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Ourselves, when old, 1935.

Sermon 423

Use of Jan 27, 1935

OURSELVES, WHEN OLD

By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple
On

Sunday morning, January 27, 1935.



splitting talk in the
25-18.

Old age, my friends, may be viewed from different points of view. Many of you may view it in terms of physical decline -- in terms of abatement of vigor, the lessening of our power, the slowing down of physical and mental prowess. That, you will recall, was how that gentle cynic, Kohelet, in the closing chapter of his remarkable book of memoirs, the Book of Ecclesiastes which you will find in the Bible, views old age:

Remember then thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
Before the evil days come,
And the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say:
I have no pleasure in them';
Before the sun, and the light, and the moon,
And the stars, are darkened,
And the clouds return after the rain;
In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,
And the strong men shall bow themselves,
And the grinders cease because they are few,
And those that look out shall be darkened in the windows,
And the doors shall be shut in the street,
When the sound of the grinding is low;
And one shall start up at the voice of a bird,
And all the daughters of music shall be brought low;
Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high,
And terrors shall be in the way;
And the almond-tree shall blossom,
And the grasshopper shall drag itself along,
And the caperberry shall fail;
Because man goeth to his long home,
And the mourners go about the streets;
Before the silver cord is snapped asunder,
And the golden bowl is shattered,
And the pitcher is broken at the fountain,
And the wheel falleth shattered into the pit;
And the dust returneth to the earth as it was,
And the spirit returneth unto God who gave it.
Vanity of vanities, saith Koheleth;
All is vanity.

I say, old age may be viewed from this angle of physical decline. And so many poets have sung dolorously of this slow, dull sinking into withered old age.

Some assume that old age and happiness do not dwell together. Seneca, that great Roman philosopher said: "It is rare to find happiness and old age in one!"

Old age, again, my friends, may be viewed from the point of view, and often it must be viewed from that point of view, of economic dependence, of destitution. Their earning power gone or substantially reduced, old people, unless they have saved up for themselves a security for old age, are frequently forced out upon the niggardly charities of the world or the generosity of their children which frequently is not forthcoming. This is the whole theme of King Lear, which strangely enough, is repeated in the lives of humble people over and over again.

Some of you may have read that very sad book "The Years Are So Long." It is the story of an old couple who in the declining years of their lives turn to five children whom they had reared, cared for, educated and established. They turn to their children for support in their old age. You know the old proverb -- one father can support six children but six children can't support one father. That is the story of "The Years Are So Long." The children repudiate their responsibility to the old folks. They claim that they do not have enough place to keep them both. After trying to separate the father and mother, they conceive of the plan of taking care of each of them in their home, in a sort of revolving process which humiliates the old folks. One of them finally dies and the other is sent to an institution for the aged.

I say, old age may be viewed from that point of view as many are compelled to view it, from the angle of dependence and destitution.

Old age may also be viewed in terms of mental stagnation, of a minimum of intellectual activity, of a loss of interest in all that is going on around them -- a sort of diffidence towards the inescapable end, a muted submission, a helpless submission to the inevitable end. But learning is possible in old age. And intellectual progress is possible in old age. Keen interest in old age -- that is very often overlooked by people.

And yet old ^{age}, my friends, may be viewed, and has been viewed by people, in quite a different light. In fact, when we bear in mind the the self-evident physical decline which comes with old age, it is quite surprising to find how many of the sages and thinkers of ancient and modern times have looked at old age without any sense of pessimism or apprehension or fear. Quite the contrary. Some of them looked forward to it in anticipation. Our own Bible which is the greatest book of wisdom ever written speaks very often of "a good old age." It speaks of old age as a crown of glory.

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Old age, my friends, need not be undignified, if it can be spared the indignities of insecurity. It is degrading and a reproach to our age and civilization that people who worked hard and enthusiastically all through their active years and gave to their utmost to the tasks which life assigns are compelled to enter old age as dependents, as impoverished people, cast upon the mercies of others. A civilized society, my friends, ought to pay men and women during their working years, not merely a living wage, but a saving wage so that if they are thrifty, they can set aside from their weekly income, without seriously affecting their standard of living, something which will protect them in the years when their earning power is at a minimum.

