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

Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

Sub-series B: Sermons, 1950-1989, undated.

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Where Parents Fail Their Children, Where Children Fail Their
Parents, 1956.

are not unique WHERE PARENTS FAIL THEIR CHILDREN of delinquency are
 WHERE CHILDREN FAIL THEIR PARENTS
 not unique or new to our day. If you believe that this is so, I invite
 you to pick up the work The Temple
 November 18, 1956 Dickens, to open his novel of

Oliver Twist, and to read there the escapades of Magin and of his band
 of young Children have puzzled parents and parents have caused con-
 sternation to their young people since the dawn of time, and I suppose
 that they will continue to do so till the end of time. Sometimes we
 forget that which the Talmud calls the " -- the worry, the concern, the trouble which we are caused in the
 raising of our children, is a constant all-day, every-day concern of
 men. We sometimes do not pause to think that even in our Bible, even
 among the spiritual heroes of our tradition, there were many who had
 troubled youths and there were many who were far from idealic parents.

people, The psychiatrists would search long in our recorded world
 literature before they could find as classic a case of rivalry
 between twins, between brothers, as the rivalry between Jacob and
 Esau. Young Joseph, pampered and petted by his father, becoming
 conceited and arrogant and selfish as a result of this indulgence, is
 another case of the behavior problem caused by the mistakes of one of
 our ancestral forebears. And so also is the conduct of his brothers
 who finally could no longer take his arrogance and turned against him
 and decided to sell him into slavery -- to kidnap him, to bind him,
 and to sell him. I wonder what the suburban educators of that day must
 have said as they read the headlines of the morning paper. I wonder
 what consternation they evidenced about the sad state of the world's
 youth.

literature Behavior problems, the difficulties of raising our young people,
 these problems.

are not unique in our own age, even the tensions of delinquency are not unique or new to our day. If you believe that this is so, I invite you to pick up the works of Mr. Charles Dickens, to open his novel of Oliver Twist, and to read there the escapades of Fagin and of his band of young toughs. And if you believe so, I invite you to open the pages of any classical history to read there of the council meetings of ancient Athens or of ancient Alexandria or of ancient Rome and you will see writ large in the pages of that history, the wail and the complaint of the city fathers that bands of young people are terrorizing their citizens at night and that it is no longer safe to be abroad after dark on the streets. And if you still feel that delinquency is a unique problem of our day, I invite you to open the pages of our Talmud, to read there the wail of one of the ancient teachers of our people, Eliazer Bar-Yehuda, a sage who complained that it was easier to raise an olive tree in the parched, arid, sandy soil of upper Galilee, than it was to raise in all of Israel a single strong and sturdy and upright son.

No, these problems which face us today are recurring and recurrent problems. They are not ours alone and not unique to our generation. And so I speak today of the problems which young people cause their parents and the problems which parents cause their young people -- not out of any sense of urgency, not out of any feeling that there are certain elements in our social living which must be condemned -- but simply because I feel that raising a family requires understanding and that being raised in a family requires understanding, and that there is a great deal of wisdom and understanding which the ancient literature of our people can bring to bear on these tensions and on these problems.

Now, the problems of raising young people occur on many levels, with levels, and I would concern myself this morning primarily with the young people with whom I work and with their parents with whom I am associated. There are, of course, the problems of neglectful parents and neglected children. There are the problems of abnormal parents and abnormal children. These, I would today for the moment, lay aside. I would concern myself principally with well-meaning and well-intentioned parents and with young people who seek to grow, desire to mature, desire to become adult.

The first point that I would like to make this morning is one which is taken from an illustration drawn from our Bible. When the children of Israel came to the foot of Mount Sinai, God propositioned them as to their willingness to accept the Ten Commandments. He was not willing to put upon them the yoke of obligation to this very strict and demanding moral law unless they signified their willingness to accept these responsibilities and abide by them. The answer which the children of Israel gave God on that occasion has always been taken by our teachers as an important indication to men as to the attitude they should take in life. Israel, it is said, answered, "We will do and we will listen." Deeds are more important than words -- that we live by our moral principles, that we accept them and practice them is more important than that we preach them or mouth them or clothe them in beautiful phrases. There are many who make in life great promises but who do little, and there are many who seldom speak of moral principle but are seldom found wanting in moments of moral crisis. It is these latter whom our tradition always holds up for acclaim.

