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Regaining Lost Horizons, 1937.

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REGAINING LOST HORIZONS

BY
RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

WRHS
AT
THE TEMPLE
ON
SUNDAY, MAY 9, 1937



The theme of James Hilton's book "Lost Horizon" which is now being artistically produced as a moving picture has been a favorite theme for poets and writers . Throughout the ages it has been a recurrent theme in the wish-life of mankind. There is hardly a man who at some time or another in his life has not experienced this longing, this nostalgia for the distant horizon on the rim of which lies the delectable valley of our hearts' desire. In a sense, this hunger of the race for distant horizons is an escape from reality.

There are periods in human history when conditions become so bad and the problems of life become so involved and seemingly so insoluble that the generation of that period is seized with a mood, a sense of impending doom. And then it would like to escape, to free itself from the coils, the involvements, the problems, anxieties, to find somewhere on earth a sequestered, a secluded spot of utter peace and tranquility, a spot into which the anxieties, urgencies, desperations of the world are not allowed to enter. In such periods, and they are frequent in the history of mankind, you will find people leaving their homes in populated cities and going out into the wilderness. Kings have been known to leave their thrones and enter monasteries. Whole generations of men will wait prayerfully for the coming of a Messiah who will bring them into that kingdom which they have been unable to build for themselves.

You may recall, those of you who have read this delightful book of James Hilton called "Lost Horizon", that it was this impending sense of doom in the world and to escape from it, to preserve something of the treasures, beauties of the world which prompted Father Perrault to build his Shangri-La, his lamasery way up in the mountains of Tibet. To his Disciple, Hugh Conway, whom

he had kidnapped and brought to Shangri-La in order to prepare him as his successor, Father Perrault gives the motive which prompted him to build this lamasery. He says to him:

"There is a reason, and very definite one indeed. It is the whole reason for this colony of chance-sought strangers living beyond their years. We do not follow an idle experiment, a mere whimsy. We have a dream and a vision. It is a vision that first appeared to old Perrault when he lay dying in this room in the year 1789. He looked back then on his long life, as I have already told you, and it seemed to him that all the loveliest things were transient and perishable, and that war, lust, and brutality might some day crush them until there were no more left in the world. He remembered sights he had seen with his own eyes, and with his mind he pictured others; he saw the nations strengthening, not in wisdom, but in vulgar passions and the will to destroy; he saw their machine power multiplying until a single-weaponed man might have matched a whole army of the Grand Monarque. And he perceived that when they had filled the land and sea with ruin, they would take to the air...Can you say tht his vision was untrue?"

"True indeed."

"But that was not all. He foresaw a time when men, exultant in the technique of homicide, would rage so hotly over the world that every precious thing would be in danger, every book and picture and harmony, every treasure garnered through two millenniums, the small, the delicate, the defenseless -- all would be lost like the lost books of Livy, or wrecked as the English wrecked the Summer Palace in Pekin."

"I share your opinion of that."

"Of course. But what are the opinions of reasonable men against

iron and steel? Believe me, that vision of old Perrault will come true. And that, my son, is why I am here, and why you are here, and why we may pray to outlive the doom that gathers around on every side."

"To outlive it?"

"There is a chance. It will all come to pass before you are as old as I am."

"And you think that Shangri-La will escape?"

"Perhaps. We may expect no mercy, but we may faintly hope for neglect. Here we shall stay with our books and our music and our meditations, conserving the frail elegancies of a dying age, and seeking such wisdom as men will need when their passions are all spent. We have a heritage to cherish and bequeath.  Let us take what pleasure we may until that time comes."

And so, way up in the mountains of Tibet, in the Valley of the Blue Moon, sheltered by insurmountable mountains hardly accessible to the world, Father Perrault and a few of his disciples built this community on the foundations and principles which the world outside trampled under foot - ~~and~~ particularly moderation of all things. To this place, to this Valley of the Blue Moon they brought all the art, all the treasures which the abundant gold found in this valley could purchase. And here, amidst refinement, culture, peace and pleasant labor, these people spent their days unhurried, unharassed, savoring all the richness of beautiful lovely living.

