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Loyalties, 1922.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER

SUBJECT: LOYALTIES.

AT THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

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WRHS



JOSEPH T. KRAUS
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If men could be classified simply as good or bad, and if it were possible in any given situation to say accurately what is right and what is wrong, the problem of ethics and the problem of human relationship would be a very simple and elemental one indeed. And there are people who are more eager to judge than to be judged, who find it very easy indeed sharply and definitely to characterize somebody as either good or bad, as if they were in possession of absolutely infallible standards of measurement. This man has committed this crime; therefore he is bad--absolutely, completely. This man has performed this good deed; therefore he is good--perfect and complete.

And when you ask them for their standards of evaluation, for the gauge with which they measure one's goodness or badness, you find that they have nothing else but a sort of vague, primitive, emotional reaction about what they have been accustomed to regard as good or bad. To the thoughtful man it has long been apparent that no man is absolutely good or absolutely bad. The rabbis long ago said, "A man should always look upon himself as though he were half innocent and half guilty."

Life is not simple and our actions are not the result of one impulse but oftentimes the result of a conflict and a confusion of overpowering impulses. We are not simple; we are what our ancestors have made us, we are what our environments have made us, we are what our wills and desires

and ideals make us, and oftentimes a definite act, one single act, is the result of a struggle between these three powerful forces for mastery, for the determination of our act. And so you cannot always judge a man by his acts. Of course the more thoughtful among us do not. We at once ask for the motives behind the acts. But even in the case of motives we are not on very safe and sure ground; very often a good motive will lead to a base deed.

You take the zealot and the religious fanatic who kills and destroys in the name of his religion--his motive is admirable; you take the patriot who fights and slaves in the name of his loyalty and patriotism--his motive is a noble one; you take the son who continues a family feud for the sake of the honor of the family--his motive, too, is a good one. And yet their deeds may be socially harmful.

The cry of the old Rabbis comes back to us. These sages of ours thousands of years ago knew the human soul much better than we know it; they were not as naive as we sometimes believe ourselves into believing. "Woe unto that man," they say, "who does not know good from evil." And that is the case with most of us

Take the last war. Assume that we could without difficulty pin the responsibility for the last war upon the shoulders of this group or that group, of this diplomat or that diplomat, of this king or that king; surely the privates who fought in the trenches, the humble soldiers in the ranks, in each one of the contending armies, friend or

foe,--surely, they were prompted and urged and stirred by the finest of impulses and motives; they were defending their country, each one of them--the German, the Frenchman, the Austrian, the Englishman. Each one was fighting because his country was in danger, and each one was sacrificing all that he had in the name of his loyalty. And yet some of them, at least, in fighting for their country, were fighting against civilization; some of them, at least, were doing hurtful and harmful things.

And that is really where most of the misery and the suffering of the world comes from. Most of the misery is brought about in this world not by the consciously wicked, deliberately wicked, bad and sinful people, but by misguided and misled and blinded, earnest, sincere loyalty.

Not so very long ago I had the occasion to remind a churchman that his pastor was unusually vindictive and unscrupulous in defending his particular theology, and at once he answered me, "But he is so sincere and so devoted." That is true. But the men who established the Inquisition, the men who put the torch to the stake where the heretic was burnt, the men who waged a hundred years of warfare in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and devastated and desolated half of Europe--they, too, were earnest and sincere and devoted people. In other words, sincerity and loyalty and enthusiasm are insufficient; they will lead to disaster. The cause to which a man is loyal is the important thing.

Galsworthy makes one of his characters at the very close of the play to sound just this keynote, which sums up the whole moral of the situation. "Keep faith?" she says. "We have all done that; but that is not enough, that is not enough."

The play "Loyalties" is a struggle not between the good and the bad. There is no clear cut moral issue involved; there are no heroes and there are no villains. So in life. The struggle which leads to the tragic defeat of almost everyone involved is the struggle between loyalties and sincerities faithfully kept by each one. In a crisis, in a critical situation, each actor remains true and loyal to his code, to his standards, to his convictions; and the inadequacy of that kind of loyalty is proved by the tragedy which overtakes them all.

