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The Privilege of Friendship, 1924.

"THE PRIVILEGE OF FRIENDSHIP."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

MARCH 23, 1924, CLEVELAND.

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JOSEPH T. KRAUS
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I would suggest as the text of my sermon this morning that marvelous phrase found in the Book of Exodus: "And God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend ." In our discussion of friendship, the privilege of friendship, it is well, first of all, to discover what friendship is not. There are many spurious forms of friendship in human relationships which go by the name of friendship.

There is, first of all, acquaintanceship. We meet many people in our business life, in our social life, in our neighborhoods; we get to know them; we get to like them; we exchange courtesies; we become friendly. And such contacts are highly desirable. It is only the embittered misanthrope who will refuse to see the desirability of such friendly human relationships; they facilitate social life. And that man indeed is fortunate who has that sunny disposition and that largeness of spirit so that he can make friends readily, but whose mass attraction is not yet friendship. It is largely a matter of affability, of delight in society, of propinquity; it has very little to do with that rare spiritual communion between two souls which we call friendship. Such acquaintances are like the travelers we meet on the highway of life. We exchange the compliments of the day with them; we walk a pace or two with them, and then we part.

I said that man is fortunate who has that temperament and disposition which enabled him to make such acquaintance or friends readily. That is true. And yet there is grave danger lurking in a man who is gifted with such affability. The hail fellow well met, the man who is the life of the party, the man to whom people are quite instinctively attracted because of his charm and grace--that man is in grave danger of losing his soul; that man is easily imposed upon; that man, if he happens to be powerful or in the high places of life, is victimized by sycophants and flatterers and charmers; and that man who consciously tries to please people, seeks not to make enemies, that man is likely to scatter his personality; that man is likely to lose his spiritual integrity. I am suspicious of the man whom everybody likes, and I would never trust a man who has no enemies.

Now, this is the first type of human relationship which goes by the name of friendship oftentimes, but which is not friendship. And there is a second type: friendship which is almost entirely utilitarian; friendship which is deliberately cultivated for what it can bring one. Men make friends oftentimes because of the monetary or social prestige, position or influence which such associations may bring unto them. This of course has nothing to do with that rare intimacy of human souls which we call friendship. That is business. There are people who choose their friends as they choose a garment, or a neighborhood in which to live.

As soon as the garment becomes old they discard it; as soon as their friends become poor and they become rich, they discard their friends. That is, of course, not friendship; that is business. And of such that wise poet of the Book of Job said: "Ye make merchandise of your friends." And of friendship such the wise rabbi said: "Every love, every human affection that is dependent upon some thing, it ends after a while. When that thing disappears the love disappears."

And that kind of friendship is very dangerous, especially to rich men, to men of affluence. A rich man can make ten enemies easier than one real friend. "Everybody is a friend to one who can give gifts," said the writer of the Book of Proverbs. "The doors of the rich are crowded with brothers," says a wise sage of our forefathers, "but the doors of the poor are desolate."

Now, this is commercialized friendship, and such friends are not friends but pensioners. We must guard ourselves against that.

And then there is a third type of friendship-- friendship to the poor, to the needy, to those in want - a much more exalted type than the one of which I have just spoken, a much finer type, but not yet friendship. To befriend a man is not yet to make a friend of him. Friendship has nothing to do with philanthropy. Whenever and wherever there is the thought of superiority and inferiority involved as between two people, there no real friendship can exist. Friendship must be between equals; not necessarily

between equals as regards possessions and money and position, or even intellect, but equals as regards spiritual competence and spiritual independence. I must feel that my friend has as much to give me not in things but in spiritual communion, in wisdom, in counsel, in inspiration, as I can give him, and when that feeling of absolute equality does not exist, no real friendship is possible.

Of course the man who has those rare qualities of mind and soul which prepare him for friendship, that man will quite naturally be a friend, in the limited sense of the word, to the needy and the unfortunate ; he will have that human kindness which will prompt him to stretch out a helping hand to all those in want. But that is charity, and friendship is not a matter of alms-giving; friendship is something else altogether.

