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Little Man, How Big are You?, 1936.

WRHS
"LITTLE MAN, HOW BIG ARE YOU?"
A Sermon On the Uncommonness of Common Folks

Delivered by
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, March 22, 1936

I had occasion, a few years ago, to pay tribute to a man who gave of his work in our community for a great number of years. And at that time I had occasion to say that in estimating the work of a man, people are prone to think primarily in terms only of a man's work and that sometimes it is not so much what the man gives that is important as what the man is. Sometimes it is the building of one's character, the fashioning of one's own personality that is a greater and more difficult achievement than doing things in the outside world, doing things that people can see.

There are many men and women who win real greatness in this field of self-building who are nevertheless unknown and unnoticed in the world because they have achieved no one outstanding thing that the world can see, no extraordinary exploit for which they would be known. These people who win greatness in their inner life and who are not known outside, we are prone to call common folks. They don't make good newspaper copy. They belong to the great class of the anonymous and because they are anonymous, people think they are unimportant.

Our histories, as a rule, tell of the dramatic things in life, the extraordinary, the catastrophic. People who occupy the stage of the world, at least today, are the heroes, the great, the so-called unusual. The people who monopolize publicity today are the dictators, statesmen, real or imaginary, famous actors, actresses, prize-fighters, kidnappers, quintuplets - unusual people - people who have plans for sharing your money. These extraordinary folks - these are the people that get into the papers! The average man seldom is given a chance at publicity. By the average man I mean the man who has managed

in his lifetime to keep out of jail, the man who has not donated a museum, the man who has built no depot or wrecked no bank - I mean the plain ordinary folks who do their work in the world, build homes, raise families keep their faith and then quietly go out of the world making room for other folks with but one bit of publicity in the obituary column.

Because of this fact, ~~my friends, because in the end the unusual, the extraordinary are commented upon,~~ there is a grave danger of our getting a ~~distorted view of things,~~ a distorted view of what are the real elements that make up society, of what constitutes real civilization.

It is well to remember that ~~life is not made up - I mean social life -~~ is not made out of emergencies and crises which call for extraordinary people, for heroes, leaders. Life is made up of common, everyday tasks which are nevertheless exalted in the beauty of faithful performance. A social life made up entirely of crises, emergencies, dramatic situations would break down very quickly. A world of geniuses and heroes would be a mad-house!

Because the busy world is all too busy to notice common folks - it has time only for the unusual. If a man marries once, that is no news. He belongs to the great silent group - I use the word silent because he doesn't receive any particular notice. If a man marries four or seven times, that is news which is emblazoned in the newspapers. His picture appears surrounded by his entire matrimonial constellation.

The real work of the world is not done by these people. The man of genius may be the salt of the earth but you can't make a meal out of salt. The bread and the meat of life is the common people, the men who plough the fields, who forge the steel, the men who build homes and schools, the men who perform the everyday ordinary tasks in the

ten thousand "Main Streets" of our lives. They are the bread and meat of our civilization. And any one who thinks that "Main Streets" are nothing more than sprawling ugly raw streets with squat unattractive buildings which are filled with people who are characterized by nothing but their intolerance, drabness and gossip - ~~any/who thinks that~~ ^{one}, has simply not looked into the "Main Streets" closely enough.

Among those who dwell in these towns and village - the masses - ~~in their humble lives~~ you will find so much of courage, perseverance and loyalty and sacrifice. You will find men and women who by their labor and devotion and sacrifice conserve ^{the} ~~a~~ of a great people great tradition/and transmit it to their children. You will find souls, many souls ^{who} which have passed through the deep waters of life, through great tribulations which have endured, men and women who have been subjected to the hard buffeting of fortune who yet quite dogmatically and determinedly carry on and do their work. And ~~in greatness~~ - in real greatness - ~~it~~ is not show and sham and greed and pomp but substance, ^{but} our real inner spiritual strength, the power to endure, the power to carry burdens, the power to perform tasks however hard/^{or} cruel those tasks may be. ~~There~~ You will find lawful martyrs uncommonly heroic among the common folks who make up the Main Streets of the world. Some people think of heroism as something flamboyant, impulsive. Real heroism is a thing of long endurance.

