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

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Friends I have Won and Lost - The Gentle Art of Making Friends  
and Enemies, 1922.

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LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON  
"FRIENDS I HAVE WON AND LOST--THE GENTLE ART  
OF MAKING FRIENDS,"  
AT THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,  
FEBRUARY 26, 1922, CLEVELAND, O.

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WRHS





Charles Lamb, in his pleasing essay called "Imperfect Sympathies," takes issue with those people who claim that they can love everybody. Lamb questions the veracity of those people who have such generous and circumambient affection that they can without difficulty, without prejudice, love everyone. As far as he himself is concerned, he says he is a bundle of prejudices; he has his likes and his dislikes; he can love all people indifferently, but he cannot feel towards ~~all~~ of them equally.

Now, Lamb was a keen student of society and of human relations. You will recall that it was Charles Lamb who first divided the human race into two classes--those who ~~lean~~ and those who borrow. And he placed himself, of course, in the nobler, the more profitable of the two classes: among those who borrowed. And it was Charles Lamb, too, you will recall, who had the courage to tell exactly how people felt about their poor relations. He said that a poor relation was the most irrelevant thing in nature; it is a shadow in the noontide in your prosperity; it is a drain on your purse; it is a triumph to your enemies and an apology to your friends; it is the one thing not at all necessary.

Now, a man who has such keen intuition and such exact intuition in those human relations that are

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most often hidden, or not even acknowledged to ourselves, one should listen to when he speaks, because the likelihood is that he speaks authoritatively.

Charles Lamb did not like the Scotch because they were too precise for him; too exact, too unimaginative, too realistic; they never had any doubts. He does not like a man that has no doubts. He did not like the Jews because, he said, he cannot shake off the ancient prejudices. He is very frank about it. The Jew was, to him, a piece of stubborn antiquity: they date from before the pyramids. He says, however, that he never saw a silly expression on any Jew, and he never heard of any idiot being born among them. Of course, we would correct him on that score.

He did not like the Quakers; their regime of life was too austere, too Spartanlike for him. He did not like the negro because he was black. And we may assume that he liked himself.

But his main contention I am afraid is true: we really cannot love everybody. We love some more and some less and some not at all; we all have our prejudices; we do not always speak of them; we always speak of the prejudices of other people that affect us unfavorably, but we do not speak of our own prejudices towards other people. Human beings have a knack of throwing a ring of prejudice around themselves to protect

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themselves, just like certain plants and flowers encase themselves in those rough and prickly burrs.

I suppose that we are entitled to our prejudices; we are entitled to our pet aversions the same as we are entitled to our pet maladies. I know certain women--and I suppose you do, too--who would be absolutely and utterly unhappy if they did not have a certain ailment to complain of; the interests of their lives would be robbed of a focusing point--as well as of a ready subject for conversation.

Some people never feel themselves so important as when they can, by a gesture or a word or an act, show the inferiority of their neighbor; they feel that they become exalted through this degradation of the other fellow.

Now, there is really no particular harm in having these pet aversions, until they become ugly, until they begin to translate themselves from mere innocuous sentiments into rather distressing and unpleasant and irritating acts. It is like a bumble bee, which is a pleasant little insect as it flits from flower to flower, but when it suddenly ceases to bumble and begins to sting, it becomes rather ugly.

Well, that is the nature of certain pet prejudices and aversions. Pet aversions, like pet dogs, have their uses in the world. Judging from the life some

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pet dogs lead, they must have marvelous uses. But they must not be permitted to interfere in the business of life; they become serious things when they get in the way of the business of living. As far as the business of life is concerned, it is well for all of us to have a normal, wholesome, healthful spirit of good will to everybody; a spirit of gentleness and tenderness to all our fellow pilgrims in the highway of life, and a spirit of compassion for the unhappy ones and those who are sorely tried. But that rather precious jewel which we call human affection and love, we must, perforce, reserve for those very near and very dear to us--our kin and our friends.

