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This is your life - Ways of self-appraisal, 1954.

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THIS IS YOUR LIFE
Ways of Self-Appraisal
March 14, 1954

One of the programs on the television is called "This Is Your Life" and it is very popular. There are quite a number of features which contribute to its popularity, not the least of which is the giving of things away. At the close of the show, you may recall if you have watched the program, the one who has been chosen to have his life celebrated on the program is showered with gifts of all kinds - bracelets, pins, electric washing machines, automobiles. There have been so many programs on our television which turn out to be breathtaking handouts - "Two for Your Money" and "Twenty Silver Dollars," and a thousand dollars or five thousand dollars if you can guess who lies buried in Grant's Tomb.

It's a year-round Purim party that the American people are enjoying on the television, a "sholach monos" every day. Although in all the years that I have been watching television, not even a bag of peanuts has come my way. But I am an optimist, and some day I hope the telephone will ring and I will be informed that I have won the Empire State Building.

But gifts apart - there is an attraction to a program such as "This is My Life." The men and women whose life story is recounted, who are singled out for honor, are as a rule interesting people. They have done something worth while in the world. And this is something to bear in mind if you are ever tempted to make up your own program for yourself - This is My Life - when you wish to strike a balance - a sort of a self-appraisal of your own life - the element of interest and of having done something worth while in the world.

The people who appear on this program and similar programs are not as a rule famous people. The world is not made up entirely of famous people - something to be grateful for. Famous people are rare! And God must have liked also people who are not famous because he created

so many of them.

But there are a lot of interesting people in the world, and these people make up all the exciting and colorful life of our world, and these people are found everywhere, in all walks of life - artists, artisans, workers, housewives - those people who do things just a little differently, a little more originally, perhaps, with greater skill, perhaps with greater concentration and consecration - men and women whose work and careers have helped and inspired and delighted other people in such a way that these other people are glad to live in the same world with them and are pleased to do them honor.

I have watched some of these programs, and I find as a rule that the qualities which seem to qualify a man and a woman to have his or her life story narrated are qualities, broadly speaking, of courage, of strong resolve, a capacity to persevere and overcome handicaps and some loving service to one's fellow men without the expectation of reward. And I believe that as long as our world will endure, these qualities will be treasured by men regardless where we find them.

And so if you should ever be tempted to write a scenario of your own life and call it "This is My Life," you ought to ask yourself how many of these qualities could you really include, could you honestly include in your life story. What portion of your life are you devoting to others? You should devote a considerable portion of your life to others if you want others to devote any part of their life to you. And without that, without other people devoting a portion of their life to us, we are sequestered in the world, isolated, alone, and there is no affliction in life greater than the affliction of loneliness, having "an age of years all winters," as the poet Byron put it; an age of years all winters - cold and lonely.

That is one of the qualities that you often look for in yourself

and also the quality of courage - courage to surmount whatever failures, whatever obstacles, whatever setbacks may come your way, and what life is free of such setbacks? Ask yourself whether you have ever stayed down when you have been thrown, whether you're spending your days in self-pity, whether you are disgruntled and are full of bitter reflections all your days on those who you believe have wronged you.

Well the world will never applaud you for these sentiments. The world is too busy to listen to your complaints. There isn't a worthwhile person, an interesting man or woman that you know in your circle of acquaintance, who has not at one time or another in his life or in her life suffered a loss, a bitter disappointment, a frustration that they had the courage to rise after having been thrown, to rise on the rungs of defeat and failure to higher levels of effort, enterprise, and manhood and womanhood. That is true of every man - true of every great man.

So in your appraisal of yourself, you should be able to include a measure of these qualities. I know too in watching these programs as the stories of the people are unfolded, that the narrator who is telling the story of the man who is being honored is interested in telling something - a great deal, for that matter, of the man's past, his childhood, of his home, of his education, his family, his friends. And sometimes the most exciting and the most moving incidents of these programs have to do with relatives, with brothers or sisters or friends whom one has not seen these many years, whom fortunes of life have separated, and it is their unexpected reunion on the stage before your eyes that frequently brings tears to your eyes. There is a lesson here too, because, my dear friends, as human beings we live not only horizontally, in extension, in time, so many years - we live not only perpendicularly, as it were, in

depth and in experience, we live also circularly in association, in family, in fellowship, in friendships. A life purely horizontal, exclusively perpendicular, is not a complete life and is never a happy life. It is the all-embracing circular existence, the life with others, the large orbit of association which rounds out our life and gives it deep satisfaction.

