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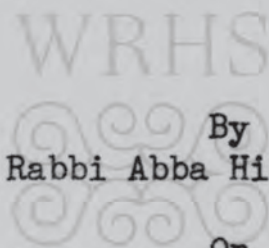
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What is Permanent in Character?, 1937.

489

WHAT IS PERMANENT IN CHARACTER?

First of a series of four lectures on "Things Permanent" -  
the things that endure though all else change.



By  
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

On  
Sunday morning, November 7, 1937

At  
The Temple



We are so accustomed to the idea of change and evolution that many people come to think of morals as a sort of improvisation, as a sort of temporary expedient. We have come to think of morals as something shifting from age to age, from place to place, possessed of no continuity, no direction, no informing principle. That, of course, is sheer nonsense. Morals do change, of course. But there is no caprice. Morals do adjust themselves to times, places, circumstances. But there is no chaos. The stream of moral life moves sometimes into narrower channels and sometimes into wider channels, but the stream is a constant stream, fairly continuous, very steady though not uninterrupted.

The moral life of man advances toward definite goals and they are twin goals, if you will, the twin goals of freedom and responsibility. That is to give to the life of the individual the fullest scope of self-expression, self-realization for fulfillment within a free and just society. And no ethics worthy of its name in any epochal civilization but what took cognizance of these twin goals, these basic ends in the life of man and set about organizing these basic ends. No age, of course, ever quite succeeded in realizing fully its ethical goal. Custom and usage and convention always lagged far behind the ideal. That is simple to understand. But the ideal was always present in the lives and aspirations of a few of the moral pioneers of an age and from time to time, morals so bound them that the ideal broke through custom and convention and propelled mankind nearer to these twin goals of which I spoke.

In other words, there are definite universals in morals and they are binding upon all men regardless of the differences which exist among men, nations, races, regardless of variations. Of course



there are no two people alike because there is no single family wherein there are no vital differences between the members which constitute that family. Nevertheless there are morals, qualities which are indispensable to every normal human which are necessary to his well-being and necessary to the well-being of the group, society. No man is exempted from these universal morals. No man however gifted or talented is automatically exempted from the maintenance of the moral laws of mankind.

What are these universal qualities in morals. What is permanent in the moral life of the individual. What is permanent in character? In the first place, what is character? A man is a multiple. In a sense a man is a composite of many human beings. A man stands in numerous relationships in life. He is at one and the same time, a husband, father, son, citizen, a member of a business group, a member of profession, a member of the human race. He is a friend. And a man has to make adjustments to these numerous relationships constantly. Furthermore a human being is called upon almost daily to make decisions, render judgments, choose, act. Therefore, character is the total man in action. Character is the inner organization of a human being, the inner coherence of an individual, that organization and coherence which enables him in all these numerous relationships to act as one man, to act independently, intelligently, purposefully and not whimsily, sporadically, if you wish.

Character, in other words is what makes man whole, one, distinctive. The word character comes from the Greek word which means to "make furrows" to engrave. In Hebrew we have a



beautiful word for the perfect man - "Ish Tamim" - an organized human being. It was Emerson who said that "character is like an acrostic. You can read it forward, backward and across and it always spells the same thing. In other words man's character is the governing element in life. He always acts and you can be sure he will always act according to the inner necessity of his life. Character is destiny. A man who has developed his character will act in <sup>a</sup> certain definite way inescapably, not because there is an external fate which is compelling him to act in a certain way but because his inner will having taken possession of his thought and conduct, will make man act always right. In that sense, character is a challenge to fate.

Fate means that man must act in a certain way because forces outside him have predetermined him to act that way, that he can't help himself.

Character, on the other hand, denies this. Character builds up within man an inner organization which enables him to do certain things in the face of fate, fear, punishment or the opinion of his fellow men. Character is the free man of action and the meaning of life, the real, profound meaning of life is found, therefore, not in fate, but in character.

Character, my friends, may be said to be the basic health of a human being. When a man has character, you know that all his inner functions, operations, are harmonious. Without character a man decays. Intellect without character is charlatanism. To use a simile of the Rabbis - when a man has intellect but no character, he is like a tree that has numerous branches and beautiful foliage but no roots. When a storm strikes the tree, that tree is overthrown.



