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Children of yesterday and today, 1930.

"CHILDREN OF YESTERDAY AND OF TODAY"

LECTURE GIVEN AT THE TEMPLE,
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14th, 1930

BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

It is assumed by some that all the children of yesterday were model children, obedient, moral, good, and that all the children of today are rebellious, immoral and bad.

I seriously question this.

You and I were the children of yesterday. You and I who are the adults of today, were the children of yesterday. And I question whether looking back upon our own childhood we would be inclined to give ourselves such a fine report card.

We were rebellious, we resented and at times resisted authority. We were not too good. And as a generation we did not make such a success of our lives. Remember that we, who are the children of yesterday are responsible here and abroad for the most terrible war of all times. We were not so wise.

The sad thing is that the children of today do not seem to be any wiser.

I read in the newspapers where the young men of Germany today, young men of twenty and twenty-one, who were six or seven when the World War broke out, some of them babies in arms,

are rioting in Berlin because a moving picture, a dramatization of Remarque's terrible indictment of war, "All's Quiet on the Western Front" is being presented, which to them, these children of today, seems to be not sufficiently patriotic, does not sufficiently extol the qualities of heroism and the glow of the souls of life. They are making the same mistake that we made and that's the sad part about it.

It is true that we, the children of yesterday, were not as outspoken or as frank as the children of today. And it is also true that fewer children of yesterday dared to break with social conventions and with the moral code because there was a firmer control, a stricter authority in the home and a better organized social opinion outside of the home.

Today parents can not exercise that authority largely because they are not sure of their own ground. They are not convinced of what is right to do under a given circumstance. They are in a transition period, passing from the older stage of absolute parental authority to the newer stage of morals, a stage of freedom, the right of the individuals to express themselves and to live their own lives. And society too can not insure that pressure on the individual because it too is confused as to .

I seriously question whether the children of today love their parents any the less than the children of yesterday, whether they

love truth any the less, whether they are less loyal, less brave, are less given to admire real worth in men or are less ready to make sacrifices when the challenge comes. I think there is in all youth of today and yesterday and of all times, thank God, a certain beautiful and generous quality of heart, a certain fineness, which unfortunately age sooner or later dampens and that some unfortunate epochs in civilization drive this spontaneity, this spiritual generosity of youth into undesirable channels.

I seriously question, too, this business of the revolt of youth. A revolt implies a criticism of what was and what is and a projection of the higher standards in the name of which the old is to be destroyed. A revolt, in other words, is the up-reaching for a nobler way of living whether it be a political or a moral revolt. A mere kicking of the traces, a mere breaking with conventions for the sake of greater self-indulgence, that's demoralization. That is not a revolt. That's mere capriciousness, mere fractiousness, not a real revolt.

Some older men who really belong to the children of yesterday have tried to define to the children of today what their program ought to be rather than what it is.

There appeared not long ago, a very fine book called "Growing into Life" by Dr. David Seabury. And in this book Dr. Seabury gives what he called a Magna Charta of youth, a new program

of modern youth - what are its aims and its goals.

It is a very imposing Magna Charta: First,

The right to refuse repression and inhibition as a means of moral conduct.

Protection against the ignorance of adult sanctions and prejudices.

Discarding of the coercion process as a means of enforcing adult ideas.

Opportunity to seek truth and to refuse parental platitudes.

Freedom from the cloying weight of parental possessiveness and domination.

The end of mere parental authority and the coming of companionship in its stead.

Admission by parents that they do not know best, but that we must all learn to follow natural law.

The right to deliberate with parents on what is best: the right of choice.

The end of angry punishment as a mere means of parental self-expression.

An admission of more equality and the right to refuse being made inferior.

Discredit of the mere sanctions, conventions and hollow standards, and the right to refuse parental example.

Freedom from the creed of "ought to do" as a decree and release from the rigid perfectionism of conduct that goes with it.

An end to adult censoriousness, blame, shame and spying on the part of elders.

