



Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

Series II: Subject Files, 1956-1993, undated.

Reel
19

Box
7

Folder
238

Dialogue (WKYC television program), transcript, 1977.

RECORDED MATERIAL REQUEST & RELEASE

REQUESTEE: James Reich

The Temple

26000 Shaker Blvd.

1. MATERIAL DESIRED:

A. Description: DIALOGUE: "COPING SKILLS" (Show # 102)

(Audio tape only)

B. Date and approximate time of broadcast: Sunday, March 20, 1977

Noon- 12:30 pm

C. Length: 28:48

2. Cost of material and handling is \$No charge Please make your check payable to The National Broadcasting Company.

3. It is understood and agreed that this material or portions thereof, either picture or sound, will NOT be used for transmission on any broadcast station, nor reproduced, nor shown for the purpose of charging admission, nor otherwise used for commercial purposes without the prior written approval of WKYC-TV.

4. I understand that the above material must be returned.

5. X The material is purchased per the above agreement.

Please sign this release and return it along with your check and one copy of the invoice to:

THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY, INC.
1403 EAST SIXTH STREET
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44114
ATTN: David M. Goff

James M. Reich
Signature
March 30, 1977
Date

⑥

On March 20 Tom Haley and Rabbi Silver discussed Coping Skills on WKYC's Dialogue program. In response to many requests the transcript of the discussion follows:

Tom Haley: It used to be when you asked a person how he was doing, the automatic response was 'good' or, in some cases, even 'fine.' Now, more often than not, if you ask a person that, that person replies, "I'm hanging in there" or they say "I'm coping."

If you can't cope without assistance, then your local book store or your library has an abundance of books on how to cope with things like divorce, children, parents, youth, age, a job and, in some cases, even with leisure. Does the fact that so many of us are trying to cope with so many parts of life imply that life doesn't offer too many good moments?

Today's Dialogue on the subject of Coping will be with Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver of The Temple. Last September, at the beginning of the Jewish new year, Rabbi Silver delivered a sermon that received great response. He spoke on how to do more than just cope with life. Rabbi, as a person living in this world today I find my mind blown all the time. You might be going along on an even keel and you see some headlines and your mind's blown. You know, the things that can happen: the recent earthquake in Roumania, escalating energy bills, the threat that maybe you might lose a job, the possibility of nuclear war, the awareness that we're all vulnerable. You're healthy today, maybe you won't be there tomorrow, who knows? When I ^{face} ~~have~~ these mind-blowing things I think, well, I'm just going to kind of try to stay sane. I'm going to try and just go along with things. If I say that to myself is that another way of saying I'm coping?

Rabbi Silver: Yes, ~~to me~~ ^{The} interesting thing in what you are saying is that you seem to accept the fact that you are in a situation for which there is no immediate solution. In saying this you ~~are~~ ^{are} freeing yourself for a moment from that great American myth that there are instant solutions to all the problems of life. There aren't.

Haley: But there were at one time, or at least we thought there were.

Silver: There were always solutions to technological problems; to the life problems, no. If you have a debilitating illness there is no solution to it. There may be relief, but there is no solution. Like so much else in American life, we tended to focus on what was outside of ourselves; the physical, the building, the material, the technological, and to neglect the fact that our lives inside had not changed that much. We ^{have} had not solved any of the human problems, the problems of growth, the problems of marriage, the problems of health, the problems of survival.

Haley: I read your sermon, ^{You} talked about going into a book store where there were books on how to cope with about everything there is. If you have to put out books for people telling ^{people} ~~them~~ how to cope with life as it is, the implication is that life doesn't have too many good moments. It's too rough to really live without getting some expertise. . .

Silver: Life has some good moments. The problem is that we have been conditioned to believe that life can be an almost continuous good moment. ^{WE ARE DELUGED WITH} We expect everything to work out happily. That is what we are promised, ~~you know~~ on TV commercials, the joys of travel, the joys of love, the joys of happy parenthood, the joys of happy childhood. ^{AND} ~~These are made to seem inevitable and deep down~~ we are made to feel that something is wrong with us if we don't find these joys ^{ON HOLD ON TO THEM.} ~~to be continuous~~. In point of fact, our

lives are as difficult, as confused and as full of intricate challenge as people's lives ^{EVER} have been, ~~perhaps more so. One of our problems is that~~ We are caught up in a revolution of rising expectations and our expectations have become unrealistic. Many of us expect a life full of satisfactions which no life can deliver.

Haley: Is it possible when just a few things go wrong, when the life isn't as perfect as our expectations would have it, that we see life as much darker than it really is? Another way of saying it is that we don't count our blessings.

