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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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The Sages of Our People: Rav, 1967.

Sages of our People - Rav
Daniel Jeremy Silver
March 5, 1967

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compassionate, intellectually omnivorous, the master of a dozen trades. In his long life he is reported to have been a merchant in flax, a bridge engineer, a wheat farmer, an irrigation expert, scholar, poet, a cantor, the chief inspector of the markets of Babylon, judge in one of the high appellate divisions of the rabbinic courts, friend of the Parthian king, professional translator, college president, social reformer, flaming liberal; because he was also a child of his age, an astrologer, one who guaranteed that he could perform the prayers, the incantations that would bring rain. Rav was a man of prodigious industry and energy. His colleagues said that he slept at night less than 60 breath lengths. At 64, when most men are planning for retirement, Rav was planning his new college, Sura, building the buildings, raising the money, finding faculty, interesting students. All his life his mind was three steps ahead of the curriculum of his daily routines and he fed this vigorous machine of his with the fuel of food. Rav was a physician and he used to tell his patients that more men die from a full pot than from an empty stomach, but his stomach was rarely empty. He didn't consider it a complete meal unless he'd enjoy two or three well stuffed doves or squabs. He was a gourmand, a gourmet. He liked the good things of life. He liked to dress in natty clothes, colorful garments and he liked to wear jewelry. He loved a garden. He loved sumptuous surroundings. He used to say he didn't understand how anyone could live the life of a bedouin, wandering in the desert, it was so sparse, it was so bare. His philosophy was, enjoy the moment for there is no pleasure in the pit, but he had that rare capacity of recognizing that the good things of life are here to be enjoyed and if they are not here it's no great tragedy. So many people live their lives for things. Deprive them of these things and they are bereft, they are

shattered. Rav was willing and able to pick up roots. Every two or three years he was embarked on a new career. He didn't ask, will I make as much money, will the salary be as great, what will be the retire benefits; he simply went out, tried, enjoyed, threw himself into the work, took what came along, enjoyed the blessing of the moment. Rav had an eye for beauty as well as a zest for life. He found Sur, this town which he was to make into the Oxford or the Cambridge or the New Haven or the Princeton of Babylon, a typically mud gray, brick, squalid little community. His eye saw the natural beauty of the town between some low hills, but he never really built a college, he built a model city, a city of magnificent gardens, those beautiful oriental fountains coursing through them, a city of fine architecture, of collonaded buildings, of high rising monumental structures, and for the 800 years that this city was to be one of the great university cities of the Jewish and the Babylonian world, Sura remained a thing of beauty, of joy to all who came to study.

Now this man with a poet's sensuous response to beauty responded sensuously to women. Apparently he had something of the wayward eye and one of his students tells us in the Talmud that he was walking along the streets of Sura with a very elderly Rav who now was in his seventies, perhaps his early eighties. They rounded a corner and there was a beautiful woman walking down the streets, the street ahead of him, and Rav said to the young man walking beside him, quick, hurry up, let's pass her by so that temptation will be behind us. Now, Mrs. Rav had her problems. She couldn't count on her beauty or apparently on her personality to keep Rav's poetic sensuous spirit safely at home. She took to becoming a shrew, one tempted to say there was a tiger in his tent, and she struck back where it hurt this gourmet the most, by simply changing the menu. When Rav wanted some dried peas with the fish dish, she served him some rich mushy lentils; and when he wanted the lentils with his meat dish, she served him the dried fish. And the Talmud which is not quite that cold, legal, dry tone that so many think it is, tells

us that more than once his dinner guests were heard to say, dear God, any evil except the evil of an evil wife. Now this protracted domestic warfare apparently went on for years and years. There were prolonged periods of time in which Rav and Mrs. Rav, we don't know her name, simply didn't talk to each other. They spoke through intermediaries, their children. Dr. Spock wouldn't have been very happy with them, and during one of these periods Rav noticed that his evening meals began to come more or less as he'd ordered them and he said to his son, you know, your mother's getting better, and the boy simply smiled and said to his father, well, I've simply been ordering in your name the very reverse of what you ordered. And Rav, who was apparently one of these unabashed conversationalists, reported the story and added that it takes a child to teach you diplomacy. Now this is hardly the very very model of a model Jewish home and, yet, surprisingly, their children turned out very well. The one daughter married into the Exilarch's family and her two sons were each in turn senior Jewish officials, official of all of Babylon. One boy became a respected and fine scholar; the other became a respected and rather well-to-do businessman, proof again, I suppose, if proof be needed, that we raise our children to the very best of their ability. And I suppose that Rav had very little sensitivity, obviously, to his wife and to her needs, had that born pedagogic instinct that knew what it meant to relate to children, to sense their individuality, to make use of it. Some of the very finest and most modern pedagogic statements to be found in all of our literature are quoted in the name of Rav. He said, for instance, in an age that was quite severe, if you punish a child punish him with nothing that is more bitter than a shoe string. That one will catch up with you. You can hardly hurt a child with a shoe string. He used to say, don't send a child to school until he is six years of age and then stuff him like an ox. He said, there are some children who are self-starters and there are some children who are born daydreamers. If you're managing a class sit the daydreamers by the self-starters,

