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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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Together we stood at the altar, 1953.

611

TOGETHER WE STOOD AT THE ALTAR

January 4, 1953

That so many of you, dear friends, have turned out for this Service this morning in this weather shows that you must be very much in love with one another. It is with joy that I welcome you to this Service - you, whom I was privileged to marry during the 35 years that I have been Rabbi of The Temple, the members of your families, as well as all other friends present here this morning at whose weddings I may not have had the privilege of officiating.

Two years ago, on the occasion of our Temple Centennial, I invited all the past confirmands of The Temple to a Service of Reconsecration, and a beautiful and unforgettable service it was. I believe that it is good to renew the remembrance of the shining hours of our lives, to recapture the music of the imperishable experiences of our past. It is like returning to our high and sacred altars and to rededicate ourselves anew.

Routine, my dear friends - routine is the enemy of exaltation, and life needs its exaltations even as it needs its quiet routine. The glory of religion lies in the fact that it is a form of exaltation. It sublimates the commonplace; it makes life radiant with meaning and purpose, noble and solemn and sacred. Everything that religion touches is exalted in mystery and becomes something beyond itself, and it is the something beyond itself which makes the thing itself significant.

This morning we bring back to grateful awareness one of the most decisive moments, one of the most decisive experiences of our lives, the hour when we were consecrated in the holy bond of marriage. As I look over this congregation this morning, I see here, dear friends whose marriages I solemnized many years ago and others who were married before I became Rabbi of The Temple. And I see before me, too, many who were married quite recently by me.

Through the years it has been a great joy to me to officiate at these weddings. As you may well imagine, not all the duties of a Rabbi are pleasant ones. There are many sorrowful duties to perform, and one sees much sadness as the years go by, especially one in my calling. But a wedding - a wedding fairly rings with hope and happiness. And my heart has rejoiced time and again as radiant young men and women a tip-toe on the waves of ecstasy, stood before me, pledging their love and their loyalty in the aura of tender music, fragrant flowers, shimmering tapers and the smiles and tears of joy.

We are neither deathless, good friends, nor unageing, and the older I get, the more I am moved by this joyous ritual of a wedding, a wedding ceremony where buoyant youth and high resolve and solemn pledges and the mystery of the unpredictable future all combine into a glorious drama of life, triumphant and undefeated, and the everlasting mercy of love, divine and human.

I rejoice then and thank God fervently for having created joy and exaltation, and for having - to use the words of the prayers pronounced at the wedding ceremony - for having created man in His image after His likeness and prepared for him, out of his very self, a perpetual fabric his immortal continuity.

And I have been made very happy through the years, when these very young men and women ^Iwhom married, a few years later came and brought with much pride and joy their little children to enroll in our Religious School, and again my heart was moved with joy when these same little children, a few years later, stood before me to be consecrated in their Confirmation. And before you knew it, there they were, the same little children, grown up now, standing before me, asking for my blessing in their marriage with the young man or the young woman whom they had chosen to be their life's companion.

And so, the magical cycles move, orb upon orb, pre-destined by God, and he who watches them is moved not alone by a realization of the swiftly revolving years, but by what is magnificently permanent and enduring and eternal in all this ebb and flow of life.

How the years have fared with all the men and women whom I married, I do not, of course, know, except in the case of those whom I came to know very closely, and even there, of course, one cannot know what is innermost and what is frequently not re-vealed to the people themselves. Some of those whom I was privileged to marry^{have}/had more joy in their married life than others; some more sorrow than others. Some have tasted of the bitter cup, of sickness, of want, of loss, of bereavement - a dearly beloved wife, a dearly beloved husband, a dearly beloved child. Few indeed, my dear friends, are the men and women whose ways through life never passed through the valley of the deep dark shadows. But I have always observed - and this has been unfailing - that where true love and companionship existed, even these inevitable sorrows seemed to be softened, and love or the remembrance of it was able to heal where fate smote cruelly - those men and women who sought and found completeness in each other and fulfillment never found themselves entirely bereft when mortal separation, bereavement overtook them. For much remained to comfort and to sustain them, much of pride and gratitude.