Silver: I think that's true. I see a lot of people whose problems really are negligible, but to them they are real and bitter. If their grandparents had faced the same problem they would have hardly broken stride; let us say they must scale down their standard of living to something more modest, a scale of living their grandfathers would have believed to be grand.

Haley: Total luxury -

Silver: They find it difficult to accept, to adjust, because of this heightened measure of expectation which we all have.

Haley: I wonder if it isn't part of living today? (I find myself) When things are really going well, when you string two or three days together when things are really almost this perfection we think about, thinking, when is it going to end. What is going to happen next? Is that normal? Do people normally do that?

Silver: They used to. There was what I call the shoe drop school. You wait for the other shoe to drop.

There is much talk now about the problems of violence on television. ~~One of~~ The real problem of television is that it brings into every home a level of expectation, both material and emotional, which people can't manage and no life can sustain. However, well off people are by any kind of objective standard, they are not ^{content} happy because they feel that their happiness is not complete. You ^{hardly} ~~almost never~~ see in prime time television drama which suggests that most of us live ~~many~~ of our days just this side of what somebody has called the edge of desperation, but that's in fact where ordinary people live.

Haley: I think television would have us believe that if life isn't completely fulfilling or there's something wrong, the right pill will remedy that.

Silver: The right pill, the right trip -

Haley: The right appearance, whatever. Okay, we come to something that you talk about

and I'm not sure I totally understand it. I know that in Jewish thought a messiah never came. I know that in recent times many Jews have thought of a messianic age, I suppose a utopian age, an age when there would be no wars, when we could trust and love each other, where life would just be beautiful. You ^{SAID} say in that particular sermon that deep down ~~inside~~ ^{such as} most no longer believe in ~~that~~ messianic age. You feel that what they really think about is not a messiah or the messianic age but what you refer to as a messianic journey. I think I understand it, but I'd rather have you explain it to me.

Silver: One correction. Jews have believed that many messiahs have come, ^T the word messiah simply means 'one who is anointed,' All the kings of Israel and all the priests of Israel were anointed, so ~~that there~~ ^{all} were messiahs. The idea that there was some kind of supernatural messiah, that Jews have not -

Haley: In other words, they would not accept Christ as the messiah as ~~say as~~ ^{is} divine?

Silver: Traditional Jews would have accepted as messiah any person who, in fact, brought about the kingdom of God on earth. But the kingdom of God is obviously not here ~~yet~~; so Jesus and all other self-styled messiahs have been rejected by the tradition because they did not fulfill that one criteria which rabbinic Judaism insists that they had to fulfill; to secure peace, justice ^{AND} security, all the things that people devoutly pray and hope for.

I said that I have a feeling that for most in the world I come from, faith in any kind of supernatural intervention has diminished. This has come about in part because we have learned of man's capacity to destroy disease and to free the ~~human being~~ ^{man} from back-breaking work. Science, research, the laboratory, the library, all of these have given us a new faith in man and man's capacities, ^{LAW} and diminished our faith in and need of ^{for} a supernatural messiah. Unfortunately, as men developed faith in man, that faith became exaggerated into a ^{simple} ~~simple~~ romantic notion that you and I and all men and women of good will would

come together, pitch in, and ~~together~~ create heaven on earth. In the 19th century, particularly in the west, in England and in the United States, we ^{held} ~~had~~ this kind of Pollyana idea; ~~you know~~, every day in every way the world was getting better and better.

Haley: Didn't Twain say that at one time, 'in every day in every way I'm getting better and better'?

Silver: The idea was that in a matter of a generation or two all the big problems would be solved. We'd have social welfare. We'd have a thoroughly competent educational system. ~~We would have~~ ^M medical research ^{CONQUER} ~~which~~ would ~~destroy~~ disease, and so on and so on; but it didn't happen that way. Instead, in the 20th century, we have ^{LEARNED} ~~found~~ that every problem we solved created other problems. You can, in a matter of hours or days, immunize a whole population and increase their life span by twenty or thirty years, but, at the same time, you increase the numbers who are doomed to starvation ^{SINCE} ~~because~~ you have not increased the food supply. The questions of ecology and overpopulation and ageing and the quality of life are all consequences of the triumph of our science. Among the triumphs of our science are terrible weapons of destruction, ~~so is~~ ^{THE} the crowded city with all of its violence and emotional tensions. ^{1) ANOTHER TWAIN} In the last generation or two we've lost that innocent faith which our grandparents had. ²⁾ Our great grandparents believed in a messiah. Our grandparents believed in a messianic age. We need to reformulate our doctrine of hope. What is it that gives us courage to go on? What makes it feel that the human enterprise is a worthwhile one, fraught with some possibility of success? ^{TO DESCRIBE OUR FUTURE} ~~For example~~, I have coined the word 'the messianic journey.' ^T You take life as it is. You ^{do} life hopefully and joyously, even though you know that there are no solutions, that there will never be a final point when you can say, 'all the problems of the world have been solved, we are in paradise.' We move society and ourselves forward. We try to grow. We try to learn. We try to empathize. We try to develop and expand. We try to humanize the social order.