Briefly the story is this: the play is a vital play, a profound play, an incisive play and a well constructed play. DeLevis, a Jew, described by the playwright as young, rich and new, is guest at a house party, and during the night a thousand pounds in bank notes are stolen from him. DeLevis is a type not altogether rare either in England or in America; he lacks culture and refinement, and yet he tries hard to get into the charmed circle of the old English aristocracy; and he succeeds by dint of his wealth and his money--to which, as you know, even the oldest aristocrats are quite susceptible.

He knows that he is tolerated for his money; he has no illusions on that score; and that hurts. He is conscious of that impalpable wall that still remains in spite of the fact that he has been introduced into the charmed circle, and he is raw and very sensitive on that point. He never attempts to deny that he is a Jew, but he hates to be reminded of the fact; and even when people do not remind him of it he somehow feels they are thinking of it all the time.

DeLevis suspects that Captain Dancy stole the money. Captain Dancy is a brave, adventurous, reckless, retired officer, the proud possessor of a distinguished service cross, who had but recently married a very beautiful and charming young woman called Mabel. This Dancy had given a horse to DeLevis; he wanted to get rid of the horse; he thought that it was worthless. But DeLevis, by skilful manipulation, succeeded in selling the horse for a thousand pounds, which thousand pounds have now been stolen.

DeLevis tells the host, Charles Winsor, of the theft. Charles Winsor refuses to believe that anyone of his guests could be guilty of such an act. He is loyal to his guests. And when DeLevis makes the open charge that Dancy stole the money he is outraged. DeLevis insists that the police be called, and all the guests are outraged at such a plebeian procedure. The idea of calling the police! But he wants his money. The police come and investigate, and, very much like our American police, they find nothing.

But DeLevis discovers clues which confirm his

suspicion, and he tells the host, Winsor, and another guest, a true representative of the old British aristocracy, General Canynge, that Dancy stole his money and that he wants it back; that if Dancy would return it and apologize the thing would be hushed up. But they urge upon DeLevis the scandal that would ensue if he should be insistent. DeLevis feels that if he were not a Jew they would not be so complacent about the loss of a thousand pounds, and he does not see why he should sacrifice his money for a society which only at best tolerates him. He will not permit that society to add injury to insult and take his money, too.

And then Canynge tells him that if he wishes to remain in his three clubs and wishes to be held to join a fourth exclusive club, he had better keep quiet. Social blackmail! And DeLevis consents to keep quiet for a time. And when he leaves General Canynge turns to the host and says, "Winsor, I felt Dancy's sleeve this evening and it was wet." The money had been stolen by someone who entered through the balcony, and it had rained, and Canynge felt the sleeve of Captain Dancy and it was wet, and he suspects. But Winsor at once replies, "He is my guest, and I refuse to believe anything of him." Loyalty! And Canynge, too, at once realizes his mistake and says, "Of course, we cannot suspect him."

Well, DeLevis is blackballed in that fourth exclusive club, and that angers him; and one day in one of his

clubs, in the presence of a few members, he again makes the charge openly that Captain Dancy purloined his money. Dancy is at once summoned and DeLevis is confronted, and he again repeats his charge, and Dancy loses his affable and gentlemanly bearing; he loses his temper and calls DeLevis a damn Jew and invites him to a duel.

When DeLevis is called a damn Jew his racial loyalty surges to the top, and if he had at all been inclined to drop the charges he was now determined to see the thing through. The members of the club feel that the Captain's invitation to a duel sounded rather tame and lame, that in order to clear his own name and that of his club he must sue DeLevis for slander--to vindicate himself. They are loyal to their club and the traditions of the club.