Unfortunately, in our own day, when people are thrifty and are able to set aside something for their old age, they are not certain at all that they ought to save it for when they might need it. They put their money in banks. The value of stocks and bonds dwindle. There is no security in the very system in which they are to invest future incomes and it becomes increasingly more imperative that government as such should provide through pensions, that security for old age which is now lacking. And it is to be commended that finally, a great effort is being made in Washington under the guidance of President Roosevelt to establish such ^{an} old age pension fund and to remove the indignities of insecurity, dependence and humiliation to those who enter the declining years of their lives.

Old age, my friends, need not be an age of mental stagnation. Chato, the Roman, began to learn Greek when he was eighty years old.

Sophocles, the Greek dramatist, wrote the greatest part of the Oedipus when he was more than eighty years old and Goethe completed his Faust when he was more than four score years . It doesn't follow that because a man grows old his mental faculties grow old. If we keep our minds trained, not merely during the years of our study in high school and college, but if we keep training our mentality during years of maturity we will enter old age with minds eager, active and enthusiastic. The trouble with most ^{of} us is that we stop studying -- which means vigorous intellectual training -- when we leave school. And thereafter, all of our reading is reading for relaxation, the kind of reading we do in bed for ten minutes before going to sleep. The reading of magazines, newspapers and light reading matter do not exercise but merely massage the mind. That is why after we reach the age of forty our minds have lost their suppleness and resilience. They are crusty and hollow.

Adult education is an ugly word but it means a great deal. Adult education should continue to the day of your death and by education, I mean education -- seeking solid knowledge, solid information, pursuing a strong discipline of thinking along certain lines, whatever your interest may be, whether it is science, art or literature, but solid thinking which requires effort. That sort of thinking ought to continue right through our lives. Some people assume that because a person grows old, he grows stupid. Why some people do grow very stupid as they grow old. But one can get wiser the older he grows. One should not slacken his intellectual pursuits just because he grows old. The old cynic, Diogenes, was a very wise man. When the king asked him when he found him in a barrel what he could do for him, Diogenes said that

the best favor would be to step out of the sunshine. Then he said: "If I were running in the stadium, ought I to slacken my pace when approaching the goal? Ought I not rather to put on speed?" That is wisdom. The nearer you get to the goal, the quicker should be your intellectual pace.

If you want to save yourself from a crabbed, testy, complaining old age, if you don't want to feel that everybody is out of step but you, if you don't want to see the world slipping away from you, then keep pace with the world with your mind.

Old age, my friends, can be very beautiful and complete, very rich, if you have saved up for it. "Nothing is more dishonorable", said a wise man long ago, "than an old man, heavy with years, who has no other evidence of having lived long except his age."

Old age should begin to pay dividends on your investments. It can pay and it will pay if you have made investments. It will pay you, for example, in dividends of the love of your children and grandchildren whom you have trained to love and respect you. You will draw dividends in terms of the pride which you will have at the accomplishments of your grown sons and daughters if you have helped to lead them in the ways that men and women should go. What greater satisfaction do our parents have when growing old than the satisfaction in knowing that they have given to the community fine upstanding sons and daughters? That is a large dividend and it mellows and beautifies the declining years of men.

Old age can be very rich if you have rich memories. I imagine the saddest thing would be in a man's old age if he had no remembrances

a proof that he is a prophet; the aged requires no proof. His numbered years point to a wisdom and a sanctity which are sufficient. No one could become a member of the Sanhedrin, the Governing Body, unless he was an old man, rich in the experiences of life.

Our Rabbis also defined the life of a man, as Shakespeare did in seven stages. They defined life in quite a number of stages. At five, they said, five years of age, that is the time for the beginning of the study of the Torah. Ten years is for the study of the Mishna. At thirteen, Bar Mitzwah, that's the beginning of the fulfillment of the commandments. That's when a young man becomes a full-fledged member of the community; takes upon himself the responsibility of

In the Orient men mature earlier than in our part of the world. At fifteen it is time for the study of the Talmud. Notice that from earliest infancy, from the age of five, children are put to study. At eighteen, that's the time for marrying. And wiser by far than our system under which we live, where young men are unable to be married until they are thirty or thirty-five. It is far more natural that young people should be married early in life and the wise parent would bestow the greatest blessing upon his children if he would make it possible for the son to marry early in life.

