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Yom Kippur sermon, 1960.

YOM KIPPUR SERMON

The Temple
October 1, 1960

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

Every holiday has an enemy. The enemy of Yom Kippur is pride. Now, what has pride to do with those magnificent, well written prayers of our liturgy, or with that sheaf of magnificent minor-keyed melody which we have heard, or with the rite of fasting? Simply this -- these prayers have no meaning unless they are our prayers, unless they express that which is deep within. And the music has no significance unless it touches our hearts and moves us, helps us in our process of repentance and atonement. And the rite of fasting is no more than a crash program of diet unless we understand its spiritual significance.

There are some who can recite, every Yom Kippur, the litany of confession and fail absolutely to see that every term contained in it applies to some chapter and verse in their own lives. And there are some who leave the synagogue after Neilah exactly as they entered for the Kol Nedre, appreciative of a grand and glorious celebration by rabbi, choir, and congregation, but not one whit the better for it as human beings.

What is it that blinds the eye to the fact that we are the principle actor in this drama of Yom Kippur, that our prayers are not set speeches by some master playwright, but the speeches of our own heart, suggested ideas to lead to that which should be moving about and coursing within and disturbing us and seeking expression in the meditation of this day. What is it ^{that} blinds us to the meaning of Yom Kippur in our own lives? Pride. False pride. Our vanity. It is told that the Emperors of the Austro-Hungarian kingdom took place in the cathedral of St. Stephens in Vienna. This magnificent religious building was a fitting place indeed for this ascension. But before the Emperor designate was

allowed to enter the cathedral for his coronation there was one ritual which he was perforce obliged to undertake. As he and his cortage approached the gates they found the iron gates locked to them, and the Emperor was obliged to go before the gates and pull at the door latch to summon the canon attendant and to cry out, "I, I the Emperor Franz Joseph of all Austria-Hungary, demand admittance." The canon was to reply, "We do not know the Emperor of all Austria-Hungary. Who is it who desires admittance?" And again the Emperor pulled at the latch, and again he was obliged to call out, "I, Franz Joseph, I demand admittance." And again came the answer, "We do not know Franz Joseph. Who is it who demands admittance?" A third time the Emperor pulled at the cord and cried out, but this time his words were of a different tone, "I, I, a sinner, request admittance." The answer, "Enter, sinner. Thou art known to us." The purpose of this ritual is self-evident. Here was a man upon whom the power of life and death over some many millions of subjects was to be invested that very morning. The future of his people would rest entirely upon his shoulders, and only a man who was conscious of his limitations, of his frailties, of his folly, who was willing to listen and to reason and to advise — only such a man could judge and direct the kingdom with compassion and with mercy and with understanding. The rite was ~~unmistakably~~ understandable, and it was well and beautifully conceived. But one wonders in what spirit the Emperor designate spoke these words. Did he really think of himself, that morning, of his glory as a sinner? When the streets of Vienna rang with his praises could he have the to listen to the still, small voice within saying, "Thou art but a man, no more. Though Thou be king, thou art mortal. Though thou be Emperor thou are full of error, mistakes." Indeed, if one picks up the chapter book of the canons of the cathedral of St. Stephen one will read, opposite the description of one of the coronations of an Emperor these words by a pious prelate: "Would that the heart heard that which the mouth hath spoken."

Many of us, I am afraid, undertake the Yom Kippur in much the spirit in which the Emperors of Austria must have undertaken this perfunctory rite. When we are full of the surge of youth, flushed with success, surrounded by friends who are full of respect, when the world paints a most glamorous portrait of us we have no patience, no patience indeed, with a more carefully delineated picture which shows the wrinkles of age, the sags of weakness, the lines of ineffectuality. We want to be told that we are beyond the ordinary, something more than the average, when we are full of pride. We are empty of humility, empty of that contrition which enables us to see that this litany of success speaks of us, of our failings, of our compromises, and of our faults. The pompous egocentric must always remain a spectator at his own Yom Kippur. For surely the confession speaks of someone else. It is nobly intended, but it speaks not of his life. His life is of totally other proportion.

Pride is the enemy of Yom Kippur, and equally, pride is the enemy of faith. An eighteenth century Hasid was once asked by his disciple where God dwells. He might have answered, "God dwells everywhere, for God dwells in the beauty of nature, for God dwells in the history of human progress, for God dwells in the spark of divinity that is in every man." But his answer was otherwise: "God dwells wherever man lets Him in." And there is truth to this answer, for we come to belief not solely or even primarily through the logic of a philosopher, through premise and conclusion. We come to belief and faith by confronting the illimitable expanse of the universe, the mystery of life, the miracle of love, by confronting the fact that we are mortal, small, and that our universe is large, that our power is limited, that we are surrounded by unlimited power, that our talents are God-given, given by Someone beyond ourselves. We live in a world of wonder, and when we stand in fascination and awe before that world, then faith moves within us. The awe, fascination, and wonder are the seeds of faith.