We try to create decent public welfare, but we know that everything we succeed in doing will create a set of new problems. We accept this as the condition of life. We do what needs to be done and leave it there.

Haley: At this point we're aware that we no longer have all the answers, there just aren't all the answers. ~~Okay, now~~ I want to mention a few things about this journey that I have a little trouble with. You say, accept life for what it is, a short journey between what ~~ever you call it~~ ^{you} have called 'the dependency of infancy and the dependency of age.' How in the world could it be a happy life if all the time you're thinking, and I've visited people in rest homes, one day maybe I'll be there.

Silver: God willing.

Haley: God willing, be in a rest home?

Silver: It's an alternative to an early death.

Haley: I'm not so sure, from what I have seen.

Silver: You are assuming that ~~in a rest home~~ all you do is lie in bed and vegetate. You can have a fine social life among -

Haley: Or maybe not have your faculties?

Silver: That's something else. One of the things I've also talked about is the need ~~for~~ ~~all of us~~ to think beyond the romantic notion that we must hold on to life to its last desperate gasp. We must redefine life and death. There is such a thing as a living death.

Haley: Then you're talking about holding on to a quality of life. ~~What I'm saying is~~ ^I if I'm thinking in terms of between the dependency of infancy and the dependency of old age all the time I'm kind of looking over my shoulder and never really enjoying this time in here, so my question is how do you enjoy that time in here, knowing that from here you're going to go there, this is so short?

Silver: Stop looking over your shoulder.

Haley: But how do you stop?

Silver: By doing something each day that's worth the doing, that satisfies you, fulfills you. You have done things, Tom, which have involved you totally, intellectual challenges, challenges in your profession, and I am sure you were not conscious during such periods of the brevity of life. You were fulfilled. When somebody who ^{has mastered} ~~knows how to play~~ the piano is playing a great symphony they are totally wrapped up in it. They have no sense of what went before or what will come after, ^{the} ~~the~~ moment is the thing. If we fill each moment with the fullness of which it is possible, that's enough for us.

Haley: Isn't that kind of harsh to give to people, something that's saying kind of find temporary happiness is really what you're saying?

Silver: That's all we have.

Haley: Okay. Let me go to the second part of this. These were things I picked out because they interest me. You said: 'there is no finality in life, no perfection', and you went on to talk about a scientist working on a project all his life and without being able to conclude it, but it didn't really bother him because he knew that people after him would keep working toward that conclusion.

Silver: He knew that though he had been unable to solve the problems, at least the dead ends that he had pursued would not have to be pursued again by ^{anyone} ~~somebody else~~ attacking the same problem. He had made a contribution even though he hadn't gotten the Nobel Prize for a major breakthrough.

Haley: Okay, but ~~the problem I had with it is that~~ if there's no finality in life what would you say about the person working on, we'll say, the polio vaccine? One day there was ^{breakthrough} ~~a finality~~ and that vaccine was, in fact, discovered, but you would seem to say we're always working on something like that but never really create it.

Silver: The day after the vaccine was discovered that man either found his life to be

empty because he didn't have an intellectual challenge before him; or he set about to find a totally new field in which he could ~~immense~~ ^{immerse himself.}

Haley: So there's nothing lasting is what you're saying?

Silver: No. All we have is the day, the hour, the minute, the moment, and the test is to fill that ^{moment} with as much love and experience and achievement and fulfilling activity as we can.

Haley: But the very fact that we know that's all we have would make it almost impossible to fulfill it ~~with that~~ ^{way.} for me

Silver: There's a great psalm, if I can quote Scripture to you, the 90th. ~~It's~~ ^{It's} the one psalm that's ascribed to Moses. "The days of our years are three score and ten, or even by reason of strength four score years, yet is their pride but travail and vanity, but teach us O Lord to number our days that we may get us a heart of wisdom." Teach us to value each day. They are brief. They're vain. They're full of work. They're full of anguish. They're full of possibility. Teach us to number our days, that's wisdom.