My dear friends, there is no unalloyed happiness in the world. There is no unalloyed happiness in married life, though there can be unalloyed devotion and loyalty and love. The perfect year is not the year without clouds or rain or cold or sharp and biting winds. In fact, these very things make the perfect year because they make a fruitful year. The perfect wedded life is likewise not without its overshadowing clouds, its harsh and searching experiences, its trials - but if it has been a fruitful life wherein the personalities of husband and wife have been enriched and matured, wherein difficulties and conflicts were faced and surmounted, wherein a home, stable

and secure, was built, rich in tenderness and mutual regard and affection, a home to which children loved to return always, like homing-birds to their nest, then this home, then this wedded life has been the perfect wedded life, and you can read that fact in the eyes of the men and the women and the children.

When I first began to marry people some 37 years ago, I was myself unmarried and I told the people whom I married many things out of the books, books that I had read. I felt very much like that Rabbi in a small town in Eastern Europe who, all his life kept preaching to his people and telling them about the beauties and the wonders and the glory of Eretz Yisroel, of Palestine. He had never been there. He had read it in the books, and he told them of the glorious mountains, the hills and the valleys, and of its climate and its sunshine, at noon and at night in Eretz Yisroel. Rhapsodically. And finally when he became 70 years old, the members of his congregation got together a purse for him, and decided to send him to Palestine on a holiday, and he went to Palestine and spent three-four months there and then he came back after his holiday to his congregation. And on the first Sabbath he addressed his congregation and said, "My dear people, I have now been to Palestine and I have seen it with my own eyes. I want to tell you. All the lies that I told you in the past about Palestine are true."

Well, I didn't wait until I was 70 to get married, but I can tell you that all the lies that I have told all of you through these years are true. Because the love that is true for men and women is one that is compounded of dream and of reality - of dream and of reality, a reality that gives substance to the dream, and a dream that suffuses all reality. True love is not all shimmering gossamere, all romantic thistle-down. It is the love of mortal and fallible men and women.

You may recall that beautiful Greek legend of Marpessa. Marpessa, a mortal maiden who was beloved by Idas, a mortal man, one of the heroes of the Argonaut. But Marpessa was also beloved of the god Apollo, who claimed her because he was a god. But Idas,

the mortal man, would not give her up to the god, and finally Zeus, the god of all gods, intervened and told Marpessa to choose whom she would have, mortal man, imperfect man, or immortal god, the perfect god. Now, Apollo offered Marpessa unalloyed felicity, an existence without a single tear and all the golden homes of heaven. She would be able to soar above the earth, sheltered from all mishaps and all sorrow, and share forever the glory of Apollo's radiating sun. But Marpessa chose the mortal Idas. She was not afraid of sorrow and tears. She knew that against the background of sorrow and life's certain brevity, life becomes more tense and more loved and more wonderful. "Out of our sadness have we made the world so beautiful." The poet, Stephen Phillips, who sang this beautiful legend of Marpessa, makes her say to the god Apollo, on making her decision:

. . .if I live with Idas, then we two
On the low earth shall prosper hand in hand
In odours of the open field, and live
In peaceful noises of the farm, and watch
The pastoral fields burned by the setting sun.

. . . At some festival we two
Will wander through the lighted city streets;
And in the crowd I'll take his arm and feel
Him closer for the press. So shall we live.
And though the first sweet sting of love be past,
. . . there shall succeed a faithful peace;
Beautiful friendship tried by sun and wind,
Durable from the daily dust of life.
And though with sadder, still with kinder eyes
We shall behold all frailties, we shall haste
To pardon, and with mellowing minds, to bless.

Then though we must grow old, we shall grow old
Together, and he shall not greatly miss
My bloom faded, and waning light of eyes
Too deeply gazed in ever to seem dim;
Nor shall we murmur at, nor much regret
The years that gently bend us to the ground,
. . . we shall sit with luminous holy smiles,
Endeared by many griefs, by many a jest,
And custom sweet of living side by side;
And full of memories, not unkindly glance
Upon each other. Last, we shall descend
Into the natural ground - not without tears -
One must go first, ah god! one must go first;
After so long one blow for both were good;
Still like old friends, glad to have met, and leave
Behind a wholesome memory on the earth.