Another type of loyalty is introduced in the presence of Major Colford, who is a close army friend of Dancy. When Major Colford is told of Canynge's suspicion--the wet sleeve--he, too, at once replies, "But he is my friend. I served with him. It cannot be. But what if it is? I will stick to him just the same." And then another type of loyalty is introduced in the person of Mabel, his wife. And that is a beautiful loyalty. After this incident in the club Dancy comes home and tells his wife it will perhaps be best for them to leave the country, to go somewhere else; and Mabel suspects, but she does not permit herself to believe. She is loyal. And she urges upon her husband to remain and see the

thing through, to clear himself.

Dancy is finally compelled to sue. He entrusts his case into the hands of his solicitor, Jacob Twisden, a representative of that fine school of British solicitors. His case proceeds favorably to him, and then one day a grocer appears on the scene and tells Twisden, the attorney, that he has one of the notes whose numbers had been advertised by the police in the newspapers, and that he traced down to learn who gave him that note and he found that an Italian wine merchant had given him that note; and the Italian wine merchant appears on the scene and confesses that that note and other notes up to the amount of one thousand pounds had been given to him by a man named Captain Dancy in payment of a debt of honor.

Captain Dancy had had an affair with the daughter of this Italian wine merchant, and the Italian wine merchant had insisted upon a compensation. Another kind of blackmail. And he had urged upon the Captain so long and threatened to make the facts known to his wife, that Captain Dancy paid him. The solicitor at once realizes that his client is absolutely and completely guilty, and out of loyalty to his profession, to his standards, to his code, he throws up the case.

DeLevis is vindicated. He appears upon the scene and says, "I am proved right. I do not want his money. Do not think that I am acting like a Christian. I am a Jew! I wanted to be proved right, and now that I am, I am through.

I am not going to prosecute Captain Dancy, but I understand that the police are after him." Captain Dancy is urged to flee the country.

And then the last type of loyalty, the greatest, the one that rises to the sacrificial heights, is portrayed to us in the final scene in the home of Captain Dancy, when he is alone with his wife Mabel. He tells her that he is ruined; he had been publicly branded. He tells her that he stole the money, and, what is more heartbreaking and crushing to Mabel, that wounds her mortally, he tells her why he stole the money. But Mabel sticks; Mabel remains loyal. Mabel says, "I will go with you whither thou goest."

And when the police begin to knock at the door and she faces the possibility of her husband's arrest and his imprisonment, she says to him, "Buck up! I will wait for you; a year or years, I will wait for you!" But then Dancy discovers a type of loyalty in himself. He will not submit her that stood by him through thick and thin to the humiliation of exile or of imprisonment; and so he, entering another room, shoots himself.

That is the story of Loyalties, and when one is through with the play one finds it very difficult to blame any character, any actor. Dancy was a thief, it is true, but he stole in order to save his dear one the knowledge of a thing which would have crushed her. DeLevis was harsh and insistent, but, after all, his money had been stolen, and the thief, in place of restoring the money or apologizing publicly,

called him a damn Jew and insulted him. Solicitor Twisden, who perhaps might not have been so ready and eager to throw up the case--for after all he was representing a client and not his standards--was, after all, prompted by the highest motives in so doing; and no one, of course, could have anything but love and pity and tears for Mabel.

There are no villains in the story, and yet there is a terrible tragedy there. And why? What brought about the tragedy? True loyalty? No! Loyalty to conventions, loyalty to artificial standards, loyalty to inherited traditions of caste and class and club and army and race! That type of loyalty devastated the lives of these people.

Professor Royce has written an admirable book called "The Philosophy of Loyalty," in which he very aptly divides the subject into two heads. First, loyalty in reference to the individual himself, and then loyalty in reference to the things to which a man is loyal. A man may be loyal to a bad cause, and that loyalty, even though it be to a bad cause, is helpful. You recall that poem of Browning's, the incident in a French camp where a little lad rushes up to Napoleon, and, though mortally wounded, announces to him in pride and happiness the fact that Ratisbon had been stormed, and that he himself, though wounded, had planted the emperor's standard in the market place of the city; and then the lad collapsed and dies at the feet of the emperor.