This is Shangri-La. And this, my friends, is all the Utopia that men have dreamed of since the beginning of time and in some instances, actually set about to establish.

In our own country, in the latter part of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century more than two hundred communities have been

established by dreamers. There are communities, one not far from Cleveland, which were established by religious enthusiasts, by people who were tired of the cruelties, the belligerency of the world around them and they turned to a new world and here they sought to establish these isles of peace and loveliness for themselves and their descendents. Shangri-La! And that has been the horizon that has beckoned mankind all through long weary centuries, the horizon which was frequently glimpsed but as frequently lost.

So that in 1937, we are just as far removed from Shangri-La as we ever were and the world is just as bad and topsy-turvy as it ever was - perhaps more so because it is a world full of explosives, hatred, civil war, bitter economic conflict and there are millions of people all over the world who would like to escape, run away, who are sick at heart, who can't stand the strain of it. They would like to find some peaceful lamasery, some isle of tranquility, security, where life would again be simplified, where men would rediscover the quiet sanities and the orderliness of human existence.

Unfortunately it can't be done. All such hopes were in the past, are today, and will in the future, be doomed to disappointment. There is no Shangri-La! There is no pleasant valley on the rim of the distant horizon.

"Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
of all of us - the place where in the end
We find our happiness, or not at all.

So wrote the poet Wordsworth. "Here or not at all!" Here and there an individual may free himself from the coils and involvements of ^{his} day and age. Here and there an individual may remove himself from the problems of society and drift away to some quiet, sequestered island and there lead a sort of

lotus existence, untroubled and unworried. That is possible for some individuals. For mankind, for the toiling millions of the earth, there is no running away. There is no place to run. Here, in London, in Berlin, in New York, in Cleveland, is where this new heaven and new earth is to be found if it is to be found at all. It is out of the hard realities of life itself, through struggle, sacrifice, planning, organization that mankind must hew out that new order which will help to give us some of the tranquility which we all long for. Every man and every woman who in his or her own life practices some of these principles of Shangri-La -- moderation, kindness, patience, is helping in his or her limited way to lay the foundation, stone upon stone, and to raise the pillars, one by one, of this sanctuary, of the ultimate principles of the human race.

Many many generations ago, mankind glimpsed those horizons for which we have been through the years groping. Long long ago, mankind caught sight of a Shangri-La, wherein "every man shall sit under his vine and his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid." Long long ago, men had a vision that "men shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; when nation shall not lift up swords against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

The visions were there. The horizons were there. But somehow mankind has lost sight of these horizons and never quite as much as in our own day - this day of tyranny, brutality and the fragmentization of mankind. We must try, as Hugh Conway did, after he lost his Shangri-La, to find our way back to that past which will some day enable us to enter into the delectable valley of peace and harmony.

The race itself has had horizons and has lost them. The individual man has such horizons and loses them. In our youth, my friends, we start out in life with our eyes glowingly fixed upon those distant magnificent horizons. Then through the years we lose them. In the generosity of youth filled with idealism, we are full of dreams of noble careers. We want to be worthy, true. There is a minimum of selfishness and a maximum of altruism. We are all reaching up for some Shangri-La in our own private lives. But unfortunately, through the years, almost unawaredly, we lose that vision, that Shangri-La. Our eyes turn downward. We become self-centered. Money, success, pride, position come between us, ourselves and our horizons. Mountains rise up to block out our horizons. We love our Shangri-La.

There is a story told of a rabbi who came to call upon a very rich man in a community. "We have a very poor family in our community," he said. And the rich man refused to give any help. The rabbi turned to him and said: "Look out and through the window. What do you see?" The man looked out through the window and said: "Why, I see people, many of them, men, women and children whom I know." "Now, look into the mirror. What do you see there?" "Why, I see there nobody but myself." "That is so, said the rabbi, "through a clear glass you could see people - men, women and children - other people - friends, relatives. Through this glass because it has a little silver on the back, you can see nobody but yourself."

