

Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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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.

Reel Box Folder 63 20 1298

Age - A New Problem, 1985.

AGE — A NEW PROBLEM The Sermon of April 14, 1985

How can age be considered a new problem? There have been elderly folk in every society; though perhaps never in quite the numbers as today and perhaps not as vigorous and long lived as today.

In 1900 the life expectancy of an American newborn was forty-seven years. Today a newborn male infant has a life expectancy of a little over seventy years and a newborn female child seventy-seven and one-half years. In 1900 those sixty-five and over — yes, unfortunately, that is the age sociologists use to define the elderly—numbered four percent of the total population. Today they represent something over twelve percent.

We have no comparative figures from antiquity, but, it is clear that despite the Bible's measure of life as "three score years and ten or perhaps by reason of strength some four score years," few made it to seventy. From the skeletons exhumed in excavations, researchers estimate that life expectancy in Biblical times hovered around thirty years. Probably less than one percent of the population reached the age of seventy.

Such statistics have led investigators to speak of what they call the graying of America. The number of men and women who reach sixty-five and of those who remove themselves from the world of regular employment has grown rapidly. In 1900, seventy-five percent of the men who were sixty-five or over remained at work or were seeking employment. Today that figure has fallen to twenty percent. Many believe that in a decade it will fall to ten percent. There have been radical changes in longevity and in the quality of the lives lived by the elderly. Age and infirmity are no longer synonymous.

The graying of America is a fact, but the prolongation of life is not its sole explanation. We must also consider the rapid fall of the birth rate. You may have seen figures released just a few days ago by the Census Department. Over the last fifteen years the number of those who are eighty-five years of age and older has increased by nineteen percent, while the number of children ten and under, has decreased by about four percent. Since the actual number of children is much greater than the number of those eighty-five and over, these figures signal a significant change. In 1970 the median age of Americans was about twenty-seven years; today it is on the order of thirty-two years.

As an aside, I should tell you that the median age of the Jewish community is not thirty-two years, but forty-five years. We are the oldest defined population unit within the American body politic which says that our children prefer professions to parenthood and that the issue of Jewish survival will not only be fought out in the areas of assimilation and intermarriage, but in the bedroom and the nursery. Survival is impossible for any group which does not reproduce itself.

Some, noting these figures, argue that in postindustrial age in societies like ours, the basic confrontation will not be a class struggle, but an age struggle. Countries like ours have been able rather successfully in closing the have, have-not gap, but not the age gap. The age gap yawns ever wider as more and more burdens are placed on the young by the elderly. It is only recently that the community as an organized unit accepted responsibility for the health, maintenance and care of the aging. Until a half century ago each individual had to provide financial security for his old age and each family was expected to provide physical support for aging parents. Those who could not provide for their age had to depend on charity and live in whatever alms house had been set up in the community for worthy widows. For most age and poverty were synonymous.

In recent years our society decide to include the support of the aged as part of the welfare system. In 1935, just fifty years ago, President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act. For the first time, the aged could look upon community support as a right due them for their efforts. What was not foreseen in 1935 was the burden an articulated system of support for the elderly - Social Security, various pension programs and Medicare – would place upon the young. Today twenty-one percent of all Federal expenditures go to the support of the aged, a sum equal to nine percent of the gross national product; and the sum continues to rise. Some estimate that by the year 2030, one in every four dollars earned by the working population will have been taken from paychecks to provide for nearly fifty million elderly. Those who think about these things say that we are heading for a confrontation between the young lions and the gray panthers. The young will say, "we have heavy financial burdens. We must provide for our children. We need to be able to place a down payment on a house and pay a monthly mortgage. We have to save for college tuition for our children. You're asking too much."

Then too, the image of the elderly among the young has changed. Not so long ago, age suggested destitution, the diminution of natural powers and dependency. Today, age is seen as a second childhood — a playtime. Once upon a time our children went north to camp in the summer. Now, elderly children go south to camp in the winter. As the young look at the growing body of able-bodied people sixty-five and over, they wonder why they should subsidize those who are still able to perform useful services in the society.

