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Man's Relationship to God, 1940.

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MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

A Sequel to the Series on "Fundamental Human Relationships"



By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, January 14, 1940

In recent weeks I have discussed with you a series of fundamental human relationships. I dwelt upon a variety of such relationships between man and his fellow men. We pointed out that in a sense the whole of life, the whole of human life is a bundle of such relationships and that these are the channels down which course all of our human experiences and through which we express ourselves. While it is true that our personality is one, nevertheless, we live simultaneously in many worlds - in the world of our work, in the world of our home, in the world of our country, in the world of our business, in the world of our class, in the world of our nation.

But there is one relationship, and it is an invisible reality which in a real sense interpenetrates and determines all other relationships - and that is our relationship with God. It is the fountain-head, of all our human attitudes. It is, in a sense, the world which embraces all of our little worlds and microcosms and unites them all - the little world in which we live.

The Ten Commandments found in our Bible which prescribe the proper regimen for many human relationships, begin with the significant phrase: "I am the Lord Thy God". That is the mentor for all human relationships, because without God there is no moral order into which a human being can fit the order of his own existence. That is the starting point.

You look at that sentence found in Psalm 14: "The Fool has said in his heart there is no God." That is a mistranslation of the word "Naval". It speaks of man as an ignorant person or a man of poor judgment. Naval means something much more sinister. Naval means disgraceful, impious, arrogant, the man who treats all things with scorn and contumely. That man says: "There is no God." That sentence in Psalm 14 is immediately followed with: The Naval says: "They deal corruptly, they do abominably. There is none that doeth good."

The Naval and his ilk used Godlessness as an excuse for their moral

heedlessness, for corruption, for the doing of all things evil. That, of course, is true in the life of individuals and in the life of nations.

In our own day those who have let loose upon the world war, hate, tyranny, persecution, brutalities, aggressions and conquests - they are the Navalim - these scornful, insolent, arrogant folk who have denied God and who treat with contempt the religious principles both of Judaism and of Christianity, who have rejected with contempt the ethical codes both of the Old and the New Testaments. Some have burned synagogues, and if they were free to do so, would burn all churches to the ground. And in some countries these were actually reduced and destroyed to ashes.

So from Godlessness there is but one step to moral anarchy and moral chaos. That is why the Ten Commandments begin with: "I am the Lord Thy God". The very story of creation in our Bible begins with: "In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth". And that phrase is put there right at the beginning to point out the reason - that this universe is a creation. It is not accident. All that transpires in the Universe is not just a meaningless play of blind forces, in furious animation signifying nothing, but that this Universe has been rescued from chaos by divine will and hammered into cosmos, into order for a purpose in keeping with an ultimate design. So we read in our Bible: "Thus saith the Lord, the Creator of the Heavens. He is the Lord who fashioned the earth and made it. He established it." He did not create it for chaos. He formed it so that it might be a place of habitation for mankind.

And also the creation of man is introduced by an amazing phrase in the Bible: "And God created man in his image - 'B'tzelem Elohim' - in the image of God, created He him." In other words, man was set upon his career bearing in his mind and in his spirit the image of God, something vast,

mysterious, creative, incorruptible, everlasting was put into the very essence of man.

There is an interesting sentence by one of our Rabbis, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi who said: "When a man goes on his way, when a man sets out on a journey, when he proceeds on his way through life, a troop of angels preceed him and proclaim: 'Make way for the image of the Holy One, Blessed be He!'" And that is a superb, that is a startling conception of the worth of an individual. Where an ^{di}individual goes, where an individual works, what an individual does, there is a God moving, working, being. That is a holy ground.

Thus the closest possible relationship was established between mortal, finite man, and the immortal and infinite God. The same form principle identifies them. If God is a creator, so is man. If God is truth and justice and love and goodness and beauty in His infinitude, so is man in his humbled, in his restricted finitude. But the form, the principle is the same. In other words, in origin and in destiny and in life, man is finite.