God dwells wherever man lets Him in and the man who is full of himself has

no room for God. One man looks at his family and he says, "How fortunate I am. How fortunate I am to be surrounded by such love." And he meditates on the miracle of love and on the mystery of life and instinctively, directly he comes to God. Another man looks at his family and he says, "How fortunate they are. How fortunate they are that I am their protector and provider." And his ~~thoughts~~ thoughts describe a narrow circle of which he is hub and center and they can never extend beyond that circle. He confronts in life only himself, he begins and ends with himself. One man looks at his talents and blesses God for those talents. He looks at his station and he blesses the training of his parents, the understanding of teachers, the healing of physicians, unnamed strangers who brought into being by their sacrifice the freedom and the prosperity and the social order which he enjoys. Another man looks at his talents and prides himself upon having disciplined these talents. He looks at his station and he prides himself on being self-made: "All that I have, all that I am I achieved for myself." His thoughts begin and end with himself. told of the
British Prime Minister Disraeli that the thing of which he was most proud in life was that he was a self-made man, and the critics of his character added, that he worshipped his maker. When we are filled with self-adulation we have no inclination to bow before God and praise Him for the world. When we are full of ourselves we are empty of God, for we can see only our handiwork, our achievements, our glory. The far vaster/^{glories} achievements of God pale into insignificance in the background -- we have no eyes for to see them. And we do not see them. We are amazed and we wonder only at ourselves, indeed the pride has become the dominant element of our personality and we raise ourselves on a pedestal and cry out of our own divinity.

I think this observation, that pride is the enemy of faith, could help us understand much of the dimension of faith in our own day. Social critics and social historians have pointed to the fact that our faith is by and large (and

I am speaking broadly now of the faith of this generation) that our faith is, by and large, lukewarm, tepid, uncertain and unsure. We affiliate reachingly; we congregate attentively; we listen respectfully; we believe by and large that faith is a good thing and we send our children to schools to learn faith. But somehow in our own lives many of us cannot hold fast to a secure faith, a strong, vital faith, a faith which gives us power and comfort, courage. And why so? Why so? Why is our faith lukewarm and uncertain? Are we militantly atheistic? No, certainly that is not the dimension of our age. This is an age of religious revival. Are we indifferent to faith? No, if we were indifferent to faith we would not join the communions and the churches and the synagogues. And we do join. Why, then, are we uncertain in our faith? The usual answer has been that the content of our modern learning has undermined and sapped the foundations of faith. As we all know, there has been a revolution of learning in the last one hundred years. Almost all the old axioms of the sciences of physics and of biology, of philosophy, psychology have been perforce discarded and replaced by new discoveries, and it is said that these new discoveries undermine all that was once sacred and belief. Well, I do not believe so. Faith, belief in God is no more creditable or disproven today than in any century heretofore. Indeed, the ship of faith sails on as serenely in the sea of modern knowledge as it did in any ancient ocean of wisdom. Now, it is true that the modern science has scraped from the keel of our ship of faith many a barnacle of superstition. It is no longer possible for men to believe that Adam was created on the sixth day, specially, or that there was a flood which covered the world for forty days and forty nights, or that God has invested in any one communion or church infallible knowledge in matters which are specific and which are spiritual and which are philosophic. Biology and physics and history teach us otherwise. But the ancients, the more brilliant of them, knew long ago that much that we now challenge in the name of science was only myth legend, morality myth, not intended as science, as literally true, but intended to teach the auditor a lesson of life.

Where does faith begin? Faith begins with wonder, and is our world any less full of wonder? Indeed, those who work at the outposts of knowledge, who approach the unknown, who search with their tiny flashlights to bring light into those dark recesses, these are the men who are men of faith today. These are the men who sense the freshness and the force of the world without, the world over which we have no control, the world within which we live, the world whose dimensions defy description, the world of God, whose glory we can hardly describe even in measure of a broken fragment. No, it is not the content of our modern knowledge which has undermined the substance of our faith. We have perforce reformed some of the orthodoxies, but faith remains strong and secure.

