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How Shall We Measure Life? New Year's Sermon, 1928.

**HOW SHALL WE MEASURE LIFE?**

**RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER, D. D., Litt.D.**

WRHS



**THE TEMPLE**

**CLEVELAND, OHIO**



**Price 25 Cents**



## HOW SHALL WE MEASURE LIFE?

Each New Year marks the passing of time; and the passing of time brings to us reflections, somber and earnest, touching life, its meaning, its goal and all its strange vicissitudes. One question among many is induced in our minds by the meditations of the New Year.

How shall we measure life? By what rule shall we gauge it? Shall we measure life by time? Shall we say that he who lives longest lives best? Assuredly, there are very few people indeed who really believe that length of days is life's highest prize. We all wish to live long enough to carry through our life's program, and to see in part the fruits of our labor. But we <sup>would</sup> never conceive of ourselves ~~as~~ having lived splendidly simply because we ~~have~~ lived to be seventy or eighty years old. The size of a canvas does not determine the value of the painting, nor does the number of our years determine the worth of our life. "It is possible," said the Roman sage Seneca, "or rather usual, for a man who has lived long to have lived too little."

If we are to think of life only in terms of time we are likely to be saddened by <sup>as we get older</sup> the prospect. For on the sunny side of the hill of life, on the up-grade, time brings with it joy and eager anticipation, but on the shadowy side of the hill, on the down-grade, time brings with it, as often as not, sadness and disillusionment, and ~~the~~ <sup>the thought</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> fear of the certain and ineluctable end. In our youthful years time means ~~growth and unfoldment~~, the burgeoning of our hopes, the relish ~~and~~ <sup>of</sup> novel experiences, the glow of ambition, ~~the strengthening of our body and spirit~~. In our aging years time means the ripening of all things unto harvest, the ingathering, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> retarded tempo, ~~and~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~reduced powers, stunted ambitions~~ and hopes bounded by <sup>ever</sup> ~~narrow-~~ ing rings.



It is true that time teaches us wisdom. Time ~~softens~~ <sup>softens</sup> sorrows, subdues passions and often-times brings moderation and peace of spirit. But time also wears all things down, robs us of the rich ~~rich~~ <sup>best</sup> of living, teaches us what we cannot do, ~~writes wrinkles in our hearts,~~ and brings us at last, spent and wearied, to the gates of death.

And what does human life when taken as time amount to after all? It is ~~insignificant~~ <sup>amazingly</sup>. The whole life of man is less than a second ~~in~~ in the cosmic calendar, less than a point on the chart of time. Our life is just a moment's continuation of that life which was in our ~~ancestors~~ <sup>ancestors</sup>, and further back through unnumbered generations to the animal, to the protoplasm, to the unicellular organism ~~in the animal~~ <sup>was of</sup> ~~all~~, to the sun-heat and the flaming, leaping hydrogen. Our individual life is but an imperceptible vibration in that infinite throb of cosmic life. How can it be measured at all? It is so infinitesimal. What meaning has the flurried eddy of a man's three score years and ten, when one comprehends the immeasurable sweep of the ~~wandering~~ tides of time? "A thousand years are in Thy sight but as yesterday, <sup>and</sup> as a watch in the night." Nay, ten thousand thousand years are in Thy sight but as yesterday! It took perhaps a thousand million years for the first invertebrate to evolve out of the ~~lowest form of~~ <sup>lowest form of</sup> ~~unicellular~~ life. Another five hundred thousand years <sup>possibly</sup> elapsed before the first vertebrate and the first mammal appeared, and incalculably long cycles of time before man emerged from the man-ape. Against this background of stupendous ~~time~~ <sup>epochs</sup> - eras which even our imagination cannot grasp - what is man's puny life of three score years and ten?

How <sup>then</sup> shall we measure human life? Shall we measure it in terms of possessions? Is that man to be credited with having lived most who has accumulated most? ~~Shall we say~~ <sup>shall we say</sup> ~~shall we say~~ Behold, this man got the most out of life. Witness his wealth. This man got the least out of life.



Witness his poverty. Is this the true guage of life? Few of us would really consent to ~~it~~<sup>this</sup>. When we wish to speak kindly of someone who has departed from the world of the living, do we say of him: "He lived superbly as ~~shown~~<sup>proved</sup> by the money which he has accumulated." If we were to write our own epitaph, I dare say ~~this~~<sup>that</sup> would be the last thing we would think of for our final eulogy.

