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Why not do it yourself? Religion and social action, 1954.



## WHY NOT DO IT YOURSELF?

### Religion and Social Action

May 16, 1954

This subject, "Why Not Do It Yourself?" which I set as the theme of my sermon this morning, was suggested by two events which transpired both this week and over this weekend in our community. One is the meeting of the Region of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in our city over this weekend, the central theme of whose deliberations is "Social Action" - religion expressed in social action. The other event is an exhibition in our community of the things which many can do if they set their minds to it by themselves, and the name of that exhibition, of that enterprise which aroused considerable interest in our community is "Do It Yourself."

Both of these events stress the importance of self-help and of doing it yourself. If something has to be done, as a rule we are tempted to call in other people to do it; we refer the matter to others, we delegate it to others, or we sit helplessly by, hoping that the thing will correct itself. If we see anything wrong with the government, we are prone to say there ought to be a law about it, and we are satisfied to let it go at that. (machine difficulties)...If you are sure that you cannot fix a broken chair or hang a picture or mend a water pipe or a defective wiring or your boy's bicycle or the grandfather's clock, if you are sure that you can't do it, it is perhaps better that you don't tinker with it, perhaps better to let a skilled hand have a go at it. Many a minor domestic tragedy is caused by some valiant spirit whose ambition and good will far exceeded his capacity.

But there are many things which one can do, or which we can learn to do if we are not lazy or indifferent or otherwise engrossed or if we do not regard these things as not worthwhile, as beneath us. That's where we miss out, many of us.



Every human being should do more than one thing. Every human being should live in more than one world. If you are a mental worker, and your profession is largely a matter involving the intellect, the mind, it would be well for you to seek recreation, and that word recreation is a very beautiful word - to re-create yourself, to be reborn, to renew yourself. It would be well to seek recreation in some physical activity, some craftsmanship, things that you can do with your own hands (and there are so many things which one can learn to do with one's own hands). If you are a manual worker, it is well that you supplement your activity by some intellectual or cultural pursuit, to exercise your mind, to live in another world, to do more than one thing in the world.

I am not referring at the moment to just plain relaxation, which all people require. I am not referring to just periods of rest and pleasant drifting which are good, both for the body and the mind; I'm referring to disciplined, purposive activity of a creative character, to supplement what you are doing professionally. I am referring to a contrasted activity which will refresh you, which will take you out of a routine, out of your unitary occupation, which will help to give you a well rounded sense of existence.

You will be surprised when you find out how many things you really can do yourself, and you will be surprised to find out how delighted you will be when you discover how many different things you can do. It is like the handicapped person, like the blind person, who felt doomed to inactivity, to the drabness of the handicapped's existence, who is suddenly trained to do things which he had not done before and finds a new meaning and a new eagerness in the enterprise of doing things in life. It is so with every human being.

The saddest thing in life, my dear friends, is that men who know how brief



life is nevertheless do not expand themselves maximally, do not unlock all the chambers of their powers and their talents and their potentialities, do not discover before it is too late how many things they are really capable of doing. The saddest thing, I believe, is the fact that we do not discover ourselves, we do not explore ourselves fully. It is like mankind which lived for thousands of years, the peoples of Europe, without knowing that there was a western hemisphere. Many people go through life and are not aware of undiscovered continents and hemispheres within themselves and die incomplete, unfulfilled, having partially lived. I wonder why people do that. Is it because we are too easily satisfied? Is it because we think too little of ourselves? Is it because we lack imagination or will power? Is it because of some inborn conservatism? Or plain laziness in us? I don't know.

Now Judaism challenged men to discover themselves fully - to fulfill themselves. Judaism taught people to look upon themselves as supremely important, of unmeasurable capacities. Thou hast made him little lower than the angels. Actually what the text of the Psalm says, "Man, Thou hast made him a little lower than God" - crowned him with glory and honor. The greatest Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides said, "Think not meanly of yourself, and despair not of perfection." Our religion wanted us to think of ourselves greatly; our religion gave man a sense of greatness and importance, as a co-worker of God, "in the works of creation." Our religion believed in progress, in the progress of the individual from less to more, from more to higher, and in the progress of humanity. Many of the religions of the world and many of the philosophies of the world taught a different kind of an attitude towards human life, towards the capacities of the individual, and towards progress. Many of them denied the reality of progress. Many of these religions and philosophies were pessimistic - man cannot help himself, the good



society cannot be established on earth, there is no real purpose in resisting evil, the very will to live is at the root of man's suffering and unhappiness. The classical world, the Greek and Roman world, did not believe in human progress. They rather believed in cycles of repetitive existence and one cycle being lower than the other, a steady degradation in human life. Goodness and nobility have been running down since the beginning of time. The Golden Age was in the past, perfection was in the past, decay is in the present; there is no hope for the future.