At twenty years it is time to begin to seek a career, to make a livelihood. At thirty man begins to enter into his full strength. At forty one begins to understand a little of life. (Quote Hebrew)

At fifty, one is about ready for counsel, for advising others.

about outstanding things in his past life, if he had nothing to look back to in terms of fine things done, true causes advanced, triumphs endured and overcome, tests which he withstood and did not find himself wanting.

Blessed is the man who can look back across the long road traversed and find on looking back that there were obstacles that he surmounted, that there were triumphs, tribulations which he withstood bravely and courageously and that when he was called upon he was not found wanting. When there were noble things to do, he helped to do them. To have a sea chest of treasures when you come to shore after the long journey on the high seas of life, -- that makes old age contented and happy. And to be able, my friends, to look back when you are old, upon one great love which was yours whether love for a man or a woman or a great love for some great cause or ideal -- that helps to sustain one in the declining years. A remembrance of things passed, beautiful, sacred memories, even of sorrow endured, even of grief and loss -- just so they are noble, they help to ennoble our declining years.

So that there is another view of old age -- the view of harvest time, the view of a day ended in a glory of color, sunset. Sunset can be as perfect as sunrise and many men and women have found this out. For in old age, the seas are calm, the storms are over. We have ceased to beat out wings in the void. We have reconciled ourselves to the inevitability of life. There comes a calm, a peace, a reconciliation in our lives.

Blessed is the man who is able to strike a balance and say to himself: Thank God for the days and the years which are mine. I have lived not unworthily. I have done whatever destiny called upon me to do. I have raised children and given them to the world. I have helped

to build worth insititutions. I have tried to be a friend among friends.

This is my record, perhaps not brilliant, perhaps not outstanding, but it is the record of an average man.

Blessed is the man who is able to live the closing years of his life with a blessing upon his lips for the gift of life, the gift of youth, for the gift of old age.....for the spring, the summer, the fall and winter, for the dawn, the noon and the sunset. Perhaps he knows that the sunset will be the forerunner of another sunrise.



Sermon
#23

1/ Old Age may be viewed in terms of physical decline, as gentle cynic Kohlet does - abatement of vigor - ebbing of strength - slowing up of all our physical and mental processes.

So many poets have sung dolorously of "the slow, dull sinking into withered age".

Seneca - "Rarum est felix idemque senex".
"How rare it is to find old age & happiness in one!"

2/ Old Age may be viewed, as unfortunately it must be viewed by many in terms of economic dependence - even distraction. Their earning power gone, old people, unless they have been able to save up for their declining years, find themselves thrown upon the charity, the alms which is given miserably - a upon the generosity of their children which is often denied. How frequently is the stop & look year repeated, in humble hours - how tragically.

→ Years are so long -

one father -

3/ Old age may be viewed in terms of mental stagnation, a minimum of intell. activity - a slackening of interest in all that goes on in the world - Learning in old age and progress in old age - is hardly conceived. Old age is regarded as helpless drifting toward the merciless end - a helpless submission to the inevitable.

4/ And yet old age may be viewed - has been viewed - in a quite diff. light. In fact, when we bear in mind, the great self-evident physical decline which comes with the ^{advancing} years, it seems remarkable that sages & thinkers throughout the ages have spoken of old age in far diff. terms -

→ Bible - (1) דברי הימים ב' כ"ד - "good old age".

(2) It speaks of old age as a crown of glory - אור
דברי הימים ב' כ"ד

Evidently the wisdom, the severe books felt that old age can be something more - "ashes & spent embers." The old men, the Bible, were dignified, patriarchal, ^{in form} ~~and~~ revered by their folk as fathers of homes as 7 years, who when their end came, felt as full the very glories in splendid majesty of Moses it is said - tho he died at 120 - "his eyes were not dim - nor his natural force abated" -

(3) Psalms speaks, the righteous man - אשר יצדק
אשר יצדק אשר יצדק אשר יצדק - אשר יצדק אשר יצדק אשר יצדק

The Righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree
He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon
They shall bring forth fruit in old age
They shall be full of sap and vigour

(4) Poet Browning sings: R. Ben Ezra - "How old along etc."

Evidently - the poet believed - that there are even greater satisfactions in our old age - than in our younger years.

