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155

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55

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459

On choosing a career for your children, 1934.

Silverman 411

ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE, ANSEL ROAD
AND E. 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 6, 1934.

"ON CHOOSING A CAREER FOR YOUR CHILDREN"

In guiding a child to a career his major dominant interest should first be considered -- the subject which intrigues him most over a period of years and to which he devotes most of his eager voluntary activity. In the case of most people life denies them the privilege of pursuing their major interest in life by way of their vocation. Life forces assignments upon us and we have no choice. But a great effort should nevertheless be made by parents to assist their children in finding a career which will correspond most nearly to their major life wish.

The child's abilities should next be considered. This is quite difficult. For parents as a rule over estimate their children's endowments and the young person of course can not be sufficiently detached to estimate himself objectively. False and unattainable goals are therefore set and unhappiness is the price paid in later life. A young man who would make an excellent mechanic and a top man in his field, and therefore a contented man in later life, is forced by false standards in the home and by over-estimation of his intellectual prowess, to study for some profession wherein he is doomed to hopeless mediocrity and to a life long sense of defeat. Parents should avail themselves to the utmost of expert vocational guidance which is now available in almost every school.

The opportunities which are open and which are likely to be open in any given calling or profession should also be carefully canvassed. Conditions change rapidly and the young people of today may have greater opportunities in fields which are not now as popular as others. Some fields ~~are~~ are definitely over crowded. And while there is, of course, room at the top for the exceptional person, the average young person is not able to overcome the law of supply and

demand and should not be handicapped by being recommended to a field of interprize which is already crowded.

Finally parents should remember that a child's economic career is only part of his career in life. He has a human career to pursue as son, husband, father, friend. He has a social career as a citizen, and one must train oneself for this non-economic career quite as deliberately as for the other. A child should be trained for a career of fair play, team work, reliability, honor, good will. He should carefully be guided to the career of his leisure life wherein men are most free and more truly the masters of their destiny than they are in their work career. Intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic interests should be cultivated to the utmost early in life regardless of whether the child is preparing himself for a liberal or vocational education.



411

ON CHOOSING A CAREER FOR YOUR CHILDREN

By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple
On

Sunday morning, April 15, 1934



I have spoken on this theme "Choosing a Career for Your Children" before. I am speaking of it again, first, because the subject is of utmost importance at this season of the year when so many young people graduate from high schools and colleges. The subject is uppermost in the minds of many people, both parents and children -- what we are to choose, how to settle on the choice of a career; secondly, because particularly in these latter years of economic uncertainty, the subject has become a much more serious, depressing and confused one than in the past. It was much easier to plan years ago for one's career. Life was much more orderly. The future was much more calculable. One did not have to discount so many sharp catastrophes as one must do today. A young man could figure ahead, get at least an opportunity to work at the job which he had chosen or an opportunity to practice the profession which he had prepared himself for.

There is no such assurance today anywhere. Thousands of young people graduated from our high schools and colleges in the last four years are unable to obtain any work or have any opportunity to practice the profession they had been preparing themselves for during years of study. Many young people have prepared themselves for vocational occupations. The skilled workmen have found no employment. The government of our country as well as the governments of other countries have been

attempting desperately to organize labor in order to provide at least some measure of work for those young people who otherwise ^{would} be compelled utterly to waste their years in demoralized idleness. I am convinced that the worst casualties of the years of depression have been the young people -- those who entered the working age in the last few years. Their careers have been interrupted and many of them permanently ruined. Their spirits have been demoralized. In many instances their youthful ardor and enthusiasm has been curdled and soured and the consequences of this demoralization will probably not be noticed in our national life until a decade or two hence.

And even those who have or will find employment, a chance to practice their professions, are not sure how long they will be permitted to remain in their positions, what will happen to them tomorrow, what unforeseen economic crash will doom their careers.

