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The Psalms - How Can Man Find God?, 1919.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON "THE
PSALMS--"HOW CAN MAN FIND GOD," AT THE
TEMPLE, EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE,
NOVEMBER 23, 1919, CLEVELAND, OHIO.

No Book of the Bible has been so dear to the heart^{to} of the Jewish people, and the heart^{to} of the whole world, as the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms has found its way into the ritual of almost every service of the synagogue and of the church. The Psalms are ~~sung~~ sung under every sky and in every human accent. Men are daily turning to the Psalms in all the varied needs and moods of their lives. The heart that is weighted down with sorrow and the heart that is filled with joy, both alike, find in these ancient psalms of Israel a satisfying articulation of their own unexpressed emotions.

Calvin once said that the Book of Psalms is the perfect anatomy of the human soul. And it is in very truth that. Every Psalm reveals some hidden corner ^{of} the human soul, some sacred longing, some ^{private} ~~prided~~ grief, some troubled mood. The Book of Psalms is the mirror not of the mind, but of the heart, in which all the confused concerns of life, the doubts, the cares, the anxieties, the sorrows find faithful reflection. And because of that men have always turned to the Psalms; for after all is said and

~~the~~ the seat of religion is the heart, the well and the mainspring of human emotions.

Men are religious not because they know God, but because they feel God instinctively, intuitively, directly. Some people will come to God after a long, hard-fought process of mental speculation, but their God will somehow always remain ^a cold, abstract, intellectual creation--light but no ~~heat~~ ^{warmth}. But the God whom the heart intuitively divines amidst all the rush and confluence of the swift moving experiences of life is overpoweringly real and living and soul-satisfying.

A man who is insensate to music may come, after a long period of study and training, to appreciate music, its conventions, its forms, its types. He may even come ~~to have or~~ to derive a certain intellectual pleasure in its interpretation, in its composition, but the soul of music may remain for him an undiscovered land all the time. But ^{for} the man who by temperament and disposition, that is to say, by his very soul, is prepared for it, music ~~for him~~ will be a thrilling, soul-compelling, dynamic reality, a creative force in his life, a being, as it were, a living presence.

Now, some men are temperamentally unfit for religion just as some men are temperamentally unfit for art. These men must travel the circuitous paths of speculation in order to arrive at the goal of God. But the Psalmist divines God intuitively. His religion is

the religion of the mystic--full, real, emotional.
That is why millions of men, pious souls, whose concern was not whether God exists, but how to find God dearly loved these sacred Psalms and treasured them.

The Psalmist feels God in everything about him. He sees him manifesting Himself first of all in nature--its grandeur, its beauty, its immensity. The Psalmist does not interpose a mental analysis between his soul and the things which he sees; he does not take the rainbow and reduce it to an ocular illusion; he does not take a flaming sunset and analyze it into a host of rays of light. The appeal of the world of beauty ^{to his sensitive soul,} is superbly and exquisitely magnificent, ~~that its appeal to his sensitive soul is~~ direct and immediate. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His hand." "Go forth," he says, "and see the works of God and divine His presence"--in the tumultuous beatings of the waves and in the holy serenity of the quiet ^{lit} moon night. "The voice of God is upon the waters," he ^{exclaims} in his superb imagery. God speaks through the tempest and the storm, and ⁱⁿ the whispering of the leaves and the quiet rustling in the heart of the forest. God is everywhere--in the magnificence, in the order, in the arrangement, in the symmetry of the universe. And ^{his} ~~passionate contemplation of nature leads him to exclaim;~~ ~~he reads up his thoughts by exclaiming,~~ "How awe-inspiring!—How fearfully beautiful—are Thy works, Oh Lord!"

^{some}
Now, /men go through life with a scientific eye

and a chemical mind. Some men are frantically bent upon analysis and definition, ^{upon} ~~the~~ reducing ~~of a~~ composite thing into its separate component elements.

They miss the appeal of the thing in itself, the thing as it is, the emotional soul-appeal. And these men find it often very difficult to find God amidst the ^{cold} ~~cold~~ formulae of their scientific laboratories.