And this, my friends, is of utmost importance in civilization. For given this dogma, accepting this dogma, and it is a dogma, it can^{not} be demonstrated scientifically, this dogma pulls man away from his lower animal substratum. This dogma of man's connection with God sets goals for human expression and provides the motive, power for attainment of these aspirations. This dogma makes mandatory in all human life the qualities which man ascribes to God. "Just as I am just be thou just. Just as I am merciful, by thou merciful."

This introduces into human life ethical concepts which are the results of what you might call "noblesse oblige"; the results of one's

station, one's status in the cosmos. We must be true and just and clean and noble not because of profit or gain, not because of fear of punishment, but because we are divine. We are kin of divinity, not because we occupy exalted stations or because we are endowed with extraordinary prestige, but because we are the children of God.

And so all of our human relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, the rich and the poor, employer and employee, between nation and nation, between race and race - all human relationships are exalted and sanctified, purified by this dogma of man's relationship to God because you see a God in every human being. Think of the cynicism with which present-day dictators look upon human life and upon man. Think of the human beings today regarded as so many statistics. Because of this conception of God and man, the human being is made tantamount to the whole of the Universe.

Because there is a God, there are also eternal principles - justice, love, truth, peace, to which man can appeal when their rights are denied, when they are oppressed, when they are thirsting. Because there is a God there is a universal moral law which can become the refuge of the human, in the name of which man can challenge tyrants, and have, throughout the ages.

We assume many human ideals as though they were scientifically established. We think of them as axioms. Yet, when you analyze them, there is nothing in nature to justify them. You take the principle that all men are created equal, the principle to which we appeal when we speak of the rights of man. Where in nature is that principle? Where in science is that principle? It is a purely religious dogma that there is a God, and that all men are created equal. You take out the fact of God from this syllogism, and the whole reasoning falls to the ground. That is why the Founding Fathers of America appealed for their authority to religious

principle: "All men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights" etc. etc. That was their authority - the invisible God. Your entire Bill of Rights and your Constitution of the United States derives from this religious dogma. You take out this religious dogma and your Bill of Rights has no basis upon which to rest. People forget that. People forget that when men of ideals fought, for example, slavery, fought to uproot that evil institution of slavery - to what principles did they appeal? in whose name did they speak? They didn't speak in the name of economic determinism. They appealed to the fact that these slaves, were God's children, and that all men are equal. No man has the right to enslave other men. And the men who fought through the ages against wage slavery, child slavery, against the oppression of one group by another group. All plead equality in the name of their religion and God and in the spirit of man which is of God.

What is lacking in our day, when you come to think of it, is that men have lost this over-whelming conviction of the reality of God, and they no longer have anyone in whose name to appeal for justice and righteousness and tolerance and peace in the world.

There is an interesting story told in our Talmud. The great Rabbi Elazr ben Simeon, a very learned, very wise and very wealthy Rabbi was traveling day from one city to another and he passed a deformed and hunchbacked and frightfully ugly man. This poor, deformed man greeted the Rabbi. But the Rabbi did not return the greeting. He was an exquisite and an aesthete and this deformed being sort of shocked his fine sensibilities. In fact, he not only refused to return the greeting, but said: "What an ugly human being you are. And are there many like you in the place from which you come? The deformed hunchback said: "Master, you should not address that question to me. You should address it to the artist who made

me. Ask him why I am so deformed and whether there are many such deformed, unhappy and unfortunate people like me. And the Rabbi, of course, realized what a shameful thing he had done, how contemptible he had been and he knelt before this man, kissed his feet and begged his pardon. In whose did name/this unfortunate man appeal? And what was it that brought this powerful and wealthy man humbled and groveling into the dust? It was an appeal to an invisible God. And that, alone brings tyrants groveling into the dust. That alone restores harmony in the world.