Character is not something that is given to an individual. Character is something achieved. Character is the result of constant training and exercise in right conduct, in moral pursuits which are frequently attained by much trial, struggle and effort and suffering. This constant self-training, exercise is what gives us habits and these habits are the component elements in character. Therefore it is of supreme importance to begin a man's training almost from very birth, to continue it to the very end. It was a wise educator who once said that it is well to wait to discover what a child's habits are before you recommend <sup>a</sup>/certain career to him. But for character development, we can't wait. It is vitally necessary for the parent, <sup>the</sup> community to begin/training of character from the very cradle. That, of course, is true of character and religious education. I have often heard a parent say: "Oh, well, I don't have to give my child religious education. He is young. When he grows up he will have a choice. Character and religious education you begin in infancy - to build that inner organization, that inner coherence so that by the time he grows older he is pretty well done or undone.

But what, then, is permanent in character? What are the things, <sup>of</sup> what are the things/permanent value which every age must stress and must insist on as quintessential in personal morality if it is not to destroy itself? What must it inculcate in the rising generations as the supreme values of living? I would say that there are a series of reverences, a series of veneration - veneration for the human body, for the human intellect, for the human spirit, for human handiwork, and for human society. These are the permanent values in character and these veneration translate themselves into the ideals, into the



aspirations which strengthen them and ennoble life, which nurture art, science, philosophy and religion and which establish justice and peace among men.

I stress the word veneration and reverence because in character, it is attitudes which are decisive. It is approach that is paramount, the spiritual and intellectual approach. The human being cannot always achieve what he sets out to achieve for after all, man is man and not God. But if his attitudes are right, if the things which are noble he regards as noble, that man is never lost. It is the scoffer, the man who denies the very validity of these ideals who is pretty well lost. "Happy is the man", says the first Psalm, "who does not sit in the seat of the scoffer". That is the secret of it all. "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness."

Reverence for the human body - that body which the Rabbis called the Temple in which the soul dwelt. When a man has that reverence in him, it will lead him to temperance, sobriety, to avoid all excesses. It will lead him to physical cleanliness, to physical health and it will lead society to the creation of those agencies and institutions which protect, safeguard human life. No great ethics in civilization ever contemned the human body. No great ethics unless it was vitalized by an extreme theologic worldliness ever looked upon the human body as a cesspool of iniquity, something ugly, despicable. On the contrary the body was a God even as the soul was a God. "Both are divine". It makes no difference what civilization you will have, if it is worthy of the name it will have to be a civilization which will express ~~ref~~ reverence for the human body.



The second veneration is the human intellect - Chachmah - which the Bible says is God's dearest and most precious creation. Respect for learning, for wisdom, for the eternal quest of man for more insight and profounder understanding about the universe about him, and inside of him. That is indispensable to character. It is that which makes man study, develop mentally. It is that which gives the human race the impulse towards that immemorial quest, the quest of the Holy Grail of Truth. It is that which enables the human race to destroy war, error, ignorance, falsehood, superstition - which render human ugly. Not every human being can be a genius intellectually. It is not possible for every human being to be a great student in writing or in philosophy. But it is absolutely necessary that every human being should have a profound deep set respect for learning truth, that he continue to build schools, universities and continue to bring light and more light into the habitations of mankind.

The third reverence is reverence for the human spirit. I use that term for lack of a better term - I mean reverence for the dignity, for the worth, for the inviolability of human personality, reverence for the sanctity of human life. I mean a vital conviction of what is the link which binds man to God, which exalts, extols man, I mean also a realization of the suffering, the struggling which man must endure in order to wrest a little bit of happiness in the world. Reverence for human spirit will give man, first of all his ideals. He will have something to aspire to, something to look up to. It will keep him from stepping down, from dragging other people down with him. It will also teach him sympathy and kindness. And to Society this reverence for the spirit of man will bring continuing impulses



toward greater freedom, greater justice, toward greater equality, toward greater democracy, greater peace in the world. The indignities which are being visited upon people all over the world is due to this loss of reverence of the spirit of man, this cheapening of the individual, this regimentation and submergence of the individual.