~~But~~ The psalmist sees God not only in the arrangement and in the beauty of nature, but also in the perfect arrangement and beauty of the moral life of men. Good is always triumphant, evil is always punished. If not immediately then ultimately; if not in the individual then in his descendants, in the people, in the race. There is a perfect balance in the moral order of life, and the pluses and the minuses always cancel. ^{"Good"} ~~And so~~ he says, "good" was never wanting to those who walked in uprightness."

~~Not~~ This power ^{not} ~~in~~ ourselves which makes for righteousness, this power that under-rides the ultimate triumph of the ^{human} good in life is to the psalmist God. ^P And he sees God in history, ~~in the evolution of life.~~ I sometimes think that the surest and best specific for the man who is restless and impatient with the imperfections of ~~the~~

~~human~~ life is to read history; to see what we have achieved, to look back and see the hard road which ~~we~~ ^{humanity} ~~has~~ ^{traversed} already ~~traversed~~. The psalmist, though not ^{conscious} ~~knowing~~

^{of} an evolutionary philosophy of life, ~~the maintenance of a~~ ~~divine purpose in the human race,~~ sees it nevertheless

in the history of his own people. "Our fathers have told us the things which God has performed for them....He led them from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from sorrow to joy;...He blessed them upon their own soil and gave them a law. ..."

There is a plan and a purpose gradually unfolding itself in the history of ~~his own people~~ ^{Israel}, and that is evidence and proof to him of the existence of ~~the~~ ^a wise Purpose, a wise God in the world. Translated in our terms it means simply this: that the evolution of life, from the lower to the higher, this ~~climbing~~ ^{steady ascent in} slow gradations from ~~the~~ beasthood and ~~the~~ ignorance to civilization and the sacred arts of peace; this constant upreaching and ~~reaching~~ ^{outreaching} ~~heavenward~~ ^{an intelligent} is evidence of the presence in ~~human~~ life of a force which we call God. ~~And~~ ^{also} the psalmist sees God ~~and feels God~~ in the trials and experiences of his own life; and that is where men ~~must~~ must often find God.

" * * * that which God has done and to my soul." And many a man who ~~passed~~ ^{had} passed through the deep waters and in the anguish of his soul ~~found~~ ^{had} found God has made a similar confession. In those crucial moments of life, when our mind, and our reason, and our knowledge, and our wisdom, and our education, are of no avail, when we lie stretched upon the rack of life, bleeding and tortured, in those moments, some of us, sometimes reach out our bleeding hands and touch the hem of ~~the~~ ^{God's} robe of glory. "Thou

hast tried me, oh Lord," says the psalmist, "Thou hast put me in the dark hole, .. Thou hast caused me to go through fire and through water, .. but Thou hast brought forth my soul into greater freedom." That ^{feeling} ~~feeling~~ that comes to one in those black moments of ~~dark~~ despair, when everything seems to be slipping away from us; ~~that feeling~~ which says, "Hold on"; that feeling which says, "Thou didst not suffer my foot to stumble," - that is God for the psalmist.

Some men must wait for some such soul-searching experience to bring them humbly ~~and gratefully~~ to ~~the~~ ~~feet of~~ God. But some whose souls are more sensitive, find God in the quiet ^{or} humbler, customary experiences of daily life ^{as well}. Why, God can be found if men but ~~search~~ ^{seek Him} in the gentle word that falls like dew upon a parched soul, in the eyes that beam a cheerful welcome to the ^{lonely} ~~lonely~~ soul; ~~God can be found in these~~ ^{these} hopes that ~~warm~~ ^{thrill} our mortal ^{day} ~~lives~~ ^{lives} in ~~the~~ heavenly aspirations of our adventuresome ~~lives~~; God can be found in the love of a mother's kiss, and in the warm embrace of a child's tenderness; God can be found in the love of youthful hearts, in the pledge of ^{faith} ~~loyalty~~, in the vow of fidelity; God can be found in the tear of pity, in the grief we feel at other men's sorrow; ~~God can be found~~ in the sacrifices of man for man, in the death of heroes, in the martyrdom of saints; God can be found in all the struggles of our troubled lives, in all our heroic building upon the ruins of a thousand hopes; God can be found in the sorrow that ennobles and

in the joy that inspires; God can be found in the humblest acts of our daily lives if we could but attune our souls to catch the ~~sweet~~ ^{sweet} whisperings of the Infinite.

