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Men who serve - the teacher and the social worker, 1930.

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"THE TEACHER AND THE SOCIAL WORKER."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

MARCH 23, 1930, CLEVELAND, O.
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As regards the two professions to which the address this morning is to be devoted, the series should be called, in place of Men Who Serve, --Women Who Serve; for women by far predominate both in the teaching profession and in the profession of social service. Of the 825,000 school teachers in the public school system of the United States, 690,000 are women, and of the teachers in the high schools and secondary schools of our country, 62% of them are women.

I do not have at hand the statistics for social workers, but anyone who has had any contact with any philanthropic institution, or any department of social work, here or elsewhere, is of course impressed with the fact that overwhelmingly women are represented in this profession. And, personally, I have no fault to find with this condition. There are educators who believe that the presence of an overwhelming number of women in the teaching profession constitutes one of the weaknesses of our educational system. Perhaps a ratio of fifty-fifty would, on general principles, be more desirable. But I have never been able to see that the presence of so many women in the public school system of our country has in any way adversely affected instruction.

It is highly desirable, of course, that in the higher departments of education more men should be

represented, because there is a danger there that our young men and women should come to think of education as something quite effeminate,--not a man's job; and there is the possibility too of their receiving too much of the point of view, of the attitudes of the woman instructor, whereas there should be the proper balance as between the two.

The teacher, of course, is the civilizer of the human race. He transmits the culture of the past and prepares the mind for cultural creation and activity in the future. You abolish your school system for one generation, and banish your school master for one generation, and mankind will return to barbarism, and all the accumulated knowledge of the race garnered in books would remain so much meaningless hieroglyphics, were it not for the teacher, who makes them accessible to our generation for instruction.

We sometimes overlook the simple fact that every child - even the child who is born in the twentieth century - is born a savage; that no generation begins where the previous generation left off; that every generation of new born children must begin at the very beginning and traverse anew the slow, laborious process of learning the very rudimentary, the very elementary fact of human living. During the first few years of the child's life the parent plays the role of the teacher,

and it is the parent who teaches the child how to eat, how to walk, how to talk, how to adjust himself to the business of living. But soon thereafter the job is taken over by the professional, trained teacher, and it is the teacher who perfects the child's speech; it is the teacher who teaches the child to read, to write, who stocks his memory, who kindles his imagination, who acquaints him with the world about him, with the society of which he is to become a member; it is the teacher who guides him step by step into his rightful estate as a civilized human being.

It is the teacher, in other words, who leads him from the jungle, from savagry, from ignorance into the modern world of culture and civilization. But like so much that is being done in this world of an indispensable and basic character, the work of the teacher is being taken as a matter of course. It is unheralded and unacclaimed; it is taken for granted. Some day when we become more civilized and a little more enlightened and begin to gauge the services of men properly, the teacher, this quiet, patient, consecrated civilizer of the human race, will come into his own, both as regards social recognition, social prestige, and remuneration.

One of the gratifying things about our present day civilization, in this country, at least, is the fact that our budget for education is still the

largest single item in our national economy. We spend today over two thousand, five hundred millions of dollars on the education of our youth. That is the finest, the most profitable national investment. We spend but 800 million dollars on our army and navy, and that of course is pure waste, unprofitable because unnecessary. But here the largest single item in the budget of our municipalities, counties, in our states and federal government jointly is the educational one, and that, to my mind, constitutes the glory and the strength of American civilization today. You can fairly gauge the status of a people's culture by the amount of money which it is willing to spend on education.

The problems of education, of course, both as regards material and as regards method, are almost endless, and it is not my desire this morning, nor is it within my province, to discuss any of them. I merely wish to point to one or two educational problems which are of a specific ethical character, and which touch vitally the spiritual, the religious life of the people. From the point of view of religion, that is, from the point of view of humanism--because real religion is real humanism--education has a two-fold function to perform in society, and the teacher is charged with carrying out this two-fold program.

In the first place, the function of

education is that of utility. It is to train human beings for efficient thinking; it is to train men to concentrate, to think intensively, to think consistently, to think critically, and to think creatively. Education ought to train the human being so that he will be able to sift the true from the false, the real from the unreal, the factual from the propaganda. That the American system of education is far from being perfect was indicated during the war, when the American mentality succumbed to the onslaught of propaganda, was unable to resist the invasion of half truths and palpably false notions.

Education, therefore, first of all, should train men for critical and effective thinking. It should also enkindle the imagination of men, so that some men will be able to get out of three sounds not a fourth sound but a star, a new insight, a new revelation, a new discovery, which come to men not merely by the combining of knowledge already accessible, but by a thrust into the unknown, a sort of intuitive outreaching for the new, which is the way of the creative imagination.

