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Fear, 1932.

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"FEAR"

THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF LECTURES ON "THE

BASIC REALITIES OF LIFE"

BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7th, 1932

That fear is a basic reality in life nobody will question. Everybody fears some thing or some one at some time or other. With some people fear is only an occasional visitor who makes his call and takes his departure; with others fear is a permanent lodger who consumes all that one has and all that one is and pays no rent.

The presence of fear is always attended by sharp physical organic reactions and when its stay is prolonged, it is almost always disastrous both physically and psychically for the individual.

Normal fear, if I may use that term, normal fear has a distinct service to render the human organism. That is why it is universally found in every man, everywhere. It prepares the body for flight from danger. Fear may be said to be the emotion which is engendered by the sharp chemical reactions which take place in the

organism at the sense of danger. When a person becomes frightened, that is to say, when he is made aware of some impending injury, then certain chemical reactions take place in him automatically. The body mobilizes itself for the threatened onslaught. There takes place an automatic organization and redistribution of the forces and energies of the body. The heart is speeded up, the glands begin to pour adrenalin and thyroid secretions into the blood stream, the blood pressure rises, the digestive processes are checked. The blood is pumped out to the external muscles, energy is diverted to where it is most needed, to the nerves, to prepare for the onslaught, as a refuge against danger.

The medieval Jewish philosopher in the pre-scientific ages anticipated the modern definition of fear when he said that "Fear is the reaching of the soul," (Hebrew) "and the gathering of all her powers unto herself, when she imagines some fear-inspiring thing." I am quoting Joseph Albo who lived in the fifteenth century. He wrote the "Sefer Ha-Ikkarim" in which he stated : "God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

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Normal fear is the recruiting of the body against a threatened injury to itself. And fear may therefore be said to be a part of man's equipment for survival. All life is a bitter struggle for existence, beset with dangers. Primitive man and his arboreal ancestors of the jungle were beset with countless dangers which lurked all about him, in beast or human foe, in forest, brush or cave or thunderbolt. The memory of man was early seared and branded with records of pain and injury and through countless generations the knowledge of possible sources of danger was handed down from parent to off-spring and thus became the racial legacy of caution and strategy.

And man has inherited some of these dark ancestral memories of the human race. While it is true that modern psychology indicates that most fears of children are not inherited but are transmitted to them through the suggestion of parent, nurse or playmate, there are certain fears in children which seem to be inherited, Watson, notwithstanding. The fear of sudden, sharp noises, the fear of sudden movements, in fact the fear of all that is unaccustomed and mysterious, seems to be instinctive in the human race. That, of course, is part of the e mechanism of the human race.

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Fortunately modern man is not as beset with the many elementary dangers which beset his jungle-dwelling, less-protected and less-knowing ancestor. Modern man is not afraid to come out on the street 'lest, like little Sambo, he will be eaten up by a tiger. But nevertheless modern man has his fears and they are quite as real fears, whether it is the fear of losing his job or the fear of the automobile, or the fear of fire, or the fear of catastrophe real or imagined. And as long as these fears dwell among men, so long will man react towards them in the selfsame way that man has reacted through the countless ages.

Real fear, normal fear, therefore is not to be feared. It is the normal reaction to danger. Every man experiences it. And it is not a sign of cowardice at all. Some people are led to believe that because they experience fear, therefore they are cowardly. The awareness of danger which results in fear is the common heritage of man because he is man. It is not cowardice. The greatest of heroes experienced it. Cowardice is when we succomb to fear and permit that fear to dictate the kind of conduct which we believe is unworthy to ourselves. That's cowardice. It is one thing to be afraid when one is on the firing line at the front and another thing to desert because of that fear. One need not be

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ashamed of his fear, his normal reaction to danger. One need be ashamed to permit one's self to become victimized by that fear so that his normal way of living is destroyed by it.