~~The~~ ^{The} psalmist finds God also in ~~the~~ ^{that} inexplicable longing after God, in that pathetic need which a man feels for God. "As the hart panteth for the living waters, so my soul panteth for God," he cries. "God, I seek Thee; my soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh longs for Thee in the land of wilderness and great thoughts." Oh, the man that feels the great hunger for the presence of God, ~~the~~ ^{the} need ~~for~~ ^{for} some mighty kinsman to stand ~~alongside of~~ ^{beside him} ~~us~~ ^{his} in our struggles ~~in~~ ^{through} life, -- that man feels God and knows ~~God~~ ^{Him}.

~~The~~ ^{The} great concern of the psalmist is not, ~~whether God exists, because he finds him in nature, in the moral order of things, in history, in his own experience, in his own longings, and yearnings of his own soul.~~ ^{Experiences Him directly} ~~His~~ ^{His} great concern is how to find God, how to approach Him, how to establish a communion with Him, how to prepare his soul to receive Him. ~~The psalmist knows, oh, so wonderfully well, not by the external forms of religion, not by sacrifices, meals, etc.~~ ^{that God cannot be approached by the mere} "The sacrifice and the meal offering Thou dost not desire." "The sacrifices of the Lord are the broken heart, the humble spirit. . . . It is very pitiful to see ~~so~~ ^{the} many men and women ~~who~~ ^{who} think that they can come to God through some one act of charity ~~or almsgiving, after their life has been one of~~ ^{when whole is}



It might not be well, perhaps, that all the unrelated
prayers for the momentary needs of our
life be answered. But some answer
is always vouchsafed to the earnest
worshipper in the form of

great ^{un}charitableness. An act unrelated to your soul, that does not spring out of the well of your soul will never bring you near to God, and all the charity that you might give, and all the sacrifices in things that you might make, will leave you in the morass of your own little ^{care}~~solves~~ as before.

How can one approach God? *In the holy ecstasy of*
~~prayer.~~ *Why, first of all one*
~~must call upon him.~~ "The Lord is near unto all who call upon Him in truth. To be answered one must first call!"

Prayer is the channel through which the divine comes and enters the soul of man. It need not be the fixed and formal prayer of a ritual; it need not be the prayer of a periodic service, but the prayer that comes rushing to one's ^{lips}~~self~~ in those moments when we feel the need of someone in whom to confide, ~~of~~ someone in whom to put our trust.

It is a great pity that men are forgetting how to pray. "I called upon the Lord and He heard me, and He set me in a wide place." "Out of the depths I called upon the Lord."... If men would but know that they can call upon the Lord out of the depths of their own ^{souls}~~miser~~ and their suffering and their disillusionment and be heard!

Prayer is always answered.

The answer ~~to prayer~~ need not be in terms of things.

We ~~we~~ might not be granted that for which *we directly pray* ~~you are praying,~~

~~but the answer will come in a~~ *renewed* spiritual strength, in a spiritual fortification, in a spiritual exhilaration, ~~there will be a psychic reaction that will follow the~~

WRHS



Faith is a great illumination - ~~that~~ a glowing
presence that comforts and guides and
heals, ~~and~~

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present
help in trouble"

Man can also approach
~~prayer.~~ Then you could come to God through a life of holiness, through purity of conduct and purity of motive. "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in the holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." One prepares to receive God by a life of ~~loyalty~~ and devotion to the highest ideals of life, and one can never and does never find God in a life of selfishness, of feverish concern ^{for the} ~~after~~ little things that ^{are as the} ~~satisfy~~ *fitting shadows!* ~~only himself.~~ *PP* When one finds God what does one find? What does God mean to the religious man? What does God mean to the psalmist? Why, first of all, God means comfort. "The Lord God will lighten my darkness." God comes like a blessed wind ^{driving} ~~that drives~~ the clouds of darkness ^{before it} ~~away from one's life.~~ God comes as a light. No one word is repeated more often ~~through~~ ⁱⁿ the Psalms than the word "light." "God is my light"; ~~God will lighten my darkness.~~ *PP* And God means strength. ~~to the worshiper.~~ "With God," cries the psalmist, "I can face a host of enemies, and with my God I can scale ^a ~~the~~ wall." *Man is* ~~why,~~ you are not alone in ^{his} ~~your~~ struggles; *He is an arm* ~~you are a projection of~~ Divinity. *PP* And God means confidence. "God is my light and my salvation. Whom need I fear?" *the stronghold of my life* "God is ~~my~~ [^] Of whom need I be afraid?" *God* ~~that~~ is the armor of the ~~great~~ man who plunges into battle against the greatest odds in the face of certain defeat; ~~knowing that~~ "God is my shield, my armor, my spear, my strength, my ultimate victory." And God means