I remember during the war, somewhere in Alsace Lorraine where American soldiers were stationed, a General was decorating some of the soldiers for bravery. I commented on their heroism. His answer was, "Heroism in war - that is the most commonplace thing we know about here." But if heroism is not a thing of impulse or of the moment, if it is a

a thing of long endurance, infinite patience, if it has to do with the faithful performance of duties even when duties are dull and monotonous and grind upon the heart through the years, there you will find all the qualities of real heroism.

This ^{nation} station was built by the anonymous. The noble folks remained behind in the Old World. The people who left the Old World, or the Atlantic shores, who plunged into the new world were all humble, unknown folks, many coming from the lowest station in life. Yet these folks with a gun, an axe and a sack of seed entered the wilderness, endured ice, storms, loneliness and sickness without the aid of doctors, went through the miseries of cold winters and with forked sticks broke up the ground and planted a nation. Common folks! No heroism! No one to applaud or acclaim them! But it is of such greatness that our nation was built.

This station was settled by immigrants from all over the world, nearly all of them poor. The rich remained behind. The rich don't migrate. These immigrants came into a new strange world. Many of them did not know the language. They were humble folks, nameless folks. And it is these immigrants who built the cities, who girded the plains with paths of steel, who dotted the prairie lands with towns and cities and built schools and hospitals and made America - humble folks, unknown folks.

How they labored, these poor humble folks, to build up a home for their families! Some of them - you may recall a father or a grandfather who labored and sacrificed not for themselves but for their children, to give their children what they were denied. There is no record kept of individual acts of greatness, acts of heroism.

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while humble, honest labor is surrounded with indifference and sometimes with indignity.

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In the sight of God, my friends, there is no bigness and no littleness. Of what significance is all this dress-up-edness, all this puffing, all this strutting? None at all. Bigness and littleness lose their value in such a world. "All alike, the prince and the pauper, the king and the slave, the rich and the poor lie together in the grave." There is no distinction.

If, however, my friends, you have ever felt the thrill of some deep devotion, consciousness of some deep love, the exaltation of some great sacrifice, if ever you have felt in your life the pride of honest craftsmanship, if you have ever experienced the sensation of something you wanted to do, something you are doing well, then you have come as close to real greatness as is within reach of mortal man and in the very truth, you are x blessed and such blessed people are all around you. Just open your eyes. It may be your father, your mother, your sister, your brother - great souls!

I know a little woman who permitted life to pass her by and all that life holds of permanence and love - allowed all that to pass her by because she wanted to insure the success of her brother who is a great artist and she labored day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year in poverty, denying herself everything, stinting herself to the bone so that her brother for whom there was a great future, might have his chance in life.

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CARAVAN BOND

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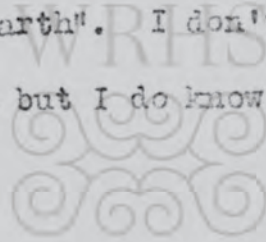
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This ~~station~~ was built by the anonymous. The noble folks remained behind in the Old World. The people who left the Old World, ~~on the~~ Atlantic shores, who plunged into the new world, were ~~all~~ humble, unknown folks, many coming from the lowest station in life. Yet these folks with a gun, an axe, and a sack of seed entered the wilderness, endured ice, ~~storms~~, loneliness and sickness without the aid of doctors, went through the miseries of cold winters, and with forked sticks broke up the ground and planted a nation. Common folks! ^{ics!} No heroism! No one to applaud or acclaim them! But it is of such greatness that our nation was built.

^{nation}
This ~~station~~ was settled by immigrants from all over the world, nearly all of them poor. The rich remained behind; ~~The rich don't~~ migrate. These immigrants came into a new strange world. Many of them did not know the language. They were humble folks, nameless folks. ~~It~~ is these immigrants who built the cities, who girded the plains with paths of steel, who dotted the prairie lands with towns and cities and built schools and hospitals and made America - humble folks, unknown folks.

