



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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The Common Heritage of Christian and Jew, 1920.



LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON "THE  
COMMON HERITAGE OF CHRISTIAN AND JEW." AT  
THE TEMPLE, EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL  
AVENUE, CLEVELAND, OHIO, SUNDAY MORNING,  
FEBRUARY 15, 1920.

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Men and women of today are seeking a fundamental unity in all the departments of human life. Politically, this craving for unity expresses itself in the demand for a league of free nations. Socially, it expresses itself in a demand for greater democracy; but democracy is only the demand to bring the children of man into closer contact, spiritually and mentally, with one another. Economically, the demand manifests itself in a desire to unite all those who toil with their brain or with their brawn--all the toilers of the earth. And religiously, the same desire expresses itself among certain elements in a craving for one religion for all mankind.

Now, unity is a desirable and a worthwhile thing provided it does not make for uniformity in life! When unity is understood as uniformity it is a veritable menace. The nations of antiquity tried to establish an external unity among all the peoples of the earth by making them all the subjects of one vast empire--Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Syria, Greece, Rome, Spain, and, laterally, Germany and England have attempted to unite all the peoples of the



earth by making them all subject to one imperial law and organization.

Every empire of antiquity has collapsed, and every empire to today is due to a similar collapse because they do not make sufficient allowance for the diversity, for the uniqueness, for the cultural self-identity of every group, of every race, of every people. They impose an external sameness upon an internal diversity, which is in itself an anomaly. We are no longer talking today about cosmopolitanism or the one-nation idea. Fifty years ago the liberal minds of Europe spoke and were enthusiastic about the time when all nations will merge into one and all the lines of demarkation and boundaries will be removed.

Today we no longer speak of one nation because we know a little more of racial psychology; we know a little more of those basic, sub-conscious characteristics which differentiate one race from another, one nation from another, which cannot be destroyed by a mere theory or a mere say-so. We speak today of the internationalism which recognizes the identity of each group, but which aims to unify them in spirit, to establish a more sympathetic contact and interrelationship among them. That is internationalism.

We no longer speak of one language for all mankind, because we know that one language does not necessarily make for peace. The English and the Irish speak one



language; Austria and Germany speak one language; the North and the South spoke one language; yet that did not of necessity imply peace and understanding. The citizens of Switzerland speak three languages, yet they live in comity and peace with one another.

We have come to understand that civilization is moving ~~not~~ in the direction of homogeneity, of sameness, of monotony, but that the more civilized humanity becomes, the more diversified it is, the more it individualizes itself, but that we endeavor to bring these distinct and separate units into some harmonious relation to one another.

Now, religiously that is equally true. There is a laudable desire among a good number of honest souls to convert all men to one religion. The Mohammedans of old tried it, and during the middle ages Europe was dominated by one religion. But one religion makes for suppression, for the enthronement of authority; one religion inevitably and of necessity makes for reaction and stagnation. The Reformation was an attempt to gain religious independence and individuality, and the Reformation paved the way for liberalism in Europe.

There is an attempt today on the part of the Protestant churches to establish an organic unity among the various denominations. If they aim by this establishment to create a greater efficiency in administration it is a most desirable thing; but if their desire is to unite them all into one organic unity,



thereby suppressing the individuality of each group. I maintain that it is a step backward. The mass moves slowly. It is the single group, that does not feel that tremendous responsibilities of the whole world, that can strike out upon a new path that can progress and lead the way for other groups to follow.

And so the attempt on the part of well meaning Christians to Christianize the world and to gain Jewish converts, while it is very sincere and readily understood, is, to my mind, a rather undesirable and impracticable thing. What the world needs is not one religion. I believe that one religion would be the gravest menace to civilization and to progress; just as one political party in the United States would be a danger to our free institutions; just as one kind of <sup>art</sup> ~~art~~, one school of art, and one school of music would deaden the very progressive spirit of art, which is experimental, which is constantly attempting to evolve new forms and new expressions--one religion would be a danger to the soul of the world.