Another permanent thing in character I would say, is a reverence for human handiwork. God created the world in six days. Whenever he fashioned a day's work, God saw that it was good. Labor, work, performed by man in faithfulness and honesty is holy. This reverence for human handiwork will give to an individual an ideal of craftsmanship, an ideal of industry, a pride of achievement. Human labor is the God in man ~~x~~ fashioning creation anew every day! Reverence for human handiwork will give to society its art, its science and all the things that are beautiful.

And lastly, I would say that a thing permanent in character is a reverence for human society, for the group life to which we owe everything including our own lives, an understanding of how we are bound fibre by fibre to the group, a realization that will give to the individual an essential element of altruism, of selflessness to his make-up. It will help him to understand the beauty of human service, of noblesse oblige. It will help him to become a more capable being, a joyous co-worker in a cooperative enterprise which we call society. It will allow him to understand that it is far more important to give than to receive, to share than to accumulate. And to Society it will give human material for the building of a perfect society - the Kingdom of God.

This last reverence, reverence for society, ~~if~~ is of course the most difficult because it asks for the largest measure of sacrifice



from the individual. It requires an heroic measure of self-control. We have to learn how to curb our appetites, our ambitions, our desires. We have to learn how to coordinate our individualities with those of others. Because this last reverence is so difficult, all the great religions of mankind laid the greatest emphasis on it. "Love thy neighbor as thyself." "Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God."

These, my friends, I regard as the permanent things in character. And character is largely a personal matter. There are so many people in the world today who would like to instruct the world, to reform the world. Reform yourself? That is too difficult, too unpleasant. I have known many business men, individuals who any day in the year can give you a plan for the reconstruction of the whole system of society and the establishment of a new kingdom but who haven't yet learned the first rudiments of how they themselves can be good men, good fathers, good sons, good friends, faithful laborers, honest business men. It is very easy to point out what is wrong with the world. A truly intelligent person first points the finger of accusation against himself. The Commandments of the Bible are written in the second person singular.

It is important in our day to emphasize two things: first in this age of change and confusion it is necessary to emphasize that there are enduring, continuing classic values in human character which no society can afford to ignore and secondly that it is important in this day to organize society in institutions, laws so that stress is laid on the individual, man's relation to his destiny, man's relation to his God.



Our religion has always underscored these values, reverence for the human body, reverence for the human intellect, reverence for the human spirit, reverence for human handicwork and reverence for human society.





1. Things Permanent - So accustomed to idea of change and evolution in all fields that many have come to think of morals as improvisations, temporary expedients, shifting with each age, possessed of no continuity or direction or informing principle. This is of course sheer nonsense. There are changes of course, but no caprice. There are necessary adjustments to time, place and circumstance but not chaos. The stream of moral life moves at times into wider and at times into narrower channels - but the stream is <sup>the same and</sup> fairly constant. Strikingly, the west un-  
interruptedly man's moral life has been progressing towards the twin goals of freedom and responsibility - greater scope for the individual's life through a free and just society. No ethics worthy the name in any epoch of civilization and in any place <sup>ever failed to</sup> but what organized itself around those <sup>twin</sup> basic ideas. No age <sup>of course</sup> realized its <sup>in full</sup> ethics. Customs and conventions lagged far behind the ideal. But the ideal was always present usually in the lives and aspirations, the advanced <sup>the moral progress</sup> few and <sup>from time to time</sup> often the ideal broke through the customs & conventions, and propelled the people that period <sup>on</sup> a step nearer towards the ideal.

2. <sup>Both personal and public</sup> There are universal in morals, and they are inconstant <sup>and all nations</sup> on all men, regardless of their differences and variations. No two people are alike. <sup>and all nations</sup> The members of any given family differ widely one from another. But there are moral qualities which are indispensable for all - upon which necessary for the well-being of each, upon which society must insist - and no exceptional excellence in talent or genius in any one human being is warrant or excuse for disregarding them.

3. What are these universal and permanent things in character? What, in the first place is character? A man is a worthwhile being. He stands in numerous relationships. He is son etc. He must ~~must~~ <sup>must</sup> make adjustments to each & every one of these relationships. He must ~~must~~ <sup>must</sup> evaluate, choose, judge, evaluate, act. Character is  $\therefore$  the total man in action. It is the inward organization of a man, the inward coherence, which







~~the essential constitution of the man~~  
It is what he is. Not what he thinks he is. A what he says he  
is. A what others think he is. It is himself - his real self -  
in revealing action.