the spirit of competition will teach him to move along. He also said, don't worry too much about asking the children what they want to study, don't spend the first half of every semester debating with the children whether they want to do this or do that, simply do it. It's the act of completing a piece of work, the enjoyment of going through an exercise, which carries a child on and once he's mastered it then he enjoys doing it over and over and over again.

Rav was something of an educational pioneer. He is, as far as I know, the first man to experiment with internship programs, on the job training. In his college of rabbinic law he not only taught the young people from the books and theory, but he sent them out with the judges as they made their circuits in Babylon to be clerks, to look up citations, to listen to the cases, to debate with their teachers, to learn practically what will be required of them after graduation. He was also not averse to having students teach students, you learn most when you have to explain something to another much more than when you simply have it explained to you.

Rav was a very sensitive human being. Most poets, most people of his artistic temperament are, and he proved this within his own family. To be a scholar in those days was to have status, to be a merchant in those days was to lack status. One of his boys got all A's in school very simply, the other simply couldn't do it, but Rav called this boy to him and he said, I've tried, I've hired the best teachers for you, it hasn't worked, now let's set our mind to business. And then he proceeded to give the boy some very good business advice, proof, I suppose, if proof be needed, that rabbis are not necessarily the unworldly creatures that clerics are presumed to be. The Talmud tells us this advice. The first bit of advice he gave the boy was, buy and sell quickly, don't keep a big inventory. The phrase the Talmud uses is, sell before the sand of the journey has washed off your feet. The second bit of advice he gave his son was, don't

store wine. Wine improves with age and the price of wine increases with age, but there's always the danger that wine turns to vinegar, it sours. The third piece of advice he gave the boy was this - receive payment before you give over the goods. The Talmudic phrase was, untie your purse, tie it up again before you open your sack. And the last piece of advice he gave the boy was, don't eat your profits. There were many date palms in this area of Babylon and date beer was the favorite drink of the Babylonians. The way the Talmud phrases this is simply to say, be sure you get the dates from the field to the mill, to the plant where they were turned into beer without keeping in your house overnight.

Now Rav himself, during one period of his life, was what is called a senior market inspector of the stalls and of the shops of the cities of Babylon, and he was responsible for watching the honesty of the weights and for the measures for maintaining the price levels which were established by the Exilarch. Rav was a little bit of a free enterpriser. He said that one ought to check the weights and the measures, honesty was required, but he felt that in any sale, caveat emptor, that the buyer beware. If somebody was simple enough to be duped by a peddler and to pay more than he should, that was his simplicity and he would have to pay the piper, but lest any of you feel that this is good middle-of-the-road Jewish doctrine, let me assure you that Rav was quickly thrown into prison for this particular bit of heresy because the Exilarch in this case was wiser than he. Most of the men and the women who shopped in the marketplaces of Sur and Pompedita and the Hardea in Babylon were peasant folk, illiterate. They couldn't keep up mentally and intellectually with the shopkeepers. They were offered the same way the people in our center city are offered, easy credit, easy terms, which turns out to be a terrible cost for the item. They had to be protected from their own ignorance and it was the responsibility of the community to offer that protection.

...way, that if you're going along in one of these merchant caravans in Babylon and

Rav was a rugged character. He didn't want to be dependent upon anyone. He used to tell his students, get your carcasses up and don't be afraid of picking up carcasses in the street if it's the only way you have of providing for yourself. He was determined that no one should have to be patronized by another. If a man eats at someone else's table, he used to say, his days will always be dark. He can't speak his mind and he can't run his life the way he wants to have it. Every man should go out and should work and should earn his living. Rav never doubted that, but lest anybody here seeks to recruit him for the National Association of Manufacturers let me assure you that he would have been most unwelcome in their midst, for to Rav the only virtue of money was that it allowed you to provide for your family and to provide for yourself enough leisure for that which was important in life - study, worship, the search for understanding, the pleasure of good company, travel, reading, that which is civilized, that which is life itself. Rav had no patience with those whose lives are dedicated to one and only one end, the accumulation of money. Money is a means and not an end and those who make money the end of their lives, he said, are destined for hell. Some of the strongest enunciations of the wealthy appear in the paragraphs attributed to Rav. The wealthy, he said, lose all balance. They exploit the worker, they hold back the laborer's wage, they seek to take the yoke off their own shoulders, the yoke of taxation. The rich in every generation have that unique ability to impose the heaviest burden of taxes on those who can least afford to pay them. And, finally, he condemned the wealthy again and again for their haughtiness, their arrogance, the fact that they have lost their sense of humanity, their sympathy, the ability to understand how it is that some men fail, that some men are in need, that there are families who need to be provided for by the community. Those whose whole focus of life is the office and the audit, money and figures, he mistrusted. He used to say that, in a very pithy way, that if you're going along in one of these merchant caravans in Babylon and