What we need is not one religion; what we need is purified, elevated and noble religions of learning, reverence and tolerance for one another, and all uniting upon the things which are basic to all of them. Not uniformity of observance, of creed or dogma, but unity of purpose, of ideals--the unity of service, and the unity of mutual sympathy and tolerance. That is what the world needs. Let the Jew Judaize the Jew and let the



Christian

/Christianize the Christian, and let both of them co-operate in those acts of social beneficence and usefulness that will bring about greater happiness to the children of men.

Judaism and Christianity can readily do that, because they have so much in common. They have such a beautifully rich and common heritage. Both the Jew and the Christian look upon the bible, the old testament, as the fountainhead of religious inspiration. The Jewish bible has inspired the law, the literature, the political institutions, the art of all the nations of Europe. The Jew and the Christian have the ten commandments in common. The Jew and the Christian have the Golden Rule in kind, and it matters little whether the Golden Rule be in a positive form,--"Love thy neighbor as thyself,"--"Do unto thy neighbor as thou wouldst have thy neighbor do unto thee," or whether it be in the negative form--"Thou shalt not do unto thy neighbor as thou wouldst not have him do unto thee." It matters <sup>little</sup> whether it be Jesus of Hillel, it is the common treasure, the spiritual possession of both Jew and Christian.

The Christian took his master from the Jew. The founder, the guide, the master of Christendom was a Jew; the great apostle, <sup>Paul</sup> the missionary, the messenger of Christianity was a Jew; the disciples were Jews; the writings of the new testament were the writings of the Jews. There is a close spiritual affinity in all the



literary achievements and progress of Christianity.

The teachings of Jesus are almost entirely Jewish. They <sup>(3)</sup> breathe the spirit of the old testament, of the Apocrypha, of the Apocalypse, of the spirit of the rabbis and the sages.

You read the beatitudes attributed to Jesus and <sup>(4)</sup> you can take each one and place a biblical parallel to it. Both manifest, both express the one spirit which has inspired and informed the experiments of the Jew and of the Christian alike. Jesus said, "Happy are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In the Psalms we read, "The Lord is nigh unto thee that are broken in spirit, and save of such as are of a contrite heart." Humility is a common virtue of Jew and Christian.

<sup>(1)</sup> Jesus said, "Happy are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." The Psalm says, "They that sow in tears will reap in joy." God is the divine comforter of all who mourn. That, too, is a common, sustaining and beautiful ideal of Jew and Christian.

<sup>(2)</sup> Jesus said, "Happy are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." The Psalm says exactly the words-- "The meek shall inherit the earth." Jesus said, "Happy are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." The Jew in his bible says, "He that followeth righteousness and mercy shall find life, righteousness and honor." And just as was the very theme of prophet and sage. The master of Christianity said,



5 "Happy are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."

6 Three hundred years before that time the Jew said, "Happy is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in the day of evil." Jesus said, "Happy are the pure in heart for they shall see God." The Psalmist, centuries before that time, said, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His hallowed place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart."

7 Jesus said, "Happy are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." And Isaiah, the prophet, seven centuries before that time, said, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings that publisheth peace." And Hillel, an early contemporary of Jesus, said, "Love peace, seek peace, pursue peace, and love all mankind." Jesus said, 8 "Happy are they that have been persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Isaiah said, speaking of Israel, "I gave my back to the smiters; I hid not my face from shame, and the spitting of men, for the Lord God will help me." And Israel, by his life, by the heroic epic of two thousand years of suffering for the sake of a great ideal, was evidence of the fact--"Happy are those that are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In other words, the virtues extolled and praised by the founders of Christianity--humility, meekness, justice, mercy, purity, peace, selfsacrifice--are the very virtues



concerning which our prophets and sages hundreds of years before had spoken. They are the common possessions of Jew and Christian. Both the Jew and the Christian have the goal of service before them. Progress by social reconstruction, the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth by social justice and by individual salvation. Both have served the cause of God and the cause of man, and both have this beautiful heritage in common. It is a tragic pity that two religions, the one the daughter religion of the other, having so much which is common to both of them, should be so far separated because of the folly and stupidity and the hate of men. The time has come for the two religions to recognize their mutual indebtedness. The Christian owes much to the Jew, and the Jew owes much to the Christian. (5)

