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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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In the academy of Hillel, 1956.

"IN THE ACADEMY OF HILLEL"

The second lecture in a series on
Ancient Wisdom for Modern Man

THE TEMPLE
April 22, 1956

Last Sunday morning, you may recall, I spoke of the wisdom of a famous Rabbi, "Simon the Just", which is found in the "Pirke Abot". This morning I should like to speak of the wisdom of another famous Jewish sage, useful for modern man, found in the same "Pirke Abot", "Sayings of Hillel" — some fifteen of the sayings of Hillel are incorporated in these chapters of the Fathers in the first and the second chapters. They are, like all the other sayings, terse, concise and pithy, and they are profound and they are timeless. All great wisdom is timeless, like all great art. The science of the ancients has long been largely antiquated. But not their art nor their wisdom.

whose
Hillel is probably the greatest of the rabbis/teachings are found in the Mishna. That collection of rabbinic law and lore, covering a period of a few centuries, and compiled and edited about the beginning of the third century by Judah ha-Nasi. Many rabbis had a hand in the formulation of those laws and those ethical doctrines which are found in the Mishna, and probably the greatest of all of them was Hillel. He was foremost among those who developed the technique for the exposition of the Bible, for the exegesis of the Torah, which made possible the development of Jewish law and what came to be known as Jewish Rabbinic Judaism, or Pharisaic Judaism — the classic, the normative Judaism, which has survived to this day. The famous Seven Rules of Hillel for the exposition of the Torah, gave flexibility to the application of Biblical law to new situations as they arose and thus secured for Judaism a continuing vitality, and relevancy which saved it from becoming obsolescent.

The appreciation of the role which Hillel played in insuring the survival of Judaism is reflected in a famous rabbinic saying of later times. In the beginning

when the Torah was forgotten in Israel, Ezra came up from Babylon and reestablished it. That, you will recall, was in the 5th Century, Before the Common Era. When it was again forgotten, Hillel the Babylonian came up and reestablished it. So Hillel is coupled with the great ^{Ezra} ~~Ezrah~~ as the saviors of Judaism. By the very name, Hillel ha-Babli, you can infer that he was born in Babylonia. He was born in the first century before the Common Era and died around the year 10 of the Common Era. Hillel was forty years old when he migrated from Babylonia to Palestine in order to continue his studies. Babylonia remain^{ed} an important center of Jewish life and of Jewish learning from the very time of the Babylonian exile in the 6th century before the Common Era and Babylonian Judaism developed alongside of Palestinian Judaism and there was the closest contact between them. In fact when Jewish life began to decline in Palestine as a result of the destruction of the Temple in the first century, and the failure of the rebellions of the Jews against Rome and the disorganization of Jewish life in Palestine and the closing of some of its schools, it was Babylonia, from about the beginning of the fourth century, that began to take on the importance of the center of Jewish life and learning in the world. It was there that great academies were established - the Academy of - great teachers arose. And it was in Babylonia, you will recall, that the great Babylonian Talmud was compiled. It is interesting to note that while the important Jewish Diaspora in Babylonia continued to be a vigorous center ^{of} ~~in~~ Jewish life and thought, a similarly large Jewish center in the Greek Diaspora, in Egypt for example, where about this time that we are now discussing there were probably five hundred thousand Jews in the City of Alexandria alone, that that center of Jewish population never became an important center in Jewish religious development and in Judaism - and in fact, in the course of time it disappeared from the purview of Jewish life. And the reason for it is not far to seek. In Babylonia the Jewish people established schools and academies -- centers of learning -- and trained teachers and leaders. In Alexandria they were too much assimilated to the Greek culture and the Greek way of life and they failed to establish those institutions which alone make possible the survival of Judaism --

schools and centers of learning.

