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What must we give up in order to be happy?, 1938.

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WHAT MUST WE GIVE UP IN ORDER TO BE HAPPY?

By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, January 9, 1938



Most people think that in order to be happy, we must require many things. In reality, in order to be happy, we must renounce many things. Happiness is quite as much a matter of giving up as it is a matter of gathering in. And the wise men of all times knew this. They knew that sacrifice and self-denial were of the very warp and woof of happiness, that they are, in fact, the divine law of the good and happy life. It was the first lesson which God taught unto Abraham - sacrifice.

There is a charming story told by one of the wise men of a beggar who all his life missed out on happiness. And one day he heard that the great king of the country was to come to his town, the town in which this beggar lived. The beggar resolved to wait until the king would come down the highway in his chariot. He would then rush out into the path of the chariot and throw himself, prostrate himself before him. He would say to him, "Great and mighty king, look down on your old and humble servant. I am old. I have nothing. All my days I have missed out on happiness. Thou art rich and mighty beyond all the imaginings of men. Out of thy great wealth, give me something that I may be happy, too, for the remaining few years of my life."

And so the great day arrived and the multitudes thronged the highways and among the throng was the beggar. Soon the trumpets sounded and a great cry went up, "The king! The king!" The chariot of the king drove down the highway. The beggar threw himself before the chariot, reached up his hands and cried to the king, "Great and mighty king, look down upon this old man. I am old. I have nothing. Thou art ~~rich~~ rich and mighty beyond all the imaginings of men. Give me something of thy great wealth that

The great king descended from his chariot, walked up to the beggar and said to him, "Friend, you ask me to give you something." "Give me something". The beggar reached into pocket and brought out a dry crumb of bread and gave it to the king. And that night, alone in his hovel, the beggar, on going through the pockets of his coat, found in place of the dry crumbs of bread, a lump of gold which the king had put there.

The wise men of old knew that it is only as we give that we get. And the more we give, the more we get. The more we surrender, the more we acquire.

What must we then give up in order to be happy? In the first place, we must give up trying to be happy. We must give up pursuing happiness. You can pursue pleasure but you cannot pursue happiness. Happiness deludes all pursuits. And the more energetic you are in the quest, in the pursuit of happiness, the more it will escape you, because, don't you see, happiness is not a thing in itself. It is not a reality in itself. It is an incidental phenomenon. It goes with. It is the result of certain kinds of work that you do or certain kinds of experiences which you have. Happiness may be said to be a sort of radiation, a radiation of some inner satisfaction to some congenial work that you are engaged in, or some congenial thought or memories.

When the earth swings into the orbit of the sun, it is drenched in light. When it swings away from the sunlight, it is stepped in darkness. It is the course which the earth takes that determines whether there is sunlight or darkness. And so it is with a man's life. When the course of ^{his} life, when his interest

swings into the inner light which is in man, which is always in man, then his course becomes suffused with the light, radiance, happiness, contentment. When it swings away from that light, it becomes darkness. That is what the Psalmist meant when he said, "Light is sown for the righteous and greatness for the upright."

Another thing that we must give up in order to be happy is look for it in far, far away places. There are two diseases of the human eye. One is Myopia and the other is Hyperopia. In one instance, the eye can see only things very near and in the other instance, only objects which are distant. The things near at hand are almost impossible to be discerned. Both are diseases. Now, spiritually, most men suffer from the Hyperopia. They can only see the desirable, the delectable things, far away, beyond, in the other man's field. Things near at hand are humdrum, drab uninteresting but over there, there is romance, there is glory. Of course, the fellow over there feels the same way about it. His world is drab, uninteresting. But over here, it is bright, and colorful and full of adventure, you would rather have other days, other climes, other work, other wives, other husbands, other children. Happiness is always elsewhere. But that is a fallacy, my friends. That is Hyperopia. Because happiness, when all is said and done, is here, in sight of a man, in what a man is doing, in a man's philosophy, in a man's attitude towards life. By going elsewhere you don't get away from the world. That same thing which God said unto the children of Israel concerning the mitzvot, commandments of life, may be said about human happiness.