Well, Mar pessa chose a mortal man. If any of you has married some god or some goddess, I would be inclined to sympathize with you. They are rather tiresome to live with. If, however, you married a real man or woman, I should most heartily congratulate you for real men and women are very livable. They face up to life and to its situations with courage and tolerance and good humor. Real men and women are kind because they are strong; they are generous and forgiving. And while refusing to be imposed upon or exploited, they cheerfully make all necessary sacrifices. Real men and women profit from their experiences and rise on the rungs of their mistakes to higher levels of companionship and devotion. Real men and women grow and develop. They do not deplete the initial capital of love which they bring to their marriage. Love, like all valuable capital, must be replenished. Real men and women give and take. They give more than they take. They do not say: What is mine is mine and what is ~~also~~ thine is also mine. Rather, they say: There is neither mine nor thing but ours! They grow into oneness, not through the surrender of their independent judgments or personalities, the one being washed out for the sake of the other; rather, do they grow into oneness through the interweaving of destinies, the pooling of interests, through an eager partnership in the building of a home which still remains man's and woman's most glorious mission in life, and the rearing of children, and the joyous comradeship in doing the work of the world together.

In the Book of Proverbs, from which I read this morning, there is a phrase:

"By wisdom is a home built."

"And by

intelligence is it firmly established." When all is said and done, my dear friends, it takes a certain amount of wisdom and intelligence to build and to maintain a home in peace and in happiness.

Love is not enough. The rather uncommon God-given common sense is frequently the cement which keeps a home firmly established. This common sense is not a low grade of intelligence, rather is it the universal sense of fitness, of value, of utility, of propriety which the race of man has discovered through the long experiences of the many centuries. Many a home is disrupted by sheer stupidity, by an ineptness to handle the most rudimentary problems which face men and women - the most rudimentary problems of adjustment. And this stupidity is not limited at all to the uneducated. Sometimes the uneducated are wisest in the ways of building a home. It is not limited to them at all. We find it among the educated, particularly among the sophisticated, the smart set.

In the same Book of Proverbs we read:

"The wisdom of the woman builds her home."

"And the

foolish woman tears it down with her own hands." Now this is true, of course, of the man as well as of the woman, only the authors of the Bible seem to feel that the woman has a more decisive role to play in the preservation of the home than the man. That is why, I suppose, you find that very beautiful tribute paid to the good wife in the Bible, which I read to you this morning, the women "who opens her mouth with wisdom and looks well to the ways of her household" and there is no such tribute found in the Bible to the good husband. I don't know whether it's because there were no women writers in those days, or whether we simply don't deserve it - but there it is.

Wisdom, intelligence - builds the home. And the beginning of wisdom, as the Bible says, is reverence.

"The beginning of wisdom is reverence of God" which embraces reverence for all the basic institutions of human life which God created. And marriage is one of these basic institutions, one of the most important.

The reason why men and women wish to have their marriages solemnized by a minister of religion, which they do not do in the case, for example, when they conclude some business partnership, is because they realize instinctively that this is something different. It belongs to a different order of human association. It reaches to the very roots of human existence and to the depth and breadth and height of their souls, and it calls for sanctification. And through the years I have observed, as I am sure you have observed, that those who take with them into their married life the ~~order~~ aura of reverence, a reverence for the institution of marriage as such and for each other and for their home and for their family and for that little world which they themselves created, this microcosm which is as great and as significant as the whole microcosm of the universe - those who take into their days this order of reverence, this religious attitude, if you will - they have walked more confidently and more joyously into their future. They somehow feel that strong arms sustain them, and a noble tradition and the inspiring example of generations of ancestors who maintained high standards of family life under all circumstances and all conditions, standards which have evoked the envy and the admiration of the world.

Religion is that - or reverence, the term is not important - you know exactly what I mean - religion is the compass which holds the home on a steady course.

