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Husband-Wife, 1939.

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HUSBAND - WIFE

The first of a series of discourses on Fundamental
Human Relationships.

WRHS

By

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday, November 12, 1939

My dear Friends: It was long ago that man is a social animal, and his life is therefore channelled along manifold relationships. A man may at one and the same time be a son, a husband, a father, a brother, a citizen, a friend, an employer or an employee. A man may stand simultaneously in any of those relationships in life. The most vital and important, because they are the most decisive and continuous of those relationships are those relationships which are implanted within the family circle. They are the most fundamental because those relationships within the home are the most influential in determining the life of an individual, and at the same time are the most reflective of the real character of a man. What a man or a woman is to be is fixed largely by that molding complex of relationships in the home. What a man or a woman truly is is revealed most frankly, most accurately within the private world which is the home. Human life is made or marred, ^{the} human spirit is strengthened or destroyed, human happiness is won or lost nowhere as decisively as in the home.

And these relationships within the home are decisive not merely in the home but in community civilization. They are the bedrock upon which ^{rest} the larger complexes of human relationships, the city, the state. The quality of relationships within the home, the mutual attitudes of the members of the home in that microscopic community inescapably reflects itself within the world of life outside the home, in the larger world.

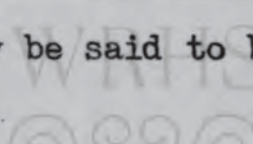
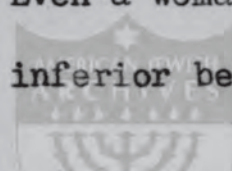
That is why so much of ethical teachings of all great religions has been directed towards the home and those who dwell therein. Our own religion, for example, already discerned the great truth that you cannot reform the world. You cannot improve the human race without first improving the morale of the family in the home. So our religion set about to exalt, to ennoble

human relationships within the home, to define a rather elaborate code, the aim of which was to sanctify the whole of human life through a precedent sanctity of the little worlds which make up the larger one.

Some religions despairing of human progress looked forward ^{to} and sought the quick liquidation of society through all forms of ascetism and through celibacy. Marriage was looked upon at best as something necessary but undesirable. Thus, for example, Paul who expected the early end of the world, the coming of a new society considered celibacy to be preferable to marriage. He thus declared that "He that giveth his daughter in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better." If men and women cannot be continent let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn." Such religions built monasteries and nunneries and ordained absolute celibacy for their clergymen. There were religious sects among all the great religions which prohibited marriage among their followers and which counselled those who sought admission into the religious community, if they had been married, to be come separated before they could be admitted into the community. Sex was regarded as a form of pollution; and woman as a sort of inferior being and a source of evil.

Not so Judaism. And here again is one of the unique characteristics of Judaism. Immediately after the first man was created, the Bible says that God declared "It is not good for man to be alone." Woman was therefore created from man as a companion to man and as a natural complement to man. The man and the woman together constitute the man - the complete human being. One of the first commandments unto man was "Be fruitful, and multiply. Life is sacred; love is sacred; the begetting and rearing of childred is a sacred act. How utterly different is this conception of fundamental human relationships of man and woman, husband and wife.

Marriage brings sanctity into the world. The unmarried man, the unmarried woman cannot reach, according to the traditions of our religion, that state of absolute fulfillment and completion which human life should aspire to. "He who has no wife dwells without good, without help, without joy, without blessing, without peace, without life...He is incomplete." And marriage is extolled by our people into a sacrament. "When Isaac brought Rebecca to his mother's tent", say the Rabbis, "the spirit of God entered with her and light burnt from Sabbath to Sabbath."

And Judaism also turned its back upon that attitude towards woman, which was generally entertained in the ancient world, in the Greek world - a world which had a high degree of civilization - that woman was held in low esteem. Even Aristotle in his , said: "Even a woman may be good, and also a slave; tho the woman may be said to be an inferior being and the slave quite worthless." 

Contrast that attitude with that which is reflected in the chapter which I read to you and with numerous other references in the Bible, in the Appocrypha, in the Talmud toward women and you will see the great contrast. It is a fundamental thing. Therefore, you will find characters like the Matriarchs Miriam, Esther, Deborah, Hanna, Ruth fill the pages of our history - noble women, women who influenced the course of life of the whole nation, competent women, women who were the helpmates of their menfolks.

Our religion having therefore established a spiritual equality between men and women - spiritual equality is more important than legal relationships, and legal relationships very often lagged behind spiritual equality - it found it possible then to elaborate a code of honor, a code of conduct for husband and wife which would advance the life of each and enrich the life of each.