The right not to respect elders unless they are respectable.

Understanding of the saturation point, that no one can stand any influence if constantly exposed to it.

Admission of the principle of selfhood, that each person is an individual that independence and self-determination are sacred privileges.

Admission that no child ever asked to be born and is in no sense responsible for his character.

Admission that no child chooses its birth environment and is in no sense responsible for its effect upon him.

The right to a compatible environment, compatible playmates, lessons, interests and vocation.

The right to grow after one's own endowed nature, as long as that growth is constructive.

The right to periods of fallowness and relaxation: not to be always on duty.

The privilege to be judged by the sum-total of character, not by some single action.

Opportunity for life experience: even to suffer and learn from mistakes, not to be always told.

The absolute right to ego outlets, to adequate channels for the welling energies within the nature.

Freedom from stereotypes as to what is manly and womanly.

Admission of the relativity of right and wrong, that while truth is absolute man gains differing conceptions of it in every religion and in

each day and age."

That's a broad contract and I question seriously whether youth has thought all this out or whether some middle-aged philosopher is thinking it out for modern youth.

I question whether the young people of today are in any real sense different from the older people of today. I rather suspect that the same interests which really concern the older people among us, concern, attract and consume the time and energy of our young people as well.

The American people today as a class, as a group, is economically conservative, politically orthodox, internationally narrow-minded, religiously indifferent and morally cruising. And that is true of the young people as well. They react to their environment absolutely. And I don't know wherein they are revolting from their environment.

If really they were dissatisfied with conditions as they are, this intellectual or spiritual dissatisfaction would express itself in new points of view on economic or social or political or international problems of our day. But it does not.

It is of course true that moral standards have broken down. But they have broken down for the old as well as for the young. And they have broken down not because people today are more critical, not because people today do not submit to authority, questioning their inherent truth, not because people today are wise. They have broken

down because life today has been terrifically speeded up. The tempo of existence has been accelerated, industrial interests, material interests and an passion has taken hold of life; wealth has increased and with the increase of wealth, ease and luxury and self-pampering, self-indulgence and a breakdown of moral discipline; the shifting of life from the small villages to the metropolitan centers, have been responsible for the change in the moral code and standards of people.

And if these factors bring any unhappiness into human life they have brought unhappiness into the lives of the parents who were the children of yesterday. And because these standards of yesterday have broken down it is imperative today to try to build them up again. And we can build them up again only through enlightenment and education.

When life moves on in its normally accustomed pace it is not necessary to give to the young people reasons, the whys and the wherefores for doing certain things which society demands of them. I say it is not necessary. It is wise, but it is not necessary. The passing to the young, the conduct and standards of the old is by and large adequate and sufficient. But when a revolution has taken place, when there has been a critical age in the lives of people, then it is no longer sufficient to indoctrinate the youth with them. "quote Hebrew"

"Give them the reasons for the why and wherefore for the moral code."

That does not mean that the goal and standards of the moral life have changed. They have not changed. The goals remain the same.

Dr. Seabury, who has very little good to say about the old form of morality/^{and} spends hundreds of pages defining the difference between the old and the new morality, when he comes to define just what the new morality really is, what are the virtues which are to be inculcated in the youth of tomorrow, strangely enough and to his own utter amazement, finds that these are the self-same virtues which enlightened people in the last three thousand years.

He enumerates them: orderliness, integrity, faith, hope, charity, reverence, compassion, contentment, poise, development, temperance, prudence, application, spontaneity.

Like echoes of our old text-book that we used years and years ago - the old pass words, eternal verities. And modern psychology, while it may use a new terminology, has not displaced them, can not give us a new set of values. There are none to be had. These ^{virtues} ~~repetitions~~ are not the creations of an age. They are the crystallized and tested wisdom of the ages. They are the of a millenia, of ten milleniums, the expression of the whole human race.

