halls of universities and colleges do not forget that
you are the emissaries of our civilization, that you are
the trustees for the future. Do not forget ~~that~~ whereas
society has enabled you, in some measure, to reach the
~~peak and the pinnacle~~ ^{has} ~~that~~ the millions ^{and} in the masses
are still groping in the dark of the valley. Do not for

a moment think that because men speak so ^{gloriously} ~~honorably~~ today of high wages, that all our social problems have been solved, that there is no poverty, and no misery, and no ignorance, and no superstition, and no hate, and no vulgarity, and no greed in the world. Nine-tenths of humanity are still groping in the fogs of the valley below, and it is your sacred duty to take the torch that has been placed in your hand and descend into the valley. That is where you belong. A social servant is what you are and what you ought to be.

9 A few days ago I read a book which I would recommend to every young man and woman ~~within the sound of my voice~~, to read. It is called, "An American ^{Idyll} ~~Idyl~~." It is the life of Carlton H. Parker, written by his wife. Mr. Parker died a year or two ago. He was professor of economics at the University of Washington. During the war Mr. Parker settled more strikes than any man in the United States. He was the entrusted agent of the government in all the ^{great} ~~terrible~~ labor disputes and difficulties of the ^{it} ~~great~~ Northwest. But ^{is} not what he achieved that is the supremely beautiful thing. It is his life. ^{and a traveller} This man was a miner, and a ^{stolen} ~~stevedore~~, and a farmer, and a doctor of philosophy. This man began his college life with one ideal--~~namely~~, to get as much adventure, as much real relish and zest out of life ~~that~~ he possibly could. He was not going to rut ~~himself~~ and routine himself, and

from the very start.
~~deden himself~~ in any profession, ~~enticing and promising~~
~~as that might be.~~ He was going to wait, to experiment
with his life, to try many things, to see the world, to
see men of all classes, to live with men and work with
them, and suffer with them, ~~and then~~ to understand them.

Up to the last year of his life, Carlton H.
Parker ~~had a terrible~~ struggle to make ends meet. He was
blessed with a wife that understood him and that under-
stood life itself. She, too, was eager not for the suc-
cess of life, ~~not for the position of life,~~ but for the
adventure of life, for the God that is to be found in the
adventure of life. Carlton H. Parker found, as most of
us come sooner or later to find, that the real adventure
of life is to be found not in traveling to foreign lands
and distant shores, ~~that sooner or later become terribly~~
~~monotonous,~~ *one lives 7 ft.* but ^{are} that the real adventure of life is to be
found right where you/around the corner from you, in the
manifold relationships that you can establish with your
fellowmen, and in trying to understand them, their needs,
their aims and their ideals; in reading yourself into
their circumstances, and reading out of their souls some
inspiration for your ~~souls~~; in spiritual adventure; in
being constantly on the alert for new ideas and new
impressions and new sensations. That is the thing that
makes life worth while, and that is the thing that so many
of our young men and women of the middle class completely
miss.

TP

to enjoy the zest of life the more. ~~and~~ I believe that I
owe a debt to ^{my God and my fellow men} humanity and to ~~my God~~, for the soul which ^{God} ~~He~~
gave unto me, ~~is pure, and the mind which He gave unto me~~
~~is fine and active,~~ ^{for} and the education which society gave
unto me, ~~is an investment.~~ ^{TP} I believe in service, first as
a payment of a just debt, and, secondly, as the only avenue
by which men and women ever can find or ever have found
real, soul-contentment, and ~~soul-satisfaction~~ ^{happiness.}

I do not believe in being ordinary ~~and tame~~ and
average and commonplace, ~~and mediocre.~~ ^{TP} The one ambi-
tion of my mortal days would be ~~to try~~ to break through
^{all Confining Circumstance} ~~the mortal clouds~~ and give myself a chance to rise above
the dead level of mediocrity, and then to raise others; to
lead, even as I first am content to follow--to be a
path-finder, to blaze a trail through life. . . .

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