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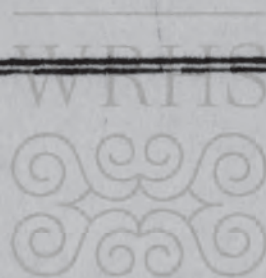
The measure of a man's worth, 1926.

"THE MEASURE OF A MAN'S WORTH."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

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Questions which frequently present themselves to men are these: How are we to evaluate human worth? By what gauge shall we measure the intrinsic merits of men? When we eulogize someone and do not eulogize another one, what standard do we employ? And are these standards accurate? In other words, what conception of the ideal man, the perfect man, do we hold by which we measure the relative worth of human beings? These are important questions, for upon the answer to them depends quality of human conduct.

I make bold to say that most of us judge other men and our own selves falsely. We see with the outer eye; and with the outer eye one cannot see. We oftentimes confuse the price of a thing with the worth of a thing; the impression which a person makes with his inner reality, with his true self. Oftentimes we are tempted to confuse two ideas in our minds: the success of a man with the worth of a man. When we see a man successful either in business, in a profession, in political life or social life, we almost unconsciously attribute to him a certain degree of worth. We translate outer manifestations in terms of inner moral excellencies. And that is not always so.

No one has established the essential relationship between these two. Success is not always an infallible test of ability; success is not always the infallible test of ability. Character and achievement do not always follow one another as cause and effect; and popular acclaim is not

always an index to a man's true worth. Last week I had occasion to speak to you about the problem of human suffering, and I presented this query: Is suffering punishment for sin? Is prosperity a reward for virtue? And we were constrained to answer, you will recall, in the negative. Punishment is not necessarily the result of one's iniquities and prosperity is not necessarily the reward of one's good deeds.

And similarly, when this question presents itself: is success the true measure of a man's ability or of a man's true worth? one is constrained to answer in the negative. It is not. A man's intelligence, a man's ability, are of course tremendous factors in winning success in one's chosen vocation; but there are other things which enter into success and failure. There is chance, there is luck, there is opportunity which was extended to the one and denied to the other. There are a thousand and one factors over which the man himself has no control that enter into the ultimate result of a man's career. Just as accidents may kill the strongest and the healthiest and the best in physical life, so chance and luck and opportunity may make or break an individual, as far as success in life is concerned--in business, in the professions, in politics, or in any other department of human life. I know many a failure who deserved to be successful, and I know many a successful man, so-called, who deserved to be a failure. I know of many vast fortunes which have been built up, either through

unearned increments, or through fraud, through corrupt methods, through piracy and exploitation; and I know men who have remained poor because they were strong enough to withhold their hand from corruption. ✓

So that success in the outer world is not always a true measurement of a man's inner worth. I have known and you have known political figures who rose to great prominence and importance in the political life of our nation; men who were carried in on the crest of a wave of great popularity, and I know that many men have taken this great victory or triumph to indicate great worth, great merit in these successful political figures, and yet there is absolutely no essential relationship between their worth, their merit, their quality, their intellect, their genius, in their political triumph. Many a man has won popular acclaim, victory, because he was favored by fortune, by opportunity; he happened to come at the right moment when the confluence of circumstances favored him, or he happened to be so shrewd and canny as to manipulate his own success. ✓

Popular acclaim is perhaps one of the most common gauges of success. Nine times out of ten the populace acclaim the wrong person; nine times out of ten the masses are in the wrong. Its heroes have feet of clay; its enthusiasm is uninformed and excessive; its loyalty is inconstant and treacherous. When the mob applauds an individual it is really applauding itself, its own inner, commonplace banality, its own cheapness and its own weakness. ✓

Popular acclaim cannot be taken as the true measure of a man's real worth. It is recounted of a great Athenian statesman who refused to be flexible to popular sentiment, who found himself one day delivering an oration to a great mass of people, and at one part of that oration he was loudly applauded by the populace, and he turned to one of his friends and said: "What have I said amiss that the people are applauding me?" The greatest danger to men in public life, whether in politics or in social work or in the ministry or in newspaper work, is that of evaluating one's service, one's contribution, one's ^{work} ~~work~~ by the manner of its reception by the populace. For when one does that over a long period of time you will soon find that he has ceased to be a leader of men and has become a lackey of men, cutting pretty capers to amuse them; for that is what the mass likes. The mass will stone its prophets, but will cry "All hail!" to the buffoon and the gilded fool who will entertain the crowd.