How they labored, these poor humble folks, to build up a home for their families! ~~Some of them~~ You may recall a father or a grandfather who labored and sacrificed not for ^{himself} themselves but for ^{his} his children, to give ^{he had been} their children what they were denied. There is no record kept of individual acts of greatness, acts of heroism.

^{history books}
No ~~histories~~ will ever record them, but they were there and they were known to their closest friends. Every one, if you will stop to recall, knows of such stories, marvelous cases of greatness, among some individual persons who are no longer here, who are dead.

I recall, as a boy, one man who lived ^{on} in one of the most crowded streets, one of the most ^{thickly} settled streets ^{on the} of East-Side New York, ^{City}. We children coming and going from school would oftentimes see him. He was a little old man with a gray, straggly beard, who dealt in coal and ice. He had his place of business in a dark basement underneath a huge tenement ~~house~~. In winter he sold coal and in summer he sold ice, ~~that~~ ^{is}, he would sell coal by the bucket-load and would carry these buckets up three and four flights of stairs. In the summer, he would buy large cakes of ice, and would cut them into smaller cakes and would carry them ^{up} five, six flights of stairs to his customers. He was always bent under ^a load, ~~of something~~. We called him "humpback" ^{though}. He was really not hump-backed. ~~We called this little man with the gray, straggly beard, "Jacob the humpback,"~~ ^{he} died quietly like all humble folks, as he had lived. ~~Only~~ ^A few years ago I learned that one of his sons, because of the labors of "Jacob the humpback", ^{had become} became a Professor of Mathematics in a large ^a University, and another ^{had become} ~~became~~ a surgeon. I suddenly asked myself, "Little man, how big were you?"

Think of the mothers of men - not the glamorous ~~people - the~~ ^{women but the} plain, humble folks, the millions ~~of them~~ whose hands are more tender than soft, because they have no wealth, servants, ^{leisure} ~~liesure~~. They are the working mothers of the world, mothers whose faces are perhaps a little rough ^{who} ~~but~~ yet have a skin people love to touch, mothers who are always there when there is washing ^{or} ~~to do, when there is~~ scrubbing to do. When

there are lessons to study, stories to tell, they are there - mothers who are always there, who work for their brood, who sacrifice for them. Talk about heroism in common folks! There are plenty of fathers, many of them not educated properly, who had to leave school ^{at} ~~when~~ twelve ^{or} ~~and~~ thirteen, ~~years of age~~, who are not always up ^{on} ~~in~~ the latest novels or ~~to~~ the latest fashions - but fathers who give up their life blood for their children. Who has counted the myriad acts of greatness of common folks?

There are startling evidences of bigness in the little people who make up the humble folks. I recall, a few years ago, coming home one afternoon, rather tired, and ~~being tired~~, I was fretful. The doorbell rang and a middle-aged couple came in. The man said to me, ~~after I had invited him into the house~~, "Rabbi, we would like to get married." I was a little impatient and I said, "Why all this suddenness?" "Why didn't you telephone first?" He took me aside and said, "This lady I am about to marry is on her way to New York to ^{have an operation} ~~be operated~~ on her eyes. The likelihood is that she will go blind. I want to marry her so that I will be able to take care of her if she goes blind."

They were plain folks. I ^{saw} the hands of this man - hard with manual labor. There was ^{nothing} ~~none~~ of grace and charm about either of them, but being with them ~~but it~~ was like standing in the presence of reverence. I married them. A year or two later, a blind woman came to see me - ^{the same} ~~this~~ woman - and told me that her husband had died. ~~and~~ I asked her how she was getting along. ^{she said:} "Why, all right." There was no complaint, no bitterness. "I am working, I am doing odd jobs, getting subscriptions. I am getting along." Courage! Greatness!