That is how we lose horizons, friends. That is the saddest thing because we all start out with such beautiful dreams, to be fine, beautifyl, good. Then in the humdrum of life, grown into selfishness, self-centeredness, we lose Shangri-La.

How do we regain those lost horizons? And the wise folks regain them. The wise folks from time to time stop and check up on themselves. Like a man driving down the road frequently stops to consult the map of his itinerary, so the wise man stops and checks up on his life's itinerary. Where am I going? Why have I detoured from the highway? I am driving away from my Shangri-La. The wise man, the thoughtful man deliberately turns about.

In our religious literature we find () "Turn! About face!" We set aside a whole holiday season beginning with New Years, through ten days of Shubah, right through Yom Kippur dedicated to this motive of human life. Turn about! Regain your prospect. Glimpse your horizon again! Look up! If you have been hard-hearted, learn again how to be kindly. If you have been self-centered, learn again to be altruistic. If you have been thoughtless, learn to be solicitous! Turn about! Regain your Shangri-La! That is not easy to do, of course. But that is the whole purpose of life.

It is possible, my friends, even in this turbulent world in which we live, for man and women to have quiet sanctuaries in their lives, to have a quiet, peaceful world provided that they want it and want to build it-- a world which is removed from your vocation, from your business, from your every-day work, a world which is completely your own, into which you can retire from time to time to read, to reflect, to dream - a world where you can close the doors of what is going on outside, to shut out and to listen to your own thoughts, to the sounding of the invisible wings of your own hopes. And, my friends, if you can build just that kind of a world for yourself, a world into which you can invite a few friends, a few friends who are not too exacting, a world in which you can pursue out of the sheer love of the thing, a world where

you have your sheltered love, into which you pour the things dearest to you - into that world you can retire and find strength and solace. You and I could ^{not} escape to the mountains of Tibet as Hugh Conway did. But there is a way to build for ourselves a world out of ideals which are strengthened, out of devotions which are unswerved, out of a sound and clean way of life, out of lovely interests even in the midst of this worried troubled world because that world for ourselves is sacred, inviolable. And if we do that, perhaps we shall be able to escape somewhat the fever and the enemies of the world and taste a little of the milk of Paradise.

When you look about you as I frequently do - in those moments when I stand as it were, on the curb and watch, I see moving by me a sort of spectacle. I see certain people rush by me all hectic, flushed, figuratively speaking; and then I see people who are also occupied productively in the world and who are also doing a fine job in the world. But somehow there is about them an air of calmness, of repose, of steadiness. And I think to myself. That man is harassed, troubled. He has only one world in which to live in and that is a crazy world. He hasn't learned how to get out from that one world spiritually or intellectually. But this man has two worlds. When he is tired, he moves out of that world and he regains his composure, his perspective, his sense of balance, his sense of harmony. He rediscovers humanity.

Blessed is the man or the woman who doesn't permit himself or herself to become so absorbed in what is going on about him but who can stop occasionally and lift his or her eyes to some distant horizon.

484 sermon 484
1/ "Lost Horizon" - James Hilton - poets - writers - recurrent -
Hardly - longing - nostalgia for other Horizons - fulfilled - desire

2/ In a sense - expression - "Flight Complex" - Periods - Hermitage
- simplified - urgencies and auxiliaries -
- People leave - wilderness
- Kings " -
- whole generations of men

3/ Hilton's "Lost H." prompted -
The peaceful lamasery - "Shangri-La" - "Valley of the Blue Moon"
Perrault - to present -
To his young disciple - "Hugh Conway" - Kidnapped -
(Just 189)

4/ And so high up - Tibet - a community is founded on
Principles - "Moderation" -
Here are best treasures -
And there amidst refinement, peace, pleasant labor
they live long - unhurried - savoring

5/ This is "Shangri-La" This is Utopias -
Inviting Horizons - growing - glimpes of
good
communities

6/ In 1937 - as far removed from 'Shanghai'

"As bad, twisted and topsy-turvy" -

And now full of menace and apprehension

Full of Explorers - hats etc

Men would like to escape - lamasery - toils.

