



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel
145

Box
51

Folder
33

Man, 1918.

Apr. 28, 1917

"MAN"

At the conclusion of our lecture last week, we essayed the opinion that the highest and most complete definition of God, in Judaism, was holiness, because the concept of holiness embraced both the highest ethical ideal and the highest monotheistic ideal. Holiness means absolute unity and holiness also means absolute perfection, so that holiness is the highest concept of God for the religion that is both ethical and monotheistic, such as Judaism is.

Now, if our contention is true, that a people is as its God, it must follow that the highest ideal for man, according to Judaism, would be the ideal of holiness and one need not go far in the realm of Jewish thought to find first: that holiness constitutes the highest ethical ideal and that Imitatio Deo, the imitation of God, the attempt of finite man to pattern his life after the attributed qualities of the infinite - that thought was ingrained in the very conscience of Judaism. The classic source of that, is, of course, that sentence in the book of Leviticus which gave ^{the} to/holiness code

***** "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy". The righteous took this ideal and defined it more minutely and more in detail. "Just as God is merciful so be you merciful." "Just as God is gracious so be you gracious". Now just what did Judaism understand by the term "holiness"? What were the implications of this ideal? First of all let me define negatively. Holiness in Judaism never meant Asceticism, or passiveness or self-negation or inactivitism. That thought is foreign to the spirit of Judaism. When I say that the thought is foreign to the spirit of Judaism I do not mean

that in the lost treasure house of Judaism we found no reference to it. It would be strange indeed, would it not, if in the product of many minds, ages and climes, you would find no stray thot, no alien ideal -- for remember, my friends, that the Jew was constantly under the influence of foreign cultures and it naturally re-acts on him, so that we find in the Talmud and in the encyclopedia of Jewish thot for about one thousand years, here and there a stray thot that would suggest asceticism as part and parcel of Judaism, but these thots were always the lowly byways, the little lanes of Jewish thot, not the broad highways. We had a sect in Judaism the sect of the *****that took as its dominant ideal asceticism but if they did *****they did not constitute*****official Judaism -- that is everything and even unofficial Judaism, thru public opinion, never countenanced asceticism, self-negation*****and why ---- I believe it is because of the ideal of unity in Judaism. Just as Judaism did not tolerate a Judaism of good and evil, of justice and love, so Judaism refused to tolerate a Judaism of body and soul. Judaism welded body and soul into one harmonious unity and made that unity complete.

Just as Judaism said, with reference to good and evil "God creates darkness and forms light - just as Judaism said with reference to justice and love, that justice is the foundation of the throne of God and love the glory of the throne of God, so with reference to body and soul Judaism said "Thine is the body and thine also is the soul". Both are *****of God and both are, because of that, holy. If the idea of the body as the cesspool of corruption *****the idea that the soul is enmeshed with the imperfections of the body*****the idea that the soul can gain perfection only

by freeing itself, by self-castigation, is a pagan idea, which Christianity ***** thru Paul, adopted. Judaism said that the body of man is the shrine of the soul, that the body is the channel for the revelations of the soul, that the body is to its ***** what the voice is to the song. Judaism never tolerated the dualism of body and soul, the human ***** said Judaism was ***** not evil ***** serve purposes of life and therefore they are good, but thru unbridled excess, thru unbridled indulgence, thru lack of co-ordination - these ***** take, for example, the instinct of self-preservation is a very laudable one and is sometimes the source of some of the finest ***** of life but the instinct of self-preservation leads to selfishness, to miserliness, to niggardliness, qualities which are malodorous to society. Even the basic self ***** of human life may become the source of all the beauties ***** the beautiful endearments of family life but thru ***** and corruption may lead to degradation.

The instincts of themselves are not evil it is what men make of them which determines their social weal. The senses of man may become the highways for a spiritual ***** leading to the fine things of life. That is the Jewish conception of body and soul and therefore Judaism also did not turn upon the innocent Joys of life. Judaism never cast a suspicion of ungodliness upon the innocent happiness of human beings. Judaism has nothing of that morality of sourness and straight-laced rigidity which characterized the sects of old and still characterizes some of the Puritan sects of the present day. Judaism believes that God does not begrudge his children a little joy, a little happiness, a little sunshine in life. God is as much in the smiling eyes of infants as in the teardimmed eyes of mothers. God is as much in the ***** I say that God is in that joy and in

that happiness as surely as he is in the trials and sorrows of men. If men were not so foolish, if men were not so blind, they would come to see in God, no source of dreadful mystery, they would come to see in God, not the source of an unrelenting and cruel faith, but they would come to see in God ~~x~~ the most complete happiness of human life and they would think of God in joy and think of him in song. If men were not so blind and foolish they would come to regard religion for what it really is -- they would come to regard religion for the all-encircling *****happiness that it really is -- for what is religion if it is not this: a great freedom, a breaking of bonds, an emancipation of the spirit of man. What is religion if it does not mean the development of all our powers, the deepening of our spiritual interests -- and what is religious life, I ask you men and women, if it is not the harmonious exercise of all our faculties, and is not that the supreme kind of happiness -- is it not, after all, the unifying strength of all our life's purposes -- that unity, that strength which needs the best *****is not that the truest type of happiness. Religion, my friends, must come to mean Joy ***** for the psalmist knew it when he said "Come to God in Joy and approach him in sorrow". Judaism preaches joy and not sadness. "O son of man life is the vale of tears". Judaism says unto you "Within your own power it lies to achieve the highest kind of happiness".