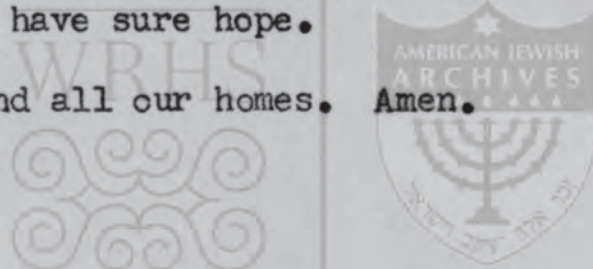
"Together We Stood at the Altar", you and I, years ago, more recently, yesterday. And it is spiritually upsurging and restorative to recall that moment when we stood at the altar. Whenever things begin to go awry and the frets and the nettles of life begin to chafe us and we are in danger of losing ourselves in discords, it is good to recall the glow and wonder and beauty of that resplendent hour and to remember that at that inviolate altar we pledged long ago, or yesterday - we pledged to share each other's burdens - in health and in sickness, in adversity or in prosperity, till death do us part, till death do us part.

The world is full of discords today, dear friends, uncertainties, insecurities, fears. I came across the other day these few lines of a poem with which I shall conclude:

So long as there are homes to
Which men turn at the close of day;
So long as there are homes
Where children are, where women stay;
If love and loyalty and faith
Be found across its sills,
A stricken nation can recover
From its gravest ills.

So long as there are homes
Where fires burn and there is bread;
So long as there are homes
Where lamps are lit and prayers are said;
Although people falter through the dark
And nations grope, with God Himself
Back of these little homes,
We have sure hope.

May God bless us all and all our homes. Amen.



morning I see dear friends whose wedding I saw ^{at} ~~ago~~
many years ago - and other who were married even before I
became Rabbi of the Temple. -

I see before me ^{also} many ^{by me} who were married ^{by me} ~~just~~ re-
cently.

Then the years it was a great joy to me to preside at
these weddings. But all the duties, a Rabbi, a far away
well in years, the pleasant ones. The ^{many} ~~are~~ ^{strong} duties
to perform - and one sees much sadness as the years
go by.

But a wedding ^{fairly} rings with life and happiness -
and my heart has rejoiced, ~~from~~ and again - as radiant
young men & women - a life ^{on the waves} ~~on the waves~~ ^{ecstasy} ~~ecstasy~~ ^{stirred} ~~stirred~~
before me - pleading ^{the} ~~eternal~~ love and loyalty - in the
aura of tender music, and fragrant flowers, and
thundering ^{the} ~~tapers~~ ^{smiles} and tears of joy.

We are neither deathless, ^{nor} ~~nor~~ ^{friends} ~~friends~~ ^{nor} ~~unhappy~~ ^{unhappy};
and the closer I get the more I am moved by the
the ^{sublimity} ~~sublimity~~ of a wedding ceremony, where turbulent
faith, and high resolve, and robustness and the mystery
of ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{unpredictable} ~~unpredictable~~ future combine into a glorious
drama of life exalted and undefeated - And the line
between ^{divine} ~~divine~~ and human love.

I regret and thank God ^{heartily} ~~heartily~~ for having
created joy in life and ~~happiness~~ ^{exultation} ~~exultation~~ - and for having

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created man in his image ~~and~~ after his likeness,
and prepared for him, out of his very self, a perfect
fabric - 21, 22, 23 - the immortal continuity.

I have been made happier than the year when
they were ~~very young~~ ^{very young} men & women whom
I married brought, their little children to me ~~the~~ ^{an} Temple
religious school - And, ~~then~~ ^{after some} years later, when I
confirmed them; and before, you
knew it, then they were, standing before me, as did
their parents before them, asking to be blessed ~~on~~
~~the~~ ⁱⁿ marriage with the young man or young woman
whom they have chosen ^{to be} their life's companion.

And so the magical cycle moves ~~on~~ ^{on or on}, pre-
destined by God - and he who watches them is moved not
alone by a realization of the swiftly ~~moving~~ ^{moving} years, but by
what is magnificently permanent and enduring in
this ebb and flow of life.

