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Rationing for life, 1943.

RATIONING FOR LIFE

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Our nation has within the year had a taste of rationing. Perhaps for the first time in the life of most Americans they have experienced a new fact, a new set of facts, which have been quite disconcerting and inconveniencing, one which called for a complete reorganization of their customary habits of living, food, dress, travel. Certain ideas are passing out of the customary pattern which used to be followed by the American people.

The idea of abundance is passing away -- the idea that there is all you want is no longer true, at least not for the duration, and perhaps for considerable time thereafter.

The idea that money will buy everything you want is also passing away. We require now, besides money, a permit to buy, a ration ticket which entitles you to buy only a certain amount of what hitherto you were free to buy to your heart's content, provided you had the money for it -- the book which defines how much you may have. The rich man cannot obtain more of the rationed things than the poor man unless, of course, he chooses to violate the law and bootleg on the Black Market.

Every man, woman and child is given a little book which tells you how much you can have of certain items, and no more -- so much of meat, butter, coffee, canned foods, oil, gas. And the list, as you know, grows almost from day to day. If the war lasts much longer it will probably embrace practically everything which we need for subsistence.

Thus certain new ideas come to impress themselves upon the mind of all of us. The need for carefully budgeting points in our rationing books, for finding substitutes for those things which one has been accustomed to, and especially for establishing a proper balance in the diet of the individual and the family which has to be maintained in spite of rationing -- adequate nutritive value -- so many minerals,

so many vitamins. Our people are being advised, especially the housewives, on how to achieve a simple and balanced diet in order to maintain health, with the growing scarcity of all things.

Why has all this come about in a land known to have an abundance of almost everything? Clearly because of the War! The needs of our fighting forces, the needs of our Allies are drawing heavily on the food reserves and on commodities of all kinds, which our mines, our mills and factories can produce. A dozen battlefronts and a dozen Allies have a prior claim upon our granaries. War, especially global war always creates scarcities for the civilian population. And we are willing to pay the price in order to win the war, because if we will lose the war, we will not only have continuous scarcity, but continuous slavery as well. And so the civilian population voluntarily subjects itself to a hard discipline and a hard regimen of life. In some countries there is a very hard and rigorous regimen of life. Civilian life is denying itself not only luxuries, and comforts, but some of the necessities of life, and so joins in spirit and in fact with the hard military discipline which its sons are subjected so that together we may wage successfully a total war.

Now this is all elementary and is readily grasped by any intelligent person. Everyone understands the importance of rationing during war time.

Our Religion teaches us to raise our sights a bit, to think of rationing in yet a wider and higher plane -- to consider the rationing of life itself. Because the resources of life are not unlimited, nor the days allowed to men upon earth. Nor will money buy everything you want in life. And surely there is need in life for the most careful budgeting and for a simple and well-balanced regimen as there is for food in a national emergency.

This, too, is very elementary but is easily over-looked. And unfortunately there is no government to enforce rationing in life as there is in national emergencies. It is all up to us to ration our lives. There is no penalty except the waste and disharmony, the dissonance of our lives, which result from the failure to ration

time correctly.

Now all men know that their days are numbered on earth. There are just so many "time points" in the ration book of life and no more -- three score, four score years; and when they run out, why there is no more! No one is given another ration book -- no one! Some live longer than others. Some are given, so to speak an "A" card, a "B" card, or a "C" card, and the distribution is made not on the basis of merit, but on some mysterious plan known only to Him Who rules over the lives of the living and the spirits of the dead. But even the holder of a "C" card of life has no unlimited years to draw on. "There is no man who will not see death." And when the summoning hour comes, hardly any man has had enough of life, unless he has suffered much in life.

Men know all this! They know that their days are numbered and that point values after a time will pay less and less. The Rabbis say at 20, you are ambitious; at 30 you have attained your full strength; at 40 a man has come to some understanding; at 50 he will give counsel to others; at 60 we start getting old; at 70 you are old; at 80 one must be very strong indeed to be fully alive and in full possession of our faculties; at 90 you are bowed down; and at 100, say the Rabbis, it is just as if you were dead.

As the years go on, point values are less and less. Men know all that, yet they live as though their years were unlimited, inexhaustible, as though time were so abundant that it could be squandered, as though there were no need to budget, to plan their fugitive days, to place point values upon their interests and ambitions, to select and discriminate, choose among all the available commodities on life's counter, to choose wisely, in order to achieve a simple and well-balanced life.

Over and over again in our sacred books ~~we~~ we are admonished to consider the brevity of human life, the scarcity of time. So we read in one of the great Psalms: "As for man, his days are as grass; As a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it and it is gone."

In that great Book of Job, the most philosophic book of the Bible, there is a prayer of a sage who is aware of man's unwillingness to face up to the challenge of his determined and sharply contained life: "Lord, make me to know mine end, And the measure of my days what it is? Let me know how short-lived I am."

And you, of course, recall that very profound prayer found in Psalm XC, after brooding upon the shortness of life and how shot through it is with grief and vanity, he prays fervently "to teach us to number our days", to number our days, that is, to ration our lives.