There is a great element of uncertainty today which did not exist years ago. Nevertheless even under difficult conditions, a young man aspires. Every fresh generation of young people starts out with great spiritual avidity. Our young people may be sobered and probably are sobered by what is in the world today. Nevertheless they are not being deterred from pursuing their goal if they are ambitious. They believe and they have a right to believe, that the future will be brighter than the present. And those of this high hope of theirs, they are soaring high on the wings of great optimism even in these hard and trying days. And that is as it should be. It is youth's privilege -- it is youth's high testament not to yield to this depression

of the hour. For there is nothing so certain in life as uncertainty, the unforeseen, the X in the equation of life. The unpredictable most often happens and all our carefully calculated situations in life based on the known facts are rendered valueless. Youth today is counting on a changing world. That is, that the world will change soon to give them a chance at life. If the world does not give them that chance, they will set about changing it.

The theme "Choosing a Career for Your Children" is somewhat limited. It is something of a misnomer. In the first place, very few people do choose their children's careers. In the second place even young people themselves do not deliberately, consciously in many instances choose their own careers. There are many other factors the choice of involved in one's ultimate calling in life. In the case of the poorer classes the choice of the career is fairly well restricted by the economic circumstances which the family finds itself in, the economic environment of that class within the community. There are numerous exceptions but as a rule restricted economic opportunity will restrict the possible choice of careers.

Among the Middle Classes there is a freer choice -- but here the choice of the parents in guiding the child is not as decisive today as that of the child. The choice of the child is not as deliberate and conscious as we are led to believe. Frequently a child settles upon his career or choice of his career on the basis of facts quite incidental. His choice may be made on the basis of what a close friend decides to do; or upon an unconscious desire to emulate some individual in his community who is well known; or the choice may be made on the basis

of a casual remark of a teacher; on the basis of having read some book whose hero or heroine appeals to the child; or on the basis of what the young person has seen in a moving picture. Who can calculate the workings of the mind of a child? Very few children indeed sit down and cause the whole category of professions to pass before them, then proceed to weigh all the pros and cons for each and then balance them and arrive at a decision.

Life isn't planned quite that rationally and with such logical rigor. We often make our decision by forces over which we have no control and of which we are not aware, and frequently we stumble into our careers. The element of chance, luck and coincidence is far greater in life's decisive conjuncture than we would like to acknowledge.

There are definite limits to choosing a career. There are parents, of course, who are sufficiently strong-willed and competent to choose a career for their child. And that does not always work out badly, particularly if the decision of the parent is wished on the child subtly. The child not suspecting coercion, will not resent it. That is the way you will recall how marriages were made a generation or two ago. And they did not always work out badly. At least not as badly as our free choice marriages today which end in the divorce courts. But when it does work out badly, it is very very bad, for then the child blames the parents for his misfortune. In many cases he will not forgive the parents for not having given him the right to face his own life and to determine his own career and follow his own interests.

That is a terrible indictment to make -- to have robbed a life of its inherent right to fashion its own destiny. It is better in later life if a man says "I would have been much better off if I had listened to my parents" than "It would have been much better if I had not listened to my parents."

It is therefore much wiser as a general principle to allow our children to make the final decisions themselves when they arrive at a fairly mature mental development. When they are able to make that decision the parent, of course, at all times is right there to advise the child, to counsel with him, to guide, to propose, to inform. The children will be wise to listen to his counsel, from one of his closest friends in life.

Now in choosing our children's career, therefore; that is to say, in guiding our children to their careers, one should take into consideration first of all, the child's dominant interests. What subject intrigues him most? To what does he devote most eagerly most of his voluntary activity? What hobby does he have consistently over a period of years? What branches of mechanics, or the arts, the sciences, does he admire most? That is the important test. Because if a man's major interest in life ultimately corresponds with his chosen profession, then he is the most happy man in the world. I think it was Shakespeare who said "To business that we love we rise betime, and ^{go} to with delight."