So when you write your story, ask yourself whether you are living only in time and in experience alone or in the midst of a circle of devotion which embraces other lives in precious intimacy with other lives; whether you are advancing circularly with others. There are individuals - you and I know them - who are very self-centered, ruthless; very often they use others and discard them as soon as they no longer have use for them. They travel alone, thinking they can travel faster because they travel alone. Men and women who are self-centered even when they are married - they somehow do not seem to move in a radiant orbit of mutual affection and mutual helpfulness.

If you were to be the guest of an imaginary TV program, how wide would be the circle of those whom you would like to include in it - how many would care to be included? Forgotten friends, perhaps? Why did you lose them? Estranged brothers and sisters? Why did you quarrel? Parents? Why did you neglect them? Children who have drifted far away from you? How were the links broken? Or would your circle be thronged eagerly with many people who happily shared in your life and who wish to remain forever a part of your life?

This is your life. This life of ours, dear friends, has its definite terms of reference. We were not given life on our own terms. Our lives have their sharp limitations; our years, for example, are numbered. We cannot by wishing live forever. That's a hard framework in which our life is included. Our freedoms are not unlimited. We are bound in many ways

by heredity, bound in many ways by environment. We are subject to sickness and to accident and to sorrow and to bereavement and to unhappiness. Very often we have no control over these things. So often life itself becomes a bafflement and a mystery. These are the terms of reference. We are not born into a paradise, and those who are born into the lap of luxury are perhaps the most handicapped of all! We find ourselves in a world which is riven with strife and political, social, and economic conflicts; there is a constant threat of war and of depressions. These are the facts of our lives. This is your life! And wise men and women realize that they must work with these facts and within that framework nevertheless^{find} a satisfying measure of fulfillment and of happiness.

Some become very sad and lugubrious about these terms of reference of life; they become pessimists, they become cynics, they become escapists. There have been whole schools of philosophy, there have been religions who have despaired of life and of society. There can be no progress in the world and why make the effort? There is no possibility of happiness in human existence - it's all (Hebrew) "vanity of vanities." There is today quite a trend in certain religious circles, in Christendom especially, called existentialism, which stresses the tragic sense of life, the unresolved contradictions and paradoxes of human existence which in their thought hold men to sustain inner crisis and torments; man is helpless to help himself. Someone has defined existentialism in terms of a program "the world is in a terrible mess. Don't try to do anything about it. You might make it worse."

Now Judaism accepted life's terms of reference, but not in bitterness and not in resignation and not in hopelessness. They were terms of reference decreed by a good God. And that man and woman might live and derive as large a measure of happiness and satisfaction within that kind

of a world defined by God, Judaism has given mankind a Torah, a code of instruction, a way of life, by means of which man can find joy and happiness in the world, a way of life which has to do with aspiration, with doing good, with creative work, with helping to build the good society on earth. When men follow that way of life, they will find much happiness in the world.

There is a story told of one of the *Chassidim*, of that interesting sect of Jewish pietists who lived in large numbers at the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, whose dominant philosophy was the joy in serving God. A truly pious man was a happy man. The way of serving God is the way of boundless, exuberant spirit. They used to sing at their services and dance at their services, especially in the presence of their leader. One day a group of *Chassidim* were singing and dancing in the ecstasy of religious fervor, chanting psalms, portions of the liturgy, and one of them was heard singing with the greatest of joy a verse from the Bible which said, (Hebrew) "A man - his origin is in the dust and his end is in the dust." And one turned to him and said, "Shmul, what is this joyous expression and singing about the fact that a man his origin is in the dust and he will end up in the dust - what is there to be so happy about?" "Well," he said, "why shouldn't I be happy? If my origin had been gold and I am destined to become dust and mud, that is something to be sorrowful about. But if I were born out of the dust and will end up in the dust, that's nothing to cry over. And in the meantime I can perform good mitzvohs, good deeds, sometimes have a little shnaps and wine as I go along - why shouldn't I be happy?"

There is good philosophy there friends. Between the mystery of our origin and the mystery of our destiny God has given us the life to

live and to make, and the wise man can make of that life something beautiful and something satisfying, studded here and there with rare moments of great joy and deep satisfaction.