And so it is not surprising at all that all through our sacred books this thought of man's relationship to the Higher Being is reiterated - not only distantly related, but the closest kind of relationship like that of father and son. "You are children of God." "Don't do this. Don't do that. This cruel. That is unjust. Don't do those things because you are the children of God." When a human being is in despair and is troubled and in the midst of persecution, in the midst of utter degradation he is taught to look up heavenward and say: "Our Father who art in Heaven". We are not small and insignificant. We belong to that which is immortal, eternal - God. Men were taught by the same dogma to live in brotherhood and seek peace, not because war is destructive, not because war is a human fallacy, but because "Have we not one Father? Has not one God delivered us all? Why then should we deal treacherously with one another. No lasting peace will ever be established in the world until men have recaptured this vision of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and the family relationship.

It is an invisible reality, a reality that can be more truly imagined than expressed, a reality which is beyond demonstration, but not

beyond experience. We cannot know God as we know parents, children, friends. "Can'st thou search, find out God? " No, we cannot. We know very little about God.

There is an interesting legend among the mystics of Islam that under the Throne of Allah there is a Tablet upon which is inscribed all that shall happen to the last day. And this tablet is so broad that a fleet Arab horse would not be able to cross it in four years, and the writing thereon is finer than a hair. And of all the writing which covers it, only a single line has been communicated to God's creatures, and that single line has kept God's children ^{that} and line will keep God's children in perplexity until the Resurrection. And in the luxuriant phrasing of this legend there is this profound thought: "We cannot know".

Nevertheless, God is a reality, the supreme reality of the Universe and they who have grasped it, they who have sensed it, have all. They then possess a spiritual clairvoyance, a sort of second sight which enables them to see what other people cannot see. They can see more clearly, more inwardly, more revealingly. "And Moses approached the darkness wherein God Dwelt." The believing spirit sometimes has the gift of seeing into darkness of human life. "To me the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

This fact of God in human experience, once it is grasped, once it is permitted to penetrate our experiences and our relationships, helps to illumine our experiences and unify our direction. It helps us to make all necessary adjustments in life. It helps to compensate us for all seeming deprivations in life. It was once asked of what it meant to believe in God, what God meant to him. And he answered: "It is glory

in wretchedness, and riches in poverty and lordship in servitude and satiety in hunger and clothedness in nakedness and freedom in slavery and life in death and sweetness in bitterness."

That is why it is so necessary to be aware of this supreme relationship - our relationship with God.

Finally, it gives men courage - the realization that we stand in relationship with God. It is necessary to fight, be a martyr, for an ideal, for goodness, for truth, for justice. Men do not become martyrs out of knowledge, or experience but they become martyrs out of Faith.

Salvation cometh from God. And only as mankind will learn to recapture the vision that men are not animals or machines or robots but that they are the children of God, destined for a great exalted destiny, destined for spiritual perfection - only as they recapture that vision that they are children of God destined for spiritual perfection and knowledge and wisdom and truth and goodness freedom and happiness and peace will the redemption of our society begin.

We have tried to bring about the salvation of society in many ways in this age, but we have failed. We are on the brink of disaster today. We have tried to establish proper relationships between the classes, between capital and labor, etc. etc. and we have failed because of one basic principle which alone can make these relationships possible - the principle that all men are children of God. For the conviction that there is a God in this world, not transcendent, not removed but in the life and structure of mankind, society.

Someday mankind will return humbled, beaten, kneeling again at the feet of this invisible reality which is God. And the redemption will begin for mankind.

Life is sermon 5/11
1- Discussed a variety of relat. bet man and his fellow man & brother of such relat. - they are the channels from ethical experience and expression. Our personality is one but it lives simultaneously in many worlds - our work - our home - our country - our class.

But there is an relationship to an invisible reality which is a real sense ^{interpretation} determines all our other relat. - our rel. to God. It is the foundation-head of all our human attitudes. It is the world which embraces all other worlds in which man lives and has his being.

2- The 10 C. - which prescribe the proper reg. rules for many human relat. begin sign with with - that is the best rule for all fundamental human relat. without God there is no moral order into which man need fit his own order of existence.