Well Hillel came from that Babylonian center. He came to Palestine. And the 1st Century before the Common Era -- in other words he was an earlier contemporary of Jesus,-- he was also a contemporary of Philo the Jewish Philosopher in Alexandria - that century, that hundred years preceding the destruction of the Temple in 70 of the Common Era, was a stirring, a turbulent, a politically restive and culturally effervescent century in Jewish life and thought. The power of Rome, which was established in Palestine in 53 Before the Common Era, with the coming of Pompei, the power of Rome was beginning to weigh increasingly heavy upon the people -- the storms of revolt were beginning to gather, and the hatred against the ruling power was increasing year by year. Politically a restless century. It was religiously a restless century -- religious heresies, non-conformism rife. The old bottle seemingly could not hold the new wine as a spirit. Many diffident and unorthodox groups appeared, some of them of an extremely mystical character, reaching out for new revelations and newer ways of life and newer disciplines of life. And bitter religious controversies were in the ~~air~~ air. The great cleavage, which was to lead to the creation of a new religion - Christianity - was not far off.

Now in this agitated and troubled age there was need for a strong, wise, spiritual leader to guide the people -- one who was not an unyielding, and rigorous doctrinaire, but one who was conciliatory -- firm in his own convictions but not narrowly partisan. One who was prepared to make necessary adjustments, to ease burdens - in order to rescue the spirit of the faith even when the letter could not be fully observed. Hillel was just such a leader. A providential leader of his people - in that critical and decisive century for Judaism. And he was great, not only as a rabbi and a teacher, but as a human being - great in character. He was wise in heart -- that wisdom regarded as the supreme gift that a man can have -- a good heart which contains everything else -- that Hillel possessed.

He is best reviewed in his own maxim which he taught to his pupils in his own academy

(be of the disciples of Aaron - the brother of Moses)

(loving peace)

(and pursuing peace). It is

one thing to love peace - it is another to go out ~~and question~~ in quest of it - to pursue it.

(loving all men regardless of

^{who}
~~what~~ they are, of what race they belong to, what religion they belong to.)

(not ^{only} ~~many~~ Jews ^{or} ~~are~~ your brothers)

(but all ^{created} human beings.)

(And so bring them near to the ideals of the Torah.) Through love of man, through friendship and kindness, to bring men near to an appreciation and a devotion to the great ethical ideals of the Torah -- that was the guiding principal of Hillel.

And Hillel helped to save Judaism! The storms did sweep over the people. The Temple was destroyed, the nation was exiled, scattered -- but thanks to the works of Hillel and of the Disciples whom he raised, like Jochanan ben Zakkai, Judaism and the Jewish people, survived.

Hillel left Babylonia at the age of forty to study with the great teachers in Palestine, Shemiah and Abtalion. That pair was the fourth of the five pairs of the Zugoth who headed off the Sanhedrin - one was the Nasi and the other was the Abbath Bin. Hillel wanted to study with these great luminares of Judaism so at the age of forty, without anything - with no possessions - he came to Palestine - he came to Jerusalem to study - terribly poor. At the age of forty he began to earn a living in Jerusalem as a woodcutter, a hewer of wood. And of the few which he earned, part of it he ^{used} ~~earned~~ to sustain his life, and the other to pay for admission to the academy of Shemiah and Abtalion, for his tuition fee. And one day, when he did not have the to pay, he was excluded by the by the section of the academy, and so the legend has it that he climbed to the roof of that synagogue on a cold winter day when the snow was falling and through a shaft he listened so as not to miss any of the instruction and when

they found him there, half frozen, they said that Hillel was worthy to have the Sabbath Day desecrated for his sake. And later on they said that Hillel

, if a poor man says how can I study the Torah I am poor, I have to earn a living, they would turn to Hillel, and say Hillel accuses you for not studying the Torah, he too was poor and he found ways of studying.

Well, after some years, Shemiah and Abtalion died and the leaders of the community looked about for a successor and they found no one so versed in the law, and of such fine character, as Hillel and Hillel was appointed Nasi of the Sanhedrin, and for some forty years he was the head of that important judicial and legislative body in Judaism.