For few of us are really beguiled in our judgments touching the relationship between wealth and life's real values. Most of us who strive after material success do so not because we regard it as life's highest good, ~~the ultimate goal~~ and the true criterion of life's worth. Rather do we seek it in order to acquire by means of it, other, and to us more valuable ends: security, independence, power, the respect of our fellowmen and a chance to play a role in the world.

Some people, to be sure, do think of wealth as life's greatest good. In their estimation life is summed up in beautiful houses and rich appointments, in costly raiment and glittering jewels, in many servants, in much luxury and ease. The wise man only pities them. The wise man does ~~not~~ underestimate the need of material things in providing himself and his family with the indispensable requirements of civilized living. He is not an ascetic and he does not make a virtue of want and privation. But he does not confuse that which is necessary with that which is important. He sees things in their proper perspective - as means to an end, as aids in removing some of the obstacles in the way of life's advancement. He knows too, as Socrates knew, "How many things there are in the world for which he has no use" - how many are the things he can get along without - how frequently the super-abundance of things becomes a burden and a drag, and how often wealth makes of us slaves more abject than ever poverty ~~does~~<sup>can</sup>. Man does not require much to be happy. It is in his



passionate striving after the excessive that the root of his unhappiness lies.

The great Russian, Tolstoi, the hundred<sup>th</sup> anniversary of whose birth the whole of mankind celebrates this month, illustrates this truth in one of his "~~Rapport~~" Legends" called: "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"

Pakhom was a muzhik - a peasant who was not rich but who had enough. He was satisfied. But one day he visited a richer relative in the city and envy made him dissatisfied. His few acres were no longer enough. He wanted more. So that what with his savings of a hundred rubles, what with the selling of a colt and half his bees, with putting his son out as a laborer and with borrowing, he succeeded in buying some more acres. He sowed his land and prospered. He was happy. *He thought he knew how much land a man needs.*

But soon the rumor spread that people were moving to new places - down the Volga, where there were rich, fertile ~~acres~~ acres free for the asking. Pakhom reasoned!: "Why remain here in straightened circumstances? I can sell my house and land, and with the money I can buy many more acres down there in the Volga region and together with the free land which I will obtain <sup>there</sup> I would have a real establishment. And so he did. He settled in the new place and again he prospered - on an even larger scale. *Now he knew how much land a man needs.*

But again glamorous rumor reached him of land most good and <sup>nourishing</sup> ~~fertile~~ in the territory of the wandering Bashkirs which could be had for a song - ~~He was not wise enough to know how much land a man really needs.~~ thousands of acres of it. Pakhom was fascinated by the prospect. He gathered up all his available capital and travelled five hundred versts to the land of the Bashkirs. He was well received and he was told that he ~~can~~ <sup>could</sup> have all the land he wanted. The price ~~is~~ <sup>was</sup> one thousand rubles a day - all the land that a man ~~can~~ <sup>could</sup> go round in a day ~~is~~ <sup>was</sup> his for one



thousand rubles. There ~~was~~<sup>was</sup> only one stipulation. If he ~~did~~<sup>did</sup> not come back within the day to the place from which he started his money ~~was~~<sup>was</sup> lost.

Pakhom was delighted. He knew that with his sturdy peasant legs he could cover a good deal of land in a day - in fact all the land ~~was~~<sup>was</sup> a man needed. ~~Now his life's ambition would be completely realized.~~