The trouble is that we look for greatness where it really doesn't exist - ^{often} ~~among~~ people who ^{destroy} ~~kill~~ and whose ^{acts of destruction} ~~killing~~ we surround with nobility,

while humble, honest labor is surrounded with ~~indifference~~ ^{anonymity} and sometimes with indignity.

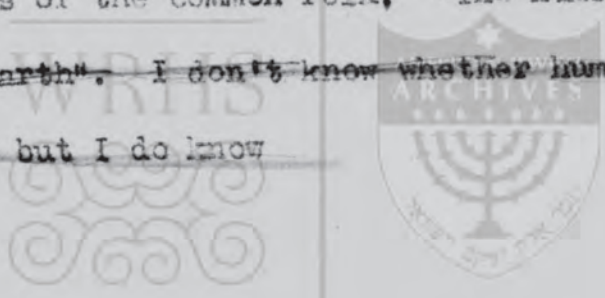
I have never forgotten a story told to me when I was a little boy about the old lamp-lighter, ~~an old lamp-lighter~~ who would go down every afternoon through the streets of the city and light the lamps. No one knew him. People ~~didn't~~ even know his name. Hardly any one stopped him or paid any attention to him. When in the fog or ~~dark~~ ^{murk} of the evening he went down the street, he left behind him a kindled light. How many myriads of such people are there in the world to whom we don't give a second thought, ~~and yet whose~~ ^{whom we take for granted,} ~~ways are marked by the lamp-lighter who~~ ^{quiet labors light our own ways?} lights our way?

In the sight of God, ~~my friends,~~ there is no bigness and no littleness. Of what significance is all this ~~dress-up-ness~~ ^{all this} puffing, all this strutting? None at all. Bigness and littleness lose their value in such a world. "All alike, the prince and the pauper, the king and the slave, the rich and the poor lie together in the grave." There is no distinction.

If, however, ~~my friends,~~ you have ever felt the thrill of some deep devotion, ^{the} consciousness of some deep love, the exaltation of some noble ~~great~~ sacrifice, if ever you have felt ~~in your life~~ the pride of honest craftsmanship, if you have ever experienced the ~~sensation~~ ^{joy} of something you wanted to do, ~~something you are doing well,~~ ^{doing well} then you have come as close to real greatness as is within reach of mortal man and in ~~the very~~ truth, you are ^{the} blessed. ~~and~~ such blessed people are all around you. Just open your eyes. It may be your father, your mother, your sister, your brother - great souls!

I know a little woman who permitted life to pass her by ~~and all~~
~~that life holds of permanence and love - allowed all that to pass her by~~
because she wanted to insure the success of her brother, who is a ~~great~~ *fine*
artist, ~~and she~~ *she* labored day after day, week after week, month after month,
and year after year in poverty, denying herself everything, stinting herself
blessed with a talent,
~~to the bone so that her brother, for whom there was a great future,~~ might
have his chance in life.

How many such people do you know in the world? There are more
than you imagine ¹ your husband, your wife, your father, your mother,
your brother; ² look around you! This world could ~~not~~ exist if it
weren't for the greatness of the common folk, ~~"the humble folk -~~
~~they shall inherit the earth".~~ I don't know whether humble folk really
~~inherit the earth or not~~ but I do know



*ent? as
final her.*

1- Had occasion - Achievement - Greatest
"Himself"

2- Many men & women with greatness in field
of character - good men, women, good husbands etc -
never receive recognition - for no single effort
worth their good "news" - ^{That are} common people here.
no unusual gifts mark them out from among
their fellow-men. Belong to great anonymous masses -
whom thoters deem unimportant!

3. Our histories, as a rule, tell, the dramatic things,
spectacular - catastrophe.

Men who have held and held stage of world - are
the "great", the "heroic"

The people who monopolize news, the day - are the
extraordinary people - dictators, (so-called) statesmen -
moving picture stars, Kidnappers, quints, triplets,
prize-fighters - people who have plans for sharing
your money with you etc.