How many people there are in the world who after many years at their jobs or professions say: "If I could only live my life over again

I would choose a different profession altogether." Of course in many instances that is due to the fact that to every man the grass looks greener on the other side of the fence. In some instances it is due to the fact that there was not correlation between the man's profession and between his essential profoundest deepest interest in life. Of course it is not given to many people to enjoy the privilege of pursuing their major interest in life through their calling or through their job. Life frequently forces upon us our economic assignment. We have to do the best we can with no choice. Our salvation then lies in pursuing our real interest outside of our work.

But certainly a man ought to make a supreme effort to choose that career which will be the vehicle of expression of the wish world of his dominant interest in life.

And after consulting the child's chief interest, basic wish, a parent ought to consult the child's ability. First, because every parent over estimates the ability of his child and the child cannot be sufficiently detached to estimate his own ability objectively. As a result of this children are frequently moved and encouraged to aspire to certain objectives which are far beyond the reach of their intellectual equipment. A life of unhappiness is the price paid for such over-estimation of ability.

For example, a young man who might make an excellent artisan or mechanic and would be a top man in his work and therefore proud and contented, is moved to prepare himself for a profession because

his abilities are over-estimated and he thereby is consigned in his profession to a hopeless mediocrity which speeds a life-long sense of defeat for that individual.

Not long ago, I met a mother who was very much perturbed about her younger son. Her older son was very brilliant. The younger boy was not so brilliant. He had a hard time making his way through school. He was forced to go to High School although he had no desire to do so. He flunked one subject after another. The mother was almost in tears when she told me about it. I asked her, "Is your child well?"

"He is very good in athletics."

"Is he a lazy boy?"

"No, he is a very industrious boy. He makes things very skillfully."

"Why do you force that boy to go through High School? Did your husband go through High School?"

"No."

"Did he make a good husband?"

"God be praised, he is an excellent man."

"Did your father go through High School?"

"No."

"Then why do you force your son to go through High School? Why not have him a first rate mechanic, carpenter, machinist, rather than a third rate dentist?"

Now that mother looked at me as though she had received a new

revelation from Mt. Sinai.

And that I say especially to Jewish mothers because with a Jewish mother, you know, as soon as a child is born it is voted by the parents that that child is a genius. If a child is able to add quickly he is a second Einstein and if he plays the fiddle fairly well, he is another Yehudi Menuhin. There is that ambition to see our children go into a profession and we don't take stock of the child's native ability or equipment.

There used to be a time when manual labor was regarded as socially inferior to that of mental labor. The working man occupied a socially lower status than the business or professional man. In some countries that is now completely turned about. In Russia, for example, the manual laborer is the aristocrat. This is likely to happen in other parts of the world. There is no longer a stigma attached to a man in a vocational calling. In many of these jobs there is far more security for ^aman than in some of the professions we would like to see our children go into.

There is expert vocational guidance available today in all our schools and high schools. And wise parents will and should avail themselves of the opportunity of taking stock of their children's abilities. Some parents are afraid to be let down. Your pride is to discover what your child is fitted for. If you can discover what your child is best fitted for you are contributing to the ultimate well being and happiness of your child.

And after consulting your child's interests and ability, I think you ought to consult the opportunities which are open or which are likely to be open in the calling in which the child is to place himself. Life moves rapidly today and certain professions may offer greater opportunities in five or ten years than they do today. You ought to canvass the situation. You ought not to force your child to prepare himself for a profession that is over-crowded and that is likely to be more crowded as the years go on.

"There is always room for the good at the top." That is true. But we are not discussing the genius. A genius is a man who can defeat the laws of supply and demand. We are discussing average intelligence, average young people, not the exception. The average young person is not able to defy the laws of supply and demand. It is handicapping him to send him into a field already over-crowded. That has particular application to our Jewish young people. The tendency on our part has been to crowd into the free professions.