All that modern psychology can do for us and fortunately is doing for us, is to call our attention to a better and easier way

to arrive at these ancient goals of humanity. And the way to which it points is also not a new way, but a way which some of us in the past lost sight of. A way, not of restraint, of exhaustion, of external authority, the way of an ipse dixit but by the way of enlightenment, the way of voluntary obedience on the part of the individual because the individual knows and consents to the principles in its behalf. He is summoned to obedience.

In other words modern psychology advocates not suppression of normal desires and cravings by inhibitions, not by way of dunts, but by the way of normal self-expression through wise and tactful guidance, by a wise and tactful parent and teacher.

In other words, we need today, because of the changes which have come over life, more of knowledge as to what is involved in the moral code and in our set of moral values which the children of yesterday had acquired: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

It is important to give the children of today some knowledge of biology, physiology, philosophy, some acquaintance with psychology, something of the social significance of the moral principles /in life. They ought to be told some of the handicaps of heredity and environment under which men and women live, the obstacles in the

way of moral advancement, so that knowing these things they will, when they grow older, have more sympathy. They will be able to judge less harshly of other people knowing that sometimes men can not achieve what they set out to achieve, hard though they try.

We are indebted to modern psychology for discussing these truths which are not new truths but which require a new emphasis. And wise parents will use all the tools of modern psychology in the training of their children. They will teach their children. They will reason with their children. They will never try, if they are wise, to coerce their children. They will not try to use what they believe to be parental authority, in imposing their will upon their children.

I say all that is excellent. On the other hand the children of today should remember and should be taught to remember first of all that knowledge about biology, about physiology and about psychology and about sociology is not sufficient for the moral life of a man. To know is one thing. To do is quite another.

Over and above knowledge a man requires will. Knowledge does not give us will-power and knowledge is never the motive power of any moral act. We may know what is right and yet we will not do that which we know to be the right.

In other words, we must not only train our intelligence but we must train our discipline, our will. To will to do that which we ought to do and that requires effort.

And that's the second point which young people should remember. There is no psychology in the world which will enable people to attain to the harmony and beauty of life without effort and without struggle. The ancients call this struggle in the individual, between his good and evil nature, (quote Hebrew) Modern psychology calls it the struggle between the conscious man and the sub-conscious man; between the social self and the anti-social self; between the jungle man, the ego man and the civilized man. By whatever name you call it the fact remains,--there is a struggle. Naturally there must be. If man has been evolving through the ages he has been evolving from the lower to the higher

perfecting in life, mere striving, mere yielding to the first impulse of the moment. That makes for defeat and for spiritual desolation.

I read to you this morning from the thirtieth chapter of Deuteronomy: "Behold I have set before you this day life and the good, death and the evil, choose ye therefore life."

And that brings me to the third point which the children of today ought to remember. Namely, that no one can absolve himself of responsibility, however much you believe in heredity, however much you believe in the influence of environment

however much you believe that man is a creature of there still remains a large measure of responsibility which no man can shake. We may call upon our parents to share in the responsibility, we may call upon society to share in the responsibility but we can not absolve our own selves from responsibility, else civilization is impossible, progress, human values, are impossible and man is reduced to the level of a beast who lives by instinct only and is controlled by external physical force only.

Man has a measure of freedom. Our Rabbis expressed that in a parable in legendary form: When a man is to be born an angel whose name is Leila takes this soul before the throne of God so that God may decree for that soul what it shall be. And the angel asks, "shall it be strong or weak?" And the decree is given. "Shall it be rich or poor" and the decree is given, "shall it be wise or simple" and the decree is given. But the angel never asks "shall it be good or bad?" For that there is no decree. That is left with the soul itself. There is a measure of freedom, because we are sharply aware of moments in our own lives when we do choose, when we do pass judgment and make appraisals. In as much as we are keenly aware of that freedom of choice, we are aware that we are responsible beings.

I stress this thought because if young people today insist that they ought to have the right to think for themselves and make their own decisions, that they will not submit to the authority of adults, parents, the social group, ought to have the right to think through for themselves, control their own conduct, they could not turn around and at the same time say "we are not responsible for our conduct. Our heredity, our environment is responsible." "We will do what we want but we will take no responsibility for what we do."