In response society has begun to place more and more responsibility on each of us to provide for our old age and to make it easier for us to do so. Pension programs of various kinds are now mandatory in most businesses. The largest corporations allocate something on the order of seventeen percent of their labor costs for pension payments. New tax programs allow us to set aside untaxed income for future use. The IRA and Keogh plans are programs of forced savings. Slowly, but inexorably, we are moving towards the establishment of a means test which will eliminate social security payments to those elderly who have no need for the support of the society as a whole because they are well endowed or well able to support themselves.

Rest assured, the elderly will resist such changes. It seems to be taking away something which is theirs by right, but in order for the society to provide a rough degree of equity between the ages, the cost of income transfers to the aged will have to be reduced.

There are still significant pockets of poverty among the aged, but the problem is not as universal as it once was. Many are surprised that the percentage of the elderly who have incomes which fall below the poverty level is less than the percentage of poor in the population as a whole. Fifteen and six-tenths percent of those in the general population live at a sub-poverty level income, and fourteen and one-tenth percent of the elderly. The number of the elderly living below the poverty line has dropped precipitously. It was thirty percent just fifteen years ago. Many of the elderly have the capacity to provide for themselves, and if we are not to have an age war, ways will have to be found to limit the claims of those who are able to provide for themselves in order that the society can provide for those who are in real need.

Many of the new problems associated with age and aging concern medical services, medical costs and the way these services and costs are distributed. How much doctoring and hospitaling should the age be able to claim? Many in the medical profession, as in the society at large, still maintain that the purpose of medicine is to keep us 'alive' as long as possible and pay all too little attention to what is meant by the operative term 'alive.' They suffer from what I sometimes call a Methusaleh complex. Methusaleh. you will recall, is that legendary Biblical figure of the ante-deluvian era who was supposed to have lived for nine hundred sixty-nine years. According to Genesis, the men who lived between Adam and Noah lived inordinately long lives. Enoch lived for eight hundred years. Kenan is supposed to have lived for nine hundred ten years; Methusaleh for nine hundred sixty-nine years. It never happened! The Bible here simply echoes a widely shared West Asian epic tradition which assigned extreme longevity to a number of heroes of deep antiquity. By Methusaleh complex, I mean the consuming interest of those who believe that the purpose of medical research is to keep us alive as long as possible and insist that medical research should concentrate on breaking the present upper limits of age.

The Bible does not set great store on these longevity records. The days of our years are three score years and ten, or perhaps four score years. Another tradition describes one hundred twenty as the measure of life. This tradition appears in a chapter in Genesis, a legendary chapter again, in which we are told that the sons of the gods and the daughters of men mated and produced a new breed. Observing all this. God is supposed to have said that "man is not made to live forever. These people are of flesh. They will live no more than one hundred twenty years." Even though there are something on the order of twenty thousand centenarians in the United States today, there is to all intents and purposes a limit of life. Most of our cells seem to have a built in time limit beyond which they will not reproduce or regenerate.

I am inclined to believe that if those who are determined to eradicate death are successful, they will precipitate a tragedy. We are meant to die. One of the commitments we make when we have children is to death. We agree to make way for them, to give them space and opportunity. We will not clog up the earth because of a selfish desire to hang on so that there will be no place or opportunity for them.

(Continued)

The purpose of medicine ought to be to keep us as young as it can within the present limits. Our emphasis should be on maintaining vigor and capacity. Our research should be concentrated on delaying the degenerative processes which sap the capacities and the dignity of those who move towards senscence. This task should not be impossible. Through diet, exercise and medicine we have been able to transform for many the sixty's and even the seventy's into a vital and exciting period. Geriatric medical research ought to have a preventive bias.

The new problem of age is not primarily that of medicine, but that of our use of the years of capacity medicine provides us. What are we going to do with this gift of years?

Once upon a time, respect for the elderly was built into the social fabric. "You were to rise before the hoary head and show deference to the old." Why does the Bible insist on such courtesy? Precisely because experience made it clear that the aged could not always command respect. Theirs was an authoritarian, patriarchal society. Once the young had displaced the old, they wanted them out of sight and out of mind. The old were often cantankerous and demanding. Still they had done their share and Biblical society was determined to treat age with dignity and did so by surrounding it with a number of formal courtesies.