But after that is said and done only half of the story is told. Intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character--that, to my mind, is the totality of the educational objective. It is not only important to have a critical judgment, but we must also

learn to acquire a profound sympathy by which to temper the asperity of our judgment. It is not enough to have a cultivated power of concentration; we must also have worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. It is not enough to have a stimulated imagination; we must have an enkindled enthusiasm for the objects of this imagination. It is not enough to have knowledge, which is power; we must have wisdom, which is control. Truth is only light. We must have goodness, which is warmth.

In other words, the goal of education is not the cultivated mind but the good life. Sometimes the most dangerous person in the world is the man who has a clear, sharp, keen, trained intellect, but is altogether without moral scruples and principles, a soulless being. And of course the danger of our age is just this: that our training in science has far exceeded our training in culture; that our mastery of the machine is far in advance of the mastery of ourselves.

And then too, I believe that education ought to be tipped with a bit of the living fire of the crusading zeal for righteousness. The truly educated person ought to be socially-minded. Education ought not to make us easy going, cultured, refined skeptics, taking things as they are and trying to gather as much honey as we can. There ought to be a bit of the drive of prophecy, the passionate urge for establishing a better

order of life in the thinking of the educated man. He ought to be made aware of what are the true economic, social and political conditions in the world, and having been made aware, he ought to be inspired to become something of a crusader of the changed condition for the better, so that life may become a little more emancipated, a little richer, finer.

And there is this additional ethical problem involved in education. A few weeks ago Dr. Niebuhr addressed the Department of Superintendents of the National Education Association, in convention assembled, and made this observation: "We are living in such a narrow world that the parochialism of the fathers, their prerogatives, their limited outlook, their racial and national sympathies, unrelieved by broader outlook, have become insufferable tribalism and group bigotry. From a fairly harmless limitation in the life of the fathers, it has become a menace of our peace. Education must help the new generation to achieve some degree of world citizenship."

One of the great challenges to the educator, to the man who is more than a mere pedagog, but who has the vision of the real educator, is to destroy tribalism, provincialism, parochialism in human thought. If prejudices, my friends, of all kinds, are ever to be relegated to the past, if international hates and wars are ever to be relegated to our jungle era, then those

things can be accomplished only through education, through the slow, patient, plowing and seeding of the human mind. National interdependence, racial interdependence, must become much more than a mere human sentiment. They must become a pattern of the human mind, a habit of human thought, and that can be achieved only through education.

The real kind of text books will do more for international peace than the real kind of peace treaty. The teacher in the class room, particularly the teacher whose work lies in the departments of government and civics and politics, current events, international relations, literature, if you will, art, if you will, why, even in the realm of the exact sciences, can do much more in the way of guiding the thinking of young people in the direction of a real understanding of international relationships, interracial relationships, intercreedal relationships,--can do more to give them sound, true, fundamental notions about human relationships than the preacher in the pulpit, and the editorial writer in the newspaper, and almost any other professional man. For he teaches minds when they are most eager, most alert, most plastic, most susceptible to influence.

Tribalism is not entirely absent from our educational system. Racial and religious prejudices still find their way into our colleges and our universities.

It is notorious that in many educational institutions of higher learning certain men are prohibited from attending, or their attendance is restricted as regards numbers because they happen to belong to one race or to another, to one religious group or to another, to one color or to another. Fraternities in our colleges are notorious for their anti-Jewish bias, and perhaps other kinds of antipathies and dislikes. Racial and religious considerations are still determining factors in scholastic advancement in the case of instructors and teachers. In fact, social stratifications of all kinds are not only tolerated but in many instances fostered by many of our colleges and universities.

There is too much of the spirit of the collegian, that queer homo sapiens in a raccoon coat, in our educational system; and the real educator has a marvelous opportunity, if he is true to his life and to his vision, to strip that sham away, to cut down to fundamentals. Certainly the world of learning, of scholarship, ought to be swept clean of all the debris of medievalism.

There is an old Rabbinic saying--"The teaching of the Torah excels every other consideration and every other profession in human life." The teacher ought to feel a real glow of satisfaction that he or she has been granted the sacred privilege of of keeping alive

on the altars of mankind the fires, the sacred fires of truth. I wish many more teachers were as courageous, as free, as independent in their thinking and in their teaching as some teachers are. I think by and large teachers are a bit too conservative, a bit too overly impressed by the social regime of the economic system in which they find themselves.

