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People whom I Like Very Much, 1962.

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PEOPLE WHOM I LIKE VERY MUCH

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

May 13, 1962

Today is officially Mother's Day. President Kennedy proclaimed this Sunday as Mother's Day "to express the boundless affection, respect and gratitude we feel for our mothers." This proclamation was issued in accordance with a Congressional resolution which was approved in 1914 to set aside the second Sunday in May each year as Mother's Day.

The American people has a penchant for setting aside special days for special remembrances. Father's Day, Flag Day, Citizenship Day; May Day, United Nations Day, Armed Forces Day, Arbor Day, and many others. They are not legal or public holidays, but they are, nevertheless, observed by our people in one way or another. It is a pleasant custom, and a socially useful one if it helps us to carry over the message of the one specially appointed day to all the other days of the year.

I selected my subject, "People Whom I Like Very Much", without any reference to Mother's Day. Mothers are not people whom we like very much. They are people whom we love very much, or not at all. There is a great deal of difference between loving people and liking them. There are many people whom you and I like, but whom we do not particularly love. Love is a category of human affection all its own. More has been said and written about love, I suspect, than about life or death or any other major phenomenon of human existence; and it still remains as indefinable, as mysterious, as baffling, as ever. It is so rare and precious an essence that we reserve it for the very few, for those in the very close circle of our intimate lives; and we

feel exalted and uplifted if we know ourselves to be embraced in such a love. It is an elemental force. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." And the noblest of all love is mother's love, for it knows more of sacrifice and compassion and of being greatly needed.

I speak this morning of a far lower category of human affection. I speak of people whom I like very much, not because they are intimately bound up with my life -- members of my family, or closely related to me, or people who are distantly related, but, unfortunately, not far enough removed.

I am not ~~even~~ thinking this morning of unusual people, of unusually gifted people, of outstanding scholars, artists, scientists, statesmen whom I admire very much because of the preeminent contributions which they are making to the world. While I salute and praise such people, I may not particularly like them. "We do not always love those whom we admire".

There are also people whom I respect greatly and to whom I am inclined to show deference because they are old, because they have lived long and useful lives, or because they occupy important posts and are rendering useful service to their community.

But they may not at all be people whom I especially like if they do not tug at my heart by their personality, by their qualities of loveable humanity, if they do not make me feel better as a human being.

The people whom I like may be found in exalted or in very lowly positions. They may be rich or poor, educated or not. I like them not because they evoke my admiration or my sympathy, but because of the style of their soul, as it were, ^{because of} ~~by~~ some nameless grace which pervades their entire being, their bearing and behavior. They make me feel good and warm inside. It is like listening to

fine music. Nothing is really said, no words are spoken, and yet you feel better for having heard it. And it speaks differently to each listener. Each listener receives a message according to his need, or whatever happens to be the pull of the magnet of his heart or mind at the moment.

"Music", said Beethoven, "is a higher revelation than philosophy," and so is the revelation which comes to us out of lives which we feel to be genuine, which ring true, which have the strength and dignity of simplicity and the exquisite gallantry of humaness. These are the thoroughbreds of the world, and whether they have much or little of earthly goods, power or learning, they are the people whom men of good-will really like, and it is they who receive the universal tribute of human affection. The Book of Proverbs does not say: "A great name is better than precious oil", but "a good name".

I stand in reverence before human talent and genius. I honor and esteem every worthy achievement and creation of the mind and hand of man. But I like inordinately the men and women who may not have great accomplishments to their credit, but who have a rare talent for life, who, by the example of their daily lives, the manner in which they comport themselves under all the searching experiences, the wear and tear of life, the manner in which they measure up to the sudden challenges and unpredictable misfortunes and tragedies of life, move me, and teach me to appreciate more fully what is genuine greatness in humanity.

My likes and dislikes are authenticated in Scriptures, and confirmed by the Rabbis.

I like simple people. "God loves purity of heart" -- 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851,

~~"His trust is a spider's web". I dislike the vulgarity of affectation. I am~~

~~suspicious of human beings who are counterfeit coins. "God loves purity of heart" --~~
~~-- "Nothing is more simple than greatness",~~
~~wrote Emerson, "indeed to be simple is to be great".~~

I like people who do not try to impress one with their importance.
A genuine article speaks for itself. I shy away from people who are walking
commercial. The Rabbis advised men -- *היה ענוה ופזיז* -- "Be humble and
modest; *פזיזות תביא לנפילתך* --
"A man's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain
honor." When President Lincoln was informed of the death of a General who
was known to have been very vain and was told that his funeral had been largely
attended, he replied: "If the General had only known how big a funeral he
would have had, he would have died long ago...."