Some one has truly said, that we can wait upon evidence of aptitude or talent in a young man before we recommend a career to him. But we must begin character devel. from the very outset of his life. Whether he was naturally can afford to wait.

6. What is Permanent in Character? What must every age insist on as fundamental in personal morality - if it is not to destroy itself? What must it inculcate in the rising generation - as the supreme values of living? A series of generations, of reverence for the human body, the human intellect, the human spirit, ~~and~~ the human handiwork, ~~the human society.~~ Their homage which is paid to them translates itself into aspirations and ideals which strengthen and exalt man, ~~create~~ <sup>nurture</sup> art and science and philosophy and religion, and establish peace <sup>and peace</sup> further among men.
7. I stress the that of generations for their values. For it is attitude which is decisive in character. It is the sp. & intell. approach which is paramount. Man cannot always achieve what he aspires to - for he is man not god. But if his attitudes are correct - if the things which are noble he regards as noble, and defers to them in his work-life - he will never entirely fail. It is the scuffer - the man who denies their validity, and their value - who is forever lost! <sup>שלי, פ'ל -</sup> <sup>ג'ה' תל</sup> man should have <sup>עצ'ר ע'כ'ד = Esteem of others</sup>
8. Reverence for the human body - which our Rabbis called the Temple wherein the soul dwells - will lead men to temperance, sobriety, physical cleanliness, <sup>exercise</sup> and health, and the development of their <sup>science and</sup> institutions for the race, protection and strengthening of the physical man. No noble civilization ever <sup>careless</sup> cheapened the status of the human body, and no ethics, unless it was vitiated by <sup>an</sup> extreme other-worldliness, even failed to teach reverence for the man's physical life.



9. Reverence for the human intellect - ~~which~~ <sup>Truths</sup> for knowledge and wisdom - which the Bible calls the dew like, Heaven - will lead man on in his work. Moral quest which has been his ~~own~~ <sup>own</sup> ~~cross~~ <sup>cross</sup> this immortality. It will inspire the individual to study ~~and~~ <sup>research</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> contemplation. It will sharpen the human tools for proper research & investigation. It will continue to build our universities and academies. It will continue to destroy error, ignorance, superstition and prejudice which make man's life dark and ugly. Respect for learning <sup>and</sup> wisdom, and for the ~~highest~~ <sup>highest</sup> ~~but~~ <sup>but</sup> ~~persons~~ <sup>persons</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~truth~~ <sup>truth</sup> - is an indisf. quality of character.

[illegible]

11- Revere for human handiwork - Poalm - לִפְנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים  
- לִפְנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים - What man builds in honesty & integrity  
is holy! Human labor is the food in man's forbearing creations  
anew every day!  
Will give man - health, faith for craftsmanship, industry,  
pride & achievement.  
and to society - Art and the beautiful -







Hermont 489

ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE, ANSEL ROAD  
AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 7, 1937.

WHAT IS PERMANENT IN ~~ANY~~ CHARACTER?

*Dr. Abba Hillel Silver. The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio.*

We are so accustomed to the idea of change and evolution in all fields that many men have come to think of morals as sheer improvisation, temporary expedients possessed of no continuity, direction or informing principle. There are changes, of course, in morals, but no caprice. There are necessary adjustments to time and place, but not chaos. The stream of moral life moves at times into wider and at times into narrower channels but the stream is the same and fairly constant.

Steadily, though not uninterruptedly, man's moral life progresses toward the twin goals of freedom and responsibility - greater scope for the individual's life within a free and just society. No ethics worthy of the name in any epoch <sup>d</sup> civilization ever failed to organize itself around these twin basic ideas.

Character is the total man in action. It is the inward coherence which enables a man who is a multiple being and stands in numerous relationships and faces daily the necessity of ~~xxx~~ making many choices and decisions to act consistently and purposefully. Character is what makes a man dependable.

Under all circumstances <sup>the man of character</sup> ~~he~~ is sure to act according to <sup>the</sup> ~~his~~ inner necessity <sup>of his being</sup>.

