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Sanity in living, 1934.

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SANITY IN LIVING

By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple
On

Sunday Morning, December 30, 1934



It is good to see so many of you young friends here this morning and I am happy to discuss with you a subject which is probably very close to your thinking and which should become the thinking of all people, particularly of young people. I want to speak this morning about "Sanity in Living". Now I realize that it is very difficult to be sane in these insane times, particularly for young people. Everything in one's world seems to be upset and at every turn one finds confusion, conflict and maladjustment. The governments of the world are either coming in or going out of revolutions. I don't suppose that there are a half dozen stable governments in the world today. The political cauldron is seething and boiling over and it seems as though witches were tending its fires. Terrorism and assassination, conspiracies and putsches are the order of the day and seem to be the instrument of political policies. Reason seems to have fled from the field and in its place has come about loud mouthed strident lies, which we call propaganda, and which merely incite and contribute to the intellectual chaos of the world.

And what is true of the political scene is more true of the economic scene. Everything there seems to be contributing to our bewilderment and confusion. A young man picks up a newspaper today and reads it. He would find in one column the news that in 1934 the group of millionaires increased perceptibly. In the next column he would read that the number of unemployed in the United States has also increased by millions and in the next column he would read that seventeen million people in this country are today receiving relief doles from the government. He would read that there are millions of people in these United States who want to work and there is work to be done,

and there are factories in which work can be done. There is enough raw material with which work can be done. Yet, somehow, over ten million people cannot be brought in contact with the work that is to be done. He would read of multitudes, almost innumerable multitudes who want food, raiment, shelter. There are plenty of resources to provide all this for all men and yet these men are unable to obtain that which they need desperately. They would read of a government attempting to create a scarcity of the resources; in some parts a desperate need of getting people to get under a condition of scarcity that which they could not get under plenty. And you would read of banks flooded with money and at the same time you would read of a credit stringency which makes it impossible for people to resume normal operations.

A young man today knows that you may spend huge sums annually to train them for their professions and that upon the completion of their training, these young men, instead of being helped to become producers in the nation, are forced into idleness and denied the opportunity to practise what they learned in college, and they are consigned to spiritual defeat. As a result their careers are thwarted, checked.

Surely, this is not a world in which people, particularly young people, can have a sane outlook either upon their own lives or upon the lives of society, generally. Nothing seems to be stable today. A man's job is insecure. The future of the workingman, the professional man, is terribly insecure and uncertain. Fortunes are wiped out over night by forces over which man has no control.

And all over the world are ominous rumblings of class struggles and conflicts. Most men have come to believe that there is something

basically wrong with our economic set-up, that there is a weakness in its foundation which endangers the entire structure.....And when property rights and vested interests are in danger, human passions are aroused so that all economic discussions today are surcharged with bitterness and hatred. Men don't think about these problems. They just realize their prejudices. Clearly, it is not a world in which young people can gain a sane outlook.

And yet, just because the times are out of joint, it is of utmost importance that young people shall discipline themselves into a sane way of thinking and acting. The rabbis said: The devil does his most successful work in a world of stress and confusion and danger. It is in such times that human beings lose their prospective, their sense of proportion and balance, their tolerance and sportsmanship and good will. It is in times like these, when the temperature of men's minds leaps perilously high and is in a state of fever, that reality loses its sharp angular outlines and one's world becomes strangely perplexed.

The nations of the world today are in such a feverish condition. They are restless; times are excitable. The nations of the world today are not rational. They are over eager to get something not clear in their own minds. They are racked with apprehension. They are suffering with a terrible thirst for something, a thirst which they cannot quench. The world is not in a civilized condition.

How else can you account for the madness which sweeps over it every day? How else can you account for the things that took place in

Russia where a political chief was assassinated by a member of the ruling party and over one hundred men and women who in no way connected with the crime were killed, were made to pay the penalty of this crime? This was done in a country which has been attempting a juster and nobler order of living than that which exists anywhere in the world. How else can you account for the madness in the country of Yugoslavia? A king was assassinated and thousands of people were uprooted. There is a madness which seems to be driving. How else can you account for what took place in Germany? A civilized, noble country, a country suddenly gone mad, turned over its fortunes to physical and intellectual perverts who undermined the hundreds of thousands of people -- millions of people. How else can you account for a country like Japan scrapping the international treaty which insured peace in the Orient? How else can you account for this mad armament race now going on all over the world?

The world is in a feverish condition today. It is a mad world, my friends. And unless you want to be caught up in this madness, you will have to make a supreme effort to build for yourself isles of sanity, by yourself and within yourself, where you can live your own life decently as befits a man.

I am not asking that you isolate yourself to a hermitage or an ivory tower or live your life away from the world. That cannot be done. It is not wise. It is not normally justifiable. This is your world. This is your destiny. You have to make the best of it. You have to make of this world, such as it is, the best possible world.