Early at dawn he arose - and with the Baskirs watching him, he set out upon the steppes. He walked about a ~~mile~~<sup>mile</sup>, halted and dug a little pit and piled the turf in it to show where he had passed. ~~and~~<sup>and</sup> he went ~~farther~~<sup>on</sup>. He quickened his pace. He stopped and dug other pits. ~~He began to get warm. But he walked on.~~<sup>It grew hot but still he walked</sup> on in a straight line. It was too early as yet to turn around. He saw in front of him beautiful black soil covered with lush, green grass. No he could not forego that. So he continued ~~to walk~~<sup>in a straight line</sup>. The farther he went, the better the land became. ~~Still he walked in a straight line.~~ He began to feel weary, He thought of turning - but no he must not miss this land. "Endure it for an hour" he said to himself "and you have an age to live." ~~But~~<sup>So</sup> the sun was now high in the heaven. And ~~he~~<sup>he</sup> turned sharply to the left and went on a long distance again in a straight line. He knew that he should be turning again to the left - but the land was so low and the soil so moist and fertile. He walked on and then he turned the second corner. ~~He~~<sup>when</sup> started on the third side ~~and~~<sup>he</sup> knew that he must hasten his pace. The sun was already far down in the west. He must now ~~hurry~~<sup>hurry</sup> back to the starting-point - which was now full ~~of~~<sup>of</sup> 10 miles ~~away~~<sup>away</sup>. But his legs began to fail him. He felt a desire to rest, but he dare not. His money was at stake. The sun was sinking lower and lower. He took to the double-quick. He threw away his blouse, his boots, his flask. He hurried on, weary and staggering. His breath began to fail him. His mouth was parched. His heart was like a mill beating.



He was afraid of dropping dead, and yet he could not stop. He ran and ran. He was getting nearer. He could now see the starting-point. The Bashkirs were waiting. Pakhom exerted his last energies, threw himself forward with his body, reached out his arms to the starting-point and collapsed - a stream of blood poured out of his mouth - and he lay dead. A Bashkir took a hoe, dug a grave, made it just long enough, from head to foot - seven feet - and buried him. This was all the land the man needed....

What <sup>then</sup> is the true measure of life? Not time. Not things. Is it perhaps - happiness? Shall we say that the man who has been most happy is the one who has gotten most out of life? But then what do we understand by happiness? Shall we say that it is contentment, ease of mind, a sense of general satisfaction with one's self and with life? Then the least enterprising among men, the most stolid and unimaginative, the vegetative temperaments, the meagre souls would have to be accounted the most happy. For these, as a rule, are the most complacent and satisfied. But are we truly inclined to concede this? Shall we say that those whose souls are tuned to a higher pitch, more vibrant and sensitive, the pendulum whose life swings to greater heights of ecstasy and to lower depths of agony - the artist, the prophet, the dreamer, the thinker, the leader of men - shall we say that their lives are less blessed, <sup>and weigh</sup> ~~less~~ <sup>less</sup> ~~weight~~ in the scale of being? Do we not rather see in these lives, shot through as they <sup>frequently</sup> ~~are~~ with fury and despair, flung into revolt, hurled against the brute might of circumstance, and yet reaching up, tortured and bleeding, for the divine gift of truth and beauty, <sup>do we not see in them</sup> the very acme and perfection of human existence? When you think of the great men of the earth, "when you call to remembrance the great and the good through whom God hath wrought great glory" - Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus, Angelo, Dante, Spinoza, Shelley, Lincoln -



do you think of them as happy? Clearly there is no visible relationship between magnificent living and happiness. ~~In the field of life the tares and wheat, the joys and sorrows are strangely intermingled.~~

The ancient Stoics drew a sharp line of distinction between pleasure which they called "voluptas" and happiness which they called "gaudium". The distinction is readily apparent. Pleasure is a physical, bodily enjoyment borrowed from without, ~~in the control of external~~ induced by physical things, by food or drink or play or passion. It is a moment's or an hour's stimulation, followed by sharp reactions. The more it is indulged in ~~the sharper the~~ longer the periods of reaction, ennui, ~~and depression.~~ Happiness, they held, is an intellectual enjoyment, rising from within, "from our own store." It springs "from the knowledge that we possess the virtues - that we are brave and just and true".- Such happiness - <sup>which to us seems to be</sup> a rather stern and cheerless happiness - they held to be unbroken and continuous. But this Stoic definition makes no allowance <sup>for the accidents of fortune</sup> ~~for the hard strokes of fate~~, for the sorrows which crowd <sup>in upon</sup> ~~upon~~ even upon the brave and <sup>the</sup> just and <sup>the</sup> true - "for the arrow that flieth by day and the pestilence that walketh in darkness," for the evils which come unsought, unheralded and unwelcome, and which turn even the <sup>"gaudium", the happiness and</sup> justly merited serenity of men into bitterness and despair. <sup>It is not ours to say that among the wheat there shall be no tares.</sup> It is not ours to order tomorrow's bloom or blight. Nor <sup>this definition</sup> ~~does~~ <sup>take into account</sup> ~~take account~~ of the fact that the very men who most aspire to be brave in a world of moral <sup>cowardice</sup> ~~weakness~~, to be just in a world of oppression and exploitation, to be true in a world of deception and falsehood are the very men who most often taste the bitter dregs of defeat and disillusion, and who most often experience the feeling of the utter emptiness and uselessness of all <sup>their</sup> efforts.