So if you come ever to a serious stocktaking of your life, to a self-appraisal, here are some things to keep in mind. First, don't appraise yourself in a spirit of self-depreciation. The great Jewish philosopher Maimonides said, "A man should never think meanly of himself. No character, no great effort is ever built upon human dis-esteem. Think greatly of yourself and try to live up to the high conception of yourself. The rabbi said that all the children of Israel are sons of Kings. Of course they were not all sons of kings. Very few of them were princes, but they were all challenged to live and to conduct themselves as if they belonged to a kingly dynasty."

When you appraise yourself don't do it in a spirit of self-depreciation. On the other hand don't do it in a spirit of a false self-appreciation. Don't base your self-appraisal on false values, especially values which you yourself have nothing to do with - values of your father's and grandfather's, preening yourself upon ancestry. That's what we call snobbishness - racial snobbishness, social snobbishness - trying to get credit for what other people did, not what you yourself achieved.

Don't evaluate yourself on the basis of a family tree. It is told that a man who spent \$5,000 to trace down his family tree - \$2,000 to discover his ancestry and \$3,000 to cover it up.

In a self-appraisal take into account what others think of you but not altogether. It is well that others think well of us, especially the right kind of people, but our lives must not be conducted and organized with an eye towards making impressions upon people because that means catering to people, and that is a form of self-destruction.

And finally, in appraising yourself, don't put too much emphasis upon the element of success, especially material success. It is good to be successful. It is no discredit to any man to have succeeded in his business, in his profession, honorably. But success is not always the true measure of life. Some great people have been great failures when measured by the common yardstick of success. The greater your ideals are in life, the less likelihood is there that you will attain them completely. Success is important, but you must understand what it is that you want to succeed in your life. It is far more important to be a successful father and mother than a successful business man.

Write your own "This Is My Life." It is a good thing to do. But write it frankly, fairly, honestly, something which your own eyes and only your own eyes will see. And then if you do that you will find, I believe, there will be much ground in your life to justify your thinking well of yourself, and there will also be much ground in your life for self-improvement, all our lives.

I go back and I conclude with words from the Bible, because as the rabbi said, (Hebrew) "Turn it round and round and round again - everything is in it." There isn't a human problem that is not suggested there. All the doubts and all the dark heresies and all the pathetic questionings of the human heart are there. In the Book of Deuteronomy we read, "Keep the words of this Torah." This way of life that I spoke about a moment ago. "For that is your life." That is your life. Life that will give you what you really want - contentment, inner peace, self-respect, as well as the approval of your fellow men. After the skeptic or the cynic Koheleth got through with all his cogitations and reflections on life and the vanity of life and the hopelessness of human striving, that book of Ecclesiastes ends up with one verse that sums up the whole philosophy

of religion and of human life - (Hebrew) "To conclude, after everything has been said and heard, to sum things all up, serve God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man." This is it. This is your life.



1) TV - "This is your life" - very popular - so many features which contribute to its popularity - esp. the one of giving things away - At the close of the show - the one whose life is recounted - is showered with gifts - all kinds of gifts and presents - brooches - pins - stationery machines - automobiles.

(a) ~~Most~~ ^{so many} ~~show~~ TV shows - turn out to be "hand-outs" - "I'm for your money" - "I want I don't know" \$1000 - or \$500 - if you can guess who ~~has~~ ^{has been} buried in Grants Tomb -

(b) It is a year-round Premium party for the American people - altho in all the year that I have been watching TV. not a bag of presents has come my way - free!

(c) But I am an optimist - how long I expect my telephone ^{will} ring and ~~have~~ ^{some one} ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{phone} ^{on} ^{that} I have ~~won~~ ^{won} the Empire State Bldg.

2) But gifts apart - there is an attraction to a program such as "This is my life" - The men & women whose life story is told - who are ^{suffered} ~~by~~ ^{by} out for heaven - as in a rule interesting people who have done something worth-while in the world -

And this is something to bear in mind when you appear your own life - when you strike a balance - and say "This is my life!"

They are not as a rule fanatics people. ^{He} ~~He~~ is not made (2) ^{of} ~~of~~ fanatic people. Fanatic people are rare! And God must have left also people who are not fanatics - for He created so many of them.

But there are a lot of interesting people - in the world - who make up this braking and colored life of ours - and they are (found) most every where - in all walks of life - artists & artisans - workers & house wives - people who do things a little differently, a little more original with greater skill, or dedication. - men and women whose hink and career have helped and enriched and delighted other people in such a way that they are glad that they live in the same world with them - and are proud to do them honor.