That is economically not very advisable today and from the Jewish angle it is in a way detrimental. Many of the professions are over-crowded and the future of the small business man is very uncertain. In the second place the over-crowding of our people into a few professions or callings has created irritation and anti-semitism. That, of course, has been the case everywhere, particularly in Germany.

The Jews of Germany still constitute less than one percent of the population. In the last forty years a movement has taken place equal to a stampede first to the cities and then into the professions and callings, few in number, which became over-crowded. The Jewish percentage far exceeded the Jewish population for such. For example, the city of Berlin in 1850 had 10,000 Jews. In 1880 there were 54,000 Jews. In 1910 there were 144,000 Jews and in 1925 there were 172,000 Jews. Mind you, the Jewish population in Germany has remained fairly constant but the Jews became urbanized, cosmopolitanized. Thirty-five percent of the Jews found themselves in Berlin. In these large cities they naturally drifted to trade, banking and the professions.

In Berlin they constituted fifteen percent of the legal profession, eight to ten percent of the medical profession, eight to ten percent of the writing and journalistic profession. In other words, in the eyes of the German people, that rather small people in Germany became too important. They concentrated in the free professions and the fact that Jews constituted a large percent of people in professions and were heads of large industrial establishments and did not hold their percentage in the industrial group among the manual laborers and farming men of the contributed largely to the anti-Semitism that the Jew is an exploiter and lives off the labor of other people.

In other words we were too much in the middle classes. Our economic life wasn't normalized. It was top heavy. Now we are in danger of reaching a similar position in the United States. It is not being underestimated here or any other place. It is therefore advisable, my

friends, from the point of view of considering the welfare of the child in the position of the Jewish minority group in this country today, that we as parents begin to think of the avenues open for our child: skilled labor, agriculture, fields of municipal, of state, of county and federal service, where Jews are not at all represented according to their percentage. We ought to try, difficult as it is, to level off the peaks. That would give us a more stable economic foundation in this country.

Of course in choosing a career for our children and in guiding our children's career, we ought to remember finally, that an economic career is only part of his career. He is to prepare himself for a human career too, as a son, as a husband, as a father, as a friend. He is to prepare himself for a social career, as a member of his community, as a citizen.

One must train as deliberately and consciously for that as for the economic career. A child should be trained for a career in terms of honor, integrity and fair play, team work socialbility, reliability, self-discipline. Those things do not come by accident or by merely wishing for them. One trains himself into those habits of mind in forming, in choosing this career. A child can be much more helped there in training the human career.

What is a child to do with that other half of his life, his liesure life? What will be his artistic, his aesthetic, his cultural life outside the confines of his job? One can be a cobbler and still have a rich cultural life. In fact, the whole tendency today is to

make it possible for a manual laborer to enjoy the self-same cultural advantages that the professional and business man enjoys. Whatever physical job may be his in life his mind and his soul should be free. So begin to train your child now for that career of heart and mind and soul which will be his real world in the future.

He may not make as much money as he would like to make at his job. He may be a failure in his profession. But he can be a great success in his other career which is man's real world, the world of character.

This is our job, my friends, to help guide our children to an intelligent choice of a career related to their interests and their abilities, to the opportunities about them and also to help guide them to a career of human beings, rich, full, beautiful.

1. Have spoken of this before - Importance.

(1) At this season of years.

(2) At this part time of econ. uncertainty. It was much easier to plan years ago - Econ. life was orderly & future calculable. No sharp breaks, catastrophes anticipated. A young man could figure ahead - assured of getting at least an opportunity to work at the job or to practice the profession for which he had prepared himself.

(3) There is no such assurance to-day. Tens of thousands - h.s. graduates - at no opening - professionals - no chance to practice - skilled workers - unemployed. Gout here and abroad - labor camps, other devices to occupy the otherwise wastefully idle days of young people. - Worst casualties of the depression - careers interrupted - men demoralized - men's youthful ardor & enthusiasm - curdled & soured. Cannot marry & build homes.