No happiness is not always within our ordering, nor is it ever continuous, nor can it summarize the profoundest meaning of life.

How then are we to measure life? By success? Shall we say that he who has achieved what he set out to achieve has derived the most out of life? Then those of the lowliest ambitions, whose life-aims are the most ordinary and commonplace would have to be adjudged victors by this test. For it is they who succeed most. The man whose ambition is high, who links his destiny to a soaring vision, who brushes aside the <sup>near at hand</sup> petty gains for the distant goal, is not likely to succeed. His hope out-distances him. ~~"His reach exceeds his grasp"~~ His arms cannot embrace what his soul describes. Oft-times such men have nothing to show for their labor but the labor itself, nothing to show for their sacrifices but the sacrifices themselves.

There is an Indian fable which bears out this thought of ours. An indian chieftain once commanded his three sons to climb a certain steep and difficult mountain and to bring back to him some object as a token of the highest point which they reached in their climb. Towards sundown the three sons returned. One had climbed half-way up the hard and dangerous slope and brought back a cluster of rare flowers which he had found there. The second had gone farther and reached quite two-thirds up the mountain side and brought back specimens of rare stones which he had discovered there. The third, the youngest and the bravest of the three, had by his pluck and daring climbed to the very top, but he had found nothing to bring back with him. The crest of the mountain was above the timber line so that nothing grew there and it was one solid rock from which he could abstract nothing. "Father," he said. "I have brought nothing back. I have nothing to show for my labors. But from the heights which I reached I <sup>caught sight of</sup> ~~could see~~ the sea!... ~~I caught sight of the sea.~~

No, achievement is no more a true measure of life than it is a



true index of character. There are men who are great in the arena of thought and character and helpless in the arena of action.

How then, shall we measure life - our life? Not by time, not by things, not by happiness, not by success, By what? - Why, by growth! Growth! Mind and soul growth! How much have we grown since yesterday, since yester-month, since yester-year? By how much have we bettered our yesterday's best? <sup>or P</sup> Man's true life does not take place in time or space but in the secret processes of growth. All life is growth. The splendour and miracle of the universe are growth, unfoldment, becoming....~~The~~ life-seed passing through the dark mysterious stations of death and resurrection, ~~growth and transformation~~ until it breaks forth into the breathless glory of flower and fruit. "And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind; And God saw that it was good." This was the supreme miracle of Creation. Everything is a growing and a becoming. Nothing is done. Nothing is ended. Stars grow. Planets grow. Worlds grow. Throughout all creation is an <sup>unceasing</sup> ~~unceasing~~ throbbing life which manifests itself endlessly in endless variety. - what path leads to it

To live is to feel continuously the teem and thrust of expanding life within one's soul, the thrill of new ideas, the throb of new purposes, the stir of revelation and new insight. Some plants live longer than others, some are hardier than others, some are more colorful and fragrant than others, some bear fruit while others do not - but there is one ineffable glory which they all share - they grow... they fulfill their destiny... Some men live longer than others, are richer, happier, more successful. That is interesting but not important - not the crucial test. The <sup>real test</sup> ~~ultimate criterion~~ is growth. Do they grow? Are they fulfilling their heroic destiny of endless spiritual and mental inflorescence?



Are we able to find <sup>any</sup> beauty to-day where a while ago we could  
see none? Are we <sup>a little</sup> more resentful of truth to-day than ever  
before? do we love these about us more profoundly now  
because we have learned to understand them more?  
Does human sorrow and human joy and all the sweet, sad  
music of humanity move us more deeply now because  
we have attuned our souls <sup>and inescapably</sup> more fully? Were there  
any fears which darkened our days in the past, any  
hates or tithers, any <sup>or self-deceptions</sup> self-interests which we have now  
sloughed off and cast aside. <sup>If so.</sup> Then we have grown  
and we have lived.