If young people today feel that they are not free to choose, to control their actions, then it is far better for them to submit to conventions and traditions, to the social habits of life and let it go at that.

Lastly, I should like the children of today, in whose hands will be the destiny of tomorrow, to remember that while right and wrong are to a degree relative terms, they are not interchangeable terms and they are not indeterminate terms. In the moral life of a race there are eddies and tides. The eddies are indeterminate, they come and go and there are the tides which carry into deep channels
are
There ~~is~~ in the physical world natural laws, the violation of which brings disaster upon a man. Similarly there is in the moral nature

of man, law, cosmic law, eternal law, which man can not violate with impunity. Mankind, seems, from the very beginning of time, to move in the direction of twin goals. One is the goal of freedom and the other the goal of responsibility. And everything which makes for the happiness of the individual and freedom of social, intellectual is by that token part of the eternal law, of the cosmic trend of ethics and everything which makes for responsibility, the responsibility of parents for children and children for parents, the responsibility of a man for his neighbor, everything which makes for responsibility, which is at the same time is by that token cosmic law. To define it, to itemize it, to apply it to every human relationship in detail, that has been the whole ~~part~~ of ethics through the ages. But the goals are there. The general concept is there for men to approximate philosophic thought.

There have been two extremes in moral philosophy. One has been the school of thought of stoicism, restraint, repression. The other has been Epicureanism, self-indulgence, pursuit of pleasure. Both are extreme schools of thought and both do not contribute to the harmony of life.

There is another school of thought, the Jewish school of moral thought which says that the goal of life is joy. The kind of joy which our Rabbis called "Quote Hebrew"

"The joy which comes from doing that which you know you ought to do and which you want to do, and in doing it well." The joy of creation, the joy of self-expression, not through self-indulgence, through aspiration. That is the Jewish ethical standard.

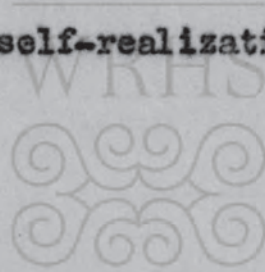
Our Rabbis never had any use for a man who was a dyspeptic, who thought that in order to be good he had to be sour, to go through life carrying the atlas of the world upon his shoulders. God carries the burdens of the world.

They even called such a man "quote Hebrew" a fool who happened to be pious. They said too "quote Hebrew" They said too that a man who spends his days fasting, in denying himself the joys of life, is called a sinner.

I want you to understand how thoroughly human and wholesome the ethics of your people is. But on the other hand they taught man to find supreme joy of life not in pleasure, which is after all circumstances of physical enjoyments, but to find it in joy which comes, with fulfillment, which comes with creation, which comes with taking the next step in human evolution, which comes with climbing to the level from which you can behold a new horizon. The joy which comes from sounder judgments, from truer percepts, from new words opening up to the mind and soul. Joy which comes in being able to see better than you have ever seen before, to hear more accurately, I am speaking in the spiritual sense, than you have ever done before; the joy which comes with talk, more and higher.

And that I believe, is as much a challenge for the

children of today as it was for the children of yesterday. Their task is just as difficult today as it was a hundred or a thousand years ago. Perhaps more difficult in this age of materialism, of temptation, diseases; in this age of big cities where all about them are temptations beating in on them. Still their task remains today as of yore, to live clean wholesome, fine, beautiful lives, moving steadily to the goal of growth and fulfillment and self-realization.



①

T. It is assumed ^{all} children of yesterday model
obedient - moral. Children, to-day rebellious,
immoral - bad.

Seriously question it - (Pretend to idealize
past - we were children ; yesterday - if we
looked back upon our early youth - I doubt
if we could give ourselves out a perfect
report card. - Sure, we just - nothing - at
so good - we rebelled - we went on moral
tears.