Haley: Wow, okay. Now, the third part. You say that we're all a part of the pilgrimage toward the solution which, in a sense, makes us almost seem like -

Silver: Towards the non-solution.

Haley: Or toward the non-solution. Alright, it reminds me of Fred Allen and his treadmill to oblivion. It seems like we're simply all on a treadmill. . .

Silver: The treadmill is the wrong image. It's the image of 'stop the world, I want to get off.' ~~The treadmill~~ ^{The treadmill} It suggests you're rotating in space and going nowhere. In point of fact, ~~society~~ ^{The social}

~~OR~~ ^{AND} does change, ~~does~~ ^{part of} evolve, but we are on it for a brief ~~part of that ride~~ ^{only} and the solutions that we come to, the achievements that we make, will be part of the reality which our children and grandchildren will have to wrestle with. Life is not a merry-go-round. Life is a slow-moving stream which is coursing from the beginning of conscious life to whatever will be at its end some place out there.

Haley: Seeing it as such a slow-moving stream and just being here a short time ^{KNOWING THAT WE WILL} ~~we have~~
 to ~~accept that~~ and if we accept that, that ^{OFFERS} ~~brings~~ us a little more than coping? ^{A CHANCE TO}

Silver: ~~I think if~~ ^{LIFE'S LIMITATIONS,} we accept it, ~~first of all,~~ it helps us to avoid the frustration of batting
 our heads against a wall, a wall which will never yield to us, ~~that is, of destroying our-~~
~~selves because there isn't more.~~ If you're satisfied with being a human being and not
 being God, if you're satisfied being mortal and not being immortal, you can have great
 happiness in life. My life is a happy one and a fulfilling one, so is yours, I suspect.

Haley: In some senses.

Silver: In mine, too, but the point is I ^{have} found a measure of joy and a measure of pos-
 sibility in all that I do.

Haley: Well, we are opposed to this extent. I ~~would~~ believe that there is a life to follow
 that I will be a part of. I'll call it a spiritual life, I certainly have faith ^{in it.} It gives me
 hope and lets me do a little bit more than cope ^{WITH} in this world. I would think it would be
 easier for me than it would be for you because you don't believe that another life exists.
 As far as you see it, you think this is the life, period. Am I right or wrong?

Silver: You're right.

Haley: Well, now, shouldn't it be easier for me to cope than for you when you think
 that this is it, period?

Silver: But here we are, ~~and~~ ^{you're} saying: 'Life is difficult and I have troubles with it';
 and I'm saying: 'Life is fairly full of possibility and I don't have great troubles with it.'
 You're the person who says I have a strong belief in immortality and I say I do not.

Haley: So that would prove the point?

Silver: It doesn't prove the point. It simply suggests that the point of view we have as
 to the nature of life is an ~~emotional feeling~~, an emotional reaction to a reality. It's a
 matter of feeling, of judgement, of insight, of understanding. There are some who

are encouraged if they feel themselves able to solve problems or if they feel that what they do now will be rewarded in heaven. Others ~~of us~~ feel that we must do what we do simply because it's right to do, the messianic journey, ^{W/S} ~~and who~~ feel that the question of what lies beyond is an open, non-resolvable question which we are not going to spend too much time worrying about. I never argue with anybody about what they believe about a life after death. That doesn't seem to me one of the critical problems of being.

Haley: You talk about a messianic journey, Christians believe they are on a pilgrimage. They believe they're a pilgrim people advancing toward God. The difference is that they expect to be one day reunited with Him.

Silver: I believe that all mankind is on a pilgrimage, advancing towards civilization and God.

Haley: Okay. Those are distinctions and they are interesting. Can you specifically tell me how you would apply this messianic journey concept to a person coping with divorce? ~~in this day and age.~~

Silver: Well, Once you've gotten to that point, I don't know; but if you ask me how do you cope with marriage, I would suggest that we need to talk to the young before the marriage formation years about what they can expect out of a marriage relationship. If they go into a marriage expecting bliss forever more, that the sense of fulfillment and happiness in one another that exists in the early days of a relationship, ^{CAN LAST BECAUSE THAT THEIR MARRIAGE} ~~that these~~ will not be shadowed by illness or by ^{MONEY} ~~problems~~ ^{having to do with money and job} or by the frustrations of two personalities living together over a long period of time, if they live with such naivete and romantic notions the divorce rate is going to stay high. If we can lower their expectations and sensitize them to the problems as well as the possibilities of marriage I think we can do something about coping with marriage and, therefore, with divorce.

Haley: Alright, what about coping with something like the loss of a loved one? Again, this is a problem we all try to cope with. It happens and in many cases we're destroyed. I have a number of children. I know if I were to lose one of mine it would be something I, at this point, wonder if I could cope with.