✓ And in very truth there are, if not greater, then ~~as~~ equal satisfactions - if we know where to look for them & how to lay up a stock of them -

S/ of course there is no escape from the ^{physical} ravages of old age - Time takes its toll. And yet, for many of us, How old too young. We hasten our physical decline by an ~~at~~ all too quick leap & living - by as looming ourselves up in consuming ambitions - in over-reaching, & we quickly exhaust our reserves of ^{physical} energy. We over-tax our hearts & our nervous systems. Worry undermines us. We suddenly snap like an over-taut string (drawn too tight). A natural old-age is like fruit ripening to completion. A premature old-age is like fruit spoiling before it is ripe. We ought not to rush headlong into old age - by having premature leaving life - the careful husbanding of our physical & emotional resources - will prepare us for the normal level of old age, where, while is neither old nor underprepared.

~~If it is possible in a normal old age it is possible to find a large measure of happiness -~~
(1)

7-Old age may be spared Indignity & dependence -

1. It is degrading to whole race. When it prevents the reward, a life time of honest labor - to the pauperism & the institutions.

1. Thrift - Danger, saving to-day (Magazine)
2. Saving wage - ~~danger saving to-day~~

3. Reverence - Mr. Roosevelt -

8/Old age need not be a mental stagnation

① Cato learned Greek - so

② Sophocles - Oedipus - more & more

③ Forster - Cambridge

A mind actively trained in youth & ~~that~~ middle age will not go to seed in old age.

no stop learning at 20-25 - Rigorous mind

discipline - we then read for "pleasure" - by let
weather, newspapers, magazines - in off moments -
to be no longer used to increase our mind, solid
knowledge - we do not exercise our mind. we manage
them - we read in bed ^{and were} Our minds like

When we get old - our mind has lost their suppleness
and resilience. They are crusty - & hollow -

9/ Adult Education - should carry on until the last day

→ Learn lessons - Age does not prevent learning
→ Many do not learn with money by being old. { 2000 1000 500 250 125 62 31 15 7 3 1 1 }
① One should not slacken his intell. acquisitions

→ Diogenes

② Save you from crabbed, testy, complaining old age -

10/ Old-age will be rich - if we saved up for it -

→ Nothing is more dishonorable -

① Reverends @ Fort of children - (b) pride of children

(c) Fine memories (d) True causes advanced

(e) Trials - endured -

Tested - not found wanting

with sacrifices -

Played the war

(f) Sad, indeed, is man who has no remembered days!

(2) Here is a sea chest full of treasure brothman
after a long journey at sea -

(3) If you had no great love! - Kingsley '34

11/ Harvest Time . a golden year's labor -

(1) The seas are quiet - Storms are over -

(2) Reverenced - Beating wings - calm - sure -

(3) Stark balance - not have lived in vain -
- Here are my children - Here are my needs -

(4) Sun-down can be as brilliant as sun-rise

(5) And let my last breath be - a blessing for life -

Diogenes:

"If I were running in the stadium, ought I to slacken my pace when approaching the goal? Ought I not rather to put on speed?"

"Nothing is more dishonorable than an old man, heavy with years, who has no other evidence of having lived long except his age."

When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown;
And all the sport is stale, lad,
And all the wheels run down:
Creep home, and take your place there,
The spent and maimed among:
God grant you find one face there
You loved when all was young.



Serene old age.

ע"פ אבות אבות - 16.31 ✓

= learning in old age - age does not prevent learning ✓

Diogenes - "If I were running in the stadium, ought I to slacken my pace when approaching the goal? Or let I let rather to just on speed?"

"Nothing is more dishonorable than an old man, heavy with years, who has no other evidence of having lived long except his age" —

= Compensation - recapitulation - legitimacy - heating our way with words
- enjoys an authority - crowned with honor.

Memories - "search fully known" - calm - born by passions

"The fruit of old age is the memory of abundant blessings previously acquired" — Cicero.

"The dead are quiet"

^a Sun-down can be as beautiful as San-Rini

Harbor

Reins - Cato barked first at 80

✓ Siphos - Delipus - more 4 score

Gather - completed first part 80.

When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown;
And all the sport is stale, lad,
And all the wheels run down:
And all the wheels run down:
Creep home, and take your place there,
The spent and maimed among;
God grant you find one face there
You loved when all was young.

