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A Sane and Happy Life in a Sometimes Insane and Often
Unhappy World, 1966.

A Sane and Happy Life in a
Sometimes Insane and Often Unhappy World
Daniel Jeremy Silver
February 27, 1966

Our midrash, my dear friends, records what is possibly the most protracted debate in all of history. According to its tradition scholars from the school of a teacher by the name of Shamai^{and} scholars from the rival school of a teacher named Hillel met, debated, discussed, puzzled two and one-half years the single proposition; resolved, that it were better had man not been created. We might phrase it: is life really worth the living? Is it really a joyous blessing or is it not^a rather heavy and oppressive burden? Now, this extended debate seems at first glance passing strange. Surely, it could have been resolved in a much briefer time, but is it really that. You and I, every man, have definite opinions on any number of subjects, but when it comes to our overall assessment of life, our fundamental judgment on being, our point of view shifts with our mood, with our age, with our condition or situation. When we are young we thirst for life, we bound out of bed every morning, the lure of adventure is in our hearts and our eyes are ablaze with the joy of life. Aging becomes somewhat more difficult to bestir ourself with each dawn. Our years are at best bittersweet. They have their measure of disappointment, defeat, of death. When we look ahead we are somewhat frightened.

The confident man says life is my oyster. The bone-weary, broken man says oysters give me indigestion. And the Bible, that magnificent document of human feeling and human hope and human vision records all of these various shifting attitudes of ours towards this life of ours. How happy we are, how joyous our life, the Lord is good to us all, the tenderst of His mercies are over all His works. The sun shines. The air is clear. The dawn is bright. Life is worth the living. But read on in the Psalms and you find other moods, bitter moods, harsh moods, despairing moods, for my heart is overflowing, sated with evil things, my strength has been exhausted, drained away from me, I am considered as if I am dead though I am still alive; I have become as a man for whom there is no help, no hope, no opportunity.

Now, David will exalt. I will sing unto the Lord with a whole heart. Job will lament, wherefore is life given to those in misery, a blight onto the bitter and hard, who long for death and it cometh not.

How would you answer the question this morning at this stage and in this condition of your life? Has life been worth the living? Has it fulfilled your fondest expectations? Has each dawn been a bright dawning? Or has life been a rather thankless routine, hard work, and have you been buffeted about by its storms, bruised in the buffeting?

Now, I cannot, of course, read your mind or sense your mood, but I would suggest to you that most men have answered in the negative, that it would have been better had man not been created. What proof have I? Simply this. That all of the great ancient religions and most of the great ancient philosophy are woven out of the stuff of despair, sewed together out of the fabric of fear and loneliness. Life, they said, is a via del rosa, a way of sighs, a road of tears. There is no release this side of the grave. In the East men longed for nirvana, the absence of life, the absence of feeling, parole from the cruel sentence of having to be born again. And in the West the philosophers agreed with the teachers of the East. Aristotle said it - not to have been born is best of all and death is better than life.

Now, of course, ancient man knew moments of happiness and the joy of accomplishment, of heavy triumph, love, but surprisingly little of the joy of life as reflected in his serious literature and his philosophy and his books. Why so? Because his life was a bitter one. He was surrounded with difficulty. Job said it for him: man that is born of woman is few of days and full of trouble. Man that is born of woman is few of days and full of trouble. Life was a wretched thing. One in two children died in their infancy. And mother couldn't count on the fact that if she had three children she would die in childbirth. One in two who reached the age of adulthood died before thirty. If they did not die before thirty they faced a life of being crippled and wasted. Ninety-five out of a hundred men were other men's

slaves and serfs. Few men could call their soul their own, and even those who could lived in cities which were plagued by disease, where war was endemic, where there was no security and little safety. Hope not, philosopher Haracleitus wrote, hope not lest the unhopd for come for which there is no trail and no path to it. Man that is born of woman is few of days and full of troubles. Life for the ancient was a rather wretched affair, but we live in the twentieth century, an advanced age, in what we confidently call the brave new world. What about our age? We are happy in our age, we tell ourselves. We will wage successful war on poverty. We have removed the blindness of illiteracy from half the world. We have circumscribed and constricted disease until it no longer plagues the world. So much has been accomplished. We have assuaged the physical torture which beset ancient man. Yet, I submit to you, that most of us are deeply suspicious of life, and that there are very few here who have lived any number of years who cannot testify that life can give you quite a drubbing.