you meet a man from the town of Hazara and he kisses you on the cheeks the way they used to do in the Orient, be sure to check your teeth. And if you fall in with a man from the town of Pharbkut and he begins to examine and take pleasure in the color of your mantle, be sure you put it under your pillow that night. When you fall in with a man from Pumpedita, he's such a thief that if he knows what inn you're going to stop at be sure you change your inn. Money is a, in Rav's mind, a monomania for those to whom it is the nth of life. It destroys every other value, it corrodes personality, yet, money is necessary, and Rav worked and he was often well-to-do. He knew what it meant to earn a living. He knew the responsibilities of providing for his family and for many of his students. Money was to Rav simply the means which allowed him the freedom to live, to do those things which satisfied his soul, his very innermost being. Rav lived fully, he read voraciously, enjoyed music, beauty, landscape, travel. Would you have liked meeting Rav? I suppose so. He was a full-blooded man. You knew you were meeting a man. He could be irascible and he could be opinionated and he didn't age very well. Many men to whom life is an adventure resent the indignity of the weakening of their powers; this man who prided himself on an encyclopedic mind, on being able to remember any legal citation he'd ever heard, began to lose his memory and his response was simply to challenge his pupils to prove him wrong. When they did he simply said, I'm right and you're wrong. He had some insight to his problems while he was aging. He used to say, if you see a man walking along, his back bent double, his eyes focused on the ground, he's looking for something he has not yet lost. And when a man gets old, he used to say, almost anyone can rule over him. This is what he took as an indignity, that others could master his life, he was no longer Rav, the full-blown, the man in command of all of his senses, the man who could make the world yield the beauty and the opportunity and the power that he sought.

Rav, in a way, is a paradigm of the Jewish leader. This worldly faith, expectedly, brings forth this worldly kinds of leaders, that pale cast of saintliness which we sometimes associate with the minister, is absent among Jewish leaders. For the most part these are very practical-minded men, hard-boiled in many ways, if you will, eager, thirsting for knowledge, thirsting to be out in life. And what is their power? The thrust of their mind, the magnitude of the spirit, their ability to move men, to make history. Our leaders never walked above the earth, they were of the earth, protein, capable of failure, capable of failing, all of them had severe limitations, perfection does not belong to our leaders, but they are blessed with an eager mind, an eager heart, an eager spirit, a vitality which carried them to leadership.

Now why is it that we remember Rav? What is his importance? His importance, I believe, lies in two things: first, historically. It was Rav who made Babylonian Jewry recognize the potential of Judaism, to demand more of their faith than they had enjoyed of Judaism to them. More to the point, for us, Rav's words and his spirit and his poetry are still our words and our spirit and our prayerbook. The Jewish people had come to Babylon as early as the eighth pre-Christian century. They'd been brought there as exiles after the defeat of Israel by the Assyrians. They had been in Babylon for almost a thousand years before Rav came on the scene. They had lived, they had remained for the most part loyal, and for the most part of their life had been most unenlightened. During that thousand-year period we hardly know of a single great figure with the one exception of the prophet, Deutero-Isaiah. Babylonian Jewry simply existed. It was not creative, and then in the second century of this era, this young man, Rav, went down to Palestine for commercial reasons and he studied in the great academies of Palestine and he became excited by the potentialities of rabbinic Judaism and he recognized the limitations of Babylonian Judaism, and after some 20 or 30 years of study

in Palestine. He came back to Babylon and he began to agitate there for schools, for universities, for seminars, for centers, for a great synagogue, he gave the impetus which founded the institutional life of Babylonian Jewry, that life which was to produce the Talmud, that life which was to produce most of the midrashim, that life which was to be the center of Jewish existence for almost a thousand years.

There's an old principle in our tradition, that the man through whom God's miracle is being carried out is unaware that he is the agent of the miracle. Rav was unaware, obviously, that he was the agent of God's miracle, yet, because of Rav's activity largely that the rather mediocre seminaries and schools of Babylon which had existed for some years came alive and that the very time when the great colleges of Judea were beginning to slip and to fall because of Roman cruelty, because of the depopulation of the land, these Babylonian schools began to flourish and became the great centers, the heart, of Jewish life and remained so until the 9th and the 10th centuries of this era.