Oh, I suppose it is well to speak of loving all men, and in the abstract I suppose we can love all men, but in the concrete, in the detail, it is impossible for a man to love really all men. It is only God himself who can love all men, because all men are His children. Man, by his very nature, by his finite composition, is limited in the extent of his affection to his children, to his kin, to his friends.

The love for one's family, for one's children, for one's parents, is almost instinctive, of course; it is automatic; and it is rooted in the subsoil of physical things. It is a spiritual reality--it is a beautiful spiritual reality, but it is, nevertheless, rooted in the soil of physical considerations. There is

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dependency, there is protection, there are blood ties, there is propinquity, there is nearness, there is intimacy; but in the case of friendship none of these considerations is involved. Friendship has absolutely no physical basis, and because of that it is perhaps of a higher rank and of a subtler and nobler quality than any other kind of human affection.

We sometimes express this thought when we say we can choose our friends. Relations are wished on us. I suppose many of us feel towards many of our relations as my friend did who spoke about a person distantly related to him but not far enough removed. I have always thought that it must be very disconcerting for a young person to be born into a readymade world of relations, without having previously been consulted, and then asked, uncritically and indiscriminately, to lavish his affections on all his infinite relations of uncles and aunts, cousins and second cousins, ad infinitum.

But friends we can choose. Perhaps that is not a very exact statement, either. We do not choose friends, really. I think it was Emerson who said: "My friends came to me unsought: the good God gave them to me." We do not take a man and critically appraise him, analyze him, inspect his credentials, satisfy ourselves on all points, and then make a friend of him. That is how we make business associates but not friends.

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The process of making friends is rather intuitive than intellectual; it is psychic rather than logical; it is almost unconscious; our souls just reach out, and through the antennae of our feelings we search for certain qualities of mind and soul, for certain spiritual essences in another human being, and when we find them we gravitate towards that person even as he gravitates towards us--and we have a friend.

We do not know why we make friends. There are other people who are brighter and more educated and handsomer and better placed in life, and yet of all those that pass to and fro before us during our days upon earth, one man we choose as our bosom friend, and him we take along in the fine adventure of spiritual kinship which we call friendship.

I suppose some day those terrible people who are called the psychoanalysts, who are confusing the minds of so many innocent people today--the psychoanalysts who are the grand inquisitors of the twentieth century.--that some day these people will discover some sex basis for friendship; they will begin to study friendship as a sort of another emotional complex, and they will startle us by showing a rather commonplace, perhaps sordid, basis for friendship.

But whatever their discoveries may be, we need not be really disconcerted; what the foundation is

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is not always an indication of what the structure may become. It is undoubtedly true that we have with us, in our souls, survivals of things primitive and things archaic. The past is always present with us; we always carry our past and the past of our race with us. But it is also true that through the endless cycles of human evolution man has evolved through struggle and through pain and through effort and through adventure certain higher spiritual values and considerations!

It is a long cry, it is a long road between a nursery rhyme and Wordsworth's ode on Immortality. The nursery rhyme came first, of course. That is primitive; that is archaic; but the ode is none the less a true characteristic of the human race, essential because it is late. And so in spite of the fact that away back in the primitive days of the race friendship may have been formed on purely physical and material considerations of mutual self-protection, it is nevertheless true that this marvelous phenomenon of two human beings, unaccountably and for no ulterior motive, getting together in an exquisite harmony, blending their destinies and finding in one another's society supreme good and supreme happiness,--I say that this phenomenon is with us today, will always be with us, and is, to my mind, one of the supreme indications that, after all, there is much of goodness and much of sweetness still abroad in the world

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today.