How can I prove my point? I might cite to you the applauded literature and philosophy of our day which tends to begin with the single proposition: all life is absurd, we are born without our willing it, life is a burden which we must carry as best we can along a distant way to a destination which may not even exist.

Modern life, Kafka once wrote, is full of possibility, but every possibility reminds us of the inescapable impossibility of our own existence.

But let me rather than cite you philosophy and literature which, after all, is but the more orderly creation that exists within our mind. Let me talk of us, of our instinctive response to life and, as proof, cite to you the amazing response to a book. Truman Capote has written a book about a senseless brutal murder. He called it In Cold Blood. In the five weeks since its publication this rather well-written report of pathological murder has outsold the initial sale of any volume in this century. Now, there is nothing classical about this book. It's a well-contrived and well-told story, and nothing more. What accounts for this fantastic sale? Public relations? Yes. The book was well publicized, but the public relations expert can

only harvest on a ground which has already been carefully seeded. I would submit to you that the sale of this book reflects something deep within our soul. We have lived through Auschwitz, Dachau. We have seen the photographs of corpses carelessly piled upon corpses in endless rows. We saw the slaughter of the second World War. We have lived through the violence of Korea and the violence of Vietnam and the violence in our streets. We live in a world where the missiles are smoking and ready on the pad, armed with their warheads. We live with violence. We live if and when we admit it with the realization that we stand on quicksand and that the world can suddenly open up at our feet and envelop us and suck us down. But all of these fears are too vague, too vast, too far away to be understood, drawn in, empathized with. It takes the story of the senseless murder of a Kansas farm family, a family not unlike our own, hard-working, decent, hopeful of the future, a good citizenship family, church-ed family, a family which asks only to do its share, to be granted peace and an opportunity. It takes the tragedy of this family to reduce violence, the context of our life, into understandable terms, to admit, as we seldom admit, that life is a difficult way, that cruelty can suddenly and viciously intrude upon us with all our securities, all our foundations are essentially weak, pliable, and that there is no security this side of the grave. Our husband may leave the house happy in the morning. His voice lingers on our mind. We may never hear his voice again. The child goes off happily to school and a car careens suddenly on the sidewalk. We go to the doctor for our ordinary checkup only to find ourselves under the sentence of approximate death. A rabbi stands in his pulpit to bless the congregation and a debuk seizes a tortured soul. We build, we plan, we labor, we sacrifice, and suddenly an economic convulsion draws down and reduces to rubble our best-laid plans. And there is always that war looming in this capital and that capital with the little box with the little red button and someone ready to press the button and blow us all into holocaust. We have reason to be deeply suspicious of life even though with our science and our technology we have mitigated and assuaged most of the physical difficulties which beset ancient man. Indeed, as science conquered for us and made life for us

bearable, our hopes soared high, and often the higher they soared when they were frustrated, defeated, the more precipitate the fall, the more shattering we were after. How can one live a sane, happy life in an often unsane, sometimes unhappy world?

Some simply withdraw. They leave the cold winter, hard workaday world for the sunshine climes^{where} they cannot leave the winters of discontent. Those who work with those who have retired from life because of age or simply because they no longer wish to be in the hurly-burly testify that these men and women are not only lonely but frightened. Their personalities begin to disintegrate for they have no adventure, no excitement, no purpose, no goal to look forward to, no work which gives them dignity. And some there be who simply withdraw into their rooms. The mother in this Kansas family which was so brutally slaughtered had long since withdrawn into her white-washed pristine bedroom. She lay there upon her bed in an unreal world. Was she the happier in that world? We cannot know. Psychiatrists who explore men and women who have withdrawn from life tell us of the terrors which beset them and yet it was in this haven, in this security, on this bed of withdrawal in which this mother was found bound and gagged and murdered. The unreal world is no citadel. It does not erect walls against the real world. It cannot protect us. Reality always intrudes. Wither shall I flee from Thy presence?