We need path finders in our social thinking; we need pioneers in our economic thinking; we need to think freely, adventurously, courageously, interpretively, if we are to refashion our social order after a higher pattern of justice and truth, and the challenge is the teacher's not to submit to dictation, to the outside pressure, but to follow truth wherever it leads him. That is the one compensation which the teacher, the real teacher, finds in his work; for surely the financial compensations are very meager, indeed; and so are the social compensations.

The real remuneration for a life of service of the teaching profession is the privilege of leading youthful minds courageously in the paths of truth, whether it is economic truth or social truth or political truth or scientific truth. Our schools ought to become centers of dynamic thinking rather than the conservators of old traditions. Light and leading should come from our institutions of learning. Unfortunately, too many of them

are either under the thumb of politicians or financiers, and the real teacher frequently finds himself against a stone wall in his disinterested pilgrimage towards the dwelling place of truth.

I should like to say a word about the profession of the **social worker**. It is only very recently that it has become a profession. Up to comparatively recent days social work was the work of well intentioned and well meaning amateurs and volunteers. But as people surveyed the immensity of the task it became apparent that for the sake of doing satisfactorily that which had to be done, the social worker would require much more than good intentions, to-wit, training, knowledge, study, technique. And so today we find that social service has its schools, its laboratories, its literature, its code, its standards, its technique. It is a profession and a very noble profession.

The whole scope of social service has enormously broadened in the last few decades. There are men living who recall that charity used to be almost exclusively a matter of doling out alms to the needy, a matter of relief, a matter of dispensing, of distributing food, raiment and shelter to the needy ones; and all that was necessary was a good heart and a skillful administration of the funds at hand. But before very long charity passed from that primitive stage of relief to a second

stage of prevention, and there much more skill and knowledge and information were required. It was found to be much more philanthropic and much more practical to anticipate disaster,--not to wait until the flotsam and jetsam of social wreckage come drifting to your doors, but to try to prevent social wreckage. It was found much more helpful, much more desirable, for example, to provide wholesome recreational facilities for our children in the congested sections of our cities, rather than to wait until the juvenile delinquent comes drifting into our courts. It was found to be more economic and more humane to teach men and women how to safeguard their health, how to prevent sickness, rather than to pay the price of illness and enforced idleness.

And so down along the line it was soon learned that much can be done in the way of social prevention, of delinquency and breakdown; and so social service passed from the first stage of relief to the second stage of prevention, and today it is entering the third stage where even more skill and knowledge and training are required--the stage which, for lack of a better term, we must call adjustment. Many a family which applies to our charitable institutions is in need neither of food nor of raiment nor of shelter; they neither ask nor receive material relief, and yet they come by the hundreds and the thousands in the large

cities.

Why do they come? Why, simply because they are confronted with an exigency or threatened breakdown in the family, caused by the lack not of material things but by the lack of what we must call spiritual

things,--the inability to solve some difficult domestic problem, some snarled cross-purposes within the home, moral incompetence, indolence, inability to wrestle successfully with some pressing human problem within the home; the home is threatened; then they turn to our organized philanthropic agencies and ask for guidance. And then the social worker steps in. He steps in as sort of a diagnostician; he studies the situation critically,--clinically, as it were; finds out what the root of the trouble is; sometimes calls in the relative, the neighbor, the doctor, the psychiatrist, the minister, the judge,--anyone who may be able to contribute to the rehabilitation of this family. The social worker may preach, may instruct, may cajole, may threaten, may do one of a hundred things in order to revitalize the moral sentiment in the individual, and along at last he may succeed and the family will be saved.

The problem of human adjustment is sometimes a serious problem in life. Most of our unhappiness is caused by our inability to adjust ourselves either to economic conditions or social conditions

to our neighbor, and to the opportunities of our family. And so the whole scope of social service has broadened tremendously in our day. It has become a real profession, and to the credit of the social worker be it said that much of the progress in our American life today in the departments of sociology is to be attributed to the quiet, patient, deliberate, affirmative work of social service.

If child labor has depreciably decreased in our country; if women are today more protected in industry; if conditions of employment are better; if the health of the workingman is safeguarded; if infant mortality has been reduced; if the immigrant has been adjusted to American life; if a thousand and one of these vital items in our social life have been achieved or are being achieved, the credit is due largely to the social worker. For the social worker is more than a man who stands by and waits until the social casuals come passing by him. He is today a social reconstructionist. I would have used the word social reformer, but the word has fallen into disfavor among people. And yet when all is said and done, friends, there are only two ways of human progress. One is the way of revolution and the other is the way of reform. And you have the choice between Lenin and the social worker. Your choice is between the revolutionary reconstructionist of society, or the one who,

like the social worker, would construct it slowly, deliberately, along tried evolutionary ways. And every time the social worker in a community saves a family from disintegration, or provides material relief to those in desperate need, or finds employment for a man out of work, or creates a wholesome, stimulating, recreational environment for young boys and girls, they are lifting by so much the social drudgery of discontent and dissatisfaction which must rest upon our economic system if that work were not done.