3- Ps. 14 - "The Fool hath said in his heart there is no God". mis-translation (2) - means. the improvis - arrogant - the disgraceful - he who treats things with contumely ^{scrupulous insolence} & it is not and his ill - who declare ... & therefore (look) From Godlessness stems moral heedlessness - all corruption, all abomination - the doing of all evil.

They who have let loose upon our world today - abomination and corruption - War - Hate - Tyranny - Persecution - have the ps/2 - who have denied God - who treat with contumely the religious principles and ideals both of Jud. & Christ - who reject i. the ethical codes of O.T. & New.

They have burnt all symp. in Gen. If they were free to take their way - all churches - Soviet -

It introduces ethical concepts into human life, not as experiences, but as "noble obligation"; as requirements of station and status. We must be just and true and clean and noble — not bec. of fear of punishment, or hope of gain — but bec. we are children of God.

All of our relat- husband-wife — parents-children —
religion — employer-employee — ~~we~~ strong-will — nation-nation —
race-race — are exalted, are sanctified, are so spiritually bec. of this dogma of man's kinship with God.

→ To see ^{in the face of all men} ~~there are also~~ ^{there are also} Humanity, and
Bec. there is God, ~~there is also~~ ^{there are also} Humanity, and

→ ~~man can appeal to the eternal principles of justice,~~
^{and man can appeal to them whenever}
Love, Truth, Peace, which are gods in behalf of
a Humanity ^{wherever it} which is deprived of them.
→ ^{bec. there is God} there is a Universal Moral Law = binding — challenge tyrants

7) The dogma of the equality of all men is a purely rel.
dogma — based on belief in a common Father whose
that there is one God, the Father of all and all men
are His children and all men are His brothers.

Freedom — democracy derive from same dogma.

Champions of human freedom & equality invoked

this same faith — "We hold these truths etc"

→ When men fought slavery — wage slaves — child labor —

8) How consistently — principles

principles
principles

11/10/52 150/11
— 11/10/52 —

Rec. there is one God - one Humanity.
Brotherhood - Peace.

14

No lasting peaceful fellowship of men or Nations - God -

9) Invisible reality.

"More truly imagined than expressed"

Beyond demonstration - but not beyond experience.

אֱלֹהִים אֵין כְּדָמָיו

"Ivanded Tablet"

But it is a Reality - Supreme -

Those who grasp it - have all - a sp. clairvoyance
see more clearly - more inwardly - more ~~truly~~ ^{revelingly}

It illumines all their experiences. It unifies and
directs them.

It helps make the necessary adjustments - and compensates
for many seeming deprivations (Jude).

10) It gives men courage to fight, to suffer, to be
martyred, if need be, for the True, the Good, the Just.
Men do not become martyrs out of wisdom but out
of Faith.

11) Salvation cometh from God -
Only as men will re-capture vision that they are not
animals - or machines - or robots - ~~or~~ but children of God
will destined for sp. perfection - Knowledge - Wisdom - Freedom
Justice - Truth and Beauty - will redemption of our
Society begin.


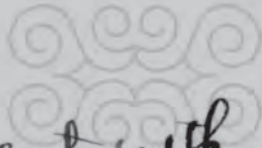
Under Throne 7 Allah there is a Tablet upon which is inscribed
all that shall happen till the last day.

It is so broad that a fleet Arab horse would not be able to cross
it in 4 years, and the writing thereon is finer than a hair.

Of all the writing which covers it, only a single line has been communi-
cated to God's creatures.

That little keeps them in perplexity until the Resurrection.

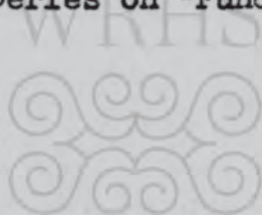
"It is glory in wretchedness, and riches in poverty and lordship
in servitude and satiety in hunger and clothedness in nakedness
and freedom in slavery and life in death and sweetness in
bitterness" - Abu Sa'id -

  לִפְנֵי - to treat with contumely Ps. 14. - ^{distrustful} ^{- arrogant} ^{- ignoble} ^{unpious}
"They ~~have~~ ^{deal} ~~that~~ corruptly, they ~~have done~~ ^{do} abominably. There
is none that doeth good"