A few weeks ago a courageous minister in this city spoke of Christianity's indebtedness to the Jew, and said these beautiful and courageous words: "The Christians to the Jews are indebted/for everything worthwhile in the Christian religion. Biologically we are the heirs of Teutons, Celts and Franks, but religiously we are the heirs of the Jews. The founder of Christianity was a Jew, a loyal Jew. He was the product of Jewish life and Jewish thought. When a young man asked Jesus to state the essentials of religion, He did not talk about Messiahship or vicarious atonement, He did not even use His own words, but quoted direct from the Jewish law--Thou shalt love



the Lord thy God and thy neighbor as thyself.' We Christians have sat at the feet of the Jew but have denied our everlasting debt to a race that made Jesus possible."

Reverend Lupton's words are true. Take the Jew out of Christianity and you have nothing left but paganism and heathenish doctrines. The Christian owed much to the Jew; but let us not forget that the Jew owes much to the Christian. Without Christianity the ideals of the Jew would have remained the exclusive possession of a little group of men in Judea. Without the missionaries and the apostles of Christianity the bible would not today be the precious possession of hundreds of millions, but the exclusive possession of a few millions. Without Christianity the ideals of the prophets would have remained confined and limited to a group of men and would not have become as they are today, the driving and propelling motives in every social movement of humanity.

The Jew was not a missionary; the Jew could not be a missionary. It is providential that the Jew was not a missionary in the world, for the missionary, in bringing his faith and his ideals to other peoples, must compromise with these other peoples, he must take even as he gives, so that the pristine purity of his religious ideas must of necessity be lost. When Paul took Jewish teachings and Jewish ethics to the pagan world and tried to comfort the pagan world to his ideals, Paul was of necessity com-



promise, to take on somewhat of their beliefs and somewhat of their superstitions and blend them with the pure ideals of Judaism.

The missionary must do that of necessity. But the world also needs besides the missionary an individual or a group that would remain constantly uncompromising in its convictions so as to hold aloft the goal, the absolute, the perfect ideal. The world needs the prophet and the reformer; the world needs the missionary. But it also needs the prophet who refuses to become a missionary. The Jew is providentially endowed to be the prophet of the world, to hold aloft the ideal unstained, unadulterated, absolute. But the world also needs the missionary who would take these ideals and even at the cost of compromise bring them to the nations of the world, popularize them, make them acceptable, make them effective in the lives of the millions. And so the world needed the Jew and the world needed the Christian, and the Jew is indebted to the Christianity for making the bible the holy possession of hundreds of millions, and making the name of one God and the prophets of Israel known to the races of the world. The Jew is not unmindful of the martyrs of the church, of its saints, of its priests, of its sisters of mercy who endured and suffered and sacrificed themselves in order to bring our teachings, our bible, our ideals to the furthestmost ends of the earth. 8

Now, if Jew and Christian would but realize that,



how much of a better understanding could be established among men. The ideal of the Jew was never bigotry. You remember that magnificent statement of the rabbis-- "I call heaven and earth to witness. Be ye Israelite or non-Israelite, a man or a woman, a man-servant or a maid-servant, according to their deeds will the spirit of God descend upon them." Not according to their pretensions, not according to their words or creeds or dogmas, but according to their deeds will the spirit of God descend upon them; whether he be Jew or non-Jew, master or servant, man or woman, it is the deed that counts.

Why, all religion is, after all, only a groping in the dark; it is only a terrific struggling and striving of the children of man in the darkness trying to find some reality, some hold in this frightful chaos and confusion of life, in this tragic complexity of the world. And God sits above and guards us not with the truth which we achieve, because after all, we can achieve but little truth, but God guards us with the earnestness and sincerity of our seeking and our striving.

The rabbis of the middle ages said the Christian was not a heathen, the Christian was the "proselyte of the gate." The Christian was never called heathen by the rabbis. Maimonides said that the great philosophers of the middle ages of Christianity and Mohammedanism, were sent into the service by God to prepare the service for the Messianic age.