Our new problem is that there is now an age which is not age, a period during which we remain fully competent and capable of making useful contributions to our society and to our families. Such an age cannot command respect as a formal courtesy. It can command respect only the basis of activity and accomplishment.

I am struck by a fact which reveals a good deal about the preoccupations of our society. Many spend a great deal of effort on financial preparations for age and retirement and almost no time or thought on what they will do with the found time. People save money. People purchase annuities. The young ask about pensions when they apply for their first job. We plan carefully for the financial aspects of age, but hardly at all for the uses of age. Questions of money, yes. Questions of the use of the time, no time. I have seen person after person accept retirement without a serious thought about where the next step will take them.

I would like to erase the word retirement from our vocabulary. Retirement comes from a Latin root which means to pull back from, to withdraw. A lot of people look upon retirement as a pulling away from life and responsibility. All of us have known capable and competent men and women who worked until the day of retirement and, suddenly, found themselves in that condominium which faces the sea which they had enjoyed so much for two weeks every winter, looking out at the sea day after day after day, looking out at the same green of the same golf course morning after morning after morning, wondering each morning how to fill their hours, where to go for dinner, whether to phone their children back north. Monotony and boredom can kill. A year later I see them ten years older, bowed, drained, old before their years.

We must never allow ourselves to retire. We must

never drop out. Last January while I was in London, I went to a retrospective exhibit of the work of Marc Chagall. As you know, Chagall died two weeks ago at the age of ninety-eight. The Royal Academy showed several large canvasses which Chagall had painted two years before when he was ninety-six years of age. Chagall never retired. Neither did Picasso or Pablo Cassals. You don't have to be a genius not to retire. All you have to do is have some imagination and be determined to stay with it and be useful. It doesn't matter what you do as long as you feel that what you are doing is valuable, uses your talents, and involves you in your community and life.

Too many people define the retirement years as leisure time, as a child defines play. So they play and play until play becomes work. Their leisure is now not a moment or two to regroup from the pressures of the day, but all there is to life, and that is not enough for any self-respecting person. We are meant to work, but work need not be drudgery. We are meant to be active, but activity need not be frenetic or unremitting.

Retirement for many is a terribly lonely time. After all, the human being is a social creature, and is meant to be. Some plan never to retire, but some have to retire. We can start a new business. We can teach youngsters to read. Each of us has talents which we have enjoyed during our youth and had to put aside which we could now develop more seriously. It only takes imagination and will to use time meaningfully, but you won't succeed in building a full life if you withdraw or pull back.

I also wish that we did not define retirement in geographic terms. I don't know if the same applies to people who live in warmer climates, but in Cleveland many define retirement as moving away. Well and good, but for many to move away is to withdraw. Here they belong. There they are strangers. One of the ways not to withdraw is to continue to accept the challenges of a fully integrated community, a community where there are all ages and every kind of problem and responsibility; where we can continue to match our skills, energies and concerns against those who are younger.

I am not sure that when sociologists finally evaluate the phenomenon we call a retirement community, they will judge it to have made a valuable contribution to the well-being of the American people. What happens in such places? Activities are scheduled at a quiet and sedate pace, but most of them are quite trivial and few involve real challenge or responsibility. Here we have a bright, active, professional man, a lawyer let's say, who has been part of the civic give and take of Cleveland all of his life. He sees the Retirement Community brochure. It's winter here and there the sun is shining, the golf course is green and the water is blue. He is tired and cold. It sounds wonderful. He buys in. He goes. But he is not a man for macrame classes or finger painting or aerobics. He should be a precinct chairman in Cleveland or a school board candidate or a part time public defender. He needs to be involved and it is much harder to be involved in a world that is apart

We ought to stay in our world. We need the give and take of community and family. Here is another new problem created by our mobility. To begin with the

family unit is small. Our children are scattered. As age comes we become determined not to become a burden, God forbid, and so we withdraw. We don't want to complicate their lives, yet age inevitably is a time of loss, of widows and widowers, friends of a lifetime disappear. Life can become very lonely unless we remain open to friendship and cultivate carefully and intelligently the ties of family. Unfortunately, many are loathe to do that. Others are not trained in friendship. They have lived among people, but not intimately. They mistook companionship for friendship and now that they no longer have the status and power which accompanies office, no one pays attention. We can't expect our children always to come to us. We have to go to them. We have to open ourselves up to others, but it's not easy. Many feel at ease only with people they have known all their lives, but inevitably there are less and less of "our crowd."