"Happiness is in your heart." That is the second thing we ought

to give up - the futile attempt to find it elsewhere.

Then we ought to give up something else. We ought to give up something of the present for the future in order to be happy. There is an old Jewish legend which tells the story of a man who was shipwrecked and who found himself, after many days, drifting toward a barren and deserted shore. He wandered about in that strange, unknown land, for many days until one day he saw in the distance the tower of the dome of a great city. And he approached that city. And as he came near the gates of the city, two men dressed in uniform of guards took hold of him and brought him into the city and lead him into the great palace which crowns the citadel. There his raiment of poverty and rags was stripped from him and he was dressed in rich purple apparel. He was seated upon a throne and on his head was placed a crown, and in his hand, a sceptre. And every one in the great audience chambre made obeisance to him. And one day, he asked a servant what it all meant. The servant told him that the people which inhabit this country were a strange people living between heaven and earth. It was their custom to choose for their king the first stranger who happened to come to their gates. This stranger was made king - but only for one year. During that year he had everything that his heart desired. At the end of the year, the king was stripped of his raiment and was given back his poverty-stricken rags, was put in a ship and shipped off to some desolate island and there left. "What happened to all those who preceded me?" asked the king. They ruled for a year, they indulged themselves to their hearts' content and after the year was up were taken to some desolate island to ^{starve} ~~starve~~ and die .

This stranger was a wise man - so says the legend. Instead of spending all his time in revelry, he thought of the future. So, during the year, he commanded that some of the men go to the desolate, deserted island and plough the ground, set up houses and transfer livestock. Being king, his word was law. And during the year, his servants peopled that desolate island and built him a city there. At the end of the year, he removed his purple raiment, was given back his old garments, was put in a boat and sent off to the island. But by his foresight, he had provided for himself for the day of reckoning which he knew would come. The wise man, in his hour of prosperity lays up for himself, a world, a city, a sanctuary, a place of refuge for the day of adversity, not merely in a material sense. The wise man insures himself not only materially against the day of adversity, but intellectually, spiritually and socially as well.

I know many people who would like to retire, have all the physical means but who are afraid to retire because they don't know what to retire to. The wise man stores up during his active and vigorous life, stores up wisdom. The wise man trains his ear, his eyes, all his senses so that in the days to come, he will have many more interests, many more contacts with more things in the world. He will have a peopled world to which to retire.

In order to be happy, my friends, we must sacrifice something of the present for the future, and conversely, in order to be happy, we must sacrifice something of the future for the present. Some people are so ambitious, so absorbed in getting somewhere, so tense from ambitions which are all-consuming, that they sacrifice the whole present for the distant future. That is to say, they sacrifice

whatever little joy each day can give them, whatever little happiness each day can give them in their over-zealousness to get there, to get success. Sometimes, unfortunately, they trample upon their own lives, those closest to them in their haste. So many people live poor in order to die rich. That is the way of the miser and the way of the fool.

Generally speaking, in order to be happy, we ought to give up haste, super-activity. What shall a man do who is in a hurry? The answer is, "Nothing!" Because everything that he is likely to do will be wrong. Life is altogether too short, my friends, to shorten it still further by too much haste and too many activities. It is an interesting thing that in our Torah, in our Talmud, there are far more laws concerned with not doing things than with doing things. There are far more negative than positive laws. It is far wiser to linger along the way of life, to sample everything, to relish to the last drop, all there is life. Nature reveals herself most lovingly to those who are calm of mind, tranquil of soul. Nature never catches up with a man who is in a hurry. Death does. Those who are too zealous, too impatient, miss most of the things that they are in such a hurry to get. And that holds true not only of the individual, but it holds true of society, generally. Most of the tragedies of the world today, in 1938, as you scan the scene of the world, most of the tragedies are attributable to the impatience, the pride, the furious haste of peoples, quick lunch methods, to attain Kingdom come in a hurry.