WRHS





*This measure of life is a hard measure, for it does not preclude pain and suffering.*

All birth and all growth in sentient creatures are attended by pain. This is the law of the physical world. It is also the law of the spiritual world. And no one can attain to the compensations of maturity, to the satisfactions of abundant life, physical ~~and~~ or spiritual, without these growing pains. We must be ready and willing to pay the price.

If then <sup>my friend</sup> you have made of your life a developing romance, a legend of budding and blossoms, if you have made your past fruitful and your present a seed-bed for future growth - ~~(for a day has meaning only as it is related to yesterday and to tomorrow even as a note of music has meaning only as it is related to the note preceeding it and the note following it)~~ - if you are striving ever upward and sun-ward *even though* ~~it be~~ through labor and pain and struggle, if every year you feel that an added measure of mind and soul ripening has come to you - keener perceptions, finer discriminations, sounder judgments, deeper loyalties....- *- if you feel that you are growing -* then you are alive my friend, and the greatness and the glory of life are yours - and you are to be called ~~the~~ blessed among the children of men.



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CLEVELAND, OHIO



my father. But from the night when  
I reached I could see the sea!



# How Shall We Measure Life?

ABBA HILLEL SILVER, D. D., Litt. D.



THE TEMPLE  
CLEVELAND, OHIO

~~Aug 1928~~

Sep 14, 1928

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DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

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How shall we measure life? By what rule shall we gauge it? Shall we measure life by time? Shall we say that he who lives longest lives best? Assuredly, there are very few people who really believe that length of days is life's highest prize. We all wish to live long enough to carry through our life's program, and to see, if only in part, the fruits of our labor. But we would never conceive of ourselves as having lived splendidly simply because we had lived to be seventy or eighty years old. The size of the canvas does not determine the value of the painting, nor does the number of our years determine the worth of our life. "It is possible," said the Roman sage Seneca, "or rather usual, for a man who has lived long to have lived too little."

If we are to think of life only in terms of time we are likely to be saddened by the prospect as we grow older. For on the sunny side of the hill of life, on the up-grade, time brings with it joy and eager anticipation, but on the shadowy side of the hill, on the down-grade, time brings with it, as often as not, sadness and disillusionment and the thought of the certain and ineluctable end. In our youthful years time means the burgeoning of our hopes, the relish of novel experiences, the glow of ambition. In our aging years time means the ripening of all things unto harvest, the ingathering, the retarded tempo, the reduced powers and hopes bounded by ever narrowing rings.

It is true that time teaches us wisdom. Time softens sorrows, subdues passions and often-times brings peace to the restless soul. But time also wears all things down, robs us of the rich zest of living, teaches us what we cannot do, and brings us at last, spent and wearied, to the gates of death.

And what does human life amount to after all, when taken as time? It is amazingly insignificant. The whole life of man is less than a second in the cosmic calendar, less than a point on the chart of time. Our life is just a moment's continuation



of that life which was in our ancestors and further back through unnumbered generations in the animal, in the protoplasm, in the unicellular organism, in the sun-heat and the flaming, leaping seas of hydrogen. Our individual life is but an imperceptible vibration in that infinite throb of cosmic life. How can it be measured at all? It is so infinitesimal. What meaning has the flurried eddy of a man's three score years and ten, when one comprehends the immeasurable sweep of the tides of time? "A thousand years are in Thy sight but as yesterday, and as a watch in the night." Nay, ten thousand—thousand years are in Thy sight but as yesterday! Perhaps a thousand million years passed before the first invertebrate evolved out of the lowest form of life. Another five hundred thousand years possibly elapsed before the first vertebrate and the first mammal appeared, and incalculably long cycles of time before man emerged from the man-ape. Against this background of stupendous epochs—eras which even our imagination cannot encompass—what is man's puny life of three score years and ten?

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The great Russian, Tolstoi, illustrates this truth in one of his "Legends" called: "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"

Pakhom was a muzhik—a peasant who was not rich but who had enough. He was satisfied. But one day he visited a richer relative in the city and envy made him dissatisfied. His few acres were no longer enough. He wanted more. So with his savings of a hundred rubles, with selling of a colt and half his bees, with putting his son out as a laborer and with borrowing, he succeeded in buying some more acres. He sowed his land and prospered. He was happy. He thought he knew now how much land a man needs.