Age must be looked upon as an active time. Age requires imagination and will and energy. The less you do, the less you will do. The more you do, the more you can do. The more you sit on your hands and contemplate nothingness, the more your mind will rust. The more you challenge yourself, the more your mind will keep you good company.

I know a lot of people who believe they have Alzheimer's disease. They cannot remember names or places. Actually, they are suffering from nothing more than the television set. Instead of reading they watch television. Instead of interesting conversation, they turn on the tube. Instead of thinking about politics or reading the New York Times, they watch soap operas, and then they wonder why they can't remember a name or what President Roosevelt did in 1936. Their minds have atrophied because they've let them atrophy. It's not Alzheimer's.

For most here the worst of the financial fears once associated with age are not the issue. There will be enough - perhaps not a great deal, but enough. There will be food on the table and a roof over our heads. We will need less. But in another sense, we will need more. We will need more stimulation. We will have to find ways to fulfill ourselves, and nobody will come knocking on the door with just the idea for us. You must seek it out. Just as you did at twenty and thirty. You must find a career for yourself and it has to satisfy you. Unfortunately this generation has no training in age. There are no familiar models. The model that most of us have is of a parent who worked till he died, of a mother or grandmother who scrubbed, cleaned and cooked till she went to Montefiore or Menorah Park. A good old age is a new phenomenon. But now there are fifteen years, twenty years, more perhaps, when we will be condemned to leisure unless we make a meaningful life for ourselves; unless we remain active, alert, involved, determined, committed, the kind of person that we are now and want always to be.

Daniel Jeremy Silver

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AMERICAN JEWISH

ARCHIVES

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
APRIL 14 SERVICE 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver will speak on AGE: A NEW PROBLEM Mavo Program 12:30 - 4:00 p.m.	15	Adult Hebrew 7:45 a.m Branch TWA Activities 10:00 a.m Branch Fellowship & Study Group Rabbi David Sandmel 10:30 a.m. LUNCH WITH THE RABBI	17	18 YOM HASHOAH	Service - 5:30 p.m. The Temple Chapel	Shabbat Service 9:00 a.m. Bar Mitzvah JONATHAN GALKIN 11:00 a.m. The Temple Chapel
The Temple Branch SERVICE	22	Uptown The Somerset 12:00 noon - 1:30 p.m.	24	25	THIRD FRIDAY 6:00 p.m.	27
10: 30 a.m. The Temple Branch Rebbi David F. Sandmel will speak on YOM HASHOA: LEST WE FORGET Ath & 5th Grade Swim Party		Adult Hebrew 7:45 a.m Branch TWA Activities 10:00 a.m Branch Fellowship & Study Group Rabbi David Sandmel 10:30 a.m.	MIDWEEK C CLASSES Administrivia Meeting 7:15 p.m Branch		ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY	Precious Legacy Trip Shabbat Service 9:00 a.m. Bar Mitzvah JOSHUA LEVY 11:00 a.m. The Temple Chapel
Confirmation Class Party - 5:30 p.m.	29	Adult Hebrew 7:45 a.m Branch	TMC Board Meeting 8:00 p.m Branch	2	Service - 5:30 p.m. The Temple Chapel	Confirmation Weekend Classes End Shabbat Service
10: 30 a.m. The Temple Branch Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver will speak		TWA Activities 10:00 a.m Branch Fellowship & Study Group Rabbi David Sandmel 10:30 a.m Branch Outreach Group Discussion Meeting 8:00 p.m Branch			Service - 5:30 p.m. The Temple Chapel FIRST FRIDAY 8:15 p.m Branch LESLIE GELB	9:00 a.m Branch Confirmation Rehearsal 9:00 a.m Noon Main Temple Bar Mitzvah JUSTIN SHEPERD 11:00 a.m. The Temple Chapel
SERVICE 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver will speak HIGH SCHOOL	6	Adult Hebrew 7:45 a.m Branch TWA Annual Meeting Oakwood Club 12:00 Noon Fellowship & Study Group Rabbi David Sandmel 10:30 a.m Branch	Confirmation Rehearsal 4: 15 - 6: 00 p.m. Main Temple	9	10	Shabbat Service 9:00 a.m Branch Confirmation Rehearsal 9:00 a.m Noon Main Temple Bar Mitzvah JOSHUA FRANKEL 11:00 a.m. The Temple Chapel
GRADUATION AND YOUTH GROUP RECOGNITION		TYA Board Meeting 8:00 p.m Branch			Service - 5:30 p.m. The Temple Chapel	TYA at Pepoy's