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears"

MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

A Sequel to the Series on "Fundamental Human Relationships"



start to discuss inter-religious
 God in practical terms - gives
 family guide
 vs. ideals, strength, sense of
 human will (from Jewish
 story of Eliezer ben Hurin
 to meeting with
 Logos and man)

By
 Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
 The Temple

On
 Sunday morning, January 14, 1940

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But there is one relationship, and it is an invisible reality which in a real sense interpenetrates and determines all other relationships - and that is our relationship with God. It is the fountain-head, of all our human attitudes. It is, in a sense, the world which embraces all of our little worlds and microcosms and unites them all - the little world in which we live.

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And also the creation of man is introduced by an amazing phrase in the Bible: "And God created man in his image - 'B'tzelem Elohim' - in the image of God, created He him." In other words, man was set upon his career bearing in his mind and in his spirit the image of God, something vast,

mysterious, creative, incorruptible, everlasting was put into the very essence of man.

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And this, my friends, is of utmost importance in civilization. For given this dogma, accepting this dogma, and it is a dogma, it can ^{not} be demonstrated scientifically, this dogma pulls man away from his lower animal substratum. This dogma of man's connection with God sets goals for human expression and provides the motive, power for attainment of these aspirations. This dogma makes mandatory in all human life the qualities which man ascribes to God. "Just as I am just be thou just. Just as I am merciful, by thou merciful."

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me. Ask him why I am so deformed and whether there are many such deformed, unhappy and unfortunate people like me. And the Rabbi, of course, realized what a shameful thing he had done, how contemptible he had been and he knelt before this man, kissed his feet and begged his pardon. In whose did name/this unfortunate man appeal? And what was it that brought this powerful and wealthy man humbled and groveling into the dust? It was an appeal to an invisible God. And that, alone brings tyrants groveling into the dust. That alone restores harmony in the world.

And so it is not surprising at all that all through our sacred books this thought of man's relationship to the Higher Being is reiterated - not only distantly related, but the closest kind of relationship like that of father and son. "You are children of God." Don't do this. Don't do that. This cruel. That is unjust. Don't do those things because you are the children of God." When a human being is in despair and is troubled and in the midst of persecution, in the midst of utter degradation he is taught to look up heavenward and say: "Our Father who art in Heaven". We are not small and insignificant. We belong to that which is immortal, eternal - God. Men were taught by the same dogma to live in brotherhood and seek peace, not because war is destructive, not because war is a human fallacy, but because "Have we not one Father? Has not one God delivered us all? Why then should we deal treacherously with one another. No lasting peace will ever be established in the world until men have recaptured this vision of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and the family relationship.

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in wretchedness, and riches in poverty and lordship in servitude and satiety in hunger and clothedness in nakedness and freedom in slavery and life in death and sweetness in bitterness."

That is why it is so necessary to be aware of this supreme relationship - our relationship with God.

Finally, it gives men courage - the realization that we stand in relationship with God. It is necessary to fight, be a martyr, for an ideal, for goodness, for truth, for justice. Men do not become martyrs out of knowledge, or experience but they become martyrs out of Faith.

Salvation cometh from God. And only as mankind will learn to recapture the vision that men are not animals or machines or robots but that they are the children of God, destined for a great exalted destiny, destined for spiritual perfection - only as they recapture that vision that they are children of God destined for spiritual perfection and knowledge and wisdom and truth and goodness freedom and happiness and peace will the redemption of our society begin.

We have tried to bring about the salvation of society in many ways in this age, but we have failed. We are on the brink of disaster today. We have tried to establish proper relationships between the classes, between capital and labor, etc. etc. and we have failed because of one basic principle which alone can make these relationships possible - the principle that all men are children of God. For the conviction that there is a God in this world, not transcendent, not removed but in the life and structure of mankind, society.

Someday mankind will return humbled, beaten, kneeling again at the feet of this invisible reality which is God. And the redemption will begin for mankind.