We did
not
want
such a
success
your
world -
was
all
strict

Less outspoken less frank
about it. Perhaps, too, fewer among the
children of yesterday who dared break
moral code - see purity. Rigid control
and org. social opinion - hard as flinders.

② Less, this control & opinion to-day.
Parents as well as church exercise more
authority - for they are not sure, their own
ground - our convictions re moral standards.
And social opinion is no longer one in
defense of def. moral standards.

③ Seriously question Result ^{and youth} ^{living & death}
whether there is less of loyalty, love
of justice & fairness, love of truth, admi-
ration of real worth, spirit of spontane-
ousness among young people to-day?

(2) There is in all youth this admirable, generous qualities which are dampers and which some unhappy persons in civil life put into wrong channels.

(3) Deming question ("Revolt") implies criticism; cost & tradition - Up reaching - killing stones is not revolt - men capitulate & fractionaries - unidimensionalization. -

→ Elders have tried to give what youth might think - give it program - Island Seabury "growing into life" (p652)

(4) Question it all - Have to be philosophical - a certain school, tend to have that then their understand moral unpleasant / civil - Fact is they are like Elders today - "Am. people is etc. econ. course."

(5) Standards ^{not on body - with narrow - in up. rel. world - you} have broken down - but not due to Capitalism - but to tempo of life - industrial - materialism - wealth - Big City - Scepticism, cynical attitude towards life, worldly-wise,

3/ ⑥ It is this factor which has made
for unhap. among old and young.

2.- Bee. standards have broken down - it is
necess. now to rebuild Eds than Eds,
+ Explanation. When life moved on its
accustomed way - no sharp breaks or
changes - it was suff. for men to be
unconscious in moral life of conscience -
Now we must grow to why & wherefore -
Alfred, 1916. -

① There does not seem goals have
changed - what was good yesterday is bad
to day, but at all. goals remain
the same.

② Seabury - when he comes to
certain attitudes to be taught - or
as we would say - characteristics / virtues

① Orderliness - Integrity - Faith - Hope -
Charity - Reverence - Compassion - pride
patience - courage - self-control -
humility - temperance - prudence -
etc - Old pan-words - & know
Verities

(4)

3. Modern Psych. has not displaced es. un
derstand a new set of values. There
are more - Travel, age-old, pres. wisdom
& Ages -

① Mod. Psych. does not advocate un
temperant - sexual indulgence - anarchic
passions - undisciplined Ego -

② It admits, it believes, a better &
easier happier way by which to reach
these ancient objectives - The way
is restraint whenever, external
pressure - which as modern impr
one to man's emotional & intel. life
but way of enlightenment, of for ready
adherence to inner principles unde
stood & voluntarily submitted to -

③ Advocates not suppression of
normal desires rewards by artificial
bars, but normal self-expression
than with psych. guidance and
consent -

④ In other words - Knowledge - "If I shall

⑤ its ambition, prayer, justice, values
are unhumble - and man is reduced to
Beast who lives by instinct & phys. laws
only.

④ We have a measure of freedom - enough
to enable us to move forward if
we want to - Choice is it - We
are sharply aware of power & choice,
deliberation, appraisal, & thinking.
As to the degree that we are
free are we responsible -

③ If we are not willing to yield
to external parental & social control
& insist on our right to judge
& make decisions ^{+ responsible conduct} & we must
not at same time claim that
our decisions & conduct are in-
voluntary & we are controlled.
If we are not free to make well
decisions then it was better to
remain under control & direction
& frustration. We must face the
rep. of freedom squarely.

know truth - bro. - physic & history ^{psych}

& moral evol - social reg. & moral principles - A recog. & ambitions & human soul - the handicaps & heredity & evils. Under which some live -

^{of train - limit} Have plebs sympathy + his circumstances & rigidity & judgment.

(5) all this is Excellent -

(6) Rabin already knew it - 31st Aug -
- / 31 / 11 -

~~4. but children~~ (7) Good wise parents to-day will teach - will reason - no space for ditto!!

