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The ideal man; the ideal woman, 1934.

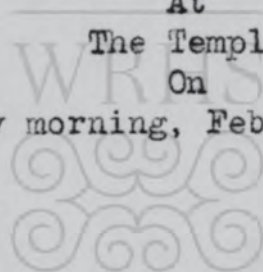
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THE IDEAL MAN; THE IDEAL WOMAN

By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple
On

Sunday morning, February 4, 1934.



The answer to the question, "Who is the ideal man?" or "Who is the ideal woman?" depends, of course, upon your philosophy of life, upon your concept of what you consider man's destiny to be. It depends upon the social milieu in which you live --upon the dominant current of thought in the age in which you find yourself. For it is the outstanding need or condition of an age which determines the type of man or woman most sought after in that age.

For example, in the age of struggle and conflict when the warlike qualities are most in demand, the warrior would be the ideal type of man. All other desirable qualities of character would be subordinated to physical prowess and bravery. The perfect soldier would be the ideal man. And children's minds would be influenced by the military traditions and they would be taught at home or in school to emulate the example of the warlike heroes, the ideal type of man. In a country like Germany, today, for example, this type of man is again being held up for the emulation of the rising generation. The soldier is again being exalted and apotheosized.

There were other ages when a wearied and spent world turned away from the chaos which strenuous military achievements had brought about and turned to the monastic life, the ascetic

life. When the soul of man was tired, he was accustomed to seek refuge and peace for his soul in solitude and in that age, we exalted a new type of man, a saint -- the man who turns his back on all worldly achievements, upon conquest or triumph, who leads a quiet saintly life of contemplation and piety. Here a new set of character values is extolled, a different model set up for the admiration and emulation of the youth of the country.

In the Age of Chivalry, it was a mixture of these two types; of the man of military prowess and the man of moral rectitude, the man who combined courage with courtesy, bravery with good manners, the Roland or the Sir Galahad. That was the ideal type of man. He was the synthesis of Feudalism and Christianity -- the belligerency of the people of Western Europe mellowed by the worship of Mary, the Mother of God.

In the Victorian Era, the ideal man was the man of property, the substantial important man of property, the successful man of affairs. He was the product of a triumphant bourgeois society of the Nineteenth Century.

Among our own people, for many centuries was the man who combined learning with piety -- the Zadik. The model held up for emulation was the Zadik, the scholar, the man of piety.

Every age and every evolution really produces its own ideal type of man.

Similarly the ideal type of woman varied with the ages and reflected the ages. The matriarchs of the Bible, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Deborah, Ruth -- the dominant familiar figures of the Bible are worlds removed from, say, the Greek ideal type of woman -- Helen of Troy, Sappho or the hetaira Aspasia. And these again are as far removed from the type of the austere Roman matron as the Roman matron was totally different from the cloistered nun or Dante's Beatrice or the Jane Austin type of Victorian woman or the pioneering woman of our West or the free and equal types of our modern womanhood.

What is ideal, therefore, for one age is not necessarily ideal for another. The ideal man or woman is the one who most adequately meets the social requirements of his or her age and the conditions of the society in which he or she finds himself.

There are certain qualities, generally speaking, which are fairly constant in the race's estimate of the ideal man and woman. I say, generally speaking, for there are significant exceptions. Beauty in woman, courage in man. They are as universal qualities as you are likely to find in the race. They are biologic and instinctive and while preference was not always given to them in the social estimate of all cultures of our people, nevertheless they are fairly constant throughout the world.

Our Book of Proverbs says: "Grace is false and beauty is vain." Nevertheless when the writers of the Bible have occasion to speak of woman, they always take the trouble to point it out. Of Sarah, the Bible says: " She was very beautiful." Of Rebecca old Eliezer said: "And the girl was good to look at." In the case of Rachel, the writer of the Bible says: "The girl was beautiful in form and fair to look upon." Her sister Leah was not so fair. Jacob, strangely enough, fell in love with Rachel. Beauty in woman, courage in man.