There are certain abnormal fears, some less and some more serious. There are certain phobias which some people have which attach themselves to people in some unaccountable way and which do not seem at all to be related to any immediate danger. Perhaps they are some of these dark ancestral memories that I spoke of a moment ago; perhaps they are the result of some unpleasant early experience in infancy or childhood; perhaps as the psychoanalyst would have it, they are to be explained in relation to the sexual interests, to an unsatisfied libido. Be that as it may, there are great numbers of people who have one form or another of these phobias. Some are afraid of crowded places, some are afraid of open spaces. Many are afraid of darkness, some of solitude, being left alone. Some are afraid of the sight of blood, some afraid of cats, spiders, mice, snakes. I recognize them, these phobias in the congregation.

I know an engineer, a man of fifty, one of the most brilliant minds in his profession, a highly cultured man, who is

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very well-read in philosophy, who is afraid of cats.

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These are abnormal fears because they are less rational than the other kind of fear of which I have spoken. They are not related to any immediate danger confronting the individual. But they are not necessarily of a serious character. Men can go through life quite happily even though they have the handicap of one or the other of these fears.

That is also true of what I might call superstitious fears. The fear of walking under a ladder, the fear of sitting down to dinner when thirteen are at the table, the fear of the broken mirror, the fear of spilled salt, the fear of putting the left shoe on the right foot, the fear which makes people carry charms, amulets of one kind or another. These are indoctrinated fears. I might call them propaganda fears because if you were not told of them you would not know of them and would never suspect that you need be afraid of them. These fears usually go with, I am sorry to say, with an undeveloped intelligence. (No criticisms) In fact many fears, except those of the neurotic type of which I will speak in a moment, can be dissipated by knowledge.

Early man was afraid of the eclipse. He dreaded it. It was fraught for him with all forms of danger and dread possibilities. We do not fear it because we know that it is part and parcel of the astronomical process just as day and night are. We know and therefore we have lost the terror of the unknown which is the grimmest terror of man. Because we know that there is danger connected with the phenomena of nature, earthquakes, volcances, tornadoes, they do not frighten us as they did the men who did not know. We do not see in them some dread, mysterious, willful, malicious force bent upon our destruction, as the primitive man did. And we are therefore not prostrated by the terrorizing fear in the face of these, even dangerous phenomena of nature. Knowledge may dissipate certain fears.

In olden days men feared dreams. Some people still do. A dream is a vivid experience, a real inner experience of a man. And from earliest times man tried to understand his dreams. Even in antiquity there were whole schools whose business it was to explain and interpret these strange night experiences of the disembodied spirits. When the body was asleep the soul of man wandered off into other realms and super-natural planes of experience and experienced significant things in dreams. They

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believed that God revealed himself through dreams to man; that dreams foretold their future or the future of their friends or their country. And they were afraid of their dreams, especially if they happened to be night-mares. We still are.

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We know that dreams don't tell the future. They tell a good deal about our past. Dreams, we know to be suppressed desires, the things that we ardently wish for and that we will not acknowledge to others during our waking hours, because some are indecent, are the things we express symbolically, vividly, vicariously in our sleeping hours. They tell us a good deal about ourselves and if properly analyzed may help us to control our conduct. But they are not things to be feared. They do not prognosticate. They have nothing of a mystery about them and therefore we need not fear them and we do not fear them.

The most serious form of fear, of course, short of extreme pathological type which borders on insanity as a result of some psychic injury, the most serious form of fear is that general condition of anxiety. Freud calls it "a free-floating fear." An anxiety which floats freely and continuously in the life of a

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human being. A person who is always anxious, always worried, the person who always expects the worst to happen, the person who anticipates trouble all the time, who wonders why it doesn't come and who is worried about it, the person who when he is prosperous is sure that his prosperity can't last and when he is down, is sure that he hasn't reached bottom; that type of anxiety which is persistent and **MANNIX** continuous and controlls all of a person's thinking, judgments and actions. That's not a mood. That's a malady, a disease, a very serious disease. Psychoanalysts tell us that it is somewhat related to a thwarted instinct, a frustrated sex life and a knowledge of the cause of the anxiety or neurosis may help one to understand himself and that which darkens his life and the life of people about him.