Silver: Again, we have to go into parenthood knowing that there are no guarantees against accidents or against death, and that whenever we give ourselves in love we are risking terrible, devastating hurt. It's a risk worth taking because it's the ultimate fulfillment, but there is also pain. When two young people stand in front of me at a marriage altar and promise to love each other until death do them part, ^{IF I LIVE LONG ENOUGH} ~~there is a good chance that~~ ~~one day~~ I will see one of them devastated, in tears, because of the death of the other. It's got to happen that way unless by chance they die together. There are no guarantees with children either. Suddenly an accident, devastating illness, a tumor takes away a child whom we love. How do you cope with it? I don't know, but it helps not to expect that by sheer force of will we can guarantee life to our children any more than we can ^{them} ~~guarantee happiness to our children or success to our children.~~ We bring another human being into the world. We provide our children home, sustenance, love, whatever advice we can; but they are independent human beings and they are going to have whatever life holds in store for them, whatever they're able to achieve in life.

Haley: So there are no guarantees.

Silver: We have to forget the myth that being a parent is a happiness producing undertaking. It isn't.

Haley: A couple of years ago I was in Mt. Sinai Hospital. There was a chance that what I had was serious and I was scared. I wondered if they came in and said: 'what you have is terminal', if I could handle it. Frankly, I didn't feel I could. In a situation like that, and this happens every day all over the city, a doctor will say to a person: 'we've just

discovered you have whatever it is and it's terminal and you have so many months. '

How do you cope with that?

Silver: I have seen a lot of people cope with terminal illness and I've always been awed by the resources that God gave us, emotional resources, to cope with the dark side of life. There are defense mechanisms, obviously. There is the love which goes out to those you love and comes to them from you. There is a kind of resignation, an acceptance, which comes over you, which will come over all of us because whether we die at Mt. Sinai Hospital suddenly of illness or after. . .

Haley: We have our shot at it at a certain time?

Silver: Yes, every one of us is going to die, and ^{FACING DEATH} the faith that we have in ourselves and our sense of dignity comes to the fore. People handle themselves remarkably well in the face of ^{such} ~~these ultimate~~ tragedies in part because they recognize that death is not the ultimate tragedy. Death is the cessation of pain, not pain. The ultimate tragedy is loneliness, not death, being totally alone, having no one to love or to be loved by. Death is not the worst of the things that can happen to us.

Haley: Do you think if a person had a true understanding of this messianic journey that you talk about, that a person would ~~really~~ be able to face almost anything?

Silver: No. I don't think we can face just anything. There are things which are really too terrible, which overwhelm us and destroy us, which destroy our sanity: an atomic war, the horrors which throw us into the chaos. I don't think that any attitude helps there; but I think that if we can limit our expectations, if we can accept the idea that life is going to be a continuing set of challenges, ^{WE CAN FACE EVERY DAY AND ALL THE} ~~that as we develop,~~ new challenges will come, ^{AND WE WILL FIND} ~~we may solve some, but we will always face others.~~ I think a certain excitement ^{IN} flows into life. I'll give you an example. As you grow up and train yourself to earn a living you look on life in a certain way. You will spend so many years doing whatever

you're going to do professionally and then you will retire and it's going to be peace and quiet. Those who retire to peace and quiet often find that their lives are empty. They are unhappy. Some age quickly; but if you recognize that every stage of life is both a challenge and a chance to fulfill one's self, then there is a certain balance. The child is fulfilled being in a classroom. The adult is fulfilled in his vocation. The person in retirement can be ~~completely~~^{thoroughly} fulfilled in a series of friendship relationships and in service to the community, ^{or} in a hobby or skill. There are always new challenges. There is no completion. There is no finality. You are always becoming, that's the key. We are here and we always must be something more.

Haley: Rabbi, we're about finished. Is it traditional Jewish thought to concentrate more on this world and much less on the other one?

Silver: No. Traditional Judaism had a strong faith in the resurrection of the body and in life after death and in God's promise; but it was also true that you were to do the will of God, not because it would gain you admission to heaven, but because it was the right thing to do.

Haley: It almost seems empty to say: 'I'm always going to do what God says because I'm afraid of death or there's something in it for me at the end.' That seems like a kind of bad motivation.

Silver: It is rather childish. The child in fifth grade or sixth grade does her schoolwork because of the report card and parental approval. The adult does his work because it needs to be done.

Haley: Rabbi, thank you very much.

Silver: It has been a pleasure.

Haley: I was touched by some of the things you said. It was interesting. Thanks for being with us.