Now we are concerned, each of us, as parents, as educators, with teaching our young people the morals, the attitudes, the values towards life which we feel to be important. We believe it to be important for them to be honest, to be truthful, to be forthright, to be good, to be respectful, to be considerate, to be kind. And we are concerned that our schools and that our synagogues and that our homes should teach these principles. We enroll our young people in a religious school that they may be exposed to the moral tradition of Judaism. Our schools have adopted courses in civics and in the teachings of way to democratic living in order to expose our young people again to the mandates of responsible citizenship. And finally, we in our homes, take great pains to discipline our young people as to the way that they may go.

But I sometimes feel that we neglect the classroom and the textbook from which our young people learn the most. They learn by seeing rather than by hearing. Their favorite, and most effective classroom, is the home, and the most effective textbook is the lines which their parents adopt for their own lives. If a child sees his parents being strong in purpose, taking an upright position on moral issues, he will respect his parents and he will learn the meaningfulness of these moral positions. If, however, a child sees his parents mouthing the conventional moralities but practicing the conventional immoralities, he will quickly discard the words as meaningless, as unrealistic, and he will adopt a much more practical and hard-headed and much less moral position when he, himself, must make such decisions. A child who sees his father in private take great pride in the integrity of his positions on the matters which shape our national destiny but who sees the same father in private

who sees the same father in public conform to the attitudes of his neighbors or of his friends will see no particular virtue in his own personal integrity. A young person who hears his mother constantly backbite and tear down verbally the character of her neighbors and of her acquaintances, will herself not be willing to trust herself in friendship and will set no great store by the loyalty with which one man or one woman should bear herself towards her neighbors. A young person who can induce his parents to sign a false excuse for his truancy from his school will always in life look for the easy way to excuse his behavior, will always look for ways to shirk and to avoid the responsibilities of his own actions. If you would train up a child in the way that he should go, you must be first willing to go that way yourself.

Now the same classroom in which the child or the young adult learns his morals is the room in which he learns his manners. I have heard it said and repeated that this generation is less courteous, less respectful, less considerate of its elders than the previous. I am not sure that this is so, but if it is, it is because our homes have become so unconcerned with privacy, with being considerate, with respecting the dignity of each individual member of the home, that our children have no act, no guide from which to guide their own actions. A father who invades the privacy of his son's room and who violates the integrity of his son's diary cannot expect his son to consider his mouth sealed as to any matter which he hears being discussed in the household. A mother who is constantly frustrated and bothered by the presence in the home of some aged relative who voices freely, openly, her criticism of this person's conduct and

practices is certainly not preparing for herself a warm and beloved old age. A family where the voices are raised freely, loudly, and stridently, and where no one is particularly concerned about the language and the vocabulary which punctuates one's speech, is not a family which can expect its young people to be concerned, when outside of the home, with the tone with which they express themselves and with the language which they choose to use towards their friends or towards their neighbors. In manners as in morals, the example must be lived in the home before it can be expected of our young people outside the home.

Many of our homes have expected that the schools and the synagogues would take up the slack in moral education which they, somehow, feel they cannot assume, and certainly the temples and the schools are concerned with the moral edification of our young people. But here again, unless the parents are partners in the work of the temple or in the work of the school and are concerned with the values which the school is attempting to teach, there can be no hope that the child will hold his lessons dearly. A parent who comes to the synagogue only to drop his child off to go to school cannot expect that the lessons learned in the classroom will make a lasting inspiration. A parent who never attends the preachings and the teachings of the pulpit cannot expect his child, after all, to attend to or to pay attention to or to value highly the lessons and the teachings which taught in the classrooms or from the pulpit. These institutions can be partners with the home in the development of the child, but they cannot do it alone. They cannot make up for any lack which the home may have.

Now, I know that this represents a heavy burden of responsibility for the parents. I know that our young people demand a high standard of us. After all, in a sense I am a half father to the thirteen hundred young people in our religious school, and I know the high values and the standards with which they expect the teachers and the rabbis and the administrators to abide. But I also know this -- as we do not expect perfection of your young people, so our young people really do not expect perfection of us. What they react to is really more the texture which they sense in their home or in the school or in the synagogue -- the total configuration which is given and presented to them there rather than to any single thread of indifference or of impatience or irritability. But we must beware always of our own moral position. If we expect our children to grow in their standards, our standards must grow up with them.