7/ But - it can't be done! All such hopes -

There simply is no "Sh. Ha" (Just)

Here and there an individual -

For mankind - millions no running away -

Here! Here out

Every man -

8/ Long ago Mankind glimpsed Horizons - Prophets
lost! To day = Terror -

Regain! Chin! as Conway - Structures

9/ In our Personal lives, too, we glimpse - youth
and later lose them.

In the generosity - we set high destinies

beautiful and noble careers

Maximum

we want to be fine - worthy - true

And then, then the advancing years, unawaresly
we lose

Our eyes turn downward - self centered -

Money - come bet. us -

Mountains blot out -

Rabbi (Josh)

10/ The wide world - repairs - highway

From time to time check up - Current Map

High road - Detour

Deliberately - 2/2/2

Hard - Kind; Exploiting - Rapacious - thoughtless
deceitful; self centered.

11/ It is possible to have a little "Sh. La" - turbulent
but Vortex

Every man should have a "Private World" - retire
- apart from his vocation - Fears - Hobbies -

Read - Reflect - dream - close doors - listen to no one -

We cannot go to Tibet - shelled homes - steady -
unswerving - warm friendships - oases - who tell
escape somewhat - perils & menace -
task of Paradise



ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE
EAST 105TH AND ANSEL ROAD ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 8, 1937

REGAINING LOST HORIZONS

The theme of James Hilton's "Lost Horizon", now artistically produced as a moving picture, has been a recurrent one in the wish-life of mankind. We all have a nostalgia for some far-off horizon on the rim of which lies the delectable valley of our heart's desire.

There are periods in human history when conditions became so bad and problems so involved, desperate and seemingly impossible of solution that whole generations are seized with a sense of impending doom and the desire to escape. Then men yearn for some distant hermitage of tranquility where life is again simplified and into which the urgencies and anxieties of a twisted world are not allowed to enter.

These are the Utopias, which under one name or another, men have dreamed of and have actually endeavored to establish throughout history.

Unfortunately such hopes have always been doomed to disappointment. Here and there an individual may free himself from the coils and involvements of his day and age and find sequestered peace in some isle of security where he can carry on a lotus existence. For the millions of the struggling masses of the earth this is impossible. There is no running away. There is no peaceful lamasery in the Valley of the Blue Moon to which the masses of mankind can retire, where amidst refinement, peace and pleasant labor they ~~xxx~~ can live long, unhurried and unharassed lives, savoring all the loveliness of living. It is out of the hard bitter realities of life, through suffering and sacrifice, by means of planning and organization slowly and with many heart-breaking set-backs that mankind must hew out a cleaner and lovelier order of life for all.

In our private lives, too, when we are young, we glimpse distant horizons and later on lose them. In the generosity of our youth we set high destinies

for ourselves, beautiful and noble careers. We want to be fine, worthy, true. Through the advancing years, however, we lose, almost unawaredly, those horizons. Our eyes turn downward. We become self-centered. Money, success, pride, position come between us and ourselves. Mountains rise up and blot out the shimmering horizons.

The wise folk of the earth make constant efforts to regain those lost horizons. From time to time they check up on themselves. They consult the map of their life's itinerary. They ask themselves why they have detoured from the highway. They say to themselves: "This is not the road that I wished to travel on! Yonder is not the city to which I wished to go!" And deliberately they turn about.

It is possible even in this turbulent age of ours for every man to have a little "Shangri-La" - a little private world apart from his vocation into which he can retire from time to time to read, reflect and dream - a world where a man can close doors and listen to his own thoughts and to the beating of the invisible wings.

A ~~few~~ few friends, a hobby, a sheltered love, a steady, clean way of living, a few friends, and these not too exacting -- these will help a man to escape somewhat the fever and menace of the world and to taste a little of the milk of Paradise.

Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us, - the place where in the end
We find our happiness, or not at all.

words worth - Fr. R.