



## 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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We, the undefeated!, 1934.

WE, THE UNDEFEATED!

Delivered By  
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver  
At  
The Temple  
On

Sunday Morning, December 9, 1934.





The Festival of Chanukah, my friends, is one of the most joyous of our holidays, if not the most joyous one. It commemorates a victory, a military victory. That in itself, is very rare among the legends of our people. Chanukah is the joyous celebration of the triumph of the meagre forces under Judah the Maccabee over the vast army of the Syrian empire whose king was Antiochus the Illustrious.

Chanukah is a very happy holiday because it indicates that our people in the hour of need and in defense of their sanctities could fight and fight valiantly. The last two thousand years of our wandering over the face of the earth has habituated the non-Jews to think of the Jew as a passing individual, a shuttlecock in the hands of estiny. They have forgotten the Jews of ancient days from Joshua to Barkochba, who fought determinately, resolutely against overwhelming odds frequently in defense of what they regarded as the sanctities of national life and the preservation of their faith. The Jew carved out a place for himself in Palestine through fighting. The Jew met the Syrians, the Greeks, the Babylonians and the Romans in battle. The interesting thing about most of the wars of Israel, as was this war of the Maccabees, is that this war was one in defense of religion and that was a rather novel thing in ancient days. People did fight in defense of their countries, or in the past, of empires, in an effort to conquer others. There are many such wars among ancient peoples but we have no record of a single major war being fought in defense of their religion.



When Antiochus sought to coalesce his Empire in the East by merging all the peoples into one common religion and one common speech so that he would be in a better position to fight against the rising power of the Romans, all the other peoples were quite willing to forego their own religions and accept the religion of the Syrian Greeks which was the policy of the Greeks. It didn't matter to them.

Only one small people among the hills of Judea, a people that possessed no political independence at that time and prior to that time -- one small people defied the Edict of Antiochus and insisted upon retaining their faith. And so you will recall that grand sentence which I read to you this morning that "though all the nations that are under the King's dominion obey him, and all away every one from the religion of their fathers -- yet will I and my sons and my brothers walk in the covenant of our Father."

Jewish History is full of changes, full of movements and full of surprises. Yet there is one recurrent theme in Jewish History -- the refusal of the group to assimilate, to submerge itself. Our people have had frequent opportunities to permit itself to become completely assimilated by other peoples, by other cultures.

We were in Egypt for exactly four hundred years. The Egyptian people had a far higher civilization than our people. Normally, the highest civilization imposes itself upon the lowest civilization and absorbs it. Not so in the case of the Jews.



After four hundred years the people struck out for themselves. They did not change their names and did not change their speech. They refused to assimilate. When our forefathers came into Canaan it was much the same situation. Israel refused to assimilate and insisted on leading its own pristine culture. In Babylon, again, one of the highest civilizations of antiquity, our forefathers did not permit themselves to be submerged. In the days of Alexander the Great, when the peoples one by one fell under its incantation, under its spell, the Jew, alone, refused to be assimilated. And so throughout history.

And why? The Jew always had a strong will to live, a voracious insatiable appetite for life. He always defended himself with physical arms when he could as in the days of the Maccabees, and when the sword was struck from his hands and he could no longer defend himself by physical prowess, he defended himself spiritually, by stubbornness, by spiritual resistance, by martyrdom. He built for himself all over the world citadels, not of stone, but impregnable citadels, mightier by far, -- Jewish homes, schools, synagogues wherein the spirit of our race was fresh and vigorous and undefeated!

Why did the Jew do that? Why did he prefer the yellow badge, the inquisition to the ghetto, to the life of an outcast. He could have been an equal among equals if he had given in to his fate. Why did he persist? Not that the Jew is an inveterate isolationist who is clannish and tribal. <sup>at</sup>Not all! He never has been. He was always ready to adapt himself to foreign cultures and civilizations.



The Jew never voluntarily ghettotized himself. During the Arabic times, the Jews who lived in Arabic countries wrote, spoke in Arabic and important Jewish books were written in the Arabic language. And certainly in the 19th century, the Jew picked up the speech and ideas, the manners and customs and even to the point of self-abnegation and assimilation.