4. but children to-day should remember -

(1) Knowledge is insufficient - will - Reason is indisposed to listen to power

(2) Moral life requires effort - struggle but good & evil is real - 16/31 1 6/31 - Bel.

Conscience & sub-conscience - Moral Truth - Soc.

The good life - not easy to attain - Must pay price - 11/12 5/12/1 -

(3) Can not abolish one self & other - Heredity & Evil can - Many parents of Society -
They must share in resp. - But to most you - There is pers. resp. for initiation & aspiration

⑤ Run too, that while they are very
 near to a degree relation, they are not
interchangeable & indeterminate -
 There are eddie. There are tides & surfs.
 & Permanent - There are laws in
phys. world - where violations bring
disaster - It also in Moral & sp. order.
Cosmic, eternal laws - There are
twin-goals to all Morality - Freedom
& Responsibility - The happ. & Just.
 then the happiness of society - Any
conduct which violate either or both
 is destructive of the good life, & the
harm of being -

3/ There are ^{two bent} 2 extremes in Moral philosophy
Stoicism - Epicureanism -
Repression - Indulgence
Solomon - Unbridled pleasure seeking

There is a third - the middle path

① Rabbi called dysphoric unhappy all men
 רבן קהן כל בני אדם כאלו הם חסרי שמחה

② Joy which comes from within, exaltation
effort - (Benson 16)

④ Children, to-day will find happiness
if they will lead clean, wholesome,
free + resp. lives - pursuing the
ideal of growth + fulfillment



reuben w. jacobson

AN ABSTRACT OF THE ADDRESS

"CHILDREN OF YESTERDAY AND OF TODAY"

BY RABBI ABB HILLEL SILVER
THE TEMPLE, DEC. 14th, 1930

I seriously question whether the children of yesterday were as model and obedient as they are represented and the children of today as rebellious and bad. We are prone to idealize the past.

We, the adults of today, were the children of yesterday and I doubt whether in our more realistic moments we would be inclined to give ourselves perfect report cards for our conduct as children.

Incidentally the children of yesterday, who are the adults of today, did not make such a great success of their world. The World War is but one proof of their tragic short-comings.

I seriously question whether the children of today possess less of filial love of loyalty, of admiration for real worth, of sportsmanship and of the spirit of justice and fairness than the children of yesterday. There is in youth of all ages an admirable, generous quality which sadly enough age dampens and which some unhappy epochs of civilization drive into wrong channels.

The children of today live like their elders, the children of yesterday, in an age in which life has been furiously accelerated, in which the absorption in the production of material wealth has been unprecedented and in which wealth has increased prodigiously, bringing with it all that goes with wealth, - laxity, self-indulgence and the weakening of moral disciplines.

Moral standards have broken down not because the standards were at fault but because the age is incapable of living up to them. It is now necessary to rebuild these standards through education and social training.

The moral goals have not changed. Right and wrong may to a degree be relative terms but they are not inter-changeable or indeterminate. Mankind is moving in the direction of the twin goals of freedom and responsibility - the increase of the happiness of the individual through the happiness of society. Any conduct which violates either or both of these principals is destructive of the good life and of the harmony of existence.

Modern psychology has not displaced the eternal verities of the moral life nor has it discovered a new set of moral values. Psychology offers men a better and an easier way by which to reach the great and eternal objectives; it points to the way of enlightenment, of consent, of ready obedience to inner principles understood and voluntarily subscribed to, rather than to the way of restraint, inhibition and external pressure.

The children of today should not be confused by the uncorrected and unfortified findings of much that goes by the name of psychology or psycho-analysis today. No real science of living gives warrant for moral temperamentalism and for a life of uncontrolled and undirected impulses. Today as in the days of old the good life demands effort

struggle, discipline and the sharing of responsibilities.

The children of today will find their happiness ~~in~~ if they will lead wholesome, free and responsible lives in the direction of the ideal of growth and self-realization.