Now, having discovered what friendship is not, let us try to find out just what friendship is. It is very difficult to define absolutely any spiritual reality; spiritual realities elude definition. We can at best only describe a thing by its attributes, by pointing to some qualities which that spiritual entity, that spiritual fact, contains. The first thing I would say concerning friendship, that one can say concerning friendship, is that it is, that it exists, that it is a fact in human life. Now, there are many men who have never experienced friendship, many good men who have never felt the want, that urge of friendship, and these men, not having experienced that thing, would be prone

to deny its existence altogether. There are men who say that friendship is nothing more or less but a clarified term for a rather prosaic thing--the common human gregarious instinct that leads men to seek companionship; others will say it is only enlightened self-interest; and still others are pseudo-psychoanalysts who perhaps say it is a phase of some sex complex.

But the deaf must never be quoted as authorities on music, and people who have never experienced friendship must not be the judges of it. Friendship has no right to be judged by those who have in no way felt its propelling power, its transcending and transfiguring potency. When one listens to that soul-cry of the man David lamenting over his friend Jonathan, over the untimely death of this friend, who was a prince, when he was a lowly shepherd, and whom the disparity of position could not and did not keep from linking their souls in eternal bonds of love,--when one listens to that soul-cry of David: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; you were so sweet to me; thy love was wonderful, passing the love of women."; when one listens to that spontaneous cry of the soul, one feels himself in the presence of something very real, a tremendous fact, unknown to any but those who are initiated, but to them known very mightily.

When one listens to a sentence such as this, coming from the lips not of a poet, but of a keen, critical essayist, Montague: "If a man should ask me to give a reason

why I love him (speaking of his friend), I find it could no other wise be expressed than by making answer: because it was he; because it was I. What there is beyond all that I am unable to say. I know not what inexplicable and fated power that brought on this communion. We sought one another long before we met, and by the characters we heard of one another, which wrought upon our affections more than any recent mere reports should do. If I compare all the rest of my life--though thanks be to God I have passed my time pleasantly enough,--if I compare all, I say, with the four years I had of happiness, to enjoy the sweet society of this excellent man, it is nothing but smoke the rest of my life, an obscure and tedious night"--I say, when one listens to these (and they are numerous) expressions touching a human relationship, one cannot but feel that he is in the presence of something very real in human experience.

And then this may be said of friendship: that once it enters your life it takes possession of it completely; it transcends everything else, nay, more, it transfigures everything else. When you discover a friend it is as if you discover a new continent; you never grow tired of exploring its abundant wealth. Friendship stimulates, excites our mind, our soul; we never think as well, or speak as well, or act as freely and as happily as when we are in the company of one whom we really love--a friend, a kindred spirit. It seems as if all the wells of our being open up, and our soul becomes flooded with warm, comforting

streams of contentment. We feel that our life, heretofore unfulfilled and incomplete, becomes fulfilled and complete in the life of our friends.

When we discover a friend it seems as if the circle of our life, hitherto broken and fragmentary, merely an arc, is now well rounded and complete. The ancients believed in the transmigration of souls; some souls wander through the world because during life they were not completed, and so they are destined to wander through the waste spaces of the world, and enter some tree, or some stone, or a beast, or a human being, and they are complete, they are in complete existence.

Now, in a sense every human soul wanders through the vast emptiness of life, seeking completion, perfection, and blessed is that soul who can enter the soul of another one and there find its beacon, its completion. When that happens you have what Aristotle called one soul in two bodies.

And then a third fact may be postulated concerning real friendship, and that is that it is utterly, utterly unselfish, uncalculating, disinterested. True friendship never strikes a balance; it is never exacting, never wishes to settle accounts. That is why we say that we never choose our friends. A man does not choose a friend. We do not choose friends for their beauty, or their wealth, or their position, or their influence. Friends are drawn together by the inexplicable and mysterious, attractive

power of spiritual affinity; even as a magnet draws to it, so some men will draw to them kindred spirits.

Of course there must be reciprocity in friendship; of course there must be a give and take in the highest sense of the word. Unless there is reciprocity one in due time becomes the debtor and the other the creditor; there is inferiority and superiority, and then friendship languishes and dies. But that is never conscious and never deliberate. True love always brings with it its recompense. Love always blesses the lover, if only in giving him something to love; but no love anticipates rewards. And so it is with friendship. It is never shrewd or calculating or weighing a balance; it is an affection of generosity, of open-heartedness, of bigness and freeness of soul.