Each being of inherent and sovereign worth, and because of what husband and wife come to mean to each other, they bring to the partnership of marriage gifts - and both assume obligations, and both derive blessings from it. And the spiritual independence of each becomes merged into a higher spiritual interdependence, because the highest form of freedom is voluntary and cooperative living. One of the first consequences of this installation of woman, the wife, upon a basis of spiritual equality with man, and in recognition of their significant interdependence, there resulted first of all in the Jewish code of conduct, the demand, the mandate for mutual respect. The lives of husbands and wives must be grounded in reciprocal reverence. It was not only children who were commanded to honor their parents, but husbands were commanded to honor their wives, and wives were commanded to honor their husbands. No dignified relationship - respect, harmony, well-being, can be grounded on anything but mutual respect. "He who loves his wife as himself, and honors her more than himself...to his house the words of Job apply: "Thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace."

Now, this honor and respect is of course not something that can be imposed by law, particularly in these days when the authority of religious law is not as binding as it was in the old days. This respect and this honor if it is not to be a matter of formality, this respect and honor must be achieved. It can be achieved through sincerity, through candor, through fairness, through strength of character, through good sportsmanship in the home on the part of both husband and wife, by being real and not sham, by being solid and not a puffball. You create respect and win respect because you create a sense of pride, and that respect, that honor so essential to a beautiful relationship between husband and wife is also retained by husband and wife constantly marching together and forward into light, constantly improving

themselves. It is bad, very bad for husband and wife to stop growing - I mean spiritually, intellectually. I think it is bad if both sink into mental doddiness, become intellectually unkempt, sated. Something fine and precious and appealing goes out of their lives. The zest, the quest and eagerness vanish and they soon become bored with one another, with themselves. I think it is bad enough when both sink into that mental and spiritual decadence, but it is even worse when one does, and the other does not - because they get out of step. There ceases to be that reciprocity, that give and take spiritually, intellectually, which alone can keep men and women marching together forward into the light. So the first essential quality is that of mutual respect.

The other, I have indicated - is give and take. I don't mean reciprocity on a commercial basis. I mean reciprocity based on spiritual companionship. The curse of such a relationship is the curse of domination, either overt or covert, either on the surface so that people see it, or subtle. The result is the same - a devastated life, a blinded spirit, whether it be that of the husband or of the wife. You can read it in the eyes of men and women whether they are free and joyous companions through life, or whether one is a subjected spirit. There are men and women born with a passion, sometimes unknown to them, to dominate, to dictate, to exact obedience. And they become autocrats in their own homes. If their partner happens to be weak or indifferent, why he or she yields to that subjugation and sinks into a dumb, uncomplaining, inglorious compliance. If the partner is not weak, has a will of his or her own, naturally there ensues conflict and tempest and storm.

I recently had a man come to me and say that he couldn't understand

why his family didn't appreciate him. "I have given them everything. I have denied them nothing. And I am not appreciated in my home." And I could see the hot temper mounting in his speech. And I said to myself that perhaps if he had provided less of things and more of warm, generous, kindly companionship, perhaps if he gave his dear ones less of objects, but sacrificed a little more of his imperious and dominating spirit, it would be more greatly appreciated.

So it is with wives! There are three men, the Rabbis say, whose lives cannot be called life. One is the man who is dependent upon the table of another man, one is the man who makes pain the master of his body and the third is the man whose wife masters him. The Rabbis called that kind of a woman an evil woman. They said: "There is no ache like a heart-ache. And there is no evil like an evil wife." (14 likenesses of an evil woman)



The third great quality in this companionship of husband and wife is not to seek domination, but a companionship based upon the fullest measure of freedom of each, compatibility, the fullest measure of responsibility of both to one another and to the family. And not only not to dominate, but to be, to an extent, self-sacrificing. That is also an important element - loyalty to the point of foregoing mine for that type of loyalty which is ours. Why the noblest characteristic of love is to want to protect the ones we love, to want to protect the woman we love, the children we love. People frequently forget that.