ON SUNDAY, MAY 5th THE TEMPLE SENIORS GROUP INVITES THE TEMPLE MEMBERSHIP TO REMEMBER THE TEMPLE PICNICS AT EUCLID BEACH PARK. THIS NOSTALGIC EVENT WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER TASTE OF THE FAMOUS EUCLID BEACH POPCORN BALLS AND TAFFY; HAVE YOU ENJOY A GREAT BOX LUNCH: SEE EUCLID BEACH MEMORABILIA, MANY OF WHICH WILL BE PICTURES OF TEMPLE MEMBERS DOING THEIR THING: AND SEE A SLIDE PRESENTATION BY MR. LEE HEHR, ONE OF THE AUTHORS OF THE BOOK "EUCLID BEACH IS CLOSED FOR THE SEASON". SO, COME TO SERVICES SUNDAY MORNING AND GO TO EUCLID BEACH PARK IN THE AFTERNOON!

Kaddish

Friday

Sunday

APRIL 14, 1985

Those who passed away this week

Yahrzeits

NATHAN FRIEDMAN PHILLIP J. SPITZ YETTA FIRTH KLEIN EVELYN HOLTZMAN SAKS MARY TOMARKIN ROSE S. GARSON SAMUEL S. KAUFMAN RAYMOND SCHMERTZ WILLIAM H. SCHWARTZ GOLDIE SALOVON MILTON P. ALTSCHUL HERMAN A. JACOBSON CORA L. NEBEL NELLYE SHAFARMAN ISADORE R. LEVY MAX DAVIDSON MATILDA SHARLITT HYLMA I. WALLACH ALINE S. LIEBENTHAL MAX PEVAROFF DR. JOSEPH L. FETTERMAN MAX FREEDMAN CARL LEHMAN MELVIN NEUERMAN MORRIS J. BROWN CHARLES GRAVER ALFRED A. FREEDHEIM ALBERT KLINE IDA GAMSON WEITZ DR. YALE MANDEL

ORDER OF SERVICE

ROSSI SERVICE--Sunday, April 14, 1985 10:30 am

PLEASE BE IN YOUR SEATS BY 10:25!!!

Organ prelude bls to harpsichord

Instrumental trio sonatas (3) ROSSI INSTRUMENTS

Psalm 80 ROSSI INSTRUMENTS

Bar'chu ROSSI INSTRUMENTS, bls to organ

Sh'ma Trad.

V'ahavta Braun

Mi chamocha Ephros

Tzur yisraeil Trad.

Avot Dymont C. SMITH

K'dusha Sulzer bls to harpsichord

May the Words ROSSI

Al naharot bavel (quartet) ROSSI bls to organ

SERMON

Aleinu Trad.

V'ne-emar Trad. bls to harpsichord

Amen #1

Psalm 121 ROSSI INSTRUMENTS

Instrumental trio sonata ROSSI INSTRUMENTS

Chair to congregation/bls to organ

Hymri Ein keilohainu

Organ postlude

THE MUSICIANS

Members and friends

of the Temple

Sunday, April 14, 1985

THE CHOIR

Mina Kulber, Eudi Silberman, and Bernita Smith

Elizabeth Davidson, Marge Davidson, Claudia Folkman, and Gail Franklin Altos:

Tenor: Charles Smith

Seth Malkin Bass:

THE INSTRUMENTALISTS

Flute: Hal Lewis and Carol Rivchun

Harpsichord and conductor: Bruce Shewitz