There are other qualities which are fairly constant in man. Of some of these I want to speak this morning. Let me read to you the description of the ideal man as envisaged by a member of our race twenty-five centuries ago. I would like to have you contrast the ideal man of twenty-five centuries ago with the ideal man of today and see how many qualities you would include in your conception of an ideal man to-day. Please make allowance for the theologic language in which it is written.

He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness,
And speaketh truth in his heart;
That hath no slander upon his tongue,
Nor doeth evil to his fellow,
Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour;
In whose eyes a vile person is despised,
But he honoureth them that fear the Lord;
He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not;
He that putteth not out his money on interest,
Nor taketh a bribe against the innocent.
He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

Stated in modern terms this psalmist incorporates the following qualities: justice, truthfulness, kindness, honor and courage. These hold good today, after twenty-five centuries.

Let me read what an author twenty-six centuries ago held up as the ideal type of woman and see how many qualities you would say are present in your conception of the ideal woman today:

A woman of valour who can find?
For her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband doth
safely trust in her,
And he hath no lack of gain.
She doeth him good and not evil
All the days of her life.
She seeketh wool and flax,
And worketh willingly with her
hands.
She is like the merchant-ships;
She bringeth her food from afar
She riseth also while it is yet
night,
And giveth food to her household
And a portion to her maidens.
She considereth a field, and buyeth
it;
With the fruit of her hands she
planteth a vineyard.
She girdeth her loins with strength,
And maketh strong her arms.
She perceiveth that her merchandise
is good;
Her lamp goeth not out by night.
She layeth her hands to the distaff,
And her hands hold the spindle.
She stretcheth out her hand to the
poor;
Yea, she reacheth forth her hands
to the needy.



She is not afraid of the snow for
her household;
For all her household are clothed
with scarlet.
She maketh for herself coverlets;
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.
Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sitteth among the elders
of the land.
She maketh linen garments and selleth them;
And delivereth girdles unto the
merchant.
Strength and dignity are her clothing;
And she laugheth at the time to come.
She openeth her mouth with wisdom;
And the law of kindness is on her
tongue.
She looketh well to the ways of her
household,
And eateth not the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up, and call her
blessed;
Her husband also, and he praiseth
her;
Many daughters have done valiantly,
But thou excellest them all.
Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain;
But a woman that feareth the
Lord, she shall be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands;
And let her works praise her in the gates.

Reduced to its simple terms, the author regards as essential in the portrait of the ideal woman these qualities: Industry, competence, sympathy, strength of character, dignity and wisdom. How many of these qualities can we carry over in to the Twentieth Century? Let me read to you a poem which a poet of the last century wrote in tribute to the perfect woman and see how similar many attributes the author of the Nineteenth Century A.D. and the author of the Fifth Century B.C.E. applied to the same woman.

PERFECT WOMAN

She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament;
Her eyes as stars of twilight fair;
Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair;
But all things else about her drawn
From May-time and the cheerful dawn;
A dancing shape, an image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and waylay.

I saw her upon nearer view,
A spirit, yet a Woman too!
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet;
A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

And now I see with eye serene
The very pulse of the machine;
A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller between life and death;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;
A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.

When you analyse this poem of Wordsworth, his conception of the ideal woman, what do you find? That the ingredients are industry, sympathy, strength of character, competence and wisdom.

Why this amazing similarity? Because, my friends, after all is said done, life and the needs of man hasn't changed so fundamentally in these cycles of time. Life is still a sober and earnest affair, a very serious business. It is still a hard struggle with reality, a serious problem of adjustments and relationship, and

and it requires just these qualities of human character, competence, sympathy, dignity, perseverance, tact and kindness.

Many other qualities are of course desirable, brilliance, charm, beauty, intellect. But these are the rocks upon which the struggle of social stability and human happiness can be built.

Now, of course, there is no ideal man or ideal woman living, except of course if it happens to be your husband or your wife.

Men are no angels and women are women. We are all what the rabbis call - average persons. Man is made of earth and spirit.

"Adam" means earth -- clay and blood. And in every man there is that which is earthy and lowly and the blood of passion and lust.