3/ I have watched some of these preparations - and others like them. I find that as a rule the Exalteds which seem to exalt one to have his life - they ~~are~~ are Exalteds of courage - determination - the capacity to persevere and overcome handicaps - and service whole-hearted service to one's fellow-men.

As long as the world will endure - these Exalteds will be treasured by society.

'This is my life' - How many of these Exalteds could you include - what portion of your life is your devotion to others? You should - a considerable portion - if you wish it. No devotion any part then has to you -

And without that - you are segmented, isolated, alone
- and there is no affliction greater & loneliness -
"an age of years all winters"

(a) And Courage - to surmount failure - obstacles - set-backs
- do you stay down when you have been thru? Spending
your days in self-pity, or in bitter reflection on them
who, you believe, have wronged you?

(b) The world will never applaud you, ^{too busy to listen to} for complaining your
complaints -

(c) There isn't a north-while, interesting man or woman
in your circle of acquaintances who has not at one
time or another - suffered a loss, a frustration, a little
disappointment. They had the courage to rise on the ruins -

So did every great man!

4). So in our self-appraisal we shall be able to include
a measure of these qualities -

I note too - as the story is unfolded - that the
narrator is interesting in telling us something of the man's
past - his childhood - his home - his education - family
friends -

The most exalting - moving - incidents - relations - brothers -
sisters - friends - long when we have seen these men
youth - when life begins to be separated - and the ^{possibilities}
reunions - often brings tears to the spectators.

And there is a lesson here too - we have not only
longed for in living perpetrators in experience, but
circumstances - in fellowship and friendships -

4
Do you live only in time, or experience, alone, or in the
midst of a circle of devotion - which embraces other lives -
in precious intimacy - advancing with them together -

Some individuals are useless - using others - and dis-
carding them - travelling alone - self-centred even when
married, ~~and~~ they do not move in a radiant orbit
of ^{mutual} affection and mutual helpfulness.

5/ If you were to be the guest on an interview TV. This is
your life: - how wide would be the circle of those whom
you would like to include in it - how many would care
to be included?

For the friends? Why did I lose them?
Extraneous brother & sister? Why did I lose them?
Parents -? Why did I lose them?
Children - who have strayed away - Why have I lost them?

Or would your circle be thronged eagerly with many people
who happily shared in your life - and wish to re-
main forever, a part of your life?

6/ My Friends: This life, our - how to learn, references -
its sharp limitations - Our years as numbered - because
by wishing like before -
Our freedom - is not unlimited - Heredity & Environment
- Sickness - sorrow - bereavement - unhappiness -
- So often a bafflement and a mystery!

We are not born into a paradise - and then who are
born into the laps of luxury - are perhaps the most handicapped
of all!

Our world is ruined with stupid - pol. social, econ -
and there is the constant threat of war & depression
- "This is your life!"
There are the facts of our lives and wise men
realized that they must work with these facts,
and within that framework find a measure of
fulfillment and satisfaction -

7/ Some become very sad and ingenuities about it - and
become pessimists & cynics & escapists -

There have been schools of phil - religions - debased /
life & society - philosophy - no purpose - no
effort - no possibility of happiness in this world

Existentialism - tragic sense of life / unresolved contradictions, and paradoxes
- which hold man in constant crisis & torment
- man is helpless to help himself - "World is a terrible mess
Don't try to do anything about it -
You might make it worse!"

8/ Jordan accepted the basic terms / referred directed by /
and worked out a DOX - a way of life - which would give
man a large measure of happiness even within - strong will to live

Possibility of joy in this world - in aspiration in doing work
- in creative work - in helping to build the just society

- Selfishness - man, with man, within an angry cold world
- without the possibility

10/ Self-Appraisal - Talk start

(1) Don't do it in a spirit of Self-Deprecation.
depression - 2nd

(2) Fals Values - Austerity - Satisfaction
\$5000 -

(3) What other think of you - impression
Cater - destroy yourself

(4) Success - What is success?
WRHS



11/ Frankly - fairly - heartily - whole of yourself
Much ground for thanksgiving
" " for improvement

14. Dt. אין אדם יכול להשיג כלום בלי עמל
אין אדם יכול להשיג כלום בלי עמל
אין אדם יכול להשיג כלום בלי עמל