What, then, has happened? For surely our faith is uncertain. I think this is the answer. Man looks today at the heavens. And for what does he look? The silver trail of satellite or echo, coursing round our world. Man looks at his world. For what does he look? For high, towering cities, for giant industry, for bridges spanning the wide rivers. Wherever man looks he looks ~~with~~ evidence of his own handiwork. For we are a proud age, and we have reason to be proud. No age heretofore has achieved as greatly in engineering, technological terms. We are proud of our accomplishments. But our accomplishments have caused us to lose perspective. Look to the heavens and see who has created these -- this is an age-old question. But what heavens are we looking at? The limited heavens surrounded by the satellites and sputniks? or the heaven which is infinitely expanding, which is surrounded and contained only in God? And what are you looking for on the earth? The harmony of sky and soil and sea and air which creates life and permits life, the beauty of the landscape, or evidence of the few drifts upon drifts which man in a few thousand years has been able to build upon this landscape. You must see both, but you must see both in perspective. You must see not only our human handiwork but the background of all of our human activity as the handiwork of God. And once our generation sees and recognizes this, then I firmly believe ours will be a generation of certain faith. For

pride is the enemy of God, whether it be the pride of the individual or the pride of the race, only a race or an individual humble enough to see himself in true perspective can come to God, accept God, and live by His law.

Pride is the enemy of Yom Kippur -- pride is the enemy of God -- pride is the enemy of man. Pride destroys love. What is love but a sharing of life's beauty? What does a beloved say? "My beloved is mine and I am my beloved's." But what does the prideful man say? "Love is a conquest. Love is a domination. My beloved is mine." But he can never say, "I am my beloved's." Love is a rejoicing in another's beauty. What does the prideful man rejoice in? Truly in the beauty of his beloved, but why? Because she is beautiful, or because he can dangle her beauty before his friends? No, pride is the enemy of love because pride destroys sensitivity, our ability to share, and love can not long survive when men and women lack the capacity to share life's beauties. Pride is the enemy of friendship. How long can you sustain a friendship with however brilliant and witty a man if that man only asks your audience and your attention to gratify his own vanity? You are an object to him though he is a man to you. He wants your applause, your approbation. He will not listen to your criticism, nor to your reason. He wants you for selfish reasons, and once you cease to gratify his whim he will pass you over for someone who knows better how to flatter and how to gratify his will. Pride destroys love, pride destroys friendship, and pride destroys compassion. Compassion -- those tender shoots which go out from us and permit us to relate to all in the world about us. Of what is compassion born? Of our own recognition that we are frail, that we have moments of folly, that there but by the grace of God go I. That is compassion, and when we see another falter along the way of life, instinctively we hold out a supporting arm, we are eager to tender our support. But what now of the prideful man? He cannot say, "There but by the grace of God go I", because he does not believe it. He has overcome his weaknesses, he has disciplined his

talents, he has seen to overcoming the financial and emotional insecurities of life. Why cannot you? Why must he have sympathy with human weakness? he asks. He has not known the overturn of an economy, the tumult of war over which no individual man can have control. He walks alone in pride as if he is a god. As you remember from your stories of the Greek gods, they are not prone to be compassionate of men.

Pride destroys love, and pride destroys friendship, and pride destroys compassion, and ultimately pride destroys man himself. For what is life? Is life a broad highway, smooth and easy? ~~Life~~ Pride is a dangerous path along a narrow precipice. Yawning on both sides of life are death, disease, suffering, financial reverses and loss, unexpected invalidism. In life we need support. We need to be tied by many a rope to family and friends, so that if we slip others will shore us up and pull us to safety. The man of pride walks alone. One by one he cuts the ropes which bind him to his fellow men, and when an ill wind blows through his life and he trips there is none to pick him up. He falls finally down into the abyss from which there is no return.

Pride is the enemy of man and pride is the enemy of God. What are the enemies of pride? Well, self-respect is the enemy of pride. Self-respect and pride are the two opposite end of a single strand of emotion. Pride boasts; self-respect is deliberate in judgment. Pride struts; self-respect walks modestly and humbly. Pride is the center of a narrow world of his own creation and he cannot see beyond this world of his own imagination; self-respect is the one of two and a half billion citizens of this world, he is a part of God's universe, he fails to see that he is the god of any universe. The man of self-respect contemns vanity in another, and he works diligently to exterpate and to root it out from himself. The man of self-respect walks with dignity and without his head held high in the air. He walks conscious of his talents, but without presuming that his talents are of his own creation or that they are of any higher degree than those of many in the world about him. The man of dignity is conscious of his

responsibilities. The man of pride is conscious only of his responsibility to himself.