I like people who do not carry a chip on their shoulder, who are not
always complaining: "I have been slighted, I have been overlooked! I have
been wronged! I have been deliberately insulted! Everybody is turning against
me!" Such people make themselves and the people about them unhappy. Such
people are never liked. They are insecure in themselves. If they only knew
that their dignity and security lay not in the hands of others but only within
themselves. *(People who are always looking for excuses - Sam -)*

I like people who themselves like people, regardless of their station
in life, or their background, or their family connections, or their color,
or the church they go to. Such people, who do not build walls, "in scorn, and
plastered high with pride", who quite instinctively are friendly and helpful
to all, are very rare to find, and when you do, you have found God's noblemen.

Our sages said: -- *חזקו ליהודים* -- "Hold all
men in esteem" -- ^{if they were} as souls of great value -- all men, not only those in your

own social set or those who are your cultural peers, or belong to the same ancestral stock. "Be well-disposed to all whom God created and show them the same honor that you would wish others to show you." --

אלה שיהיו לך כאלו.

Those who are so disposed, our Rabbis said, were blessed with the good eye -- the eye that sees goodness in all men, or were possessed of the the good heart -- the heart that has sympathy and understanding for all men.

The word of the Lord which came to the prophet Zachariah declared: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Render true judgment", but that was only part of it. The rest was even more important: Show kindness and mercy each to his brother; do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the stranger or the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart."

Justice is not enough! Being correct, and law-abiding, and formally impeccable is not enough! Warmth and graciousness, the milk of human kindness, is what nourishes mankind. "the world is established upon loving-kindness" -- on people who like one another sufficiently to help one another gladly and spontaneously; for all men need help of one kind or another and all men can help in one way or another. I like people who go through life as if they were needed. They are the people of God's own choosing, and these are the people who know God.

"I sought my soul

But my soul I could not see.

I sought my God

But my God eluded me.

I sought my brother,

And I found all three."

Eliezer, the wise and faithful steward, was sent by the patriarch Abraham to the country of his kindred, to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia, to find a wife for his son, Isaac. How ^{should} ~~would~~ he go about it? What criteria should he apply? How would he know that the maiden whom he chooses will indeed be the one which was appointed by God for Isaac? Shall it be beauty alone? If she were very fair to look upon, would that be enough? Certainly, that would not be a deterrent! It would certainly not disqualify her! But the wise Eliezer knew that physical beauty was not enough for an ideal life's companion. There must be something more -- a grace of spirit, a radiance of soul. When he arrives in Nahor, ^{should} ~~shall~~ he go to the elders of the city and get a financial rating on all its leading citizens? ^{should} ~~shall~~ he inquire about the most important man in town, and what dowry was available for ^{his} ~~a~~ daughter who would marry the son of the renowned Abraham?

Eliezer thought ^{pondered long} ~~thought long~~ and finally fixed upon a test. If the maiden who would meet him -- a tired, travel-weary wayfarer -- by the spring water and he would say to her: "Pray let down your jar that I may drink" and she would reply: "Drink, and I will also water your camels" -- she would be the one whom God had appointed as wife for Isaac. Rebecca met the test, not knowing, of course, that she was being tested. When Eliezer said to her as she came up from the spring where she had filled her jar: "Pray, give me a little water to drink from your jar", she said: "Drink, my lord," and she quickly let down her jar upon her hand, and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said: "I will now draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking". So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. Eliezer gazed at her in silence. He knew that the Lord had prospered his journey.

What was the test? Why, the native courtesy of the heart -- ^a ready and spontaneous kindness to a total stranger -- and even to his thirsty beasts of burden who have traveled many weary miles in the heat of the desert.

Every man is put to some test in his life, the poor man by his poverty, the rich man by his wealth, the learned man by his learning, the merchant by his business, the suffering man by his suffering. Those who stand their tests well, ^{those} ~~or~~ who meet the unforeseen situations which arise with a quick, sure and almost automatic ^{right} response, they are the valiant and likeable people of the earth. They shine, as Shakespeare said: "like a good deed in a naughty world".

I like people who smile through their tears -- who build upon the ruins of their lives -- who have been hurt, oh, ever so deeply, but no one would ever know it! They have grappled with their sorrow and have prevailed. They bear their burdens silently and bravely. Such people are guide-posts on our own trackless way through life. To know them is to find help in our own grief, ^{we} ~~and to~~ learn from these men and women who have travelled in company with pain, how to "go out into our own darkness and put our hand into the Hand of God." They communicate to us some dark wisdom, some blessed insight, which only those who have wrestled with the dark angel can impart. To come into their presence is to be humbled and challenged before the unconquerable spirit of man. You stand on holy ground.

I like people who know how to stand alone, without any fan-fare or dramatics. "This is what I believe in! This is what I do! This is how I live! Others may not like it -- others may think differently. I have no quarrel with them. But this is my way." Such men do not defy public opinion. Quite unconsciously they ignore it. They obey an inner prompting. They are true to themselves, to their selfless self, undemonstratively, with no banners flying.

These are the people whom I like very much. Do you like the same kind of people?

May 13, 1962