(4) Even those who have employment or jobs do not know how secure their positions are - what will happen to - what what upheaval - what crash will leave them unsettled.

2. Nevertheless, even under difficult conditions men live and plan and aspire. Every fresh generation of young people starts out life with high hope and ardor. They may be sobered a bit by what they learn to see of the case. But they are not deterred from pursuing their goals & ambitions - if they are ambitions. The future may be much brighter, than the past or the present. They and so they pursue their careers - on the wings of soaring optimism. And that is as it should be! There is nothing so certain in life as uncertainty! The accidental, the unforeseen, the X in the equation, may at any moment bring about a totally diff. situation - and all our weighty calculations based on the known facts are rendered valueless. Youth is coming at a world which will change radically soon to give them a chance at life - or he will change it!

3. Title misnomer. We do not choose our children's careers - in most cases. Nor do they themselves consciously & deliberately choose them - in most cases. (1) Among poorer people a child's career is as a rule determined by the econ. circumstances, the family, the ^{acc-} ~~environ-~~ ment of that class within the community. There are numerous exceptions, but as a rule restricted econ. opportunity will restrict the ~~possible~~ ^{choices} / careers. Among the middle class there is free choice - but here the parents' choice is not as decisive to-day as the child's own. And the child's choice is frequently made on the basis of an analysis of his ^{own} part. ability and equipment for the selected career - but ~~often~~ ^{often} ~~something~~ ^{just} what one's class friend has chosen, or the desire to emulate some important or popular person who has interpreted the child's imagination, or a chance remark of a teacher or a character in a book, or a hero on the stage or screen. Who can fathom the workings of a ^{child's} fancy, ~~man's~~ ~~or woman's~~ mind and soul! Very few children indeed sit down and ~~weigh~~ ^{then proceed to} ~~weigh~~ all the professions ^{occupations} that pass before them - and ~~weigh~~ all the pros & cons for each - and then draw up the balance and decide. It is not planned quite that rationally and with such logical rigor. One is ~~made~~ ^{moved} to make his ~~choice~~ ^{choice} often, by ~~forces~~ ^{forces}, which he is not himself aware of. And often we just stumble upon our future careers. The element of chance, luck, ^{or} coincidence ~~is~~ ^{is} far greater in life decisions ~~conjunction~~ ^{conjunction} than we would like to acknowledge.

4. There are parents of course who are apparently strong-willed and competent to ^{determine the} ~~decide~~ ^{with} ~~on~~ ^{the} career upon of their child. That does not always work out badly - part. if their decision is ~~not~~ ^{too} ~~wished~~ ^{wished} on the child subtly - the child respects not overruling and is not reversing it. That is how marriages were made in older days - and did not always work out so badly - certainly not as badly as modern marriages - which end so frequently in the divorce courts.

But if the career does not and is not well - the child will never forgive the parent for having wished it on him - and for not having given him the chance to choose for himself - and follow his own interests. That is a terrible indictment to have robbed a life of its inherent right to follow its own destiny.

✓ It is better for a man to say in after life - I would have been better off (1) It is wise to allow our children to make their final choice of a career themselves - when they have reached the stage in life when they are sufficiently mature & capable, choosing - ours is the privilege to guide, to advise, to prepare, to counsel - and children will be wiser to consider this counsel of the closest friends they have in the world -

5. ^{or rather} For choosing a career - the child's major or dominant interest should be considered. We should not talk stuff of family traditions, of our family traditions, of family pride, of social status, of our past, of our ancestry but, the child's interest. What is he interested in? What subject enthralls him most? What does he do most to what does he devote most, his voluntary activity? What hobbies does he have that really give him pleasure? What branch of mechanics, or the arts, or what science does he admire most? Consistently over a period of years - That's an important test. If a man's career corresponds exactly to his major life's interest - he is a blessed man.