Woman was made from man, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. Woman was fashioned out of the rib of man. Why out of the rib? The wise men among the rabbis explained why woman was fashioned out of Adam's rib. God didn't want to fashion her out of his head because then she would be too proud. He didn't want to fashion her out of his eye because she would see too much. He didn't want to fashion her out his ear because she would hear too much. He didn't want to fashion her out of his mouth because she would talk too much. He didn't want to fashion her from his hand because she would touch too much. He didn't want to fashion her from his foot because she would gad about too much. So God fashioned her out of his rib so that she would be hidden, modest and retiring. But all His plans were set at naught. There is a little of everything in her.

Nevertheless, God made man in the image of himself. There is something divine, a divine urge, a divine impulse which drives man heavenward, which moves him to overcome the set limitations of his life, to reach out beyond his human reach. That is the grandeur of man.

No man is ideal. But man can reach out after the ideal. The unpardonable sin is not in not being ideal, but in not striving and reaching out for the high and noble. What, then, is the ideal in life in the quest of which men and women approximate the ideal in life. What is the ideal? It couldn't be wealth and power or fame or greatness. After all, these are not within the reach of everybody but in the reach of only a few. A universal ideal must be applicable to all. The rich man today is no longer the ideal model of society. Men of easy living and private wealth today are more or less apologetic and on the defensive.

And the ideal of power -- power over whom? Over others? That brings heartaches and conflict and bitterness and disillusionment.

Fame? What is fame? How many of the two billion people today are famous? And how long will fame last? How many people living today will be remembered fifty years from today? How many who lived fifty years ago do you remember today? What is fame? Oblivion! That is the fate of nearly everyone. Fame is so ephemeral, so transient.

We cannot all be great but we can all be good. And this simple, old-fashioned, threadbare word, good, perhaps sums up the whole story. It certainly sums up the whole attitudes of the psalmist, of the Book of Wisdom, of the poet. The good man! The good woman! The good father! The good mother! The good daughter! Goodness!

One of the great rabbis, Yochanan ben Zacai once called his disciples together and asked them what the most perfect quality is which each should choose for himself. "What is the thing which a man should cultivate most in life?" One said, "A good eye." Another said, "A good companion." Another said, "A good neighbor." The last said, "A good heart." And the great Yochanan said, "I regard the words of Elazer as being the greatest spoken. All other words are included in his, a good heart."

Now we are accustomed to think of goodness as something weak, as something negligible. That is not the true meaning of goodness. Goodness is the crowning of a life-long building of discipline. To be good! That means to leash your selfishness, your appetites, to suppress your egoism. That is no easy thing to do. It means the curbing of your passions, to enlarge your world of sympathies, to include other people in the sphere of your life, to cultivate your spiritual sensitiveness, to extend that good all about you. That is what I always understood to be good.

To be good, to be gentle, to know pity, to respond to love, to be charitable in our judgment. To be good is to be just, honorable and fair in our dealings. To be good means to be strong, to be strong in purpose, to be strong in conviction, to be strong in temptation, to be strong in the face of opposition, to be strong in trial, to be strong in defeat, to be strong in victory. That is to be good.

To be good, my friends, means to be a good artisan, a good craftsman, a good laborer, a good farmer, a good merchant, a good lawyer -- good in whatever task destiny has assigned to you, regardless of how humble the task may be.

Very few achieve a full measure of this goodness. Those men and women who reach after the ideal and enjoy a fullness and vitality of living which is a blessing to ourselves and to those whose lives touch ours. "A good man is satisfied from himself." (אדם טוב הוא שיש לו מה שיש לו). A whole philosophy is summed up in those four words. Goodness is its own nourishment, its own inspiration, its own via, veritas, vita. It is the inspiration of the word that is the ideal. And to my mind, this goodness is a supreme ideal.

