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When parents grow old, 1931.

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WHEN PARENTS GROW OLD

BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING
MARCH 22d, 1931.

When parents grow old! Well when are parents old?

If the opinion of 'flaming youth' is to be accepted, parents are old as soon as the son has had his first shave and the daughter her first date.

Children then quickly discover that their folks who can not always approve of their ideas, their conduct and their manners, are terribly old-fashioned. Their parents may still be on this side of forty or forty-five but to adolescents of sixteen or seventeen or eighteen, forty and forty-five is a frightfully old age and it is inconceivable to them that people so old can really understand the vast and seemingly unprecedented problems which are agitating the minds of young people.

Thus the process of relegating parents to old age begins very early in this day much to the chagrin of the parents. The parents would like to tell these young upstarts a thing or two. Frequently they do. They would like to remind their children that it was only yesterday that they showed them how to locate China on the map and how to solve a problem in arithmetic and how properly to scrub their necks.

Thus the struggle between adolescence and obsolescence begins very early,- the children charging the parents with excessive old age

and the parents charging the children with excessive youth. And the struggle continues until the parents actually do grow old.

Parents grow old when they really become dispensable in the lives of their children when their children can really do without them.

Some man said that one of the bitterest pills which he had to swallow was when his three year old, walking with him one day, pushed his hand away and said that he wanted to walk by himself. In a way he was glad that the young lad was growing up and yet in a real sense he was sad because this was the first evidence which had come into his life of his dispensability to his child. That complete need of him was gone and that ^{little} ~~XXXXX~~ incident was the first evidence to the parent that he was becoming more and more dispensable in the life of his child.

When children are grown, reared, schooled, married, then parents slowly begin to realize that the chief interest of their life is gone; that sweet, hard, oftentimes, heart-breaking task of seeing their children through infancy, childhood, adolescence, young-manhood or womanhood, that task which drained them of their best years, of their vigor; that task is, for better or for worse, ended.

Parents become reconciled to it. All the ambitions which they had for their children have not been realized naturally. Some of them thought that their children would reach the skies. Some of them didn't even reach the ceiling.

When you come to that period in life when you can't do anything about it you become more or less reconciled, but you do feel the need

of making new adjustments in life, of discovering some new interests in life and until new adjustments are made the home and the hearts of the parents are awfully empty. They begin to feel themselves growing old.

Now some parents resent this, what I call dispensability. They do not wish to relinquish their rule and their position in the lives of their children. The habit of years when they supervised their children, guided them, instructed them, - the habit of years is too strong upon them and they do not wish to see others usurp that in the lives of their children. They feel that they have a prior claim on their children, even after their children are married.

And so this desperate craving, not to be dispensed with, not to be shut out, as it were, from the lives of their children, to continue unchanged the matriarchal or patriarchal relationships which held good for so many years, frequently leads to unwise interference in the lives of parents and children resulting in family wranglings and quarrels in the family circles.

Much has been said, a good bit of it humorous, much of it foolish, about the proverbially interfering motherinlaw. But when you come to think of it the pretentious and interfering motherinlaw is no other than the mother, a mother, any mother whose great hunger for love,

whose unwillingness to be shut out from the life of a son or a daughter expresses itself unwisely of course, in this interference, in this craving after indispensability in the only way she knows how.

Now some parents do not resent having become dispensable. Some parents remove themselves almost entirely from the lives of their grown children after they are married. They remove themselves as much as they can. They are very sensitive people. They do not want to intrude upon the lives of grown men and women. They wish them to live their own lives. They feel that they really haven't very much to give them any more and so they retreat. They continue, of course, to be regular visitors in the home of their children, they follow very closely the fortunes of their children, but they live by themselves in a home or a hotel and I suspect some times that they are lonlier than they would confess even to themselves.