41. How the years have passed with ^{all} the men & women whom I
married, I do not of course know, except in the case of
those whom I came to know very closely - and even they
I never can know what is ~~in their hearts~~ ^{in their hearts}. Some
have had more joy in their married life than others; some
more sorrow than others. Some have lost, the bitter
cup of ^{sickness or} loss and bereavement - ~~some~~ a dearly beloved wife,
or husband - or child. Few indeed are the men and women
whose ~~lives~~ ^{lives} way through life never passes through the
valley of the dark shadows - But this I have observed - that

7. The love that is true for men and women is one that is
confronted by dream and reality. - a reality that
gives substance to the dream, and a dream that
~~satisfies~~ ^{is} all reality. It is ^{the true love} not all shimmering
possessiveness - all ~~other~~ romantic chills down. It is
the love of mortal - and fallible - men and women.

For we recall the Greek legend of Persephone
who was beloved of Idas - a mortal man, one of the heroes
of the long quest. But she was also beloved of the God
Apollo - who claimed her. But Idas would not
give her up to the God. Finally Zeus, the God of
all Gods, intervened, and told Persephone to choose
whom she would have - the mortal man or ^{in mortal} God.

Apollo found her unalloyed felicity, existence
without a single tear, and all the golden homes
of heaven. She would soar above the earth, sheltered
from all mishap and sorrow, and share forever in
Apollo's the glow of Apollo's radiating sun.

But Persephone chose the mortal, Idas. She
was not afraid of sorrow or tears. "Against the
background of sorrow and life's certain brevity, life
becomes more tense, more loved, more wonderful."
"Out of our sadnesses have we made the world so
beautiful."

The Poet - Stephen Phillips - who sang - makes Winfrey say (last) ⁽⁶⁾
81 If any of you married some God or Goddess - would be inclined
to sympathize with you - They are rather tiresome to live with.

If, however, you married a real man or woman. congratulate

For real men and women are very liveable -

They face up to life and its situations with courage and
tolerance and good humor.

They are kind because they are strong. - They are generous
and forgiving.

While refusing to be imposed upon or exploited, they cheer-
fully make all necessary sacrifices.

They profit from their experiences and rise on the surges of
their mistakes to higher levels of companionship and devotion.

They grow and develop. They do not deplete the initial capital of -

They give and take. They give more than they take.

They do not say: What is mine is mine, and what is theirs is
also mine;

Rather they say: There is neither mine or theirs - but ours!

They grow into oneness, not through the surrender of their
independent judgments or personalities - the one being
washed out for the sake of the other.

But then the interweaving of destinies, the pooling of
interests, then an eager partnership in the building of
a home - which still remains man's and woman's most
glorious mission in life - rearing of children - joyous comradeship.

9/ In the book, beneath we read:

$$24m \in \mathbb{Z} \quad 24 \mid 2m - 12 \quad -12 \mid 2m - 12 \quad 24 \mid 2m - 12$$

By wisdom a home is built, and by intelligence is it established.
When all is said and done - it takes a certain amount of wisdom
and intelligence - to build and maintain a home - in peace
and in happiness.

The rather vacuous ^{and in appearance} common sense ^{is not low grade intelligence at all} is frequently the current
 which keeps a house family established. — and common sense
 but rather the universal sense of fitness ^{value, utility} and propriety
 which the race, mankind has discovered through the
 long experience, ~~the~~ centuries.

many ~~but~~ homes are disrupted by sheer topicality - by an
inability to handle the most rudimentary problems, adjustment,
- not limited to the medieval - Found among the sophisticated
and the Savant Set

In the same book, formats are used.

$\frac{1}{10} \times 12 = 1.2$

"The wisdom of the woman builds her ~~home~~ ^{home} - ~~and~~ ^{and} the
 foolish woman tears it down with her own hands -"

It is true, of course, ^{as much} of the man as of the woman - and the authors, the Bible seem to feel that the woman has a more decisive role to play in the preservation of the home than the man.

that is why I suppose, there is that beautiful verdict
 paid to the good wife in the Bible - 'who fear her
 mouth with wisdom - and look well to the ways
 her household' - And now to the 'good husband'!
 Is it that there were no women writers in those days
 or that we, men, don't deserve it?