They speak of Hillel as the gentle Hillel. Hillel favored in his interpretation of the law the mild interpretation -

He always found ways of lessening the rigors and the harshness of the law to make it easier for human beings to observe it. And when need be he dared even to sacrifice the letter of the law, in order to save its spirit. Thus, for example, there is the law in the Bible, which says that at the time of the Sabbatical Year every seventh year, all debts contracted are automatically remitted. That law was intended to save human beings from being perpetually in debt and pauperized. But it worked a great disadvantage after a while for as the Sabbatical Year approached people refused to lend money to the poor, knowing that a Sabbatical Year would cancel the debt, and the poor suffered as a result of this law which was intended to protect them. Whereupon Hillel devised a legal technicality - a fiction - and permitted the creditor to turn over his note of indebtedness to the court which retained that note during the Sabbatical Year and after the Sabbatical Year the creditor was permitted to collect on his debt. That radical revision of the law was a sharp cancellation of the law, but worked to the advantage both of debtors and of creditors. That is known in Jewish law as which is the Greek word meaning 'before the assembly of counselors' which Hillel instituted. Hillel

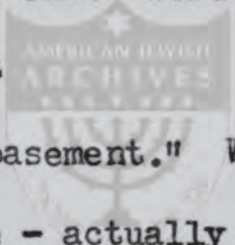
But it is not with the legal decisions of Hillel that we are concerned with

this morning, although they are tremendously interesting, but with his ethical teachings - his words of wisdom - for the man of his day and for the man of our day. In his academy Hillel taught ^{perhaps} ~~that~~ one principal, more than any other guiding principal for life - he taught men to be modest and humble at all times. Pride is the root of much contention in the world, of much bitterness and estrangement between families, between friends, between communities, between nations. Pride - false pride. The feeling that if I don't insist on this why my status will be lowered - something will happen to me -- I will be less than I want to be. The later ages had a popular saying

(always a man should try to be as humble a man and as modest a man as Hillel).

By the way, that was also said in the Bible of Moses, that he was the humblest, this great emancipator, this great law giver was the humblest of men.

Hillel was fond of saying

"My yielding - my self abasement" its not the exact word that I am reaching for, self-abasement ~~as~~ implies much more than what  means, "My self abasement ~~and~~ ^{is} my exaltation and my exaltation is my abasement." When you voluntarily lower yourself a bit - get off from your high horse - actually you are elevating yourself spiritually. Your showing ~~what~~ a greater and finer man you are. And when you artificially seek to exalt yourself above your fellow men, you are actually lowering yourself. A proud man can never be truly in love. A proud man can never truly love, for he is always in love with himself. He is always concerned about himself, and when one is always concerned about himself he cannot be concerned about the one whom ^{he} ~~you~~ loves. A proud man never forgets himself in others. He never serves a greatness that is not his own. He is never content to know and to be unknown. He can never be the friend of the friendless poor because he is afraid that that too, through association, would somehow lower his esteem in the eyes of the other people. He can never be a friend of the friendless poor and therefore will never know the basic unity of all men and of all mankind. Hillel said, following this basic thought of his,

"A name made boastfully great

is a name destroyed." We see it before our very eyes today. There are dictators in the

world - dictators of great countries - who peeled themselves into fame and notoriety - who boomed themselves and climbed their names - who plastered the walls of their cities with their names and their portraits - who built monuments for themselves during their lifetime - who affixed their names to cities and towns which they did not build. Dictators like Stalin - like Mussolini - never content to wait what history will say about them - and a few short years after they are dead their names are erased, their portraits are removed - their glory is thrown into the dust.

(A name made boastfully great)

(is a name destroyed).

Abraham Lincoln did not have to inflate his reputation and his prestige during his lifetime, but with the passing of the years and the generations his name becomes sweeter and sweeter upon the lips of men. His fame grows from age to age.

To love and to be loved one needs but ~~to~~ serve in modest devotion and in a spirit of humility which is really the spirit of confident strength. Now Hillel did not ^{mean} ~~think~~ that a man should think meanly of himself or unworthily -- that is not modesty or humility -- that is the abandonment of status - that is degradation - that is spiritual decay and nothing grows from that sickly and tainted soil. A man should think reverently and nobly of himself, as if he were ordained for greatness because he was made in the image of God, because he is privileged by his very humanity.- He is a child of dust to be sure, but he is also the heir of glory.