So that outer success and public acclaim are not true measurements of a man's worth, nor do I take it is the accumulation of knowledge and learning a true measure of a man's real worth. You know the accumulation of intellectual worth is very much like the accumulation of material wealth: its value depends entirely upon the manner in which it is employed. The sheer amassing of fact and information and learning is in itself of little value as far as the moral worth and excellency are concerned. It is only when

knowledge becomes ethically dynamic, when knowledge is translated into wisdom and wisdom is employed in charity and loving kindness that it becomes a symbol and a manifestation of human worth. I think it was the great Christian mystic, Thomas a Kempis, who said, "On judgment day we shall not be asked what we have read, but what we have done." It is how we use our experiences and our knowledge and our information, it is to what beneficent ends we apply them, that are the important things.

What, then, are the true measures of a man's worth? If you will permit me, I will give you my opinion of what is a true gauge of a man's worth. There are three things by which I always like to judge a man, if I am tempted to judge him at all--and I always try to avoid the temptation of judging other people, for I do not like to judge even myself. In the first place, I like to judge a man by this standard: Has he a ^{open} free mind? Is his mind open to the four corners of the earth, ready to welcome all truth from whatever direction it may come? Or is his mind shut tight by prejudice or bigotry or sloth or indolence, refusing to accept any new revelation which might come to him? Has he a free mind? Nay, more, is he ready to dig for truth? For truth, like all precious ore, must be dug for with hard labor and the sweat of one's brow. Is he willing to dig deep down for truth, and having found it, is he ready to refine that newly discovered truth and use it in his life?

Now that is a very decisive criterion to use

on a man, for it goes right deep down to the very roots of his character. Is that man ready at all times to forsake those ideas which have become dear and sweet to him because of tradition or time, for the sake of truth, for the sake of the new revelation? Is he ready to surrender peace and ease of mind and welcome new ideas which necessitate new adjustments and work and effort? Is he ready to welcome new ideas which bring with them new problems and a greater complication of life? For every new idea does not simplify life but makes life much more involved, much more perplexing. Is the individual ready to welcome new truth? Has he a free mind? And having found new truth, is he ready to be true to it. Has he strength of conviction to live by it and for it? Can he defy convention and the standards and the uniformities of his day in order to be unique with his truth and his God?

That is one great criterion which I would set up for evaluating a man's worth. The free mind, the openness of intellect, the eagerness of the quest, the desire to choose the hard road of pilgrimage leading to the far off shrine of truth--that is one gauge that I would apply to any man to determine that I am called upon to determine; and it is a very decisive criterion. // And my second gauge would be the strong heart. Is this man strong in adversity? Has he the fortitude and the moral hardihood to rise after he had been thrice beaten down by fortune? Has he within him the strength to endure defeat and not to yield to defeat? That

is another decisive criterion of human worth. Seneca, the great Roman philosopher, said: "It is true greatness in a man to have the frailty of a human being and the security of a God." If a man can have in his life the Dei--that self-confidence and strength in the very midst of --the frailty, the weakness, the debilities of modern man; if a man will fall seven times, as the Psalmist says, and rise again, buffeted by fortune, holding up his bleeding head, maligned and slandered by human beings, he will yet remain steadfast to himself and his ideals. If a man has that quality in him he is a real man of worth.

You know that life has a way of treating the best of us; life has a way of sending its arrows deep down into the deepest soul of the best of us. Life brings us its physical pain and its losses, the loss of dear ones; life brings us, to all of us, frustration of purposes--unfulfilled ambitions, unrealized hopes. The older one gets the more he realizes how few of his cherished dreams were ever fulfilled. Every man, whatever his calling in life, and every woman, soon comes to know that the dearest wishes of their hearts remain unfulfilled.

I remember the story that was told to me by an old rabbi years ago, whose words so profoundly plumb the depths of human experience. He said: "When I was young I thought that I ^{could} ~~would~~ reform the ~~whole~~ world. I was ~~so~~ full of ambition, and the spirit of God, ~~as it were~~, was ~~so~~ strong

within me that I thought that I could improve the whole ^{world} ~~of~~ mankind. A little later in life I realized that it would be enough if I were to improve my ~~own~~ little community, and that would be a great achievement for me; but I soon found that I could not ~~do even~~ that; and as I grew older, I said to myself, 'If I could but improve the lives of the members of my own family, I would be a fortunate man, indeed, and I would realize a great ambition in life.' I found that I could not do even that. And now that I am old, I say to myself, 'It would be a wonderful thing if I ^{could only} ~~would~~ improve myself, ~~elevate myself, fulfill myself.~~' And I find even that is ^{seriously difficult hard} impossible."