I have been very frequently called to minister to men and women in hours of joy and sorrow. I have frequently seen wives whose husbands were brilliant men, important men, wealthy

men. And when their husbands died, the eyes of their wives remained hard compressed in bitterness as if they resented their husbands in death even as they had in life, as if life had somehow robbed them of the most precious things. What other people said about him was no compensation for them.

I have seen wives whose husbands were humble men, whose quiet ways were unheralded, whose lives accomplished nothing spectacular or particularly important as we human beings measure importance. When their husbands died, I could see behind the rich copious tears of their wives the glow and the light of a marvelous pride. I could almost hear their wives mutter as if in tribute to the departed: He was a good man! He was a good man! Death could not rob them, when life had not! Life had given them through their life's companionship, the most pleasure which life can offer. Goodness expressed in the human presence of a human being. Think of a higher ideal! I can't!

When you think of your mother, what quality in her life stands out as the most revealing, as the dearest quality? Her goodness. Beauty divined. It is a composite. It is a totality. It is a fullness of being. She was good. And when your mother took your face between her hands and she looked at you, you were conscious of one radiance, of goodness! Goodness! Blessed is the man who is good! Blessed is the Mother who is good! Blessed is the daughter who is good. Blessed is the son who is good! Blessed is the woman who thinketh of her father! The ideal, the truth of life is goodness.

(3) Power? over whom? over others? That means heart-aches and conflict - & at the end bitterness & disillusion.

(4) Fame? How many men & women are really famous to-day? out of 2 billion - And how long will it last? How many of those living to-day will be remembered 100 yrs. from to-day - How many who lived 100 yrs. ago - do you remember to-day. Oblivion is our common lot!

10. We cannot all be great. We can all be good. And this old-fashioned, thread-bare, common-place word, perhaps, sums up the whole story. It sums up all the attributes of the Prophet, the King, wisdom and the poet. A good man! A good woman! A good father! A good mother! A good son! A good daughter! A good friend! Goodness!

(1) Goodman has 3 meanings - Best Quality in life? ^{a man} Kind Cultured.

(1) 2216 1/6 - ^{generous} (2) 216 221 (3) 216 21

(4) 31/10 1/11 1/12 (5) Elohas - 216 21.

2216 21 1/12 1/12 1/12

(2) Goodness is not a weak, diluted sentiment, effortless and negligible. It is the crunning flow of a life-long self-discipline. It involves a bashing of one's selfishness and appetites - a suppression of one's egoism - a curbing of one's passions - a broadening of one's world & sympathies - a cultivation of one's spiritual adventures to the world about him.

(3) To be good is to be gentle, to know poth, to respond to love, to be charitable in judgment,

(4) To be good - is to be just and fair & honest

(5) To be good - is to struggle in purpose - struggle in connections -
struggle in temptation - struggle in the face of oppression -
struggle in trial - struggle in suffering - struggle in
defeat - struggle in victory...

(6) To be good - means to be a good artisan - a craftsman -
a merchant a professional man - good in whatever
task destiny has allotted to you - a good, faithful
worker in whatever is ours to do.

~~It is not~~ ~~difficult~~ ~~to speak at such occasions of death~~ ~~it is not~~

11. Few of us, ^{if any} ~~even~~ achieve the full measure, ^{which is akin to utility} that goodness,
~~that is one~~ But in so far as we reach after this ideal, we
are enjoying a fullness & vitality, being which is a blessing
to ourselves & those whom ^{it} less touch ours. 21C like 82C 1.4.4.4
"A good man is satisfied from himself"

12. I have known rich men whose husbands were brilliant men -
and important men - and wealthy men, who, when their husbands
died - their eyes remained cold, and their lips sharply
compressed - as if they resented them in death even as
they had in life - They felt eyes betrayed, - ~~and~~ as if life
had robbed them of some ineffable precious thing - which they
never but could not explain. I have known others, whose
eyes husbands were humble men - whose gentle ways were
unfettered and curious, and yet, when they left them, their
eyes seemed to glow behind their eyes to light, &
great pride, and their lips would smile in triumph and
the defiant and comfort to eyes - He was a good man!...
Death could not rob them when life had not!

Via Veritas - Vita