~~In the absence of character, man decays. Intellect without character is charlatanism.~~ Character is something achieved. It is the result

of long training and continued exercise in right conduct and moral pursuits. <sup>It is the acquired moral skill which ~~is~~ makes possible the exercise of moral freedom.</sup>

What is permanent in character is a series of veneration, of reverences for the human body, the human intellect, the human spirit, the human handiwork and the human society. These veneration translate themselves into ideals which strengthen and exalt man, nurture art, science, philosophy and religion and establish greater justice and peace in the world.



It is attitude and approach which are decisive in character.

Man cannot always achieve what he aspires to. But if his attitudes are correct, if the things which are noble are regarded by him as noble, he will never entirely fail. It is the scoffer, the man who denies the very validity and ~~sanctity~~ <sup>manate</sup> of these values, who is quite lost.

Reverence for the human body will lead man to ~~temperance~~ <sup>and to</sup> ~~sobriety~~, physical cleanliness and health. It will lead society <sup>to</sup> the development of those <sup>medical</sup> ~~sciences~~ <sup>- health agencies, hospitals and</sup> and institutions which care for and protect the physical life of man.

Reverence for the human intellect will inspire the individual ~~to~~ study and contemplation and to the quest of learning and wisdom which are man's magnificent adventure in life. ~~It will move society to continue its~~ <sup>Our age is systematically destroying,</sup> ~~heroic task to destroy error, ignorance, superstition and falsehood which~~ <sup>in blind political or economic dogmatism backed up by brute</sup> ~~make man's life dark and ugly.~~ <sup>force, man's reverence for the sovereignty, the</sup> ~~human mind.~~

Reverence for the human spirit, for the dignity, worth and inviolability of human personality, for the spiritual link which binds man to God, for man's inexhaustible potentialities <sup>and and</sup> for his hard road of suffering and struggle <sup>gives</sup> ~~will give~~ to the individual <sup>the</sup> ~~ideals~~ <sup>ethical</sup> ~~a sense of honor, loyalty,~~ sympathy, and kindness, and to society the ~~impulses towards greater~~ freedom, equality, justice and peace.

Reverence for human handiwork will give to the individual habits of faithful craftsmanship, industry and ~~pride of~~ <sup>pride of</sup> achievement and to society ~~art and~~ <sup>art and</sup> esthetic pursuits.

Reverence for human society, for the group life to which we are indebted for everything including our very lives, will give to the individual

It will  
continue  
to build  
on univ-  
sities and  
in schools  
of research.



*the sure of cooperation but*

~~life the elements of unselfishness and altruism.~~ He will learn to give as well as to receive, to share as well as to possess. He will come to despise careerism and exploitation and will learn the glory of human service, of noblesse oblige. *To* ~~it~~ *it gives* society will have the dynamics for the building of the Kingdom of God.





# WHAT IS PERMANENT IN CHARACTER?

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Character is something achieved. It is the result of long training and continued exercise in right conduct and moral pursuits. It is the acquired moral skill which makes possible the exercise of moral freedom.

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Reverence for the human body will lead man to temperance and to physical cleanliness and health. It will lead society to the development of those medical sciences and institutions which care for and protect the physical life of man.

Reverence for the human intellect will inspire the individual to the quest of learning and wisdom which are man's magnificent adventure in life. It will continue to build our universities and our schools of research. Our age is systematically destroying, in blind political or economic dogmatism backed up by brute force, man's reverence for the sovereignty of the human mind.

Reverence for the human spirit, for the dignity, worth and inviolability of human personality, for the spiritual link which binds man to God, for man's inexhaustible potentialities and for his hard road of suffering and struggle gives to the individual the ideals of honor, loyalty, sympathy, and kindness, and to society the ethical impulses towards freedom, equality, justice and peace.

Reverence for human handiwork will give to the individual habits of faithful craftsmanship, industry and pride of achievement and to society art and esthetic pursuits.

Reverence for human society, for the group life to which we are indebted for everything including our very lives, will give to the individual the sense of cooperative living. He will learn to give as well as to receive, to share as well as to possess. He will come to despise careerism and exploitation and will learn the glory of human service, of noblesse oblige. To society it gives the dynamics for the building of the Kingdom of God.