When Hillel concluded, one day, his instruction in the Academy, he left ~~the~~ with some pupils who accompanied him, who asked where he was going, and he said "why I am going to the baths," and the pupils wondered why, every day at the conclusion of the studies, Hillel went to the public baths, and he said unto them, "Man is created in the image of God. The Body is the temple of the soul. The pagans clean the images of their Gods - polish them - and their Temple is a public institution - and their idols. But man -- physical man, contains within himself the spirit of God. How much more careful he should be to keep his body clean - not to speak of the spirit. Hillel wanted a human being to have a sense of dignity - in himself and everything about himself. A man should rely upon himself in all of

his aspirations. In all of his struggles to rise, a man should rely upon himself - his own capacities - his own resources.

(If I am not for myself who will be for me.) Others can do much for us but the essential things of life must be done for ourselves - by ourselves. Who can study for us? Who can acquire an education for us? Who can think for us? Who can enjoy the world for us? Who can conquer our sorrows for us? Who can make the great decisions for us? if we do not wish to be slaves. No one but ourselves. And only if we think greatly of ourselves and are confident of our inner strength can we exercise our will and make the necessary effort to attain what we are seeking to attain. There are too many people in the world who are unwilling to take on the responsibility of doing things for themselves. Too many people, ^{who prefer to lie} as it were, ~~who~~ ^{are} in the womb of maternal protectiveness - to be dependent all their life - to hang on to others. That is a form of lifelong infantilism which is fatal to the proper maturity of a human being.

Hillel summoned men and women to be self-reliant - to consider themselves as responsible and enfranchised individuals. When God created man the bible said "God blessed Man" - told him to have dominion

(have dominion over the earth)

(Rule over it.)

But self-reliance does not mean self-sufficiency. A man must think of himself as spiritually sovereign but not as spiritually independent. We are all dependent upon one another.

, said Hillel,

(if I am only for myself what am I?) What is man by himself? Without family, without friends, without guides and teachers, without the appreciation of our fellow-men - without the great unnumbered, living or dead, who created this world of art and science and music and beauty for us? What are we by ourselves? What meaning is there or significance to our lives? if we live by ourselves and for ourselves. If we cannot reach out for a book which some other man wrote and in reading it gain knowledge and courage and inspiration -- if we cannot listen to music that another composed - paintings and sculpting that others created - if we cannot turn to a friend in an hour of need - what is man by himself? If I

am for myself what am I?

What then is the balance according to Hillel? Between

(between self and other) Where is to be found this great harmony? in living?

Hillel found it in a phrase which he gave, you may recall, to a would be proselyte who came to him, who said, "teach me the whole law quickly, while I stand on one foot". He had gone to Hillel's great rabbinic companion, Shammai, who was a rather harder kind of a person, intolerant of many things, and posed the same thing to Shammai and Shammai had driven him away. He was a light-minded individual who was trying to waste his time. Hillel did not drive him away. And when the proselyte said to him, "teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot" he said, "Yes, I can do it, I can give you the epitamy, the core, the heart of the Torah, in one simple sentence,

(what is hateful to thyself do not do to others). The rest of the Torah is a development of this thought. (Go, and study.)

Hillel, of course, was rephrasing that famous statement which is found in the Book of Leviticus in the Bible

(love thy neighbor as thyself) but he negative form and he put it in Aramaic, which was the language spoken by Jews at that time both in Babylonia and in Palestine. What is hateful to thyself do not to any other man. And there you will find the key to the solution of the problem of how much a man ought to stand up for his own rights (for himself) and how much he must think in terms of the cooperative quality of human existence. If I am for myself only what am I?

Would you like to be humiliated? Would you like to be discriminated against? Would you like to be exploited? Would you like to have people talk about you behind your back? Would you like to be slandered? and excluded? And in an hour of great sorrow and bereavement left alone without other human beings sharing with you in your sorrow and bringing you the healing balm of consolation?

Would you like that? Well if all that is hateful to yourself, it is also hateful to your neighbor. He is also a human being, made of the same flesh and the same blood ~~and~~ by the same God, sharing the same destiny of a brief existence upon earth -- trying to find his little measure of happiness on earth. What is hateful unto thyself do not do unto others. If you follow that principal your own domain as a human being will remain unviolated, sacred. You will be strong, you will have the consciousness of doing your work in the world properly, of not being an exploiter, a cheat, conquering over the rights of other human beings to insure your own. You will be happy and your neighbor will be happy.

that ancient wisdom for modern man - if I were to try to summarize in one sentence all that we have learned since the days of Hillel of ethical science, of moral principals, I couldn't do any better, I couldn't do as well. No one could. There it is. The eternal principal which is at the heart of creative and happy human existence on earth.