That is a superb type of martial loyalty. But regardless of the cause which this lad served--and it may have been a poor, worthless cause--the storming of Ratisbon by no token had any value whatever for mankind, for civilization, for anyone; but the loyalty of this lad, the loyalty to his emperor, to a cause, was magnificent; and it helped him; it filled his life with a glory and a beauty that it would otherwise never have had.

Any fine type of loyalty is desirable; it brings unity into our lives; it gives us something to which to devote the scattered, conflicting energies of our mind and soul, to be able to lose ourselves into some great cause, and, in losing ourselves find ourselves. To liberate the capacities and the gifts of our heart and mind is to find freedom, is to find dignity, is to find the one thing that is really worth while in life. And in that sense everyone of the actors in the tragedy were compensated for their loyalties.

But that is not enough. That leads to tragedy very often. What is important is the cause to which a man is loyal. A cause, in order to merit one's loyalty must, first of all, be one that is universally good, that is socially desirable; a cause, in order to deserve a man's undying loyalty, must be one which a man chooses of his own free will--not a cause which tradition or society or convention, club, race, creed, social circle or environment puts upon him. That type of loyalty enslaves me; that type of

loyalty makes of me a blind, helpless tool, and leads very oftentimes to degradation and to misery.

A cause to which a man is to devote himself must be one which, if he were able to, he would choose freely, willingly; and it must be a cause which inspires loyalty in other people, which evokes that which is best in other people. Now, none of these actors of the play fully served such a cause. DeLevis was loyal to his race, but to a racial passion; he was loyal to his race not because he worshipped the ideals of his race, the universally good qualities of his race: he was loyal to it because he was of the race of necessity; and it hurt him when he was held in contempt and mockery because he belonged to that race. Had Delevis been loyal to the ideals of his race, had he served the cause of his race--the universally good, freely chosen, loyalty inspiring cause of his race, then he never would have been *undisciplined* ~~convicted~~, then he never would have been insistent, then he would have known love and forbearance, then his soul would not have been filled with hate. He was loyal, but to a poor cause.

And Winsor and Canynge and Colford, the friends and associates of Dancy, were also loyal. But to what? They were loyal to conventions, to artificial standards. Knowing what they did know and suspecting what they did suspect, had they come to Dancy they might have persuaded upon him to make restitution. Had they served the cause of truth,

the universally good, the one that can be freely chosen, and the one that inspires loyalty in others, they might have saved Dancy from the tragedy.

The one who perhaps was above reproach may be Twisden, the solicitor. He served a cause, a universally good cause. But then there is a very fine legal and ethical question there involved which complicates the problem. Has the attorney the right to throw up a case when he knows that his client is guilty? And that is not at all a one-sided question. Even Mabel's loyalty, the beautiful, the superbly beautiful loyalty which brings tears to one's eyes,--even that did not reach the heights. When she suspected, as she did suspect, had she been loyal to that which were best, she might have wormed the secret and the truth from her husband; she might have insisted upon restitution. She undoubtedly would have forgiven him and the tragedy would have been averted. But she, too, was loyal in her blindness, in her ignorance, to a convention: she must stick by her husband, instead of helping him to find himself, which is a higher type of loyalty.

The moral of this play is very clear.

Loyalty to that which is not true, loyalty to that which is not socially beneficial, loyalty to that which we would not choose willingly if we had the opportunity, loyalty to that which does not inspire loyalty in other people and does not help them to be loyal,--that type of loyalty oftentimes leads to unhappiness.

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind." With all thy heart and soul and mind--the highest expression of loyalty. But to whom is that supreme virtue of the human soul to be devoted? And thou shalt love the Lord thy God--the things that are of God, the things that partake of the truth and the universality and the love of God.

To keep faith--we all would do that. But that is not enough!

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