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Mother's Day Sermon

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"AN APPRECIATION OF MOTHER'S GIFTS - THE PULPIT'S GIFT TO MOTHERS"

The institution of Mother's Day is predicated on the fact that one good turn deserves another; that mothers, as a general group, bequeath certain gifts to their children, for which they deserve gifts in return. These gifts of mother's are universally acknowledged and acclaimed, but in reality are little understood. Let us, therefore, this morning, attempt to appreciate and evaluate mother's gifts to her children, and let that appreciation be this pulpit's gift to all mothers.

When I speak of mothers, my friends, I speak particularly of Jewish mothers; and not just of Jewish mothers, but of Jewish mothers of a very special type - a type which, I fear, is rapidly taking its place beside the buffalo and American Indian and the five-cent cigar as a vanishing species in American life. This type of Jewish mother is the kind usually eulogized in so many folk songs as **DIE YIDDISHE MAME**. The Yiddish mame is not necessarily Yiddish speaking. In fact, I believe that many American-born ^{mother} here today can answer to that name. It is not a matter of natuonality, but of temperament; not language, but loyalty; not origin, but devotion.

There are three gifts which the Jewish mother gives to her child, one for each period of his life - early youth, young manhood, and one which she needs give him even in his old age.

The first gift the Jewish mother gives ^{her} his child is that of a pre-school education. The leaders of another faith show insight when they say "give us child until he is six years old and then you can have him". It is in this pre-school age that, as modern psychology now teaches us, a child is most impressionable and most receptive to learning. How different ~~mothers~~ are many of the new brands of mothers from the genuine Jewish mother. Nowadays the tendency of parents is to give the child his complete freedom until he is sent to school - because it is required by law or reason of a parents' nerves. The child is carefully shielded from the strain of the learning process by over-benevolent parents. "Let him enjoy his childhood while he has it", is the pedogogical formaula of the age. Unless goaded by a psychology book which they don't understand, many of today's sophisticated parents will encourage a child to continue his baby talk. It is the very babyishness of a baby that parents worship and bacuase of which the child's education - religious and secular - is deferred to the conventional six years of age.

The typical Jewish mother - how different she was and is. The child was not withdrawn from life, but rushed into it with ^{the} zeal of a healthy optomism and devotion. When a child was a mere tot, mother already began teaching him all about Torah. I wonder how many of you remember that lovely, and I might say holy, Yiddish Lullaby וואס איז די טאג, - which contains that powerful refrain, sung by so many thousands of tender and loving mothers - טוהר איז די גוטע בעסעצונג - Torah is the best occupation, the best profession, the best vocation. A child barely able to utter a few simple words, was already treated to that delightful and melodious verse וואס איז די גוטע בעסעצונג. And very soon afterwards, when the little boy graduated from his crib to his Junior Bed he was taught the first lines of the "Shma", which he ~~repeated~~ repeated with his mother before going to sleep and after he kissed the Mezuza. A ritual simple, but holy; naive, but sacred; ancient in origin, but pedogogically sound.

That our Rabbis recognized this educational gift of mother to child in his earliest infancy, is a patent fact. Our Rabbis of the Mishna enumerating the merits of their illustrious predessors, mentioned that one Rabbi had a phenominal memory - ר' יוחנן בן עזריאל; another was distinguished by his dynamic and analytic intellect - ר' עקיבא; a third Rabbi was awarded with the epithet ר' עקיבא - the Pious; and a fourth was heralded as ר' יוחנן בן עזריאל a G-d fearing man. But one of these men, a man who became one of the great immortals of Israel, received a very strange commendation by the Rabbis. וואס איז די גוטע בעסעצונג. "And as for Rabbi Joshua, the son of Chanania- happy is his mother". How out of place is this citation! Not genius, not memory, not piety, not reputation is the mark of this man's greatness - but

In Victorian era - parent great dictator; now died - Kelly hymn

thing

Obviously, this sage's mother must have had some/considerable to do with his greatness in dorder for the Rabbis to mention her so respectfully; and indeed she did! The Talmud records ~~for~~ the testimony of a sage of Jerusalem who says אני שמעתי את המלך שלמה אומר "I remember how the mother of R.J.b H. would wheel his carriage to the Academy so that the words of the Torah there expounded might impinge upon his tender ears". No wonder, then, that she reveled in her son's glory. For her gift to him was an education which began in the crib. She taught him Torah-talk not baby-talk. (And no wonder, therefore, that the Rabbis said אשר יולדו and not אשר יולד. For אשר יולד means "Happy is his mother", while the former means "Happy is she who bore him". The difference between אשר יולד and אשר יולדו is this; אשר יולד refers to a natural relation, a woman gives birth to a son, therefore she is his mother or אשר יולד; אשר יולדו is a much more profound relationship. אשר יולדו means she who not only bore him and then left him after the act of birth, but she who continued to mold and create and guide his entire personality. Even an animal or bird is referred to as אשר יולד; only a human is called a אשר יולדו.)