We are not a spark of a moment's glow, a
voice betwixt two silences, alone in an
everlasting solitude. We "live eternally" in
the benign influences of our lives in the
potent memories that guide mankind
and treasure our immortality.

to the religious man a sense of ^{kinship, the knowledge of} someone ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ shared with him his burdens. "Cast upon the Lord thy burden and He will strengthen thee"--the sense that we have a helpmate, ~~a co-worker~~, a kinsman, a friend in God. The burdens of life would crush ~~any one of~~ us if it were not for the sustaining thought that God shares our burdens, ^{even as He puts the burdens upon us}. And God means ~~to the psalmist and to the religious man also~~ ^a the sense of eternal in our brief life. ~~Whether you follow me in that.~~ One can do big things ^{in life} only as long as one feels that his life, in spite of being brief, is yet eternal; that that which is best in him possesses an eternal and everlasting quality which can never be destroyed, ~~that sense of abidingness, of endurance, of fine aspirations in our lives is to our mortal days a sense of eternity.~~ And so the psalmist turns to his friend and says, "Turn from evil and do good and abide forever,"--~~that sense that the spirit of man is eternal with God comforts the religious man.~~

^{God brings a} And ~~yet he has still another~~ sense of at-homeness in the world, at-oneness with the world. A man that is alone feels that the world of ~~necessity~~ is hostile to him; ^{that it is} ~~the world~~ arrayed in force against him, to destroy him, to thwart him; to deny him; but when one finds God one finds a sense of being at home in the world. ~~The feeling that one is near unto God becomes the greatest joy in one's life.~~ And so the psalmist says, "The nearness of God was good to me." ~~That was the joy of my life.~~ Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place, ^{in all generations, what} Oh, ~~that is a~~

superb imagery. ^{to} dwell in God! ^{to} feel that you are ^{not}
dwelling in a world ^{hostile} ~~antagonistic~~ to you, a world of evil
~~and~~ and destructive forces, but ~~convince~~ that you
are dwelling in ^{the} graciousness and fatherliness and kind-
liness of God. "A dwelling place hast Thou been for
us in all generations." That ^{conviction} comes to the religious
man.

Lastly there comes a sense of perfect joy. I
have often said, and I cannot say it too often, that
religion if it means anything means the supreme joy and
happiness of life. Religion is not a matter of solemnity,
religion is not a matter of depression, or sorrow, ~~sadness~~,
or self-castigation, or self denial. Religion
must destroy every bond, every confining limit, everything
that narrows ^{us}, everything that keeps us small, ^{Religion must} ~~and~~ liberate
the human spirit. Religion is the great emancipator of
life, ^{Religion} ~~it~~ fills our soul with a most exquisite happiness.
"Rejoice," says the psalmist, "and be happy, ye righteous
man, and ^{sing} ~~see~~ all ye that are upright in heart".--That peace
that comes to one after having found God is the peace
that passeth all understanding. It is joy unalloyed and
supreme.

This then is the religion of the psalmist, and to
my mind the true religion ^{for} every man. To be a religious
man ^{is} to feel God in nature, in our moral lives, in history,
in the trials and tribulations of our days, and in the
yearning and longing of our hearts, ~~This, then, is the~~

~~truly religious life:~~ to find God in prayer and in a life of service and sacrifice and holiness; to find in God comfort, strength, confidence, a sense of kinship, a sense of eternity, a sense of at-homeness and a perfect happiness, ~~in life.~~

Philosophy ~~will~~ ^{will} devise system after system, and science will evolve as age succeeds age new theories and new doctrines to explain life, but the religious man of all times will ~~not~~ ^{continue} humbly and gratefully ^{to} say, "The Lord is my shepard, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul, He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." ****