✓ "To business that we love we rise betimes, and go to with delight" - Shakespeare -

✓ How many people there are in the world who after many years at their jobs or professions say: "If I were young again - I would choose some other occupation or profession". If ever in many instances it is the case, the years looming seem as the other side of the prize. But - & in many cases it is a clear indication that their calling did not correspond to the essential interest of their life -

6. In the case, many people ~~it is~~ life denies them this privilege of pursuing their major interest in their work. Life frequently poses an assignment upon us - and we have no choice. Our satisfaction, then lies, in pursuing our interest outside of an work-a-day world - in our leisure hours. ~~where we are~~ But the extreme effort should be made by parent and child to correlate the job with the predilection or wish.

7. The child's ability should be considered. This is difficult. For parents often overestimate their child's ability - and the young person himself cannot be sufficient detached & objective to estimate himself properly. Neither is youth ready to acknowledge limitations. False and unattainable goals are set - and unhappiness is the price paid in later life for it.

(1) A young man who would make an excellent artisan or mechanic, a top-man in his field, and is contented and at peace with himself - is forced by false standards & values, and by over-estimation, his intelligence, powers to study for some profession wherein he is doomed to hopeless mediocrity - and to a life-long wear & defeat.

✓ (2) I met a woman

✓ (3) Among our people - No stigma - transvaluation of values - the Manual labor & Mind labor share alike to-day in the esteem of the world - for human activity.

✓ (4) Expert vocational guidance is now available. Parents should avail themselves of it - they are afraid of being "let down" - ~~they are~~ ^{it is much more important for child's future happiness -} "To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it - is the key to happiness." ^{liberal or vocational education}

8. The opportunities which are open or are likely to be open in the service calling or profession should be carefully canvassed. - Conditions change rapidly. The present generation may have greater opportunities in this field rather than in another. Some fields are overcrowded. Room for good man at top" mis-leading.

The average young man or woman cannot ~~but~~ defeat the laws of supply and demand.

9. Our Jewish youth.

1. Tendency to crowd business and "free" professions.
Not good for gen. economic reasons; for specific Jewish reasons
2. Anti-semitism - Germany. (just)
agriculture - skilled workers -
It is inevitable
Artisan - farmer
3. Must explore other avenues -
Municipal, county, State & Fed. civil service
wherein monetary rewards are possibly not as high -
teachers - and less exacting.
4. This will normalize our econ. status.

10. Remember, finally, that a ^{econ} career - is only part, man's
career in life -

(a) Human career - as son - as husband - as father - as friend
social " " - as citizen

~~It~~ One must train himself for that too.

(b) Training in fair-play, team-work, in reliability, in
honesty, in just-will

(c) Career in leisure time - when we are unfree recreation
workers [we are destroying] intell. spiritual
and aesthetic interests - regardless of what our
job is -

11. We must as much as deliberately choose the right
career here for our children. Even if they fail -
in the first Here we can be far more helpful.

Ger. J pop. small. - less 71%. Has not increased much in last 30 yrs.
But migration from towns, villages to big cities i.e. urbanization or
metropolization - and from E. Germany to W.G.

1850 - Berlin - 10,000 Jews

1880 - " 54,000 "

1910 - " 144,000 "

1935 - " 172,000 "

About 35% in Berlin

Migration from Province of Posen -

1850 - 75,000 J there

1910 - 26,000 " "

II. Lawyers - 15% of profession ✓

Writers
Journalists } 8%

Doctors 6%

Judges - 4%

III. Industry - largely represented - as owners, superintendents, ^{13%} but few among
workers - a farmers - artisans -

Albert Ballin - Hamburg Arm & Co

Emil Rathenau - A.E. G.

Haber, Carl - Chemicals.

Bankers - Bleichröder, Wassermann, Goldschmidt, Mendelssohn
Warburg.

Wool Stores - Tietz, Israel, Wertheim

IV. Too much in middle class.