The average man is seldom given a chance at publicity.
^{Young} The man who has done nothing to put him in paid -
the man who has not donated & ^{but a debt} received a wrecked
a bank - the plain, quiet sort of a man, who does his
work faithfully day by day - builds his house, raises his
family, keeps the faith - and when his turn comes - passes
out quietly to make room for other people - with one ^{brief} farewell
that is published in the Obituary Column -

4. Be that - in danger of getting a distorted vision, what
makes up real life - civilization - Real elements of
constructed society.

5. Life is not made up of emergencies - crises calling
for extraordinary people, the heroic stamp
life ... of common tasks - exalted than the beauty
of faithful performance.

Where social life never full of emerg. crises - it
would break down - World full of genuses and
heroes - it would be a Mad House!

6. Of course this very busy world of ours - tries to
notice the unusual - the extraordinary -

If a man marries once - why he is just one, the
great lost silent host (as "Silent" advertised) one
whom no one particularly notices
you
(Seven times - newspaper hero - name blazoned for the
picture appears - surrounded by his entire maternal
constellation)

The unusual - receives tribute of attention -

But the work, the model is not done by these people but

7. Man of genius - Salt of the earth
But you cannot make a meal out of Salt.
Bread & meat of life are the multitudes - plow -
clear - dig - forge - build houses & schools &
churches - 10,000 "Main Street"

8- And anyone who thinks that Main Street is nothing
but prancing, new street - spatially buildings -
manners - civility - gossip drabness.

There is courage - perseverance - sacred loyalty -
brother - strength of the race is there - the
men & women who conserve & transmit the
great tradition of a great people.

The faith that helps children to grow up
with fine manhood & womanhood.

There are souls there - passed there - Carry on.

If greatness is to overcome obstacles - Endure
with sacrifices - do your duty - then -

9- Real heroes in - not flash - a brave impulse
a thing of long endurance - of infinite patience,
steele monotony - Ground of duty -
the wear upon the heart - the long, long
years!...

10- Pioneers - built this land. No one knows
their names - humble folks

Axe - gun - sack of seed - plunged into
wilderness - ice, cold, sickness, dog calves

the misery of loneliness
with forked sticks they tore up earth planted
- a nation

11. Immigrants - how is want - poor - new
used - strange language - no friends -
humile unknown paths -
Forest cities - gravel plains with paths &
that - bridged river - doth land with
hills turn & forever

12. How they labeled - think - said to see
children - Recall, if you can -
(1) little, old man - old 'coal rico"
dark basement - died as he had lived
(2) little man - How they when you?

13. The mother - who is glamorous - more than soft - tired - you a lot
to see children - a chance - fighting for her brood -
Father - left school at 12 - was read - gave her death - Then was
The Sister - who let life go by her - lost certain
- care - advance women
who has counted the ungrateful acts & madness
(common paths)

14. Man - woman - Blind -

15. Ordinary folk - roadway on the rain & the
soil - as external as either.

Their work - menial? Holy -
Divine Vocation - Victorious Living!

Surrounded common labor with indignity
and killing with utility

To the Mass pilgrim - also build the earth

16. I have never forgotten -

"Old Lamp Lighter"

17. In light of God - no great men - no little men

- אין אדם גדול וְאין אדם קטן -
- אין אדם גדול וְאין אדם קטן -

What part. seg. is there - sub specie aeternae -
to our thinking - puffing - playing by rules -

~~He, however,~~
~~was a common man who - during his~~
~~days on earth~~ ^{we can feel} ~~felt~~ ^{deply} ~~the thrill of a~~
~~loyalty - a~~ ~~great~~ ~~love - a~~ ~~great~~ ~~sacrifice -~~
~~a sure & honest craftsmanship - a~~

~~He shall be~~ ^{we say} ~~shall be~~ ^{referred to as} ~~called~~ ^{blended, united,}
~~greatness~~

RABBI A. H. SILVER
CLEVELAND, OHIO



Enclosed for your review -