Things have changed, have they not, since a generation or two ago when in nearly every home and as a vital part of that home there lived a grandfather or a grandmother. And they were not unwelcome, especially in ~~the~~ such cases as they were not an economic burden upon the home. They had a definite, welcomed place in the home. They were a fine influence in the home, especially on the lives of the children in the home. A generation or two ago the thought-life of every boy or girl had in it an affection for grandma or grandpa. They were always on hand. They were never in the way.

These grandparents were after all parents grown old. They were symbols in the home,-- symbols of family stability, of family loyalty, of family tradition, of the continuity of a beautiful family life.

Well, things have changed. Today grandparents are visitors in the home. Perhaps the change is for the better. But surely the lives of the grand parents have not been enriched and made happier by this new arrangement.

So that the great problem which confronts parents today, parents who are growing old and who are facing the problem of disability, is how to remain indispensable in the lives of their children without intruding themselves upon them.

It is clear, is it not, that our lives have meaning only as long as we are needed; that we live only as long as we are used. Can we so rear our children and cultivate our own lives that when they grow older they will still have need of us? Is that possible? My answer is decidedly yes.

Now some parents think that they can achieve this end by making their children financially dependent upon them. They will hold them through the exercise of financial authority. That's been done. But that, at best, is only a poor substitute for that spiritual thing and not the dependence which we have in mind. That sort of an arrangement never illicit from the children that which the heart of the parent really yearns for, - love and devotion and being honored. In most cases that leads merely to children waiting impatiently for their legacy.

Now some parents hope to achieve this end by being very generous to their children, by bestowing gifts upon them during their lifetime, by making their children grateful to them. That frequently works. Gratitude paves the way for love, for affection. But it doesn't always work. Sometimes children take what is given to them and then forget.

Thus for example: King Lear who grew old before he grew wise, thought he could hold the affection of his children by giving them all that he had.

The subtler, and to my mind, the surer way of remaining indispensable to our children all through their life, is the way not of intrusion, the way not of compulsion by the exercise of monetary power, but it is the way for which plans must be laid very early in life. It is the way of weaving our lives into the lives of our children during those early years when they are really and truly ours. It is the way by which we gain the confidence and trust of our children during the early and developing and formative years, when we become to them friends and companions and confidants. It is the way, subtler and tremendously effective, of winning their confidence on the basis of their recognition of our superior wisdom, of our calmer judgments, of our riper opinions. It is the way of winning the respect of our children through the respect which we have won for ourselves from our circle, in our community.

Above all, it is the way of winning our children's

life-long allegiance by the grace and dignity of our life, by the manner in which we keep ourselves intellectually and mentally alert, keeping pace with them, not falling behind them, not becoming antiquated in their mind.

That's the way, I believe, of assuring for ourselves a permanent place of indispensability in the lives of our children. For don't you see, when they grow older they will be proud of us, proud to have us in the circle of their friends. They will want their children to be influenced by us, by the serenity of our lives, by the tranquility of our moods. They will want to share with us their joys and their sorrows. They will turn to us from time to time to help them unravel a knotty problem.

I am convinced that that is a more difficult way, but really the only way of insuring for ourselves a welcome in the lives of our grown children.

When parents grow old it is then too late to try to command the love or admiration of their children. That's a mistake that so many people make: I have done so much for my child he ought to be a loving child, he ought to be affectionate, he ought to be reverent. He ought to be, but he isn't. It is not those qualities which commend themselves to the mind or imagination of grown children.

Parents, fathers who were too busy when they were rearing their children or having others rear them, fathers who were too

busy making money and didn't have time to play or plan or read with their children, to enter into their lives vitally, to become a growing center of hero worship in the life of their child, fathers who were too busy during the years making money for their children to keep replenishing their minds, to keep their intellect satisfied so that their souls and their lives like lamps became dim because they hadn't been nurtured and soon found themselves out-distanced by the intellectual development of their sons and daughters; or mothers who turned the rearing of their children over to hired nurses or professional kindergartners or teachers, who spend their years instead of improving themselves and growing with their children and weaving their lives, hour by hour, day by day into the lives of their children and went to seed spending their hours in stupid amusements, foolish reading, card playing and what not, - such parents will realize, much to their sorrow, that when their children are grown men and women, that somehow their parents do not appeal to them as being very indispensable.