The old Sage, Seneca, writing to a disciple of his gives him this advice: "There are more things Lucilius, likely to frighten us than there are to crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality. What I advise you to do is, not to be unhappy before the crisis comes; since it may be that the dangers before which you paled as if they were threateneing you, will never come upon you; they certainly have not yet come."

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"Accordingly, some things torment us more than they ought; some torment us before they ought; and some torment us when they ought not to torment us at all. We are in the habit of exaggerating, or imagining, or anticipating, sorrow."

With some people that goes to a point of morbidity. One of the great tasks of civilization, my friends, has always been to banish fear from the habitations of man.

Religion once upon a time was a matter of fear. Man feared God and therefore sought to appease Him by all forms of sacrifices. Man struggled hard during countless centuries to outgrow this sense of fear of his universe and his universal God, and did. Soon fear gave way to reverence in religion, to reverence and love. The Hebrew word " " is significant of the change which came in human thought in relation with man to God. The word "Hebrew) means both fear and reverence and when the Bible speaks of fear, as it does frequently, "Fear the Lord, fear of the Lord." Do not imagine that the word fear means being afraid of some harm that might come to man from God, in a sense of dread. There are other Ħ = 11 Ħ ". But the Hebrew words for that " Hebrew word " " means reverence, that emotion which one

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experiences when he stands before something sublime, majestic and is aware of his own insignificance. That admiration, that is "Hebrew ". That does not bring with it dread. That brings with it trust and confidence. That's why the Psalmist is able to say (Hebrew) "God is with me therefore I need no longer fear. God banishes fear."

Fear is when God is removed from man's life. "When thou dost hide thy face from me I become frightened." But in the presence of God the religious man reaches a point in his development. God is his friend. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

From being feared, God became love. (Hebrew *

Thus you see the development in the field of religion away from fear as the controlling motif.

That is true also of morality. The savage practices

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his social mores and customs because he is afraid of the punishment here or hereafter, of the agency of man, of supernatural powers. Fear was the controlling force in morality. We have moved far away from that. At least many of us have. We now advocate the moral life because it is the best and happinest way for man to live, because it makes man free and happy. "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of reward." Seek the good life for its own sake. Morality has moved away from fear.

The state, too, was grounded in fear. The subject was afraid of the ruler, the king, the despot. Punishment was visited upon criticism. The state was some mystic power, feared and dreaded. Man moved away from that to democracy, to the conception of the state as a voluntary organization of men into units for mutual benefits and the rulers of the state, those who possessed relegated authority, were subject to the will of the government, to support the state which is/the best interests of everyone.

The family too, was grounded in fear. The father was the master and demanded obedience. We still speak of the master of the household. Punishment of disobedience was the ruling principle. We

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have fortunately gotten away from that concept of family life. Today we have a cooperative family life, mutual love and helpfulness.

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Education was once grounded with fear. Pedegogy and the rod went hand in hand. Education too, today, is built upon a different outlook altogether, by the system of winning the cooperation of the child through interest in delightful projects which train him and develop him into fine habits of living and thinking.

And so, my friends, in almost every department of human life fear is being banished and reason, intelligence, love are becoming the guiding principles in human action.

But there are still many fears left in life today, even in the lives of the most intelligent people. There is for example the kind of fear which great love creates. When we love our children so deeply that we become afraid, fearful, for them - fearful of their health, fearful of their well being, of their progress. We worry about them. We would like to control every step and movement which they take. We would like to guide them and follow them right through life. Away from them we are frightened and overly concerned about them. That I find to be the case with many loving parents, especially with mothers. It is a

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great mistake. That's a tyrannous kind of love and a timorous kind, a love altogether too exacting and not helpful. It's a love which leaves nothing to the inner resources of the child itself. It is a love which would like to shield the child against many experiences, painful though they may be, which would prepare the child for real manual living. We ought to guard ourselves against this kind of love which brings with it an all too great measure of fear.