My counsel is that you try to keep a balance, your balance, in an unbalanced world in the hope that by so doing, you may contribute to

restoration of balance, sanity. Hillel said: "In a place where there are no men, you try to be a man; and by so doing, you may inspire others to become manly; while at the same time you will be saving your own immortal soul."

Now, what makes for sanity in living? How can we live in this world in which we find ourselves? How find mental peace, equilibrium, sane living? In the first place, a calm realization that this crazy order or disorder in the world is bound to pass away; that it is not the final stage in evolution; that it is not the last world in humanity; but that it is a transition age, dangerously mad, but only a transition age.

There is a future and a great bright future for the young man today. I recently read an interesting book which I would advise all of you to read. It is written by Mr. Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture. I quote the following sentence or two from his book "New Frontiers".

"The keynote of the new frontier is cooperation just as that of the old frontier was individualistic competition. The mechanism of progress of the new frontier is social invention, whereas that of the old frontier was mechanical invention and the competitive seizure of opportunities for wealth. Power and wealth were worshiped in the old days. Beauty and justice and joy of spirit must be worshiped in the new."

✓ "The younger people of the United States have more marvelous things to work with during the next generation than any people ever had. We have in the United States, extraordinary resources of rich soil and abundant coal, with petroleum and minerals conveniently located. Our proportion of

resources to population is very great. With ordinary common sense a high standard of living in terms of material things is almost inevitable. Our climate is invigorating to human beings. The human beings now here have been drawn from among the most intelligent and vigorous racial stocks of the old world. Railways, highways, factories and all the varied equipment necessary for abundant production and rapid distribution have been built. Able research-men are at work in the endowed institutions, the State experiment stations, in the Federal Government and in the commercial laboratories, finding new and better ways of getting things done."

"Able men, unequalled resources, inventive genius -- here are the materials which the older generation, partly as a result of inept leadership, partly as a result of war, have so terribly fozzled. Here is the challenge to all younger adaptable spirits possessing sufficient courage and insight to enter upon a plan of national coordination, realistic, yet idealistic."

I think the Secretary is not over-optimistic or over-idealistic in the picture which he draws of the possibilities of American life, the prospects of our future generation. I think that a realization of this fact and the effort to make it part of the thought pattern of our life will help to give us a calmer, more patient, less nervous and more sane outlook upon life.

In the second place, one should have for a sane outlook of life, and this sounds like a platitude, but a dynamic platitude frequently overlooked, is a sound body. Most of us are endowed by nature with a fairly healthy constitution. Some of us neglect our bodies by careless indecent

living. We are not sufficiently mindful of the nobility and the sanctity of our bodies. Hillel said that "the body of the human being is the Temple in which the soul dwells." Now it doesn't always follow that a strong mind dwells in a strong body. It doesn't always follow that strength of character depends upon strength of one's physical condition. A healthy mind does not always dwell in a healthy body. But what a marvelous harmony is established when the two are side by side, one within the other, when one fits into the other. When we weaken or cheapen our bodies by over indulgence, by pampering or pollution, we undermine not only spiritual resistance but our physical resistance as well.

In these times a man needs a vast reserve of spiritual resistance. Sanity in living requires a normal health-protecting regimentation for our physical selves. I am not advocating a spartan discipline of self-abnegation. I am not counseling an ascetic system of living. I am counseling a regimentation, moderation with a view to harmony of our being, a control over our passions and of its occasional self-denial. There can be no sanity in living when one's physical life is not regimented and controlled.

Then again, for sane living, my friends, we require the knowledge of a definite goal. If you don't know where you are going, you are wandering. And aimless wandering in life almost always leads to disaster. You may not reach your goal. Few people ever do, completely. And unless you have definite objectives, all your efforts are futile and so many purposeless gestures in the void. All your forward movements don't get you anywhere. You have got to know what your goal is; what you want to make of yourself.

That is what I mean by having a goal. In our country the goal of most people used to be success and a lot of money. Our civilization was largely and for a long period of time a materialistic civilization and the summum bonum, the highest good, was wealth and power. Towards the close of the eighteenth century, our country began to develop a new type of civilization and culture. In the early settlements a leisure and wealthy class grew up which developed a code of living and a philosophy of living. Then came the American Revolution. Most of these wealthy leisure classes were Tories. They were forced to emigrate to Canada and England. No country up to that time, unless France, when the Huguenots fled, suffered such a weakening of its intellectual forces as did the United States.

In the 19th century, many immigrants came to this country attracted by the wealth. The frontiers were moving westward. The slogan was "Do, achieve, amass wealth!" And a materialistic civilization grew up. The ideal person and the person with the most prestige was the man who amassed the greatest wealth. The times have changed in recent years, not entirely, but perceptibly changed.