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Early at dawn he arose—and with the Bashkirs watching



him, he set out upon the steppes. He walked about a mile, halted and dug a little pit and piled turf in it to show where he had passed and went on. He quickened his pace. He stopped and dug other pits. It began to grow warm but still he kept on in a straight line. It was too early as yet to turn around. He saw in front of him beautiful black soil covered with lush, green grass. No, he could not forego that. So he continued in a straight line. The farther he went, the better the land became. He began to feel weary. He thought of turning—but no, he must not miss this land. "Endure it for an hour" he said to himself "and you have a whole life-time to live." But the sun was now high in the heaven. And so he turned sharply to the left and went on a long distance again in a straight line. He knew that he should be turning again to the left—but the land was so rich and the soil so moist and fertile. He walked on and then he turned the second corner. When he started on the third side he knew that he must hasten his pace. The sun was already far down in the west. He must now hurry back to the starting-point—which was now full ten miles away. But his legs began to fail him. He felt a desire to rest, but he dared not. His money was at stake. The sun was sinking lower and lower. He took to the double-quick. He threw away his blouse, his boots, his flask. He hurried on, weary and staggering. His breath began to fail him. His mouth was parched. His heart was like a mill beating. He was afraid of dropping dead, and yet he could not stop. He ran and ran. He was getting nearer. Now he could see the starting-point. The Bashkirs were waiting. Pakhom exerted his last energies. He threw himself forward with his body, reached out his arms to the starting-point and collapsed. A stream of blood poured out of his mouth and he lay—dead. A Bashkir took a hoe, dug a grave, made it just long enough, from head to foot—seven feet—and buried him.

And this was all the land the man needed . . . .

What then is the true measure of life? Not time. Not things. Is it happiness? Shall we say that the man who has been most happy is the one who has gotten most out of life? But then what do we understand by happiness? Shall we say that it is contentment, ease of mind, a sense of general satisfaction with one's self and with life? Then the least enterprising among men, the most stolid and unimaginative, the vegetative temperaments, the meagre souls would have to be accounted the most happy. For these, as a rule, are the most complacent and satisfied. But are we truly inclined to concede this? Shall we say that those whose souls are tuned to a higher pitch, more vibrant and sensitive, the pendulum



whose life swings to greater heights and to lower depths—the artist, the prophet, the dreamer, the thinker, the leader of men—shall we say that their lives are less blessed, and weigh less in the scale of being? Do we not rather see in these lives, shot through as they frequently are with fury and despair, flung into revolt, hurled against the brute might of circumstance, and yet reaching up, tortured and bleeding, for the divine gift of truth and beauty, do we not see in them the very acme and perfection of human existence? When you think of the great men of the earth, “when you call to remembrance the great and the good through whom God hath wrought great glory”—Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus, Angelo, Dante, Spinoza, Shelley, Lincoln—do you think of them as happy? Clearly there is no visible relationship between magnificent living and happiness.

The ancient Stoics drew a sharp line of distinction between pleasure which they called “voluptas” and happiness which they called “gaudium.” The distinction is readily apparent. Pleasure is a physical, bodily enjoyment borrowed from without, induced by physical things, by food or drink or play or passion. It is a moment’s or an hour’s stimulation, followed by sharp reactions. The more it is indulged in the longer are the periods of reaction, ennui and depression. Happiness, they held, is an intellectual enjoyment, rising from within, “from our own store.” It springs “from the knowledge that we possess the virtues—that we are brave and just and true.” Such happiness—which to us seems to be a rather stern and cheerless happiness—they held to be unbroken and continuous. But this Stoic definition makes no allowance for the accidents of fortune, for the sorrows which crowd in even upon the brave and the just and the true—“for the arrow that flieth by day and the pestilence that walketh in darkness,” for the evils which come unsought, unheralded and unwelcome, and which turn even the “gaudium,” the justly merited serenity of men into bitterness and despair. It is not ours to order “tomorrow’s bloom or blight.” It is not ours to decree that among the wheat there shall be no tares. Nor does this definition take into account the fact that the very men who most aspire to be brave in a world of moral fear, to be just in a world of oppression and exploitation, to be true in a world of deception and falsehood are the very ones who most often taste the bitter dregs of defeat and disillusion, and who most often experience the feeling of the utter emptiness and uselessness of all their efforts.