In our business life today, in our city life, we have not much time for the obligations and the duties of friendship, and so we make few friends. I think it is Bacon who quotes the Latin saying: "Magna civitas, magna solitudo" -- a great city (is) a great solitude. And isn't it strange how few of us really realize that in spite of our many concerns in life, in spite of the rounds of pleasures and entertainments which we have, many of us are really lonely nomads in the desert lands of the world!

We have a great number of acquaintances, but friends we have few or none, and he who has no friend must be desperately lonely. Every one of us has a large number of acquaintances--business and social. The business acquaintance, of course, is very innocuous; the degree of our familiarity is extremely limited; in dull moments we may sometimes play a game of cards with him; in moments of exhilaration we might exchange cigars with him--and feel ourselves cheated in the exchange.

Of social acquaintances we have more, and they are more intrusive; we invite them to our homes; they sit at our board; they invite us to their homes; we sit at their board; we exchange mutual courtesies, the social amenities. But they are no friends. We play the conventional game--a necessary game in cultured society.

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but the depths of our souls, the real, real depths of our souls we cannot, we dare not, reveal unto them. They can never know the sanctuary of our lives, even as we cannot know the sanctuary of their lives.

Our real, true selves, the real imagery and stamp of our hopes and longings and perplexities and anxieties we can make known only to a few, perhaps to one--to a friend; for he understands; for in him we see a reflection of part of ourselves. The friend--he has the sympathetic understanding, the real grasp of things; he can hear the tone and the over-tone; he can understand what we say and what we leave unsaid--the implications.

A friend, said Emerson, is a man of whom we can be absolutely sincere. The difference between acquaintances and friends is the difference between two circles touching one another at one point at the circumference, and one circle including another in its circumference. And it is good, my friends, it is very good to have one or a few with whom we can be absolutely open and frank and unreserved; before whom we can lay bare the innermost secrets of our soul.

I have always thought that the more civilized we become, the more people we get to know, the more relations we establish in society, the higher our position and responsibilities, the more reserved we become--by force, by necessity. A king will seclude himself, will

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dress himself in royal raiments and dignity, so as to protect himself from people, so as to keep himself from their close, prying scrutiny.

But even kings need a few confidants, a few intimates, before whom they can just strip themselves of all the tinselled display of authority and lay bare their real selves, their real cares, their real concerns-- that which is really themselves. Why, to spend an hour with a friend is sometimes like having a burden taken off your shoulders. He may not say a word; he may just sit there or walk by your side and say nothing, and when you are through you feel relieved. Someone has shared your burden; someone has understood.

I have sometimes been asked: Why is it that some people make friends and others do not? I have always said that people do not make friends. You cannot make a friend just as you cannot make anyone love you. You can make him admire you; you can make him respect you, but you cannot make him love you. People will admire us for what we achieve, for what we do, but they love us for what we are. What we do is conduct; what we are is character. It is not half as important to know what we do as to know what we are.

I know many people who in conduct are absolutely correct and perfect, and who in importance are great because of their achievements and because of the

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things they do and the positions they occupy in society, and yet for some reason or other they simply haven't the knack of making friends, of winning kinship, affinity friendship. And why? Why, because it takes the whole fabric and texture of your life, it takes the whole soul-stuff of which you are compounded to attract a friend.

When you have a disposition for friendship, when you have the disposition for the enterprising friendship, when you have the qualities of frankness and mutuality and gentleness, when you are not cursed with a parasitic passion--the passion to exploit another one, to use him--and many have that passion unconsciously--when you are not obsessed with a utilitarian point of view that everything you do and everything you have must benefit you, why, then, at some time or other, somewhere, some soul will drift in towards you and will be attracted as one atom is attracted to another, and you will have a friend.

The old adage, then, is wonderfully true: the only way to have a friend is to be one. Very little can be added to that. It is imbibed; it is in your constitution; it is in your soul-makeup; it is in your character, where the real qualifications for friendship must be found, and where the real attraction for friendship will ultimately reside.