Recently I read a very stimulating editorial in the New York Times which significantly is called Liberalism and Tomorrow. I read the following few lines from it.

"The former liberal approach to social problems was the moderate, gradualist approach. The liberal temper was middle-of-the-road and a step at a time, and Tennyson described its ideal well enough as freedom slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent. But the new Liberal is in a hurry; and being in a hurry he finds himself hankering for the moral and technical shortcuts which the dictators employ as a matter of course. There are Liberals who contend that the end justifies the means, that conflagrations are not extinguished with rose water, and that you cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs.

"But today, more than ever, we are bound to ask whether it really pays, for the sake of a certain gain in tempo, to abandon the gradualist, humanitarian, fraternal liberalism of history for the Progress that hacks through to its objective, let the millions of human chips fall where they may."

There is something else we ought to give up in order to be happy and that too was well known to the wise men of all times. That is envy. Most unhappiness, most discontent is caused by comparison, not by comparing good things. We never become unhappy when we learn that other people give more to charity than we. Only when we compare what we have with another man's house, or another woman's mink coat, or her diamonds that we become unhappy. How little we know what we are really envying.

The bird which circles around another bird in a cage and sees that the bird in the cage has plenty of food and water is envious of the bird inside because he sees only the seed and the water. He doesn't see the cage. In the Ten Commandments, one commandment was chiseled in for all times. "Thou shalt not covet. "O God, how poor a man may be with nothing in the world but gold!" said a great American poet. Do we really know what is good for us when we envy other people? I question it.

There is a Chassidic legend of two men who were envious and complained to God. One man was blind and the other one was deaf. The blind man said to God, "They say that the world is beautiful, with mountains, fields, skies and I have never seen them." The deaf man complained, "Great God, the world is filled with music and song and I have never heard it. " Unto that city came a miracle worker who was possessed of a wonderful miracle ointment. The two men went to him and offered all they had to him to be cured. The miracle man spread ointment on the eyes of the blind man and he could see. He spread ointment over the ears of the deaf man and he could hear. They were both extremely happy. The

blind man went home and as he stepped into his house, he was startled and shocked. He had imagined his home a beautiful home, beautifully furnished. He found it drab, unattractive, poor. Then he saw his wife and that she was ugly and he saw his child and he was deformed. He prayed to God that his blindness might be restored to him.

The deaf man came and as he entered his home he heard his wife's voice loud and raucous. He heard his children quarreling, mean and cruel to one another. And He prayed to be brought back to that world of peace which was no longer his. He prayed to be restored to deafness. This is another one of those simple little legends which holds so much of human wisdom.

How little we know what is good for us and what we are really envying. "Who is the rich man?" "A man who is ."
That doesn't mean that a man shouldn't strive to improve his position. He must not be so obsessed with covetousness and envy that his life becomes unlivable, unbalanced.

There is another thing to give up, my friends, in order to be happy and that is false pride. A man that has false pride is always injured. He is never appreciated. A person who has a false pride is a person who is most unfortunate because he is always dependent upon other people. Happy is the man who has a calm attitude about himself, his work regardless of what other people think about it. How great are those who are humble in spirit." God did not reveal himself, say the rabbis, on the high mountain places. God revealed himself on the lowly mountain-sides because he loves to dwell with those humble in spirit.

Lastly, my friends, among things to give up, ^{and} there are many other things to give up, we ought to give up all forms of extremism - super-sensuality, super-intellectualism, super-pietism, over-subtlety, over-

refinement. It is not good. You see, life is an art and the essence of art is balance, harmony and simplicity. To be simple, said Emerson, one must be truly great." In fact, of the Bible was so convinced of this that he went even a step further and said "Better than wisdom and glory is a little foolishness." Excess, extremism - that makes philosophy shallow - that makes for affectation. In order to be happy, one must get close to the soil. So that, these are the things we must give up in order to be happy.