Now there is a way of defeating the rationing imposed by authority. You can hoard! You can get more by going through the back door of the store in the dark. You can hoard things, if you are so inclined. But you cannot hoard life; you can waste it. You can't hoard it. It is like the Mannah which our forefathers gathered in the wilderness. "He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack."

There are so many things we want in life and the time is limited. How shall we go about making the most of it? How can we get the most for the coupon we have? The answer is a very simple one. By skillful rationing of our lives, by wise apportionment of our time, energy, income, interest, loyalty, by deciding what things we want to pay the high price for, and what things we do not want to pay the high price for, by reaching out after a balance, by realizing right at the outset that you cannot have all the things you would like to have, that some things can be had only by sacrificing other things. In other words, by selecting the basic things, the things indispensable for the wholesome diet of life, by rationing our lives.

Thus, for example, it is important to ration our time wisely in work, study, play and in social contacts. Some of us work too much. Some study too much. Some play too much. And some engage in social activities too much. They get their lives unbalanced. Too many points are spent on one or another laudable activity. For example, too many men make a fetish out of work. They are completely

absorbed in their work. For them there is very little else. They give to their work long hard hours, nearly all of their eager and creative energies. They are spent for almost anything else. They seldom think of continuing their studies which they acquired in high school or college years. These men, of course, read their newspaper and an occasional magazine. A book is something to read in bed, to fall asleep over. And they hope to die in the harness! Just why human beings must die in the harness no one knows. We don't permit even horses to die in harness, these days. They are not wise, these people who are over-absorbed in their work. "Those who engage too much in business, never never grow wise." They spend all their coupons on "hard tack" and pay too high a price for it.

There are those who study too much -- the professional man, the scholar, the artist. Study is good, but "all study without work must in the end be futile and may lead to sin." To live in an ivory tower of intellectual absorption and isolation is to spend all of one's coupons on caviar -- and that is too high a price to pay for it.!

There are those men and women who play too much, who spend all their lives at play, not only games for amusement, but they indulge in an unbroken series of pleasure-seeking, excitement. They play at life generally, lacking any serious purpose in life, doing nothing that is significant and worthwhile, making no contribution to society. They spend all their coupons on "peppermints"! That is too high a price to pay for it. Play is an important element in a normal man's life. So are pleasure, relaxation, legitimate elements in a man's life.

But there are those who engage too much in social activities, who are too social. People who always are at meetings, who are on a hundred committees, who every month are connected with a new worthy cause, who haven't enough time for being alone by themselves with their souls. They haven't enough time for quiet meditation. They haven't enough time for seeking God in solitude and quietness. They are too much with the world and not enough with themselves. Such people spend all their coupons on "molasses". That is too high a price to pay.

The wise man and woman finds the proper equation between all these legitimate interests and activities in life, between Body, Mind and Soul, between oneself and others. We should learn to ration our time.

We need also to ration our affections between our homes, our friends, in society at large. Some people spread their affections too thin and very indiscriminately. Some are so absorbed in friendliness and in being friendly, in being good fellows, that they forget that friendliness, like charity, begins at home. There are people who are so sweet and chivalrous to their friends and at home so cussed you feel like ringing their necks.

We must ration our affections and our loyalties. First we must be a good son or daughter, a good husband, wife, father, mother, and then a good and loyal friend. First love your neighbor, and then love humanity. Don't start loving humanity and forget all about your neighbor. Wise rationing in human affections recognizes centers and peripheries, priorities. I am suspicious of those Jews who love humanity so much and work in great humanitarian tasks and over-look the prior needs and claims of their own people.

There is need to ration also our substance between spending and saving and charity. Wise economy dictates a balance between spending and saving. A man who spends his entire income is a spendthrift. A man who saves practically his entire income is a miser. But that, too, men know. Men will acknowledge that much balancing between spending and saving. But they will not all acknowledge in the same way that charity is an essential part of their proper and just balancing. Charity, some people think, is giving that which is left over after having spent all they want. That is not charity. Charity should be a part, a definite part, a mandatory part of our income, budgeting, the rationing of our substance and income. The Rabbis even went to the extent of determining how much a man should give -- at least one-tenth of one's income should be set aside, consecrated to charity.

Finally, we ought to remember to ration our energies so that we can carry on over long stretches. Some people never get started! Some never do today what they can do tomorrow. They are too lazy to exert themselves. Other people, on the other hand, burn up their energies too early by excess^o of one kind or another. They burn themselves up physically by their consuming ambition. Some go through the early days of their lives as though a fire were driving them. The wise man husbands his energy, allocates it properly. Of him the Bible said: "They give forth fruit in their old age, they remain strong and full of sap."

And so, good friends, as we speak daily about rationing of things, so ought we to think of the wise rationing of our lives. It can't be done scientifically, but it can be done reasonably well. And if it is done, our lives will never lack their essential ingredients, all the vitamins they require, and our life, however brief, will come to yield us a large measure of harmony and happiness.