And some there be when the shock waves of cruelty roll over our world who simply buy stronger locks for their doors. This seems to have been the general reaction in Holcomb, Kansas, a little hamlet farming village in which the murder took place. There was a run on bolts and chains and locks. If we love we love deeply and desperately and we lose. We are hurt. Our hopes are disabused. How many there be who fear, having lost and knowing the searing pain of loss, fear to love again? They close themselves in. They lock up their hearts and they walk a lonely way. They walk, I submit, a maddening way.

In the Union of South Africa men have placed arsenals in their homes. They have built high walls, high fences, around their yards. They have placed armed guards

at their gates and I submit that they are not one wit the safer. No man can make of his home, of his life, of his world an impregnable fortress. No lock will keep out the professional thief. No fallout shelter will avoid the war which we all fear. Violence can always kick down any door. How then can we live a sane and happy life in a sometimes and often unhappy world?

I began by telling you of the ancient debate between the students of Hillel and the students of Shammai. I neglected to tell you the conclusion of that debate. The men met and they voted. They answered in this wise, philosophically, it were better had man not been created, but philosophy is not life and now that man has been created let him search his ways.

When I first read this teaching some twenty years ago I was put off by it. I felt it begged the question. Either life was worth the living or it wasn't worth the living, make up your mind. Why tell me simply go out and be a good boy. Twenty years of work with people, analyzing my own life, has convinced me that there is profound wisdom in this teaching for if I understand it says this. There is no virtue in that form of jaundiced speculation, philosophizing search by which the self-pitying seek to unravel, to determine the context of life for there are no answers to be gotten here. We can never make a final assessment that life is good or that it is not good, that it is pleasing or that it is difficult. Rather, grace comes to life in the graceful living. Happiness comes to life in the purposeful living. Decency comes to life in the decent living. Let man put off this form of ^mcomiseration, this endless speculation about life and let him get about the business of living. So short the time for work or play, why grieve the night or waste the day. Ecclesiastes said it as well, the end of the matter, all having been said, fear the Lord and keep His commandments, but now that man has been created let him search his ways.

Now, I don't know how I would have answered in the first century the debate that was held between these scholars. Today I would answer in the affirmative, that I believe life is worth the living for I often think of that first man, the

primitive, crouching in his cave, how that first man must have rued the day on which he was born. Life was a daily deathly struggle for survival against the elements, against predatory beasts, against an unyielding earth, against the other homo sapiens who wanted to take the little that he had. There seemed no hope. He could not see research, skill, technology advanced, only that his children and his children's children would live as he had lived, fearfully, frightened, terrorized, crouching in the darkness. But somehow that first man had within him the capacities of hand, head and heart sufficient to create civilization. He and those who came after him, who put beside them, aside, the philosophizing, the worrying, the self-pity and went about living, doing, thinking, inventing. They built for us a civilization and they gave us the grace and the opportunity which we have in our lives. They made our lives better than their lives ever were.

And what of our lives? Have we not, too, the talents of head and heart and hand sufficient to control the violence that walks in the back alleys in the dark nights of our cities? Have we not the skills to give better education, to provide better mental treatment, to classify those who may be pathological and to treat them or to give them guarded care? And have we not the knowledge sufficient to see how we can control war and establish peace in our world? We know what is required, the institutions that are needed. We have all the skills if only we will leave off commiseration, self-pity, the throwing up of the hands in surrender and go about the business of living. But now that he has been created let him search his ways.