Rav, then, plays an important part in the mystery and the miracle of Jewish survival. It's a grand history, a noble history, but it's past history. Those Rav's have significance to us, the poet and the man. On Rosh Hashonah in the afternoon, you recall, we sound the shofar. The shofar is sounded in three episodes. Before each of the soundings of the shofar there is a great thematic prayer; the first signalling the shofar as the sound which summons us to God, God's kingdom and His majesty and our subservience of service to Him; the second paragraph reminding us of our debt to those who forged the faith, to all those whose life and whose learning and whose sacrifice has given us the tradition, the hope, civilization, the final paragraph of hope. The shofar is the signal of the possibility of life, that beyond the grayness and the darkness and the cloudiness of our day, the sun will shine on a land rich in prosperity, justice and opportunity whose people are at peace. Now the sounding of the shofar is as old as the Bible, but the words which precede the sounding of the shofar, these great paragraphs,

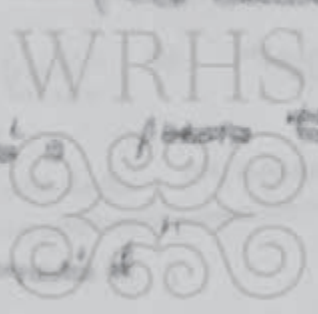
are the work of Rav. Rav's hand is written large in our literature. We find it on Yom Kippur. Much of the confessional for the sins which we have sinned against Thee under stress or through choice, for all these sins, O God of forgiveness, bear with us, pardon us, forgive us. Thou, O Lord, knowest the secrets of the world, Thou knowest our inner most thoughts. Aware of these, O Lord, Thou must be aware of our sincere urge to repent, O Lord, forgive us. All of these great phrases are the gift to us of Rav.

When he was about to die this vigorous un-self-assuming man called a certain Sheilah and said to him, Sheilah, I want you to speak my eulogy, I want you to preside at my funeral, but I warn you, you better speak good things of me, I'll be standing there looking at you. There was very little that was self-effacing about this man and, yet, in a way he knew his own merit. For just a very few moments we will stand. We will stand as the organ swells with the rising chords of the Adoration and we will speak our praise of God. We will speak of our hope that God and we together can establish a world of peace and hope. We will use the words of Rav - The Adoration, the tradition, tells us it is his. Will he not be standing there with us looking over our shoulders, proud that 1700 years after his death he is still very much alive.

fell that there were such communities "East Avenue & ...
under the ... house on ...
it is half

"No son,
no pleasure in the job"

Run toward life & beauty. He found
and built out the gardens & buildings which made it a delightful
stunning place. The ... suggests that
for a party
more
could
willing



people "being
put
~~There~~
~~... ..~~

well, but
Ran did not
was a
Mrs.
grandmother
he wanted
"I
a people
ANY BUT AN UGLY WIFE.

Those who think only of the war of life - and that they
find the meaning of the game in successful ending.
Rum did not take any gracefully - when he began to
be punished - he happily encouraged his people to prove
their virtues magnificent. What he thought of as can be
removed any one of the experiences

When in ~~any~~ and approaches anyone can be
his order

There are no gun men on the way of driving and the
other things are

When you see a man with a small head and small eyes in the ground he is lying he had been out yet not

[illegible]

would you have called this man? He had to God,
He was unimpaired, oppressed, poor, unimpaired,
talented - would you present him before God?

[illegible]

Kaddish

Friday

MAR 3

Sunday

5

Those who passed away this week

Leslie MATHES
LOUISE OPPER

SARAH STERN

ANITA S.FERTEL
ESTHER MELLMAN
HERMAN KEMPNER
JACK W.HELLER
RAYMOND DEUTSCH
HERMAN GIMP
ESTHER L.BENSON
SAMUEL WEISS
HARRY H.KOZMAN
DR.HERMAN C.SMITH
DR. IRWIN E.YOELSON
ROSIE WEISKOPF
RUTH G.KLAUS
JOSEPH H.BENSON
SIDNEY B.ROSENBAUM

Jahrzeits

SAM ROGOFF
WILLIAM LAKE
CLARA SCHAFFNER
ELMER M.KRAMER
DAVID F.BERLAND
PHILIP DAVID KENDIS
CHARLES H.MANDELKORN
PHILIP LESTER STERN
JEROME S.MALEVAN
RAY WIEDDER
FANNIE LEVINE
MAX SCHER
ISAAC FREEMAN
JEROME H.SQUIRES
FRANK I.KLEIN
ROSE SCHAFFNER LIEBENTHAL
ESTHER MEYER