The last frontier was reached some time ago. The great masses of people no longer are beguiled, by a fond hope of quickly amassing fabulous wealth. The cry of the masses is "Fairer distribution rather concentration of wealth in the hands of a few."

The American people are reaching out for a new philosophy of life. And that philosophy boiled down to its essence, is that the goal of life is no longer success and wealth, but the cultivation of self in society, the bringing to flower of all that is seeded in an individual. For man is more than a job, more than a banker. A man has more than one

thing to do in the world.

A human being has infinite relationships. A man is a son, a father, a brother, a friend, a citizen, an employer, an employe. He depends upon other men. Other men depend upon him. He is a relational human being. A man is very little unless he is taken in relation to the other men and other acts. And the sane way of living for a man is to try to perfect himself, as far as possible, in these numerous relationships. This will save him from becoming one-sided, unbalanced.

Man has many relationships and worlds of reference and association within himself. We are a kind of constellation, a sort of solar system. We have many worlds. We have our mental world, which unless we cultivate assiduously and continuously, will be bleak and barren -- our spiritual world of values, ends, judgments and loyalties, which for many people, is an undiscovered continent. We have an esthetic world inside of ourselves where beauty may be made to dwell. Now, the goal in human life is simultaneously to cultivate all these relationships within the world outside of ourselves and in the world inside of ourselves for the enhancement of our souls.

This program which I submit to you, my young friends, is not a difficult program and one which could not be utterly defeated by external circumstances. You may lack opportunities. Those facts may make the realization of that hope, that program, difficult, but not impossible. It depends only partially upon outside forces. It depends largely upon will, courage and high regard for oneself and one's fellowmen.

Such a program, my friends, calls for patience, and for steady slow cumulative effort. The man who sets for himself such a goal will not

permit himself to be beguiled by shortcuts. There is no such thing. Lastly, the man who accepts such a program for himself or for herself will place the gravity of responsibility on himself or herself. In other words, he will not transfer his responsibilities or blame his failure or burden upon society. There are all too many people today who do just that. Whatever is wrong in themselves, in their own lives, they blame upon society. If society were perfect, if the economic order were perfect, then everything would be well with them.

That is not so! Under the most perfect economic society, man can still be mentally and normally and esthetically indolent, narrow, shiftless, prejudiced, cruel and shirk his responsibilities. Under the most perfect circumstances, man can remain unfulfilled, unrealized. We should, of course, work for a more just order. This goal is a on your part. Each in his sphere of influence should try to make this world a better place in which to live, to eradicate the brutalities and miseries of our life.

Nevertheless, society can give you only the key to the outer world. The real key to the inner doors of the chamber of the palace, that you have to fashion yourselves with your own hands. The Kingdom of God is within yourselves. Sanity is possible even in these seemingly insane times. But it calls for unlimited effort and strong rigorous discipline and great faith and a strong sense of whither you are going, and what you are after. And if you have these, even in these unbalanced times, you can win for yourself a large measure of happiness and peace.

1. It is hard to be altogether same - Partic. hard -

So much in the world seems upset - at every turn

(a) Govts are either coming out -

there are not half a dozen

The pol. cauldron - witches

Terrorism + assassination, conspiracies + "Patches"

Reason has fled - propaganda, irritant, intell. chaos

(b) The econ. scene is no less confusing + bewildering

I A young man reads his paper - 1934 - crop yield
unemployed - 17m. on relief

(1) Millions want work - work to the bone - factories
raw material

(2) Millions want food, garment - Earth produces
enough - can't get - Govt. reduces acreage -

(3) Banks glutted - credit stringency

(4) He knows from personal exp. or observation
tens of thousands of young men -

II Nothing seems stable or secure!

Fortunes are wiped out by forces -

A man's job is uncertain!

" " econ. future, his own, entire man's - uncertain

III And all on the world ominous rumbling / class

Most men have come to feel - basically wrong
some weakness in foundation

When Property rights - Econ. discussion -
man didn't think - they rationalize -

Clearly there is very little sanity! Very different for men

2. And yet - just these times are out of joint - people esp. young!
effort to disengage us into sanity of that nation

(1) The Rabbi said: וְיָדוּ אֶת הָעָם בְּיָדָם

For it is in such times that men lose perspective

The Temperature of men's minds leaps perilously high
and in a state of fever, reality yields -
and one's world becomes strangely peopled

3. Nations are in such a feverish condition - restless,
tense, excited! Not rational! Recked with apprehension
over eager to get - Consumed with a thirst - state.

(1) How else - blind, stupid, cruel acts, their ^{safes}
Russia - Turkmania - Germany Algeria

4. It is a mad world, my friends! And unless - is of
sanity - but his life decently -

(1) I counsel no self-isolation! This is our world!