There is an old Roman saying: "Apex est autem senectutis auctoritas." "The Crowning glory of old age is influence." A man can build up his life in such a way that his aging years shall be called the years of wisdom. He is then in the best of position to be a potent influence in the lives of grown sons and daughters.

It is impossible for us in this day and age to exercise the kind of patriarchal rule which was exercised by fathers in the older civilizations. Cicero writes in his essay "How a Roman Aged":

"Appius, though he was both blind and old, managed four sturdy sons, five daughters, a great household, and many dependents; for he did not languidly succumb to old age, but kept his mind ever taut, like a well-strung bow. He maintained not mere authority, but absolute command over his household; his slaves feared him, his children revered him, all loved him, and the customs and discipline of his forefathers flourished beneath his roof. For old age is honoured only on condition that it defends itself, maintains its rights, is subservient to no one, and to the last breath rules over its own domain. For just as I approve of the young man in whom there is a touch of age, so I approve of the old man in whom there is some of the flavour of youth. He who strives thus to mingle youthfulness and age may grow old in body, but old in spirit he will never be."

That type of old age is really out of the question in our day and yet even in our day the old saying of the Bible "quote Hebrew

"The hoary head is the crown of glory" may be realized if we see to it as we grow older that old age should not mean intellectual doddiness, mental slovenliness, loss of interest in the great movements that are taking place in the world, but old age will bring to us the prestige of ripening wisdom, of distilled experience, of senility of spirit, of a broader outlook, of a keener insight. When a man brings all that to his old age, youth will rally round him. Incidentally he need not fear of becoming dispensable entirely ~~to~~ in the lives of his dear ones.

When parents grow old, my friends, their children no longer require their constant care and attention. It is then well to be prepared to take on some newer interest in life, something profitable in the way of mind and soul enrichment, perhaps some study which you neglected during those busy years when you had to devote yourself entirely to the maintenance and support of the family and to the care of the children, perhaps some desire which you were not able to satisfy, some yearning of the heart and mind. That's the time to begin to cultivate this new interest, some social work to which you can devote yourself, some community interest, now that you are free to do it. That's the secret of keeping one's self from becoming too old and pushed aside by life.

I have spoken so far of parents growing old who are more or less economically independent and belong to the well-to-do and not to the indigent class. But when old age comes to parents who are poor, then there enters a real element of tragedy. The tragedy is greater of course, in the case where their children are likewise poor, for then they become a complete economic liability to their children. But even when their children are not poor often times parents who are poor when they are old feel a bitterness and humiliation at being dependent upon children. There is nothing that parents dread more than that I believe. Parents like to give everything to their children and all that they ask of their children is that they will grow up to be a credit to them and not bring their hoary heads down to shame. But to live off their children, that parents dread.

Not long ago an old friend of mine said to me: "Raabi my children are fighting over me." I said, "That's fine." He said, "Fine, my daughter says I should live with my son and my son says I should live with my daughter."

How often grown sons and daughters forget the fifth Commandment, "Honor thy Father and thy Mother." And how often they seek the first opportunity to shelve them into some home for the aged.

The Rabbis said "the fifth Commandment is immediately followed with the sixth Commandment. The fifth Commandment says: "Honor thy father and thy mother." The sixth Commandment says, "Thou shalt not murder," for he who dishonors their father and mother in their old age is regarded by God as if he had committed murder all his lifetime."

I am afraid that in our age particularly we have become terribly selfish and that poor parents could not receive any absolute and complete measure of reverence and protection which is due them by the laws of God and of man; but the case is often sadder when the children are so circumstanced that they simply can not take care of their dependent parents. And that's true not of individuals but of thousands and of tens of thousands in our land today.