Perhaps the most noble philosophy of the classical world was stoicism. The stoic saw progress only in terms of the individual's advance towards serenity and calm. Everything which destroyed that serenity and that calm was to be avoided. Pity and sympathy and human compassion disturbed the equanimity of the human being, and therefore ought to be eschewed, and man should practice detachment from life as much as possible in order to retain or acquire the inner tranquility of being. That was the ideal of the stoic. Therefore, stoicism and the ancient world generally had no passion for social action, for social justice, for the improvement of society, for human progress, because all these involved effort, struggle, sometimes sacrifice, sometimes suffering, sometimes martyrdom, and these they strongly disapproved of as disturbing the calm and the equanimity of the human being. They despaired of the reality or of the possibility of progress.

We have such philosophies in our world today, The philosophy of Existentialism, for example, which has a certain vogue today among certain disillusioned intellectuals, both in the secular groups and in the religious groups. Summed up, Existentialism simply means the world is in a terrible mess - don't try to do anything about it - you may make it worse.

Judaism rejects all these philosophies of human despair and of pessimism, rejects all low estimates of the human being. Judaism is a religion which has an



historic perspective; it is a religion based on history, really, when you come to think of it. The Ten Commandments begin with an historical declaration: "I am the Lord Thy God that brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." There is a strong consciousness of history in Judaism, and our religion looks back upon the progress of man from his earliest days as a barbarian and beyond that to the stage of savagery and even beyond that to the best level and sees a steady progress and upward trend, not unbroken and not without its frequent setbacks, but nevertheless a steady movement upward to higher levels. Man has advanced so that he has, to a large degree, conquered slavery, many forms of poverty; he has improved his health; he has improved his education; he has gained in deeper insights, more power. That is progress. There is progress in the history of man, and Judaism accepts that fact and deals upon it, and projects the vision of still greater progress of "the end of days," when there will be no more war, when all poverty will be eradicated, when all forms of intolerance and bigotry will disappear, when every man will live under his vine and under his fig tree with none to make him afraid.

But - and this is the point that I want to make this morning - Judaism believes in progress, but not in automatic progress. Progress is the result of human effort, human planning, human struggle; man must make the effort; God will help; God's grace is always there ready to assist man, but man must make the effort. Behold, I set before you today life and death and good and evil; choose thou life; man must do the choosing. Man must make the decision; man must begin the great enterprise, relying upon the sustaining grace of God. In Judaism, my good friends, it is not enough to know the truth; one must seek the truth. It is not enough to know goodness; one must seek it. Justice shalt thou pursue. "One must be swift to do righteousness," said Isaiah. One must seek peace. That in a real sense is one of the basic differences between Judaism and some of the other religions of mankind - belief, and faith are not enough. Belief and faith are important if they lead to action. (Hebrew)...It



is not the study of the Torah and the interpretation of the Torah which is the important thing...The act, the deed, what you do with your knowledge and with your study. The famous Rabbi Hiyya said, "He who studies the Torah without the intention of fulfilling it, it were better had he never been born." Knowledge in itself is not an end, nor is religious knowledge an end in itself. They must lead to action, and while it is true that no man is strong enough and able enough to complete a great task because we are finite and we are mortal and our strength is limited and we are not God, nevertheless our religion tells us (Hebrew)... "It is not your duty to complete a task; nobody expects it of you... But neither art thou free to desist from it." Share your burden with God; share your burden with other men, but share; do; and act.

Fortunately, good friends, we all live in a free society where we can act, where we can participate in social action, voluntarily. And religion summons us and challenges us to do just that. If there are slums in your community, do something about it. You are a member of the community, you have the power to vote, you can raise your voice; there are avenues through which you can make your thought, your judgment, your opinion to be heard; do something about it. That is the only way slums were ever cleared in the past, by some devoted and consecrated man or woman who made that his or her particular challenge, job, task, mission to improve the situation. Things are not done automatically. Automatically things just drift from bad to worse. If you feel that your civil rights are in danger, locally, nationally, do something about it. You're a free citizen. Make your voice heard. Reach your congressman, your senator, your president. Speak through your newspapers, talk to your friends in groups, in societies, join with other men of good will who think similarly; do something about it - action! Some people are content just with grumbling and complaining. They are not fulfilling their duties,



not only as citizens, but as children of God. If the politics are not to your liking, do something about it. Get into the political situation, into the precinct, into the ward, into the party. Take part; assume responsibility. You will then have power to act. It is not enough to stand on the sidelines and say, "Oh, politics - it's corrupt!" and be satisfied with yourself in your self-righteousness. If there is intolerance in your community, forms of bigotry, do something about it. Join with other men and women who believe in tolerance and in good will, into groups and associations. Educate your fellow men. Educate your children. Reach the public press. Do something about it - something can be done about it. That's the way intolerance has ever been stamped out in any part of the world, by men and women who felt called upon to do something about it. If you feel that there is something wrong with your public school systems or with the programs that you see or that your children see on the television or hear on the radio, just don't be satisfied with complaining to yourself or to members of your family about it, do something about it. Unite with other men and women and make your wishes and your will and determination heard - you're bound to win out because they depend upon individuals for their very income, their very livelihood.