I shall never forget an experience which came to me early in my ministry. I had returned home after a rather long, ~~thring~~ tiring day. I was fatigued and looked forward to a quiet, restful evening. Someone rang the doorbell of my home. I answered. There was a man at the door. I had never seen him

before. He was a man approaching middle age. He did not appear to be a poor man. But he certainly did not appear to be a rich man either. I invited him into the house, and he lurched out before we had said more than a few words - Rabbi, I want to get married! I said - what's your hurry?. I want to be married tonight, he said. This is a rather unusual request, I said. Rabbi, he said, I'll tell you why I want to be married tonight. The woman I want to marry is going blind. She is leaving tonight for New York to be operated on. There is one chance in a hundred that she will save her sight. She may become blind. I want to marry her now so that I will be able to take care of her.

You see, that is love. That is loyalty. That is something sacred. That is something which exalts our poor common clay and makes us a "little lower than the angels".

When we hear of people who are complaining and fretful because of little irritations in their home and want to disrupt a home because of these little bits of friction, these small irritations, I say to myself - these people do not understand the loyalty of love.

And lastly there must be an element of reasonableness in the relationship between husband and wife. I hear, sometimes, people bragging to friends about having been married forty to fifty years and never a harsh word between them. Possibly so....

My philosophy is that if humans were perfect there would be no need in the world for religion, ethics. The Rabbis said that the Torah was not given to the angels. Angels don't need Torah. In every family there are worries, irritations, frets of all kinds: business is not always good; the children are not always well behaved. We become irritable. We do utter unkind words,

and we do unkind acts. But these are normal phases in a family. Reasonable people exercise reasonable skill in smoothing things out. This is one of the prime obligations of human life - to keep pin-pricks from growing into festering sores and cracks from becoming chasms. And those who permit cracks to become chasms come to talk about incompatibility - another one of those fine words which is a fraud and a confession that he or she is unwilling to make the necessary adjustments in their human relationship, that he or she has reached a state of stiff-neckedness to the point of stupidity. It is true that some should never have married, that it was a mistake. Those are exceptions. In most cases where broken homes result it is because one or the other has lacked the skill or the will or the understanding to make adjustments, to make concessions, to iron things out and not permit the little things to become the red foxes of disagreement and to destroy their homes.

A certain basic common sense is needed to convert the nectar and ambrosia of first love, that strange, wild tumult and ethereal ferment, a certain common sense is needed to convert that into the consecrated daily bread of every-day human companionship. If you will allow them to endure, to war well, the love of youth and beauty will also walk with age. It will give us cherished hopes and treasured memories that will warm our winter days even as it radiated the flaming days of our youthful years.

That is what the author of the Chapter which I read to you this morning meant by that phrase . It means a woman of competence. The ideal Jewish woman was not that cloistered figure, nor the Victorian woman. The ideal woman was the woman of competence, the woman of ability who looked well to her household, who was the helpmate to the provider of the family, who looked after the rearing of her children, who kept the light of virtue burning in her home.

That certain sanity, that certain wisdom, added to candor, self-respect and reciprocity, will the lives of men and women as near the ideal of enduring companionship as possible and will increase their mutual happiness.

I close with this story which I read the other day:



That is the story. That is what a beautiful human relationship of husband and wife. It enriches their lives and increased their happiness. Each additional year of their pilgrimage of life is an added happiness. Life becomes a beautiful adventure through men and women walk hand in hand through life full of courage and confidence and faith because in each other they have a supplementing strength and inspiration.

- 4.

- with the
life.

- AMERICAN JEWISH
-
- ARCHIVES

- sought
night

built monuments and temples and adorned the absolute celibacy
of their clergy. ^{"Then very rel. notes why prohibited marriage among the priests, who were made up of the best men"} Sex was regarded as polluters; and woman, as an inferior being and a source of evil.

5). Not so in Judaism.

After creation of Adam - 21611.

Woman, being created from him, is forever his natural complement.

פסוקים 1112 12611 1112 ..

The first 2131 is 1221 112. ^{together} hearing and seeing
he is good, his is good, and the ~~many~~ hearing and seeing
7 children are good acts.

"He who has no wife dwells without good, without help, without
joy, without blessing, without peace, without life... He is incomplete."

And marriage - a necessary evil - a concession to Satan -
extolled into a sacrament - פסוק -

"When Isaac met Rebecca this was the 2nd entered
with her and he at last from Sabbath to Sabbath."

Zohar - "The foundation of a man's house is his wife - for it is
on account of her that the soul departs not from it"

Exaltation Ps. 128. 7111

6). Judaism, in some way turned its back also on the ^{at the time} ~~extreme~~
towards woman generally entertained in ancient world. In Greek
world - woman in low esteem, indeed.

Aristotle, "Poetics", "Even a woman may be good, and
also a slave; tho the woman may be said to be an
inferior being and the slave quite worthless."