Permit me here a word aside: many of our parents seem to be, in our day and age, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the tasks which are required of them. They live all day, every day, under the tensions of child-rearing. They seek above all else to do the finest job possible, but it seems to overwhelm them, to be beyond them, and so they turn to some textbook, to some of the literature of our modern educators or psychiatrists. Now, it is well to seek out whatever edification, whatever knowledge that modern science can bring to our attention. But I submit to you that it is wrong and that it is harmful to forget the individuality of our own young people and to think that they can be forced into the norms of some character development chart. I submit that it is wrong to abdicate our own

chore were once done by the various siblings in the family. But it is,

good common sense in the name of some overwhelming or overweening principle of child growth. In a sense our parents have immobilized themselves because they have been fixated on certain fads in child raising and in child education. And I submit that it would be well if each of us went back to his own good sense, began again to use his own reservoir of human understanding, used intelligently the insights of modern science, but did not become dominated and controlled by them.

Now, the second point which I should like to make as to the responsibilities of parents can be illustrated also by a story from our Bible. It has to do with an episode already alluded to -- the episode which has to do with the rivalries between Jacob and Esau. The young Jacob was a bright, well-born, well-preserved young man. He was a person of shrewdness and cunningness and he was the apple of his mother's eye. His mother saw to it that the young Jacob had everything that his heart desired. She saw to it that he was freed from every responsibility in the home, in the fields, or with the flocks, and he was given his head -- he had nothing but leisure. The young Jacob soon became spoiled and as he was spoiled, he became increasingly selfish and self-seeking, and he became the young man who was not above taking by deceit from his brother the birthright which was not rightfully his, and taking by deceit from his father the blessing which was not rightfully his.

Now, particularly in our age of overabundance, in our age of prosperity, we as parent, I believe, and as educators, tend to overindulge and to spoil our young people. We tend to relieve them of all the chores and all the responsibilities in the home. After all, we can now afford the professional sitters and the maids and the cooks and the yard men whose chores were once done by the various siblings in the family. But it is,

unfortunately, true that the less the child feels responsible for the home, the less close he feels to the home. And that the more a child feels necessary to home, the more he feels a partner in the ongoing growth and the wellbeing of the home, the closer he will feel to his parents and the closer kinship he will feel to the standards which the home tries to teach.

And secondly, our overindulgence of our young people, it seems to me, tends to keep them as children long beyond their rightful years as children. Many parents today have told me -- but I want my child to have the many opportunities, the many recreations which I lacked. Many a father who worked every day after school and on the weekends, and many a mother who had her first party dress at sixteen, it seems to me, is somewhat overly concerned with the recreational aspects of her child's life.

There are two dangers here. The first danger is that they will force the young people into recreational pursuits beyond their years. A mother who becomes overly concerned at eleven or twelve with partying her daughter, will destroy some of the freshness with which her daughter should enjoy her years when she is sweet sixteen. A father who gives his child a car long before even the law permits it, will find that the thrill, beyond that of ownership of the car, is racing it. And he may find that his child is engaged in pastimes of which he would not approve.

But secondly, just as Rebecca indulged Jacob and made him into a selfish young man, so often our overindulgence of our young people turns them into selfish young people and into self centered adults. The difference between childhood and maturity is, it seems to me, the difference between one's concern with one's immediate amusement and one's concern with one's long range accomplishments. Many of our young people I hear complained would submit to you that this is not so. There are problem children, and there are weak children, and there are children who do not follow the moral

about always. Many of our young people are toying with life. They are playing at the responsibilities of living, and I submit that this is because they have been made to feel that sports, and cars, and dances, and one's enjoyments are in and of themselves, and it is only with a second thought that they are made to appreciate the importance of earning one's living and of planning for one's future and of serving one's community.

The Rabbis had a wonderful piece of advice for any preacher -- " -- that he should not be harsh or severe in his judgments of his people. I hope that nothing I have said makes you feel that I hold cheaply the success which parents have made in the raising of their young people. Quite to the contrary, you cannot live in our school, you cannot administer it and work with its young people without sensing the amazing success, the amazing ability of these parents to bring out the best and the finest which is in their young people. Our Rabbis said: "

-- that a son is as the knee of his father and they asked, why of all the organs of the body, was a son compared to the knee of his father and the answer was that it is the knee only which can raise or lower the body. Well, your children have inestimably raised you in the estimation of myself and of all of their teachers. You are doing a fine job, and what I say I say only because sometimes by bringing these matters of moral understanding to light we can see the more clearly the way that we must go.