Then there is the fear of the new. Many of us are afraid of that which is new. Particularly in thinking, in politics, in economics, in social values, that which is new frightens us a bit just as the child is frightened by that which is unmastered. That is why the human race often turned upon its prophets. They spoke a new word which brings with it a certain uncomfortable feeling, a fear of giving up that which is close to one, that which we know, that to which we have already adjusted ourselves. And yet no progress is possible unless we have the new, not necessarily the novel, but the new. And we must train ourselves to shake off the fear of the new so as to hasten human progress.

There is, of course, in the world today this projected amount of fear between nations which leads to armament and war. Fear! That is back of armament. When you live in a secure

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community you do not carry guns around with you. When you live in a community which is lawless, you will, in self-defense carry around weapons of protection. And so in this lawless world of ours, in this insecure national setup, nations are driven to armament by fear. When once we are able to banish fear by establishing security, by establishing a central authority which will really give security to the weak against the strong, armament will be unnecessary.

One of the fears which is the most wide-spread among human beings is the fear of ourselves, the lack of confidence in ourselves, in our own powers. The fear of trying because of the fear of failure. Fear makes cowards of us and frequently it makes traitors of us against our highest ideals. We know that we should be doing a certain thing, to be reaching out after something and we are afraid lest failure bring criticism upon us, afraid lest we haven't sufficient inner resources to carry us through. Against this there is only one remedy and that is a deliberate cultivation of will power and courage. Learn to decide in your own favor. Learn to believe in what you prefer. If you fail, no disgrace attends failure in behalf of a worthy objective. Cultivate confidence in yourself. (Hebrew)

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"Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not."

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There is a fine way of cultivating courage, my friends and that is by identifying yourself with a cause which you know to be indestructible. We are weak, we may not possess that prowess and dynamic effort to carry us on to a great end. But if we identify ourselves with some great cause which we know to be so real and true that nothing can stop it, then we get some of the enduring quality of that cause, the eternity of it, into our blood stream. Then we become powerful beyond our own limited power. That's what makes that hundred pound, weak, Gandhi, master of half of the world. That's what gives him that courage and bearing to confront kings and potentates dressed in that minimum dress of his. Just the conviction that he, Gandhi, is just only a channel, the conduit through which some is passing: that he is just a tool in the hand of destiny. He speaks words that life itself puts into his mouth and so he is a giant and people quake before him. He doesn't have to resort to physical violence. He can be patient, quiet, humble, as patient and as quiet as the enduring Himalayas.

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con and that That's how to accomplish fear, by borrowing courage from ideals, from convictions, from causes which we know to be eternally true and therefore bound to win. That is what the religious man found in his God. When the religious man said those things which I quoted a moment ago, he wasn't repeating mechanical, written phrases or poetry. He was voicing profound inner expressions. When the Psalmist said, "The Lord is my refuge and my strength, a very pleasant help in time of trouble, therefore h will not fear, though the earth tremble and though the mountains be moved unto the depths of the seas" he was voicing a profound inner conviction of his life. The mighty arms of God were about him. He didn't have to fear though he knew himself to be weak and subject to pain and suffering. What of it? Here was a spark of the Eternal fire. Here was a ray of the sun Whose light never sets. He belonged to God. That's how people banish fear my friends. They put some of their burden upon God. We take all the burdens of life upon our own shoulders. Shouldn't we leave something to God who has something to do with the management of this universe? That's the belief of the religious man. Leave something to Him. (Hebrew)

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"Cast upon the Lord your troubles."

That's why religion is a release, an emancipation. That's why I can see an old Jewish mother, beset with sorrow, having gone through life, suffered much and seen dear ones leave her one by one, gone through tribulations and yet the old mother could take that old Prayer Book and find some quiet corner in her home and quietly chant the old Psalms and perhaps drop a tear as her **quacking** voice repeated the ancient words. And when she was through she felt as though a load was lifted from her shoulders. She felt better. She had come in contact with a Source, a Reservoir of infinite strength and that comforted her.

Learn to banish fear, my friends, by identifying yourself with some great cause, some great reality, then you will be able to say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil for Thou art with me."

Amen.

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