There are thousands of homes where every morsel of food counts, when to take care of a dependent parent is to deprive a growing child of the necessities of life. We who live in comfortable circumstances don't think of that often enough. The average workingman is unable to lay up from his wages enough to take care of himself and his wife in old age. It is almost an impossibility. And old age today comes much sooner to the

workingman than it did a generation ago.

I don't mean physical old age. I mean industrial old age. Today a man who is forty or forty-five is eliminated from all the major industrial occupations. In other words his span of earning, the years when he can earn, are limited. The amount which he can earn is limited and he finds himself at the age of fifty, fifty-five or sixty utterly without resources, dependent perhaps on children who themselves are struggling to take care of their own families in this country today, - this 'prosperous' America. Today in this country there are a hundred thousand families whose old age is embittered, degraded by poverty.

I sometimes think that the real test of a civilization is the measure of its protection of the weak and the aged. The real test of a civilization and of progress my friends, is not magnificent and costly cities and museums and palaces, that's the test of a money-groping civilization. The real test of a civilization is how it takes care of its weak, dependent, orphans, widows and its aged.

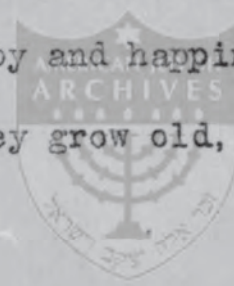
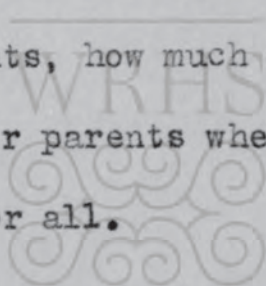
In some industries and in some states in this union systems of old age pensions have been worked out to protect men and women in the twilight of their lives. Ohio is still a backward state in this regard, as in other regards. The Old Age Pension Bill has been up before the Ohio Legislature over and over again and is not yet a certainty of being passed.

When parents grow old, my friends, they are blessed indeed if they can enter the quieter years of their lives together, if they have a host of beautiful memories to share together, if they can be sustained by the knowledge of their children progressing, advancing, growing up nicely,

their children and their grandchildren. They are blessed indeed if without being dependent upon their children they are indispensable to them; that their children want them, have need of them, turn to them.

Many parents when they grow older are not so blessed, perhaps only one is left, perhaps some loss of a child, some bereavement has darkened their sun. That is life. The stronger, the braver will endure and carry on.

If children but knew how much they could lighten the burdens of their ageing parents, how much of joy and happiness they could bring into the life of their parents when they grow old, how lovelier would life be and how sweeter for all.



When Parents Grow Old:

Lesson 35 / Th. 16

1. When are parents old? If opinion of planning youth is to be accepted - parents are old as soon as the son has his first shave, and the daughter her first date. They quickly discover that their folks who ~~are~~ ^{is} not always up to par, their manner, conduct, or ideas are old-fashioned - almost ancient. Their parents may still be thirty 40 - but 40 to adolescents (16-17) is a frightfully old age - and, to them, it is remarkable that people so old could really truly understand these vast and unprecedented problems of youth.
2. This process of obligating parents to old age, thus begins, rather early - much to the chagrin of the parents - who would like to feel the young "back fire" ~~when it comes~~ as they or two - and frequently do. They would like to remind their young upstarts that it was but yesterday that they had to show them how to read their maps, or how to locate ~~the new~~ ^{the new} ~~map~~ ^{map}. - Thus the struggle bet. adolescence + tolerance begins - young chagrined parents with excessive youth - Until -
3. Parents do actually grow old! When? When they really become dispensable. Some one said - "bitternest fruit" - 3 yr. old - pushed his head away - He was glad, in a way - but not too. That complete dependency, that utmost need, him as gar - with other such dependence to follow -

when children are grown round - reared - reared -
+ married & placed & their parents slowly come become
aware that their all-absorbing interest in life
is waning. The best reared, hard, at times
heart-knocking task, which drained their best
years & vigor is, for father or mother, finished.
They must make new adjustments. Find
new interests. For a time, at least, this leaves
their hearts an awfully empty. They
begin to feel 'old'.