This, my good friends, is a part of the business of living. That is the mission of a religious man in society. The difference between a religious man and a non-religious man in society is really the difference of a mission. A religious man feels that he is not only committed to certain basic things but he has a mission to make these basic things really in the world, and he goes out to do it. A sense of mission. It doesn't have to be world shaking. There are very few people who have the ability to carry out things which move the world, and most of the time if they move the world they move it in the wrong direction. Limited spheres of activity,



right about you, around your home, on your street, in your neighborhood, in your community. Be a missionary for the good cause. Do it yourself. That, I understand, is the purpose of the social action program which the Union of American Hebrew Congregations has been fostering in every synagogue and temple throughout our nation. Religion in action.





1/. 2 Events - Union - Social Action; "Do It Yourself"

Both stress in particular of Self-help - Doing it yourself -

If something has to be done - call in - refer - delegate it  
set helplessly by - Correct itself - Ought to be a Law!

Complain

Both tell you - "Try to do something about it yourself"

Or at least share <sup>work</sup> Colored Boy

2/. Of course, if you know that your talents are sturdily buried  
in certain directions - can't fix a broken chair; have  
a picture, or mend a water-pipe, defective wiring - you  
lay by by ask - Grandfather's clock unlike always

Best not to tinker with it - Let a skilled hand have a go at it  
Many a minor domestic tragedy has been caused by valiant  
spirits whose ambition & good intention far exceeded their  
capacity.

3/. But there are many things which we can do, or have to do -  
if we were not so lazy, indifferent, otherwise engaged, or  
regarded them as not worth-while.

Here is where we miss out - Should be doing more & one  
thing in the world.

Should be in more & one world.

Mental work - would do well to seek Recreation -  
in some physical hobby - craftsmanlike - making  
things with his own hands - (so many - too numerous)



The Manual Worker - intellectual or cultured person  
spends much of his mind

4/1. Referring to Davis relaxation - which all people  
require - just periods of rest - pleasant drifting  
which are good both for the mind and the body

Rather - to disordered, purposeless activity of a creature  
character, to supplement what you are doing purposefully,  
- a controlled activity - to refresh you - & take you out  
of routine - variety occupation

As part of a completely rounded out life -

5/ You will be surprised how many things you can do  
yourself - and you will be delighted

Handcraft

① Saddest thing in life - knowing its brevity - we still  
do not expand ourselves maximally - do not value  
all the chances, our powers & talents & potentials -

- how much we are really capable of doing!

- we do not fully discover & explore ourselves - Worst Example

- I wonder why? Too easily satisfied? Think too  
little of ourselves? Look, Weymouth, is Hill Park!

Future conservation.



6/ Jude. challenged man to discover himself fully - to judge himself 13

I taught myself of man - 1500000 - Marxism

Behind in Progress - Few Religions -

man cannot help himself - God is. cannot be established on earth.

No real purpose in resisting evil.

The very will to live is at the root, man's suffering & unhappiness  
Classical world had no belief in Progress. - Age of degradation -

- order & stability of life have been running down -

Perfection was in the past. Decay is in the present. There is no hope for the future

Stone - most noble - saw progress only in terms, the individual  
advances through severely & calmly - neither sympathy nor  
judgment - doubt - doubtment - inner struggle

No passion for social action -

7/ Existentialism - World is a mess - Don't try to do -

Judaism - rejects - personism - low estimate

History - man has progressed - good work

Not automatic! Man must make the effort - God will help /

8/ We are enough to know the truth - God!

We must learn to know God (thru)

We must seek Him - not for

We must seek justice & pursue it -



One must be "mift le do nykumen" (Israel)

We must seek first

No must sell place -

11/ המבול בדת אלו המעלה 9/

2. שנים אלה נמשך ללא הרף  
 חזרה - זהו שנים נמשך ללא הרף  
 חזרה - זהו שנים נמשך ללא הרף  
 חזרה - זהו שנים נמשך ללא הרף

Man raised fully arched 21/10/1953 714 1/1 -

Man cannot fully achieve

11/ Do I see share. - ~~Some people never think of doing same~~  
Religion wants us to do something about it. (Just)

12. 1st summer

11). Fortunately - we have - each man should feel summoned  
to read action

Slaves -

skines -  
Arist Rytls enlarged

A real Rights Magazine  
Admission not to your library.

Interviews

Pyramus TV - Radio.

Programs TV - Radio  
14. This is part, the business, life - the mission of  
religious man in society



*Get at the Cause*

A FATHER was relating to his small son the story of a sheep that got through a hole in the fence and wandered into the woods. He went on to tell him that wild beasts came along and were about to devour the sheep when the good shepherd appeared just in time to save him. The little country boy had listened thoughtfully. There was a pause at the end of the story, and then the boy spoke up, "Did they nail up the hole in the fence?" He wanted to be sure that something was done about it.

"It just ain't fitten," she