Of course, it is much more difficult to

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hold a friend than to have one and make one. How few people realize the real significance of friendship and the real obligations of friendship; and how many are there who have heartaches and pain as a result of their misunderstanding of the rights and the duties and the prerogatives of friendship! It seems to me that one of the most disastrous things that can happen to friends is when one looks upon a friend as a person who must always justify him; a person who must always agree with him; a person who must always underwrite his pretensions and his contentions and his views and his whims. A man of that temperament really does not want a friend; he wants a sycophant or a henchman; he does not love his friend, he loves himself in reflection.

We must religiously respect--and that, to my mind, is one of the prime requisites of friendship, and of all types of love and affection,--we must religiously venerate the individuality and the independence of our friends, for it is these things--their individuality and their independence, their selves, which make them of value, which make them precious to us.

I have oftentimes had friends who heaped kindness upon me, who were wonderfully good to me, and yet when out of conviction I felt called upon to challenge their viewpoints, to balk them in certain things very vital to them, they were offended, they felt outraged. I

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suppose they thought and spoke of human ingratitude. But one must shun such friendship as one would shun a blight. They undermine character; they destroy personality; they destroy anything that is intrinsically good and beautiful and worthwhile in your soul.

In real friendship there is no thought of indebtedness or compensation or calculated give and take; nothing but love--a love that is sometimes cruel because of its honesty, but always wholesome in its effect.

That is one way of losing friends. And there is another way of losing friends, and that is by permitting them to outstrip you, to outdistance you spiritually. My friend A develops; he gains new interests in life; his aptitudes increase, his horizons widen; he has many great interests and concerns in life. I stand still; he forges ahead. Before long he moves in a world utterly removed from my own, out of my knowledge, out of my touch, out of my ken. He has left me and I have lost him.

One of the supreme obligations of friendship is self-development, so that we can keep abreast with the onward stride of our friends; so that we can keep pace with them, or inspire in them a love for development. I think that one of the most important things that a real friend must do is to keep his mind active and alert and searching and inquisitive; to traverse the whole world

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and garner all the wisdom and all the experience that he can, so that when the two of them come to exchange counsel, to exchange information, he will not always be the recipient, the beggar, who always, always takes but seldom or never gives.

Friendship is a tremendous obligation. To make friends is difficult; to hold them is still more difficult; but the reward of friendship is life completed. To make enemies is the easiest thing in the world; and I need not tell about, nor need you get additional information in the gentle art of making enemies. We do that almost unconsciously. But there are certain enemies that it takes a supreme courage to make, and that are worthwhile making.

I like to have people have a few wholesome, healthful, vigorous, honest to goodness hates in their system. I do not mean by hate a blind passion, vindictive and cruel, but I mean by hate a determination never to yield until that wrong is wiped out. To make an enemy of injustice, of intrenched wrong and privilege, to make an enemy of the snob, of him who abuses, of him who maligns, to make an enemy of an enemy of society, is, to my mind, to win for oneself a crown of glory, which sometimes means a crown of thorns, but the more the thorns the greater the glory.

The love that is weak and effeminate, that

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has not the driving impulse of a will to do right and to destroy wrong--that love is worthless in human society. We must train our youth as we must train ourselves--uncompromisingly to hate wrong and to work for its destruction. One who makes friends for the sake of his position, for the sake of affluence, for the sake of comfort, with powerful enemies of society, loses every title to manhood, every quality to real character.

I will close with the sentence with which Bacon closes his fine essay on friendship. "He who has no friend may just as well quit the stage." There is in life, very little worth while, my friends, if you havenot discovered, through the years of your toil and struggle, some spiritual kinsman who will stand by your side and double your joys and halve your sorrows by sharing them with you, who will inspire you in moments of depression, comfort you in moments of sorrow, and increase your joy in moments of happiness.

Someone before whom you can be yourself--open, frank, sincere; someone who can be your fellow traveler, your fellow pilgrim, upon the road that leads to God.

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