I have the feeling that in our day and age we sometimes also over-estimate the importance of the parents. We sometimes put the whole onus of responsibility for the weaknesses of their children upon their shoulders. We often say there are no problem children -- only problem parents. But I would submit to you that this is not so. There are problem children, and there are weak children, and there are children who do not follow the moral

example of their parents. It is not true that the apple does not fall always close to the tree. We are all aware of families in which there may be several sons -- one a minister, one a professor, and one a complete misfit in life. We are all aware of the Biblical stories which tell how such sages of our people as Eli and ^{as} Samuel, men renowned for their wisdom and for their judgment and for their understanding -- each of them had sons who followed not their ways, who inclined after their baser impulses and were held in contempt by the people. Even the supposed wisest of all men, Solomon, was not able to keep peace always in his palace and lived to see his sons rebel against him.

We can teach our children by moral example, but we cannot assure that they will have the moral fiber to abide by our example. Life for our young people is a series of moral tests. We can show them the way that they should go -- that way they must go alone. The young Jacob whom we saw deceiving his father and his brother met this test in a very graphic and symbolic way. When he needed to return to his ancestral home and to beg forgiveness of his parents, the Bible says that he spent a long night wrestling with himself, wrestling with his early weakness, wrestling with his baser instincts, wrestling with his temptations not to go back, not to submit himself to the disgrace of asking forgiveness. They picture this in terms of Jacob wrestling with an angel of God, wrestling with an angel of God and the angel of God could not overcome him. And so our young people must wrestle with themselves and on their beds at night with the moral decisions that face them. We can show them the way. We can live a life which will be a guide to them but they alone, in themselves, must find the moral strength to make the right decision. And certainly

this is not easy. It is they who must learn to decide whether they will spend the hours of preparation in the writing of a theme or whether they will piece the theme together in sections culled from the work of their friends. It is they who must decide whether they will follow the lead of those who challenge them to deeds of foolhardy bravery or whether they will be cautious and abide by the strictures and restrictions of their parents. It is they who must decide whether they have the individuality and the strength to believe their own beliefs, to think their own thoughts, to go their own way, to set their own standards, or whether they will allow some group of their peers, some group of their friends, to set and determine their standards and their conduct for them. We cannot make these decisions for them. We can only hope that they will appreciate the rightness of the way we live and we only say: the obligation is yours. Be strong enough to accept it.

And finally, our young people suffer, as do the parents, from the overabundance and the overprosperity of our age. As the parents sometimes tend to overindulge the young people, so I firmly believe our young people tend to overindulge themselves. They want secure freedom. They want all the privileges of childhood and none of the responsibilities of adulthood. They want to be allowed to live in a world of dances, of parties, and of sports, and of games, long after they should have come into the estate of the men who are concerned with colleges and with careers and with standards and with achievements. They pamper themselves much too long, it seems to me often today, in their childhood and are unwilling to mature, unwilling to leave this state behind.

A Bar Mitzvah, according to our tradition, came at the age of with

thirteen. Confirmation in our practice takes place at fourteen, or early in the fifteenth year. These are the symbolic acts by which a young person graduates into his responsibility, and when our young people achieve this estate, when they achieve these services, certainly they should be willing, they should desire to take on also the planning of tomorrow. The child thinks of tonight's television. The young adult thinks of tomorrow's lessons. The child thinks of the party which will feature the weekend. The young adult sees the weekend as an opportunity to be of service in his community or to spend a few hours with the books planning his life. The child is concerned only with doing in a slipshod way the assignment of tomorrow. The young adult is concerned with what the assignment of tomorrow means in his total development. He is concerned with understanding its full complexity and its full meaning and he goes far beyond the few questions which are asked of him.

The years of adolescence are not easy years, but they are made the more hard if we seek always to overindulge ourselves, if we seek always to pamper ourselves, if we forget our planning for our immediate enjoyments.

Now, as we have seen, it is not easy to be an adequate parent. It is certainly not easy to be an adequate young person. But neither is it impossible to be either of these. Where there is the will, where there is love, where there is a sense of purpose, where there is a consciousness of one's own moral responsibility, then it seems to me nothing is beyond our achievement. Our young people, like their parents, as we see them pass through our school, give us cause for great hope in the tomorrow. Their parents have brought out much that is fine and noble in them and they are working to become capable adult men and women. Certainly as you work with

the young people and with their parents today, you see the potentiality of a bright tomorrow -- the tomorrow which will be filled for these young people with the tensions of their own child-raising, the tomorrow which will be filled by their accomplishments and be filled by the peace of mind which they will have brought to their parents.