~~It~~ My counsel is - retain our balance in an unbalanced
by no doing contribute - restriction

please please - not do violence to your own

5. What makes for sanity is living?

(1) Calm realization this crazy order a disorder must
pass.

Future bright. (Quote Henry G. Walker
"New Frontiers")

6. In the second place a Sound Body!

Most of us are endowed - fairly healthy constitution.
Some of us neglect it - undermine it by careless, undisciplined
we are not sufficiently mindful of its utility & sanctity
Hillel - Sorry day - a miracle - is done!

① Strength & character does not always depend
a healthy mind does " " depend
But what a marvellous harmony is achieved
When we weaken & cheapen our bodies by - pollution
undermine our spirit - as well as our phys. resistance

② Sanity in living ∴ requires a sound, normal,
health-protecting regimen for our physical selves
Control over our passions - appetite -
not necess. a Spartan - moderation

7. For sane living - definite goal! If you don't know
you may not reach your goal. Few people

③ We used to think - goal was success and a lot of money
Ours was a mat. civilization - "Summum Bonum"
= wealth and power.

In 18C -

Tunes have changed. Last frontier -

- ① Prospects of quickly winning fabulous wealth - dream
- ② Soc. is now concerned with proper distribution -
- ③ Wealth no longer carries with it - prestige
- ④ Then are reaching out for new goal

8. "The cultivation of self in society"
the bringing to flower of all that is seeded - enrichment
of all that is seeded! Same living calls for fullness,
A man is more than a job! Hank-lunk! He has more
than one thing to do in the world!

✓ Confucius (Inst.) 2600 yrs. ago!

(a) Man has a variety of relationships to perfect!

Sincerity in living requires - not to neglect, despise
round out; one-sided; unbalanced; meaning

(b) Numerous worlds of reference & assoc. within himself!

This mental world - barriers unless

" spiritual " - values, ends, loyalties, which for

" aesthetic " when beauty - may be made to dwell

→ The same life sets this as its goal:

"The simultaneous cultivation, then vigorous, mental"

9. Program cannot be utterly defeated -

Depends only partly -

will, courage, high regard for oneself & one's fellowman

10. Program requires patience - steady, cumulative self-training
will brush aside - that cuts -

11. Will not transfer all his burdens, blame, Sincerity -

He will work for better social order - inherent

but he will live himself - Even in perfect soc. system

At best one's key to order down!

sermon 418

ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE,
ANSEL ROAD AND E. 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING
DECEMBER 23, 1934.

SANITY IN LIVING

It is hard to be altogether sane in these insane times, particularly hard for young people. Nevertheless just because times are out of joint, people, especially young people, must make the great effort to discipline themselves into sanity of thought and action.

A calm realization that this crazy order or disorder must sooner or later pass away will help to give one a sane outlook on life. This mad age in which governments are either coming in or going out of revolutions, in which economic want is universal, thriving as it were upon the rich soil of abundance, is not the last age of society. It will pass. A brighter, more secure and orderly world is sure to come. Human intelligence is not permanently abdicated. Society is not liquidated.

A definite goal is needed for sane living. If you don't know where you are going, you are wandering, and aimless wandering in life leads to disaster. We used to think that the highest goal was success and a lot of money; and the highest good, wealth and power. These objectives are characteristic of a pioneering civilization where unbounded resources and the prospect of fabulous wealth set people furiously to work to amass wealth and to exercise power. Times have changed. The last frontier has been reached. For most of our people today, the hope of quickly winning great private wealth has been permanently extinguished. People are now concerned more with the proper distribution of wealth than with its concentration into the hands of a few. Men are reaching out for new goals in terms of the cultivation of self in society, the bringing to flower of all that is seeded in them.

A man is more than a job or a bank book. He has more than one thing

to do in the world. He has a variety of relationships to perfect. A man is son, father, husband, brother, friend, citizen. He is employer or employee. He depends upon others and others depend upon him. Sanity in living requires that a man shall not neglect any of these relationships lest his life become one-sided, unbalanced, and emptied of meaning.

Again, man has numerous worlds of reference and association within himself: a mental world which unless it is continuously cultivated lies barren and desolate; a spiritual world of values, ends, judgments and loyalties which for many people is an undiscovered continent; and an esthetic world wherein beauty may be made to dwell.

The goal of life is the simultaneous cultivation of all these human relationships and inner worlds through vigorous and continuous exercise.

The wise man will not transfer all of his burdens to society nor all the blame for his failures. Even under the most perfect economic system, man can be mentally, spiritually and esthetically indolent, shiftless, prejudiced, cruel, hateful. At best, society can give a man the key to the outer door. The key to the inner door of the chamber is of man's own fashioning.