*****but happiness that happiness which comes from the free exercise of our character, from unrestrained, purposeful activity, that happiness which comes -- what shall I say -- from self-fulfillment - from an integrated self, that happiness which is the crown of achievement, that happiness is what Judaism preaches and teaches.

*****one must master himself, one must sometimes practise self-denial. It is sometimes hewn out of the rock of pain, but pain and suffering are not of themselves, not godly. Suffering is no passport to heaven any more than pleasure is.*****

*****It is purposeful suffering that is godly. It is suffering for an ideal of ***** which demands suffering. It is that suffering, which teaches you sympathy, love and kindness, that makes you a better social agent. That suffering is sacred, holy - because it is *****serviceful. This then is the Jewish ideal of what holiness is not. It is not holiness of the saint, it is not the holiness of the man who leaves life to escape the burden of responsibility of society and seeks godliness in seclusion. It is not the man who needlessly, foolishly suffers. It is not the man who sours his life and the people about him thru a morbid solemnity - it is not the man who goes with downcast eyes and says that "Life is a vale of sorrow and tears". It is not that. It is the holiness of *****that comes thru effort, thru struggle and thru striving -- it is the holiness of *****living and I shall say a word about that. The ideal of holiness implies one great truth: that man may perfect himself. If Judaism says unto him "It is within your own power in this world, with your own body to become like unto God." Then Judaism dramatically repudiates that false notion of original sin, that false notion that man is born laden with iniquity because of the transgressions of men. No where in the liturgy of the day of atonement, where you would be most likely to find that notion of original sin is any reference to it to be found. Judaism sends man out into the world, master of his destiny, with the power to perfect himself. This idea of human perfectability implies also the ideal of freedom, of free will. Now free will

philosophers

***** have great difficulty in establishing or refuting the doctrine of free will, but to the religious man it is no problem, to the religious man freedom is the most real thing in life because if he is conscious of anything he is conscious of the freedom to choose between right and wrong for if there is no free will, my friends, there is no reality, there is no sense in punishment or in prayer. ***** that man is the free agent. Judaism knows nothing of fatalism. As a physical entity, man is subject to the immutable laws of nature, the law of cause and effect. He is as much subject there, as the stone or any natural force today. ***** man is free and because of that, man is responsible for his acts, man is responsible for sin. Be it said however ***** Judaism's concept of sin is as sane^a as human/concept as religion has to offer. What is sin according to Judaism? It is hate, a missing of the mark, an experiment that failed, a stray from the right path. Sin is more folly than it is wilfulness, it is more ignorance than it is perverseness. Sin is a human weakness, a falling from grace. A man sins and there is no man who does not." Sin", says King Solomon, on that most sacred day when ***** "there is no man who sinneth not, because man is not born perfect, because man is not an angel. And because there is a likelihood to sin, while there is no compulsion to sin. ***** there must be a chance for man to retrieve himself, to find himself, to win back God's love ***** and so Judaism places, as a corrective of sin, the doctrine of ***** of repentance and says, "God does not desire the death of a sinner but that he should return and live". "Return unto me, saith the Lord" So Judaism says "Great is repentance, for where one repentant sinner stands, the man who has

been absolutely righteous in his life, cannot stand." *****

*****the doctrine of the new testament concerning the prodigal son. Judaism says "Repentance is affected not by work, not by any profession of faith nor by act*****

"Man can repent his sins, not by word of mouth, by bringing a sacrifice -- but first of all, thru repentance, thru contrition.

Secondly, thru retribution, by making or by attempting as far as possible to make good the wrong he has done and by making a change in his life. Sin is valuable as it teaches repentance***** only then is repentance efficacious. That is why Judaism does not worship a perfect man, that is why Judaism attributes sin even to Moses and the patriarchs. We are all weak, nevertheless we are the children of God and thru effort and conscientious exertion we might approach divinity. I believe that the best summary of the ideal of Judaism concerning man, is found *** ^{psalm} that I read this morning. It recognizes both the smallness and greatness in man, the weakness and strength in man. It does not lose sight of the fact that in comparison with the mighty *****of life, that the things that endure **** that in comparison with the hills and mountains, man is an insignificant creature, a plaything of the vast sources of life. It doesnot lose sight of the fact that man is a sinful creature, that man so readily strays from the right path. It recognizes all these things and says "When I lift up my eyes, etc." "What is man that thou are mindful of him or the son of man, etc." He is so little in the scheme of ~~things~~ the universe, That notion leads to the idea of the world as a place fo r suffering *****in the underestimating of human *****and human efforts. Judaism corrects that notion, and while in humility it does say that "Man is small and impotent

in many ways, it also says yet "Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honor, etc."

*****while his feet are cloaked in the mire of mundane
 *****the spirit that circles the universe,
 the spirit that means knowledge, science, love and beauty and glory
 *****that spirit makes man king of the angels.

Now that is the Jewish ideal of man and that is why Judaism says unto men "Be ye holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. Man has within him the power so to live and so to work and so to direct his energy that gradually he may approach the perfection and glory of his Father in heaven."