4. Some few parents resent this dispensability.
and are reluctant. The bold 5 years -
when their planned, career for, counselled,
guided, supervised their children's lives, are
too strong, & cannot be shaken off. They do not
wish others to usurp their children's lives -
They have a firm claim on loyalty, and
so the disparate exacting not be helped with,
to continue unchanged the maternal protection
relationships, frequently lead to interference
in the lives; their grown children, to family
wrangles & disputes - to great unhappiness.

(1) Many things have been said abt. mother in
law - much that is humorous - a great deal
that is foolish. - But the prevalently unforgiving
and condemning m. is only the mother, hungry
for love - unwilling to be shut-out from the life
her grown son or daughter - struggling, unwilling
to remain unhappy & to them is the only
way the knows how!

5. Other ^{remote} remains from him, his children
as much as they can. They are strict &
mostly afraid of interference or being mis-
understood. They feel that they have very little
need to join their children. And so while
regularly visiting them - & of course closely
following their future - they are even or less
in horror - They less by him - and in a
house - or in an hotel - and I suspect
that they are lonelier there they cannot
confess even to themselves.

6. Things have changed since a generation or
two ago when heavily a home but what
has been in it - a virtual part yet - a
grandfather or grandmother. They were
not unimportant. They seemed to have the
confidence "out" of their family exp to the
younger generation about them. They exercised
a very influence on all members, the
family, including the little children. They
were symbols, fam unity - fam loyalty -
fam traditions, fam stability. & The
thought of the child was not without its
very affective course for grandparents &
grandpa - who now was always in
heart & mind in the way - They, I say,
have changed. Grandparents are visitors
now. Perhaps it is rather so - But
surely the lines of the grandparents - i.e.
parents from old are not the same &
happier because it -

8. The subtle + sure way - not intrude - or compell -
- way for which plans are laid very early
- WEAVE
- to be with them during devel. years - friend
- To win their faith & confidence on basis - richer -
- clear-sightedness
- To win respect
- Above all - pace - intell. awareness - Keep
pace.

(a) Our children will be proved of us -
- Knotty problems - their children -
in joy & sorrow

(b) When parents grow old - it is too late -
to command - Father who were
too busy

clear-unintendedness. To win their respect
on the basis, the respect where other men
show us for what we are & do ^{and} to the
stand for in our circle is in our command.
Always all by the peace polygamy, & are
lovers - ~~and~~ our intelligent awareness
of what is going on in the world, and our
knowledge of keeping abroad, their own intellectual development

(1) Our children will be present, as-
present to have us when their friends
are around. They will turn us, from
time to time, for to keep unusual a worthy
problem. They will want their children
to be influenced by their grandparents.
- their wisdom - serenity - sp. hangover.
They will want an enriched
ship.

(2) When parents grow old it is too late
to command love or respect, children.
That is your harvest time such affection
not need time - Fathers who work, too, long
making money. not to have time for their children,
not to read & plan & play with them - and
too long, to replenish their own mental & spiritual
so that their intellect & sp. life, from down,
with free time with time - & fill with
with their children is intellect awareness.
Mothers who turn the navy, their children
over to kind men, & phys. therapies - &
teachers - and themselves go to read by
way of staying novels and land papers
with cannot hope to appeal together to the

mind or imagination, thus from children.

9. Roman sage said:

→ Apex est autem senectutis auctoritas

→ The crowning glory of old age is influence
what kind of an influence will we be? in
Have we prepared ourselves to be an influence?