Well it is good to find oneself, from time to time, in the Academy of Hillel and listen to the words of this gentle man whose name has come down through the ages and grows sweeter and sweeter upon the lips of men.

Amen.

1) Wisdom & another famous f. sage - useful for modern man
found in 1700 - Sayings of Hillel - Some 15 in 1st & 2nd.
Terse - pithy - profound - timeless. All great wisdom is timeless
- like all great art -
The sacred, the ancient has long been antiquated - not
there art or their wisdom.
This is the past

2/ Hillel - probably the greatest, the Rabbi, this - best
the foremost among those who developed these features was
for the opposition and opposites, the Rabbi - which makes
possible the development of what has come to be known
as Rabbinic Judaism - a Pharisaic J. - close, normative
The 7 Rules of Hillel for the opposition of the 22 - have
flexibility to the opposition of rabbinic J. - and is based
on Judaism a variety, and a continuity.
rabbinic J.

3. Appreciation for his role in 'inspiring' the movement. —

4. Born in B. on fence before C.E. He was 40 yrs. old
 when he migrated to Pol. to continue his studies -
 Boh remained an important center - 4 yrs. in 6th C.
Closest contacts ~~with the decline~~ "center" from 3-10th
 122 3/4 -

5. ^{earlier} Contemporary of Jesus - and Philos - in Alexandria.
— a stirring, turbulent, politically restless, culturally
effervescent ~~period~~ century preceding 70 C.E.

13/ In his Academy He taught men to be Modest and Humble at all times. (4)
Pride is the root of ~~all~~ ^{many} contentions and strife-g bitterness
and estrangement.

and estrangement.

The later ages had a popular song: $\frac{p f / 1}{p f / 1} \frac{p f / 1}{p f / 1} \frac{p f / 1}{p f / 1}$

Remember that we also said Muse - a supreme sp.

Virtue ~~was~~ in Indecor.

① הַלֹּאֲלֵךְ הוּא הַלֹּאֲלֵךְ - הַלֹּאֲלֵךְ הוּא הַלֹּאֲלֵךְ
 "My self-abasement is my exaltation, my exaltation is my
 abasement" - based on Ps. 113.) וְהוּא - וְהוּא
 "that raises himself is to [he makes to] sit down; he that abases
 himself is to be [raised so that he is] seen."

14/ A proud man can never truly love - for he is always
in love with ^{always comparing himself} himself is the beginning of self in the
other - Never serve a greatness not his own! Never be content to
know and be unknown; Never friend of the friendless poor. - Unlucky
Hillel said - following this train, thought - 32/c - 1/c N 32/c
1/c - "A name made boastfully great - is a name
destroyed".

Indians - who traded - learned - changed their name into
temporary ^{names} names - named cities and planted their
lands with the same, then named built monuments
to themselves during their life - and affixed their
name to cities and provinces - John Stalin - Missouri
a few short months after their death - the name are
erased - the pictures are removed - the glory turns to
dust -

Too many - unwilling to take the responsibility - lie in the hands of ^{material} perfectism - he dependent - hang on to others.

17/ Held numerous men & women to be self-reliant - to consider as respectable and enfranchised individuals - 2821 - 1321 -

18/ But not as self-sufficient - as independent, others -

What is man by himself? Without family, friends, without gods and teachers - without the affection of other men without the great unnumbered, living and dead, who created his world of art & science and music? -

What is man by himself? Many a purpose is there to his life? - If he cannot reach for a book - ?

19/ When there is the balance - the harmony between self and other - but. 111111 - and 1281 111111

Held found it in that great anxiety - reformed 12211

3211 111 11211 NO 113 -

111111 111111 - 111111 111111 111111 111111 -

20/ Would you like men to cheat you with contempt - to discriminate against you - to exploit you - (to serve their own interests - then 111111) - don't do it