10/ And the beginning, the beginning - is Reverence - which (8)
for the basic institution of human life - which God created.
Marriage is one, then - perhaps the most important.

The reason why men and women ^{with} have their marriage
suggested by a religious precept - which they do not
do in the case of business contracts for example - is because
they realize that this is something different - it belongs
to a different order of human association - it reaches
to the very roots of existence and consciousness to the depth
and breadth and height where souls can reach - it calls
for sanctification.

Those who talk with them this aura of reverence
into their marriage life - and for
the institution of marriage and for each of them - and for their
home - and their family - will walk with confidence
and move joyously into their future. Strong men will
sustain them - able leaders - and the living example
of generations who have maintained the standards
of family life, where all conditions are good and admirable -
from marriage and Religion is the (Covenant) - stand on the day

11/ 'Together We Stand at the Altar' - it is spiritually uplifting
to remember that and restorative to recall that moment
- whenever life's things go amiss, and the facts and
vessels of life begin to crack in front of us - to challenge us - and

we are in danger of losing ourselves in discords -
 to recall the glow and wonder and beauty of that splendid
 hour - and to remember that ^{at} ~~we have~~ that ~~is~~
^{laying on it yesterday}
 in U. S. history ~~and~~ that we pledged to show back the banner
 in health and in sickness, in adversity and in prosperity to
death as our part.

12/. "As long as there are Jews" (quote)



MARPESSA

By Stephen Phillips

. . . if I live with Idas, then we two
On the low earth shall prosper hand in hand
In odours of the open field, and live
In peaceful noises of the farm, and watch
The pastoral fields burned by the setting sun.

.

~~And I shall sleep beside him in the night,~~
~~And fearful from some dream shall touch his hand~~
~~Secure; or~~ At some festival we two
Will wander through the lighted city streets;
And in the crowd I'll take his arm and feel
Him closer for the press. So shall we live.
And though the first sweet sting of love be past,

. . . there shall succeed a faithful peace;
Beautiful friendship tried by sun and wind,
Durable from the daily dust of life.
And though with sadder, still with kinder eyes
We shall behold all frailties, we shall haste
To pardon, and with wallowing words to bless.
Then though we must grow old, we shall grow old
Together, and he shall not greatly miss
My bloom faded, and waning light of eyes,
Too deeply gazed in ever to seem dim;
Nor shall we murmur at, nor much regret
The years that gently bend us to the ground,

. . . we shall sit with luminous ^{holy} smiles,
Endeared by many griefs, by many a jest,
And custom sweet of living side by side;
And full of memories, not unkindly glance
Upon each other. Last, we shall descend
Into the natural ground - not without tears -
One must go first, ah god! one must go first;
After so long one blow for both were good;
Still like old friends, glad to have met, and leave
Behind a wholesome memory on the earth.

A PRAYER OF RECONSECRATION

Eternal God and Father! We thank Thee for Thy favor which has preserved and sustained us and permitted us to reach this hour. We look back in grateful reminiscence upon the years since first we pledged our hearts to one another and to Thee.

We thank Thee for the joys unnumbered with which Thou hast sweetened our lives; and likewise, we praise Thee for the trials through which we have passed. Our times are in Thy hand; we know that Thou wilt guide and sustain us even unto the end.

As Thou hast blessed us in the past, so continue to bless us in the years to come. May it be Thy will that these be years of health and contentment in the circle of our family and loved ones, of mutual devotion and service, of love and of peace.

We consecrate ourselves anew unto one another in love and faithfulness, in truth and uprightness, willing to share each other's burdens, in health and in sickness, in adversity and in prosperity till death do us part, and may God help us. Amen.

A prayer repeated during a Service of Reconsecration held at The Temple on Sunday morning, January fourth, nineteen hundred fifty-three, for men and women who were united in marriage by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver during his thirty-five years of ministry in the congregation.

The Temple

Cleveland 6, Ohio

Are There Still Walds To Cope?

Can We Still Be Pioneers?

Erskine