I said it is not exacting; and that is true; and yet in a sense friendship is really very exacting. The real kind of friendship exacts of you the best that is in you; the real kind of friendship is intolerance of your laziness or your spiritual indolence. Whenever you cease to improve yourself or to cultivate yourself, to add to the assets of your being, you are desecrating friendship, and you are making for the death of that very thing which you treasure. A man who wants his friend to endure must respect that friendship by always being on the alert to rise, to improve, to develop, to increase his spiritual and mental and cultural possessions. That is how we respect friendship.

To be worthy of a friend is to rise to the highest worth within us.

And then friendship is exacting in yet another sense: it asks reverence for personality; it demands that you, as a friend, shall not presume to invade and capture and subdue the individuality, the personality, the soul of your friend. Friendship is not a melting pot in which two souls merge as one; friendship is a spiritual experience which makes for the crystalization of individual souls through a common process of mutual relationships.

A great rabbi, the son of
had a dear friend, Simon, the son of
and he always spoke of him as "my counterpart." His
friend was not himself in reflection, an image of him; he
was something which he was not; he complemented him, he
supplemented him, he was something different from him.

I shun those friends who profess friendship for me, and yet would like to kill the very things in me which make me different from them; who resent strong convictions and strong opinions, strong likes and dislikes, strong favors and disfavours which I may have, and which I may not share with them,--those friends would like to assimilate me and absorb me, to remake and remould and transform me to their likeness. That is not friendship; that is the supreme kind of selfishness; that is the kind of love that destroys friendship.

We must regard the love and the soul and the

individuality of a friend as sacred and inviolate. His personality must not be submerged in mine. That is a cause very frequently why friends part. When one becomes intolerant of the strong individuality of the other the bond breaks and they part.

And there is perhaps one other way in which real friendship is exacting--and I emphasize the thought of the rigor of friendship, because most of us assume friendship to be an easy-going sort of an affair, an entertainment for the moment, but in reality it is a very rigorous and exacting discipline.

There is yet another way in which real friendship is exacting, and it is in this: true friendship does not always applaud; true friendship does not always compliment; true friendship does not always approve. Congenial approbation is not friendship but flattery, which is a drug to the soul. A real friend will oftentimes rebuke and correct--not in bitterness of spirit, of course; not in impatience and in hostility, but in kindness, in understanding, in love; and such wounds inflicted by a friend are what our wise men, who knew friendship much better than men of modern days know it, called, "The wounds of a friend are faithful." These are faithful wounds.

Friendship is to be, if it is to be anything worthwhile, a stimulating influence. Just as a bar of the sharpest iron, so a man must sharpen the soul of his friend, says the wise man who wrote the Book of Proverbs. There

must be a mutual sharpening, quickening, intensifying, ennobling of lives, if friendship is to be anything. But whether we see it or we do not, whether we err or we do not, whether we are at fault or are not, whether we are in adversity or in prosperity, a friend is always a friend; at all times a friend loves, and that is, after all, the highest and last test of real friendship. When friendship cannot stand the strain of disagreement, of disillusionment, when friendship cannot stand the tug and the tear of every day experiences, it is not friendship but a passing acquaintance.

"And man spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." The Bible could find no finer simile to describe the communion of man with God than that found in the communion between man and man. Our friendship with fellow human beings prepares us for real friendship with God; and the highest conception of religion is that conception which looks upon God not as a king, not as a ruler, not as a mighty man of war, or even as a father (and all these terms are used), but as Friend.

God called Abraham, "Abraham, my friend." It seems that God himself wants friends. "Shall I hide anything from my friend, Abraham?" God seeks communion even as men seek communion, and blessed is that man who has found in God an unfailing friend, who feels that God is always by his side, walking with him, speaking to him the word of life and hope.

Blessed is the man who, in the moment of his bereavement, his sorrow, when it seems as if his entire life is falling away from him, crumbling around him, when his dearest hopes lie in wreckage around him,--blessed is that man who can stretch out his hand and touch the invisible and intangible hand of his mighty kinsman and his everlasting friend.

"And God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."

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