And their compensation, too, like the compensation of the teacher, is not a financial one. We reward with millions the man who discovers a new can opener, but not the men who do this basic, indispensable work of society. Their compensation lies, too, in the fact that they are the builders of tomorrow; they are the builders of the kingdom.

There is a beautiful rabbinic phrase with which I shall close. The Rabbis said, "He who saves one soul, it is accounted unto him as if he had saved the whole universe." And the social worker, perhaps more than any other human being, has this sacred opportunity,--not merely of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and giving shelter to the homeless, but of saving souls.

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Sermon 324

ABSTRACT OF
THE ADDRESS
THE TEACHER AND THE SOCIAL WORKER
BY
RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
THE TEMPLE, MARCH 23d, 1930

The teacher, of course, is the civilizer of the race. He transmits the cultural heritage of the past and prepares the mind of the race for further cultural progress. All the accumulated knowledge of the race garnered in books becomes so much meaningless hieroglyphics unless the teacher through instruction makes it accessible to man.

It is the teacher who guides the child into his rightful estate of a civilized human being. It is the teacher who perfects his speech, introduces him to the art of reading and writing, trains his mind to reason, stocks his memory and kindles his imagination and acquaints him with the world in which he finds himself.

But like so much else that is being done in the world of an indispensable character the work of the teacher is accepted as a matter of course and is seldom heralded or acclaimed. Some day when we shall have become a little more civilized and when the services of men will be gauged properly the teacher will come into his own both as regards recognition and remuneration.

From the point of view of society education has a two-fold function to perform. One is utility and the other is character. The school should train men for quick, effective and sustained thinking. Men should be trained to judge critically, to weigh evidence and to sift the true from the false, the fact from rumor and propaganda. There are in society today numerous agencies of a political, economic and religious character who carry on intensive propaganda and who have developed an elaborate technique for feeding the minds of men with brazen half truths. The school must train the minds of the rising generation to resist this concerted attack upon its mental integrity.

But beyond utility there is character. Intelligence is not enough. We must have not only a critical faculty for precise judgments but also profound sympathies with which to temper the asperity of our judgments. We require not only the power of concentration but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. It is not enough to know truth. We must love it and be prepared to sacrifice for it. We need not only truth which is light, but goodness, which is warmth. Education should prepare us for the good life.

A touch also of the prophetic ardor ought to be inculcated in our youth through education. Our higher institutions of learning do not fulfill their tasks when they create an easy-going detached attitude of refined skepticism among their students. Something of the crusading zeal for righteousness ought to go with an educational equipment.

The teacher has a rare opportunity to deal crushing blows to all forms of human prejudice and intolerance. If prejudice is ever to yield to the forces of sympathy and cooperation, if war is ever to be relegated to our jungle era, it will come to pass only through the patient, quiet, mind-plowing and seeding of the educator. The right kind of text books in the schools will do more for international peace than the right kind of peace treaties.

There is considerable tribalism in our higher institutions of learning. Our colleges are not free from racial and religious phobias. In many of our institutions of learning the attendance of certain students is restricted openly or covertly because of their race or religion. Student fraternities are notorious for their social and racial exclusiveness. Race and religion are barriers to scholastic advancement. In many of the faculties of our colleges social stratifications of all kinds are tolerated if not fostered under one pretext or another. There is too much of the spirit of the "collegian" that queer homo sapien in a racoon coat in our institutions of learning. The real educator will find here a challenging opportunity to expose the sham and to reach down to the fundamentals

of life.

The great teacher will resist the political or financial pressure which are frequently brought to bear upon him or his institution. He will courageously carry on his unbiased and disinterested intellectual pursuits regardless of consequences. He should guard zealously his academic freedom and train his pupils into supreme reverence for independent and free thought not alone in scientific fields but in social, political and economic fields as well.

Social service has in recent years become a profession. Its scope has broadened from mere relief to prevention and adjustment. It is due to this persistent work that so much of progress has been made in recent years in reducing child labor, in protecting women in industry, in improving conditions of employment and in safe-guarding the health of communities in improved recreational facilities for our youth and in adjusting the immigrant to American life.

There are but two ways of human progress - revolution and reform. The social worker is the agent of social reform - the builder of a new society along evolutionary lines. The social worker today no longer waits until the flotsam and jetsam of social wreckage comes to his door. He refuses to deal exclusively with the casualties of our social order. He has entered the field aggressively to bring about an improved order of society which will reduce the social casualties to a minimum.