So then, a woman's first gift to her child is this education in his crib, in his most impressionable years.

The second gift of mother to child is the understanding of the sanctity of home. When a young man has outgrown his infancy and adolescence and is ready to set out and build his own home, when he is ready and ripe for marriage, he suddenly discovers that his greatest present has been given to him over a long number of years by his own mother - the gift of learning how to build a home in the finest and most beautiful of the Jewish traditions of domestic peace, אשר יולדו. Indeed, our Rabbis already pointed out that such a wedding present was cherished by none other than King Solomon himself. Writes the author of the ~~1886~~ "Song of Songs"; אשר יולדו וכלה וכלה וכלה

**as they say what never they are otherwise from*

"Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon, even upon the crown with which his mother has crowned him in the day of his wedding and in the day of the gladness of his heart". And when one Rabbi protested that we nowhere find that Bathsheba had bequeathed a crown to her son Solomon, another answered אשר יולדו the crown of which the Bible speaks refers to the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle, the Mishkan, was the House of G-d. Mishkan literally means dwelling place and it is therefore the sanctity of a man's dwelling place, the holiness of his home which was the crown or the crowning gift which Solomon's mother gave to her son on his wedding day. This gift of practical experience in the laboratory of domestic peace and wholesomeness, this lesson in the construction of the Mishkan, is the wedding gift of not only Bathsheba to King Solomon, but of every Jewish mother to her Shloimele, Yankеле, Chaimel*. The Jewish mother is a good wife as well as a good mother. The home in which she raises her son and daughter is the sort of home they will set out to build when they marry. The dimensions of sanctity, love, devotion and fidelity, which characterize the Jewish domicile are the eternal gift of mother to son and daughter. The second gift of the Jewish mother is, therefore, the construction of the Jewish home.

The third gift of the Jewish mother to her children is the lesson of endurance, the ability to resist adversity whether physical, mental or spiritual. Whether one clings to the ancient belief of the superiority of the man or the equally fallacious theory of the superiority of woman, as maintained by some modern anthropologists, or whether one believes in some sensible form of equality of the sexes, he will always admit that the one quality in which woman is superior to man is that of endurance, and resistance to pain and adversity. A woman may suffer the excruciating pains of childbirth, ~~frequently in silence~~ *and always same*, while the husband frets nervously, almost pressed to insanity, because of pains not his own. How true is the modern comical stereotype of the nervous husband pacing up and down in the waiting room. And the "TSAAR GIDUL BANIM", the long, sustained pains of raising children, pains shared by the husband but borne mostly by the mother whose charges they are. How often do we hear of a wife challenging a husband to "stay home with the children all day and we'll see if you can take it".

Is is indeed doubtful that he could! Or take the matter of the constant grind and routine of housework - something which most husbands and fathers make light of but which, in more pensive moments, he readily acknowledges. For whileman may play the hero in acts of courage which are momentary ~~but~~ of other short duration, it is the woman who is the real heroine when it comes to the more serious matter of resisting long, drawnout and sustained conditions of adversity. Where a man will crack easily a woman can emerge with strength. It has been the eternal task of women to teach their sons this noble feat of real endurance and it is a lesson which they must constantly teach them even in their old age.

יִצְחָק בְּיָמָיו. Isaac was already old in days, as experienced in life as one could hope to be, yet he fell an easy prey to the sustained siege of Esau's guile. Esau assaulted his old father with all the tricks and ruses at his command trying to wring from him his last blessing. Isaac was indeed old - for his resistance to Esau's debauchery had weakened and he was ready to yield. But at his side was his loyal wife, Rebecca, one of the four great Matriarchs, whose feminine constitution enabled her to strengthen herself against her ~~man's~~ evil son's tirades of hypocrisy. At long last it was Isaac who yielded but Rebecca who prevailed. And our Rabbis' comment about their comparative ability to resist adversity bears repetition. Referring to this greater resistance by woman to opposition and disagreeable circumstance, they say "A bone is not harmed by a collision which would shatter an earthen pot into pieces. Man, who is created out of the dust of earth וְאִישׁ נִשְׁמָתוֹ כְּעָפָר וְאִשָּׁה כְּעֹסֶת has not the endurance of woman, formed out of bone וְאִשָּׁה כְּעֹסֶת. The Rebecca has the greater resistance of the Bone; the Isaac - the lesser resistance of the earthen pot. And it is this which the Rebeccas much teach the Isaacs even after וְאִישׁ נִשְׁמָתוֹ כְּעָפָר וְאִשָּׁה כְּעֹסֶת, when the Isaacs are old men.

For these three gifts, the gift of education in youth, of home in young manhood, and of endurance all through out, even unto old age - men and women will always be thankful to their mothers and all mothers.

No encomium that we can bestow upon the Jewish mother is great enough. No gift is expensive enough. What we have said and what we can say is limited by the powers of ^{our} expression. For the rest, we rely upon the loving understanding of all mothers to discern all that is within our hearts and souls.