Intolerance and bigotry were never the characteristics of the Jew, because he knew how much misery and suffering was brought into the world by the narrowness and bigotry and intolerance of the stupid mortals. He never appropriated heaven for himself and put a "verboten" sign on it for everybody else. The Jew never made heaven an exclusive suburb of Judaism and excluded everyone else from it. Why, don't you know that there are ministers in this land, and in every land, that know more of heaven and hell than they know about their own anatomy that they carry around with them daily. They have got it bedecked, described, plotted, sold and marketed. The Father of Christianity was not a bigot. Jesus was a loving, tender soul, a kindly, pious Jew. It is only the champions of this religion or that who, in the fury of propaganda, lose sight of the very ideals that they are endeavoring to propagate. It is this spirit of proselytizing of making every man and woman think and act as you do, as though you are the standard of perfection, that brings all evil into the world. Tolerance, sympathy, understanding! If the Christian would but stop and think how much of hate he unconsciously brings into the world by poisoning the minds of the children of his religious schools against the Jew--unconsciously; by taking that yielding, plastic mind of the infant and dinning into his ears week after week the story of how the Jews crucified Jesus, so that in the mind of the child the Jew assumes horrible delineations and characteristics, as he naturally would.



If he would but realize how much harm he does to the ultimate cause of universal good will and peace upon earth, and how many tears his master would shed over it, he would not continue the nefarious practice. Why, from what you hear in many churches today you would think that Jesus was a ~~scot~~ Presbyterian instead of a Jew from Galilee. 11  
The  
Warley

The Jew must be Judaized, and the Christian must be Christianized. Each one has a faith that may be sufficient for him; each one has a faith that can meet every need and every mood of his life if he but lives faith. It is the cheap, obnoxious, pretentious religion on the part of the Jew and Christian that is the baneful thing. A good Jew needs no Christianity and a good Christian needs no Judaism. Both can find inspiration, guidance, counsel, hope and comfort in their own religions, and any attempt to proselytize one way or the other is stupid, the worst kind of stupidity.

What we want is not a monotony and a sameness in the world--all men to recite the same formula and read the same words or the same liturgy, or sing the same hymns. That is not the important thing. The important thing is that all souls be united by one bond of love and sympathy and understanding, each man, whatever his persuasion, whatever his faith, trying to do the decent, the fine, the beautiful thing in life, and each one learning reverence and tolerance for his neighbor. That is the important



thing.

There is a common heritage in Jew and Christian. There will be a greater approach, a closer contact between Jew and Christian, if they will realize that the things which separate them are less important than the things which unite them; if they will learn to dissolve the particularisms, those walls of demarkation and get together on the common ground of service of God and man.

The world does not need one religion. The world needs religious men. The world does not need one creed except that it be the creed of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. There are many roads that lead to heaven. Choose the road you love best provided your goal is to reach the throne of God. (12)

There is no royal road to God; there is no royal highway to service. Each man must serve in his own way, each man must believe as the conscience<sup>and mind</sup> dictate, provided his heart is filled with love for his fellow man, with tolerance, with sympathy. That is true religion.

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1. At this season - our brothers - Christ - The faith -  
1. later Ages - Progression Chr. tho't - Approach.  
God - Juden Rom -

2. You have read - doctrinal struggle.  
1. King in coming - Superficial attack on Jew.  
Unitarian

3. Unit in spirit of both - Undenominational.

4. 7 spots of Essential Jew teaching - Unit in theory  
1. The Euphany.  
2. Unit a rebel -  
3. No new Law - (5.17)  
4. God.  
5. Law.  
6. Unit surrenders Customs - "Go not unto way of  
Gentiles, and dwell in the Cities of Samaritans entered not  
but go rather to lost sheep of Israel.  
7. No new religion - God & Truth.

5. Sermon on Unit.



6. Some doctrine - author. Just. Could not accept
1. Jesus mystic. - John.
  2. Christ not end
  3. Talk us that for to know. (6.25)
  4. Such doctrine - Just. where main intent
  5. Christ - life seems

7. Would did not come to end - Wlad  
not -  
a - among leaders - he was on

8. He did to prept the law - race

5. 43 - 48.

6. 19 - 23

7. 1 - 15.

9. And so thence - Then max. parallel