And so our ideals narrow in their circumference as the years narrow us, and our great dreams remain unfulfilled. A few days ago I read the final chapter in the book of a man who has devoted his entire life to the ethical improvement of society--Felix Adler. Felix Adler calls the last chapter of his last book--for he is an old man and his book is likely to be his last book--he calls this chapter, "The Last Outlook on Life," and he says among other things:

"I have reached the bourne, or am very near it. The shadows lengthen, the twilight deepens. I look back on my life and its net results. I have seen spiritual ideals, and the more clearly I saw them, the wider appeared the distance between them and the empirical conditions, and the changes I could effect in those conditions seemed very slight, indeed. I have worked in social reform, and the

impression that I have been able to make now seems to me so utterly insignificant as to make my early sanguine aspirations appear pathetic. I have seen the vision of democracy in the air, and on the ground around me I have seen the sordid travesty of democracy--not only in practice but in idea. I have caught the far outlook upon the organization of mankind, the extension of the spiritual empire over the earth by the addition to it of new provinces, and I do not find even the faintest beginnings or recognition of the task which the advanced nations should set themselves. I scrutinize closely my relations to those who have been closest to me,--and I find that I have been groping in the dark with respect to their most real needs, and that my faculty of divination has been feeble. I look lastly into my own heart, my own character, and the effort I have made to fuse the discordant elements there, to achieve a genuine integrity there, and I find the disappointment in that respect the deepest of all." Yet, in spite of that he is able to say in the great climax to his --his life's testament--"I bless the universe." And to be able to bless the universe in one's last moments is the supreme prize which man can wrest from life's struggles and from life's experience.

Here is a man of strong heart; here is a man of whom a poet could have sung: "O friend, never strike sail to a fear. Come into port greatly or sail the seas with God." Here is a man who, experiencing these successive

crucifixious of life, does not yield. That is true greatness and true worth; and it is such who are the chosen children of God. It is those who have been tried in the vast tribulations of the world, who have seen their dearest wishes depart one by one unfulfilled, and their most precious possessions vanish beyond recall, who have seen themselves grow old and wearied and broken by life, and who yet were able to stand up and bless the world and bless the God of the world--who are the chosen children of God. Some plants and some herbs do not yield up their sweetness until they are broken and crushed. ✓

And so I say that the second great criterion of human worth, the second great test of character is the strong heart; the man who does not judge life by its results, by its achievements, but by the worthwhileness and the quality of the effort; for there are few achievements in life, there are few ideals which we can really realize in our own lifetime and say at their completion we have succeeded. The nobler our ideals the less liklihood is there we will achieve them in our lifetime. But he who is strong of heart evaluates an ideal not for its ultimate success but for the effort, for the pouring into it of the best that is in us; for fighting the good fight--for carrying on. That is the real test of human worth. ✓

Lastly, friends, I think the third test, besides the free mind and the strong heart, is the helping hand. ✓ Has this man used the gifts of his life, his talents,

his possessions to increase the graciousness and the pleasantness of human existence? Has he used those gifts which God gave him to augment the spiritual assets of human life, to increase the spaciousness and the reasonableness and the kindness of human existence? Has he tried to be a lighthouse in the world? The lighthouse is one of the most beautiful symbols in human speech. The man who sheds radiance of cheer and helpfulness all about him, who illuminates the dark lives of those who are compelled to pass through the darkness of the world--that man is a lighthouse; that man is the servant of mankind. That is another essential criterion. Has this man so revered human life, has he so venerated the God who dwells in each soul, that he was ready to use himself as a shield and a protection for every beaten and buffeted human soul? That he was ready to give to it all that he had and all that he is? Has he the helping hand? Does he go through life with a hand which grasps, which takes, which asks? Or does he go through life with a hand which gives and upholds and lifts,--the hand which touches with benediction other fellow travelers upon the road of life?

That is the third criterion of human worth, friends. And when you are called upon by yourselves to determine whether your friend or your neighbor or your fellowman is a success in life, judge him not by the number of things which he has accumulated; judge him not by the wealth which he has amassed; judge him not by the popular

esteem or acclaim which he has received which he has received;
judge him not by the amount of knowledge which he has
accumulated, or the certificates of learning which he has
received,--judge him rather by these three inner, searching
tests: has he a free mind? Has he the eager, seeking,
questioning intellect? Does he go through life adventuring,
seeking new truth and new revelation? Is he free enough to
rise above the masses and to reach out to his own life and
his own personality? And has he the strong heart, the
heart which endures in the midst of adversity, the heart
which, strong in the confidence of men, refuses to yield
to the limitations of the frustrations of human experience?
And has he the helping hand? Is he kindly? Is he loving?
Is he helpful? Does he interest himself in the life of
people about him? Or is he self-centered, involved in
himself, in his own self-augmentation or self-improvement
or self-enrichment? Is he a servant of God, or the
servant of servants--himself?

These three, which in their essence are one,
are, to my mind, the essential measurements of a man's worth.
The free mind, the strong heart, the helping hand.

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