And, of course, one should give up the hot temper and the sharp tongue. That is the way to lose the last friend you have in the world. There is an old Spanish proverb which says: "If you have no honey in your jar, it is just as well to have it on your lips. You can carry it a step further and say that even if there is honey in your jar, it is just as well to have it on your lips too. I know really good people who somehow can't transfer that feeling to their lips. They don't mean to be mean. But they are sharp. It is hard for them to say a kind word. Don't hurt people. There is enough of tragedy and suffering and pain in the world without adding to it with the hard word and the sharp comment, not to speak of lying and slander. Give up the sharp tongue. Try to give it up. It is not so easy to control the hot temper. Who is strong? He who conquers. He who subdues .

There are lot of things to give up in order to be happy. It can be done. It is done by a great number of people who are happy, who avoid these things, who pray simple prayers for life: "Good God, give me some interesting work to do in the world. Help me to carry on, give me the love of those close to me and a few dear friends. And that

is all I ask in the world.



1/ Most people think - to be H. - acquire - In reality - renounce
H. result of giving up - just as much - gathering in
wise men - sacrifice, self-denial - very nature - Law of Good Life
First lesson taught - Abraham

Tagore -

2/ What must we give up? Pursuing H.!
You can pursue Pleasures - You cannot - It eludes all
the more energetically -
H. = incidental phenomenon - Accompanies - results from -
certain kinds of work - experiences -
Radiation from some inner Satisfactions - produced - congenial
When earth -

3/ Give up looking for H. - far far away
Two diseases, human Eye - Myopia - Hyperopia,
only near objects - distant objects - those near at hand seem
Spirit. most men - Hyperopia - Beyond - other main goal -
Here - all things - human-dream
And the people over there - find the other way round
Other days - other times - work - wives - husbands - children -
always H. found elsewhere
But H. - with us - in our own work - philosophy - attitudes
Going elsewhere brings you no nearer
What God said - 2/31 -

4/ Give up something of Present for Future.

"A King for a Year"

wise man does not live for P. only - Provides - to-morrow -
day of wrath - destroys

Not only in Material sense - insure his future -

5/ Give up something of Future for Present

Some people's ambitions - tease - absorbing - all consuming - ignoral

Sacrifice what little joy each day - goal of gold, fame, power

Trample

So covetous - future success - "live poor to die rich"

6/ Give up Haste generally. - Super-activity

What should a man do who is in a hurry? Nothing!

Life is altogether too short - for a man to shorten it -

What not to do - more numerous -

Linger along the way - sample - relish it last drops

Those who are too zealous - absorbed - strenuous - impatient
miss most

Nature reveals herself most lovingly - calm ^{heart} ~~mind~~, tranquil of
mind - mild of spirit -

Time for communion - detachment - rest & work

Menace of Haste (Just)

7/ G.O.B. up Envy.

Most discontent springs from comparisons.

אנחנו כל

How little we know what we are really envying - (Birds)

"O God, how poor a man may be
with nothing in the world but Gold"

Do we really know what is good for us - when we Envy

"The Blind and the Deaf"

אין לנו ראייה ואין לנו שמיעה

8/ False Pride.

Always hurt - insulted - unappreciated

"dependent on other people's opinions - attached

Calm - confidence

אין לנו אומץ ואין לנו ביטחון

Sinai



9/ G.O.B. up Extremism - Super-sensuality - Super-intellectualism -

Super-pictorialism - over-sensitivity - over-refinement

אין לנו אומץ ואין לנו ביטחון

Life is an Art - Harmony - Simplicity

"To be a simple man - one must be a great man"

10/ Hot Temper - Sharp Tongue

אין לנו אומץ ואין לנו ביטחון

"If you have no honey in your jar - it is as well to have it on
your lips"

Holden out of words - alienate.

Don't Hurt!

11/ Woe - Heath - Love - Friend -