→ (1) It is unfathomable for us in this age to
exercise that ~~same~~ paternal rule which
characterized sons, the older civilization

→ (2) Cicero - "How a Roman aged."

nevertheless not minor at all. If with
no income from sons and daughters
must rely - but the prestige & distinction
Esp. wisdom knowledge - mother judgment
respect & admiration -

(Next page)

12. Have spoken of well-to-do. But ^{means of} ~~from~~ ^{the} Old Age -
is frequently a tragedy. They become
habitual to their children - Esp. when
their children, too, are poor. But even when
well-to-do - poor parents are at times
not wanted - The 5th com - is perhaps - shelved
then in some old store

→ (1) My children fight over me -

→ (2) from not like to be with the old

11. But when children are born - on landline
& poverty - ^{when they are young, just} support, and folk means
depriving children of necessities. Trojan
In introduce Heaven Temple + an
unwholesome atmosphere to have -

(2) Society ought thus persons sake
old of from such unhappy -

(1) In a great mass ^{working} people
the present means far to provide
the necessary security for old age -

(2) The ^{relatively} ~~relatively~~ ^{aged} ~~aged~~ are being permanently
eliminated from all the major
industrial occupations - Age limit.

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An Abstract of the Address

WHEN PARENTS GROW OLD

BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
THE TEMPLE, MARCH 22d, 1931.

When are parents old? If the opinion of flaming youth is to be accepted parents are old as soon as the son has his first shave and the daughter her first date. They quickly discover that their folks who can not always approve of their ideas or conduct are old-fashioned. Their parents may still be this side of forty or forty-five but to adolescents of sixteen or seventeen, forty or forty-five is a dreadfully old age and it is inconceivable to them that people so old can really and truly understand the vast and unprecedented problems which are agitating their youthful minds.

Parents do actually grow old when they become dispensable. When their children are grown, schooled, placed and married parents slowly become aware that the all-absorbing interest of their life is gone; the sweet, hard and at times, heart-breaking task of rearing their children which drained their best years and vigor is for better or worse finished. They must now make new adjustments and find new interests. For a time at least, their home and their hearts are awfully empty. They begin to feel old.

Some parents resent this dispensability and the desperate craving to continue unchanged, the matriarchal or patriarchal relationships frequently leads to unwise interference in the lives of their grown children, to bitter family wrangles and disputes and to great unhappiness.

Other parents remove themselves from the lives of their children as much as they can. They are mortally afraid of intruding and so while they regularly visit their children and closely follow their fortunes they are more or less onlookers. They live by themselves in a home or in a hotel and I suspect that

they are lonlier than they would confess even to themselves.

Things have changed since a generation or two ago when hardly a home but what had living in it and as a vital part of it, a grandfather or a grandmother. They were not unwanted, especially when they were not an economic drain on the family. They exercised a fine influence in the home, especially on the children. The thought world of nearly every child was not without its very affectionate corner for grandma and grandpa who were always on hand and not in the way. They were the symbols of family unity, family loyalty and family traditions. Today grandparents are only visitors in the home.

Perhaps it is better so. But surely the lives of these grand parents- i.e. parents grown old - are not richer or happier because of it.

How are parents to remain indispensable in the lives of their grown children? ~~Some try to achieve this end by making their children financially dependant upon them. This is a poor substitute for being really wanted. Children whose sole dependence upon parents is a monetary one are simply waiting for their legacy.~~

There is a subtler and surer way of being wanted, the way for which plans must be laid very early in life. It is to weave our lives into the lives of our children through all their early years when in a real sense they are ours. It is to be with them during their developing years as friends and confidants. It is to win their faith and confidence on the basis of our richer experience, our sounder judgments and our clear-sightedness. It is to win their respect on the basis of respect which other men show us for what we are and do and stand for in our circle or in our community, by the grace and dignity of our lives, our intelligent awareness of what is going on in the world and by our capacity to keep abreast with their own intellectual development.

When parents grow old it is too late then to command the love or respect of their children. It is then the time of harvesting not of planting. Fathers who were too busy making money to have time for their children, to read, plan and play with them, to enter vitally into their lives, or who were too busy to

replenish their own minds and souls so that they were soon outdistanced by their children or mothers who turned the rearing of their children over to hired nurses and professional kindergartners and teachers, of not integrating themselves into the lives of their children and permitting themselves to go to seed intellectually and spiritually can not hope to appeal either to the mind or the imagination of their children.