And the enemy of pride is Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur can be likened to a great symphony. Like any great symphony it has many moods and many movements of one central theme that occurs and reoccurs. And what is that theme? "For we are not so presumptuous and stiffnecked as to say before Thee that we are wholly righteous and have not sinned, but verily we have sinned; we have sinned, we have transgressed, we have done perversely." The theme of Yom Kippur is man's limitations, man's humanity, his mortality, his frailty, that none of us is as perfect or as good as we presume ourselves to be, that all of us in the course of any year fail, and make mistakes, commit errors, commit sins, that all of us might be a better human being than we are at this hour. And this is destructive of pride, is it not? For what is pride but a sealing off of the soul from criticism -- self criticism or the criticism of another? Psychology has described to us the intricate defense mechanisms by which we create a zone of silence about our of personality. We refuse to admit truth to be truth when it is a truth we do not wish to hear.

Through this long day of prayer, can we help but hear the truth? "For we are not so presumptuous nor stiffnecked as to say before Thee that we are wholly righteous, that we have not sinned, for verily we have sinned, we have transgressed, we have done perversely."

Amen

That third sphere being:

Belief is not solely an even pointing a matter of logic or reason - Faith
 is born not in philosophic premises & conclusions - such notions are the
 secondary to the primary of values, the urgency of love, the urgency of life.

now some are related to the medicine and sometimes to some feelings.

On the
 1st of his family and married at my own father and mother on the
 second of June and the night of July - and a son called Edward & Mary to God.
 Another child of his family and married at our good father in August
 his son & protection - and - - - - - as he began with himself

Do not
 Bless it ^{the} talent and bless and further gift - Bless at my station
 and bless parents for their training, & pray, blessing father and mother,
 physician for their health, friends for their advice, unknown helpers for
 the prosperity, freedom, & peace which I enjoy. Another look at
 the station and realize that he is self-made and congratulate himself
 on his hard work & his wisdom - and a ~~very~~ thoughtful character -
 never more will I regret he is under the sun.

[illegible]

2nd & 3rd
 4th & 5th
 6th & 7th
 8th & 9th
 10th & 11th
 12th & 13th
 14th & 15th
 16th & 17th
 18th & 19th
 20th & 21st
 22nd & 23rd
 24th & 25th
 26th & 27th
 28th & 29th
 30th & 31st

Perhaps these observations afford an some understanding of the
 kind relationship which exists as between the two groups, and by
 observing how connected and related to it is a matter of performance
 and how much can be done. We are affected naturally, and by the
 respectfulness, better attention, and by the fact that the
 and large part of a good thing - and much of the - to have
 a more close relationship with the - and the same can
 not be held as by good to make a of better. One fact, as shown,

is not a method of unbelief, but a putdown of
of all-day hope & doubts about what seems to be the
truth in a just
the whole of life!

Can we not say by saying 'I am not a Jew' - the
method of denying all membership and proof enough of that - but not the
understanding of ourselves in matters of faith

~~Ignorance of facts~~

Why?

Why should we dare to believe in the supernatural - but we not free ourselves
of mental reservation?

The several sources of contemporary culture & historical have to do with the
conflict between Religion and the new learning, with the early church
and the modern church which have been revolutionized & the old ways
of looking at the universe - at man - at history and at life
being destroyed

Can we still have knowledge of the foundations of the old
faith, there can be no argument to-day because we are not in a world in which we
live, for a faith that covered the earth for 1900 years, in the spirit of
the universal church, is now the thing of a human, in the possibility
that we are in a world of pluralism & faith as men are less inflexible -
things & beliefs & points about which we used to be inflexible - but
but not many of us know what the second most general one was
legends really at the heart of a belief at last.

more at the heart of a belief - but we are not in a world in which we
are not in a world of superstition - but the story of faith and our
to-day is interesting and serious in the face of modern knowledge
as it did in the situation of an ancient church.

Of course we have lost the old knowledge, the old faith, the old
in fact, the proof of what we are not in a world in which we
are - but we have lost the old knowledge - the old faith, the old
legends, the secrets of life - the most important part of the
power, beyond life itself, as we are in a world, Faith, hope &
morality, and, if we are in a world, and we are in a world, and we are in a world,
by life, we are in a world, and we are in a world, and we are in a world.

Y.K. needs to bring further into - but not self report. - ~~And, it~~
is that way, except under conditions to the extent we can build with
results. So we do not report on the situation in other, as it is not
at all unusual - and we are going to give a number of the same.
May be Y.K. has some significant for us - ~~and we are going to~~