(7) And Paul's attitude

Contrast that - Ecc. 31. Ecclesiast. ^{Matriarch} ~~Thirion~~, & other, liberals, Hannah
Ruth - Beruna - ful the page, an history

bet. man and woman

7/ Having established a basis of sp. equality - even if not always legal,
it was possible to elaborate a code of conduct for husband & wife
which would advance the lives, both & enable them. Each being
of sovereign worth, both to the partnership gifts - Both
assumed obligations. Both deserved blessing from it. Thesp.
indep. & each were merged in the larger overall interdependence.

As a consequence of the installation, woman as on basis of Equality
+ recip. then interdependent
this resulted, first, all, the demand for mutual respect ~~thence~~.

Because each is a human personality - of worth - and be., without
each means to the other in term, completion & fulfillment, -
their lives must be grounded in reciprocal reverence.

It was not only children who were commanded 323 -
But husband - his wife. Wife - her husband. Each Soul is
holy ground - 1st/11 2/22 3/33 4/44 5/55 6/66 7/77 8/88 9/99
"He who loves his wife as himself, and honors her more
himself.... Thus become the words of Job apply: 'Then shalt
thou that thy tent is in peace'"

Honor & Respect are not ordained - achieved. Sincerity -
candor. Strength, character - fairness - good sportsmanship -
"Real" not "sham" - "solid" - not a "puff-ball" - Pride
And by

Constantly improving - growing. Get out - 7 steps -
It is bad if both sink into mental dullness, become
intel. unimpaired - sated - proved - some thing fine
& freedom & appealing for art, their life - the zest - the
quest - the uplift - the experience -

8/ Give-and-take: Reciprocity - not in ^{commercial} ~~commerce~~ but in the love, the bond, all companionship.

The ~~curse~~ ^{curse}, all is domination - overt or covert - bold or subtle - the result is same - a devastated life - a blighted - dreary stunt - whether husband or wife.

You can read it in the eyes, men & women - whether they are free & joyous companions, then her back is arched - or subjugated spirits.

There are men & women - born with a passion - sometimes authorities to us - to dictate - to dominate - to exact obedience - and they become autocrats in their homes - If their partner is weak - a weakling - yield to this subjugation - submit into a dumb, uncomplaining & inglorious compliance. If not - turns to resentment & rebellion.

"I provide everything... not appreciated... Hot temper, booming in his speech - the bulked tyrant! Perhaps if he provided less things & more of warm, devotion, kindly companionship - & far less of objects but sacrificed more of his own impulses & dominating spirit - he would be more greatly appreciated by loved.

And so with ~~wife~~ wives! 3 men - their life is not life (1) Dependent on another's table (2) Pain masks his body (3) Wife masks him.

"No ache like a Heart-ache"
"No Evil like an Evil Wife"

stranger & worse > than pain

Not to seek domination - but eager companionship + cooperation in
fullest measure of indiv. freedom compatible - family refuse
isolation

9. May men - Self-sacrifice - loyalty to point of personal ruin for them
for ours!
Nonviolent charact. - Love - to shield, to protect -

Blind Man ^{kingly - of royal stature}
This was a love that was Right / transpires on common clay!

10. Reasonableness.
If even there are frictions in married life.
"Never a harsh word" - Possible. Esp. if one was deaf or then
dumb.

If all that perfect - no need for Religion ^{אברהם אבינו}
Worries - frictions - irritations - But is not always good -
Children are not always well-behaved - We become irritable

Normal phases of every home -
Reasonable people exercise Skill in smoothing things out -
- that is fringe obligation in companionship living
Small cracks - chasms. Pin-pricks - Fettering Sore!

Call it "incompatibility". Frailty - Unwillingness to
make honest effort to adjust - Stiffness to point
of stupidity

11) A certain basic common-sense is needed to
convert the reckless rambles of first love - that
charge, wild tumult and ethereal ferment into the
consecrated daily bread of human companionship.

into a love that will endure - that will ^{wear} ~~last~~ well - 16
 that will well with growth & beauty and also with age -
 that will give us cherished hopes but also memories
 - a love that will warm our underdays - even as it
radiates our planning growth for glad days to come and glad days
Wisdom - devotion - reasonableness - these added
to Reciprocity and Reverence - will make the
 lives of men & women - husbands wives - as
 near the ideal and enduring friendship as possible - & will
~~mutually~~ increase their mutual happiness (Am. Morning)