No, happiness is not always within our ordering, nor is it ever continuous, nor can it summarize the profoundest meaning of life.



How then are we to measure life? By success? Shall we say that he who has achieved what he set out to achieve has derived the most out of life? Then those of the lowliest ambitions, whose life-aims are the most ordinary and commonplace would have to be adjudged victors by this test. For it is they who succeed most. The man whose ambition is high, who links his destiny to a soaring vision, who brushes aside the petty gains near at hand for the distant goal, is not likely to succeed. His hope out-distances him. His arms cannot embrace what his soul describes. Oft-times such men have nothing to show for their labor but the labor itself, nothing to show for their sacrifices but the sacrifices themselves—and the heartaches.

There is an Indian fable which bears out this thought of ours. An Indian chieftain once commanded his three sons to climb a certain steep and difficult mountain and to bring back some object from the place of the highest point which they reached in their climb. Towards sundown the three sons returned. One had climbed half-way up the hard and dangerous slope and brought back a cluster of rare flowers which he had found there. The second had gone farther and reached quite two-thirds up the mountain side and brought back specimens of rare stones which he had discovered there. The third, the youngest and the bravest of the three, had by his pluck and daring climbed to the very top, but he had found nothing there to bring back with him. The crest of the mountain was above the timber line so that nothing grew there and it was one solid rock from which he could abstract nothing. "Father," he said: "I have brought nothing back. I have nothing to show for my labors. But from the heights which I reached I caught sight of the sea! . . . I caught sight of the sea! . . ."

No, success is no more a true measure of life, than it is a true index of character. There are men who are great in the arena of thought and character and helpless in the arena of action.

How then, shall we measure life—our life? Not by time, not by things, not by happiness, not by success. By what? Why, by growth! Growth! Mind and soul growth! How much have we grown since yesterday, since yester-month, since yester-year? By how much have we bettered our yesterday's best? Are we able to find beauty today where a while ago we could see none? Are we more reverent of truth today than yesterday? Do we love more truly now because we have learned to understand more profoundly? Does human sorrow and human joy and all the sweet, sad music of humanity stir us more deeply now because we have attuned our



souls more accurately? Were there any fears which darkened our days in the past, any hates or bitterness, any selfishness or self-deceptions which we have now sloughed off and cast aside? If so, we have grown and we have lived.

Man's true life does not take place in time or space but in the secret processes of growth. All life is growth. The splendour and miracle of the universe are growth, unfoldment, becoming—the life-seed passing through the dark mysterious stations of death and resurrection, until it breaks forth into the breathless glory of flower and fruit. "And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind; And God saw that it was good." This was the supreme miracle of Creation. Everything is a growing and a becoming. Nothing is done. Nothing is ended. Stars grow. Planets grow. Worlds grow. Throughout all creation is an unceasing, throbbing life which manifests itself endlessly in endless variety.

To live is to feel continuously the teem and thrust of expanding life within one's soul, the thrill of new ideas, the throb of new purposes, the stir of revelation and new insight. Some plants live longer than others, some are hardier than others, some are more colorful and fragrant than others, some bear fruit while others do not—but there is one ineffable glory which they all share—they grow. They fulfill their destiny. Some men live longer than others, are richer, happier, more successful. That is interesting but not important—not the crucial test. The real test is growth. Do they grow? Are they fulfilling their heroic destiny of endless spiritual and mental inflorescence?

This measure of life is a hard measure, for it does not preclude pain and suffering. All birth and all growth in sentient creatures are attended by pain. This is the law of the physical world. It is also the law of the spiritual world. No one can attain to the compensations of maturity, to the satisfactions of abundant life, physical or spiritual, without these growing pains. We must be ready to pay the price.

If, then, my friend you have made of your life a developing romance, a legend of budding and blossoms, if you have made your past fruitful and your present a seed-bed for future growth—if you are striving sun-ward even though it be through pain and struggle, if every year an added measure of mind and soul ripening comes to you—keener perceptions, finer discriminations, sounder judgments, deeper loyalties—if you feel that you are growing—then you are alive, my friend, and the greatness and the glory of life are yours—and you are to be called blessed among the children of men.



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By

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

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