Gerte said it. We men are always complaining that our happy hours are so few and our sad hours so many, and yet it is we who are to blame. If we opened our hearts to enjoy the good that God offers us every day we should have strength enough to bear evil in its turn when it does come. Would it have been better if man had not been created? I believe not. I believe that God gave us the skills and head and heart sufficient to the challenge and the task which He placed before us. I believe that there can be a sane and happy life in an often unsane and often unhappy

world, but I believe that sanity will come to us only in the living, only in the struggling to create things of use and beauty, only as we relate ourselves to the upward thrust of man, as we give our skills to our communities, to our civilization. And I believe that there can be happiness in our lives for all the violence which may be intruding, for all its mortality, the happiness which comes of sharing, of sacrificing, of being sensitive to, of being kindly, the happiness which comes through and in the joy of others, the happiness which comes to us at the end of the day in which we can say, this day was not wasted.

How brief the time to work or play/why rue the night/why waste the day?



כ' לטבת תש"ז
ורח"ל
למנוחה
בית כנסת

We men are always complaining that our happy hours are so few and our sad hours so many. And yet, it is we who are to blame. If we opened our hearts to enjoy the good that God offers us every day we should have strength enough to bear evil in its turn when it does come.



David would say "I would give death certificates but with my ^{mind} hand" and John would consent.

Wherefore no light given to him and no money
I left with the letters in hand - under her,
for death and it would not.

How would you cheer money and your wife. On the way of it -
would it have been better if you had not been married? You left
fulfilled
your hopes & been in misery of opportunity & a loss of disappointment
you I feared rather in opportunity disappointment.

I can not read your mind & guess your mind - but I do know
that mind was misery "it would have been better if
we had not been married". My answer - simply then - but

by choice & reason & philosophy out of the fact of disappointment, they have said:
Life is a misadventure - a series of events - & there is no release
from the end of the game. In the end the fatal discovery is of nothing

Nonsense - freedom from life - absence of feeling - relief from the
existence of reality - In the West the philosophy is a need
since the problem - The answer! Not to be known is the best
way and death is better than life, There are 7 of us, ghosts

of existence - pleasure in living alone is a great temptation - but
surprising not to many - & under the weight of depression & stupidity
comprehend the success of life - as terrible depression. Why? Job
suggests the answer: man is born for nothing
20 of few days and full of trouble

Yards a more protected - before now higher - build in the
sustained longer - the part the money given by union of the
promised - But we have must understand just the question: how
to have a more a happy life in an after ^{something} and ~~enjoying~~ work.

Some simple multiplication - They think the numbers ^{and} ~~are~~
winter runs when - but by the end of the winter of disaster,
Some multiplied into disaster. They put themselves to bed. They
have an unreal world, no one can judge their happiness, but
Psychologists tell us of inner peace - that is by a simple
reading. The human person's self is not an important -
one in his position, ^{all} inner peace - It is in his ^{from} inner peace
he denied the world - that is the inner peace. "Wishes shall



Some simple way of inner peace - that is the inner peace. This seems to have
been the most successful method of the known world in which the
number could place ^{from} inner peace. Daniel inner peace inner peace.
Hunt by inner peace & inner peace - by the spread of the inner peace on an
hearts. We must not allow ourselves to feel - to be hurt again.
But a loved life is a lovely life - a loved life - a loved life
life. And loved life is a lovely life - a loved life - a loved life
challenge is an inner peace - a loved life - a loved life
to the inner peace and in our inner peace - a loved life - a loved life
was. In the inner peace of the inner peace - a loved life - a loved life
in the inner peace of the inner peace - a loved life - a loved life
and the inner peace of the inner peace - a loved life - a loved life

penicillin, capillary and acid.

to be in the end with the best of all worlds.

1. Brief note on the ...

Judgment has always not good men | and the
over development a pleasure, whether to be known to be
in the same way, in

of life - was fulfilled at last,
the need of things was being, in the sacrifice of love,
in the pursuit of the common good. Who is the most humble
- Is it not he

man + man at sea man
man who is at sea
himself, at sea man

Just unself part of the that of man just

A photograph of a document with handwritten text and a stamp. The stamp is from the American Jewish Archives, featuring a menorah and the text "AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES". The handwritten text is in cursive and includes phrases like "WRHS", "American Jewish Archives", and "American Jewish Archives".