Why did he fight so hard and so long for his survival? The answer is very simple. Because the Jew, in the first place, was always a normal people. That sounds rather strange. We think of the Jew as a nervous people. The Jew has survived for four thousand years through all these circumstances a proud and mighty people because the Jew was always a healthy person. He had the wisdom and sanity of the ancient race. A normal person never asks, "Why shall I live?" He asks, "How can I live more abundantly?" Only sick and morbid persons ask, "Why?" It is only those Jews who live on the periphery of Jewish life who can't make up their minds whether or not to be Jews and go into eerie discourses, and ask why? Life itself is its own vindication. It is the reason why we struggle to live. Every normal person wants to face life and enjoy life. The Jew somehow felt that while other peoples felt that they had much to give him, yet he had much to give them.

Other peoples knew much more about science and art, yet there was something that this learned people among the hills of Judea had which the whole ancient world did not have and needed desperately, something that was uniquely Jewish -- the Jewish outlook upon life, the Jewish morality, the Jewish code of ethics, the Jewish conception of one God. That the ancient



people did not have. That the Jew did have.

In one of the essays written by Matthew Arnold he tries to contrast the contributions which the Jews made with the contributions of the Greeks. He said the world moves between two points of influence -- that of the Jew and that of the Greek. The object of Hellenism and Hebraism was the same, namely, how to attain perfection. But they pursued totally different courses: "Hebraism emphasizes right acting; Hellenism emphasizes right thinking. Hebraism emphasizes conduct; Hellenism, thought. Hebraism dwells on strictness of conscience; Hellenism on the spontaneity of consciousness. Hebraism speaks of duty; Hellenism of clear intelligence. Hebraism means self-conquest; Hellenism, means self-culture. Hebraism speaks of the duty; Hellenism, of sweetness and light."

There is much truth in what he says. But in all of these sharp contrasts, there are many exceptions that must be made, many modifications.....

The Lord built the world upon wisdom. The Jew too wanted people to think, to think even about God. "Thou shalt know the Lord Thy God." The great distinction between Judaism and the religions of the peoples of those days was not the difference between duty and life but the difference between that which is holy and that which is secular. The Jew tried to sanctify the whole of human life. Hellenism tried to secularize life by bringing knowledge into it. Judaism based all human life on the conception of God. Judaism began with God. The whole of human life was holy. Every human act, holy. "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Thy God." Therefore, when



you eat your table is an altar of God. When you join yourself in wedlock it is God who is present. What you eat, what you wear, what you do should be done in the name of God, for the glory of God.

The Jew felt that he needed more his moral code of the sanctities of human life, the love for the stranger, consideration to the poor, brotherhood, universal peace -- all of these based on one fundamental conception of the unity of God.

In the Temple of Jerusalem, the rabbis say there were windows which were narrow within and wide without so that the light from the Temple in Jerusalem could spread out and permeate the whole world, "so that nations may follow Thy light and kings may see the flow of Thy illumination." The Jew felt that he had a light to bring to the gentile world, a glow-torch to bring them in defense of that which he thought so indispensable.

That is why the Jew has been the undefeated among the peoples of the world. He identified himself with God...!For I am the Lord Thy God. From these lights let our hearts take fire. Be not afraid for I will help you."

In all of our darkest moments, and they are many today, my friends, we know how to kindle the light. We knew how to borrow from the altar of the inner sanctuaries of our lives. That flame which kindled the lights in our darkness. The Temple in Jerusalem had been polluted. All the sacred vessels had been destroyed. One little cruse of oil they found therein. The miracle happened as so frequently happened in Jewish history. The little cruse of oil which was to burn one day, burned one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight days, all the days of the festival.

Let us, my friends, in these days which are perhaps more dark than



they have been for a long time and in which a new enemy again threatens our survival, let us borrow the light of Chanukah, the light of rededication and kindle a new light of devotion, faith and high hope. And we will continue to be the undefeated!









5- This gave him sense - הוא היה מודע - אשר הוא היה - אשר הוא היה  
5- Continue to be the undepicted - אשר הוא היה  
- What have they not -

- Kinda Chank. light -

6. From there by all let our hearts fast  
free!

